



Making Complexity Accessible

Daria Witt and Michael Soet, ElevatED Learning Services

Key Workshop Concepts:

- **Students need schema in order to make sense of new content.**
- **Activating prior knowledge and building background knowledge are two strategies for building schema with little/no text reliance.**
- **Graphic organizers allow us to strip away difficulty and zero in on the core skill/knowledge we are targeting.**
- **Difficulty and complexity are different.**

AGENDA

1:00 – 1:10 Introduction and Workshop Goals

The facilitator introduces the workshop, the workshop driving question, and the session's objectives.

1:10 – 1:20 Difficulty v. Complexity

The facilitator uses a series of project sample activities to clearly explain the differences between the terms "difficulty" and "complexity" in order to clarify the idea that ELs can be given complex, higher-order thinking tasks that aren't necessarily difficult.

1:20 – 1:30 Opening Text Activity

Participants are given a brief sample text to read and react to. They discover that although they understand all the words, they don't understand the meaning of the text, thus underscoring the need for providing students with context, or schema, with which to make sense of new material.

1:30 – 1:40 Building Schema

The facilitator discusses how the prior session's demonstration lesson (Experiencing Instruction through the Eyes of an English Learner) was designed as a schema-building set of activities. Participants are introduced to a tool and a resource for designing such activities.

1:40 – 2:10 Activating Prior Knowledge and Building Background Knowledge

Participants use the tool and resource to practice designing schema-building activities for a sample topic that activate students' prior knowledge and build background knowledge. As all participants are working on the same topic, they are able to share ideas and debrief the process as a whole group. They then apply this learning to design another set of such activities for a discipline-specific topic with their content area peers.

2:10 – 2:50 Designing Graphic Organizers

The facilitator shares talking points on the importance of graphic organizers in making complexity accessible to students and discusses criteria for effective graphic organizers. The facilitator leads a whole-group session in designing one for the sample schema-building activity developed previously. Participants then – in discipline groups – design a graphic organizer for a schema-building activity they created for their content-specific topic.

2:50 – 3:15 Feedback Jigsaw

Discipline groups come up with two questions that they would like feedback on in regard to the sample products (schema-building activities and an accompanying graphic organizer) they have developed; members of each team meet one-on-one with members of other discipline teams and take turns giving and receiving feedback on the products. Discipline teams meet again to compare the various ideas gathered for improving their group's products.

3:15 – 3:30 Evaluations, Reflecting on Learning, and Key Workshop Concepts

Participants fill out their evaluations first, then share one of the sentences they created in the "Additional Questions" portion of the evaluation within their group. The day concludes with a review of the key workshop concepts.