

Teaching Tips: How to Integrate Concepts in Public Work Projects

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Why is this important?

- When groups are engaged in public work projects, one of the best ways for students to learn about the political dimensions of their work is by using core concepts such as power, politics, self-interests, democracy, public, diversity.
- Concepts are a defining feature of Public Achievement; they distinguish PA from community service and many forms of service learning. Public Achievement is unique because it is not action for the sake of action, or speech for the sake of speech. **It is action that has been discussed and thought out in advance, and is evaluated once it is done.** Both the action and speech in PA are framed in terms of their political and public dimensions.

How to do it?

Before you start PA Projects:

It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the core concepts. It is important to realize that these **concepts are not vocabulary words with correct definitions**. They are ideas with multiple definitions to be debated.

In the course of your work:

There are several ways for teams to use concepts in the course of their work:

1. Concepts can help teams *plan and strategize* their actions. Possible questions / tips:
 - How is your project public? Who does it impact? How?
 - What are the politics of your project?
 - What is that organization's interest in our project? What power do they have?
 - What power does your group have?
 - What might we do to build our power in order to ...?
2. Concepts can help teams *evaluate* their actions; they can help a team think through their action in deeper ways.
 - How did the group do? Were you prepared? In what ways were you accountable to the persons they interacted with, to each other?
 - In your negotiations with the principal, what power did she have? What power did you have? What other sources of power could you tap into to be in a better bargaining position?
 - What is your understanding of the politics of the situation?
3. Concepts allow teams to *reflect on and learn* from experiences. Possible questions / tips:
 - What was it like to negotiate with the administrator? How did she treat you? In what ways did you experience her power (over our project, over us)? What was that like?
 - What was it like to make a public presentation in front of hundreds of students? Did you notice yourself acting differently in public? How did the audience respond? How did that make you feel powerful?
 - What was it like to meet homeless people at the shelter? What did you learn about their lives? Do you look at yourselves differently? In what ways was this an encounter with diversity?

4. Concepts can help teams with *group dynamics* / evaluate meetings. You can use the concepts to capture what happened in the group. Possible questions / tips:
- When there is a discussion / dispute where people have different opinions, have students talk about self-interest or diversity.
 - You help students name inter-personal issues in terms of power, equality and respect.
 - Teams can analyze their decisions with concepts. Was our decision democratic? Was it fair? How did politics play out? What happens when people's self-interests conflict?
 - When the team is having internal problems, they can analyze it in terms of power. If applicable; name the power struggle.
 - When people are inappropriately talking about their personal lives, name the public / private distinction. Recognize that personal experiences can motivate us to action.

Related lessons:

1. **Reading Current Events through Concepts**
2. **Ranking the Concepts**
3. **Concept Poster**