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# WHY YOU SHOULD BLOOM: A RATIONALE

A survey of the current research on teaching critical-thinking skills reveals that the emphases seem to be on four approaches: presenting knowledge so that it is useful to the learner; working subject matter into instruction that will stimulate students' thinking; using taxonomies to identify appropriate learning activities; and creating intervention programs for teaching thinking skills.

Although there are many models that attempt to classify the ways in which people learn, think, and create, ranging from Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs<sup>1</sup> to Guilford's Structure of Intellect<sup>2</sup>, we believe that the most usable, and therefore the most useful, is Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Development.<sup>3</sup> It has several advantages over other models:

- It is widely known and used.
- It has only six categories to learn and work with. (Guilford, by contrast, has fifteen, which outline one hundred and twenty separate intellectual abilities.)
- Its category labels are familiar educational terms that cause little, if any, confusion.
- It allows the teacher either to have students progress through each of the six levels

as though through a hierarchy or to cover material in random order according to the students' perceived needs or learning styles.

- It emphasizes critical thinking skills and is easily adaptable to criterion-referenced objectives.
- It readily merges with other thinking skills models and taxonomies.
- It is easily adaptable for students with identified exceptionalities such as those with specific learning disabilities or those for whom English is a second language.

Although most educators who attended college after the 1950s have had exposure to Bloom's Taxonomy, many teachers believe the taxonomy is impractical or hard to use. For this reason, they often are reluctant to explore its possibilities. It is our purpose to illustrate that Bloom's Taxonomy is user-friendly. We believe that once you see how easy it is to use and how much your students like it, you will enjoy using it and will appreciate the depth of knowledge your students exhibit.

There are many rationales for teaching thinking skills. Among the most compelling is

the realization that most of the students of today will spend their adult lives working in jobs that may not even exist now. As Sizer asserts:

*Education's job today is less in purveying information than in helping people to use it—that is, to exercise their minds. . . . Information is plentiful, cheap; learning how to use it is often stressful and absolutely requires a form of personal coaching of each student by a teacher that is neither possible in many schools today nor recognized as an important process.<sup>4</sup>*

Another consideration, of course, is the fact that modern course descriptions and teaching standards often require teachers to teach thinking skills and to show in lesson plans just how particular objectives accomplish such teaching. Using Bloom's Taxonomy makes that easy. Bloom is easily modified to merge well with other thinking models.

For example, if Krathwohl's Taxonomy for the Affective Domain<sup>5</sup> is being used, you might want to employ the correlations set forth by Eberle and Hall and cited by Schurr<sup>6</sup>: Krathwohl's receiving corresponds to Bloom's knowledge; responding, to comprehension; valuing, to application; organization, to analysis and synthesis; and characterization, to evaluation. The

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same verbs, the same tasks, can be keyed to the plan book “to encourage the development of positive attitudes, interests, and appreciation that should accompany the teaching of basic skills.”<sup>7</sup>

If William’s Creative Taxonomy<sup>8</sup> is being used, the wording of Bloom tasks may need to be modified slightly. Instead of giving an application task requiring the student to select ten key terms related to Yellow Journalism and find two ways to classify them, you can promote fluency and complexity by directing the student to list all the key terms relative to Yellow Journalism and classify them in as many ways as possible. Most synthesis activities promote flexibility, originality, elaboration, risk-taking, imagination, and curiosity. You need only to determine the creative level you wish to promote and attach the appropriate verbs.

Costa<sup>9</sup> points out the correlations of Bloom to other thinking skills models: Guilford’s structure of intellect (p. 44), the developmental writing process (pp. 102ff), the California Writing Project (p. 215), CompuTHINK and Project IMPACT (p. 256), the Connecticut Assessment of Educational Progress (p. 281), and a broad spectrum of other models (pp. 62ff).

A list of nineteen thinking skills models grouped according to emphasis (intellectual training or reasoning, critical thinking or philosophical reasoning, and creativity and creative problem-solving) that appears in *Reach Each You Teach II* might prove

useful to those who wish a broader research base for their planning.<sup>10</sup>

This approach to Bloom melds especially well with Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences.<sup>11</sup> While not every frame is touched on in every Bloom sheet, the approach is multi-framed and affords many opportunities to incorporate mathematical/logical tasks, visual/spatial tasks, musical tasks, kinesthetic tasks, and intrapersonal tasks with the more commonly required linguistic and interpersonal activities.

In addition to being compatible with other thinking models, Bloom’s Taxonomy can be readily fitted to curriculum objectives or to educational outcomes. An investigation of the verb lists starting on page 7 will reveal a wide range of possible activities that can be keyed to objectives and made a part of the teacher’s plan book.

### Notes:

1. Abraham Maslow, *Dominance, Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization*, ed. Lowery (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks-Cole Publishing Co., 1973).
2. Mary Meeker, “A Beginner’s Reader about Guilford’s Structure of Intellect” (El Segundo, Calif.: SOI Institute, 1974).
3. Benjamin S. Bloom, ed.; Max D. Englehart, Edward J. Furst, Walker H. Hill, and David R. Krathwohl, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay, 1956).
4. Theodore R.Sizer, *Horace’s Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985), 84, 89.
5. D.R. Krathwahl, D.R. Bloom, and B.B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational*

*Objectives: Handbook II: Affective Domain* (New York: David McKay, 1964).

6. Sandra L. Schurr, *Dynamite in the Classroom; A How-to Handbook for Teachers* (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1989), 68-84.

7. *Ibid.*, 72-75.

8. *Ibid.*, 85-98.

9. Arthur L. Costa, ed., *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1985).

10. Donald J. Treffinger, Robert L. Hohn, and John F. Feldhusen, *Reach Each You Teach II: A Handbook for Teachers*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded (East Aurora, NY: D.O.K. Publisher, 1989), 21.

11. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

# BLOOM'S PETALS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIX LEVELS

Bloom's Taxonomy is a structure of six levels of cognitive development. While many educators believe it to be a hierarchy, we have found that students may have less difficulty with the synthesis and evaluation (upper) levels than with the knowledge and comprehension (lower) levels. This seems to be especially true of the right-brained, creative learner and of the learning disabled student. Despite this incongruity, much of the teaching done in the traditional classroom is geared almost exclusively to the lower levels of the taxonomy.

In order to accommodate those students who achieve better at the higher levels and to foster higher levels of cognitive thought among all students, the teacher should strive to include activities from each level of Bloom. If it is important to you that students work through the levels in order (hierarchically), we suggest that you number the tasks for independent work or that you guide the students through the steps one at a time.

As we examine each of the levels, we will list sample activities related to the theme of patriotism. We selected a few of these activities to make up the sample reproducible page (or "Bloom sheet") that appears at the end of this section.

## *Knowledge*

The first level of learning in the cognitive domain is knowledge. Activities at the knowledge level determine whether the students know the material being studied or discussed. Can they list it, define it, recite it back? Knowledge-level activities may require specific or universal recall, restatement, or rote memory.

Knowledge activities are typically simple because they require minimal thought. Reciting the Gettysburg Address is a typical knowledge activity. Because there are so few times when we are called on actually to *know* material without also *comprehending* it, Treffinger<sup>12</sup> combines the knowledge and comprehension categories into one, which he calls *understanding*. We have retained Bloom's separation because we feel it's important that teachers not take for granted that students know the basics: don't ask them to compare the Magna Carta with the Declaration of Independence until you are sure they can list the key features of each. Doing so might cause them to reach unwarranted conclusions or to miss major concepts while concentrating on word differences.

Note, too, that as the material becomes more advanced, the knowledge task becomes more difficult. "List ten landmark court decisions dealing with civil rights, giving the year, the litigants, and the ruling" is a much more challenging task than "List the states that seceded from the Union," but both are knowledge tasks.

### **Sample knowledge activities on patriotism**

Write the words to the Pledge of Allegiance and to the first verse of the national anthem.

Draw an American flag. Place on it the correct number of stars and stripes, and use the appropriate colors.

Briefly describe the two major documents on which the American system of government is based.

Retell one of the stories about the patriotism shown during the Revolutionary period (for example, Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty" speech, the Boston Tea Party, or Betsy Ross's designing the original flag).

List five or more colonial-period patriots.

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### Comprehension

Activities at the second level of learning determine whether students understand what they have learned. They ask the students to grasp the meaning of the material; to catalog it in their minds; to understand its significance to their needs, interests, or relationships; to personalize or internalize the material; or to interpret and translate their learning into oral, written, graphic, or nonverbal communication.

#### Sample comprehension activities on patriotism

- Illustrate the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.
- Explain the symbolism of the American flag (its colors, the stars, the stripes, and so on).
- Describe the three branches of government and the resultant system of checks and balances.
- Brainstorm a list of events at which the national anthem is routinely played.
- Tell how the definition of *patriotism* can be extended to include nationalism, public service, and loyalty.

### Application

Activities at this level of cognitive thought determine whether the students can use the material in new ways. They ask, How could you use this? or How would you solve this? They differ from practice activities, which usually seek to test comprehension, in that they make use of the learned data in a new and different context. Knowledge must be

transferred from the arena in which it was learned to a new forum of the student's choosing. Applications often result in a product.

#### Sample application activities on patriotism

- Assemble a collage related to patriotism.
- Discover something about the life of an early patriot of your choice and describe the patriot's contribution to the establishment of the U.S. government.
- With other students, role play interviews with patriots. Base your answers on the biographical research your group has done.
- Determine the types of symbols and mementos owned by the members of your group and their families. Display samples for the class to view, if possible.
- Construct a pamphlet to show basic flag etiquette.

### Analysis

The fourth level of the taxonomy is analysis. Analysis activities break the data into component parts. They ask the students to extend the material, to relate it to previously learned material, or to draw conclusions about the material. They may require the learner to list the characteristics of a problem or situation, to look closely at the end to determine the relationship of one part to another, or to discover the relevance of the way parts are organized. They do *not* involve simple recall, summa-

tion, or restatement. At this level, the material is back in its original form without the addition of "what ifs" or changes.

#### Sample analysis activities on patriotism

- Compare the Articles of Confederation with the Constitution. Present your findings to the class.
- Conduct a survey to determine the national origins of your classmates and the length of time since immigration. Make generalizations about your data.
- Illustrate the gaps that exist between the knowledge that a candidate for naturalization must have about America and that which is possessed by any five native-born adults of your choice.
- Draw conclusions about the patriotic effect of four American wars: the American Revolution, the War Between the States, World War II, and the Vietnam conflict.

### Synthesis

Synthesis activities ask the students to put the parts back together, forming them into a new product. The students will combine concepts or principles to create new information, generalizations, ideas, or feelings. A product is considered "new" if it is new to the learner and not simply a rehash of a previous experience.

The synthesis step is often omitted by teachers. It requires more time than the others. It can require extensive materials,



which can be costly. The results aren't exact or predictable and are not easily evaluated. These problems should not stand in the way, however, because the synthesis step is valuable. This is the step that proves that the student has mastered the material and found a use for it: the information hasn't just been taught, it's been caught. The students who learn to synthesize information can research the data needed to solve problems and apply them as they need to. They can learn more than just what we teach them. Their vision will not be confined to the limits of our own.

### **Sample synthesis activities on patriotism**

Cluster the results of your survey in several different ways (for example, age of respondents or country of origin) and present your finding to the class.

Imagine yourself as a patriot in the post-Revolutionary period. How would life have been different for you?

Develop a poem or song about patriotism.

Design a handbill typical of the Revolutionary period to advertise America and its causes.

Write an essay on the theme "What America Means to Me."

Create an advertising campaign that promotes the American way of life.

### ***Evaluation***

Evaluation activities ask the students to make and support

judgments about the material. These judgments may be quantitative or qualitative value judgments; they are based on established criteria, not on opinion. Evaluation activities may also require the student to become an inventor or a creator. Evaluation activities produce the highest level of outcomes in the cognitive domain because they contain the essentials of all the other levels. For this reason, teachers sometimes choose to lead students through the entire taxonomy but to score only this level.

### **Sample evaluation activities on patriotism**

Compare current attitudes toward revolutionaries in colonial America with attitudes toward revolutionaries today. Speculate on the reasons for the different attitudes.

Which form of nationalism do you believe is likely to be most important in the future? Give reasons for your answer.

Assume the identity of a plantation owner, a slave, a woman, a Philadelphia businessman, or an indentured servant. From that perspective, write an editorial for a colonial paper outlining the differences between your life and the ideal of liberty and justice for all.

Once you've explored the levels of the taxonomy, you are ready to begin helping your students apply them to a social studies topic. Many teachers use Bloom activity pages without ever discussing with students the terminology of the taxonomy or the thinking skills it employs.

While this technique succeeds in terms of the students' completing the required activities, it does not teach the thinking skills themselves.

Once you feel comfortable with the taxonomy, you may choose to teach it to your students, so they can understand the objectives behind the activities and can know the levels at which they are working. If you were also to post the verb list, they could write their own activity pages for subjects they wish to investigate. This is especially useful in classes where work is individualized or dispersed among small groups. The bulk of the planning can be passed from the teacher to the students, reaping a bonus both for the teacher in time saved and for the students in learning to identify a problem, to plan a means of solving it, and to implement that plan.

### ***Notes***

12. Treffinger, op. cit., 24.

# Patriotism

## Knowledge:

Draw an American flag. Place on it the correct number of stars and stripes, and use the appropriate colors.

## Comprehension

Brainstorm a list of events at which the national anthem is routinely played.

## Application

Discover something about the life of an early patriot of your choice and describe the patriot's contribution to the establishment of the U.S. government.

## Analysis

Conduct a survey to determine the national origins of your classmates and the length of time since immigration. Make generalizations about your data.

## Synthesis

Develop a poem or song about patriotism.

## Evaluation

Which form of nationalism do you believe is likely to be most important in the future? Give reasons for your answer.

