

**Assessing the Development of  
Apprentice Principals  
in Traditional and Residency Programs**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the mixed methods study was to compare outcomes of apprentice principals in a traditional educational administration program and in an alternative residency program in one university. Researchers conducted a survey of traditional education administration graduates and a survey of graduates of both programs, and collected job status data. In addition, two focus groups were conducted. Findings showed that graduates from the residency program were significantly more likely than traditional students to report being satisfied with the program and to report being knowledgeable in their field. Graduates of the Principal Residency Network (PRN) residency program were 4 times more likely than graduates of traditional programs to report serving as assistant principal, principal or other administrator (47% vs. 12%). 50% of PRN graduates reported that in addition to their primary job, they had additional administrative duties, while only 3% of traditional graduates reported having such duties. Candidates in the residency program agreed that the work in the program was engaging and inspirational and that the program's focus was on social justice and school transformation. Mentoring principals reported satisfaction with the program structure and processes, especially with the consultancy protocol and reflective practice. Some challenges to implementing a residency program include staff morale, working in a large school and having to wear many hats (for aspiring principals) and a lack of time, and negative influences from some schools and districts (for mentoring principals). Findings can inform faculty from educational leadership programs who seek to develop transformational leaders.

**Descriptors:** assessment, leadership preparation, administration, residency.

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## Introduction

In recent years, alternative principal residency network programs have been developed and implemented in the United States. In contrast to traditional leadership programs, aspiring principals in residency programs work as half-time apprentices to a principal mentor for a year. School leaders consistently cite workplace learning as the most powerful aspect of their graduate work with the requirement of complex knowledge closely linked to the community (Early, 2009; Furman, 2002).

In Boston, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) coordinates the highly successful Boston Pilot School Network—twenty-seven in-district autonomous schools. The Boston Principal Residency Network (PRN) is now in its thirteenth year and is considered the only residency-based principal preparation and credentialing program that is designed to prepare leaders of small, innovative schools to address the specific needs of their schools' students and staff.

In 2009, LAPRN launched a similar Principal Residency Network (PRN) program in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), for leaders of small schools established in the student catchment areas of chronically underperforming public schools. The Los Angeles Principal Residency Network program (LAPRN) is a project developed in partnership with The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), California State University Los Angeles (CSULA), community agencies (CARACEN, ABC and FIS), and WestEd. The partnership was based on the values of the importance of community and family involvement in schools, equity as the foundation for all teaching and learning, and school transformation through small, autonomous schools. The goals of the project were to establish and obtain state certification of the residency students in collaboration with the university, and to graduate, credential, and place aspiring principals with either assistant principals or principals.

Assessing the development of apprentice principals' knowledge and skills is challenging. The purpose of this study is to compare the outcomes of apprentice principals in a traditional training program and in an alternative residency program at one university. Results compare self-reported attitudes, focus group findings, and employment status of cohorts of masters-level students in two educational leadership programs.

The study's research questions are the following:

- How do self-reported outcomes and satisfaction with the program differ between students in traditional and residency programs?
- How do traditional and residency graduates differ in the jobs and job duties they report after graduation?
- What are the main challenges for aspiring principals and for mentor principals in a principal residency program?

## Conceptual Framework

Experiential learning is a key element in the transition from university, or school, to the work place. Historically, since the Middle Ages, educators have sought to incorporate academic learning into actual practice learning, from medical or law school internships to school to work apprenticeships in trade or high schools. Expert guided learning in actual real world applications has been recognized as a capstone to academic studies to create a fully prepared professional or tradesman.

In the field of education, the practice of incorporating student teachers is well established, usually with licensure requirements. The development of educational leaders is less fully realized and not particularly well understood (Darling-Hammond et al, 2010). A recent study by the George W. Bush Institute found that most states have little or no information about how their principals are prepared, licensed, supported or evaluated (Sparks, 2013).

While leadership licensure may or may not require on site learning, ninety percent of all administrator credential programs require some time of experience on site (Murphy, 1990). It is widely recognized that adults learn best when exposed to opportunities to apply knowledge in authentic settings (Kolb & Boyatzis, 1999).

Existing programs that incorporate experiential learning for educational leaders vary, from fieldwork to internship and residency programs, as do their definitions of the various levels of learning. Generally, a fieldwork program is connected to an academic subject and requires a specific level of independent observation, reflection and reporting. However, in educational administration, as in teaching, fieldwork is often the most ad hoc part of the program.

A residency program, also known as an internship, differs from traditional programs in that it requires a major research project, at least half time work on site, coaching assistance, job rotation, vigorous reflection and evaluation and, commonly, a pre-admission interview. The mentoring administrator, generally a principal, is chosen with great consideration and is often compensated through a stipend. The difference between a fieldwork and a residency experience is conceptual as well as quantitative. A residency program requires robust engagement in the work of schools or school districts and strongly resembles actual employment. The focus is on developing public intellectuals who can pursue the transformation of the schools to create new opportunities for equity and social justice (Black & Murtadha, 2007).

It is school principals who provide the leadership that is central to improving learning (Darling Hammond et al, 2010). However, they are hard to find: senior level administrators report difficulty in identifying individuals with the qualities to be urban leaders despite a large number of certified candidates. (Black & Bathon, forthcoming).

The difficulty of recruiting leaders is exacerbated by preparation programs that lack purpose, coherence, change-oriented faculty, adequate funding and that provide easy credit on a contract pay scale (Levine, 2005). In most district teacher union contracts, a teacher may move up on the pay scale by completing an administrator preparation program that he/she will likely never use,

while not completing a program in her teaching specialty (Odden, 2011). The result of this is a degree that is never used as intended and a teacher who did not further his/her specialty to improve his/her teaching skill.

Residency-prepared principals are more likely to be prepared for the reality of the working conditions: the long workdays that include many late evenings, the ever-increasing role of the school boards and the ensuing complexities, the preponderance of paper work and the poorly developed preparation programs (Richardson, 1999). The difficulty of recruiting leaders is likely exacerbated by preparation programs that lack purpose, coherence, change-oriented faculty, adequate funding and provide easy credit on a contract pay scale (Levine, 2005). Despite the importance of leadership to the improvement of instruction and organizational transformation, many preparation programs remain static, often basing any change on accreditation requirements, not internal data driven growth (Early, 2009). A more robust residency-based program is more likely to produce motivated and well-prepared potential educational leaders. In addition, participants in residency programs have greater opportunities to participate in actual leadership activities, compared to students in traditional programs.

Furthermore, Orr, Silverberg, and LeTendre (2006) as cited in Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) found that the career intentions and advancement of the candidates was positive associated with the length and quality of the internship. In addition, Orr and Barber (2005) as cited in Darling-Hammond et al (2007) found that internship quality and scope were significantly associated with leadership learning and career intentions and advancement.

The expansion of mediocre administrator preparation programs and the lack of well-prepared leaders, combined with the recognition of the importance of leadership to transformational change, have spurred a number of large-scale studies that encourage movement to more serious and thoughtful preparation programs. The Southern Regional Education Board's 2005 study of 61 principal preparation programs concluded that, "the internship vessel is leaky, rudderless or still in dry dock" (Southern Regional Education Board, 2005). The Stanford Project of 2005 concluded that pre-service programs require a coherent curriculum, a program philosophy of leadership for change, student centered instruction, faculty scholars who have experience in k-12 system support at the university and k-12 level, vigorous and intelligent recruitment, well designed internships and in-system financial support (Davis et al., 2005). In a study of two English school districts, Early concluded "Adults learn better through on-the-job training and skill applications in real-life situations." (Early, 2009, p 319). Researchers from the University Council for Educational Administration in collaboration with the Stanford Project concluded in a paper delivered in 2006 that great preparation programs require support of the district leadership, a curriculum around theories, principles and practices of instructional leadership, faculty members who are competent in program theory, alignment of course content and internship learning, programs designed to improve student achievement, and ongoing professional development focused on teaching and learning (LaPointe and Davis, 2006).

A recent dissertation by Braun found a positive relationship between essential preparation practices (internships and mentors) in the school learning environment and the achievement of students (Braun, 2008). A 2011 study by Grissom and Loeb points clearly to the benefits of a well-trained management-oriented principal in producing learning results. They point out that

too many of “ the best programs tend to be overly theoretical and disconnected from the needs of day-to-day school management” (Grissom and Loeb, 2011). While all of these studies vary slightly in content, they share a common agreement on the importance of instituting a high quality residency program of significant breadth and depth such as programs developed for medical and legal training.

While an understanding of the elements of successful programs especially in the willingness of the graduates to enter school leadership is essential, Orr (2003) as cited in Darling-Hammond et al (2007) stated that changes in leadership practice follow from the following cognitive developments that must be present in successful leadership programs. These elements include the assessment of candidates to determine their knowledge of leadership, their understanding of the role of school leader, and the development of their own identity as a leader. Successful programs that develop these attributes and skills among their graduates implement high quality practices based on adult learning theory (Kaagen, 1998 as cited in Darling-Hammond et al. (2007). These would include but not limited to, a theoretical construct that centers the program, high quality student-centered teaching strategies, the use of student cohorts, and extensive field experiences.

### Praxis and Social Justice Leadership

In the development and implementation of a high quality educational leadership program, the grounding of the program in a strong theoretical underpinning is imperative to meet the outcomes of preparing candidates for transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is defined as the process of fundamentally changing school organizations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Understanding that many may call for changing of school organizations to meet local fiscal concerns to global economic needs, a true process of transformation must be rooted in an understanding of school justice if schools are to meet that moral and ethical charge of equity and opportunity of all as evident in a democratic society. To prepare candidates to engage in social justice leadership, programs must create program structures that deeply integrate social justice throughout the program. Furman (2012) states that although many in educational leadership preparation are investigating social justice, the development of actual social justice skills within these programs remains limited. Furman (2012) quotes Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) as stating that “current preparation programs aimed toward social justice tend to focus on critical consciousness (and) find it difficult to prepare leaders to acquire the actual skills needed to make equity-based changes in schools” (p 218). Furthermore, Trujillo and Cooper (2014) in their examination of the University of California’s Principal Leadership Institute found that although the program incorporates a social justice framework, processes exist within the program that both reflect and contradict this framework. For this reason, Furman (2012) contends that these skills can only be acquired only through a process of praxis that is defined in Freiren terms by the following quote:

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection, only then will it be praxis (Freire, 2002)

While this provides a definition that articulates the process of praxis as a social justice construct, Furman (2012) provides a framework for social justice leadership preparation by identifying dimensions of social justice (personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological) and within each dimension the leadership capacities that must be developed. In addition, Furman (2012) outlines various instructional practices that can be used to develop these capacities. This framework provides guidance for social justice leadership preparation programs in terms of program preparation and implementation.

### Components of the PRN Program

The Los Angeles Principal Residency Network defines itself as an intentional social justice leadership preparation program and adheres to the following definition of social justice. According to the PRN Mission and Vision Statement:

Social Justice is equity in opportunity and privilege for all people. This can only be achieved through a process of validating individual experiences, and acknowledging that current systems were borne out of and perpetuate injustice. Social justice is sustained through a societal commitment to transforming social, political, economic and cultural systems into systems that provide equity in opportunity and privilege. These systems ensure that power and decision-making are shared, and all people have autonomy to act responsibly in their own, their families' and their community's best interests. (LA PRN Mission and Vision Statement, 2008)

In addition to this definition, LAPRN incorporates these common themes about social justice leadership:

- Action oriented and transformative
- Committed and persistent
- Inclusive and democratic
- Relational and caring
- Reflective
- Oriented toward socially-just pedagogy (Furman, 2012)

Furthermore, the program incorporates the elements identified by Furman (2012) as necessary components of a social justice leadership preparation program. First, the program, rather than being primarily academic and theoretical, is experiential and holistic and focuses on “praxis” (continual, dynamic interaction among knowledge acquisition, deep reflection and action at two levels - the intra-personal and the extra-personal) with the purpose of transformation and liberation. Secondly, as an integrated, evidence-based residency program that is problem-centered and exploratory, the program prepares candidates for social justice leadership by examining each social justice dimension and the capacities necessary for leadership at each dimension level.

The model through which this is done includes the requirement that each candidate (known as an aspiring principal or AP) develops an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that is aligned with the

California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (CCTC) Preliminary Administrative Services Credential Standards as well as with LA PRN's Distinguished Principal Qualities. This plan requires the aspiring principal (AP) to work together with a mentor principal (MP) for a year. The AP is bought out half time so he/she can work in the school. The MP mentors the AP in developing and accomplishing the ILP. He/she also participates as a panel member for work presented by the AP three times during the residency, using a specific protocol. The AP conducts a yearlong, data-based inquiry project in their school that is linked to the school's vision/mission and school improvement goals. In addition, cohort seminars are held with university professors and CCE staff to provide additional social justice leadership foundational knowledge and support.

There are some challenges to implementation. Residency programs are sometimes viewed as "non-academic." MPs may give APs unwanted tasks. University professors sometimes fear that there is not enough "seat time" or academic content and that assessment of students' achievement is not adequate. In addition, professors struggle with how to measure the success of a residency program. Also, it is unclear whether residency programs work as well in large schools as they do in small schools.

This study seeks to compare several outcomes from a traditional principal preparation program and a residency-based program in order to inform practice. The literature suggests that well-funded and complex residency programs are likely to improve the development and working practice of principals, as well as increase the likelihood that candidates will actually become administrators.

## **Methods/Data Sources**

### **Samples**

In 2013, surveys were sent out to LA PRN graduates and their mentor principals, as well as to a group of traditional Educational Administration graduates. Surveys were administered online, and respondents were provided with a link to the survey via email. Multiple requests were submitted to each respondent via email to ensure a high response rate. The response rate for Aspiring Principals was 77% (n= 30/39). For Mentor Principals, the response rate was 79%. 64 responses were received from traditional graduates, for a response rate of 22%.

Ten aspiring principals (APs) participated in a focus group and eight mentoring principal (MPs) participated in another focus group.

### **Instruments**

A web survey was sent to graduates of the traditional educational administration program and to graduates of the residency program for the years 2004 – 2011 to ascertain their attitudes about the program, and current job status and responsibilities. The population of graduates was about 300.



Researchers created focus group questions for two groups: one with Aspiring Principals (APs) and one with Mentoring Principals (MPs). The questions were open-ended and dealt with issues such as the role of the mentoring principal, the importance of the cycle of inquiry, areas of opportunity, challenges and benefits of the program.

In addition, job status of recent graduates from both programs was ascertained. Data were obtained from graduates of traditional educational administration programs using a web survey and using email for four recent cohorts of PRN graduates. A total of 45 PRN graduates were contacted.

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

Surveys were sent to graduates of cohorts 1 – 4 of PRN and to graduates of traditional educational admin program. Data on job status was collected from graduates using a web survey and email. The two focus groups were conducted in 2013 with 10 aspiring principals and 8 mentoring principals. Survey data was analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics, t tests and ANOVAs to compare different groups on items. Qualitative focus group data were analyzed using open and axial coding methods. The first step in qualitative data analysis was the reduction of qualitative data by highlighting commonly used words and phrases and categorizing them. The emergent themes were triangulated for validity purposes across the findings from other instruments.

## Results

### Intentions to Become a Principal: Prior to Enrollment and Current Status

Both PRN and traditional program graduates indicated their intentions to become principals both prior to enrolling and after completing their leadership preparation programs. While at least half intended to become or thought they might become principals (PRN: 57%, CSULA traditional: 51%) prior to enrolling in their respective program, 82% of PRN graduates intended to, thought they might be, or already were a principal after graduation, while only 64% of traditional graduates responded similarly after graduating. While intentions to become a principal were similar prior to enrollment for PRN and traditional graduates, PRN graduates' intentions improved by almost 50% after graduation.

### Motivation for Enrolling in Leadership Program

Graduates from the PRN program and from the traditional program were asked their motivations for enrolling in a school leadership program. A greater percentage of PRN graduates than traditional graduates saw the following motivations as being important:

- Having an inspirational principal (76% important or very important, compared to 56%)
- Getting underprivileged students on a path to success (80% very important compared to 54% very important)
- Personally having an impact on school improvement and student learning (93% very important as compared to 74% very important).

On the other hand, traditional graduates saw the following motivations as being more important (important or very important) compared to PRN graduates:

- Advancement on the salary scale via credit accrual (53% important, as compared to 31% important)
- Job benefits (60% important, as compared to 49% important)
- Being a role model for students and staff (100% important compared to 88% important)

#### Engaging with Mentoring Principals

PRN graduates worked with their Mentor Principals with greater frequency than traditional graduates did with their mentors on many school leadership activities related to the school educational program, school improvement, data use, community, professional learning, culture and operations. The proportion of PRN graduates working on facilitating student learning, guiding curriculum and instruction and developing goals for teacher practice and learning at least once or twice a month exceeded the proportion of traditional graduates doing so by a minimum of 14 percent to a maximum of 29 percent.

PRN graduates exceeded traditional graduates in the frequency with which they worked with mentors at least once or twice a month in four of five professional learning activities by 27 to 31 percent. The activities included discussing professional expectations, designing and refining individual learning projects, shadowing the principal, and discussing improvements in school leadership

#### Using Data to Monitor Progress

With regard to data use, PRN graduates exceeded traditional graduates in their frequency of engagement in using data to monitor progress, identify problems and propose solutions at least once or twice a month by 18 percentage points (68% PRN vs. 50% traditional). In addition, 61 percent of PRN graduates reported making evidence-based decisions by using student achievement data at least once or twice a month, and 75 percent of them reported building a professional learning community among teachers and staff.

#### Perceptions of Effectiveness of Their Preparation

PRN graduates and traditional graduates were asked to rate the effectiveness of their preparation in regard to knowledge and skills in several areas including vision and mission, school improvement, professional learning, diversity, school educational program, culture and climate, community, data use and operations.

PRN graduates reported higher levels of effectiveness on three skills (developing agreement on the mission (57% vs. 33%), implementing the vision via governing structures (39% vs. 24%), and budget and operations (39% vs. 28%). 97% of PRN graduates stated they were well or very well prepared to build and sustain a school vision. In addition, PRN graduates reported a higher

level of effectiveness in engaging in comprehensive planning (46% very well vs. 31% very well). PRN graduates also reported a higher level of effectiveness compared to traditional students in engaging staff in decision-making about curriculum and policies (46% very well vs. 26% very well).

Students from the residency program were more satisfied with their program than graduates from the traditional program (mean traditional = 3.4, mean residency = 4.55,  $t=2.5$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

### Aspiring Principals and Social Justice

Three themes emerged from the AP focus group data. First, the APs reported that the residency program possesses a clear and intentional theme of social justice. Second, the APs reported that the program emphasizes the importance of “the work” of school transformation that allows the students to go to a deeper level of understanding school leadership. The candidates find this engaging and inspirational. In addition they appreciated the program’s focus on data. Third, the APs noted the importance of the mentoring principals providing them with opportunities, strategies and resources.

However, the APs reported two significant challenges for the residency program. First, the APs feel that course assignments are often not clear and that the sequencing of courses is not optimal. They suggested the use of course management software and also wanted more time for their projects. Secondly, the APs noted the challenges existing in their school sites. These include staff morale, working in a large school, constant changes made by the district, and multiple job responsibilities. In an effort to respond to this challenge, the APs recommended better selection of and more training of mentoring principals.

As one aspiring principal noted:

My new assignment is a challenge that PRN assured me would come but given the support and instruction we received during our cohort, I have managed to work with complex change in the one week I have been on the helm. I now know the true meaning of Praxis! It’s not enough to analyze and or reflect because when you are in charge and the expectation is for guidance and leadership, action is not an option, it’s a necessity!

Another aspiring principal noted:

I just moved into an AP role for this school year. This is a “watch” school and I’ve been told I’m crazy for going there, but to me this represents a school where the work really needs to be done. PRN has helped to remind me that moving up is not just about taking a cushy job with a fancy title – it’s about doing what needs to be done.

### Mentoring Principals: Action Orientation and Reflective Practice

Two themes emerged from the MP focus group data. First, the MPs felt that the program structure allows more opportunities for APs to do research, identify issues, measure results and to “experience a small sliver” of a principal’s experience, compared to candidates in a traditional

program. Mentoring principals reported that the program models best practice for the mentoring principals and that the use of the consultancy protocol was beneficial. The second theme was the benefits of the program to the MPs' work. They felt the opportunity to mold future administrators or "grow your own" was useful for them. They believed the program and processes provided a reflective practice for questioning and clarifying issues. They also enjoyed networking at common meetings with other mentoring administrators.

However, the MPs reported two challenges for the program. First, the MPs noted that the program is very labor-intensive for them. Finding time to support the APs adequately is problematic. Second, the MPs noted that the program forces them to reflect on their own school and to examine the discrepancy between the ideal and reality. Due to the fact that districts and schools were not seen as being open to transformation (which is one goal of PRN), this realization can be frustrating for the MPs as districts are seen as generally communicating messages about consistent structures for the goal of control, not for transformation.

#### Job Status: Traditional Graduates and Residency Graduates

In 2012 and 2013, directors of the PRN program obtained information from PRN graduates on their current job status and duties. A web survey was sent to graduates of the traditional educational administration program and to graduates of PRN to ascertain their current job status and duties. In addition, the director of the program obtained job status information from graduates.

Sixty-nine of the traditional educational administration graduates responded and all of the PRN graduates (n=45) responded for a total of 114. This is a response rate of 35 percent of all graduates from 2004 to 2014. Table 1 below shows the job status of traditional education administration graduates and of PRN graduates. Traditional educational administration graduates were more likely to report working as "other" or as a counselor, compared to PRN graduates (18 percent vs. 4 percent). Traditional graduates were 50% more likely than PRN graduates to report working primarily as a teacher (41 percent vs. 27 percent). PRN graduates were about as likely as traditional graduates to report serving as a teacher leader of some kind (e.g. coach, coordinator, lead teachers) (22 percent vs. 29 percent). However, PRN graduates were 4 times more likely than traditional graduates to report serving as an assistant principal (AP), principal or other administrator (47 percent vs. 12 percent).

A t test was calculated between the two groups, using 1 = other/counselor, 2 = teacher, 3 = teacher leader, and 4 = AP or principal. The mean job level for traditional graduates was 2.33 (s=.90) and the mean for PRN graduates was 2.8 (s=.77). The effect size was .50, which is higher than the What Works Clearinghouse' criterion of .25 for a "substantially important effect."

**Table 1. Primary job status of traditional administrative graduates and PRN graduates**

<b>Job Status</b>	<b>Educational Admin Graduates</b>	<b>PRN Graduates 2009-14</b>
Other/Counselor/consultant	18% (n=13)	4% (n=2)
Teacher	41% (n=28)	27% (n=12)
Teacher Leader/coach	29% (n=20)	22% (n=10)
AP/Principal/administrator	12% (n=8)	47% (n=21)
	<b>Total N = 69</b>	<b>Total N = 45</b>

In addition to reporting their primary job, graduates were asked if they had *additional* job responsibilities. Fifty percent of PRN graduates reported that they had additional AP or other administrative duties, while only 3% of traditional graduates reported having these duties. This difference was significant ( $X^2 = 19.08, p < .00$ ).

### **Conclusions and Educational Importance of the Study**

Findings showed that the students in the residency program were significantly more satisfied with their program and were significantly more likely to report being knowledgeable in their field, compared to candidates in the traditional group. In addition, graduates of the residency program were significantly more likely to hold assistant principal, principal or other administrator positions, compared to graduates from the traditional program. PRN graduates were more likely to intend to be a principal after graduation, to focus on school improvement and getting underprivileged children on the path to success, and to work more frequently with their mentor principals, compared to traditional program graduates.

These findings are impacting the ongoing development of the educational leadership program at the participating university. Program faculty members are discussing remodeling the traditional program to incorporate positive characteristics of the residency program. The cost of the residency program is very high; thus, alternative models will be considered. A major challenge to program staff has been the selection of and training of mentoring principals. Most principals have received traditional administrative training and are not familiar with residency principles. It might be that graduates of the residency program who move into leadership roles in schools will be able to serve as mentor principals in the future. Findings can also inform faculty in other educational leadership programs who are seeking to develop transformative leaders.

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