

THE SIX FACETS OF UNDERSTANDING

(Adapted from Understanding by Design, Wiggins and McTighe, 1999)

Facet #1: EXPLANATION: sophisticated and apt explanations and theories, which provide knowledge and justified accounts of events, actions, and ideas. Understanding is revealed through performances and projects that clearly, thoroughly, and instructively explain HOW things work, WHAT they imply, WHERE they connect and WHY that happened.

Why is that so? What explains it? How can we prove it? How does it work? What is implied? To what is it connected?

Facet #2: INTERPRETATIONS: narratives, translations, metaphors, images, and artistry that provide meaning. Understanding is revealed when students can show an event's significance, an idea's importance, or provide an interpretation that strikes a deep chord of recognition or resonance. It is building knowledge from "within".

What does it mean? Why does it matter? What does it illustrate/illuminate in the human experience? How does it relate to me?

Facet # 3: APPLICATION: ability to use knowledge effectively in new situations and diverse contexts. Understanding is revealed when students can show their ability to use it, adapt it, or customize it negotiating different constraints, social contexts, purposes or audiences.

How and where can we use this knowledge, skill, or process? How should my thinking and actions be modified to best them?

Facet #4: PERSPECTIVE: critical and insightful points of view. Understanding is revealed when a student can recognize that any answer to a complex question involves a point of view and is alert to what is taken for granted, assumed, overlooked, or glossed over in any inquiry or theory.

From whose point of view or vantage point? What else needs to be considered? Is there evidence? Is it reasonable? So what?

Facet #5: EMPATHY: the *learned* ability to get "inside" another person's feelings and worldview. Understanding is revealed when a student can directly confront the effects – and the *affect* - of decisions, ideas, theories, and problems.

How does it seem to you? What do they see that I don't? What do I need to experience to better understand? What was the author/performer/artist seeing or feeling and trying to make me see and/or feel?

Facet #6: SELF-KNOWLEDGE: the wisdom to know one's ignorance and how one's patterns of thought and action inform, as well as prejudice, understanding. Understanding is revealed when a student can seek and find his/her *inevitable* blind spots, prejudices, or oversights and face the problems lurking underneath effective habits, naïve confidence, strong beliefs and worldviews.

How does who I am shape my views? What are the limits of my understanding? What am I prone to misunderstand due to my prejudice, habit or style? What are my blind spots?