



FINK'S TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO USE IT IN TEACHING



WHAT IS IT?

Fink's taxonomy is an educational framework which has applications in multiple areas of curriculum design. Similar to the six categories outlined in [Bloom's taxonomy](#), Fink identifies six core components that are necessary for significant learning to emerge. These six components are: *foundational knowledge*, which focuses on students' ability to understand and remember specific information and serves as the foundation for other kinds of learning; *application*, which focuses on students' ability to develop skills and apply the knowledge acquired throughout the learning process; *integration*, which focuses on the ability to make connections between different kinds of learned ideas and concepts; *human dimension*, which emphasizes the impact that learning can have on oneself and others and focuses on developing these core skills; *caring*, which relates to the motivational aspect of learning and touches on the affective element of learning; and *learning to learn*, which is a metacognitive process where students reflect on the learning process itself. When these six core components are actualized in the classroom, significant learning is the result.



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

While the categories of Bloom's taxonomy are typically viewed as representing a *hierarchy* of cognitive development that students gradually develop, one distinguishing feature of Fink's taxonomy is that the categories are *circular*, *interactive*, and *relational* with the other elements listed. As a result, Fink's taxonomy can be viewed as representing a more holistic view of learning precisely because it recognizes the interconnections between the categories. Furthermore, unlike Bloom, Fink's taxonomy goes beyond the cognitive domain to include social and emotional components of learning. Because of this, Fink's taxonomy can be helpful not only in the creation of learning outcomes and assignments, but also in applied curriculum design and the development of a more learner-centered approach to teaching that attends to the whole person.



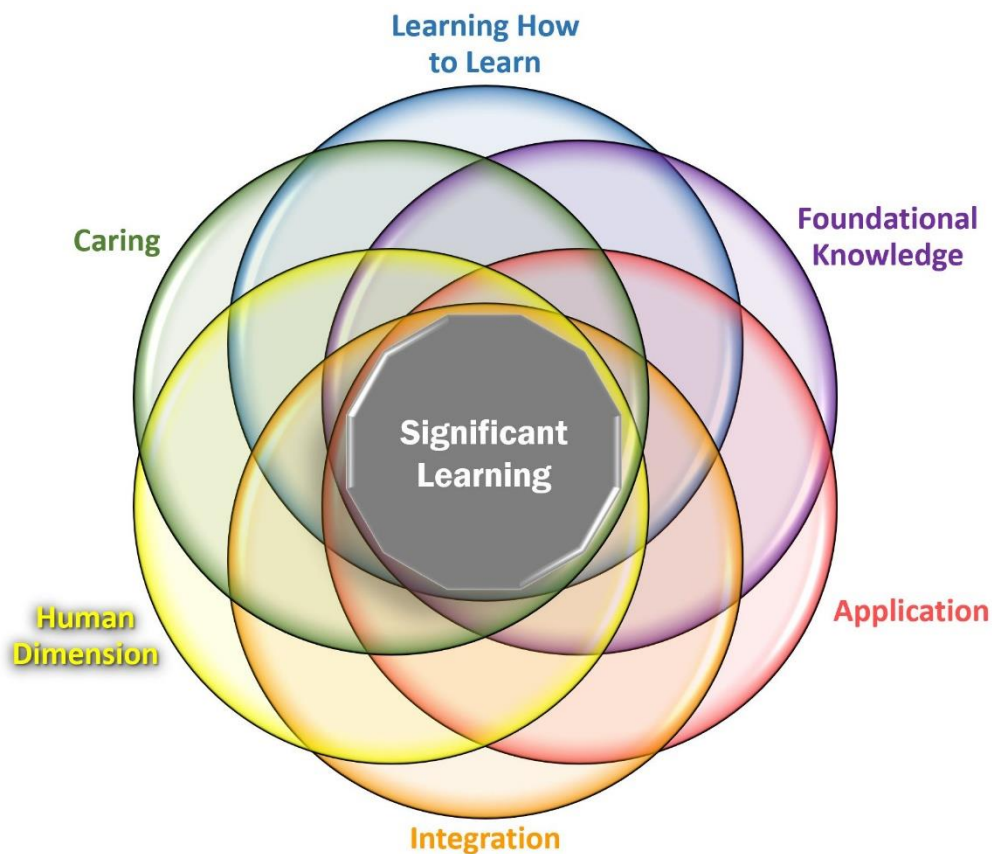
HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS IMPLEMENT FINK'S TAXONOMY IN THEIR TEACHING?

For instructors who are interested in implementing Fink's taxonomy into their teaching, consider the following suggestions:

1. **Make course content relevant and meaningful for students** by supporting significant learning and agency in the classroom. For example, draw upon current events in the news or media to make abstract and theoretical concepts more concrete and tangible. Moreover, provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their prior familiarity with topics.
2. **Incorporate elements of experiential education** into the curriculum. For example, incorporating active learning activities such as role-playing, simulation, and creating portfolios can provide students with a way to engage with course content more directly. Inviting guest speakers and finding other ways for students to engage with their community can also help promote significant learning.
3. **Provide opportunities for students to collaborate in the classroom** to build interpersonal skills and apply their understanding of course content. Finding ways to get students involved throughout the course to work together, brainstorm solutions to problems, and learn from each

other helps to demonstrate knowledge comprehension while simultaneously emphasizing the human dimension of learning.

4. **Be creative with course assessments to engage students on a deeper level.** For example, instead of relying on a final exam or final essay to test student knowledge of content, consider having students develop academic portfolios in lieu of these traditional assessments that demonstrate an understanding of content while adding an element of creativity and practicality to the final product. In doing so, students can get more out of the learning experience and develop additional skills as well. For more, check out this [verb list](#) for more examples of how to incorporate Fink's taxonomy in practice.
5. **Integrate reflection as part of the curriculum design.** Giving students an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned is crucial for helping to promote significant learning in the classroom. To help this process along, consider activities such as short journals and critical reflections at various points throughout a course to give students a chance to think about the knowledge they are acquiring and identify future areas for growth.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)

Explore in 15-30 Minutes

Pelucchi Addison, B. & Tollefson, T. (2022). Fink's taxonomy of significant learning. *UW-Platteville Teaching and Technology Blog*. <https://uwpttc.edublogs.org/2022/03/25/finks-taxonomy-of-significant-learning/>

Syracuse University Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IEA). Action verbs using Bloom's and Fink's taxonomies. <https://effectiveness.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Action-Verbs.pdf>

University at Buffalo Office of Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching Transformation. Fink's significant learning outcomes. <https://www.buffalo.edu/catt/develop/design/learning-outcomes/finks.html>

University of Delaware Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning. Student learning outcomes. <https://ctal.udel.edu/resources-2/slo/>

Explore in 30-60 minutes

Laura E. Levine, Carolyn R. Fallahi, Joan M. Nicoll-Senft, Jack T. Tessier, Cheryl L. Watson & Rebecca M. Wood (2008) Creating Significant Learning Experiences Across Disciplines, *College Teaching*, 56:4, 247-254.

Explore in 60+ minutes

Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating significant learning experiences, revised and updated: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. Jossey-Bass.

Would you like to learn more?

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!



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