

In a nutshell

This resource can be photocopied and used as a revision tool or a prompt for discussion with your peers. It is designed to help you when planning your journey through teacher training.

Deep and surface learning

The difference between deep and surface learning is based on two things: first the approach to learning and second the way in which learning is used.

Deep learning is conceptualised as learning which is critically analysed and synthesised by way of linking new concepts to old. A 'deep learning' approach is likely to involve:

- relating new ideas to previous knowledge and experience;
- discovering the key principles which allow the linking of concepts;
- critically analysing information;
- interacting with the learning.

Surface learning might be described as a pragmatic approach in that it is focused on the end result rather than the learning itself. As a result 'surface learners' tend to:

- accept information passively;
- reproduce content;
- focus on assessments;
- memorise facts and routines.

Source: Marton and Säljö (1984).

Putting it into practice

Question new learning by linking it to what you already know – how is it similar/different?

Talk about learning with others. Listen to their perspectives and ideas.

Look for connections – how does one aspect of learning relate to another?

Think about ways you might adapt a new theory or concept.

Teach others – if someone else doesn't understand something find a way of making it clear to them.

Map it – create a concept map outlining all the elements of what you have learnt.

What else could you do?