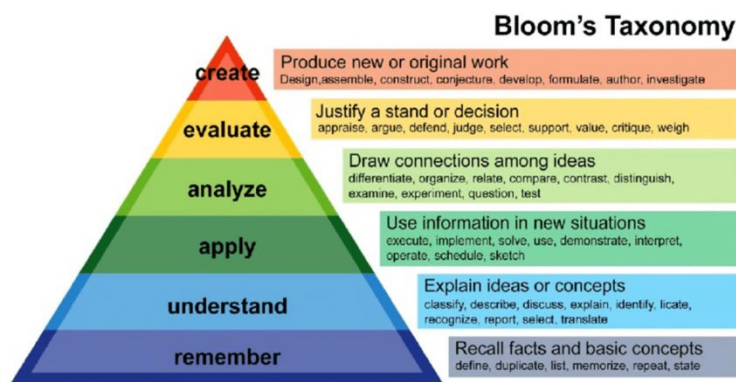


## Depth of Learning- What is it and do we need to measure it?

Depth of learning has become a focus of assessment agendas since the removal of levels in 2014. In essence, it is the ability of a child to apply their learning. Not what they know, rather how well they know it and can actually use it.



Bloom's Taxonomy is a classification of human cognition critical to the process of learning (Vanderbilt, 2016) [6].

The original model of Bloom's Taxonomy gives a simplistic view of this 'depth of learning'.

We see that as learning progresses, a child is able first to simply recall it, then moving into understanding it can explain the ideas associated with it. As

depth increases, there is the growing ability to apply, analyse and evaluate the knowledge and, at the greatest depth, to create new meaningful work for themselves.

With the demise of levels and the birth of National Curriculum 2014 came the direction to schools to ensure time was given for children to consolidate learning and work at greater depth *before* moving onto new content. Recognition was given to children making progress not only by learning new facts or knowledge (the *Content Domain*<sup>1</sup>) but also by being able to understand and apply it better (the *Cognitive Domain*<sup>2</sup>).

The exact nature of children achieving depth is a matter of more debate. Does a child only reach depth when they have first moved through the other stages of learning in order? Or can a child approach all new learning with their acquired skills of depth and hence are able to evaluate a new piece of learning almost at the same time as approaching it for the first time? Putting this in a classroom context, we can ask: 'Will children only be able to achieve depth later on in the school year when they have been exposed to the new curriculum material?'. On the other hand, do we believe that a child who achieved greater depth in the summer of the previous school year will indeed begin the new school year with a depth capacity which is notable?

<sup>1</sup> Ref: National Curriculum Assessment Test Frameworks, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Ref: National Curriculum Assessment Test Frameworks, 2014

## Greater Depth in the Classroom

The chosen nature of depth will have an impact on both our curriculum provision in the classroom and on the manner of assessment tracking we might use.

Let us consider first the model which suggest that all children will first go through the same steps of learning and depth is reached after. Let's call this model '*Linear Depth*'. In delivering provision in the classroom, we assume that all children start at the same point, but some move on further. Likewise, as we track their progress, we do so in this linear manner. The steps they will take each lie in a linear progression and as the children move through the steps in the year, some will ultimately end up further down the line.

Conversely, if we take the view that depth is always present, even when new learning is happening, then we will deliver the curriculum in layers, providing challenge within the lesson and allowing children at greater depth to find challenge at all points in learning. Here, the depth of learning is a second entity – and we shall call this model '*Two-dimensional depth*'.

Both of these models do, to some extent, over-simplify the complex nature of learning itself. There are so many more factors and presentations of how children make progress in the curriculum. However, amongst primary school practitioners, consideration of the nature of depth does assist greatly in the organisation of curriculum and tracking of children.

## Do we need to track it?

In short, yes. Probably.

DfE progress measures take into account a child's assessment at the Statutory points of assessment in their school career. In Primary Schools, this is EYFS, Year 2 and Year 6. Broadly speaking, a child is at least expected to remain where they were at the previous assessment point, but if they move upwards, that shows as positive progress for the school. So, a child who starts at a broadly 'Expected' standard but makes progress to reach standards 'Above Expected', will show to have made positive progress. Conversely, if they were 'Above' but become only 'Expected', that would be reflected in a negative progress.

The Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) measure those working above by means of a scaled score awarded from a range of questions seeking increasing depths of understanding. In between the statutory points, schools frequently choose to track depth in order to maintain the scores and quickly identify children for a range of interventions.

Experience in assessment formats actually used in schools tells us that schools with high performing cohorts rely heavily on tracking depth measures. On the other hand, it is seen that schools whose priority is to improve those reaching age-related expectations put less emphasis on depth tracking. Inspections have been known to highlight issues relating to providing appropriate challenge for children to achieve depth but would not of course comment on the form of assessment chosen to do this.

### In Summary

Schools are totally free to determine what they measure and how they measure it. Systems must be appropriate for the school demographics priorities and be proportionate for teacher workload. Educater recognises all these challenges and provides highly customisable systems to meet schools hugely varying needs as well as high quality training and support to assist in navigating the options.