The Curriculum Foundation

The Year of the Curriculum:

Life Without Levels

The programme consists of a Bridging Unit and five further units:
(Have you completed the Bridging Unit and Units 1, 2 & 3?)

The Curriculum Foundation

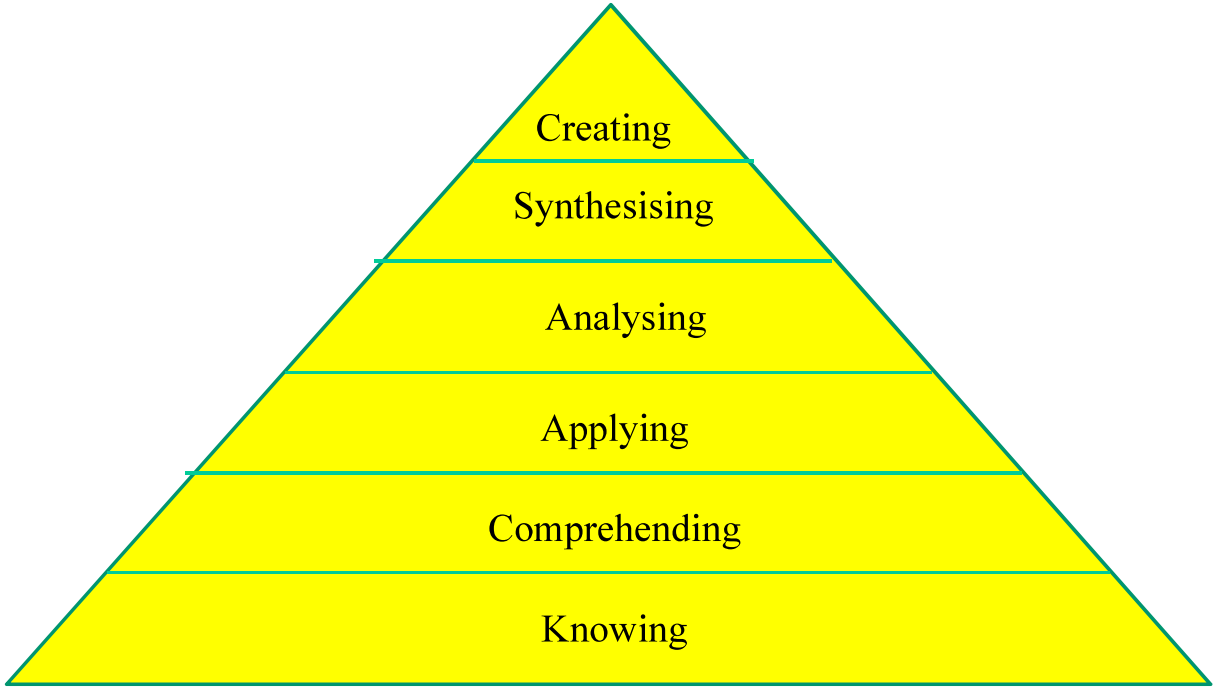
As teachers, we always work within the very practical context of what works in a classroom – and the minute-by-minute pressures that the classroom brings. Ted Wragg used to talk about teachers making "a thousand decisions a day".

Whether consciously or not, we always frame those thousand decisions within a theoretical context – yet seldom stop to consider what this is, or how it frames those decisions.

So let's take a few minutes to think about the various theoretical contexts (don't worry – it's not too abstruse!) and how those contexts lead to different approaches.

The Curriculum Foundation

Bloom's Taxonomy suggested an ascending scale of learning from knowledge through application to creating.



Sorry that the picture is not clearer – you'll just have to buy the book yourself!

A taxonomy that is very popular in UK today was actually put forward by Biggs and Collis* as long ago as 1982.

This is the 'Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes' (SOLO) that puts forward five levels of understanding.

* Biggs, J. B. and Collis, K. (1982) *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: the SOLO taxonomy*. New York, Academic Press

The Curriculum Foundation

This also suggests the verbs that will help with assessment:

SOLO level	Verbs
Uni-structural	Define, identify, name, draw, find, label, match, follow a simple procedure
Multi-structural	Describe, list, outline, complete, continue, combine
Relational	Sequence, classify, compare and contrast, explain (cause and effect) analyse, form an analogy, organise, distinguish, question, relate, apply
Extended abstract	Generalise, predict, evaluate, reflect, hypothesise, theorise, create, prove, justify, argue, compose, prioritise, design, construct, perform

There's more at: http://uq.edu.au/tediteach/assessment/docs/biggs-SOLO.pdf

Norman Webb's "Depth of Knowledge"

Level 1	**Recall and reproduction** Recall of a fact, information or procedure
Level 2	**Application of skills and concepts** Use of information or conceptual knowledge – two or more steps
Level 3	**Strategic thinking** Requires reasoning, developing a plan or a sequence of steps, some complexity, more than one possible answer
Level 4	**Extended thinking** Requires an investigation, time to think and process multiple conditions of the problem.

Three Approaches

The point of looking at three different approaches is not to say that one is right and the others are wrong (although you will notice that much of the literature about SOLO is directed at rubbishing Bloom!). The point is that they all give us a way at looking at learning in terms of its increasing depth or complexity. As we said earlier, the brain is an extraordinarily complex organ, and no simple taxonomy of levels will really describe what's going on.

However, approaches such as these help us to plan learning in terms of greater depth, and also to find out how well our students are doing in these terms.

It does not matter which one you use, or whether you find some blend that suits you best. What is important is to think about how the intellectual level is being increased, and so what needs to be assessed.