

Teaching for Understanding

What's the Teaching for Understanding Framework?

The Teaching for Understanding framework, developed in a research project at Project Zero during the early nineties, links what David Perkins has called “four cornerstones of pedagogy” with four elements of planning and instruction.

Four Central Questions About Teaching

What shall we teach?

What is worth understanding?

How shall we teach for understanding?

How can students and teacher know what students understand and how students can develop deeper understanding?

The TfU framework is not a recipe, but rather a set of general guidelines. To quote David Perkins, it provides “optimal ambiguity”— that is, both enough structure and enough flexibility to serve classroom teachers’ needs. At Institute ’96, we used the metaphor of the weaver—the teacher—who has control of her own classroom tapestry to depict how we hope people will use TfU. Why? Because both at Project Zero and in the field at large, there are many ideas, many interpretations, and many applications—not a single way. We believe that educators need to personalize their innovations, not painting by the numbers, but adapting ideas to their own characters and institutions. However, we also know educators do not have time or energy to reinvent every wheel, so we want to provide enough guidance to support teachers’ efforts at transforming their own practices. That’s what the Teaching for Understanding framework is intended to do—guide and allow room for personal expression.

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