## Teaching that Reaches Beyond the Classroom

**Overview of Idea into Action Project:** When exploring the complex work of bringing ideas into action, the core question for this research team is what components of the process might reveal themselves as "good bets" for more successfully translating ideas into sustained action. Discover early resources from the project which give leaders and educators some concepts and questions to consider in change processes.

**Purpose:** Many teachers have the goal of fostering motivated and expansive understanding that matters in the lives of learners within and beyond school. Yet research, and often our own experience, reveals widespread trends that get in the way of meeting that goal. For example, people commonly feel they understand something well when they do not, come to strong opinions on complex issues without thinking about both sides of the case, and fail to see connections between what they learn in school and applications to other settings.

The graphic below sets out research-based design principles and strategies for overcoming these barriers. Use it to help plan instruction that leads to rich understanding that matters in students' lives.

Learners identify personal significance in what's being studied

- Expansively frame instruction to help students identify compelling purposes for their learning
- Design multiple entry points into a topic to help students find personal relevance in what's being studied
- Know your students' interests and backgrounds to better design opportunities for them to develop emotional connections to the content and class

Learners engage deeply with concepts and ideas

- Use group learning structures that require students to engage with other people's thinking and perspectives
- Design actively open-minded thinking (purposeful consideration of alternative possibilities, explanations, and evidence) into the learning process
- Build comfort with and strategies for approaching cases where there is not a clear right answer or course of action

Learners view understanding as something one does, not something one has

- Ask students to apply their understanding to new contexts
- Design learning tasks that require students to think with what they know rather than
  merely to think about what they know (e.g., learners might demonstrate understanding of satire
  by analyzing the effectiveness of a clip from a late-night tv monologue)

Learners put their understanding to use in their lives

- Design opportunities for students to take learning beyond the classroom by...
  - thinking with their understanding (e.g., use math skills to determine which bag of apples gives the best value)
  - making decisions with their understanding (e.g., choose what to eat based on what they understand about nutrition or environmental science)
  - taking action with their understanding (e.g., plant a pollinator garden in the schoolyard after studying the role of insect pollinators in food production)

Learners engage in metacognition to build skills and sensitivity for effective thinking

- Have students plan their learning goals/purposes and identify the types of thinking that will help them achieve these
- Provide structures (e.g., journals) and dedicated time for students to *monitor* their progress toward goals and to adjust their learning strategies as necessary
- Have students self-assess whether their thinking moves and learning strategies were helpful, where they ran into difficulties, what they did (or might have done) to overcome the challenges, etc.



This tool was developed by the Idea into Action initiative at Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, with Independent Schools Victoria (AU). Questions? Email <a href="mailto:pzlearn@gse.harvard.edu">pzlearn@gse.harvard.edu</a>.