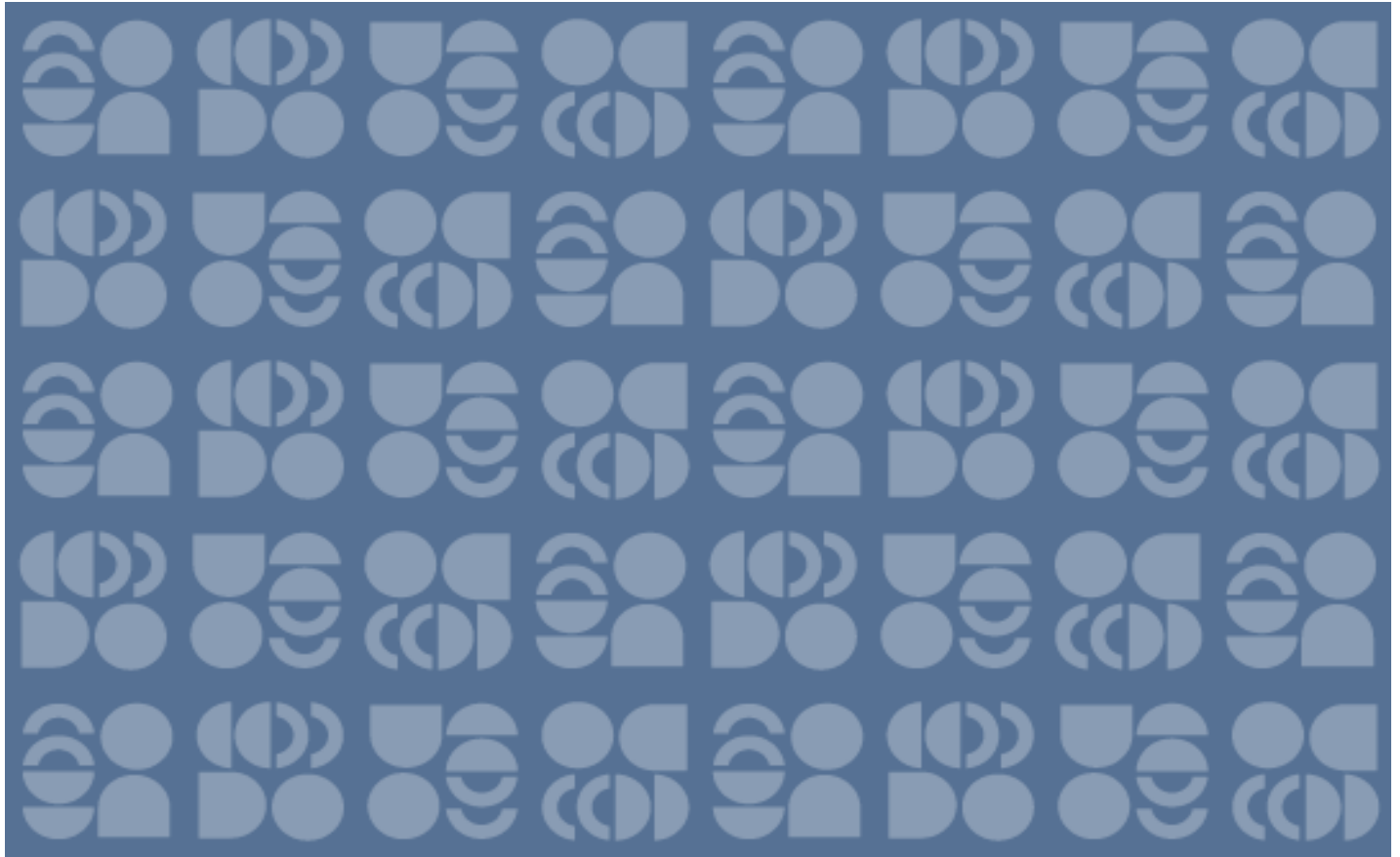


Context Expertise in Inclusive Innovation: Understanding, Integrating, and Building

By Viki M. Young, Ph.D.
October 2022



From the series, *Emerging Findings from Inclusive Innovation: An Equity-Centered R&D Model*

Center for
Inclusive
Innovation



Suggested Citation

Young, V. M. (2022, October). *Context expertise in Inclusive Innovation: Understanding, integrating, and building*. Digital Promise. <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/content-expertise-inclusive-innovation.pdf>

Acknowledgments

Many people came together to form the foundation of Inclusive Innovation and as a team we collectively developed and evolved our ideas. Alexandra Merritt Johnson, Latia White, and Viki Young together lead the research across Inclusive Innovation projects. The Digital Promise team that leads, develops, and implements the Inclusive Innovation model include: Cassie Graves, Cricket Fuller, Jenny Bradbury, Kelliann Ganoo, Kim Smith, Kristal Brister Philyaw, Kristian Lenderman, and Sherenna Bates. We want to acknowledge the formative contributions of Digital Promise alumni: Adha Mengis, Babe Liberman, Colin Angevine, Donnaraé Wade, Karen Cator, Malliron Hodge, and Sarah Cacicio.

We thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for their support of the four pilot projects on which the research reports are based. The content does not represent the views of the funders.

Above all, we are extremely grateful to the Core teams and communities that piloted the Inclusive Innovation model for their commitment to equity-centered R&D, ongoing engagement, and willingness to share their insights about and their experiences with Inclusive Innovation. Without their trust in us and effort throughout our engagement with them in the Inclusive Innovation model, we would not be able to share these emerging findings on a model for inclusive and equity centered R&D in education. Because of their contributions and their willingness to display empathy and vulnerability with us and with one another in sharing their lived experiences, we would not be here to present the Inclusive Innovation model as a promising approach to addressing and eliminating educational inequities.

Contact Information

Email: vyoung@digitalpromise.org

Digital Promise:

Washington, DC:

1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 935
Washington, DC 20036

Redwood City, CA:

702 Marshall Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

Website: <https://digitalpromise.org/inclusive-innovation/>

Contents



- Introduction 1
- Why Context Expertise?..... 4
- Participants’ Understanding of Context Expertise and Its Value 6
- Examples of Integrating Context Expertise..... 8
 - Moral Stance 9
 - Views of Reality..... 11
 - Practical Considerations..... 14
 - Instrumental Considerations 15
- Challenges 15
 - Role Clarity 15
 - Expertise, Not Experts..... 16
 - Legitimate Participation: Who Can Validly Weigh In On What..... 18
 - Information Flow 18
 - District Role and Hierarchy 20
 - Liminal Role of Teachers 22
- Conditions Facilitating Context Expertise Integration 23
 - Intentional Facilitation 23
 - Hearing the Voices at the Table 23
 - Cultivating Individual Awareness 24
- Discussion and Reflections Looking Ahead 25
 - “Balancing” Context and Content Expertise 25
 - Refining the Role of Outside Context Expertise During Implementation 26
- References 28

Introduction

Inequities in access and outcomes persist in education as they do in most facets of society. Decades of policy reforms, reform or improvement initiatives, and promised technological breakthroughs may have yielded pockets of most equitable experiences for students from communities historically marginalized. Systematic and systemic changes, however, continue to elude us. **Inclusive Innovation** is an approach built on the premise that engaging and centering those most affected by inequity and following their leadership from the start of an R&D process will produce more applicable, sustainable, and effective solutions that truly address inequities in the education system.

This paper, one in the series *Emerging Findings from Inclusive Innovation: An Equity-Centered R&D Model*, draws on Digital Promise’s key pilot projects with the Inclusive Innovation model and focuses on the role of those with context expertise in the process. Context expertise is integral to the Inclusive Innovation tenets. This paper explores how participants define context expertise after engaging in Inclusive Innovation, what value they observed and placed on context expertise, the challenges of and factors that supported centering and integrating context expertise. The paper offers reflections on lessons and areas for improvement as Inclusive Innovation and the broader field strives for authentic inclusion of those groups that have historically been marginalized and experience persistent systemic inequities.

Core Tenets of Inclusive Innovation

	<p>Co-Leadership</p> <p>The work is co-led by stakeholders who are reflective of the diversity of communities and schools to ensure mutual benefit</p>		<p>Center Equity</p> <p>The solutions are designed to address the systemic inequities that impact students — poverty, race, language, learning differences —and their intersections</p>
	<p>Co-Research and Design</p> <p>The education challenges are co-researched and co-designed to address issues the community deems important and build on what is already working within communities and schools</p>		<p>Reimagine Progress</p> <p>Progress measures must be multi-dimensional — access, participation and benefit — in recognition of the needs of the whole child</p>
	<p>Honor Context</p> <p>Context and context expertise is prioritized to center the history, culture, and perspectives of those with lived experiences relevant to the education challenge</p>		<p>Build Capacity</p> <p>The process resources communities to sustain the capacity for equity-centered R&D into the future</p>

Inclusive Innovation Pilot Projects Overview

The Inclusive Innovation model is a process by which equity challenges are co-researched and innovative equity-centered solutions that center the needs of students who have been historically and systematically excluded from opportunity are co-designed with district and community stakeholders. Four school districts across the U.S. partnered with Digital Promise to pilot the Inclusive Innovation model and address district challenges related to adolescent writing, racial trauma and mental health, and social justice and racial equity discourse.

In collaboration with Digital Promise’s Center for Inclusive Innovation, each district assembled Community-District Core Teams of district leaders, teachers, parents, community members and students in an intentional partnership to address a challenge area in their district using the Inclusive Innovation model. Each Core Team was composed of 7–10 community and district stakeholders, two of which were named Co-Leads. The Core Team Co-Leads were primarily responsible for guiding the course of research and design activities, recruiting research participants, and providing access to additional resources. Core Team member participation in Inclusive Innovation varied across each district.

The four district communities are in the eastern, Midwest, and southern regions of the country, ranging in enrollment from three districts with 15,000 or fewer students and one district approaching 50,000 students. The student populations across the districts are ethnically, racially, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Student Demographic Ranges in Four Communities Piloting Inclusive Innovation Model

Demographic	Range
Enrollment (students)	6,000 – 47,000
Free and reduced-price lunch eligible	49 – 80%
Race/ethnicity	
African-American	2 – 38%
Asian	Up to 9%
Latino	8 – 92%
Multiracial	Up to 10%
White	4 – 59%
Multilingual learners	5 – 22%

Data Sources

Inclusive Innovation Materials and Outputs. Along the Inclusive Innovation process, Core Teams met at a regular cadence to build relationships, co-research challenges, and co-design solutions. The session agendas, session materials, and session outputs developed by the Core Teams are all used as data in this project. These data are cited as Core team artifacts.

Interviews. As a research team, we developed a 26-item semi-structured interview protocol to explore interviewees’ perspectives of their experience with the Inclusive Innovation process. Specifically, the protocol contains questions that were intended to elucidate the extent to which factors such as student voice, context expertise, capacity-building, racial equity are central to the Inclusive Innovation process from the perspective of the interviewee. All Core Team members were invited to participate in an interview; 18 were interviewed (Exhibit 2). Interview respondents had participated in the Inclusive Innovation pilot projects for approximately 9 to 15 months.

Exhibit 2. Number of Interview Respondents by Role Type

Role Type	Number of Interview Participants
District Leaders	2
Teachers	4
Community Members	6
Parents	2
Students	4

Procedures

All current and former Core Team members ($N = 34$) were contacted via email by a Digital Promise researcher. If Core Team members agreed to participate, an interview was scheduled to take place over Zoom. Before the interview began, the researcher explained that the participants’ responses would remain confidential and that no data would be reported with any identifying indicators. Participants were asked for their consent to a recorded interview. All interviews took approximately one hour to complete. With the exception of one joint interview between 2 participants, all were individual interviews between Core Team members and a Digital Promise researcher. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and participants were given a \$25 gift card in appreciation for their participation.

Recordings and transcribed files were stored in a secure Box.com folder and deleted from all other servers and computers. The Box.com folder is only accessible to the Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation research team. Each transcript was integrated into MaxQDA (analytic software) for analysis.

The research team coded transcripts and selected artifacts with primary codes representing the following key constructs: context expertise, student voice, racial equity, capacity building, and outcomes. Researchers identified subcodes for each key construct in a second round of analysis and analyzed coded passages for convergent themes and disconfirming evidence.

This Paper

With the data and experiences available thus far, this paper addresses the following questions:

- How do participants define context expertise?
- To what extent and in what ways do participants value context expertise in the process?
- How did context expertise contribute to the Inclusive Innovation process?
- What factors facilitated and hindered the inclusion of context expertise?

While we certainly have much to learn about authentically and effectively incorporating context expertise in ameliorating education inequities, we share our findings here in the spirit of continuous improvement and collective learning with and from colleagues in the field.

Why Context Expertise?

So when we think about systemic and systematic racism and the fact that ... it's embedded in policies and the processes that people have been creating, it only looks like one group of people who were making those decisions. So if those are going to be the same people making the decisions [as] before,..., what was going to inform it? Who said that they know what's best for somebody else? And we already know that the status quo has not been serving our nation. –Teacher

Policy experts, researchers, scientists, and social entrepreneurs are commonly recognized as leaders who, based on their training and professional expertise, are qualified to design and develop policies, strategies, technologies, and other solutions to societal needs. Increasingly, their “content” expertise is acknowledged as incomplete without firsthand experience and understanding of what it means to live with the needs they are trying to meet. By contrast, “Context Experts are people with lived experience of the situation, including children and youth. They are the people who experientially know about the issue” (Attygalle, 2017, p. 3).

While those with context expertise can offer understandings about their situation that outsiders might not readily observe—or indeed know to ask about—that substantively affect whether the proposed strategy will work, the rationale for their inclusion goes beyond this practical consideration, which still essentially holds that they need others to determine what’s best for them. The “funds of knowledge”

concept holds that people, through their ordinary experiences, relationships, and daily functioning, have competence through “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being’ (p. 133), pertaining to ‘social, economic, and productive activities of people’ (p. 139) in local communities. Funds of knowledge include ‘social history of households, their origins and development ... the labour history of families’, ‘how families develop social networks’ ‘including knowledge skills and labour, that enhance the households’ ability to survive and thrive’ (p. 133)” (Moll et al., 1992 as cited in *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, 2020). This rich view of expertise provides a counternarrative to deficit views of traditionally marginalized communities such as minoritized peoples, those experiencing poverty, those with physical disabilities, or the elderly, and establishes the rightful place of those intended to be the beneficiaries of new initiatives to be at the decision-making table from the start.

Inclusion shows up in principles of designing *with* rather than *for*, collective action and participatory democracy concepts, and in empowerment evaluation and community-based participatory research. In healthcare, for example, the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Initiative (PCORI) illustrates the power of involving those experiencing the problem in creating the solution. PCORI developed an Engagement Rubric in collaboration with patients to guide stakeholder engagement across phases of healthcare research, as well as a Compensation Framework to compensate patients, caregivers, and organizations fairly for contributing their expertise to healthcare research (Angevine et al., 2019).

Being at the decision-making table, however does not guarantee that those with the lived experience or the intended beneficiaries have influence over how the problem is characterized or its the solution. Chicago Beyond identifies seven inequities stemming from power dynamics that anchor the current system and create barriers for communities to be full participants in redesign and development. These inequities—access, information, validity, ownership, value, accountability, and authorship—that exclude communities from research and decisions around efforts intended to benefit them (Chicago Beyond, 2018). They provide practical guidance for how communities should be, need to be, and can be integral in participatory research practices.

Within education, examples of inclusion that implicitly recognize context expertise have appeared in different ways, for example:

- Education reform initiatives that began with teacher votes to implement exceeding a certain percentage, reflecting change management literature and organizational theory that stakeholder buy in is essential to implement any change and capacity-building and supports to develop understanding and rationale necessary to sustain changes
- School-based decision-making, and efforts to include community representation, e.g., California’s Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) required of every district
- Research-practice partnerships and recently more, their inclusion of students and community

The contrast among these examples point to a range of what inclusion means, from including implementers to gain their buy-in for organizational change efforts determined by others, to apportioning seats to representatives of the local community, to greater recognition that community

involvement will increase the usefulness of research. Simply having a seat at the table is insufficient to authentically include those with context expertise. Learnings from the Inclusive Innovation pilot projects illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of what integrating context expertise means.

Participants' Understanding of Context Expertise and Its Value

Through recruiting and onboarding, Core team members understand that the team will comprise stakeholders not typically included in joint work for educational improvement. By agreeing to participate, they ostensibly espouse a belief that stakeholders outside of the formal K–12 system should have a place at the table, as well those within the system who have less positional authority such as teachers. Nonetheless, this upfront acknowledgement does not guarantee that participants' expectations about the value of context expertise will be borne out through the process, nor is it apparent that the expected contributions by community members are the ones that participants value after engaging in Inclusive Innovation.

After experiencing substantial phases of the Inclusive Innovation model, Core team members cited 10 key ways they understood and most valued community members' (including students' family members) contributions. (Student voice is a key component of context expertise, which we focus on explicitly in the paper, *In Their Own Words: Participants' Perspectives on Honoring Student Voice*.) According to Core team members from different stakeholder groups, community members:

- Provide a dose of reality to educators who might be in their own “bubble” and prevent them from being in their “silo”
- Offer “objective” views and perspectives of “reality on the ground”
- Bring a human picture of what students are like outside of school, where they can express their frustrations and hardships in “safe” spaces
- Create connections between what students are learning in school and the “real world”
- Are necessary because “it takes a village”
- Give access to community resources that educators may not know about
- Know the “local culture” and lived experience of historical discrimination in the community
- Use their lived experience to “help explain how to fix it [the identified problems]”
- Advocate for students
- Build support across the community and access different networks

Note: Words in quotations are interview respondents' phrasing.

These direct takeaways by Inclusive Innovation Core team members underscore that their perspective is deeper than the face validity that sometimes motivates or even mandates parent representatives on school committees (for example), or the typical relationships with the local community such as field trip locales and presenters for special school events (such as cultural arts day, career day).

The value that Core team members place on those with context expertise is well-rounded and nuanced. It ranges from the practical (knowledge of local resources) and the instrumental (building community support), to a moral stance (need for student advocates and the village has responsibility for its children's wellbeing) and a specific view of reality (those outside the K-12 system see the whole child in a way educators usually don't).

Exhibit 3 lays out how Core team members representing each stakeholder group understood what community members bring to the Inclusive Innovation process. Respondents spanned all four pilot projects and each stakeholder group had more than one interview respondent, ranging from 2 to 5 in each group.

Perhaps not surprisingly, community members, as a group, saw themselves as a bridge between schools and the "real world," to mitigate risks that schools and districts be siloed or students lack real-world applications of what they learn in school. Community members also acknowledged their opportunity to see students in ways they might not show themselves in school, laying bare their frustrations and challenges.

Students and parents too pointed to community members' ability to see youth more holistically, to advocate for them, and to bring objective or outside perspectives, again to break down potential school district isolation from students' daily realities. As one student put it: "Students a lot of the time aren't ready to talk about what happens to them at school to a random stranger, but they'll talk about it to their parents, and talk their ear off. So parents really bring that other view of how they want their children to be treated, and how they want their children to—what they want them to learn in a way."

Community members, students, and parents then primarily emphasized their contributions in terms of morals and reality.

Teachers and school and district administrators tended to cite more practical or instrumental reasons for including community members, such as providing knowledge of and access to community resources that might not be in the districts' purview or leveraging networks to help build buy-in. Their perspectives are understandable in the context that in fulfilling school goals, educators provide services to their students and families within a complex web of requirements, regulations, and limited resources. As such, reaching their goals entails pragmatic and strategic use of the knowledge and resources at their disposal, and their framing of community members' role in Inclusive Innovation is consistent with the everyday demands they must navigate.

Exhibit 3. Stakeholder Groups’ Perspectives on Value of Community Member Contributions

Stakeholder Group	Nature of Community Member Contribution Valued by Stakeholder Group
Community Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide a dose of reality to educators who might be in their own “bubble” ● Prevent them from being in their “silo” ● Offer “objective” views ● Perspectives of “reality on the ground” ● Bring a human picture of what students are like outside of school, where they can express their frustrations and hardships in “safe” spaces ● Create connections between what students are learning in school and the “real world” ● Are necessary because “it takes a village”
Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use their lived experience to “help explain how to fix it [the identified problems]” ● Advocate for students ● Offer “objective” views ● Bring a human picture of what students are like outside of school, where they can express their frustrations and hardships in “safe” spaces
Family Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Know the “local culture” ● Give access to community resources that educators may not know about
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lived experience of historical discrimination in the community ● Give access to community resources that educators may not know about ● Build support across the community
School and District Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access different networks ● Give access to community resources that educators may not know about

Taken together, the Core team participants’ understanding and value of context expertise underpin why those with context expertise are essential to any key effort to better serve students from groups marginalized in the local community. The emerging pattern in stakeholder groups’ different understandings of how community members contribute to Inclusive Innovation point to an area for improvement in how we build trust among stakeholders and set the stage for joint work.

Examples of Integrating Context Expertise

As efforts in education and elsewhere increasingly promote inclusion in many different ways, we think it would be helpful to provide some concrete examples to illustrate how context expertise is integrated in the work of specific Inclusive Innovation pilots and how participants suggest the work products would have been different without those with context expertise.

Using the distinctions that emerged from Core team interviews, below are specific examples illustrating the differing nature of contributions by those with context expertise.

Moral Stance

During Inquire and Investigate, the second phase of the Inclusive Innovation model, Core team members brainstorm from their collective experience and expertise potential root causes that may underlie the challenge they are examining. They then prioritize the root causes they would like to learn more about as being potentially the most important. Together they decide on the stakeholder groups they would like to gather data from and generate the questions that they would like to ask those stakeholder groups. Exhibits 4 and 5 provides key questions from different pilot projects that the Core teams generated to ask of community members and parents.

Exhibit 4. Sample Focus Group Questions for Community Members and Students in Mental Health and Racial Trauma Pilot Project

Community Members	Students
<p>Do you have opportunities to discuss race in your personal or professional life?</p> <p>How comfortable do you feel about having conversations about race? Who do you usually have these conversations with?</p> <p>When thinking about students, do you think it is important for students to be able to discuss racism? Why or why not?</p> <p>Where do you think these conversations should take place? Explain why you have responded in this way.</p>	<p>What have been your experiences with racism or microaggressions?</p> <p>What has been your response to microaggressions and racist comments/actions? Was your response different based on if the racism was coming from a teacher or a student? If so, how?</p> <p>What would need to be in place for you or other students to feel supported in initiating race-related discussions?</p> <p>Do you think that there is a difference between how students get support for trauma related to racism? ? If so, how and why?</p>

Exhibit 5. Sample Focus Group Questions for Community Members, Parents, and Students in Secondary Writing Pilot Projects

Sample questions for		
Community Members	Parents	Students
<p>How do you see students engaged in writing? What do they find engaging? What do they find challenging? What do students you work with say about writing in a school setting? How do you create an open, safe space that lets students engage, push the limits, try something new?</p>	<p>What kinds of conversations are you having with your child? What gets your child talking? How have conversations with your child changed as they've grown up/transitioned to high school? How do you feel about supporting your child in their school work/writing? How does your child approach writing (e.g., engaged, reluctant)?</p>	<p>How do you define writing? What are your goals related to writing? What purposes do you write for (inside OR outside of school)? What do you see as the difference between writing you do for school and other writing you do? What do you see as the same between them? What do you do, if anything, to get your family involved with school/your learning? Do you connect with your family about your (academic) writing?</p>
<p>What skills do you think students need to have when they leave school? What value do you think forced writing and freedom writing play into these skills? In your interactions with students, how have students shared that teachers are able to build trust with them? What other ways do you think teachers can build trust with students? As a community member who is hiring current or former students, what writing skills do you look for in job seekers?</p>	<p>What connection do you see between reading, writing, and home? What type of writing does your child do at home? What type of reading happens at home? What information do you need to become more familiar with the writing expectations and process at school?</p>	<p>What parts of writing do you find enjoyable? How can your teachers make writing more enjoyable for you? What do you think are the things that prevent students from feeling a sense of freedom when they write? What do you think prevents students from writing about their opinions? How does (or does) your school encourage you to express yourself using different formats (art, video, technology, etc.)? What other opportunities would you create for students for self-expression? What do you think of teacher feedback with your writing? Are there certain types of feedback that you want or do not want when sharing your personal writing? When sharing structured writing?</p>

As these questions illustrate, they elicit understandings about identity and engagement that go beyond what educators would typically see at school, particularly among secondary students who move from class to class and in larger school environments and may not have a trusted adult in the school that they can talk to.

Views of Reality

In the process of identifying potential root causes, community members offered perspectives that sought to let educators know what really was happening outside of school, what students' true feelings were, what the history of the local community really meant to the students and families and how their knowledge of that history shaped their views on whether and how district efforts reinforced or challenge historical wrongs (Exhibits 6 through 8).

Exhibit 6 . Sample of Core Team Members' Brainstorming on Root Causes of Students' Writing Engagement

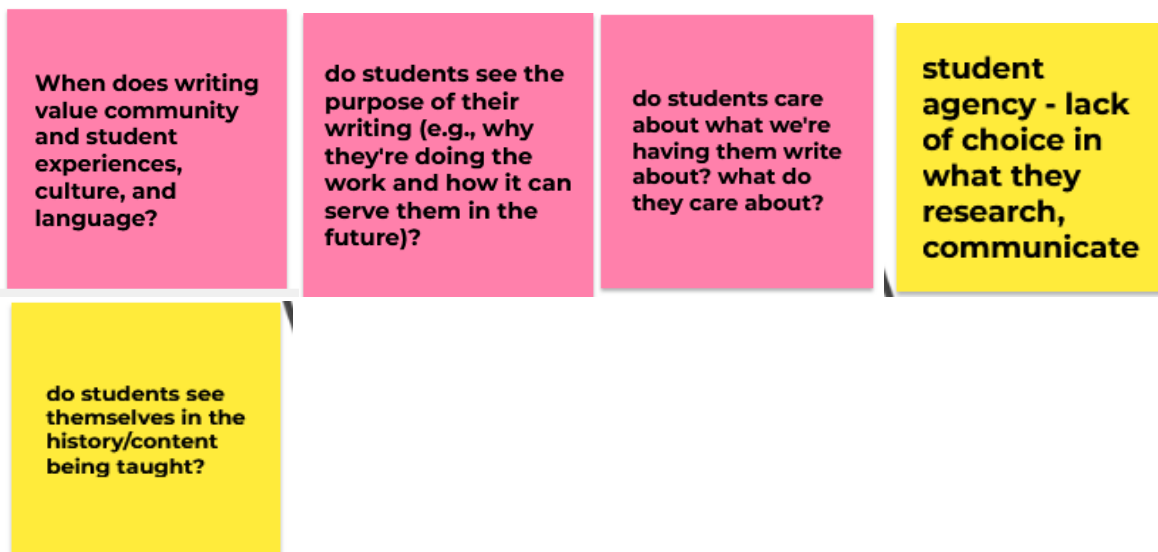


Exhibit 7. Sample of Core Team Members' Brainstorming on Root Causes of Students' Writing Engagement

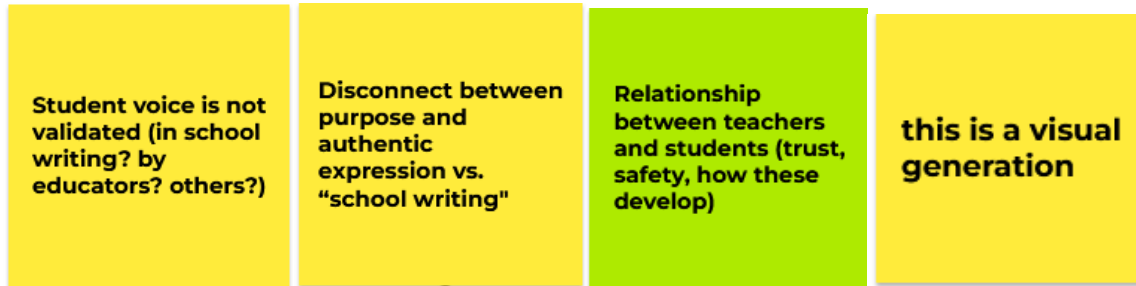
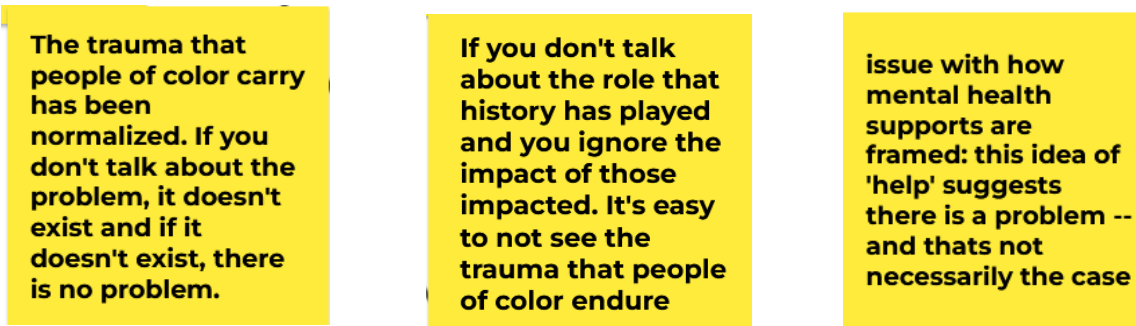


Exhibit 8. Sample of Core Team Members' Brainstorming of Root Causes Underlying Students' Mental Health



After brainstorming potential root causes to their respective challenges, Core team members generated the focus group questions they wanted to ask of different stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of those root causes. Responses from stakeholder focus groups also reflect this theme of painting a picture of reality (Exhibits 9 to 11).

Exhibit 9. Sample Responses from One Parent in Focus Group A

How do you feel about supporting your child in their school work/writing? How does your child approach writing (e.g., engaged, reluctant)?

My daughter loves to write but my son struggles. Having him at home, I got to see how much writing he had to do. My first response was “why is your teacher making you write so much?” I didn’t understand until now, why there was so much writing. The previous year (because he was in class) most of his writing was in class. Not being physically in the class, it was easier for him to slack off at home. His social studies teacher made it easy for me because it was very clear what he had to do.

Also the topic is important. If it’s something that he’s interested in, he’s much more likely to write. For my daughter, because she is timid, writing is her way of expressing herself.

What types of supports would help you other families to stay better connected to classroom learning, discussion topics, etc.?

When my son got to select the topic of his writing (James Brown biography), he was much more interested. When he first started to learn about immigration he found it boring until he began to learn about different stories in history. Then it was very interesting.

Making the expectations clear is very important. When the teacher is clear then it makes it easier to follow. Example: Immigration inquiry. Breaking down the research into supporting questions. Having all of the questions “tie together” allows students and parents to see the big picture.

Exhibit 10. Sample Responses from Parents in Focus Group B

What information do you need to become more familiar with the writing expectations and process at school?

Parent 1. Sometimes the expectations are not clearly set forward to kids of what is wanted or needed of them. I asked my kid if he needed to do this and my kid said “I don’t know.” You should be doing this, but your teacher didn’t tell you to do this? The final output with papers are not explicit enough of what the task is so that they can be successful. As a parent, I’m like but that wasn’t on there! Because I read the directions with them, and maybe it is said out loud in class. But if there were actual directions it would help.

Parent 2. My kids are still at the age where things are very literal. If I say I think we need to do this my child will say it’s not on the paper and in the directions. So things need to be super specific and literal even at this age.

Parent 3: For my kids they never want to do anything the teacher doesn’t want. Because what if the teacher didn’t want that?

Exhibit 11. Sample Responses from Community Members in Focus Group C

What do you think are some reasons that people do not want to talk about racism?

Most people don't know how to talk about racism. A lot has to do with emotion that plays into it, very emotionally charged conversation. And most people want to see themselves as good and whenever anything comes up to challenge that, it's difficult for people to accept that and be honest—a lot of dynamics that prevent people from being vulnerable.

Do you have opportunities to discuss race in your personal or professional life?

In my professional life, I work with a plethora of students.... This past Saturday, students had a lot of questions—representation matters. It's emotional, [it's] difficult, [it] should not go unnoticed. [I'm] thankful these conversations are happening more in our community and abroad.... In my personal life, sometimes I'm baffled. [I] don't have the answers to all the questions but it does turn on a light bulb. [We] need to continue conversations because students are asking questions and administrators may not be able to answer and be transparent.

When thinking about students, do you think it is important for students to be able to discuss racism? Why or why not?

I think it's important for students to be able to discuss racism because what's happening is a video comes out ... [and] when videos come out there's a reaction. We're reactionary [as a society] - it's healthy to continue these conversations as often as we need to. That way when things happen, it's rage, [channeled into] marches after George Floyd. [It's] healthy to have conversations when these things happen, not just react. [It's] healthy for Blacks and Whites to engage as we move along.

I think this is what's real for them [students]. If we don't give them the opportunity, they can't express their feelings. I talk to school social workers across the county, it doesn't happen here. We need to hear it, be honest and be real.

As these artifacts illustrate, the Core team asked for information about students' lives outside of school, aspects that educators may indirectly hear about or intuit but about which they do not have direct observations. Both parents and community members provide that vantage point.

Practical Considerations

Practical considerations can make or break a solution idea simply because the stakeholders need to believe that a potential solution can be implemented, separate from any other merit to the solution. Community members could provide some practical considerations, although as solution development moved towards specific implementation, the ones responsible for implementing and using the solution offered more practical feedback around when the solution might be implemented, how best to ensure that those who are supposed to have access to the solution would really have access, and how to stage implementation to increase the probability of success. For example, in planning to integrate compact writing assignments into her 9th-grade history class, one teacher decided to offer students a range of topics to choose from and to spend more time on the activity than originally envisioned to ensure that her students understood the nature of compact writing assignments. Another teacher planned to integrate the compact writing assignments into topics the students were reading about and to connect to current events.

Instrumental Considerations

Identifying and recruiting focus group participants was an example of community members' instrumental contribution to the Inclusive Innovation process. Each Core team member (not only community members) nominated potential focus group participants and reached out to the individuals to recruit them. Core team members also led the focus groups for the stakeholder group to which they belonged, e.g., students led student focus groups, parents led parent focus groups, and community members led community member focus groups, etc. This arrangement was an attempt to mitigate power dynamics that might have been present if the focus groups had been led by someone with authority in the school or district or potential authority over the specific individuals in the focus group (e.g., teacher leading the student focus group).

In a subsequent phase, student interns further developed the compact writing assignments as a solution designed to provide students with low-stakes, short writing opportunities on topics they choose as a mechanism to build writing skills and confidence. They were asked to present the solution and rationale for it to 9th grade history teachers, not only to showcase their accomplishment, but also convey to the teachers the validity of the solution and its promise as designed and endorsed by students.

Overall then, community members' contributions, as articulated by Core team members, fell into these different categories—moral stance, views of reality, practical, and instrumental—and the sample work products above illustrate that contributions in all four categories naturally emerged and arguably were all necessary for the process to move ahead.

Challenges

While Core team members clearly articulated the community members' contributions and we saw evidence of how context expertise influenced the Core teams' work, several challenges arose through the process. We tried to problem-solve some of these challenges in the course of piloting the Inclusive Innovation model, although as others likely also experience, many of the challenges are enduring—they shift in degree, may be addressed temporarily, and emerge again later under new circumstances. As we discuss the challenges that arose, we also point to some conditions that participants cited as helpful in facilitating the inclusion of those with context expertise.

Role Clarity

The typical roles for community members to participate in school and district activities are fairly well defined and often established by policy—elected or appointed school board members, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), local school improvement planning committees or school-based budget committees, English learner advisory councils, classroom volunteer, etc. Except for the school board, parents are the primary community stakeholders involved in these opportunities. While they wear different hats professionally and personally in the community, their inclusion is by virtue of being a

parent in the local school district, and the scope of the committees or activities that they participate in tend to be routine, following procedures set out by policy and long-standing procedures.

By contrast, the Inclusive Innovation process uses a broader definition of community to include not only parents/guardians and students, but also individuals and organizations that interact with youth outside of school—employers, community center and library staff, sports coaches, pastors, long-time community pillars who know everyone and everything. Inclusive Innovation, by design, also does not prespecify to a high degree the community members' role because the process itself entails Core team members collaborating to define the problem and design a solution to address that problem. To avoid prescribing the nature of the problem or its solution, we deliberately did not convey that specific community members were included for practical or instrumental purposes (for example, for skills they have due to their occupation), other than their relationship working with youth and their desire to engage collaboratively in the particular challenge each pilot addressed (adolescent writing, mental health and racial trauma, and social justice discourse in the classroom).

Perhaps because this type of role for community members is unfamiliar in typical K12 settings and because the nature of Inclusive Innovation is emergent, those with context expertise were unclear about their role on the Core team at different times. They were clear on the principle of including those with context expertise, like themselves, but in the specific tasks and conversations, their sense that they were creating value ebbed and flowed. It was clear early on in the process when the Core teams worked on questions inherently about lived experience, such as potential root causes to the challenge, and less so when they perceived that more technical knowledge about teaching, such as curriculum or instructional strategies, was required.

Expertise, Not Experts

We prefer the term “those with context expertise” rather than “context expert.” We find that the term “those with context expertise” conveys a sense that we each bring such expertise, and that expertise is not the sum total of a person's identity. Indeed, multiple community members initially told their teams that they didn't consider themselves experts and being characterized as such made them uncomfortable.

In the same way that the term “context expert” might seem static, “those with context expertise” conveys more fluidity in what is considered context expertise. Context expertise varies based on the emerging needs of the innovation phase. For example, as described in Exhibit 12, early in the process, when the Core team defines community assets, context expertise can include knowledge of individual people and their skills, knowledge, and resources; networks, organizations, and associations; happenings and norms in the community; its history and culture, especially the unwritten. When the team moves on to hypothesize the root causes to the challenge they are working on and ideating around possible solutions, the context expertise that was most centered was the lived experience of parents and students closest to the challenge. Beyond firsthand knowledge of that lived experience, perspectives of those who interacted with students around that challenge also contributed context expertise. In subsequent phases of solution development and implementation, the most relevant

context expertise blended knowledge of how implementation could work and technical expertise of whether the solution could be practically implemented. For instance, pilot teachers planning to try compact writing assignments in their classrooms identified the most practical places in the curriculum to tie in the mini assignments and ways to provide students with a manageable amount of choice (in topics and formats) that wouldn't overwhelm them. At the same time, the teachers understood the foundational skills students would need to successfully engage with compact writing assignments, for example, being able to provide constructive peer feedback based on a shared understanding of what they are expected to experience and learn through the compact writing assignments. The teachers built in additional time and scaffolding for the students accordingly.

At the solution development and implementation stages, community members began to express doubts about their role and whether and how they were contributing to solving the problem. Although we had not planned for a change in Core team members in two of the pilots, it naturally occurred in response to different stakeholders who needed to be involved in developing and implementing the solutions. We worked with the Core team coleaders to establish "Phase 2" teams that included some individuals who carried over from the original Core team, as well as added more priority students and teachers who would pilot the solution in their classrooms, and their respective school leaders.

Exhibit 12. Illustrative Context Expertise by Key Step of Inclusive Innovation Model

Key Step	Phase	Type of Context Expertise that Tended to Be Centered
Pivotal Moments in Education History	CC	Core team members' personal reflections on and experiences with inequity and racism in K–12 education
Community Asset Mapping	CC/IN	Knowledge of individuals and organizations in the local community relevant to the challenge or work with youth
Identifying and Gathering Data about Root Causes	IN	Knowledge of students' lives outside of school Knowledge of students' feelings about school
Prioritizing Problem to Solve for and Outcomes	IN	Stakeholder group representatives' elaboration on the root causes
Solution Ideation and Stretching for Equity and Innovativeness	DD	Teaching contexts Classroom or school environments Appeal to students; students' willingness to try solution
Solution Concept, Design, and Development	DD	Alignment with student needs and targeted outcomes Feasibility from perspective of likely implementers (e.g., teachers, community healthcare workers) Rationale sensible to students; students' willingness to try solution
Pilot Solution Implementation	IM	Feasibility from perspective of those implementing the pilot solution

Note: CC: Connect & Commit; IN: Inquire & Investigate; DD: Design & Develop; IM Implement & Iterate. These are the first four of five phases in the [Inclusive Innovation model](#).

Legitimate Participation: Who Can Validly Weigh In On What

Societal status stems from many sources. In addition to wealth, education, age, and dominant language proficiency (to name only a few), occupation or profession plays a large role in legitimating an individual's access to information, decision-making spaces, and influence. To the extent that context expertise includes both explicit and tacit knowledge that have little to do with certificates and degrees, occupation or profession in theory should not be a legitimating factor. These hierarchies, however, are ingrained in our collective and individual mental models and encoded in how we routinely interact with each other.

A key example illustrates the challenge of setting aside these mental models of hierarchy to truly take in what another is telling us about their experiences and to accord full legitimacy to what that person has to say. One Core team member who is a parent in the local school district and themselves a graduate from that system observed that when they shared their experiences and that of youth they interact with around writing, and the anxiety youth felt in confronting school writing assignments, their comments were being politely passed over. The parent then referenced research around youth development, which they were familiar with through their profession,¹ to substantiate the points they were trying to make. The other Core team members took more notice of the parent's comments when they realized that the parent was drawing on their professional expertise, even though the experiences that the parent conveyed were rooted in lived experience and shouldn't have needed the appeal to research and professional expertise.

[A]s a parent, I find myself having a very different level of language that I am articulating. But then sometimes I felt like when I wasn't being listened to, I had to kind of elevate like, "Let me put on my other hat and maybe this will have a little more impact." So I did find that the levels between parent, community members, teachers, administrators, leadership, ... -- I think we were all saying the same thing. But in the way that we were saying, it almost showed hierarchy, at least in my view.—Parent

At the heart of this challenge is the need to constantly reinforce that lived experience is real, valid, and therefore can stand on its own without appeal to authority. When discussion honored lived experience, participants reported that those who didn't have such experiences listened: "Everything was balanced. Everybody who wanted to support but did not have those experience[s], listened.... There was no argument. People just understood, 'This is my experience.' They took it as that." [RCS_VJ] (Teacher)

Information Flow

Again, beyond the initial phases of identifying community assets and digging into root causes, those with context expertise felt unsure about how to add value when discussions about solutions revolved around what has been done and what could be done within schools. The community members reported that

¹ To maintain anonymity, we are not specifying the team member's profession.

without a better understanding of the existing curriculum and content standards, they deferred to teachers, school leaders, and district administrators on what seemed feasible.

This limitation pinpoints an inherent tension in Inclusive Innovation: Educators are indeed experts in subject matter, curriculum, and content standards, as well as school organization and instruction. At the same time, a process that results in innovative solutions that meets the needs of communities historically underserved by the system may need to stretch beyond what those within the system currently perceive as workable. As this community member expressed:

I think the solutions that were chosen did lean more towards things that the folks in the district felt could be implemented fairly easily and they would be most expected from the educational perspective.... And I know partly it was because I think they'd be much more difficult for the school to implement, which I understand, especially during this time where you're coming out of pandemic and you're still trying to reestablish regularity... I think the things that are being suggested are contained. They're very important, ...but I really wanted to see them building that opportunity to engage community members to support what teachers are saying in the classroom, right? Because students hear stuff from teachers all the time and they don't necessarily always listen. But if you have people from the community coming in and say, "This is how I use writing. This is how writing can be impactful, can make a difference, right?" And then giving students an opportunity outside of the classroom with community members to engage in writing can be so powerful. –Community member

Those outside or on the periphery of the system can serve a galvanizing role in pushing the boundaries. Several steps might facilitate this role for community members:

- Summarizing relevant background information about current curriculum and standards and ensuring adequate time for community members to gain an understanding through dialogue with educators
- Creating more time during explicit reviews of the potential solutions to discuss whether and how different solutions might work in context to explore whether they are feasible with a little, some, or a great deal of effort and the degree of change that would be required of the system. Feasibility is somewhat contingent on the time horizon we assume—what is infeasible or impractical in the short term can be doable in the medium or long term
- Articulating better and weaving in those with context expertise to consistently review solution development and implementation with a lens to expand what is possible within the system

District Role and Hierarchy

Consistent with the idea of familiar scripts and the circumscribed roles that community members typically play in schools, district decision-making follows an explicit hierarchy. Although schools and districts are loosely coupled organizations (Weick, 1976) and teachers can have significant autonomy in the classroom in terms of how they teach and the relationships they build with students and families, key decisions about programs, initiatives, improvement goals, and resources allocation typically involve district decisionmakers at different levels. District decisionmakers often control or powerfully influence the narrative about what the learning goals should be, the key instructional strategies that will achieve those goals (e.g., differentiation, multitiered systems of student supports, socioemotional content, real world learning, inquiry-based learning, etc.), and how well the district is doing in meeting those goals.

The Inclusive Innovation process by definition challenges this district role. It potentially results in a different problem-framing and therefore types of solutions that differ from those that districts have considered in the past. As a community co-lead put it:

I feel like when you're at a district level ... you're a little bit more removed from where the students are. So having that feedback from the teachers, having that feedback from the community, having that feedback from the students, and them all being consistent helps build the validity, right, of saying that, yes, there definitely is a challenge and something needs to be addressed.

The problem-framing by those with lived experience is critical in several ways. The community may place a higher priority on a particular problem than the district does. The community's perspective about what the underlying causes of the problem, based on information from settings beyond school, may differ from the district's diagnosis. And thus differences in problem-framing open up different types of solutions—to address root causes rather than surface indicators of a problem.

And without them saying that that's not working or without someone actually... speaking on this item that actually lived that experience and telling you that those things don't work or this is what they need or maybe this might make a difference, I think the group would have been more of a, "We're just going to kind of fix it," but not fixing it. "We're just going to make it look fixed. We're going to give a solution and then move on." –Parent

From an organizational perspective, it is this aspect of being open to solutions that might not fit the districts' or schools' current assumptions, norms, processes, or policies, which implies necessary mindset shifts and willingness to invest in learning, capacity-building, and infrastructure. Because solutions always carry some cost—monetary, human, political—ceding enough control to include those outside of their typical decision-making structure and to allow solutions to emerge can be risky for districts. As a community member expressed: “[T]here’s this whole shift in power and authority. We might have something to say, but how quickly I even found myself doing this, falling in line with what higher leadership thought or had to say.” Another community member stated concern about whether current ways of doing things constrained district action in the end:

I don't want to say that we didn't try to do all of those things because I think that everybody was really trying to do that. I think the frustration for me is at the end, it just sort of got narrowed down into—and I guess there are restrictions on school districts and things like that. So I think that what happened is they're probably trying to just be practical, maybe.... I don't know if what we decided is going to help the kids, so I'll be curious to see if it does. –Community member

The Inclusive Innovation pilot projects varied in the extent to which the process resulted in shared power, from an early definition of the grade and subject area that the solution would focus on to a more emergent solution that would be located outside of the district. Although this range is not surprising, even some shift in how districts typically operate can make a notable difference. One principal identified the difference between an ostensibly inclusive process that nonetheless arrives at a preselected destination and one that is more authentically inclusive as they experienced in Inclusive Innovation:

[W]e've all sat in professional settings for many years, and a lot of the time there is an initiative at the end, and there is a place that we all need to get, and we're just kind of working to get everybody there. And I just really appreciate the fact that that wasn't what this was. This was really a thought process amongst all of us. And you can tell based on the ending product and so forth.... That doesn't always happen. A lot of the times this is, 'We know where we want to get them.' We just have to guide them in the right direction to get there.... I appreciate that it really was about what we were talking about, about the ideas that we were bringing up, about various people's voices and how we were going to be most efficient in trying to get to phase two [developing the solution] at a very high level. –Principal

In practice, community members saw moments when the district continued to exert its authority to shape the problem the Core team addressed and the nature of solutions. District influence on the process is predictable—we know moment-to-moment interactions cannot always ignore relative hierarchy, positionality, and power of those involved. District influence is also not inherently problematic if all stakeholders voice their perspectives and those with power seek to understand and listen openly. The ensuing dialogue may very well feature district influence but perhaps in a way that more explicitly acknowledges and accommodates learning from other stakeholders.

Those outside of the district may also assume that they do not have sufficient knowledge to weigh in on certain types of decisions.

I do think that folks tended to defer decision to... district personnel because they trusted that the districts, the people from the district, knew best.... I just think most people were thinking, "Well, the district folks know best, like what's going to work? And so let's go with their thoughts on the subject." So it could have been that I think people were feeling, 'Well, I'm not necessarily an education subject matter expert, so I would defer to those people who are.' –Community member

Core team members suggested that those outside of the district need to know upfront what is and what is not flexible so that community members know they are contributing in useful ways. They also suggested having more parents than administrators and small working groups that distribute district and school voices so that they aren't as dominant. As a student underscored: "[I]f we make it so that everyone is all on the same level, then I feel like more people listen because there aren't people that have higher positions and lower positions. It's just everyone that's the same."

Liminal Role of Teachers

Everyone has context expertise of many kinds. Within the Inclusive Innovation tenets, lived experience of a given educational challenge situated within the local community is the context expertise we amplify. With this definition, teachers have a liminal role. They possess content expertise about the subject matter, curriculum, pedagogy, and child and youth development. They also may be members of an historically and systematically excluded population; they may live in the same community as the students and families they serve; they may have experienced the same educational challenge growing up; they have direct experience teaching students from historically and systematically excluded communities and witness their strengths and their frustrations. They bring these experiences and tacit knowledge to the table.

I think [inclusive Innovation process] helps us reflect more on everything that we've taken in and processed....[M]aybe it didn't all click before or maybe we didn't process everything that we've experienced or witnessed.... Like we know that we have kids who come from certain places. We know that we have students who have had certain experiences and whether or not we responded to that in a way that we should have in the past. We still bring that knowledge there. –Teacher

As the Inclusive Innovation process moves closer to implementing a trial solution, teachers possess the relevant context expertise as well, about how the solution could work in their own classrooms, with their own students, within the curriculum they are teaching. To the extent that a solution is implemented in classrooms, teachers are at the crux of making any proposed changes a reality on the ground: "[T]hey're dabbling [in] both worlds. They have to see beyond that student to try to give them what they need to get to the next level. But also, stay grounded to be able to work with administration, the parents...—we have to kind of be flexible as teachers."

At the same time, teachers naturally experience the tension of what is feasible and what is taken for granted in terms of what can be done in the current system. It can be uncomfortable in pushing the boundaries of what is currently done. Explicitly acknowledging teachers' liminal role from the start, and being attentive to that role especially as the Inclusive Innovation model moves towards solutions design and implementation; and providing specific pause points to focus on teachers' feedback and consider how that feedback offers context expertise, as well as how it may defy or be constrained by assumptions about what is feasible under the current system may add clarity and transparency to teachers' role in Inclusive Innovation.

Conditions Facilitating Context Expertise Integration

Intentional Facilitation

Participants pointed to facilitation as important to structuring spaces and shaping interactions that allowed for all stakeholders to voice their perspectives. Planned protocols with prompt questions that all stakeholders would be invited to answer and tools such as jamboards provided a record of everyone's contributions. At certain times, affinity groups provided protected spaces for those from the same stakeholder group to bring their ideas together first and to have more critical mass, especially among those who have less perceived or real power, e.g., students. Community members pointed to facilitation that specifically attended to which voices are entering the conversations and intervening to create openings for those with context expertise as helpful.

There are stronger voices in any group, and there always will be. You guys [Digital Promise facilitators] did a really good job of making sure that, if you were noticing somebody who wasn't sharing or maybe looked as though they wanted to say something, that you really identified them and let them speak up. I think when you put adults and children together, adults, we try to pretend like we're going to sit there and be quiet and let the kids talk. But sometimes we just need to just stop and listen.

—Principal

When Core team members were in mixed groups, specific openings from either a facilitator or another member of the group created space for those who were unsure of whether they should or could chime in.

I was a little bit hesitant to share some of my experiences, but I loved that my administrator [and team co-leaders], they would specifically ask me, "[W]hat do you think?" And it made me feel like I could speak. And so I thought that kind of helped with the problem solving, maybe a little bit of perspective that I was able to share that maybe the students didn't have or the core team didn't have.—Teacher

Hearing the Voices at the Table

In any group of individuals, some will naturally be louder, brasher, or more jovial, just as some will be quieter, more measured, or less impulsive. Ensuring opportunities for everyone to express their perspectives does not necessarily mean that all voices are heard, as the prior example about the parent needing to invoke their professional expertise indicates. Experiences new or counter to other stakeholders' understanding might not be taken up initially and require reiteration and amplification:

I remember at one of our in-person meetings that someone said something and it kind of was like, "That's not 100% right, so I want to just kind of talk that out a little bit." And ...our other core team member, was able to confirm that, "Hey, this does happen, and this happens like this." So I felt that anyone who was leading those meetings or

leading that discussion took the time to listen, to walk through that until it was something that we felt good about moving forward with.—Community member

Adult Core team members often referenced or solicited student perspectives in particular. They expressed effort in genuinely wanting to center student voices, as this principal assessed: “I think that we really held what the kids had to say to a high standard.. .. I think every idea, every concept that was brought up, was taken with respect and honored people’s time...” -At the same time, as adults, we don’t necessarily realize when we are not listening. For example, a specific solution idea was a favorite among adults, while a student argued that it would not appeal to students because the solution assumed that students who already were struggling with the subject area would be willing to engage in the subject after school like an enrichment club.

I think that it’s hard for adults to let go of their ideas. I think that our kids tried to tell us that some of those things are just not going to work....-but we really stuck to our guns about some of the decisions ... It’s a difficult place. It’s a mind shift for everybody. It’s a mind shift for us. It’s a mind shift for the kids. —Principal

Explicit equity pauses—deliberate pause points for the Core team members to reflect on and answer whether key decisions were aligned with the contributions of students and others with context expertise—were initially embedded in meeting protocols at specific intervals. In practice, equity pauses were less explicit. At times, individual Core team members provided that equity check and reminded the team about what they learned from community members or students that was being ignored. Community members also pointed to visual tools, such as jamboards, where everyone could put their ideas on record and make them visible was also helpful in improving positional power dynamics.

Overall, however, more attention to listening and learning emerged as a need in practice. Over time, building the relationships aided in Core team members being able to listen, hear, and give credence to each other’s perspective, especially as their trust grew that they were united by a common goal of supporting students, as this community member described:

I think that once everyone started connecting, they were able to hear each other’s stories, hear each other’s experiences. And sometimes you would hear a student say something. You would hear a teacher just confirmed what they were saying, and it was that understanding....I think that the group meshed, melded together well because we all were really looking at how we can help support our students.—Community member

Cultivating Individual Awareness

Closely related to organizational and facilitation factors that shape the conditions for context expertise to be elevated, cultivating individual awareness of sharing the space was an explicit goal (see the paper [Capacity Building in Communities to Create Equity-Centered Educational Opportunities](#)). At key times during the process, those with more positional authority explicitly stepped back so that others got the time to offer their perspectives. This trajectory of decentering themselves was not necessarily smooth or

consistent and represents an area for further improvement. It pushed individuals beyond their comfort zone to be able to see different perspectives.

I think what we're trying to do is we're trying to have some discussions and talk about some things, and it will push you out of your comfort zone. And I probably felt like I got pushed out of my comfort zone a little bit during some of those meetings, but at the end of the day, it gives me such a better perspective of things to say, "Hey, there are other people that see things differently than I do. And although I may not agree with every aspect of it, it certainly doesn't hurt me to hear those ideas."

—Community member

Discussion and Reflections Looking Ahead

The Inclusive Innovation pilot projects show key ways in which context expertise was meaningfully incorporated into the R&D process from the start, as well as point to ways in which doing so is complex, requires intentionality and effort, and needs improvement. Below are reflections on learnings thus far.

“Balancing” Context and Content Expertise

Because context and content expertise have been juxtaposed and sometimes framed in opposition to each other, it is tempting to think about balancing the two forms of expertise. However, we are striving for an integration that recognizes that the two types of expertise are interdependent in defining and solving challenges at the root of inequity in the education system. Neither alone are sufficient.

Research-based and technical knowledge about different solutions in areas such as mental health treatment must be taken into account to prevent inadvertent harm. At the same time, strategies developed to meet common needs can gain better traction in the local community with a critical look at whether their specific needs are incorporated in the research-based strategies, ways of adapting those strategies, and identifying new community-led ways to build out, implement, and sustain the strategies locally.

Finding this third space where context and content expertise are intentionally and ultimately seamlessly integrated continues to be our goal. As a student put it: “It’s sort of like an ecosystem, I guess. The best way I would describe it is that everybody’s benefiting off of each other. Everyone’s benefiting by the different viewpoints.”

Looking ahead, doing so will likely mean continuing to build and reinforce trust foundations from the start, and developing individual capacities to recognize and honor context expertise, as well as surrounding structures that facilitate that integration. Where it has worked in the pilot projects, participants have engaged as their rightful place. As one teacher expressed: “I don’t recall ever being in a group or in a room where someone is just sitting back, like, ‘Okay, well, no. I don’t have anything to say because what I have to say is not important.’”

A community member summed up:

And so that's why I think the way it's done to incorporate all that stuff early on into it so that you're seeing it from every perspective, so that the administrators don't realize, "Hey, this isn't all about you just coming up with a process that you're going to push down to the classroom." And it's not all about the teachers saying, "Hey, just because you teach in the classroom every day, you know exactly what's best for everyone in the community." And it's a good way for the community to say, "We have kids in this community, we have friends, we have family. This way, we have some input on this." It's not like it's all being decided at a school board meeting behind an executive session and then said, "Well, this is the vote, this is how it's going." So that's where I think the value of doing it that way from the get go is. –Community member

Refining the Role of Outside Context Expertise During Implementation

I think it's important to have both an insider and an outsider perspective.
—Community member

As the Inclusive Innovation process moves into implementing pilot solutions, the concrete, everyday actions are situated with existing organizations, at least in the pilot projects thus far. Community members who had come together to help shape the problem definition and solution are then outside of the implementing organizations, raising the question of what their role can be when implementation appears primarily in the control of those with specific responsibilities within the existing organizations, for example, as teachers, school administrators, or health practitioners.

A key role for community members should be to maintain a check on the development and implementation process to ensure that in practice, the solution fulfills the original intent of the community: that the implemented solution reflects the solution components they helped design to address the problem as the community defined it and the outcomes the community specified if solution adequately addresses the problem. Having deliberate avenues and opportunities to observe, evaluate, and reflect on whether and how the pilot solution as implemented reflects the goals the team targeted in designing the solution, offering feedback on how priority students and families are experiencing the solution and gathering input for how implementation can be improved are all vital roles. Those closest to the challenge can provide interpretation and insights regarding any data on outcome indicators as well to understand whether the students and families are benefitting from the solution and in what ways. Centering context expertise in a continuous improvement role is a way to build in system accountability to those who are supposed to be the primary beneficiaries of the work.

As this student wisely instructs us:

I think the context experts have to involve themselves. Nobody's going to come to them and ask for their help within a certain solution. I mean, they might, but they have a larger chance of making things better for themselves, for their kids, for the whole

community if they step up and sort of force themselves into the room, force themselves onto a chair on the table or even make themselves a chair at the table because nobody's going to do it for them. –Student

Applying the dimensions along which participants characterized community members' contributions, those with context expertise could play the following roles under implementation, iteration, and sustainability.

- Moral stance: Are students and families who are intended to benefit really benefitting? Is the solution showing promise by impacting the indicators those with context expertise identified?
- View of reality: Are students and families intended to benefit going to buy into the solution? Believe that the solution will work? How are students and families intended to benefit experiencing the solution?
- Practical: Anticipate and help problem-solve questions that students and families will have about the solution
- Instrumental: Help explain to community members why and how the solution was developed and how it is envisioned to work

The practical and instrumental dimensions are typically the ones that implementation planning seek to address, the moral stance and views of reality embed the notions of accountability that in the end, the solutions arising from the Inclusive Innovation process need to make tangible difference to real students' real needs and that those who have historically and systematically been excluded are clearly benefitting from the solutions because they have helped lead the decision-making process from the start.

I think the overall impact is opening the discussion for something that's a difficult topic, and I hope that that paves the way for us to talk about all kinds of things that are difficult, because if we can't talk about stuff, and even if we disagree, if we can't talk about it in a rational way and come up with some ideas and some understanding of each other's perspective, we don't move forward, right? –Community member

References

- Angevine, C., Cator, K., Liberman, B., Smith, K., & Young, V. (2019, November). *Designing a process for Inclusive Innovation, A radical commitment to equity*. Digital Promise.
<https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Designing-a-Process-for-Inclusive-Innovation.pdf>.
- Attygalle, L. (2017). The Context Experts. Retrieved from:
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/The%20Context%20Experts.pdf?hsCtaTracking=56bc3396-2e91-49d8-8efc-95fa20b82878%7Cbde62d-6f5b-4aa4-8b0d-292bbd5c5b9b>
- Chicago Beyond. (2018). *Why am I always being researched?*
<https://chicagobeyond.org/researchequity/>
- Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. (2020). *Funds of knowledge*.
<https://culturallyresponsivepedagogy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/KeyConcept6-Funds-of-knowledge.pdf>
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes to classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), p. 132–141.
- Weick, K. (1976). Educational systems as loosely coupled organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1), p. 1–19.