

Schema, Assimilation, Disequilibrium, Accommodation, Equilibrium

A child sees a dog (four-legged, furry animal) and the teacher says, “there’s a dog” and the child repeats “dog.”

A schema has been formed that a four-legged, furry animal is a dog.

Later a child is looking through a book and sees a picture of a horse (another four-legged, furry animal), points to it, looks up at the teacher and exclaims “dog!”

The child assimilates information from the image of the horse into his current schema for a four-legged, furry animal – dog.

From this point on the child exclaims “dog” every time he sees a four-legged furry animal.

One day, the child encounters a dog that barks.

The child assimilates this information into his initial schema which has now been modified to include that a four-legged, furry animal that barks is a dog. The new schema is now “a four-legged, furry animal that barks is a dog.”

On another day the child encounters a horse, and exclaims “dog” (since so far the horse has fit into his schema for “dog”), however, the child is surprised when the horse “neighs” and does not bark.

At this point the child experiences disequilibrium where the information he is taking in from the environment does not match his current schema. According to his schema, the horse should bark, because up until this point the horse has fit into the child’s schema for a dog.

The child looks at mom and asks, “dog?” and the mom says, “horse.” The child repeats “horse.” The following day the child revisits the animal book with the teacher and they get to the page with the dog and the child says “dog.” A few pages later, the horse appears and the child says “horse.”

The child has accommodated this new information about the horse into his current schema for a dog (a four-legged, furry animal that barks is a dog) and developed a new schema for horse (a four-legged, furry animal that neighs is a horse). Once the new information has been accommodated and the new schema developed the child reaches a state of equilibrium.