



WIDE World

DEVELOPED AT THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Inspiring Great Teaching
through Online and On-site Learning

Teaching for Understanding 1:

Focus on Student Understanding

Overview

What planning and teaching strategies motivate and engage students in developing understanding of important content? How can we encourage deeper understanding, regardless of subject or learning level? During this course, you will learn how to apply and reflect on practical instructional strategies that will actively engage your students in the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills demanded by the 21st Century curriculum and workplace. In the classroom-focused sessions, your colleagues, your coach, and your instructor will help you to utilize the Teaching for Understanding Framework to guide planning and revision of your own curriculum and lessons. Teachers and educational leaders will benefit from this course.

13 week long course available February-May, May-August, and September-December.

Course Price: \$399 per team member / \$599 individual

The core questions we will investigate during this course are:

- What is understanding, and how does it develop?
- What is the Teaching for Understanding Framework, why and when is it useful, and how can we use it?
- How can educators create and sustain an online community to support our developing understanding?

To answer these, we will:

- Examine how your current planning and instruction support students' developing understanding, and show you further steps you can take to improve student performance
- Explore the Teaching for Understanding Framework and examine ways the framework supports teachers in planning, revising, and reviewing instruction to better help students develop genuine understanding of important content
- Demonstrate ways to work supportively and effectively in an online environment, including the exchange of ideas and resources with other teaching professionals



Instructor | Dr. Mary McFarland

An experienced teacher, Mary is an educational consultant and past president of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). Until recently, she served as the Director of Social Studies (K-12) and Director of Professional Development in the Parkway district of St. Louis County, MO.

Mary was part of the Task Force of the NCSS that produced the publication, Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. In addition to her teaching, she has hosted face-to-face workshops and facilitated at Project Zero's Summer Institutes. Mary received her M.A. in Secondary Education from Washington University, and her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from St. Louis University.

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Understanding Goals for the Course:

In this course you will develop understanding of the following:

1. What is understanding, and how does it develop?
2. What is the Teaching for Understanding Framework, why and when is it useful, and how can we use it?
3. How can we create and sustain an online community to support our developing understanding?

Course Structure

In each session you will:

- read new material posted by the instructor on the course website (every other Tuesday)
- complete the assigned readings and assignments
- post your assignments on the course website and receive feedback from coaches & colleagues
- participate in online discussions with members of your online study group

Course Structure

Orientation Session

The Orientation session introduces the resources available in the course. Participants get to know the course instructional team, course colleagues, and the WIDE technical support team. We also introduce the course environment and the pedagogical framework that structures the course and is its central focus: Teaching for Understanding (TfU).

Session 1: Understanding: What's that mean?

Understanding Goals:

- What are your current perceptions of understanding with a 'performance view'?
- How do such views shape our teaching and learning everyday?

In this session, participants compare their current perceptions of understanding and will reflect together on how their views shape their teaching on a daily basis.

Session 2: Teaching for Understanding: Framing our work

Understanding Goals:

- How can you use the Teaching for Understanding Framework as a tool in your teaching?
- What are the key elements of the TfU Framework?

In this session, we explore the Teaching for Understanding Framework as a tool for instructional planning and revision that continually reorients attention back to understanding. The framework is comprised of four key elements that help educators to shape instruction so that it helps students learn for understanding. We will reflect on and examine in some depth one of the four elements, Performances of Understanding.

Session 3: Designing instruction for understanding: Topics and goals

Understanding Goals:

- What are the additional elements of Teaching for Understanding?
- How can I modify my teaching using the TfU Framework?

In this session, we probe two more elements of the Teaching for Understanding Framework in detail: Generative Topics and Understanding Goals. Participants will select an aspect of their own teaching to create or revise throughout the rest of the course by using the TfU Framework.

Session 4: Checking understanding as it develops

Understanding Goals:

- How do we know how well students understand?
- Who develops assessments and determines how and when they are given?
- What evidence of understanding might we see??
- How can we use that information to improve students' chances to develop understanding??

This session focuses on the final element of the Teaching for Understanding Framework: Ongoing Assessment. Educators will learn how to integrate the TfU Framework into their assessment procedures to confirm student understanding



Session 5: Practicing with the framework

Understanding Goals:

- In what other ways can I adjust my curriculum using the TfU Framework?
- How do all of the TfU elements work together to build student understanding?

In this session, we suggest ways to refine curriculum designs further using TfU. We look at ways to engage every student by using entry points and to build in more opportunities for thinking (the main tool for building understanding). Participants post their draft projects and respond to each others' designs to consider how the TfU elements work together to promote student understanding.

Session 6: Looking back and looking ahead

Understanding Goals:

- How have my thoughts about understanding changed during the course?
- How can I continue to use TfU to support students' understanding?

In this final session, participants reflect on how their thinking about understanding has changed since the course began. Participants also plan ways that they can continue learning about and working with the Teaching for Understanding Framework to support their students' efforts to understand what is taught in school.

In each session participants take on the following assignments:

- read new material on the course website in the 'Session Note'
- Complete readings and other assignments
- Post responses to assignments in the online course discussion
- Receive response to work from coaches and online colleagues
- Respond to online colleagues

Professional Development Credit

For those interested in earning professional development points, units, or credits, you may earn up to 42 hours in the course if all the assignments have been completed with quality. There are 7 attainable hours per session.

Three additional hours may be earned by completing the following WIDE survey, for a total of 45 participation hours:

- final course evaluation (3 hours)

Program of Study:

This course may be taken as part of the **High Quality Instructional Design and Delivery** Program of Study. This two-course program, intended for teachers, is designed to facilitate systemic change in a school or school system. Working either as individuals or in teams, participants take two courses Teaching for Understanding 1 and Teaching for Understanding 2.

In these courses, educators learn to work with the Teaching for Understanding framework as they develop curriculum and assessment plans to bring to their own school system. Collaborative teamwork with instructors, coaches, and other teachers enrolled in the program are emphasized.

“ [The course] helped me rethink almost everything I do in the classroom. Even with the stuff I keep, I evaluate it more intensely. It pushed me in new directions and I've had discoveries this semester that opened the stories I teach in ways I never imagined.... ”

Richard Steggerda, High School Teacher
Bristol, Vermont



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1-888-759-8829

Read a Sample of the Course Content

In this week's reading in *The Teaching for Understanding Guide*, you will find a description of the four-part framework (abbreviated "the TfU framework") developed by the Teaching for Understanding Project here at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Harvard Project Zero. Essentially, this framework is designed to help people who are planning and teaching curriculum to answer three questions:

- What do I most want my students to understand?
- How can I help them develop those understandings?
- How will I (and they) know how well they are understanding (and what they need to do to increase their understanding)?

People who have administrative roles within a school have sometimes translated these questions in this way:

- What do we as a faculty most need to understand?
- What can we do to develop those understandings?
- How will we know when we have achieved those understandings and what we need to do to understand more?

In this session and the coming sessions, you will have the opportunity to explore how these questions can shape your work to help students learn more deeply.

For more information
or to register:

WIDE World
Harvard Graduate
School of Education
44 Brattle Street, 5th Floor
Cambridge, MA USA 02138

Toll-free: 1-888-759-8829
Outside U.S.: 1-617-496-9965

wideworld.gse.harvard.edu

