

Unit 6

Implications for Schools

Major principles

- We think in the service of emotional goals.
- Performance depends on context.
- Regression is essential to learning.

Assignment 1: Complete Nick’s exercise outlined below.

Nick’s exercise: Nick led the curriculum committee (the department chairs and other academic leaders) through an exercise. “Forget you are teachers,” he said, “and remember yourselves as learners. Think back to the time you did your best learning, whether in or outside of school. And write down the conditions that you believe were most responsible for your success as a learner.” As people read their list, he wrote on the board the conditions that appeared more than once. Next, he had them look at the assumptions about learning that seem embedded in the practices and policies of their school.

The purpose of the exercise is to discover how close or far apart are the conditions under which you did your best learning and the conditions under which your students learn best in your school. Discuss these with a colleague and think about what you might do to align these two lists, if that is what is needed.

Assignment 2: Create new classroom practices.

Focus on a specific group of principles that you feel are related, and look at their implications for your classroom (your teaching) or for the school as a whole (the system of practices and policies that support your teaching). Transform the implications into specific classroom practices or changes in the school.

Look at the exercise below from Section 7 of Unit 6:

Make sense of the concepts about learning. Articulate the principles that resonate with your experiences not only as a teacher, but also as a learner. Look specifically at issues in areas that are important to you—those in your classroom and those systemic assumptions about learning that restrict what you want to do in your classroom. For example, take a belief you have developed about learning, and use it as a lens through which to look at one of these areas:

CLASSROOM:	SCHOOL:
Homework	Graduation requirements
Teaching methods	Schedule
Lesson plans	Student course loads
Memory issues	Departmental organization of schools
Tests and quizzes	Standardized testing
Expectations and rigor	Meeting “the standards”
Grades	Grades
Coverage	Coverage
AP courses	AP courses
Difficult students	Discipline

Write down the answers to the following questions:

1. How does the connection between performance and context affect the way you might approach homework assignments?
2. How might it affect your school’s policies about homework and what your parent body needs to know about homework?
3. Invent something. Try something new. Take a step, however small in a new direction.

Assignment 3: Write a letter to help your colleague solve their teaching or learning problem.

Partner with a colleague, and exchange the teaching problems you wrote prior to reading the text of the course. Imagine that your colleague has come to you with this problem for help.

Write a letter of **no more than 1,000 words** in which you help your colleague solve the problem:

1. Start by analyzing and pointing out the nature of the problem, in order to answer the question, “What is this problem really about?” To do this, choose one or more concepts from the course that you think relate to the teacher’s problem, and use them to explain the underlying cause of the problem to your colleague. Examples of concepts might include:
 - consideration of the learning context
 - the students’ background knowledge
 - individual differences in approach or perception of the problem

- complexity or content of the material to be learned
 - the students' emotional response to the material
 - the design or presentation of the learning experience or materials
2. Decide whether the problem is primarily social, affective, or cognitive, or some combination of these factors.
 3. Next, explain in your own words a little bit about the concepts that you have chosen, and show your colleague how applying these concepts to the problem leads to a new way of understanding it and to a new insight about what to do. In this section, argue for your perspective; try to prove to your colleague how your view is substantiated by evidence. (To do this, draw on evidence from the course materials.) Be sure that you explain how the evidence that you give relates to the concepts you invoked in the first part of the letter, as well as how it relates to the aspect of the problem that you are focusing on. (In this section of the letter, you aim to answer your colleague's question, "Why should I believe you?")
 4. Finally, propose a plan of action that answers the question, "Now that I understand the problem, what should I do to fix it?" Here, describe one or a few instructional tools or methods that best address the problem. Explain how these tools relate to the concepts you used earlier and how they will serve to ameliorate the problem. (Be specific. Your colleague is in trouble and needs practical strategies with clear explanations as to why they may help.)

Note: This assignment should take a minimum of two hours.

Suggested readings between Unit 6 and the Conclusion:

Possible review:

Blodget, A. "Motivation: Making Room for the Self in School." *Independent School*, National Association of Independent Schools, Spring 2009 (online feature).

Blodget, A. "When School Makes Us Sick." *Independent School*, National Association of Independent Schools, Spring 2010.

Keene, E. O. "New Horizons in Comprehension." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 67, No. 6 (2010): 69-73.

Stein, Z.; T.L. Dawson, and K.W. Fischer. "Redesigning Testing: Operationalizing the New Science of Learning." *The New Science of Learning: Computers, Cognition, and Collaboration in Education*, Springer Press, 2010.

Possible preview:

Fischer, K. "Mind, Brain, and Education: Building a Scientific Groundwork for Learning and Teaching." *Mind, Brain, and Education* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2009): 3-16.

