

Principled Innovation is the ability to imagine new concepts, catalyze ideas, and form new solutions, guided by principles that create positive change for humanity. Through principled innovation, we hold ourselves accountable to design and deliver excellent **learning opportunities** for all learners, preparing them for the next economy, to assume the responsibilities of self-government, and to participate in a thriving civil society. The question, **“We can innovate, but should we?”** places values and ethical understandings at our own character at the core of principled innovation. Character adds purpose to innovation. Through new character development in our educators, we ensure that the decisions we make and the solutions we enact are best meeting the current and future needs of the students and communities we serve. **Character is social, cultural, contextual and developmental.** In education, we see character emerging in the ecological context of lived relationships: between educators and students, among educators, among students, and among both educators and students and the people with whom they interact in their professional and personal orbits. **Civil society is complex**, and all of us fulfill different roles not only over the course of our lives but even during the course of a day. As a college of education, we **prepare educators** who can work at different social and organizational scales: with individual learners and peers; with principals and superintendents; with parent and community organizations; with partners in both the private and public sectors. As faculty and staff, we ourselves need to practice and prepare educators who can discern between innovating for the sake of innovation and innovating with the **purpose to serve humanity.**



Principled Innovation in the Systems of Educator and Leader Preparation

Arizona State University
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
2019-2020

Arizona State University

**Principled
Innovation
in the Systems of
Educator
and Leader
Preparation**

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Recommended Citation:

Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. (2019). *Principled innovation in the systems of educator and leader preparation* (2nd ed.). Tempe: Author.

This work is supported by the Kern Family Foundation.

**Arizona State University
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
Principled Innovation Initiative**

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*Martin Luther King Jr., Morehouse College
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Introduction

Humans always exist amidst uncertainty and challenge, currently exacerbated by global, national, and interpersonal conflicts in today's society. Our world is volatile. We are experiencing economic and social inequality, and in education, we are seeing increasingly complex and ethical dilemmas with no clear solution. We are in a position to leverage our place and people, to encourage authentic relationships, and think deeply and differently about the future of learning and how we are equipping educators to support our youth and serve our communities. This momentum for change provides the platform for intentional innovation.

At Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, we aim to reimagine the role that a college of education can play for our students, for the communities and schools with which we partner, and for society as a whole. As we have developed our strategic initiatives and the activities that comprise them, we have asked ourselves the following question: What are the qualities of our institution that render us most likely to succeed at redefining what a college of education can provide to students, education systems, and society? Our answer is that MLFTC is committed to nurturing a core value of Principled Innovation.

The ASU Charter expresses a commitment to assume fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities we serve. In alignment with that commitment, MLFTC has developed an ethical framework for innovation and decision-making rooted in a comprehensive set of principles.

Principled Innovation is the ability to imagine new concepts, catalyze ideas, and form new solutions, guided by principles that create positive change for humanity. Through principled innovation, we hold ourselves accountable to design and deliver excellent learning opportunities for all learners, preparing them for the next economy, to assume the responsibilities of self-government, and to participate in a thriving civil society.

Learning is always about the future, and we have the capability to influence our changing world through honoring the above imperatives. It is essential that we ask the right questions, navigate uncertainty, and work in teams to design and create solutions to the toughest challenges. In practice, we need to prepare educators to look outside their professional orbits in order to innovate effectively in their schools, districts, and communities. As a college of education, we prepare educators who can work at different social and organizational scales: with individual learners and peers; with principals and

superintendents; with parent and community organizations; with partners in both the private and public sectors. As faculty and staff, we ourselves need to practice and prepare educators who can discern between innovating for the sake of innovation and innovating with the purpose to serve humanity.

The question, **“We can innovate, but should we?”** places values and ethical understandings - our own character - at the core of principled innovation. Character adds purpose to innovation. Through nurturing **character development** in our educators, we ensure that the decisions we make and the solutions we enact are best meeting the current and future needs of the students and communities we serve.

Character is social, cultural, contextual and developmental. In education, we see character emerging in the ecological context of lived relationships: between educators and students, among educators, among students, and among both educators and students and the people with whom they interact in their professional and personal orbits. Civil society is complex, and all of us fulfill different roles not only over the course of our lives but even during the course of a day.

As one of our nation's largest educator preparation institutions, one with an extensive network within the state, nationwide, and internationally, MLFTC is uniquely positioned to respond to complex issues by providing an ecosystem for the thoughtful design of educational innovation, as well as building a strong workforce of educators who embody character and exemplify an innovative mindset. This ensures that new ideas, programs, systems, and structures come from a place of equity, economic viability, and democratic ideals.

We are on the cutting edge as we work to creatively and systematically integrate principled innovation into our systems, norms, curricula, and processes to effectively prepare and collaborate with aspiring educators. We believe that building principled innovation into the heart of educator and leadership preparation can provide a bolder and broader framework for supporting innovative strategies—strategies that will develop from within learning environments to change systems for all students as change is warranted.

As we worked with faculty, staff, community partners, and students, we have (1) defined the various components of principled innovation and character for our context; (2) created guiding principles that will shape the way our college takes meaningful action to develop character within our own learning environment and with students; (3) developed an ecological model that illustrates the complexity of character development through principled innovation as it is integrated among educational systems in collaboration with local communities and ultimately society as a whole; and (4) operationalized character development by embracing principled innovation as a core value and means to positive change for humanity.

Definitions

Principled Innovation is the ability to imagine new concepts, catalyze ideas, and form new solutions, guided by principles that create positive change for humanity.

Character is social, cultural, contextual, and developmental. It is a dynamic interaction of characteristics within a person and the context in which the person operates and develops. Because of this dynamic relationship, there are elements of stability and fluidity to character. Character is not fixed or rigid; it is always in a complex dynamic tension with the context in which the person exists. Both what one does (current actions) and who one becomes (human development going forward) are influenced in a dynamic interactive way by context. Character and context impact each other in complex and systemic ways. Not only does context impact actions and character development, but character impacts context and its effect on the individual.

Character Education is the intentional social, educational, and reflective activities that foster character development.

Character Development is the life-long process of constructing character.

Principled innovation as a core value

In order for educators and our organization to take meaningful action, we commit to our core value of principled innovation - innovation which is guided by a set of principles and informed by our character assets. In recognizing our own unique context and needs, we have developed guiding principles and defined character assets that aim to foster a culture of change within our college that will not only affect how we shape our policies, programs, curricula, and pedagogy, but, more importantly, bring about positive change for the good of humanity through the interactions, relationships, choices, and actions of our faculty, staff, students, and the communities we serve.

Guiding principles

We value individuals and account for the uniqueness of social and educational contexts by

- Addressing and responding to the diverse needs of learners, educators, and stakeholders
- Seeking inclusiveness around cultural and linguistic diversity practices
- Creating personalized learning experiences
- Designing opportunities for intentional collaborations
- Seeking input from others' knowledge, perspectives, and lived experiences
- Selecting practices reflective of the needs and principles of the learning environment

We collaboratively care for and are considerate of the well-being of individuals, communities, and society by

- Sharing responsibility and distributing expertise
- Encouraging health and personal wellness through empathy and compassion
- Equipping individuals with strategies to advocate for self and others
- Building resiliency and embracing a growth mindset to design new solutions
- Establishing and nurturing authentic relationships

We create positive change by designing creative solutions to pressing educational problems by

- Understanding context, including language and culture; history and experiences; and knowledge and beliefs
- Reflecting throughout the design process in order to be mindful of context, the process, and others
- Connecting to the context and stakeholders by building relationships and identifying common goals
- Inquiring to understand the problem more deeply, identify root causes, conduct and apply research
- Imagining to explore what could be, generate uncommon solutions, consider consequences Iterating by taking action, testing ideas in small ways, studying the impact and refining ideas
- Communicating throughout with internal stakeholders and externally, to share what we have learned

These are **guiding principles** that inspire and direct meaningful action and are implicit within the moral and civic character assets. Furthermore, when we, as individuals and as a college, **engage in self-reflection** based on our actions and consequences, such practices then inform the choices and actions we take in other contexts and situations. As a result, this **developmental process** leads to the well-being of the individual and society.

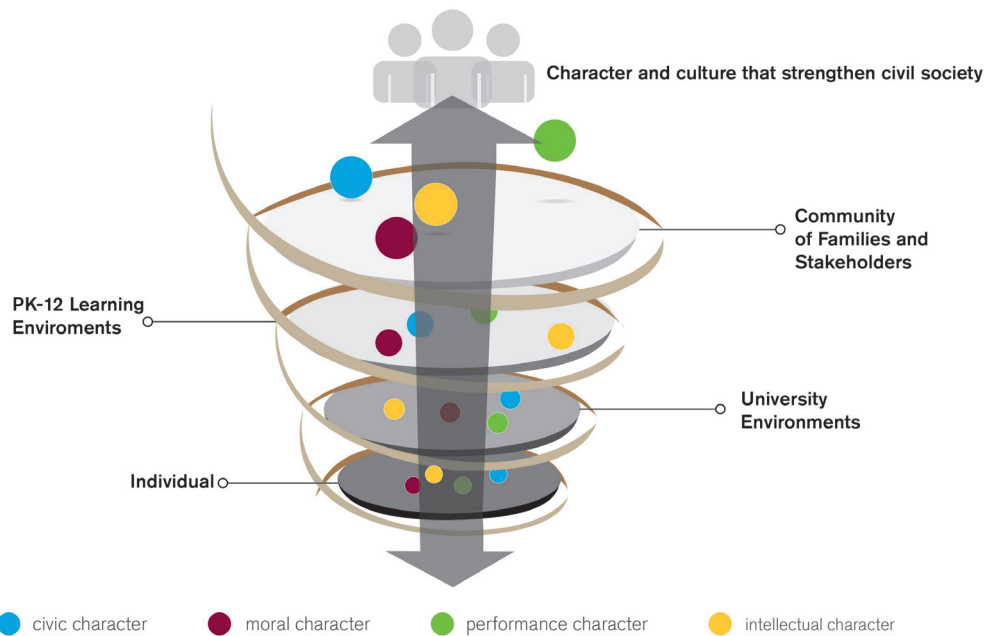
Character assets

The MLFTC Principled Innovation framework recognizes four interconnected clusters of character assets that individuals develop and deploy over their lifetime as they reflect on themselves, work with others, approach situations, and make decisions. Our definitions of the four character assets have been informed by our technical assistance team and the feedback of our MLFTC faculty, staff, and students.

- **Moral character** supports decision-making from multiple perspectives, allowing one to honestly evaluate situations with open-mindedness, integrity, equity, and justice in order to respond in a meaningful and responsible manner. **Moral assets include empathy, compassion, fairness, gratitude, and humility.**
- **Civic character** is a commitment to the public good through one's own local, national and global awareness and engagement. Civic character drives the commitment to address and challenge systemic problems to improve the well-being of others. **Civic assets include a service and action orientation, civility, perspective-taking, and an inclusive and collaborative spirit.**
- **Intellectual character** enables individuals to become innovative, creative, and critical thinkers who value quality of information in seeking the truth and strengthening society. Intellectual character supports informed learning and utilizing data and evidence to think critically and challenge the status quo in order to effect systemic change. **Intellectual assets include critical thinking, problem-solving, and truth-seeking.**
- **Performance character** when informed by intellectual, civic and moral assets, enables individuals to navigate uncertainty, anticipate and mitigate intended and unintended consequences, and work collaboratively to design and implement creative and effective solutions to the toughest social and educational challenges. **Performance assets included initiative, creativity, courage, perseverance, resilience, and risk-taking.**

Ecological model for character

The ecological model is central to MLFTC's unique framework and illustrates how character develops as principled innovation is practiced in various learning environments. It represents an inductive and bottom-up approach to character. It also demonstrates the bi-directional movement as each environment interrelates with the others, contextually and in nuanced ways. Our model represents a relational approach rather than a one-directional approach in which character is dictated from the top-down, such as from the teacher to the student, based on the ideals of equity and reciprocity, where all stakeholders contribute to the shaping of character within and across institutional contexts and life situations.



In each environment, individuals and organizations exhibit the character assets: intellectual, civic, moral, and performance. These four assets cycle through each environmental level, in our case, the individual, the university, PK-12 learning environments, and communities of families and stakeholders. In this dynamic process, individuals develop a sense of understanding of oneself and others in relation to their environment which then affects the choices they make and actions they take within organizations and systems. The learning environments also have a responsibility to the individuals to provide meaningful experiences as individuals and teams develop into a collective culture for further interactions that affect and shape civil society. For example, universities can model and create curricular and instructional design, coaching and mentoring, student success and support systems that truly support university students, eliminate obstacles, and work in fair and equitable ways. They need to create strategic partnerships with other institutions where university students are valued and utilized in meaningful and intentional ways to support PK-12 learning outcomes.

PK-12 learning environments foster the development of character when they serve as authentic contexts in which university students, as apprentice educators, engage in clinical experiences where they have opportunities to build authentic relationships, foster their positive self-concept, and address foundational character development through direct interpersonal interaction and reflection.

School environments may deepen their role in character development by providing exposure to a broader organizational climate that includes a variety of norms, policies, and cultures.

Partnerships with communities of families and stakeholders offer experiences for engaging in better understanding socio-political and culturally-relevant priorities. Stakeholders, such as business, government, and organizational leaders, are essential contributors to the greater educational system that supports the development of character assets.

Practices of principled innovation

The eight practices of principled innovation are demonstrations of moral, civic, intellectual, and performance assets in action. While specific practices align closely with the individual character assets, as seen in the model on right, all four assets are interconnected and work together to inform the eight practices.

As students, faculty, staff, and community partners innovate and make decisions that affect the lives and learning of others, the practices of principled innovation help ensure that their decisions and actions are meeting the social, cultural, emotional, and educational needs of those affected while creating positive change for humanity. The practices are not linear, and may be revisited multiple times throughout the process through generative and reflective questions that align with each practice and guide next steps. These eight practices have been identified and informed by MLFTC faculty and staff through a yearlong design process.



Practices of Principled Innovation

- **Identify and acknowledge fundamental values.** Distinguish the values that are important to the individuals, team, community and learning environment and ensure that the process, structures, and solutions honor, appreciate, and reflect the identified values.
- **Utilize moral and ethical decision making.** Use a values-informed reflective process to assess possibilities, navigate dilemmas, and make the best possible choice to serve the needs of the individual, team, community and learning environment.
- **Understand culture and context.** Use evidence-based resources, empathy, reflective questioning, and asset-based appreciative inquiry to fully understand and assess the lived and current experiences and circumstances of individuals, communities, and learning environments.
- **Engage multiple and diverse perspectives.** Seek and champion equitable and inclusive involvement and contribution to the process, including many different voices who have a variety of lived experiences, beliefs, backgrounds, and cultural wealth.
- **Develop habits of an informed systems thinker.** Use evidence-based resources and data to inform flexible thinking and appreciation of emerging insights and multiple perspectives, allowing one to recognize how the individual parts are influenced by their environment and interact to form a complex whole.
- **Reflect critically and compassionately.** Use a growth mindset to make meaning of experiences through contemplation and consideration of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions and how they affect the growth, development, and identity of the individual, team, community, and learning environment.
- **Design creative solutions.** Work collaboratively and intentionally for and with the community to define and understand the problem; then generate and catalyze purposeful, innovative ideas to achieve a desired outcome that creates positive change for humanity.
- **Navigate uncertainty and mitigate consequences.** Guide the decision-making process through observation and reflective questioning that helps to imagine and effectively respond to the possible outcomes. Allow space for meaningful action to increase the chance for desired results and reduce the risk of harm to individuals, teams, communities, and learning environments.

Conclusion

This framework was informed and developed through a co-constructed process drawing from multiple resources. We created an ecological and operational approach to imagining an educator preparation and leadership program that will prepare educators and leaders for the changing landscape of education, and to address systemic challenges in a way that is not only guided by character assets, but develops character through habituating principled practices.

The practice of principled innovation, therefore, is more than a set of activities or programs: it becomes a vehicle to enact human agency, solve real-world problems, and make innovative changes that can fundamentally improve education systems that directly affect the future of a civil and economically viable society. Character education then becomes the means by which students, faculty, staff, and partners understand how to develop individually and as systems the four character assets and create learning and working environments that both embrace principled innovation and are conducive to operationalizing character development as an action-driven means to transform society for the good of humanity. The ecological model leads us to adopt a systems approach that addresses issues through principled innovation at each structural level. In this way, we envision character to be developmental, relational, ecological, and systemic.

The interplay between these subsystems constitutes our design imperative and provides a robust framework for Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and our network of educators and community partners to enact principled innovation in our schools and communities.

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