

Online Learning and the Human Energy Field: Implications for the Science of Unitary Human
Beings

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ABSTRACT

Martha Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings (SUHB) theory predates online education. In a face-to-face classroom, human energy field (HEF) interactions take place because of the physical proximity of the students and teacher, potentially resulting in a change in field patterns for those involved. But, how does this take place in an online class environment? Or does it? If not, how can teachers create a field interaction? This presentation frames the literature findings regarding student engagement and online learning within the SUHB lens. Possible avenues for further research are also discussed.

Keywords: student engagement, online learning, human energy field, science of unitary human beings

Online Learning and the HEF: Implications for the SUHB

Origin of the Issue

This idea for this article has been simmering a while. I started my academic teaching career as an adjunct, teaching an online research course. When teaching full-time, I taught both online (OL) and face-to-face (F2F) classes. Teaching both formats in one semester is when I slowly began to sense a discontent/dissatisfaction, something incomplete for me, with OL courses compared to F2F. Despite studies showing no difference in learning outcomes for students in either OL or F2F class formats, I felt something was missing for me when teaching OL. I derived less satisfaction teaching OL and could not figure out the reason. True, OL courses are more challenging—dialogue is written rather than voiced and there is a variable time delay between responsive discourse posts that hamper ongoing dialogue.

I eventually realized, being a professionally lifelong embracer of Roger's Science of Unitary Human Beings (SUHB) theory, an empath, and an energy healer, that the missing element was the human energy field-human energy field (HEF-HEF) environmental interaction dynamic. In OL courses there is a dearth, perhaps a void, in the human energy field interactions that occur naturally in a F2F course. In face-to-face (F2F) classes, faculty can more powerfully interact (because of HEF proximity) and perceive the individual and group field patterns and nonverbal communication. So, how do faculty achieve the same level OL?

Hence, the purpose of this article is to discuss ideas for increasing teacher-student field interactions in a distance learning environment, to attempt to find solutions to this missing, or muted, element in OL teaching. I frame this discussion using the lens of Rogers SUHB theory.

Questions to ponder include:

1. How do faculty enhance the HEF-HEF-environmental field interaction to the levels that can be achieved with F2F classes?
2. What can SUHB-embracing faculty use to achieve #1?

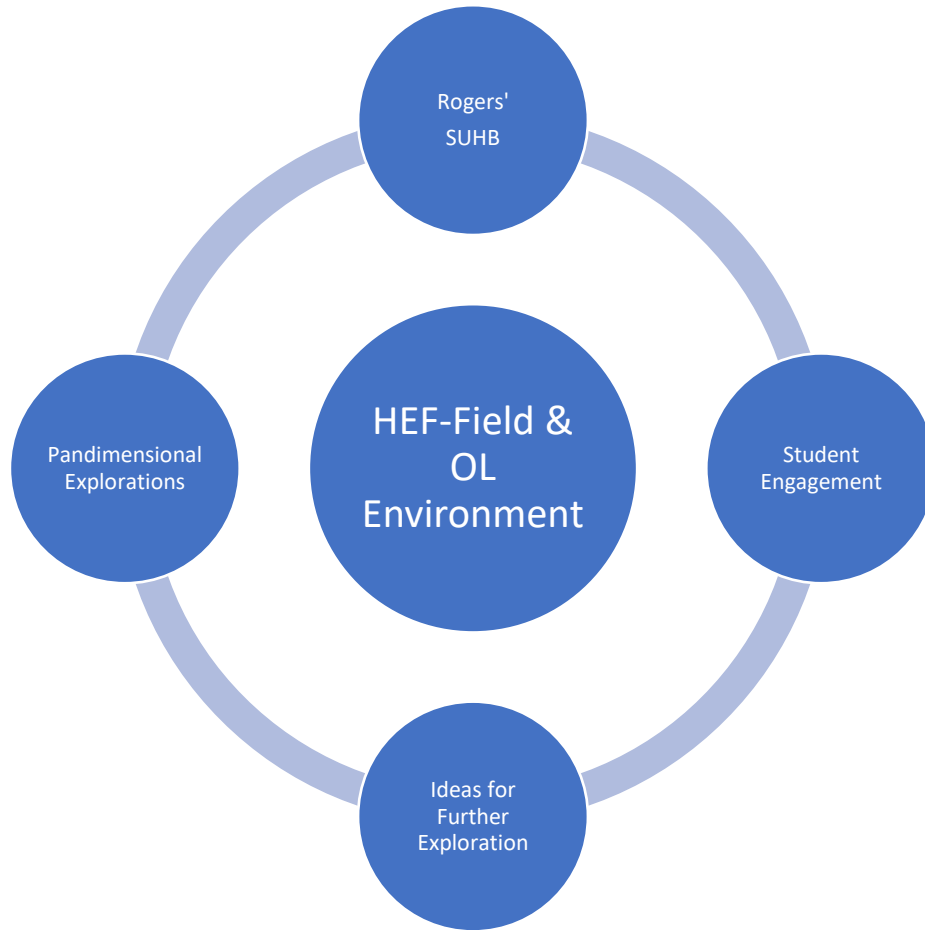
Background

The advantage that F2F classes have regarding engagement is that faculty and students can see and more accurately interpret interactions and nonverbal communications through a number of senses. In an OL environment, many, if not all, of the signals from those senses are more challenging to perceive and interpret, if they can be perceived at all (Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson, & Young, 2014, p. 319). Nonverbal (NV) cues, “noncontact touch” (Nagel & Penner, 2016, p. 99), and other forms of NV communication are absent in an OL learning environment. Access to nonverbal cues and patterns in the HEF require some additional work in OL “classrooms”.

Approach to the Issue from the Literature

My search in the literature spanned several categories of exploration. I wandered around initially as to where to start and then what to include that might be pertinent. The information eventually coalesced into the following four categories for discussion: Martha Rogers’ SUHB and fields, interprofessional concepts of pandimensionality, student engagement, and further ideas to explore (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: Categories for OL Learning and the HEF



Rogers' SUHB

The SUHB describes human beings as being fields of energy, rather than having fields, which interact with other fields of energy in ever increasing complexity and pattern (Fawcett, n.d.; Philips, 2016; Rogers, 1992). Homeodynamics are the principles that encompass changes in the human energy field, between other human energy fields, with the environment, and the patterns that emerge from such interactions (Fawcett, n.d., pp. 1-2). Pattern is a dynamic, distinct, and unifying characteristic within the homeodynamic principles (Fawcett, n.d.). It gives the field an

identity (Rogers, 1992). Rogers refined her SUHB nursing theory over time and it evolved into the following three principles:

- 1. **Helicy**—diversity in the HEF-environmental field interaction and its emerging patterns
- 2. **Resonancy**—ever-increasing wave pattern frequencies in the HEF. Resonancy moves from lower to higher vibrational frequencies, with patterns emerging and moving in an evolutionary direction.
- 3. **Integrity**—mutual process in HEF-environmental field interactions (Fawcett, n.d.; Phillips, 2016; Rogers, 1992)

Human Energy Field (HEF)

The table below (Table 1) shows the evolution in the description of the HEF in nursing. On the left is Rogers' description (Rogers, 1992). On the right is a description that emerged from an excellent concept analysis by Shields, Fuller, Resnicoff, Butcher, and Frisch (2016). As you can see, both use similar wording.

Table 1:

SUHB & Holistic Descriptions of the HEF

SUHB	Holistic Nursing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUHB Concepts: pandimensionality, energy, field, pattern, homeostasis • Unitary Human Beings (Human Fields are in <u>in constant interaction with their environment</u> are irreducible, pandimensional <u>energy fields</u>) • Energy fields are infinite, “in continuous motion,” “irreducible, indivisible, pandimensional” • “identified by <u>pattern</u>” • “manifesting characteristics that are specific to the <u>whole.</u>” <p>(Rogers 1992, p. 29) (bold & underline added)</p>	<p>The HEF is a “luminous <u>field of energy</u>” of the individual that “extends beyond the physical body and is in <u>continual mutual process with the environmental energy field...a continuous whole</u>”; it is “recognized by <u>pattern</u>” and is “dynamic, creative, <u>nonlinear</u>, unpredictable”: flowing “in lower and higher frequencies”; the HEF is “characterized by flow, rhythm, symmetry, and gentle vibration.”</p> <p>(Shields, Fuller, Resnicoff, Butcher, & Frisch., 2016, p. 12). (underline added)</p>

The key ideas to keep in mind are that the HEF continuously interacts with what it contacts and that the resulting interaction evolves.

Pandimensionality and Fields²

Several professions attempt to describe, express, or interpret pandimensionality and fields (hence the humorous play in the above title by squaring it). Pandimensionality alludes to the boundaryless attributes of space without the dimension of time (Rogers, 1992). It describes an infinite nonlinear existence beyond three-dimensional earth reality/existence. Fields describe a dynamic, nonlinear space of infinite possibilities, “a matrix or medium.... a region of influence” ((McTaggart, 2002, p. 22). The dynamic aspect is explained as energy. An energy field is visualized as a “fundamental unit of the living and the nonliving” (Rogers, 1992, Table 1, p. 29).

Parapsychology’s exploration of psi (psychic phenomena) looks to explain how nonlocal action occurs in a pandimensional field. Radin, in his 2006 book, *Entangled Minds*, states “psi is—literally—the human experience of quantum interconnectedness” (quoted in Bache, 2008, p. 93). This interconnectedness constitutes a multidimensional field, or pandimensionality in Rogers’ (1992) language. “The ability to explain precognition, déjà vu, and clairvoyance [abilities identified as psi] becomes a rational process in pandimensional human and environmental fields. Within this science [parapsychology] such occurrences become ‘normal’ rather than ‘paranormal’” (Rogers, 1992, p. 32).

There are a number of models and interpretive frameworks proposed to explain distant psi (psychic phenomenon): 1) energetic transmission; 2) path facilitation (“a warping of the fabric of the universe that facilitates certain pathways and material effects (Leder, 2005, p. 926); 3)

nonlocal entanglement (engagement, entrainment, coherence, irrespective of physical distance and unmediated by any known signal traversing space-time” (p. 927); and 4) actualization potentials (wave functions and probability patterns) (Leder, 2005). They speak to Rogers’ ideas of pandimensionality of human and environmental fields. The concept of “distant psi” reflects parapsychology’s perception of pandimensionality and what can occur irrespective of physical distance. Phillips (2016), a Rogerian scholar, proposes a theory of pandimensional awareness-integral presence that marries well with the parapsychology field’s ideas regarding psychic phenomena, or psi. Pandimensional awareness and integral presence can be key to setting the space for any classroom, although it may require a little more effort in an OL class environment.

Other categories/collections of knowledge illuminate the different ways that fields and pandimensionality have been explained.

- **Nursing:** “infinite domains without limit” “unitary whole;” “nonlinear domain” (Rogers, 1992, p. 31)
- **Biology:** morphogenetic fields, morphic resonance (Sheldrake, 1988); Global coherence research (HeartMath.org)
- **Psychology:** Carl Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious; course field and learning field (Bache, 2008)
- **Physics:** “spooky action at a distance” (Leder, 2005); Zero Point Field, quantum field (McTaggart, 2002)
- **Parapsychology & alternative healing:** distant healing, distant mental intention (DHI), & prayer (Radin, Schlitz, & Baur, 2015)

- **Esoteric:** perennial philosophy; egregor (Greer, 1998)

Teaching and Student Engagement in Relation to Fields

Teaching and Fields

Student interaction and collaboration are important in learning (Power & St-Jacques, 2014). These become more challenging in an OL classroom environment. Students build their knowledge through social interaction and the “social environment is greatly influenced by mutual interaction” (Power & St-Jacques, 2014, p. 681). What emerges from such interactions “allows students to collectively construct meaning by integrating various perspectives” and contribute to knowledge expansion. (Power & St-Jacques, 2014, p. 681). This speaks to Rogers’ field interactions and principles of integrality, triggering the potential for increasing presence of resonancy and helicy.

Within the environment of teaching, there are specifically identified fields that influence student and course consciousness—the learning field, course field, and class field (Bache, 2008). Bache, in his book, *The Living Classroom*, approaches teaching from a transpersonal psychology perspective. He discusses the classroom and teaching through the lenses of field effects and the consciousness of students and teacher.

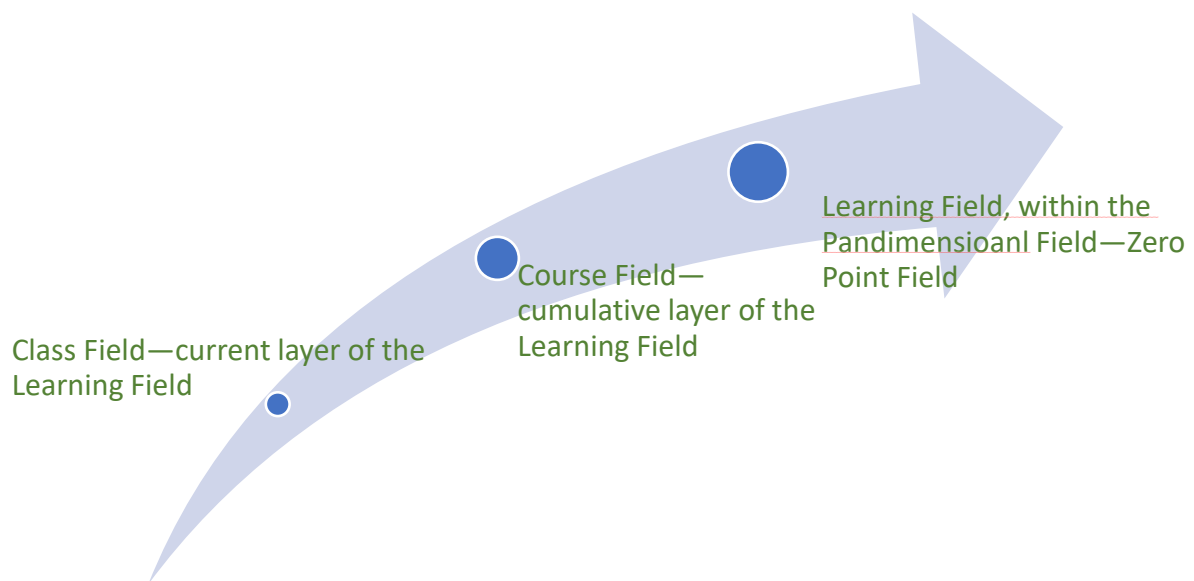
Learning fields are informational fields—distinct mental fields around a course that reflect “the cumulative learning of all the students through the years who have ever taken a specific course with a specific professor” (Bache, 2008, p. 53). The professor anchors the learning field more than the course itself does. The first layer of the learning field is the current course being taught (class field). The next is a layer of the larger learning field (course field) encompasses all the previous courses before the current one. The course field represents the cumulative effect of

repeated classes in the course over time. It rests within the largest layer, the learning field, which may be visualized as existing within the pandimensional field (pp. 51-53). The learning field correlates well with Greer's (1998) concept of the egregor and Sheldrake's (1988) idea of morphic fields.

While homeodynamics operate in pandimensional fields, and the concept of pandimensionality is nonlinear without spatial and time dimensions (Fawcett, n.d.; Rogers, 1992), energy vibrations and frequencies can show different patterns. Bache (2008) metaphorically distinguishes between the layers of the learning field (see Figure 2) by describing the class field, or current course, as the newest ring in a tree's cambium and the course field as whole tree (p. 54). Figure 2 reflects the pandimensional and continuous mutual process of the classroom fields.

Figure 2

Layers of Fields in the Classroom



(Adapted from Bache, 2008, pp. 51-56)

Group Coherence and Fields

Several authors discuss the field in relation to group coherence. Groups contain “a living intelligence” that can be viewed as “a subtle field that weaves those present into a larger operational whole” (Bache, 2008, p. 51). Field consciousness studies explore the role of consciousness within groups (Bache, 2008). Attention and focus on a common experience (object or event) have been found to strengthen group coherence (Radin, 1997). The HeartMath Institute has done extensive research in the impact of various factors on heart rate variability (HRV) and health. The heart, they found, is the strongest electromagnetic (EM) organ in the body, its field extending out at least 15 feet from the physical body (Childre & Martin, 1999). HRV coherence has been found to occur between members in a group—an indicator of a possible field effect. Other terms have been used describing the connectedness that can occur within groups, such as bioelectric interactions (McCraty, 2003; Morris, 2010) and group resonance and energy flow (Oschman, 2002). Using SUHB language, it might also be called integrality.

Galyon et al. (2016) studied whether a high level of participation in class discussion would increase group cohesion and result in better exam performance. They split 68 students in an undergraduate educational psychology course into two sections of F2F classes (n=35) and two sections of OL-hybrid classes (n=33). Despite having all levels of academic years of education (freshman on up to graduate), they found equivalence between the F2F and OL groups for GPA and critical thinking. They measured critical thinking (using the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Form S), exam outcomes of five exams across the course, and evaluated group cohesion in the last class using a nine-item Likert survey. Analysis of results showed the F2F classes had greater group cohesion than the OL-hybrid classes. There was no difference in class

participation between the two groups. Exam scores were higher in the F2F than OL classes in three of the five exam units and were not affected by group cohesion or participation. These findings lend strength to the notion that HEF-HEF-environmental interactions have an impact on students and OL courses require more thought and attention to developing group cohesion.

Student Engagement

Student engagement appears to be the popular connection in discussing OL learning (Holzweiss et al., 2014). Student engagement and participation are major variables in course performance and outcomes (Galyon, Heaton, Best, & Williams, 2016). The teacher and teaching methodology are more important than whether the course is OL or F2F (Gros, Garcia & Escofet, 2015).

Social presence OL of both student and instructor is important. Social presence is defined by Kerwald (2008, cited in Dixon, 2010, p. 3) as visible presence and interaction. It involves multiple ways of interacting and group activities (Dixon, 2010). Students feel more engaged with group interactions and assignments/activities.

The key to OL student engagement is finding and developing “social presence” and “multiple ways of creating meaningful [student & instructor] communication,” of connecting (Dixon, 2010, p. 8). Faculty engagement, peer and instructor interactions, learning opportunities, and timely feedback (Holzweiss et al., 2014) promote student engagement. Feedback fosters students feeling connected, a “sense of belonging” (Mahoney, 2006).

Evaluation and Synthesis: Exploration & Discussion of Ideas

There are a number of studies that highlight best practices for increasing engagement in an OL environment (Brown & Wilson, 2016; Holzweiss, et al., 2014; Nagel & Penner, 2016,).

We can extrapolate some ideas on connecting virtually from the healthcare setting. Knowing the patient is considered a key component of nursing care, Nagel and Penner (2016) began to evaluate the process nurses in telehealth use to create an image of the patients they communicate with, calling the process “building a picture” (p. 96). Nagel and colleagues (Nagel, et al., 2017) then used a grounded theory approach to understand and identify the process nurses use in the virtual environment of telehealth, specifically remote patient monitoring (RPM), a telehealth technology, to know their patients. After 33 interviews and 5 observations of nurses in 7 telehealth programs in Canada, the researchers identified 7 main processes and 21 additional subprocesses nurses used in the virtual environment that enabled them to get to know their patients. These processes may lend themselves to translation into an online learning environment.

1. “Entering in”
2. “Connecting with the Person”
3. “Sharing and Reviewing Information”
4. “Recognizing Trends and Patterns”
5. “Recording and Reflecting”
6. “Putting the Pieces Together Over time”
7. “Transitioning Out” (Nagel et al., 2017, pp. 72-73)

Of potential interest in the OL learning context and HEF-environmental field interactions is the processes of “Entering In” (creating the space) and of “Connecting with the Person,” with its associated subprocesses of:

- A. “Having a Face-to-Face”
- B. “Making the Connection (Plugging In)”
- C. “Building and Maintaining Relationships”
- D. “ Being in Synch” (p. 74)

The process called “Getting a picture” (Nagel et al., 2017, p. 67) could be used in promoting HEF-HEF interactions in an OL learning environment. The process involves the following steps:

1. “Entering in”
2. “Connecting with the Person”
3. “Sharing and Reviewing Information”
4. “Recognizing Trends and Patterns”
5. “Recording and Reflecting”
6. “Putting the Pieces Together Over time”
7. “Transitioning Out” (Nagel et al., 2017, pp. 72-73)

Engagement facilitates and promotes the SUHB principle of integrality. “Establishing an environment where one feels connected is more important than the type of structural environment i.e., virtual versus brick and mortar” (Mahoney, 2006, p. 16). It includes the use of intentionality and establishing a sacred space—the process of opening, operating, and closing the space (Bache, 2008; Nagel et al., 2017). Bache’s (2008) process incorporates this in addressing the environment’s energy field by:

- Setting intention
- Creating the space
- Inviting into the space

Faculty should develop multiple ways to interact, creating a social presence, defined by Keswald (2008, cited in Dixon, p. 3) as visible presence and interaction.

There are some other ideas for creating activities that engage and increase the energy within the collective field. One is adapting World Café conversations and activities to an OL format (Bache, 2008). Café conversations “connect ...[and] energize the learning field” (Bache, 2008, p. 134). They are one example of the type of activities that invite transformation, that can “push linear systems into nonlinear conditions” (Bache, p. 134). There are a number of sources on the internet that describe the World Café process.

Mahoney (2006) used the SUHB theory to compare graduate student nurses’ sense of belonging with regard to the perceived boundaries of an OL or F2F course. She used Hagerty and Paluskey’s 1995 *Sense of Belonging Instrument* (SOBI). She found no significant difference between sense of belonging in either format. Her pilot study was small—10 OL students and 29 F2F.

Instructor engagement with students is important. Dixson (2010) did a more extensive study of 186 students over 5 campuses and found that there isn’t any one particular activity that will help students in OL classes to be more engaged. What is suggested by the evidence that could relate to higher engagement are for instructors “to provide multiple ways of interacting with students themselves [in order] to create their own social presence”, which, according to the

literature, is vital to successful OL courses (Dixson, 2010, p. 8) and numerous communications channels between both students and instructors and students.

Another idea is Caring Groups and Caring Connections (Brown & Wilson, 2016). Brown and Wilson (2016) set up Caring Groups of 4-5 students in their OL graduate courses. Students were asked to participate in some reflection, sharing, and discussion activity, unrelated to the course content or assignments—activities designed to foster group cohesiveness (e.g., posting an introduction of themselves, what it feels like to be a graduate student, or how they cope with challenging situations). The students then read the responses and looked for patterns or “common stor[ies]” (p. 404) from the responses. Additionally, Caring Connections encompassed the program, functioned as a sort of listserv or blog, and included posts from teachers as well as students.

Other ideas include: activities that invite engagement and stimulate student intrinsic motivation to learn and transform; creating a picture [of each student] (Nagel et al., 2017); establishing a sense of belonging (Mahoney, 2006); and opportunities to critically think, establish peer interrelationships, and activities that invite “the creation and/or sharing of knowledge” (Holzweiss et al., 2014). Another idea is inserting live (synchronous) discussions into the course class activities—it would provide faculty with more opportunities to detect non-verbal cues, and allows for greater on-time interaction and discussion (Galyon et al., 2016). High-quality engagement boosts the power of the collective energy field, which, when generated, can lead to extraordinary learning experiences.

Summary

From my perspective, if one were to mesh SUHB principles within the context of OL learning, as it relates to teaching OL, integrality needs to be established and reinforced in order for resonancy and helicy to thrive. Integrality might be achieved from the perspective of engagement. Engagement facilitates and promotes resonance and integrality (Mahoney, 2006). The challenge for OL courses over F2F is addressing the principle of integrality sufficiently so that it strongly activates transformative learning (helicy) and engagement that brings to conscious awareness the sense of belonging and allows the wave patterns to evolve into higher frequencies as close to F2F interactions as possible. Or, in other words, within the context of an OL learning field environment, the first challenge is setting the space for increased integrality, as it lends itself to the evolution and enhancement of helicy and resonancy in HEF-HEF-environment interaction. Teachers should understand that each class builds the course field, which impacts the learning and pandimensional fields. “States of consciousness are contagious” (Bache, 2008, p. 149).

Teaching in an OL environment is challenging. For those whose conceptual framework embraces the SUHB it can also be lacking. Framed within the SUHB, pandimensional fields, group coherence, and student engagement, there are a number of ideas to consider and play with that will help mitigate the diminishing presence or void of HEF-HEF interaction. Understanding how to create virtual field interactions and setting the space intentionally are also helpful in boosting this dynamic. The HEF and environment are irreducible pandimensional energy fields. The field patterning created in every class is unpredictable, with new and different processes evolving. It can be so for OL classes as well, with some added attention and intention.

OL learning can reflect the unitary pandimensional nature of the HEF-environments field process. Scholars and teachers drawn to Rogerian and unitary science have a creative opportunity to develop teaching pedagogies that could successfully enhance OL education.

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