INTENTIONAL
COLLEGE
TEACHING

Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning

What is the Taxonomy of Significant Learning and how does it differ from Bloom's Taxonomy?

Dr. L. Dee Fink discusses his rationale for developing a new taxonomy in the Significant Learning by Design course.

"During my four decades of working in higher education, I interviewed not just professors, **but students,** about what they consider to be significant learning moments and significant kinds of learning. What I mean by 'significant learning' is learning that actually changes how a student lives his or her personal, social, civic, or professional life. I found that many of the kinds of learning that students identified as being significant did not fit easily into Bloom's Taxonomy, even if one refers to all three of his domains of learning. Therefore I **created a new taxonomy, one that builds on Bloom's concept of a "taxonomy of learning" but has some true differences.**"

– Dee Fink

Comparing Fink's and Bloom's Taxonomies

Many people find the Taxonomy of Significant Learning valuable and inspiring because it includes more than just cognitive learning. The right-hand side of this taxonomy refers to the same kinds of cognitive learning described in the well known taxonomy by Bloom and his colleagues. However, the left-hand side goes beyond cognitive learning, to include specific skills that enable Significant Learning– learning that extends beyond the end of the course and includes Caring goals (values, attitudes), Human Dimension goals (self-knowledge, cultural awareness, and collaboration skills), and Learning How to Learn goals (metacognition and self-regulation).
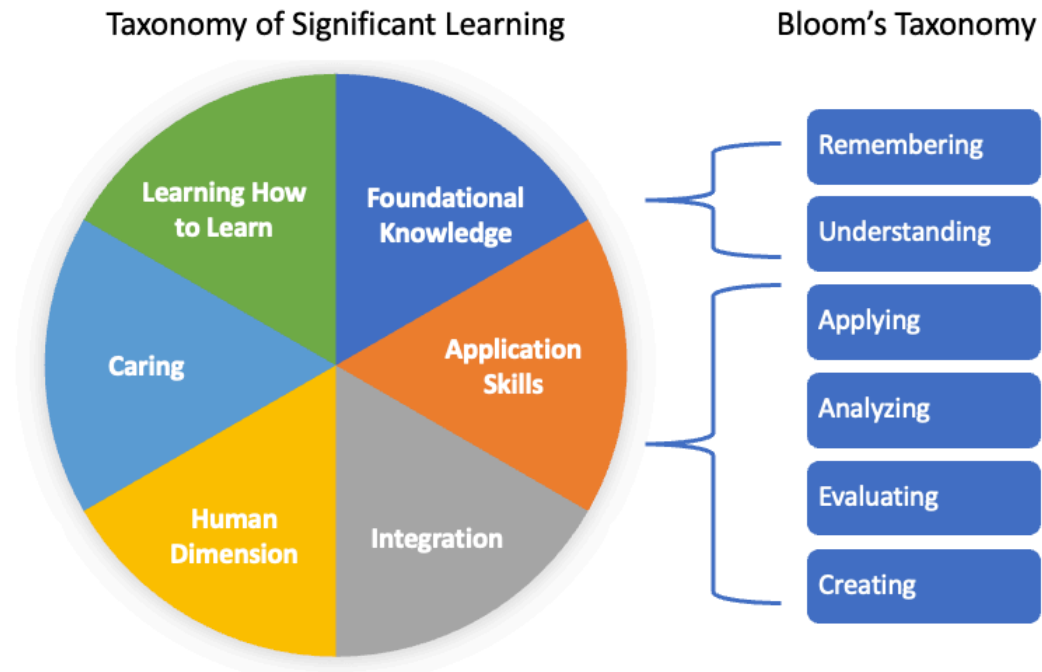
Visual comparison of Fink and Bloom Taxonomies

Read more about the **benefits and limitations of Bloom's Taxonomy**.

Questions to Help Develop Learning Outcomes for each Significant Learning Category

| Category/Goals	Questions to help develop learning outcomes
Foundational Knowledge	– What key **information** (e.g., facts, terms, formulas, concepts, principles, relationships, etc.) is important for students to understand and remember in the future? – What key **ideas or perspectives** are important for students to know? – What are the **essential understandings** for your discipline? – What are the **threshold concepts** in your field that, once understood, will transform the way students think about or approach your subject matter?
Application	– What do you hope students will **be able to *do*** with what they learn? (i.e., manage complex projects, work effectively in teams, negotiate an agreement) – What **thinking processes** are important for students to develop? What are the needed expert ways of thinking in your discipline as well as general ways of thinking, such as: — Critical thinking, in which students analyze and evaluate? — Creative thinking, in which students imagine and create? — Practical thinking, in which student solve problems and make decisions? – What **important skills** do students need to gain to be successful in this course? To be successful in their future careers?

Integration	– What **connections** (similarities and interactions) should students recognize and make … — Among ideas *within* this course? — Among the ideas in this course and those in other courses? — Among material in this course and the students' own personal, social, cultural, and/or work life?
Human Dimension	– What should students learn about **themselves**? Their identity, strengths, tendencies, positionality, etc.? – What should students learn about **others and understanding others**? – What should students learn about **interacting with others**?
Caring	– What **changes, values, or interests** do you hope students will adopt? – What do you hope students will **care more deeply** about? – How can students connect course material **to their own lives**?
Learning How to Learn	– What **learning strategies** do they need to develop to be a successful learner in your course? In your discipline/program? In their future lives? – What should learners **learn about learning,** about engaging in inquiry, and becoming self-directed in their learning?

Resource Downloads

- **Questions to Help Develop Learning Outcomes for each Significant Learning Category**

- **List of Learning Outcome Verbs appropriate for the Taxonomy of Significant Learning**.

Integrated Nature of the Taxonomy

Similar to Bloom's Taxonomy, the Taxonomy of Significant Learning has six major categories of learning. But unlike Bloom's, the categories are not considered to be isolated domains and are seen as **interactive – not hierarchical.**
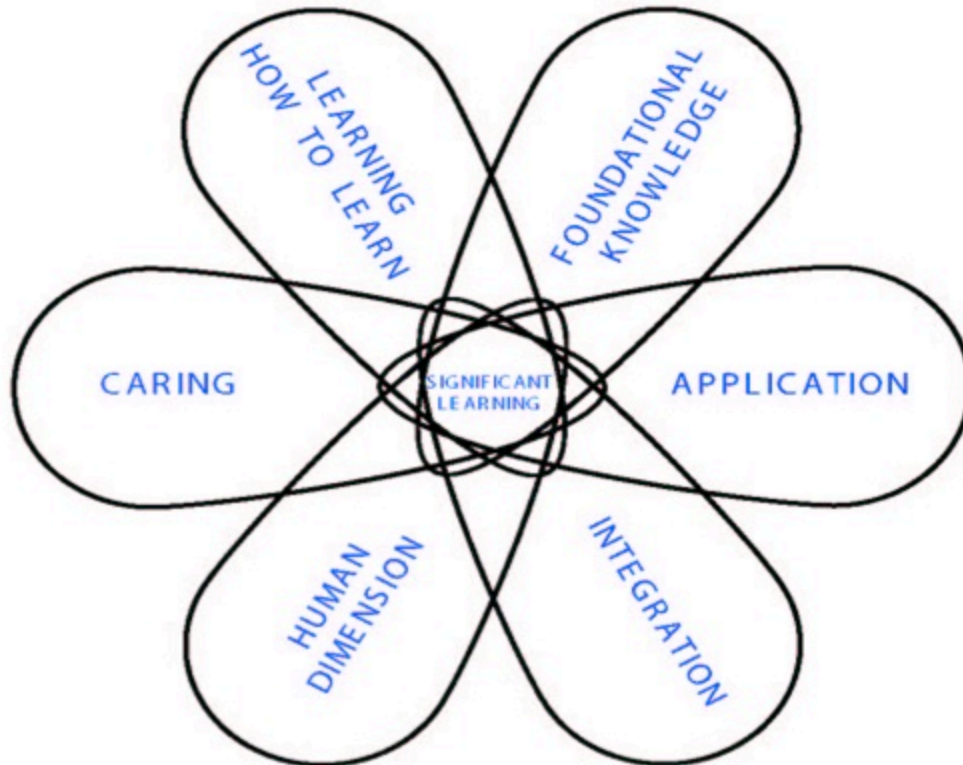
This last characteristic is particularly important; it means that **having students achieve any one kind of learning helps them also achieve other kinds of learning.**

Taxonomy of Significant Learning – Examples

Category of Learning	Meaning	Examples
Foundational Knowledge	Students will understand and remember key concepts, terms, relationships, facts, gain essential understandings.	– Describe the interaction between pressure and temperature – Identify root causes of the US Civil War – Explain the basic principles of epidemiology – Based on linguistic theories, explain the manner in which language has the power to shape reality – Construct a clear sense of how theatre has been made, from its origins to present day, by relying on key terms, concepts, and relationships as tools
Application	Students will know how to "do" important tasks, apply knowledge, develop thinking abilities (critical, creative, practical thinking), or perform skills.	– Evaluate the quality of experimental studies in research literature – Analyze how the arts inform and are informed by social, cultural, and personal stories – Interpret statistical conclusions in context (i.e., discuss practical conclusions) – Sequence multiple steps in a complex project – Perform life cycle assessment calculations using EIOLCA software – Suggest points of intervention and possible solutions to prevent the unintended consequences of our current materials economy

Integration	Students will be able to identify relationships, make connections between ideas in within and outside of the course.	– Synthesize various statistics and graphs in order to make an informed personal or professional decision. – Give examples of the ways gender is socially constructed in the media and popular culture, and reveals, reflects or shapes society – Identify the interactions among twentieth-century language and literature and economic, historical, social, and political factors.Compare major psychological theories – Describe how the geography and dominant cultures of a region have affected its history – Describe how prior learning in another course has shed light on certain new learning in a current course – Compare and analyze consumption patterns temporally and geographically.
Human Dimension	Self: Students will better understand themselves, their identities, and their strengths and areas for growth. Others: Students will be able to understand others, empathize with others, and interact positively and productively with others.	Self – Identify and describe their thoughts and feelings about a topic or concept in relationship to themselves, their life goals, their strengths, weaknesses, capabilities – Identify personal biases relevant to a given topic – Describe personal characteristics that enhance and create barriers to the nurse/patient interpersonal relationship – Self-assess their leadership abilities and identify their own strengths and areas for growth

		Others – Develop empathy, respect, and appreciation for others who are different in terms of the ways our society defines human and group differences, including race, ethnicity, religious backgrounds, linguistic differences, socioeconomic levels, age, geography, sexual orientation, and national origins – Use sensitivity, fairness and empathy in their interactions with people who are different from themselves. – Be an effective member of a team – Empathize with and better understand people different from themselves
Caring	Students will care more deeply about something, value or appreciate something.	– Value classic literature as a source of knowledge and wisdom, reflection of historical and cultural realms – Advocate for social justice in healthcare – Value the need to continually engage in the arts as an essential element of contributing to a thriving community. – Develop deeper values in relation to green environmental policies, critical thinking, religious and racial tolerance, correct English usage, etc.; – Become excited about and desire to learn more about the general subject of the course, e.g., ancient history, astronomy, insects, etc.

Learning How to Learn	Students will develop the ability to learn better, develop learning skills, in this course and in life in general.	– Self-assess their emerging self-identity as experts in their discipline – Identify and participate in activities that enrich appreciation for and knowledge of multiculturalism and cultural diversity - Create a plan for continuously enhancing their clinical expertise – Improve metacognition and study strategy skills – Learn how knowledge is created and tested in different intellectual domains, e.g., how to use the scientific method, literary analysis, historical analysis – Become self-directed learners, meaning they can develop (a) a learning agenda and (b) a learning strategy for this agenda for learning more about the general subject of this course – after the course is over.

Learn More

Want to learn more and be guided through the Integrated Course Design process step-by-step?

Take the only online course authored by L. Dee Fink, **Significant Learning by Design**!

Contents ⌃

An Imaginary Situation

Watch the short video below from Dee Fink to prepare yourself to start creating your dream.

Imagine a Perfect Learning Setting

As Dee Fink suggests, take a moment to visualize the PERFECT learning situation.

Imagine that by some magic or divine intervention, next semester you begin teaching

Intentional College Teaching, Ⓦ