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Beyond the "Human Dimension": Expanding Fink's taxonomy of significant learning to include the more-than-human world

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Abstract

We are in a particular moment in human history when climate change and environmental degradation, and the accompanying "eco-anxiety" many of us feel, are challenging predominant ways of living and educating. Just as educational developers have started turning a critical lens inward around other important social justice issues, we all have the opportunity, and indeed a responsibility, to examine the ways that our field may be contributing—albeit inadvertently—to much broader environmental injustices. In this article, we take as our starting point an influential taxonomy of learning, offered by L. Dee Fink, which is frequently utilized in U.S. centers for teaching and learning to guide faculty in the design of their courses. Our purpose is to explore the implications and potential growth areas of one particular area of Fink's learning taxonomy, what he has called the "Human Dimension," and then to propose an expanded understanding and application of this dimension to include attention to and relationships with the more-than-human world, which Indigenous peoples have long practiced. We hope, ultimately, for this piece to provoke critical reflection of an anthropocentric approach to education, inspire a broader ecological perspective-taking, and perhaps even result in concrete environmental actions.

Keywords: significant learning, integrated course design, Human Dimension, nature

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We are in a particular moment in human history when the "wicked problem" (Hanstedt, 2018) of climate change and environmental degradation, as well as the accompanying "eco-anxiety" (Whitcomb, 2021) many of us feel, is urgent and affects all of us. In response, campuses around the country are attempting to address climate change (e.g., "earth day, every day"), from cutting carbon emissions to adding charging stations for electric vehicles to investing in green energy (Budd, 2022). Educators are rallying for institutions to ramp up their environmental efforts, including through student-focused curriculum change and campus engagement (Perez-Udell, 2022). Given the crucial role that educational developers play in cultural and organizational change on college campuses (e.g., Schroeder & Associates, 2010), with our focus on supporting the efforts and growth of faculty, we must be a part of these efforts too.

Just as educational developers have started turning a critical lens inward around other important social justice issues (e.g., Brooks et al., 2022 on racism), here, too, is another opportunity. We wonder whether educational development work may be inadvertently reinforcing problematic assumptions, and accompanying instructional practices, about the so-called natural world (e.g., the idea that humans are distinct from and superior to an inert entity called "nature" or "earth" that exists only to serve and sustain us), which undergird the very climate challenges we face today. As Australian philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2007) wrote, "The marks of human-centredness include denying and minimising the agency of those others on whom we depend, and this plays a big role in our inability to understand our ecological plight" (p. 20). We know from the literature (e.g., Condon et al., 2016) that educational development can have an impact on instructors, students, and campus culture and that course design institutes, in particular, affect faculty behavior and classroom practice (e.g., Wheeler & Bach, 2021). It is thus worthwhile, at this critical moment in our global history, to examine our field's contributions to environmental stewardship through the principles and practices we endorse, either explicitly or implicitly.

In this article, we take as our starting point an influential taxonomy of learning, offered by L. Dee Fink. Many staff at centers for teaching

and learning (CTLs) use Fink's book *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* (2013), his IDEA paper (2005), an abbreviated PDF version of his book, and his six-slice pie chart visual in their educational development programming. This taxonomy is a cornerstone in course design institutes that teach faculty about "integrated," backward course design. Many centers populate their libraries and reference sections with Fink's materials. And Fink himself runs a successful consulting business, based on this popular model of learning. He has been an invited, and appreciated, speaker at both of our centers, for example.

The purpose of this article is to explore the implications of one particular area of Fink's learning taxonomy, what he has called the "Human Dimension," and then to propose an expanded understanding of this dimension, which many Indigenous peoples and educators have been prioritizing all along (e.g., Cajete, 1994; Merculieff & Roderick, 2013). We (two white non-Indigenous women) suggest that educational developers utilizing Fink's taxonomy reconsider this dimension of learning in order to bring in relationships to the "beyond-human," to move away from the anthropocentricity (or human-centeredness) that plagues our inhabitance and treatment of this planet, to recognize relationships that exist to other subjectivities, to return to a kinship-based or "kincentric" worldview (Martinez, 2008), and to trouble the invariably limited "Western" ways of knowing that have dominated U.S. education and environmental engagement to this point. We also offer some ways that educational developers might use and model this expanded dimension in our work with faculty. We hope, ultimately, for this piece to promote critical reflection of our current practices and to inspire ecological perspective-taking and even concrete environmental action beyond simply the ideas presented here.

Trailhead: Fink's "Human Dimension"

Built upon Benjamin Bloom's (1956) well-known taxonomy of cognitive learning objectives, which is usually represented as a pyramid,

with knowledge at the bottom and evaluation at the top, Fink reconceived learning goals as non-hierarchical, interactive, and inclusive of affective realms. In his book on "significant" learning, Fink (2013) offered a taxonomy of six interconnected dimensions: foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. According to Fink, for significant learning to occur, all six dimensions need to be addressed in the design of a course. This notion has been embraced by our field and many of us have spent the last couple of decades helping faculty understand that we can—and should—teach to all dimensions. Not only should instructors care about creating opportunities in which students can remember, apply, and integrate information, but instructors can also encourage students to develop new feelings, interests, and values about the subject matter (i.e., "caring") and help them to build the skills needed to become a better student (i.e., "learning to learn"). In addition, significant learning experiences should provide opportunities for students to learn something about themselves and others (the so-called Human Dimension).

For Fink (2013), learning experiences are significant when they have the "potential to improve people's lives in one or more of the following ways":

- *Enhancing our individual lives*: Developing an ability, for example, to enjoy good art and music . . .
- *Enhancing our social interactions with others*: Knowing how to engage others in more positive ways . . .
- *Become more informed and thoughtful citizens*: Developing our readiness to participate in civic activities at one or more levels, for example, the local community, state government, national government, and international advocate groups
- *Preparing us for the world of work*: Developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for being effective in one or more professional fields (pp. 8–9)

The emphasis here is clearly on the human (i.e., learning improves *people's* lives). The rest of the natural world is not explicitly mentioned (though, potentially, it could fall under several intended outcomes, for instance, as a part of better citizenship).

Popular and easily accessible is Fink's (2013, p. 35) pie chart of significant learning, which visualizes and succinctly captures each of the six dimensions. Here, Fink conveyed that the Human Dimension helps students to learn about "oneself" and "others" (p. 35). Humans are explicit in this brief summary (in "oneself") and, while "others" are not narrowly specified to only mean "other people," the human focus is made clear in the rest of the descriptions and elaborations given in the book. For instance, on the next page, Fink claimed that the "special value" of the Human Dimension is that it "informs students about the *human* significance of what they are learning" (p. 36; our italics).

To begin his longer description of this dimension in the book, Fink wrote, "Sometimes our educational experiences enable us to better understand and interact with other people" (2013, p. 52). It is clear that (human) "people" is the focus. Fink also subtly underscored the anthropocentricity later in the section when he said that "some readers might wonder whether the human dimension aspect of significant learning is applicable to the natural sciences" (p. 54). Yet, if this dimension really is, as Fink has claimed elsewhere, capacious enough to include the natural world, then this wondering makes very little sense: of course the natural world would be applicable to the natural sciences!

Later in the book, Fink (2013) proposed questions for instructors to consider as they formulate significant learning goals, related to each of the six dimensions. For the Human Dimension, such questions include "What can and should students learn about themselves?" and "What can and should students learn about interaction with people they may actually encounter in the future?" (notably not the present or the past) (p. 84). Here the question prompts limit instructor (and student) thinking to interactions with people—not other parts of the natural world.

Interestingly, Fink's (2005) oft-cited and frequently used IDEA paper broadened these questions a bit: "What should they [students] learn about understanding others and/or interacting with others?" (p. 3).

Given the predominant human focus, we were delighted by the section in Fink's book called "A Broader Concept of Others" (2013, p. 52). Here, he wrote, "Usually we are referring to other people when we speak of learning about others but sometimes others extend to more than people" (p. 52). In this context, he mentioned Monty Roberts, the original "horse whisperer" who learned to communicate with horses, as well as how "the Native Americans sometimes speak of parts of nature as being significant others in their lives" (p. 53). Without further elaboration or explanation, though, Fink moved to describing "some people" who "develop a similar, special kind of relationship with nonanimate others, for example with machines and technology" (p. 53). He mentioned the writings of aviator, activist, and officer Charles Lindbergh and added that "today we often find people who have a similar kind of relationship with cars or computers" (pp. 52–53).

Although we appreciate this move toward including the more-than-human world, we also note the brevity of this section as well as the particular choices and pairing of examples. They are presented as fringe curiosities, odd exceptions to or deviations from a norm. We also detect in their introduction a gesture of wanting to keep them at arm's length ("I have been educated . . . by Monty Roberts," "people who have read Charles Lindbergh's writings . . . often conclude"; Fink, 2013, p. 53). Furthermore, in his quick move from Indigenous peoples' intimate relationship to animate nature to the felt connections that some people develop with inanimate machines, Fink obscures important differences. While human-made objects gain significance and power through our relationship to them, kinship with cohabitating earthly creatures doesn't depend on us. Rather, we are intimately and inevitably tied together in our given, shared dependence on the planetary ecology in which we are mutually embedded and from which we are inseparable.

In a typical American educational setting, where contemporary Western ways of knowing are not only privileged but baked into its foundational core (despite the rarity of our ways of being, globally and historically; see Henrich et al., 2010), Fink's seeming discomfort with the possibility of a different type of relationship with the more-than-human world is not surprising. The current moment, however, invites us to reflect on the cultural situatedness of Fink's taxonomy, to reconsider the Human Dimension, and, by doing so, to reimagine the aims of a college education.

The Journey: Exploring Other Aspects of the Human Dimension

> *Many of us have been or are becoming students of these systems of life, wondering if in fact we can unlock some crucial understanding about our own humanity if we pay closer attention to this place we are from and the bodies we are in. (Brown, 2017, p. 2)*

Fink's "Broader Concept" subsection of the Human Dimension, which we describe above, offers us a starting point from which we can journey further. We think of this article not as a repudiation of his helpful learning model but rather an important reminder, at this crucial moment, of "our interbeing with the earth"—as philosopher and cultural ecologist David Abram (2010, p. 3) put it—of the responsibility we bear to the world that we inhabit and the other beings whom we live alongside.

Below, we offer several (by no means exhaustive or definitive) wonderings and deepenings to the so-called Human Dimension, which we urge educational developers to consider when supporting faculty in creating significant learning experiences for students. We want to acknowledge that the substance of what we are offering is not necessarily new and that some Indigenous activists have long advocated for educational practices that align with an interconnected view of the

world. Our contribution, rather, lies in speaking from the position of white Western educational developers trying to meet ourselves and our colleagues where we are and offer productive lines of inquiry to begin a learning journey. Accordingly, when we use the pronoun "we" throughout the article, we most often refer to the collective of white educational developers—not to exclude Indigenous colleagues, but to take responsibility for the work we "Western folks" have to do to correct course. (Of course, the "West" is itself a problematic notion, but that's a topic for another article.)

The lines of inquiry we offer below are overlapping and recursive; readers will quickly realize that there aren't always clear or easy distinctions among them. We acknowledge that people from different communities might delineate these categories differently—and that our divisions inevitably reflect our own cultural situatedness and limitations. In fact, we struggled ourselves with the organization of this section, feeling caught between the ways we have been taught to perceive the world and the expanded notions we are trying to advocate for here. But we hope readers will approach the below categories like blazes on a trail, letting us all know we're still on the path and encouraging us each to pause, catch our breath, and reflect. In this way, we hope to nuance and expand Fink's Human Dimension—to journey beyond it—and to bring it into better alignment and conversation with today's urgent environmental concerns.

Our Full Selves

When first considering Fink's Human Dimension, we wish to nuance what it might mean to better "know/understand ourselves." Given the contemporary Western emphasis on the cognitive, it is important to remember that our connections to ourselves include our bodies, our emotions, our senses. Western thought has led us to split ourselves and consider body, mind, and spirit as independent from one another, which is contrary to how some Native American communities, for instance, perceive our integrated, holistic "threefold being" (Lovern &

Locust, 2013, p. 79). We have become separated from "how sense-luscious the world is" (Ackerman, 1990, p. xv) and the experience of orienting ourselves to the world through our senses and emotions. As Abram (2010) claimed, "For too long we've closed ourselves to the participatory life of our senses, inured ourselves to the felt intelligence of our muscled flesh and its manifold solidarities" (p. 7). Yet, as much as academics depend on and celebrate the thinking mind as "the pinnacle of existence" (Plumwood, 2007, p. 20), we are more than simply floating brains. We are bodies. We move. We feel. We smile in joy when tasting our favorite fruit. Our skin prickles in fear while watching a scary movie. We lose our sense of smell when we get congested with a cold. Our joints are affected by changes in atmospheric pressure. Sleep deprivation compromises our thinking. Hormones can make us feel more aggressive or emotional. And "knowledge is constructed through [this] embodied experience" (Hrach, 2021, p. 13); in fact, such experience is essential to learning (see, e.g., Cavanagh, 2016). There are also, we must admit, limits to what we can experience and know. By placing tiny portable digital recorders around the world, scientists are now realizing just how much "talking" nature does that we never knew because we don't "hear" in those particular ways (Bakker, 2022). Many animals, just not humans, can see ultraviolet light; sharks can detect electric fields; sea turtles find their way using magnetic fields (Yong, 2022). Humans are both more limited and more expansive in our senses than we tend to acknowledge. But this is how we live in the world. This is how we can learn about ourselves and—"because each of us affects the embodied ecosystem of others" (Hrach, 2021, p. 11)—others too.

Multiple Modes of Communication

Fink's Human Dimension inevitably entails interaction and communication, ways of understanding the self and others. But in Western disembodied ways of moving through the world, we tend to have a very narrow sense of what it means to communicate—that is, primarily

through language and written texts, a dependency on books that Yup'ik Elder Elsie Mather called the "monster that is upon us" (quoted in Merculieff & Roderick, 2013, p. 57). In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram (1996) argued that alphabetized human language (like English) "became a largely self-referential system closed off from the larger world that once engendered it" (p. 257). The "'I,' the speaking self, was hermetically sealed within this new interior" (p. 257) looking out at the exterior world from a place of "astonishing dissociation—a monumental forgetting of our human inherence in a more-than-human world" (p. 258). (This is not the case with all languages; Chinese, for instance, makes extensive use of logograms, for which there is often a visual connection between the character and what it represents in the world.) So many of our experiences, indeed, exceed language. So much of human communication is itself non-verbal (and, of course, culturally conditioned). "We read body language fluently," as Hrach said (2021, p. 36): the frown that crosses a child's face when presented with a distasteful food, the crossed arms of a colleague who's been interrupted, the raised eyebrows and smirk of a flirt. Even silence, of course, can communicate a great deal, if we just listen. In *Stop Talking*, Merculieff and Roderick (2013) described how "Indigenous cultures value silence. Too much talking interferes with observing, listening, sensing, experiencing, deciding wisely, and acting effectively" (p. 22). It is often in silence that we learn about ourselves, through processing and reflection, and about others, when we create the space for presence, attention, observation, and story stewardship. What do, or can, we experience when we "experience the world without words" (Merculieff & Roderick, 2013, p. 12)?

When considering even expanded notions of communication, we make assumptions about just who might be possible or viable conversation partners. Sometimes these assumptions are limiting. Abram (2010), for example, noted that Westerners presume "language [to be] a human property, suitable only for communicating with other persons. We talk to people; we do not talk to the ground underfoot" (p. 174).

Non-human others, such as those we describe below, are suitable conversation topics, to be talked "about" (and—perhaps not unrelatedly—observed, analyzed, relocated, conquered, experimented upon, dissected, bred, hunted, harvested, eaten, culled, endangered, or eliminated) but not directly talked and, importantly, listened to and, dare we say, learned *from*. We value and use certain very specific modes of engagement, we note that others (the beaver, the breeze) do not, and thus we conclude that they do not engage at all. (We don't think it's a coincidence that when demonizing or debasing other groups of humans, we tend to use language that equates them to non-humans.) Yet Abram (2010) reminded us, as so many Indigenous communities continue to remember:

> Language, from the perspective of the fully embodied human, seems as much an attribute of other animals and plants as of our own garrulous species. . . . All things have the capacity for speech—all beings have the ability to communicate something of themselves to other beings. . . . Not just animals and plants then, but tumbling waterfalls and dry riverbeds, gusts of wind, compost piles and cumulus clouds, freshly painted houses (as well as houses abandoned and sometimes haunted), rusting automobiles, feathers, granite cliffs and grains of sand, tax forms, dormant volcanoes, bays and bayous made wretched by pollutants, snowdrifts, shed antlers, diamonds, and daikon radishes, are all expressive, sometimes eloquent, and hence participants in the mystery of language. . . . Human speech is simply our part of a much broader conversation. (p. 172)

An expansion and nuancing of Fink's Human Dimension in this way can serve as a reminder that we all live within "a community of expressive presences that are also attentive, and listening, to the meanings that move between them" (Abram, 2010, p. 173). Appreciating our embeddedness in a larger network of intersecting conversations may help us cultivate a more attuned relationship to our surroundings.

Other Living Beings

When attempting to better understand ourselves and others, we can also think about not only connections to other humans but connections to other living beings who are not human. Fink's model already allows for this possibility, but what is given relatively short shrift (and thus seems insignificant) in *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* can be brought to the fore. When brainstorming additional "others," we might most immediately think of non-human animals, especially those animals who seem most "like" humans in some way—elephants and their mourning rituals, dolphins and their sophisticated communication, dogs and their best-friend loyalty. Certainly many non-human animals show up in our everyday lives: the cat who lives in our house, the deer on the side of the road, the bear featured in the new movie playing at the local theater. But let's be willing to go further, to include insects and even single-celled organisms who seem quite a bit different from us, like the butterfly who emerges from a cocoonal goo or the trillions of microbes living inside of us who make our existence possible. We can even widen our circle beyond animals. We might think, for instance, of the plant world as "others" with whom we can connect (not only by ingesting and using them but also aesthetically and even morally) and from whom we can learn—the wisdom of trees, the extensive networking of fungi, the perfect synchronicity of an apple orchard when all the trees bloom together. Certainly interactions with these kinds of living others can directly influence our mental health; Western researchers are discovering, for example, how even short periods of contemplation in nature can inspire wonder, strengthen our emotional connection, and increase our commitment to environmental stewardship (Keltner, 2023; Zelenski et al., 2015).

The Land as Other

Despite the popularity of place-based education in the United States (e.g., Sobel, 2004)—the idea of immersing and engaging students in their local environment as a starting point for learning—our

understanding of ourselves and others is rarely grounded in the land, in the way that many Indigenous stories and actions simply assume (e.g., Cajete, 1994; Topa & Narvaez, 2022). But those of us who are removed from a deep ancestral connection to the land can "re-enchant/re-enspirit" all parts of the natural world with dynamism as well as "agency and creativity" (Plumwood, 2007, pp. 18–19). Take a moment to reconsider the big boulder that juts onto a wooded trail, interrupting easy passage; dirt that appears only as a nuisance when we track it inside; or entire mountain ranges, which offer idyllic but flat views to photograph on an overlook and then leave behind. In describing her experience working with found stone, Plumwood (2007) reminded us, "Losing contact with both stones and chance as teachers and metaphor-makers, we lose an important source of wit, wisdom and wonder in our lives, for stones can speak to us of the 'big themes,' of life and death, time and transience" (p. 24). We can relate to the land. It can tell stories. It can be inhabited, cultivated, fought over, even stolen. Land can be covered up, forgotten, or reclaimed over time by a succession of settlers or migrants. It can even be taught on and from, in the form of today's sprawling college campuses and idyllic university "grounds" (often, we note, themselves located on land that was taken from others). These parts of our world are not inert or static, as we might typically perceive; rather, they are animate and influential, worthy of better understanding too. Biologist and Potawatomi tribe member Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, shared how many Indigenous languages address elements of the land as fellow subjects, not the "it" of a lake or a mountain in the English we have been using here (p. 55), which is consistent with an approach to the Human Dimension that perceives "others" much more expansively. And religion scholar Karen Armstrong (2022) reminded modern Westerners that we, too, can draw on our ancestors' spiritual and intellectual insights as we seek to "recover the veneration of nature that human beings carefully cultivated for millennia" (p. 19). Like those of other cultures, there are strands even in ancient Western traditions that present nature as alive and imbued with sacrality, holding inspiration

for connecting with the "hidden reality of the natural world" as well as for living "effectively and safely within our environment" (p. 26).

Human-Made Others

Even for thinkers such as Fink, human-made products or artifacts can be included, albeit much more richly, in the realm of "others" to which we can relate in this dimension of learning. Houses shelter us. Clothing expresses our creativity, our wealth, or our climate. Buildings and their lights disrupt migratory patterns. Oil spills in our oceans and pollutes our waters. On today's college campuses, we teach in classrooms (and not very inspiring ones at that, with their fluorescent lighting, lack of windows, bolted-down chairs, etc.), work on computers, use projectors, and arrange our bodies on furniture—all constructed by humans. AI that we created can now write college essays and ace biology quizzes, not to mention hold conversations that deeply unsettle human conversation partners. Reconceiving these different parts of our world allows us to relate to our material creations more intentionally, including taking care of them and their impact. As Abram (2010) wrote, "One cannot enter into a felt rapport with another entity if one assumes that the other is entirely inanimate. *It is difficult, if not impossible, to empathize with an inert object*" (p. 44). If we address elements of our world as subjects with the potential for influence or even agency, that changes our relationship to them. Assuming that these kinds of dynamic and respectful relationships are limited to certain people, such as Indigenous Americans or religious mystics, or a certain time (the past), and excluding everyone else from considering and experiencing connectedness with the beyond-human world is a missed opportunity.

Past and Future Generations of Others

When Fink encourages educators to wonder "what can and should students learn about interaction with people they may actually

encounter in the future?" he seems to be referring to encounters that will occur within a single student's lifetime. But there is a broader perspective available, too, in which we are connected not only to people in our immediate vicinity at present but also to people from the past as well as the future, both near and far. Modernity has left so many of us removed from our ancestral homes and disconnected from our cultural heritages. Intergenerational mixing is rare. A respect for, or even an awareness of, Elders—those who bear tradition, those who have learned lessons over time, those who can guide the next generation (Merculieff & Roderick, 2013, p. 20)—is not widely inculturated in the United States. These broken linkages make it difficult to deeply feel the bond between generations and to the land and, with it, any responsibility to care for the past or the future. In cultures that have preserved a greater attunement to their surrounding environments—temporally and physically—the idea that ancestors and, in fact, any ordinary person "contribute reciprocally to the conditions of each other's growth as embodied beings" (Ingold, 2021, p. 179) is an unquestioned reality. We might recall, for instance, the Haudenosaunee principle of the "Seventh Generation," the idea that decisions made now should be sustainable for seven generations to come. Unmoored from the past, however, humans lose the ground for substantiating the future. Looking back at our ancestral histories and forward through the lens of sustainability and reciprocity can be a move toward feeling a sense of responsibility to the future generations. Questions such as "What type of ancestor would we like to be(come)?" (Ehrenfeld, 2009; Saad, 2020) can help revive our atrophied "relational imagination" (Heimann & Bach, in press) and yield a richer, more expansive Human Dimension of learning experiences.

Spiritual Others

For many students, as well as faculty, significant connections with others may also include spiritual others. The single creator God of

the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is certainly an important orienting other in the lives of the citizens of the United States, even to this day. Beyond Western religious affiliations, there also are students for whom spirituality and education cannot be disentangled: Merculieff and Roderick (2013), in their profile of Alaska Native people, for instance, described how spirituality, or the "connectedness to the web of life" (p. 80), is "at the heart of Native life and learning" (p. 88). Spirituality is not, in fact, disconnected from the land, non-human plant/animal others, or even communication itself (Cajete, 1994), which we have treated separately above. We know from longitudinal research and the reflections of experienced educators that students of all kinds are seeking this kind of exploration and development, or "spiritual quests," from their college experience (Astin et al., 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). This is a main reason why students choose to enroll in religion courses in college (Walvoord, 2008). Students hunger to find identity, meaning, situatedness, and connection in and to a world beyond human affairs. Certainly, this is not every student's goal or experience, but a learning taxonomy that does not at least allow for this possibility or acknowledge this reality—that the most significant "other" or "others" in the lives of some students may not be human, or this-worldly, at all—will be inevitably impoverished. Contemplative pedagogy programs, now popular in CTLs, have sought to make the integration of mind-body-spirit practices palatable by disconnecting them from the roots of their religious traditions. Recent scholarship is paving the way for more open discussions of how teachers' spiritual practices may enrich educational spaces. Toscano (2016, 2023), for example, shared ways in which Indigenous Chicana and Chicano educators purposefully and openly engage their spiritual traditions to enlist and ignite students' innate curiosity and search for meaning—or what Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste (2010) called the "Learning Spirit" (for a discussion and application of the concept, see Pipe & Stephens, 2023, pp. ix–xiii).

Different Destinations: How Might We Respond

> *We need acts of restoration, not only for polluted waters and degraded lands, but also for our relationship to the world. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 195)*

We don't intend to offer here one specific "solution" to the problems we perceive in Fink's original conception of the Human Dimension. Rather, we'd like to continue the journey he began and offer some ideas of different destinations to which educational developers might travel, when we experience the world, and educational possibilities, in more relational, embodied, and expansive ways. The ideas below are directed toward educational developers, those who work in CTLs and support faculty in their attempts to learn and grow as teachers. In this section, we join the efforts of others (such as those participating in the POD Earth-Centered Small Interest Group) who are brainstorming ideas for doing differently and, perhaps, better.

One immediate idea would be, of course, for educational developers to ***consider renaming this dimension*** of the taxonomy when teaching faculty about it during CTL programming. We are curious whether Fink himself—or others drawing upon the model—might be open to such a possibility. Some ideas we have considered include the "Dimension of Being," "Natural Dimension," "Earthly Dimension," "Self and Others," "Human and More-Than-Human Dimension," among others.

Related, educational developers may choose to ***emphasize the nuances of this dimension*** when introducing the taxonomy, even without renaming it. We might present diverse examples of "others," such as non-human animals and plants. We might point out that there are various ways we are embedded in, relate to, and inseparable from what we typically think of as a separate, exterior "nature." We might foreground integration, interconnectedness, and interbeing and invite

faculty to link these to larger questions about meaning and purpose that students bring to our classrooms. For instance, what if we brought Astin et al.'s (2010) or Toscano's (2016, 2023) research or narrative accounts by Kimmerer (2013) into our course design institutes and allowed participants to grapple with the dissonance that so many students experience between wanting to attend to their social and spiritual identities and the reality of being forced to live a fragmented life to exist in institutions? We might trouble and disrupt common ways of thinking, including academic epistemologies. We hope that the faculty with whom we work, as well as the students who are the intended recipients of those faculty members' instruction, can come to understand that "ourselves" and "others" are actually quite broad, flexible, and nuanced concepts and that everything exists in relation to everything else.

There is opportunity to ***use the topics of CTL programs to call attention to the different aspects of this dimension***. That is, in addition to workshops on self-reflection, peer review, or team-based learning (all perfectly consonant with the current conception of the Human Dimension), educational developers could offer additional topics on embodied, holistic learning or infusing care for our ecosystems into our curriculum. We can continue to offer and enhance programs related to place-based learning, ensuring that the natural environment is considered part of place. We can encourage faculty to teach outside or to offer "walking office hours" (to students who are able) that intentionally emphasize the relationship to human and non-human others. We can leverage our expanded understanding of the Human Dimension to help our campuses address pressing needs. For example, we can respond to the growing concern about students' mental health and eco-anxiety by helping curriculum innovators, especially in STEM disciplines, think about ways to help students deepen their awareness of interconnection with the human and more-than-human world; consider its meaning for their future work; and intentionally cultivate connections in service of our personal, community, and planetary well-being.

We also wonder whether we could do a better job in our educational development programming to ***model the complexities of this dimension*** (akin to how we must actively confront and dismantle our own racial biases, not simply tell *instructors* to do so). Our programs usually occur indoors, in disembodied ways, often not even respecting the biological need for breaks. What if we found inspiration in classroom-focused books on learning, like Hrach's (2021), and took faculty outside to move, "forest bathe," or even do field work, encouraging everyone to engage their whole-body (to whatever extent participants are willing, able, and comfortable)? What if we pushed beyond pro forma land acknowledgments to collectively investigate the complexities of present and past relationship histories embedded in the land? What if we tracked the sun's movement and shadows over the course of a CTL program and paused when we did so, with the invitation that instructors situate their work in relation to the more-than-human environment? What if we included opportunities for program participants to experientially connect with the more-than-human environment—outside or evoked through art, storytelling, or even recent science (e.g., the language of trees), harvesting the rich potential for metaphoric meaning-making that landscapes can evoke—and then develop, in conversation with others' unique experiences, an embodied sense of what it means to learn not only *about* but *from* the world and one another? What if we approached "nature [as] our textbook," engaging in "ecosophy" or "the process of searching for wisdom from nature" (quoted in Merculieff & Roderick, 2013, p. 84)? What if we created spaces in which instructors (and, by extension, students) could be silent and listen to the environment, perhaps experiencing that "the world is full of beauty, magic, miracles, and patterns that induce wonder" and feeling "the connective tissue of all that exists" (Brown, 2017, p. 2)?

We should also ***interrogate the ways in which the profession of educational development reifies and contributes to the academy's epistemological monoculture and its Western-northern-white, anthropocentric paradigms***. As Libby Roderick noted (in Merculieff &

Roderick, 2013), "It never hurts to remind Westerners that there are other ways of thinking and being as legitimate and filled with potential as those that currently predominate the U.S." (p. 33). We can discuss with CTL program participants questions such as, How might current emphasis on "evidence-based practice" in the academy contribute to the ongoing "epistemicide" (i.e., the suppression or even destruction of different ways of knowing) in anglophone publishing (Bennett, 2015) and stifle our curiosity and interest in learning about and from different epistemologies, particularly those challenging our anthropocentric views of the world? How can we leverage our "hybrid" and marginal academic identities as educational developers (Little & Green, 2012) to profess our interest in epistemological plurality and elevate the work of people and groups that bring different knowledge systems into the academy? How can we skillfully collaborate in making them fruitful in our work without running into the traps of exploitation or appropriation? What role do U.S. educational developers want to (or should we) play in the "cognitive justice movement," which argues for the critical importance of legitimizing and engaging different ways of knowing (Burt, 2019; Leibowitz, 2017)?

Conclusion

Remembering the Lakota phrase *Mitakuye Oyasin* (we are all related) is important if we want to disrupt the rigid culture and value systems that make American academic spaces so inhospitable to the humans who themselves come from different cultural backgrounds and epistemologies. Scholar and activist Dekila Chungyalpa (2021) has spoken about the alienation she experienced as a student from the Eastern Himalayas entering U.S. higher education: "there is a type of displacement that happens internally when you are very tied to the land, and you see nature as real and with sacred value" (p. 4). To her, the scarcity-driven, dualistic thinking in hierarchical, capitalist systems is at the root of othering: "Whether you're talking about racism, or sexism, or

environmental issues . . . the shortcut to rationalize your own value is to devalue everything else" (p. 4). Acknowledging the various ways in which Western education is complicit in devaluing both human and more-than-human others may allow us to embrace different epistemologies and to perceive that the boundaries between self and others are much more porous, and much more full of wonder and possibilities, than we have initially presumed.

In this article, we have appreciated the opportunity to revisit Fink's taxonomy of significant learning, which undergirds so many of the principles and programs in CTLs, and to reflect on how it might be updated in order to better address this current moment and better align with other on-campus environmental initiatives. In particular, we have suggested, the Human Dimension can be nuanced and expanded, pushed beyond a narrow focus on human selves and human others. There is more than just the human to consider, connect with, and care for. We hope, along with Abram (2010), to move toward "a replenished participation in the human collective, forging new forms of place-based community and planetary solidarity" (p. 9). Fink's original descriptions of this dimension, in his book, offered opportunities for this type of expansion. We have tried to encourage fellow educational developers to examine CTL programming critically and to consider our related responsibilities in responding to the urgencies presented to us by the present moment—the dire changes happening in the so-called natural world, among which we live and to which we contribute.

Many today believe that the global shift necessary to survive the climate crisis we have created may depend on deep inner change. As Victoria Loorz (2021), pastor and author of the Church of the Wild, put it, "Beyond caring for creation and stewarding the Earth's 'resources,' it is entering into an actual relationship with particular places and beings of the living world that can provide an embodied, rooted foundation for transformation" (p. 20). We hope that this article will spark new thinking about how our profession can contribute to the transformation and the healing of broken linkages.

Biographies

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