

Empathy

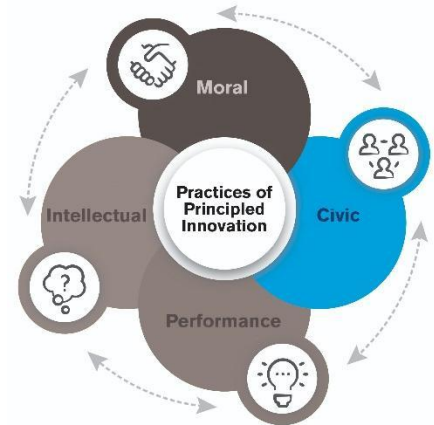
Facilitation Guide

What is it?

Empathy is a foundational asset that both *supports* and is supported *by* the moral and civic practices of Principled Innovation. Use this short film with a small group or a class to generate an inquiry-based introduction on the relationship between empathy, perspective-taking, and altruism, and their role in the PK-12 classroom.

Why use it?

The practices of Principled Innovation rely on empathy to motivate innovators to engage in positive change for humanity. In the PI framework, Empathy is described in this way:



“Empathy is the quality of being in tune with the emotions of others, including the ability to imagine and understand how other people might be feeling or thinking.”

Empathy is an emotional connection with others that comes out of an awareness of the life experience and emotional states of others. As such, it arises in part from the Civic asset of **perspective-taking**, which requires conscious effort and communication to seek to understand the worldview and experiences of other people. Building on perspective-taking, empathy provides the emotional impetus for **altruism**, a PI Civic asset which speaks of seeking others’ success. Empathy, therefore, is the emotional and motivational bridge between perspective-taking and altruism.

In the classroom, the daily give and take between students and teachers can become transactional and, depending on the history between student and teacher, can often become adversarial. Faced with these relationships, teachers—who are often motivated to enter the profession for the very purpose of helping students—can struggle with maintaining empathy for these students. Stopping and seeking to understand the perspectives and experiences of these students (perspective-taking) can develop the empathy we need to motivate us to make changes to help these students succeed (altruism). This cycle is the foundational process of the “change for the good of humanity” that is the primary focus of Principled Innovation. Small relational innovations such as these can plant the seed for the larger-scale changes needed to move society toward greater equity and understanding.

What you need

- Time: 15 minutes (face-to-face setting; one hour in online discussion posts)
- Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6CSQvdfTKY>
- Partner, small group, or class
- Background reading on empathy in the classroom:
<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/empathy/teaching-with-empathy-why-its-important>

Instructions

Step 1: Prepare

Watch the video and review the short, accessible background reading for this conversation, along with the “Why us it?” section above.

Step 2: Situate

Situate the viewing by stating that the asset in focus in this video is empathy, a key teacher disposition that grows out of perspective-taking and leads into altruism. Provide participants with the following definitions from the PI framework:

“Empathy is the quality of being in tune with the emotions of others, including the ability to imagine and understand how other people might be feeling or thinking. Empathy invites us to extend beyond our own perspective and truly care for each other.”

“Perspective-taking is the ability to take on another’s point of view to better understand how they think or feel and consider options we may have initially missed due to our positionality.”

“Altruism is the desire and capability to anticipate and recognize others’ needs, making sure they are cared for with prompt, decisive action.”

Step 3: Present

Present the video for the participants or have them watch it on their own.

Step 4: Discuss

Discuss the video’s assumptions about empathy in a group discussion (presential or online).

Here are some questions to consider using:

1. Consider this definition (above) of empathy and its relationship with both perspective-taking and altruism. How might empathy have influenced the main character’s actions?
2. Watching this video can stir our sense of justice as we see the way that the main character’s financial contributions helped provide funds for a young girl’s education. Reflect on that emotional response. What moral concerns are provoked in the situation portrayed in the video? How is empathy shaped by—and how does it shape—our moral understanding of equity in education?
3. In this film, onlookers observed the main character’s altruistic acts and thought they were foolish. But often, the important actions born of empathy will not be observed by anyone. What does someone get from transforming empathy into altruism when no one sees those actions? Put another way, what are the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of altruism?
4. Very few among us live out our empathy with the open-handedness shown by the main character in this film. Imagine one or two fictional scenarios that might have led to the development of the main character’s admirable sense of empathy. How might our backgrounds shape our empathetic responses?
5. How can we develop our sense of empathy when we come from dramatically different backgrounds from other people?