The future will belong to those who are adaptable and able to apply (transfer) their learning to new contexts. If we recognize that learning is a life-long process, we understand that our students will need to know how to learn. Education has traditionally focused on the transmission of facts and the development of basic skills. However, the educational goal of deeper learning takes on a greater importance today than ever before. A significant amount of research indicates that deeper learning leads to learning that is more meaningful, more satisfying, and more lasting. It also leads to deeper learning and enhanced transfer abilities.

Why Focus on Deep Learning, Anyway?

When is the “correct” answer not the best solution? When is the “correct” answer not the best solution? Why is a meaningful question — one that is more than a search for the facts — more valuable? Why is an answer that requires the student to make meaning deeper than one that requires memorization of all pertinent information. Deep learning is the kind of learning that helps our students make meaning of information in order to apply that meaning to real-world situations. It will help them solve new problems, make new decisions, and adapt to new situations. It is the kind of learning that prepares them for the future.

For example, in a literature class, students might compare several Shakespearean works in order to make meaning of the progression of ideas. They might analyze the use of language and other techniques to reinforce their understanding. Or, they might compare the setting and structure of two different works to understand how these factors can affect a reader's interpretation of the text. These kinds of activities are likely to result in a deeper understanding of the works and the themes they explore.

Below are a few examples of essential questions in different contexts: (National Academy of Sciences, 2018, p. 14):

1. How do we make up our minds about what is important to learn in schools?
2. How do we make up our minds about what is important to learn in schools?
3. How can we teach for deep learning?

We believe that deep learning is a goal for all students. It provides the foundation for broader learning which allows students to make connections across disciplines (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). Advocates for this view believe that learning should be integrated and connected across subjects. The focus is on real-world applications and making connections through students' existing knowledge (Wexler, 2019; Hirsch, 2016). Another group of educators put the emphasis on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and social-emotional learning competencies. We are not arguing that these aims are not important. We believe that deep learning is a necessary component of these aims.

Here are a few examples:

1. In a science class, students might study photosynthesis and cellular respiration. They could be asked to compare and contrast these processes in order to understand their similarities and differences. They could also be asked to explain why these processes are important to the functioning of living organisms.
2. In a math class, students might be asked to solve a problem involving fractions. They could be asked to explain their reasoning and to make connections with other mathematical concepts.
3. In a literature class, students might compare the themes of two different works. They could be asked to explain how these themes are related and to make connections with their own experiences.

What does it mean to teach for deep learning? To teach for deep learning means to help students develop a meaningful and lasting understanding of the subject matter they are studying. It means to help them make connections between what they are learning and their own experiences. It means to help them see the relevance of what they are learning to their everyday lives. It means to help them develop the skills they need to apply their knowledge in new situations.