



What is Deeper Learning?

As our world has become increasingly interconnected, our goals for education as well as commerce and much else must meet global standards. This is true not only so our citizens can compete in a global marketplace, but as global citizens. The emerging world community demands that our nation's schools evolve to meet new challenges. Among educators there is an emerging consensus about what students will need to be able to do to succeed in the new century. The Hewlett Foundation collectively describes the ways in which students need to be proficient as "Deeper Learning" and makes grants to encourage educators to teach students how to:

- Master core academic content
- Think critically and solve complex problems
- Work collaboratively
- Communicate effectively
- Learn how to learn
- Possess an 'academic mindset'

Master core academic content

Mastering core content is essential for success in college, careers, and life, and the other deeper learning skills support gaining mastery of this content. Students can learn content by deeply engaging in it and participating in interdisciplinary learning. They can make connections between disciplines that traditionally have been presented in isolation, e.g. math and science, or English language arts and social studies. Learning can be further solidified through hands-on practices and project-based learning, all of which are geared to real-world applications such as investigative field trips, internships and apprenticeships. Assessment can be done in new, more interactive ways as well. The focus is on assessing both students' understanding of content and how that content can be applied to different situations. Many deeper learning schools use performance-based assessments, presentations, and project-based learning in addition to standardized tests.

Think critically and solve complex problems

One way to think about critical thinking is that it includes knowing how and when to apply the core content to develop hypotheses and make well-reasoned arguments. It can also involve creative thinking, innovation, and being able to solve novel, complex problems. As part of a broad investigation into deeper learning, a 2012 National Research Council report observes that cognitive proficiency like critical thinking offers benefits in education, work, and health. By promoting student-led projects and hands-on education, deeper learning schools encourage the development of critical thinking by having students work through complex and interdisciplinary problems, focusing attention on how students acquire, assess and evaluate information.



Work collaboratively

One important way to think about collaboration in practice is that it is learning how to cooperate to identify and implement solutions to problems. It involves organizing groups, knowledge, and resources, and understanding that people come to a project with different viewpoints. Students actively learn how to be productive, supportive team members, how to provide constructive feedback, and how to take on different roles within the classroom and external real-world settings, such as internships.

Communicate effectively

Communication skills focus on teaching students to share knowledge, meaning, and intention. This involves understanding information and expressing oneself in multiple ways, including active listening as well as speaking and writing. Students can develop these skills through student presentations, student-led conferences, group work, interactive projects, and real-world experiences.

Learn how to learn

Learning how to learn is an integral part of the deeper learning instructional practices that students master as they monitor and direct their own learning. Through student-centered work and guidance from teachers and advisors, students understand their own learning styles, learn to reflect on their progress, set goals for themselves and increasingly take more responsibility for their learning. The aim is to create lifelong learners.

Possess an ‘academic mindset’

Having an academic mindset is valuable for students and encourages them to have a strong belief in themselves. They persevere to overcome obstacles in their learning because they trust their own capability and believe their hard work will pay off. Students with an academic mindset also learn from and support other students. They understand the relevance their schoolwork has with the real world and their own futures.

The focus on these deeper learning instructional strategies is particularly pertinent now, when most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards. As David Conley has noted in his “Crosswalk Analysis of Deeper Learning skills to Common Core State Standards,” the deeper learning skills can support and enhance the learning of the common core standards.