

What's Your Schema?

(from Dr. Carrie Tzou, University of Washington Bothell, at Seattle Aquarium training 5/5/15)

Idea: the importance of context/framing to learning. This activity demonstrates the importance of having a way to organize knowledge. It's not just about facts - having a frame in which to organize our knowledge makes it much easier for us to remember things. We know from learning sciences that experts not only know a lot of facts - their expertise also relies on how they organize those facts. Knowledge is connected and organized into coherent networks and frameworks.

Directions:

Half of the room closes their eyes.

Facilitator shows a slide (or piece of paper) that says "*Washing Clothes.*" Everyone opens their eyes.

Facilitator reads the passage (below) about "the procedure."

After the reading, facilitator asks participants to write down a list of as many things as they can remember from the passage as possible. Doesn't have to be exact words; can be ideas. Participants should draw a line under their last item when they are done.

Facilitator then shows everyone the slide/paper that says "*Washing Clothes.*"

Facilitator asks: Did that trigger anything else for you? If so, write it down.

Facilitator shows a slide (or provides handouts) with the 19 separate "idea units" from the passage listed.

Facilitator asks: How many did you get? Write down your "score." Then, facilitator starts at "one correct idea unit" and counts up, seeing how many people scored how many different "idea units." Compare the half of the room that had their eyes closed with the half that didn't.

Discussion Questions:

- Is there a difference between the two groups?
- What was the experience like for you? Did you use any strategies?
- What does this activity have to do with learning? (*If you don't have a schema to connect your knowledge to, where does it go? In one ear and out the other!*)
- How you can you incorporate this into communication of your topic?
- Prior knowledge is really important and shapes how people see the world. What questions can you ask to access prior knowledge? Brainstorm examples. Some might include: What are you noticing? What else are you noticing? What does that remind you of? Why do you think that is?

Passage:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one group may be sufficient, depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one can never tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually, they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is part of life.

1. The procedure is actually quite simple.
2. First you arrange things into different groups.
3. Of course, one group may be sufficient, depending on how much there is to do.
4. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step,
5. otherwise you are pretty well set.
6. It is important not to overdo things.
7. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many.
8. In the short run this may not seem important
9. but complications can easily arise.
10. A mistake can be expensive as well.
11. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated.
12. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life.
13. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future,
14. but then one can never tell.
15. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again.
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17. Eventually, they will be used once more

18. and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated.

19. However, that is part of life.