



Reflecting Critically and Compassionately: Responding to Crisis with Character

What is it?

Unexpected challenges can become opportunities for innovation if we remain responsive to those situations and ready to change our methods to fit the needs. This openness to learning and change is central to Principled Innovation and is captured in PI Practice I2 (“Reflect Critically and Compassionately”). In this video, veteran educators at Arizona State University share how they stayed open to their own ongoing change and development as they adapted their teaching and leadership styles to navigate the uncertainty of the Covid closures. Their approaches to compassionately address student well-being, engagement, and learning demonstrate the practice of critical and compassionate reflection as they engage character assets such as empathy, reflection, humility, courage, and resilience.

How does it support Principled Innovation?

Principled Innovation Practice I2 (“Reflect Critically and Compassionately”) is described in the framework in this way:

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.

The PI Intellectual asset of reflection is at the heart of being a principled innovator. It means that we pause to examine our own practices, knowledge and understanding, as well as those of others. It means being open to new information and perspectives and changing our actions as needed. Arising from this reflection is a growth mindset—and constant openness to learning from our experiences and ongoing change.

In the pedagogical pivots that came during the early days of the Covid crisis, students, faculty, staff at all educational levels faced great uncertainty both about the future of our work and about the best way to carry on that work. The Intellectual character asset of reflection—the need to be open to change—drew upon our Moral and Civic assets of humility, perspective-taking, and empathy and was supported by the Performance character assets of collaboration, resilience, and courage. “Reflecting Critically and Compassionately” begins with reflection, and reflection begins with humility—in this case, a willingness to accept that the methods

we had were insufficient and that we needed the support of others to do our jobs. Reflecting “compassionately” requires perspective-taking and empathy—both in high demand as stressed or discouraged parents and students struggled to adapt to learning from home and working with masks and social distancing. The work demanded collaborating with others who had the skills we needed, resilience to accept failures, and courage to try again. When these PI character assets are brought together, their synergy gives us the practical wisdom we need to carry out the work of Principled Innovation.

The ASU faculty in this video provide an insight into how all of this played out in their lives, providing pre-service teachers or principal licensure students with an opportunity to engage in critical and compassionate reflection of their own and how character comes together to support a community in a time of crisis.

What do I need?

- Time: 20 minutes
- Classroom or virtual setting

How do I use it?

Step 1: Prepare

Watch the video and read the “What is it” and “How does it support Principled Innovation” sections above. Read through the discussion questions provided below and consider how you yourself would respond.

Prepare for distributing the [PI Character Assets document](#) to all participants.

Step 2: Situate

Begin by providing for the students this description of Practice I2 (“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.

Explain how lifelong learning is part of innovation. When we enter uncharted territory, we need to be willing to reflect on whether the practices we’re engaged in are up to the task and be willing to adapt them as needed in order to better serve our students.

Distribute the [PI Character Assets document](#) to all participants, explaining as described above that PI brings these character assets together, creating a practical wisdom that seeks to address real problems through innovative solutions. Ask participants to watch the video with attention to the way that these ASU educators drew on these character assets as they responded to the changes brought by the Covid crisis.

Step 3: Present

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

Step 4: Discuss

Discuss the video in a group discussion (in-person or online).

Here are some questions to consider using:

1. What are one or two ways that the ASU educators in this film sought to reflect both critically and compassionately (e.g., Professor Belgrave)? What character assets do you think that practice required, and what was the impact on the students of enacting those character assets?
2. In navigating the uncertainty of something like the Covid crisis, how might the character assets of resilience and reflection be closely related?
3. How might developing the Moral assets of humility and empathy contribute to resilience in the face of challenges?
4. What character assets were most important to you when Covid arrived, and how did those assets help you navigate the changes that came with the pandemic?
5. Professor Calhoun states that “we are always Principled Innovators of ourselves, and that requires a certain humility.” What parts of our professional selves are most resistant to critical reflection—that stand in the greatest need of the character asset of humility?