# Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning

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

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 change how a student lived 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.**"

**Many people have found the Taxonomy of Significant Learning to be attractive 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. But 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, people skills (called Human Dimension), and learning how to learn.

| Category of Learning | Meaning | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Foundational Knowledge | Students will understand and remember key concepts, terms, relationships, facts, etc. | Students will be able to define Plate tectonics (term, concept); describe the interaction between pressure and temperature (relationship); identify the dates of the US Civil War (facts) |
| Application | Students will know how to "do" important tasks. | Students will be able to perform physical tasks (use a microscope); employ critical thinking; use creative problem-solving; make decisions; sequence multiple steps in a complex project |
| Integration | Students will be able to identify the relationship between "x" and "y". | Students will be able to 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 |
| Human Dimension | Self: Students will better understand themselves<br><br>Others: Students will be able to interact positively and productively with others. | Self: Students will be able to identify and describe their thoughts and feelings about a topic or concept in relationship to themselves, their life goals, their strengths, weaknesses, capabilities<br><br>Others: Students will be able to be an effective member of a team; empathize with and better understand people different from themselves (e.g., by gender, ethnicity, age, etc.); work effectively with people different from themselves |
| Caring | Students will | Students will develop deeper values in relation |

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|---|---|---|
| | care more deeply about this subject or issues related to this subject. | to "green" environmental policies, critical thinking, religious and racial tolerance, correct English usage, etc.; Students will 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 (more efficiently and effectively), both in this course and in life in general. | Students will improve certain skills that are important for being a good student in college, e.g., taking notes from readings or lectures, taking different kinds of tests, study skills, etc.; Students will learn how knowledge is created and tested in different intellectual domains, e.g., how to use the scientific method, literary analysis, historical analysis;Students will become effective 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. |

Like Bloom's Taxonomy, the Taxonomy of Significant Learning has six major categories of learning, but unlike Bloom's, the categories are not located in different "domains" and unlike Bloom's **it is interactive – not hierarchical.**
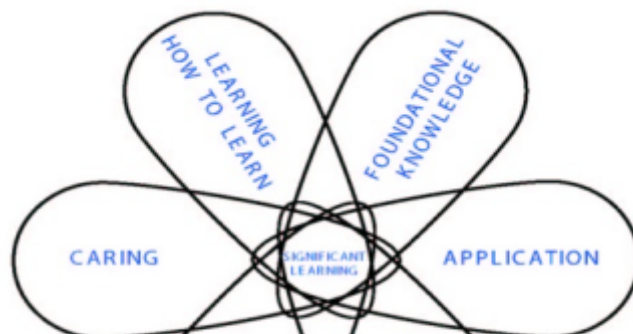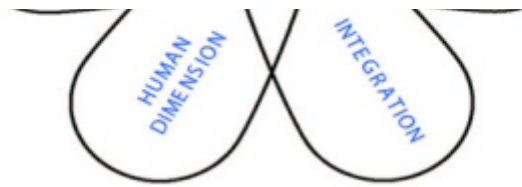
This last characteristic is particularly important; it means that **having students achieve any one kind of learning helps them achieve the other five kinds of learning.**

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