

# Elaboration Theory

Elaboration theory is one of the [cognitivist models for instructional design](#) proposed by [Charles Reigeluth](#) and his associates in 1970s. Very well accepted, it was offering suggestions on how to organize different types of instruction.

The key principle is that the content should be organized starting from the simplest and then increasing order of complexity and that learner has to develop a concept in which new ideas will be meaningful and well accepted.

Elaboration theory suggests instruction should be organized in the following eight strategies:

- organizing structure (conceptual, procedural or theoretical)
- sequencing content in increasing order of complexity
- within-lesson sequencing (based on type of organizing structure: for theoretically organized instruction present ideas from simple to complex, for procedures present steps in their order of appearance, for conceptually organized instructions start from more familiar and general concepts). Sequencing content within a lesson can according to elaboration theory be:
  - topical (topic is studied in depth before moving to the next one)
  - spiral (firstly all topics are briefly introduced before going into details about each of them)
- summarizers (to review content)
- synthesizers (to enable easier meaningful integration of new knowledge)
- analogies (to enable easier relation to prior knowledge)
- cognitive strategy activators (images, diagrams or simply directions to mentally represent learned content)
- learner control (suggest learners to exercise control over instructional strategies and content)

According to [TIP](#) Reigeluth (1983) provides the following summary of a theoretical epitome for an introductory course in economics:

1. Organizing content (principles)- the law of supply and demand
  - An increase in price causes an increase in the quantity supplied and a decrease in the quantity demanded.
  - A decrease in price causes a decrease in the quantity supplied and an increase in the quantity demanded.
2. Supporting content - concepts of price, supply, demand, increase, decrease

## Critics

One of the critics or limitations of this model comes from distinguishing between only three different knowledge types (theories, procedures and concepts). This is a simplifying design constraint, yet there are surveys (Alexander, Patricia A., Diane L. Schallert, and Victoria C. Hare. "Coming to Terms: How Researchers in Learning and Literacy Talk About Knowledge.") that resulted in different, sometimes significantly larger number of knowledge categories.

# Bibliography

Wilson, Brent, and Peggy Cole. "A critical review of elaboration theory." *Educational Technology Research and Development* 40, no. 3 (9, 1992): 63-79.

TIP: Elaboration Theory

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