

Teaching Tip Tuesday

Significant Learning Experiences

Significant learning experiences result in tangible evidence of learning that impacts students' lives. They involve more than just providing students with content to remember until the exam. Significant learning experiences allow students to make connections between real-world experiences and esoteric discipline-specific knowledge, in ways that alter how they view the world around them, how they interpret events, and how they make decisions. They should enhance students' lives, their interactions with others, and produce more informed and thoughtful citizens. In order to produce such experiences, we need to be mindful of both the **process of education** and the **end-result of learning** (outcomes).

Process Considerations

Student Centered: The learning environment should allow students to exercise responsibility for their own learning. The role of the instructor should be as a facilitator of student knowledge and skill acquisition, rather than a distributor of knowledge. Student choice in content, application, and means of assessment may play a role in this environment.

Active Learning: The learning environment should engage students in experiential learning that engages knowledge in problem solving, with ample time to reflect on the significance of activities.

Attending to these considerations can lead to a more engaging and impactful student experience that limit student boredom and improve knowledge retention, critical thinking, and students' abilities to relate content to real-life applications.

Learning Outcome Considerations

The learning outcomes of the course should focus on specific kinds of learning that the student will demonstrate, and for which the value to the student is clear. Fink (2013) specifies a learning taxonomy that highlights the following:

1. **Foundational Knowledge.** This is knowledge that provides the essential base of information necessary for further learning in a specific discipline.
2. **Application.** Developing skills, thinking, and managing projects that allow other kinds of learning to become useful.
3. **Integration.** Connecting ideas, different learning experiences, and different realms of life (like academic life, leisure life, family life, etc.), thereby enhancing the student's intellectual power.
4. **Human Dimension.** Learning about oneself and others in ways that allow students to function and interact more effectively.
5. **Caring.** Learning that increases the degree to which students care about something, thereby imbuing them with increased value and energy for learning.
6. **Learning How to Learn.** Learning that increases understanding of the process of learning, thereby increasing efficacy of learning endeavors.

Fink, L.D. 2013. *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, USA.