

Creating Significant Learning Experiences Overview*

Taxonomy of Significant Learning

Fink develops a taxonomy of significant learning that engages six major types of learning. This taxonomy is not hierarchical but rather relational and interactive. Fink suggests that courses should include but also go beyond content mastery in order to make learning more worthwhile and interesting. Using a combination of significant learning goals, interaction and synergy can be attained to greatly enhance achievement and learning for students.

- **Foundational Knowledge:** provides the basic understanding that is necessary for other kinds of learning.
- **Application:** allows other kinds of learning to become useful.
- **Integration:** making new connections gives learners a new form of power, especially intellectual power.
- **Human Dimension:** informs students about the human significance of what they are learning.
- **Caring:** when students care about something, they then have the energy for learning more about it and making it a part of their lives. Without the energy for learning, nothing significant happens.
- **Learning How to Learn:** enables students to continue learning in the future and to do so with greater effectiveness.

Initial Phase: Building Strong Primary Components

1. SITUATIONAL FACTORS

What factors in the course will be important to plan for: What is the context of the course, is it online or on campus? What are the student characteristics? What is the nature of the subject? etc.

2. LEARNING GOALS

Articulate the learning that you want your students to attain in the course. Fink articulates these based on his taxonomy; you might also use Understanding by Design techniques here.

3. FEEDBACK & ASSESSMENT

How will you and the students assess the learning? Fink recommends that assessment should:

- Be forward looking and measure students' ability to apply their learning to authentic situations.
- Have clearly articulated criteria and standards used to judge student performance and learning.
- Help students assess their own learning.
- Deliver feedback to students that is Frequent, Immediate, Discriminating (based on criteria and standards), and done Lovingly [the FIDeLity framework].

4. TEACHING & LEARNING ACTIVITIES

What will students and teachers actually do to make learning happen? Fink recommends that all courses should have components where students are actively engaged with:

- Accessing information and ideas through texts, teacher presentation, or other methods.
- Doing and observing experiences relevant to the desired learning.
- Reflecting on the course subject and on the learning process.

5. INTEGRATE THE COMPONENT PARTS

Are the situational factors, learning goals, assessments, and activities aligned and integrated in the course design so far?

* This overview is adapted from L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences : An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*, 1st ed., Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

Intermediate Phase: Coherent Whole

6. COURSE STRUCTURE

How will the topics of the course be structured to facilitate learning?

7. TEACHING STRATEGY

How will the combinations and sequencing of teaching and learning activities operate as a teaching strategy to help students attain the desired learning?

8. OVERALL SET OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

How will the course structure and teaching strategy combine into a coherent course plan? Is there a central theme, graphic, or question that can be used throughout the course to help students understand the learning goals and activities?

Final Phase: Four Remaining Tasks

9. GRADING SYSTEM

How will the grading system allow students to best demonstrate what they have learned? How will the graded items be fully representative of the desired learning goals and activities?

10. IDENTIFY WHAT MIGHT GO WRONG

After reviewing the design process so far, are there potential problems that can be addressed by modifying the design?

11. SYLLABUS

How can your syllabus be written in such a way as to help students understand the goals and structure of the course?

12. EVALUATION OF COURSE AND TEACHING

What types of final and midterm evaluations will you use in order to determine the effectiveness of the design and teaching of the course for student learning?