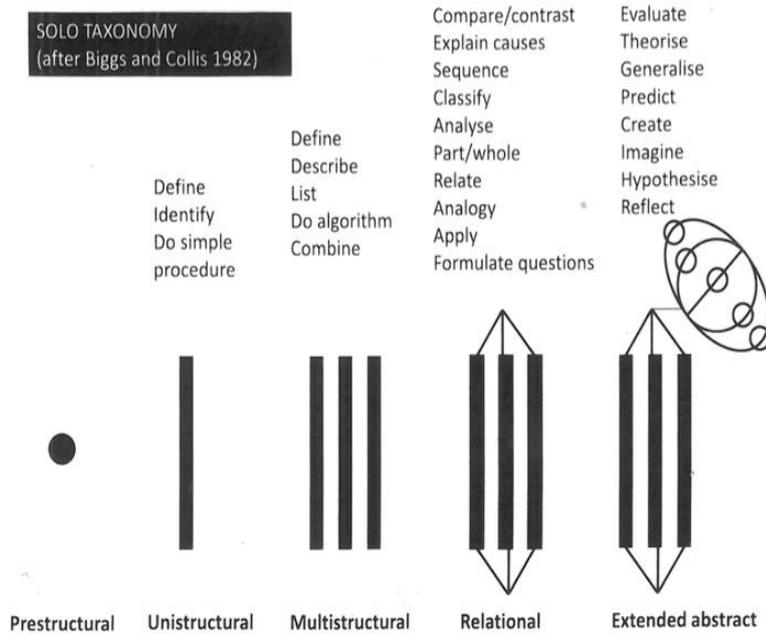


What is SOLO Taxonomy and how can it help me plan my lessons?

By Claire Bishop

SOLO taxonomy stands for Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome and is the creation of Biggs and Collis (1982).



The picture (left) demonstrates the different phases of understanding according to SOLO taxonomy, beginning with prestructural and ending with extended abstract. For many colleagues, who were trained in the ways of Bloom’s taxonomy, the words such as define and identify in the unistructural stages will remind us of the lower order thinking on this other well-known taxonomy.

What SOLO taxonomy helps us to understand, with its visual explanation, is what learning stages ‘looks like’. With the intention of being able to structure learning in a way that demonstrates progress from basic understanding to higher order extended abstract thinking, SOLO taxonomy can be used in the classroom when planning a standalone lesson or a scheme of work.

Biggs and Collis are not without their critics and, like many of the theories in educational research, have been the focus of much criticism. Visit www.learningspy.co.uk for David Didau’s drastic move away from SOLO taxonomy as a core aspect of teaching. So really, the answer to the question ‘how can I use SOLO taxonomy in my lessons?’ is... cautiously.

Whilst the founding principles of SOLO taxonomy hold true, it can all go wrong when teachers think that by following the structure (shown right) that they have instantly perfected their teaching. Structuring your lessons, starting with prestructural and ending at extended abstract, does not mean that they are necessarily effective lessons (even though it might make you look good during a formal observation!). Instead, starting with SOLO taxonomy as a *guide* at the beginning stages of planning a lesson or scheme of work then *adapting* as the learners, and specification, demand seems a much more sensible approach to planning.

As with many aspects of research, such as SOLO taxonomy, the key is to remember your own context, your learners and most importantly, your own judgement. Anecdotally, in the past I have added the different phases of SOLO taxonomy to the corners of my PowerPoints and my VI form have found comfort in the visual reminder of ‘where we are’ in the lesson. Although this is perhaps much more a comfort blanket for what I expect them to be *doing*, more than it is an indicator for what they should be *thinking*. The key with taxonomies is to think critically and use what works.

My Level of Thinking and Learning is..	Learning Task:
 Prestructural I am not sure about...	
 Unistructural I have <u>one</u> relevant idea about...	
 Multistructural I have <u>several</u> ideas about...	
 Relational I have <u>several</u> ideas about... I can <u>link</u> them to the big picture	
 Extended abstract I have <u>several</u> ideas about... I can <u>link</u> them to the big picture I can <u>look</u> at these ideas in a <u>new</u> and <u>different</u> way.	