

leads them to incorrect expectations about what mayonnaise is made of and how it is made.

A Lesson on Democracy can also be interpreted in terms of schema theory. That is, the seventh graders in Mr. Amaya's class are acquiring a government schema that will eventually enable them to instantiate details about different types of governments. According to Anderson et al. (1978), schema theory enables one to predict learning from textual materials, because "the schemata a person already possesses are a principal determiner of what will be learned from a text" (p. 438).

Efforts Toward an Understanding of Schema

Notions about the nature and function of the schema developed from several lines of research that were all focused on the impact of prior knowledge on comprehension and memory. Many studies demonstrated that what is remembered is largely a function of what was understood to begin with. But studies also revealed that both comprehension and memory are driven by meaning, or gist. Consider the following sentences, for example:

The house was in the valley.
The house was little.
The valley was green.
The house burned down.

If asked to read and later recall these sentences from memory, you are likely to produce the following response: "The little house in the green valley burned down" (Bransford & Franks, 1971). Rather than store sentences separately in memory, it appears that learners construct and store the gist of the sentences together.

Likewise, learners comprehend and remember information better when they can relate it to a familiar theme. For example, read the following passage:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange items into different groups. Of course one pile 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 never can tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places.