

The Suspense of Bloom's Taxonomy:  
How Successful is Bloom's Taxonomy in a High School Reading Course?

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**Abstract**

My thesis project explored the benefits of teaching throughout Bloom's Taxonomy. I proved that having students study the techniques of suspense, identifying those same techniques in pieces of literature and film, and creating their own suspense films enhanced their learning experience. By researching the methodology behind Bloom's Taxonomy, I uncovered techniques that can be related to developing reading skills and understanding of various genres of literature. Bloom's Taxonomy can be used as a basis for teaching units to ensure maximum student learning. The study resulted in an examination of the benefits of utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy when designing a teaching unit.

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## **Introduction**

It is said that the best way to learn is to teach, and over the past seven months, that saying has proven true in my life. I originally began at Oakland University with the intent to study accounting, but my heart was not connected to the subject. Right before my freshman year, I changed my major to English with Secondary Education and have never looked back.

I was in my first field placement at Stevenson High School in a 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts classroom that had many students with Specific Learning Disabilities when I truly knew I had found my place in this world. Two years later, I was accepted into the Secondary Teacher Education Program and began my first full semester of education courses. At the beginning of April of 2018, I had an interview at Rochester Adams High School for my yearlong student teaching internship and within the day I received a phone call telling me that I was chosen to be one of their English interns. I was ecstatic and ready for the next chapter in my life.

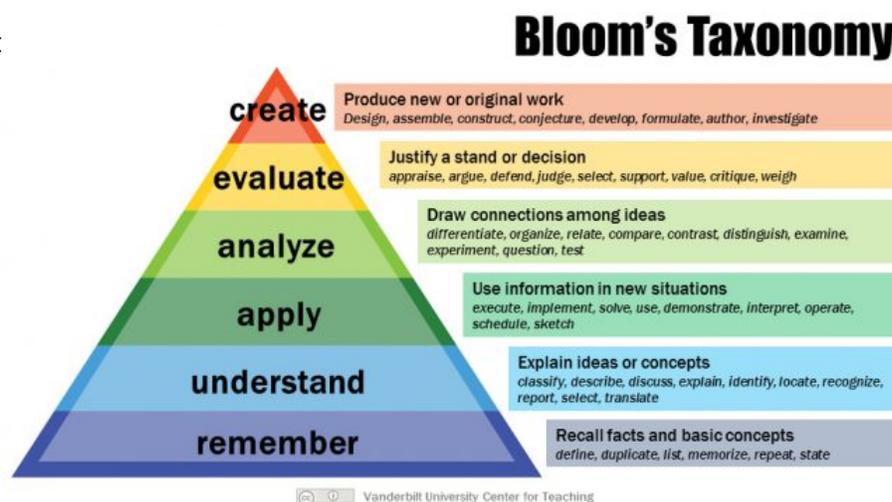
From September to December of 2018, I observed my mentor, Rebecca Bezemek, teach two hours of Applications of Composition 11 and three hours of Language Arts 10 and slowly incorporated myself into the teaching role. It was awkward and took practice before I felt comfortable in the front of the room. The learning curve was present, but with amazing students and a strong support system, I began to succeed.

My official start of full-time student teaching began on January 7, 2019. I was nervous, but ready to apply my newfound skills, abilities, and knowledge to the classroom. With the start of the new semester looming, I began planning for my new classes. The newest class I was given in February was titled Literature of the Strange and Mysterious, a junior and senior level

reading course. After discussing the course with my mentor teacher, we decided it would be the best opportunity for me to apply and test the recent pedagogy I had learned.

### **Bloom's Taxonomy**

Bloom's Taxonomy is one of the most recognized theories behind unit design in education. The research behind Bloom's Taxonomy suggests that learners are most successful when they are asked to perform more and more advanced tasks to demonstrate their learning. The original Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) was built upon the following categories: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation (Armstrong 1-2). In 2001, a group of "cognitive psychologists, curriculum theorists and instructional researchers, and testing assessment specialists" revised the framework and made it more dynamic for learners by labeling the tiers the following: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create (Armstrong 2). For the purpose of this study and to ensure the most up-to-date information, the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy will be applied. Each tier is built with various tasks and contains a goal. The following graphic depicts Bloom's Taxonomy with the goals and tasks incorporated:



(Armstrong 1)

In the realm of an English course, I will use the example of the three rhetorical appeals that students learn about in high school: ethos (ethical), logos (logical), and pathos (emotional).

Having students simply recall the definition of each appeal would be the “Remember” tier of the taxonomy. If a teacher would want to incorporate the “Understand” level, he or she would have the students read an argumentative or persuasive piece of writing and then identify the appeals used. When students are “Applying” the information, they would most likely be writing a rhetorical analysis essay where they have to write about how specific examples fit into each category. For a student to “Analyze” the appeals, he or she would be writing about how the use of the appeals creates an effective argument. The unit would be taken a step further with the “Evaluate” tier when students would be critiquing an author’s use of the three appeals. Finally, the top tier, “Create,” would require the students to write their own argumentative papers that successfully incorporate the three appeals. According to Bloom’s Taxonomy, after having completed each of these tasks, students would have a better and more well-rounded understanding of the three appeals compared to if they had just taken notes and been asked to memorize them.

Furthermore, in the modern world of teaching, teachers have to ensure that their students are meeting the standards set by the Department of Education for their subject area, and, therefore, Bloom’s Taxonomy needs to be looked at from the Common Core State Standards point-of-view. For English Language Arts, there are six different categories of standards that students must meet prior to graduating high school: Reading: Literature, Reading: Informational Text, Reading: Foundational Skills, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language (“English Language Arts Standards”). Every standard can be connected in some form to every tier of Bloom’s Taxonomy. This connection is important because it will guarantee that every student is receiving the best, most supported education.

## **Methodology**

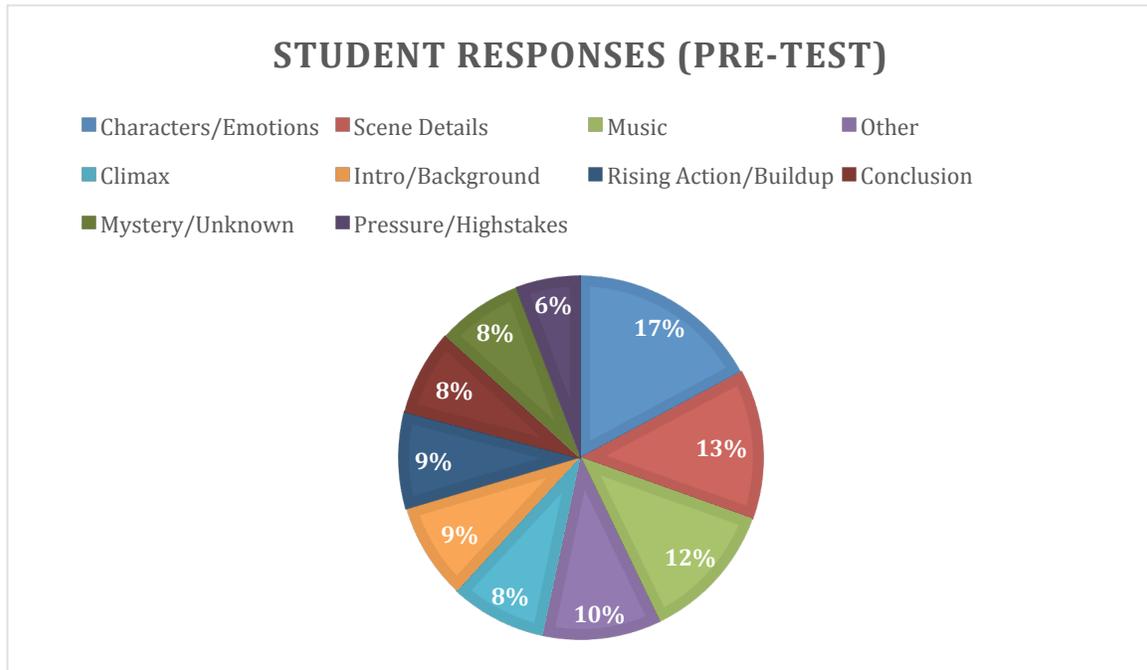
My mentor teacher at Rochester Adams and I decided that the Reading elective Literature of the Strange and Mysterious was the perfect place to connect to my pedagogy. The goal was to measure students' prior knowledge on what they believe creates suspense, complete the unit with them, and then measure their final understanding at the end.

I planned to follow my mentor teacher's previous plans for the design of the unit and connect it with Bloom's Taxonomy; doing so would provide an opportunity to test the theory behind the method of creating a unit based upon a steady increase of difficulty and variety of tiers from the taxonomy. The plans included watching a movie, reading four short stories, and having the students create their own short suspense films.

By having the tasks increase in difficulty, the students were climbing the tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy over the course of the two weeks. In order to correctly identify the success of the theory, the students needed to take a pre-test and a post-test to properly measure their knowledge on suspense. Suspense is such a common component of literature, film, and even reality that many people believe they can be considered experts in the topic; however, I wanted to make sure the students knew the true elements of suspense and their correct names in literature.

## **Research**

Prior to introducing the unit and giving notes to the students, I had the students complete a short informal assessment on GoFormative.com as a pretest so I could see their prior knowledge on suspense. The students needed to answer the following question: What are the four parts of a suspenseful scene? Below is a pie chart of all the answers students gave:

(Majestic<sub>1</sub>)

The answers were interesting, but not unexpected. I speculate that a lot of the answers came from the students' prior knowledge of suspense movies and what they assumed and associated with suspense. When discussing their answers with them, many students said they based their answers on how they would feel as they watched movies and when they would experience the feeling of suspense. All of these aspects of movies definitely create suspense, but the four elements of a story that create suspense are the set-up, build-up, distraction/delay, and the pay-off. Some of the students had similar answers like rising action and climax, but the students do need to know the correct terms for the final unit test and the final course exam.

In order to help the students understand the terminology, we completed a variety of activities that aligned with various tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy. We read four short stories that incorporate suspense ("The Black Cat," "The Last Spin," "Contents of the Dead Man's Pockets," and "The Reaper's Image"), watched various movie clips, watched and studied the suspense of the movie *The Sixth Sense*, and the students completed a project.

“The Black Cat” is a short story written by Edgar Allen Poe and was originally published in 1843. Poe’s short suspense story begins with the main character admitting he will die the next day, so the reader is taken on a journey to figure out why that man is set to die and it all revolves around a black cat. The students had a hard time understanding the ending of the story, but they were able to recognize some of the suspense elements.

One of the students’ favorite stories was “The Last Spin” written by Evan Hunter. Hunter’s short story is about two high school students in rival gangs and they must play Russian roulette in order to solve the conflict between the gangs. As the two boys are playing the game, they get to know each other on a personal level causing the readers to really empathize with them. The students felt the suspense of the short story and were eager to get to the end only to have their hearts sink at the outcome.

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pockets” was the longest story we read as a class and was written by Jack Finney in 1956. The suspense in the story is built through a man climbing alongside the edge of an apartment building in order to get a piece of paper for his job that had flown out his bedroom window. Before we read this story, as a class, we discussed our greatest fears and how we physically react to them. This discussion led the students to feel for the man struggling to get back inside his apartment building as he fights against his nerves and fear.

“The Reaper’s Image” was published in 1969 and was written by Stephen King. It is another short story and incorporates mystery with suspense as the reader tries to understand what possibly could have happened to every person that saw the Reaper in the reflection of the mirror. Students were able to recognize the suspense in the story, but admitted that the story was not their favorite that we had read.

After reading each of the four stories, the students were challenged to make book covers for the story of their choosing and had to write a summary to accompany it. This asked the students to look at their own ability to incorporate suspense and convey it to an audience. They had to avoid spilling all the details of the story in order to properly convince a reader to pick up the story and finish it. It gave the students the opportunity to be creative and integrate what they would find suspenseful in a summary in their own versions.

*The Sixth Sense* is the famous 1999 movie starring Bruce Willis and Haley Joel Osment that depicts the story of a young boy who can see and talk to dead people. Suspense is incorporated throughout the entire movie, so as the students were watching it, they needed to identify three suspenseful scenes and correctly explain why those scenes were suspenseful. The students enjoyed watching the movie and particularly liked the ending because it was different than any other movie they had seen before.

The first two tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy were incorporated through the unit notes that the students took the first day of the unit. In the notes, students were presented with the definitions of each element of suspense and were then shown a movie example of what that element looks like. The combination of these two elements completed the "Remember" and "Understand" tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy. While reading the short stories and after watching *The Sixth Sense*, I led several class discussions in which we "Applied," "Analyzed," and "Evaluated" the elements of suspense in the pieces of literature and film. Through these discussions, students were able to learn how various authors and a director incorporated the elements of suspense. Each story and the film were different from each other, which I believed helped the students learn a variety of suspense techniques. Like anything in life, there are many different ways to accomplish the same goal; so seeing how different people integrated the

elements of success into their literature helped the students experience suspense from various angles.

For the culminating project, there were two parts: the students needed to find their own movie clip that incorporated the four elements of suspense and analyze it for the class and the students needed to write and film their own suspense movie. The movie that the students created needed to be no more than five minutes long and needed to include all of the elements of suspense. On top of that, the students needed to label these elements in their script. The students greatly enjoyed spending time creating their films. Many students completed the filming at their homes, in the woods, or in the school. We had many discussions individually and as a whole about what students were incorporating into their films to make it as suspenseful and as creative as possible. The students ended up using masks to create their “bad guys,” forks in place of weapons, and footballs for bombs. Many of the students took a realistic approach to their stories; one group had their main character watching a murder mystery on the news, another group built suspense through their story of waiting for a friend to use the bathroom before they went out to lunch, and one group’s suspense was created through a story of a boy being upset because he was turned down for a school dance. During the script writing process in class, I reiterated to the students that they did not have to have murder or scary elements to create suspense because suspense is built through a constant need to know what is going to happen and being left in anticipation for a few minutes.

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of the entire project was watching all of the student-made films. We spent two days in class watching the suspense movie clips the students had found and then watching the films the students created. As a teacher, it was incredibly rewarding to watch the students’ hard work come to life and to see them supporting each other. Even when

films were different than what expected and when students appeared nervous, the others still clapped and told the students they did a good job, I appreciated the comradery within the room.

As a whole, this project contained many tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy. The students had to "Remember" and "Understand" the elements of suspense in order to successfully find a movie clip which demonstrated these elements. Furthermore, they were "Applying" their knowledge when they were asked to "Analyze" the movie clip and identify the elements of suspense in the self-contained clip. Lastly, the students were "Creating" and had to "Evaluate" themselves when they were writing and editing their own suspense movie. It was the perfect way to end the unit.

The variety of tasks that the students completed did incorporate several English Language Arts Common Core State Standards. The following are the main ones that were taught:

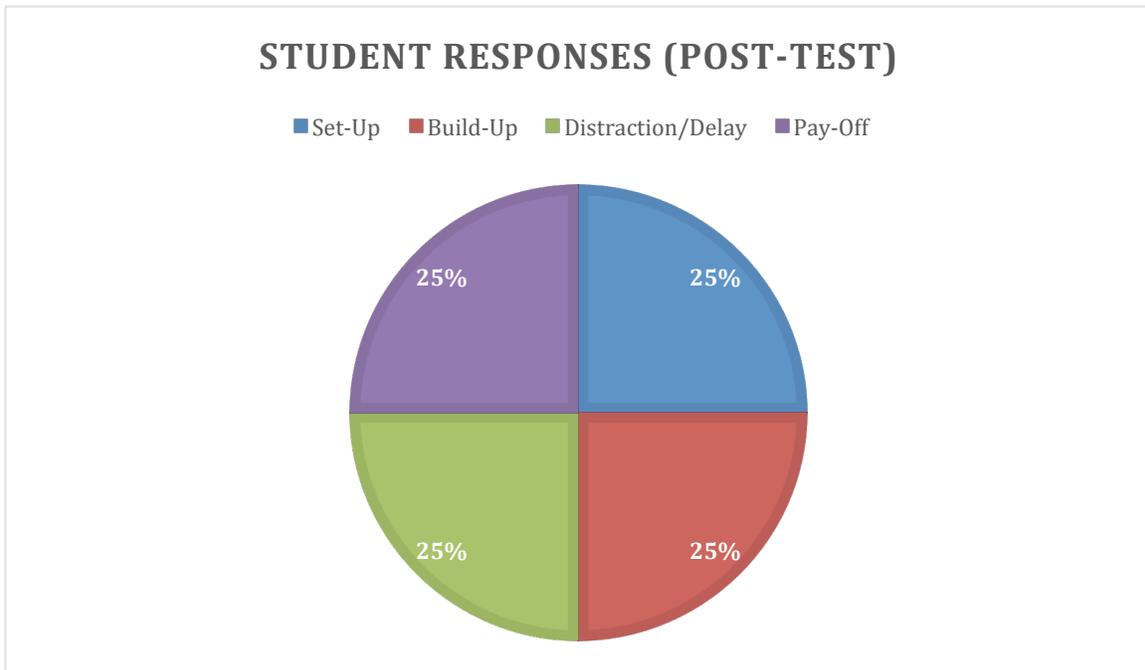
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.10: By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of

grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

(“English Language Arts Standards”)

At the end of the unit, I asked the students the same question as before (What are the four elements of suspense?) and recorded their answers. Below is a pie chart of their answers:



(Majestic<sub>2</sub>)

All students gave the same four elements to the question and all were correct. This was ensured through the constant reminder everyday of what those elements were in regards to literature. Over the course of two weeks, we analyzed how the elements were utilized in four short stories, one movie, several short movie clips, and created our own suspense stories. This resulted in the success of the unit. It was important to test this knowledge because of the heavy influence that modern movies have had on the students. Their emotions and feelings during suspense movies are not wrong and they are correct in saying that setting and music affect them while watching movies, but I wanted them to understand and recognize suspense in literature as well.

As demonstrated by the 100% success in my post-test, the students were able to expand their knowledge on what suspense is. I came to the conclusion that the variety of tasks

throughout the unit aided in this new knowledge. Having students slowly work through the various tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy did result in clear knowledge growth because they were applying their skills and knowledge in a variety of ways.

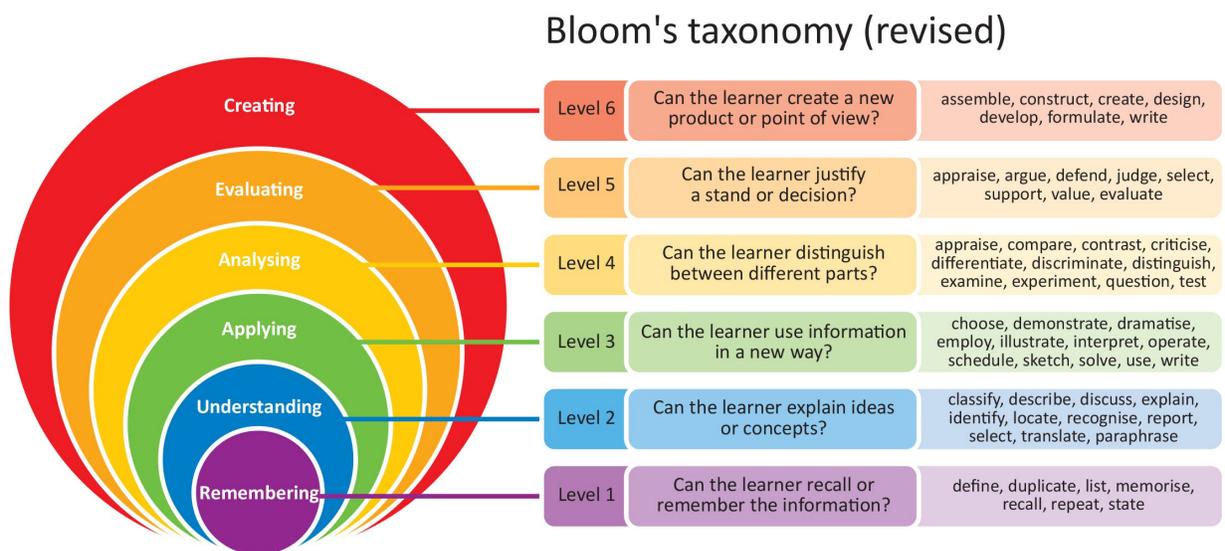
### **Application of Bloom's Taxonomy**

When teachers are designing units for their classroom, it is easy to fall into a pattern of providing notes, reading a few pieces of literature, and testing the students on their knowledge. The pattern is created through years and years of teaching and is something many teachers acknowledge. Through my conversations with educators over the years, they have expressed how best teaching practice involves evolving units to become more updated with technology and new ideas; however, there are still teachers who know what works with them even if it is not what's best for the students and they stick with that plan no matter how times have changed. While consistency in routine and classroom management is a key to the culture of a classroom, I do not believe a pattern in teaching results in a positive classroom academically. In my understanding and experience, when students are challenged to "Apply," "Evaluate," and "Create" with their knowledge, they receive a well-rounded education that will provide them with more learning experiences than just that that will be tested on.

There are a variety of learning experiences that students need to come into contact with before leaving high school. For example, in my Suspense unit, students chose groups that they were then in for the culminating project. The students needed to learn how to work with other students that had different abilities, knowledge, and levels of motivation than themselves. The concept of working in a group is not one that is tested for a letter grade within school, but it is one that students will constantly experience after high school wherever they decide to go and no matter what they decide to do. Another skill students learn through Bloom's Taxonomy is the

idea of time management. This specifically comes into play with the “Create” tier, but can also be related to the other tiers when students are asked to work independently. Students need to learn how to manage their time successfully so they can accomplish and complete all tasks. Like working in a group, this is not a skill that can necessarily be tested for a letter grade, but one that is necessary for life after high school. While all classrooms and subjects have the ability to incorporate these skills and Bloom’s Taxonomy into them, the English Language Arts classroom can easily be adapted and designed around the methodology.

As given in my example and research earlier, Bloom’s Taxonomy can be incorporated into different units within the English Language Arts. The tiers are not aspects that should be thrown at students and forgotten, they are pieces of knowledge that have to constantly be taught. With this in mind and relating it to my first example, a teacher should not teach the students once what the three rhetoric appeals are, but should continuously remind students of their definitions and examples so that students do not forget and can have an easier time achieving each of the higher tiers. In fact, one educator depicted Bloom’s Taxonomy as circles that expand with each level:



(McNulty 1)

This version of Bloom's Taxonomy represents the constant need to return to lower levels in order to ensure all students succeed at higher levels of learning. It is important to note that Bloom's Taxonomy will not create the perfect classroom, but it will create higher standards of learning that all students can achieve at.

There is no "perfect classroom" because mistakes and drawbacks will always happen since teaching is ever-evolving and depends so heavily on students of all ages, but an ideal classroom is one that grows with the children and teens in it. This is supported in the article "Reimagining the Modern Classroom" in which multiple educators are asked to describe the perfect classroom (Glatter). Many of the educators surveyed replied that the ideal classroom focuses on the learning at hand compared to the decorations and seating arrangements, but one educator described the ideal classroom nicely. Michael Horn, a Co-Founder of the Clayton Christensen Institute, stated, "Students will learn in student-centered environments—perhaps we'll call them learning studios—where each student's learning is personalized to meet his or her precise needs" (Glatter). Horn is describing what many teachers aim to create: a space for individualized learning that is specifically designed for each student. This classroom would involve a variety of differentiation so that each student could reach all learning goals at his or her own pace. Through the incorporation of Bloom's Taxonomy when designing a unit, all students will be able to succeed at their own level because of the variety of learning that the methodology allows. Since Bloom's Taxonomy can be integrated with an assortment of learning activities, it is ideal for all types of learners.

### **Current Research**

On that note, teaching at any level requires educators to constantly adapt and differentiate their lessons for the various students. In regards to Bloom's Taxonomy, the theory and

framework is easily adaptable for various student populations. Differentiation requires educators to create lessons that many students can learn from no matter their ability within the classroom. In the journal article “Integrating the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy With Multiple Intelligences: A Planning Tool for Curriculum Differentiation” by Toni Noble, Noble found that students were successful within a curriculum based off of Bloom’s Taxonomy (197). More importantly, the teachers that Noble surveyed reported that the students seemed to have more confidence in themselves when their learning path was built with Bloom’s Taxonomy was involved because they could build their understanding and see the results at their own pace (Noble 197). Students having confidence in their abilities is important because they will more motivated to learn when they personally feel they are able. Bloom’s Taxonomy provides teachers with a framework that aids in creating curriculum designed for students to succeed at their own pace.

Furthermore, researching previous studies similar to my own are ideal for best understanding the data. From Fall of 2012 to Fall of 2014, Bloom’s Taxonomy was used as a basis for designing six undergraduate Political Science courses that relied heavily on critical thinking and reading at a university with a majority of first generation college students (Mulcare and Shwedel 131). Over the two years that the study was being completed, Mulcare and Shwedel found that three of their five hypotheses were correct with significant results (the two others were also found to be correct, but did not have as significant results as the other three) and therefore concluded that designing a reading course based on Bloom’s Taxonomy does lead to students successfully gaining Critical Thinking skills (131-134). While this study did look at university courses (courses that were higher in difficulty than those taught at a high school), the results are still important and relevant. The theory behind Mulcare and Shwedel’s results can still be adapted for a high school level course and should not be ignored, especially since the

high school reading courses in question is for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Since the data and theory can be applied to a high school course, it is important to discover whether it has been further researched with other student populations.

This current research shows that there is success in incorporating Bloom's Taxonomy in various levels of education; its continuous success is important to remember when designing units and lessons. Moving forward, Bloom's Taxonomy should not be ignored when teaching and can be tested through the use of formative and summative assessments. Having student teachers personally test the framework will ideally lead them to understand its importance and incorporate it into their own classrooms upon graduation which will in hand lead to better understanding at the student level in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to earning a teaching certificate, all teacher candidates must complete student teaching. By the state of Michigan, all student teachers must consecutively teach 25 days within the classroom with a full load of classes, doing the majority of the work on their own in order to experience first-hand what it is like to be a teacher. I believe student teaching is the perfect opportunity to test newfound knowledge and experiment. When student teaching, interns are given a mentor teacher and a supervisor that are there to aid the student teacher on their path to success. These two experts in education provide guidance and support to the student teacher on his or her journey. With this in mind, student teaching is the ideal place to try something new. Student teachers are still evaluated, but they have a support system to aid them throughout the year. If something were to falter in a lesson, the student teacher has a mentor within the building he or she can call upon for help at any moment. As can be assumed from this thesis, one piece of

knowledge I believe student teachers should be allowed to assess is the ability to create and follow a unit plan.

From a research standpoint, the findings of this thesis were successful. A large goal of mine was to better understand how to create a unit that effectively allows for differentiation. If a teacher were to follow Bloom's Taxonomy, he or she would be able to design a unit that allows for all students, no matter their abilities, to flourish in the classroom. Furthermore, through the pre and post-tests I conducted, I was able to quantitatively measure my students' understanding of the four elements of suspense. This measurement supported my hypothesis that if a teacher were to follow Bloom's Taxonomy when designing a unit, then the students would be positively affected academically. This aids in understanding how Bloom's Taxonomy is beneficial to incorporate in a reading classroom. It can be concluded based upon my research that incorporating Bloom's Taxonomy into the English classroom is a key to students' academic growth.

The main purpose of my thesis was to put my own pedagogy to the test and evaluate what I have learned over the years. This project has opened my eyes to look at the bigger picture when planning lessons and covering curriculum that I plan to use when I am a teacher within my own classroom someday. Designing units does not have to be boring for anyone involved. One aspect of teaching that I realized while student teaching and completing this project was that when I was truly enjoying and having fun with the material, the students were more motivated and in tune with the lessons. Incorporating Bloom's Taxonomy into lessons and units will create a variety of teaching techniques that will keep my students and me on our toes throughout the units. With my thesis project, I have combined my reignited love for reading and my love of writing with my new skills and understanding of pedagogy.

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