Engage Multiple and Diverse Perspectives: Student Agency Through Civic Engagement

What is it?

Principled Innovation Civic Practice C2 is “Engage Multiple and Diverse Perspectives.” In both our learning environments and in our larger society, being deliberate and thoughtful about ensuring that we hear the perspectives of all community members—being inclusive by mining the depth of our diversity—is important for ensuring that we are dealing with the most pressing problems and designing the most effective solutions. In this video, learn about how schools in Phoenix have led the nation in the implementation of school participatory budgeting (SPB), an inclusive process for school decision-making that actively seeks to include the voices of those students who are most frequently overlooked in the bustling environment of large public schools.

How does it support Principled Innovation?

Democratic societies depend on inclusive deliberation. In discussions about the challenges our communities are facing and the solutions that might address those challenges, it is important to pay careful attention to who is present and not present for the conversations and to whether they have the power or agency to speak and be heard. This deliberate inclusivity is a fundamental concern of just communities, and it is for this reason that Principled Innovation builds on Moral character that is grounded in fairness, humility, honesty, and empathy, in Civic character that pursues perspective-taking and inclusivity, in Intellectual character that is curious, truth-seeking, and critically self-reflective, and in Performance character that is both collaborative and courageous. Each of these character assets is designed to inform our practical wisdom and lead us to equitable deliberations that uncover our social problems and identify creative and workable solutions (Practices P1 and P2). Within this framework, PI Practice C2 (“Engage Multiple and Diverse Perspectives”) is at the heart of fostering these inclusive conversations.

In SPB, a student steering committee is given responsibility for leading the student body through a deliberative process of deciding how to spend a portion of the school’s capital budget each year. Culminating in a schoolwide vote using official voting equipment provided by the Maricopa County Registrar, the innovative program has been growing in Phoenix public schools—the first district in the world to use SPB for civic pedagogy. This approach seeks broad input from the student body on what problems students believe a school is facing and what solutions might help solve those problems. With responsibility for sorting through 100 or more prospective budget proposals from the larger student body, SPB steering committees lead their fellow students through a process of narrowing down the options, proposing budgets, and ultimately voting school-wide to select a winning proposal.
Throughout this experience, the process of identifying both problems and solutions is driven by PI Practice C2 (“Engage Multiple and Diverse Perspectives”).

However, in the SPB initiative at Carson Junior High School, the school leadership goes one step further in their enactment of inclusivity. In building a student steering committee, the school leadership intentionally constructs a group that has a significant representation from students with diverse learning needs—students who are often excluded in more traditional approaches to student government. With a critical mass of these young people included on the SPB steering committee, these students describe themselves as growing significantly over the course of the year in their sense of agency and political efficacy. As a learning community, the larger student body benefits from knowing that often underrepresented members within the student body are being served through the school’s democratic processes.

Use this video with pre-service teachers and principal licensure students to illustrate one way that Principled Innovations can strengthen the voice of those who are frequently underserved through a highly inclusive approach to democratic deliberation.

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 PI Practice C2 (“Engage Multiple and Diverse Perspectives”):

> We design creative solutions by working collaboratively to address challenges through a human-centered process, in order to reimagine systems and invite new possibilities for improving the lives and learning of others.

Explain that we can’t design creative solutions without understanding our values and without understanding the people who will use those solutions. It is for this reason that Principled Innovation includes Practice C2 (“Engage Multiple and Diverse Perspectives”).

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 Practice C2 brings some of these character assets together through Carson Junior High School’s SPB initiative.

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. In this learning community, how does finding creative solutions build on the character assets of perspective-taking and inclusivity? How do these character assets work together to give these students the practical wisdom they need to create innovative solutions?
2. Looking at the PI Character Assets graphic, how might other PI character assets be engaged through the SPB process?
3. How might engaging in SPB nurture inclusivity and equity in the larger school climate, beyond the confines of the participatory budgeting process itself?
4. Why is it important for students to feel valued and heard? How does that contribute to the flourishing of students and communities?
5. In your own learning environment, whether that be a classroom, a school, or a district, what perspectives might be missing from your community’s decision-making processes, and what are one or two ways you might be able to better incorporate those perspectives and give voice to those who lack the power or presence to speak into those conversations?
6. What are some ways that your team can more effectively access the perspectives of the students in your learning environment?