



4.1 | Analyze: Significant Learning Experiences

What makes a learning experience significant, and how do you evaluate that?

As noted in Chapters 1 and 14 of *Streamlined ID* (2020), “Planning for a successful instructional design means *beginning with the end in mind*” (pp. 10 and 369). Of course, the measures you use to gauge success depend on the original goal identified for the learning experience. So, once you’ve identified a goal, ask yourself, “what should a successful learning experience look like to me and to my learners? What kind of learning am I targeting, and what factors or practices will likely make that learning experience “successful” or “significant” for my learners? Identifying this type of information will enable you to plan for a more effective evaluation of your instructional design.

Fink (2003) created a taxonomy that identifies six kinds of significant learning including:

1. *Foundational knowledge* which, when remembered and understood, provides a basic foundation necessary for other kinds of learning;
2. *Application skills and thinking*, which allow other kinds of learning to become useful;
3. *Integration*, which empowers learners to make connections between ideas, people and realms of life;
4. *Human dimension*, which encourages the individual to learn more about himself and others to enhance the human significance of what is being learned;
5. *Caring*, which prompts the development of new feelings, interests, and values that motivate and give the learner the energy to continue learning; and
6. *Learning how to learn*, that enhances the individual’s ability to learn effectively and equips her for lifelong learning.

Think about the learning experiences you have encountered across your lifetime. Which ones would you classify as “significant” or “successful”? Did those who provided the learning experience communicate its purpose to you?

List and classify from three to ten of your past learning experiences using Fink’s categories, above. Analyze each and identify what it was that made each of your experiences significant or not-so-significant. Did the experience fulfill its intended purpose? Even if it did not fulfill its intent, would you still classify it as “significant” or “successful”? Why or why not? What factors and practices made the learning experience either exceptional or something you would consider a waste of your time? It is likely that the majority of your experiences would be classified as “foundational,” but even foundational experiences should be designed to be significant.

Begin a record of the learning experiences that you encounter, and whether and how the designer accomplished the intended goal. Reflecting on your learning experiences and keeping a record or “design diary” of your thoughts will enhance your ability to evaluate and identify practices that produce exceptional, significant learning, as well as those that lead to mediocre or unsuccessful learning experiences. Once you know the qualities that characterize effective and successful instruction, you can design those things into your work AND add them as criteria for future evaluations of the instruction.

Read more about Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning experiences:

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