

An Enduring Understanding . . .



(description)

Involves the Big Ideas that give meaning and importance to facts.

Enduring understandings are made up of the concepts, principles, and theories that weave many facts into revealing and useful patterns. They involve the (few) organizing priority ideas that enable us to make sense of past lessons, conduct current inquiry, and create new knowledge.

Can transfer to other topics, fields, and adult life.

Such understandings endure in that they enable us to make vital and informative connections in our learning—as students and as adults. For example, the idea that “might does not make right” applies to both playground disputes and international diplomacy.

Is usually not obvious, often counterintuitive, and easily misunderstood.

An understanding is an inference, not a fact. It is an insight derived from inquiry. Key understandings in intellectual fields (e.g., in physics: *Objects remain in motion at a constant velocity if no force acts on them*) often violate common sense and conventional wisdom. They are thus often prone to misunderstanding by students. These understandings therefore cannot be covered; they must be uncovered.

May provide a conceptual foundation for basic skills.

Though skill-based teaching in mathematics, foreign language, and physical education does not seem to deal with “understandings” in most units, all skills derive their value from the strategic principles that help us know when and how to use the skill. The understandings also justify the use of a skill (e.g., the student who can explain why you should use a bent-arm pull in swimming freestyle) and enable the student to extend the use of the skill to new situations (e.g., the use of bent-arm pull in backstroke).

Is deliberately framed as a generalization—the “moral of the story.”

An understanding is a generalization derived from inquiry. It is the specific insight that should be inferred from study of the topic (not just the stating of the topic)—what we want the student leaving the study to realize. Note: The enduring understanding of a unit might be that there is no single agreed-upon understanding, or that people disagree about how the issues, facts, text should be understood.