

# **New Pedagogies in Higher Education**

These are some notes that were developed for participants at an AAC&U conference who were interested in knowing what some of the major categories of new pedagogies in higher education are.

## **A. Active Learning/Small Groups**

Some books were published in the early 90s that crystallized the concept of active learning as a good thing to do. The basic notion is that, in addition to getting information and ideas about a topic (e.g., from lectures, readings), students need to DO something and REFLECT on the meaning of those ideas and actions. Some common ways in which the “doing” happens are:

- Case studies – simulations – role play – hearing people’s stories

Following on the heels of this concept, the notion of “social constructivism” has provided a rationale for using small groups extensively and as an important way of promoting more active learning in a course. This can happen in a variety of ways:

- Think-pair-share activities
- Cooperative and collaborative learning
- Problem-based learning
- Team-based learning
- Project-based learning
- Inquiry-guided learning

Note: The earlier activities can often be inserted into an existing course structure. The last four items on the list above call for changing the whole structure of the course to promote a particular kind of small group activity.

## **B. Reflective Writing**

This is also an outgrowth of the active learning movement, to get students to pull back from the act of learning and reflect on the process of learning. Common ways of doing this include:

- Minute papers: 1-3 sentences
- Learning journals: 1-4 paragraphs
- Learning portfolios: an extended reflective statement, usually with an appendix of materials that support or illustrate the content of the statement.

Learning portfolios can be structured in a variety of ways. One way of doing this is to prompt students to address the following questions:

- I. WHAT did you learn in this course
- II. HOW did you learn that, i.e., what helped you learn, what didn’t help you learn?

III. What is the VALUE of what you learned, for you?

IV. WHAT ELSE do you want to learn, and how would you learn that?

### C. Significant Learning Goals

Most college courses are focused on various topics that form the content of the course, supplemented in some cases by having students apply what that content to a series of problems.

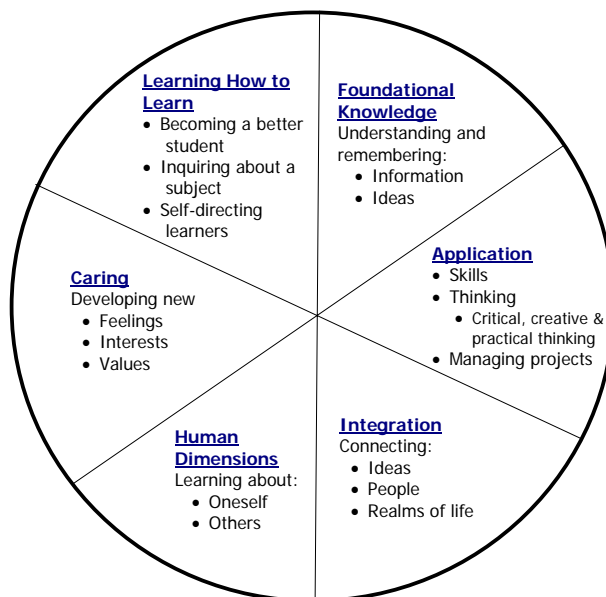
To make their courses truly learning-centered, professors need to learn how to formulate high quality learning goals that include but go well beyond content. There are two taxonomies that can help professors respond to this challenge.

**Bloom's Taxonomy:** The oldest of the two is a taxonomy formulated by Benjamin Bloom and his colleagues in the 1950s. The offers six categories of learning that can be used both to formulate learning goals and to guide assessment of those goals. Generally, these six categories have been seen as being hierarchical, i.e., students need to learn the lower levels before learning the higher levels. His categories are:

1. Knowledge (meaning "understand and remember")
2. Comprehension
3. Application
4. Analysis
5. Synthesis
6. Evaluation

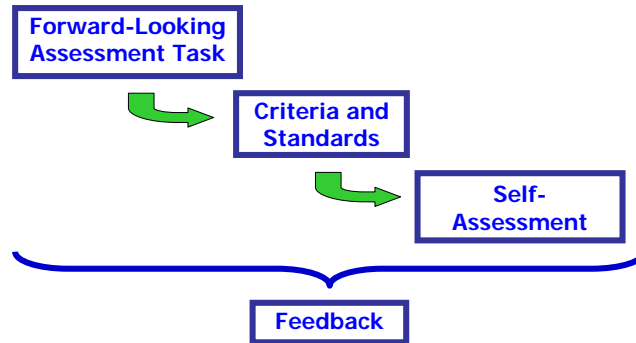
**Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning:** The more recent taxonomy has been created by L. Dee Fink and published in his book *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* (Jossey-Bass, 2003). Like Bloom's, this taxonomy has six categories; unlike Bloom's, it is not hierarchical but interactive.

The following diagram shows the categories and some specific kinds of learning in each category:



#### D. Assessment/Rubrics

At some point, professors have to decide how they are going to assess student learning. Rather than “auditing” student learning (i.e., after teaching a topic, assessing to see if they “got it”), professors need to consider “educative assessment,” i.e., the assessment process enhances or furthers student learning.



What this diagram says, in essence, that the process of assessing student learning has to start with identifying the right kind of task, and that this task should be a real-life, authentic, or “forward-looking” (looking forward beyond the course to what students can actually do with this knowledge after the course is over). Then the teacher has to create a good rubric (criteria and standards) to differentiate excellent from mediocre from poor work, and give the students opportunities for assessing the quality of their own work themselves – with feedback from the professor all along the way.

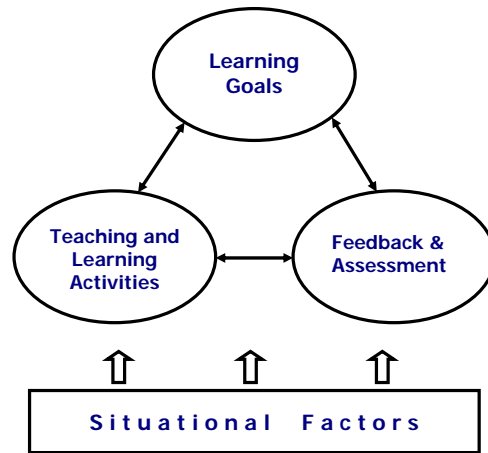
#### E. Service Learning

Service learning is a powerful, authentic learning experience that definitely has the ability to promote significant kinds of learning. In order to be “service learning” and not just “community service,” students have to reflect on and talk about how their service experiences and observations inform their understanding of the subject they are studying.

#### F. Course Design

All teachers have to make decisions before the course starts, about how they plan or intend for the course to unfold and happen. This is the course design process. Most people model themselves after teachers they have had, and then use a “list of topics” approach to designing their courses. That drives learning but generally a low-level kind of learning.

To make their courses truly learning-centered, teachers need to learn new and more powerful ways of systematically and intentionally designing their courses. One model for doing this is the following:



This model, called Integrated Course Design, suggests the following process for designing courses:

- Begin the process by gathering information on “Situational Factors”, e.g., thoughts and feelings the students have about the subject, external expectations or requirements, etc. Then use this information when making the three big decisions of the course:
- Learning goals: WHAT you want students to learn
- Teaching & Learning Activities: What the students will have to do, to achieve the learning goals
- Feedback and Assessment: What the students will have to do, that will tell you how well they learned what you wanted them to learn.
- Finally, the learning goals, activities, and assessment have to be integrated, i.e., they have to support and reflect each other. (Note: In many (most?) courses, they are not integrated.)

One nice feature of this model is that it automatically leads professors into issues and an awareness of the need to learn more about: learning goals, active learning, educative assessment, teaching strategies, etc.