



A shared vision for a high quality education for every child, in every school, every day.

Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership
ALAMEDA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
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Teaching for Understanding in Alameda County

Our vision in Alameda County is quality arts learning for every child, in every school, every day. Our program evaluation of Alameda County school districts revealed that, while there were pockets of quality arts learning, they were not systemic, sequential or standards aligned. Additionally the evaluation found that most teachers were not prepared to teach in and through the arts and that the essential role of the arts in learning was not widely understood.

The Teaching for Understanding and Studio Thinking Frameworks were piloted by arts teachers, classroom teachers and community arts providers in a three-year project, funded by the US Department of Education, among the Alameda County Office of Education, the California College of the Arts and Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. These frameworks offer a common language across schools and between the education and arts communities about what can be learned in the arts and how and when that learning can be powerfully connected to learning in other content areas.

What is a thinking frame?

“A thinking frame organizes our thinking much as the frame of a viewfinder focuses and directs our compositions as we snap photos.”

—David Perkins,
Harvard Graduate
School of Education



Classrooms are complex places! Thinking frames are structures to help teachers isolate those complexities while planning and teaching. Thinking more carefully about their choices brings more clarity to teachers' decisions, which helps them better support students in developing genuine understanding.



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What is the Teaching for Understanding Framework?

The Teaching for Understanding Framework is a thinking frame developed by researchers at Project Zero and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. It helps teachers aim lessons and assessment directly at students' developing understanding – with understanding defined as the capacity for students to *use what they know flexibly in new situations*.

Teaching for Understanding asks teachers to focus on three recurrent questions:

- What do students need to understand about this topic?
- What can students do to develop that understanding?
- What can stand as evidence of students' growing understanding?



The Teaching for Understanding Framework shifts the focus of teaching and learning from *recall* toward *thinking*. As students address complex issues, of course they remember lots of facts; but they also learn how facts relate to each other, how to use facts to communicate with different audiences, and why those facts matter.

Such thinking prepares our future citizens for the critical thinking tasks required to succeed in our ever-changing world.