Emerging pedagogies for 21st century liberal arts learning

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Overview

- Review: LACOL – why, what, where?
- What do we mean by "liberal arts" anyway, why is that important, and for whom?
- Three "emerging" frameworks:
  - Deep(er) learning
  - Threshold concepts
  - Inclusive pedagogies
- Putting it together … for the next generation

… and me

- Interdisciplinary education:
  - [Ph.D.] English (Rhetoric & Composition), UMass Amherst, [2018]
  - M.A. Communication (Performance Studies), UMass Amherst, 2011
  - M.S. Electrical Engineering, Boston University, 2000
- Career background across science, arts, and humanities:
  - Engineer & trainer, The MathWorks, 2000 – 2008
  - Instructor, UMass Amherst, 2008 – 2014
    - Public speaking, writing, social theory, performance studies
  - Instructional Designer, UMass Amherst, 2010 – 2013
  - Instructional Designer, Amherst College, 2014 – present

... and ...

Emerging pedagogies for liberal arts education

- **Liberal Arts** Consortium for _{Online} **Learning**

- What do we mean by a "liberal arts" education? What are our educational goals and values?

- What pedagogical frameworks are best suited for our mission as residential liberal arts colleges?

- What emerging ideas in pedagogy have the potential for transforming liberal arts education to better serve a wider population and to tackle complex global challenges?

Exploring online/blended approaches

- **Liberal Arts** Consortium for **Online Learning**
- What should "online" and "blended" mean in the context of our mission as residential liberal arts colleges?
- What approaches would enhance or integrate both our place-based and digital pedagogical experiences?
- What emerging approaches have the potential to innovate ways of learning and teaching that can only happen in small residential liberal arts colleges?

Matchmaking for cross-campus collaborations

- Liberal Arts **Consortium** for Online Learning

- Why are we part of this 'Consortium'?

- What possibilities can we best engage together, across campuses, rather than individually?

- What influences and leverages can we have on the liberal arts and on higher education policy more broadly through our work as a consortium?

What is a "liberal arts" education?

- AAC&U's statement (2008):
  - Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change.
  - It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest.
  - A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

What should students learn in a "liberal arts" education?

- AAC&U statement on essential outcomes for liberal arts:
  - Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world
    - *Focused* by engagement with big questions
  - Intellectual and practical skills
    - Inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative and information literacy, teamwork and problem solving.
    - *Practiced extensively* across the curriculum, through progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards.
  - Personal and social responsibility
    - Civic knowledge and engagement, ethical reasoning, lifelong learning.
  - Integrative and applied learning
    - Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies.
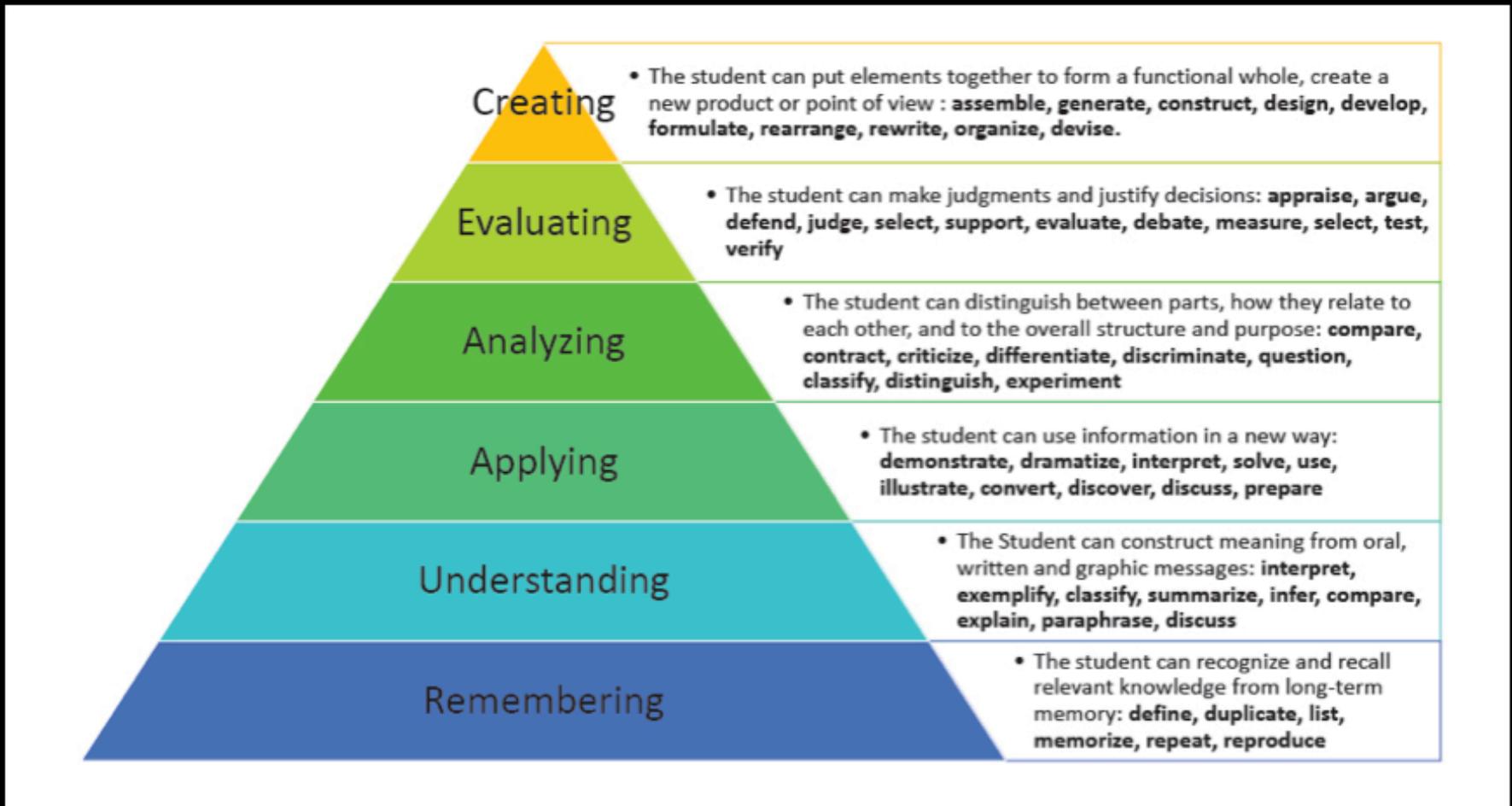
The Challenge: Integration

Engagement with difference

Integrative & Applied Learning

Content

Skills
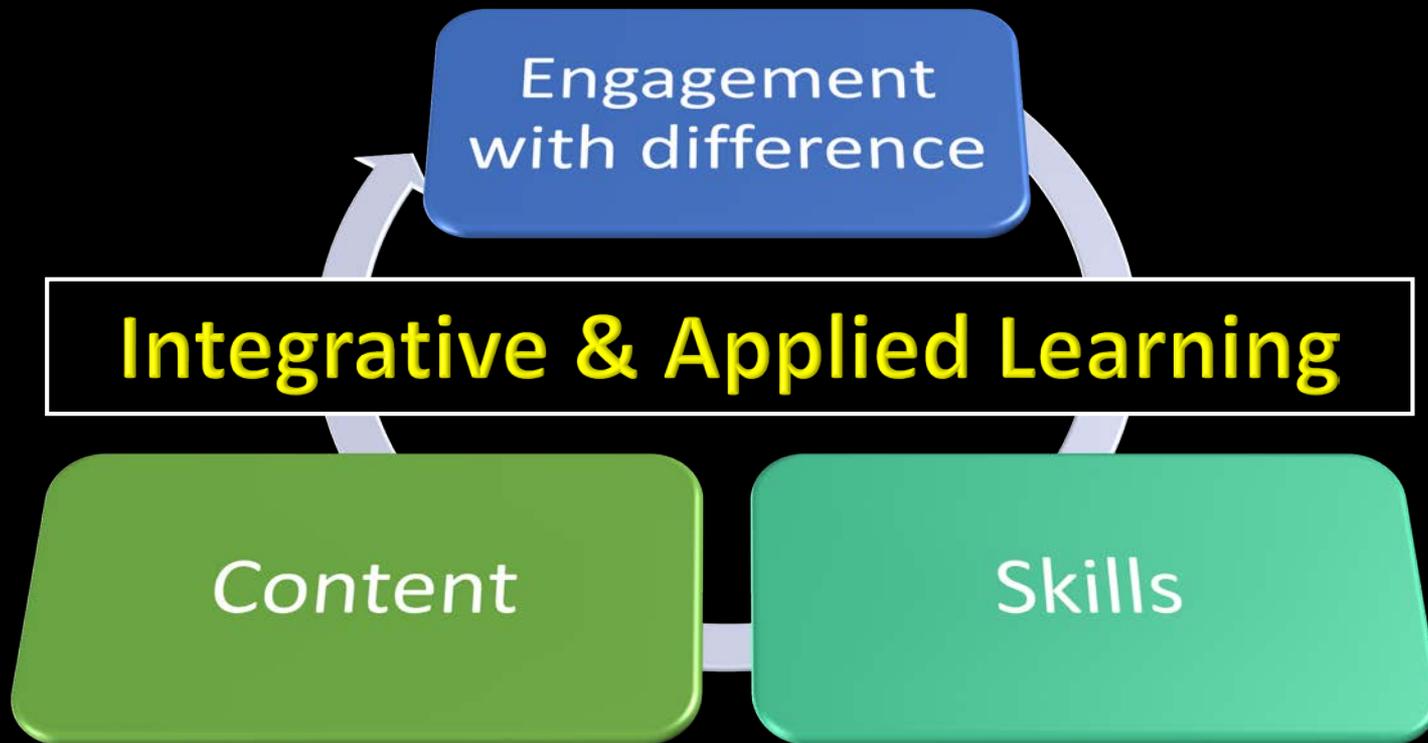
"Emerging" framework: deeper learning
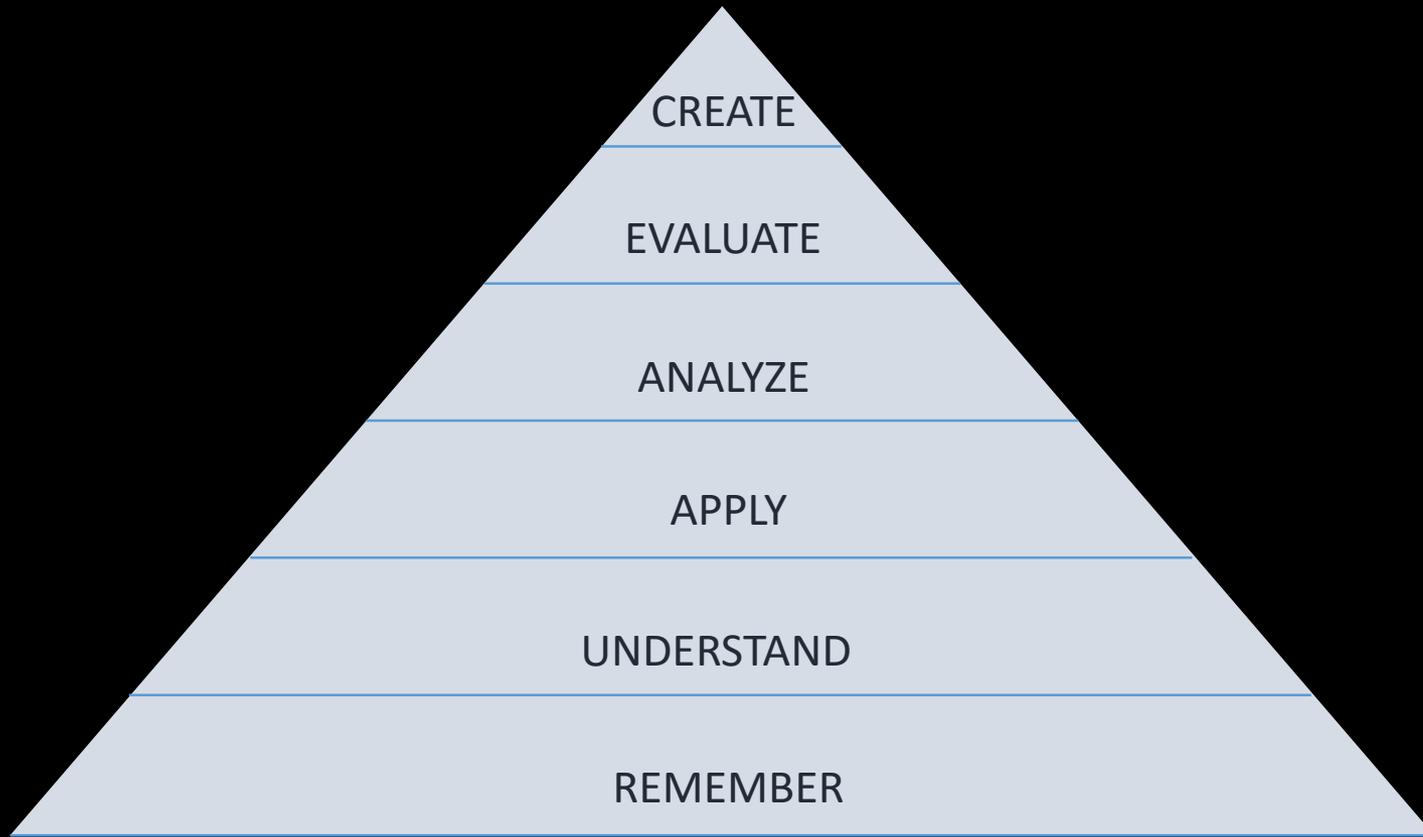
Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

Deeper learning

Source: https://emtaylorblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/blooms.png

Deeper learning

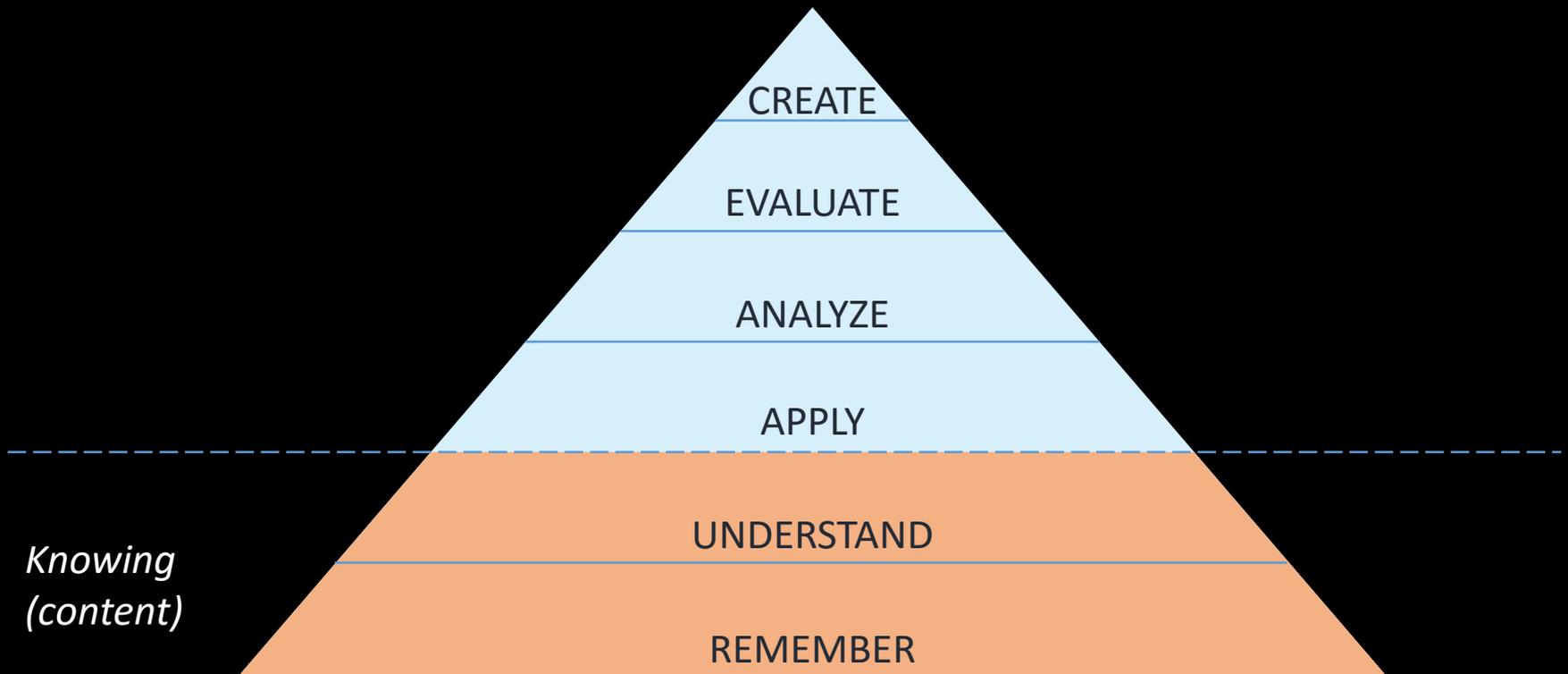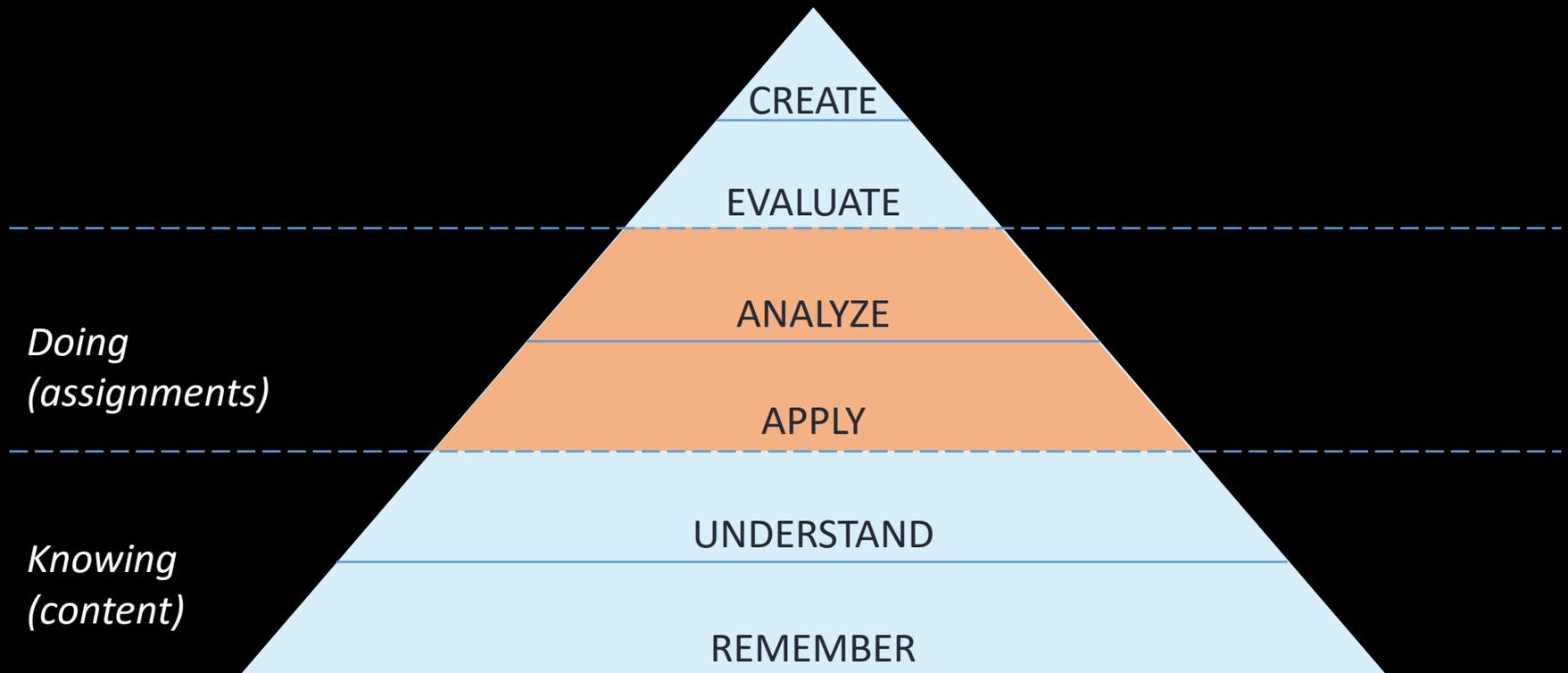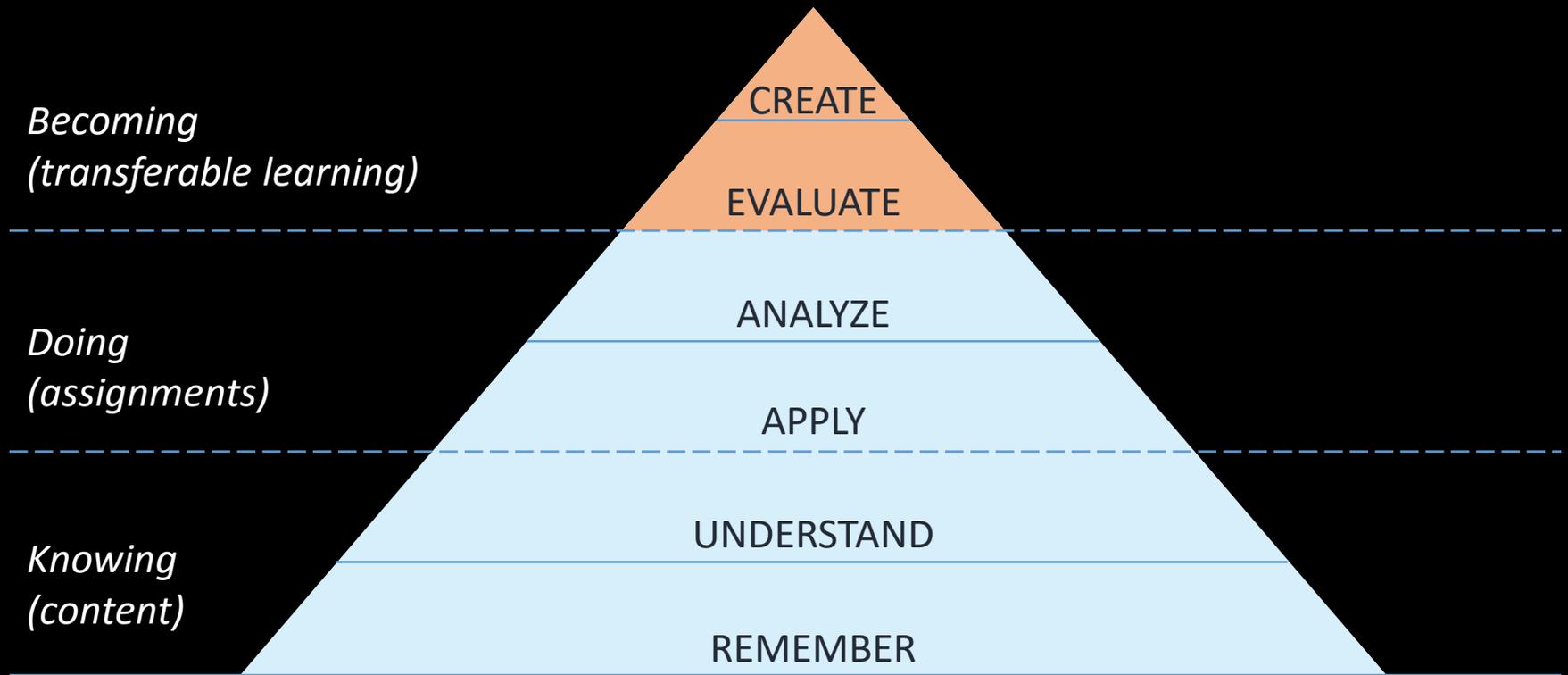Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

Deeper learning

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

Deeper learning

*Becoming
(transferable learning)*

*Doing
(assignments)*

*Knowing
(content)*

CREATE

EVALUATE

ANALYZE

APPLY

UNDERSTAND

REMEMBER

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

Deep learning & engagement

- National Survey of Student Engagement's key indicators:
  - Academic challenge
    - Higher-order learning
    - Reflective & integrative learning
    - Learning strategies
    - Quantitative reasoning
  - Learning with peers
    - Collaborative learning
    - Discussions with diverse others
  - Experiences with faculty
    - Student-faculty interaction
    - Effective teaching practices
  - Campus environment
    - Quality of interactions
    - Supportive environment

"High-impact" practices

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Common intellectual experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing-intensive courses
- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Undergraduate research
- Diversity/Global learning
- Service learning, community-based learning
- Internships
- Capstone courses and projects

What makes "high-impact" practices so effective?

- Kuh (2008):
  - Time, commitment, and purpose
  - Extended and substantive interaction with others
  - Collaborative engagement with diversity and difference
  - Formative feedback and continuous improvement
  - Tackling complex and novel problems
  - Transformational learning

Deep learning as a disruptive liberal art

Teaching for deep learning is: mentoring, coaching, role modeling, facilitative

Deep learning is: collaborative, intrinsic, relational, personally meaningful
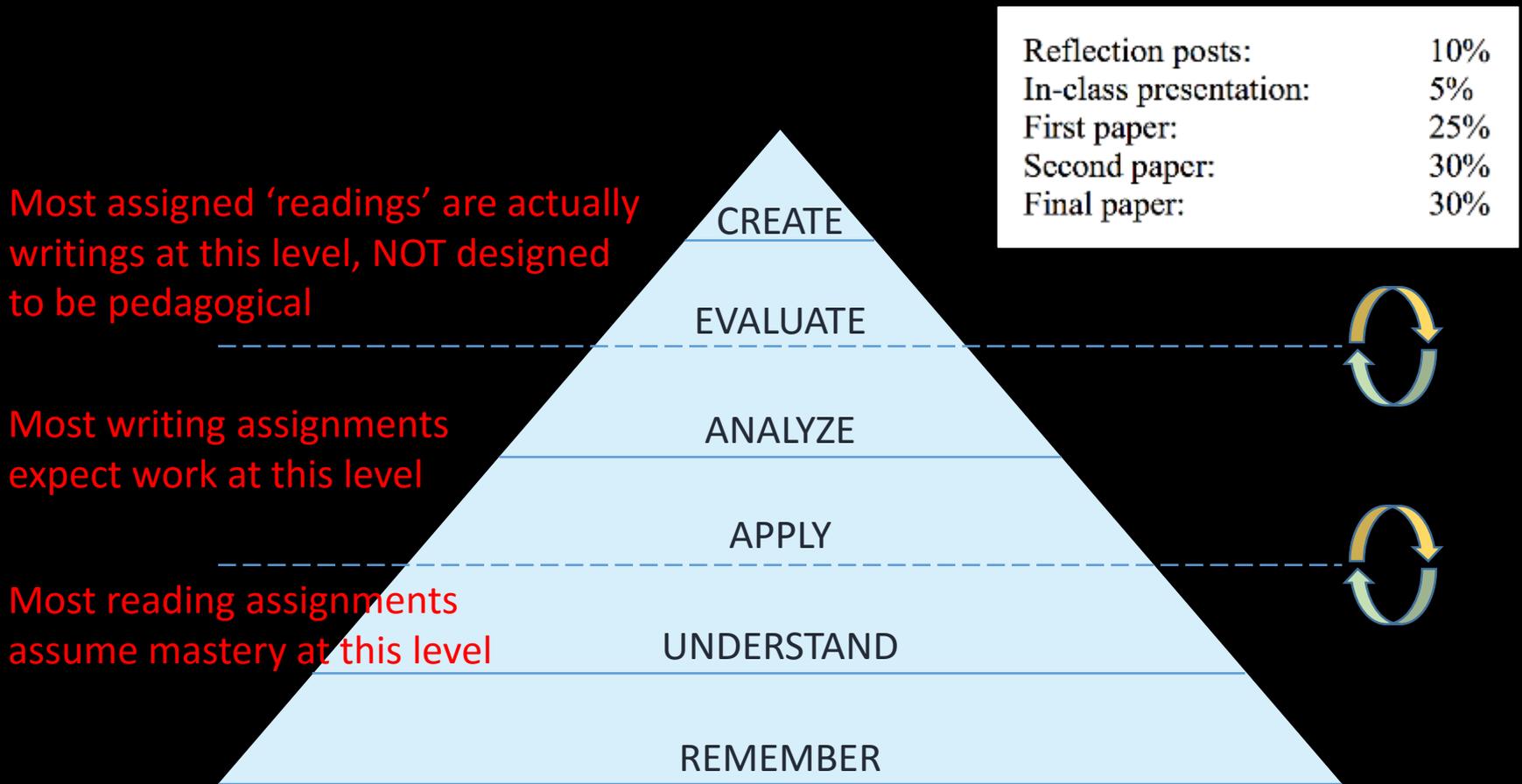
CREATE

EVALUATE

ANALYZE
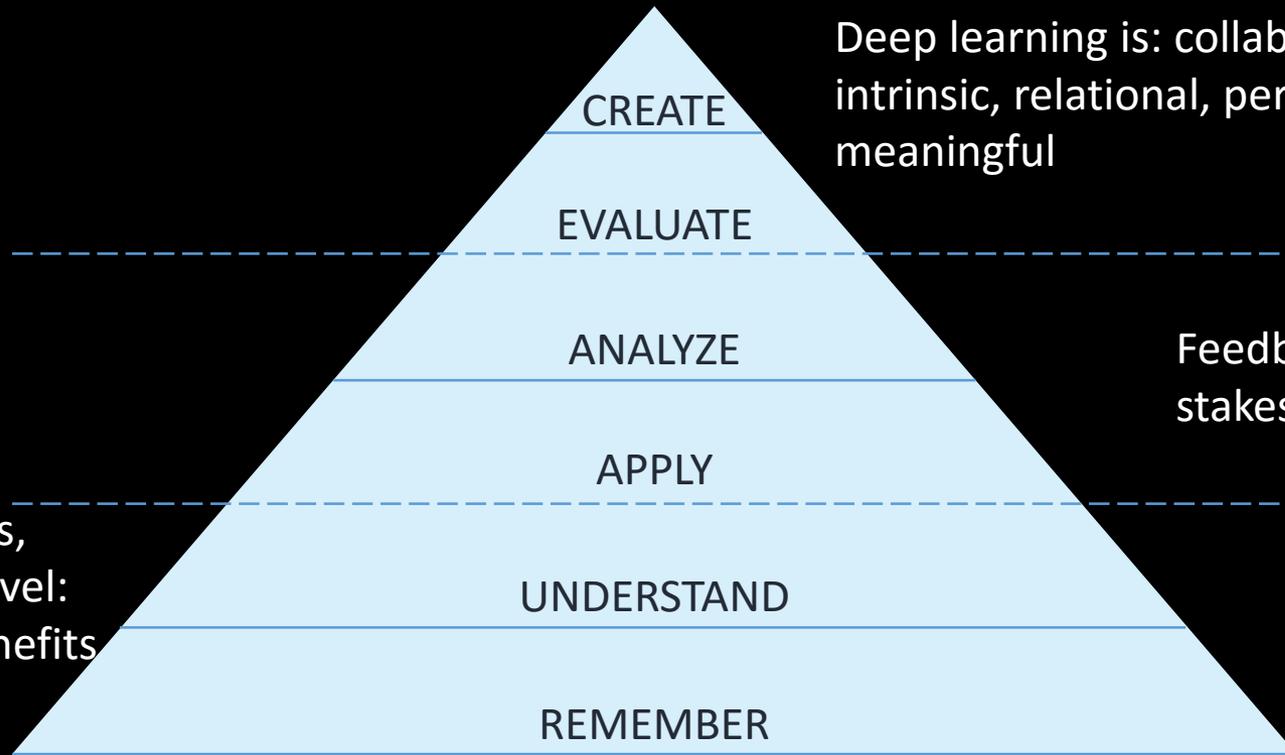
Feedback: low-stakes, practice

APPLY

(At larger schools, focus is at this level: Cost/volume benefits Standardization Grade-friendly)

UNDERSTAND

REMEMBER

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

Missed alignments in pedagogy

Reflection posts: 10%
In-class presentation: 5%
First paper: 25%
Second paper: 30%
Final paper: 30%

Most assigned 'readings' are actually writings at this level, NOT designed to be pedagogical

Most writing assignments expect work at this level

Most reading assignments assume mastery at this level

CREATE

EVALUATE

ANALYZE

APPLY

UNDERSTAND

REMEMBER

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

Emerging framework: Thresholds

- In any field, there exist concepts that are 'thresholds' for mastery in the field. (Meyer & Land, 2003-2006)

- A threshold concept often has these characteristics:
  - Transformative: Changes the learner.
  - Irreversible: Cannot be unlearned.
  - Integrative: Reveals hitherto non-obvious connections.
  - Bounded/Scoped: Leads onward to further thresholds.
  - Troublesome: Challenges closely held beliefs and ideas.

- Examples: Race, relativity, college-level reading.

Liminality and mimicry

- Learning a threshold concept involves liminality
  - "An unstable space in which the learner may oscillate between old and emergent understandings…"
- Unless intentionally immersed and guided, students "construct their own conditions of safety through mimicry" and "learning is the product of ritualized performances rather than integrated understandings."
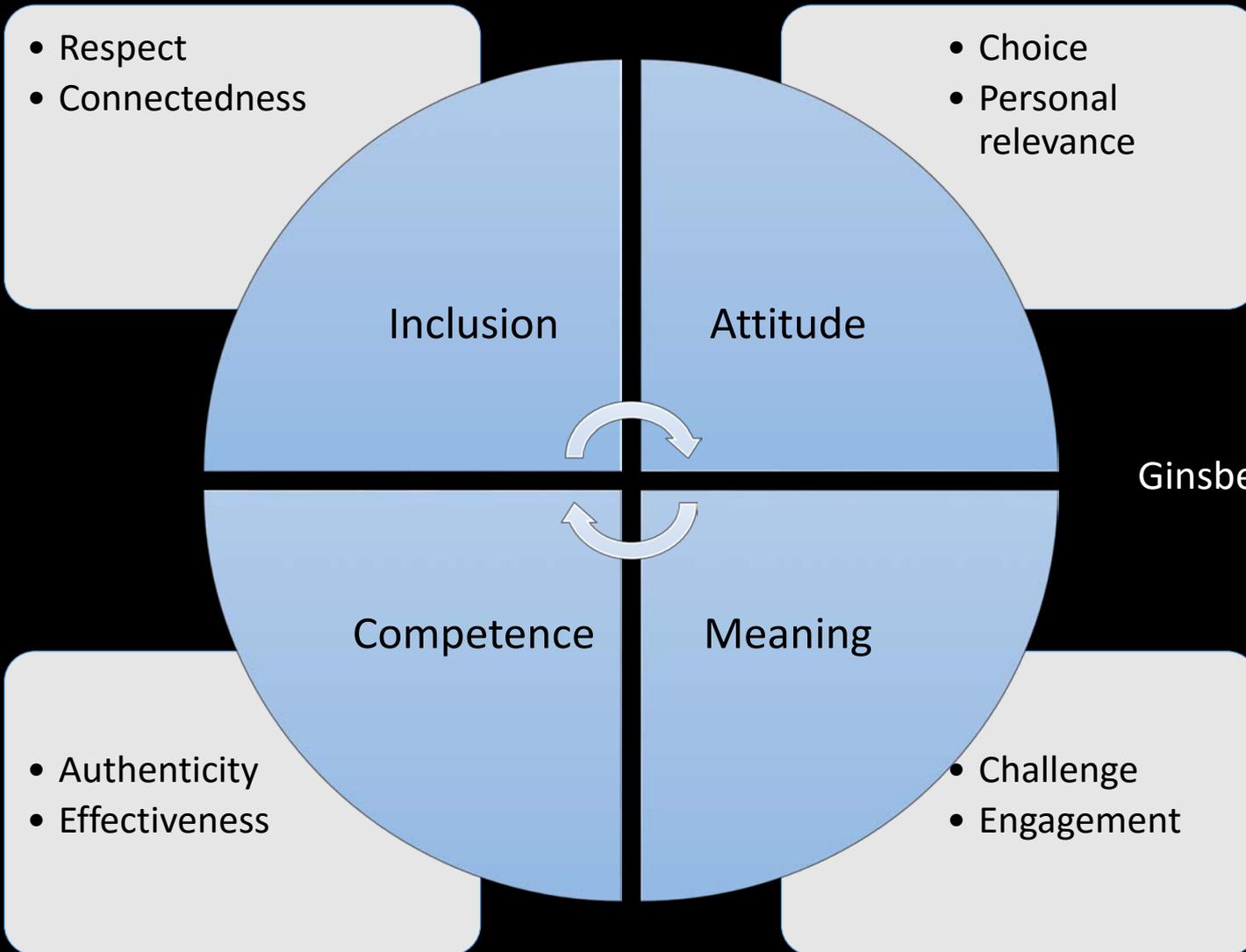
Cousin (2006)

Teaching thresholds

- **Jewels in the curriculum** (beyond content 'coverage')
  - Identify (with students) key areas that need mastery.
- **Listening for understanding**
  - "... hear what the students' misunderstandings and uncertainties are in order to sympathetically engage with them."
- **Holding environment for the toleration of confusion**
  - "... some students expressed the fear they were the only ones among their peers who did not comprehend difficult concepts."
- **Recursiveness and excursiveness**
  - Critique of a linear learning outcomes approach
  - "Mastery of a threshold concept often involves messy journeys back, forth, and across conceptual terrain."

Cousin (2006)

Emerging framework: Inclusive pedagogies

- K-12 educational policy impacts
  - No Child Left Behind (2002) ➜ Class of 2020 is first incoming class to have gone through K-12 under NCLB in public schools.
  - Reading "for comprehension" was heavily tested
  - ➜ Students are trained to read excerpts for high-stakes testing where there is ONE right answer to be gleaned from a passage.
- Accessibility
  - Increasing support for students in K-12 with a wide range of learning abilities and challenges.
  - ADHD and spectrum patterns are identified and supported through a range of resources.
  - ➜ Hitherto 'hidden' challenges are now more open and require support.

Intrinsic motivation and inclusion

- Respect
- Connectedness

- Choice
- Personal relevance

Inclusion

Attitude

Ginsberg (1995)

Competence

Meaning

- Authenticity
- Effectiveness

- Challenge
- Engagement

Putting it together – why these frameworks matter for the liberal arts

- Integration of knowledge, skills, engagement with diversity
- Misalignment of deep learning versus teaching methods
- Urgency of threshold understandings but through immersive, non-linear, liminal learning
- Impacts of K-12 policies on learning a particular kind of approach to learning (and students' motivation to unlearn/relearn better ways)
- Accessibility and learning challenges/needs
- Intrinsic motivation for inclusive teaching and learning

… and …

THANK YOU!

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