

Understanding Schemas in the Early Years

What is a Schema?

Schemas refer to patterns of repeated behaviors or play that are commonly observed in young children. These schemas reflect the natural and often instinctive ways in which children explore their environment and develop their understanding of the world.

Identifying and understanding these schemas can be helpful for Early Years practitioners and parents as they provide insights into a child's cognitive and emotional development. Schemas are often observed when children have a strong drive or natural urge to play in this particular way. Their high motivation in this way of playing means they are very involved in activities which means deep levels of learning are achieved. People often wonder why children do things again and again, but it's these repetitive behaviors that help children to learn and understand concepts

Why is it important to observe for Schemas in children's play?

By children repeating what they learn, their brains make vital connections which builds meaning to what they are doing. Recognising a child's schema can help you and the parent, to provide appropriate materials and activities that align with the child's interests and developmental needs. This can facilitate the child's cognitive, physical and emotional development. Children have unique ways of learning and exploring the world. Identifying a child's schemas allows for a more individualised approach to learning and play, which can be more engaging and effective. When children are allowed to engage in play that aligns with their schemas, they are more likely to be motivated and enjoy the activities. This can lead to more focused play, which enhances their learning experience and they can experiment and explore within their schema, leading to novel solutions and ideas

Understanding a child's schema trait, can improve communication between you, parents and children. Children may become frustrated when their natural inclinations are not understood or supported. It allows adults to enter a child's world, participating in

their play, and support their learning effectively. Recognising schemas can help prevent unnecessary frustration and promote a more positive play environment.

When children are encouraged and supported in their preferred way of play, they gain confidence in their abilities and interests. This can have a positive impact on their self-esteem and overall development. Schemas often involve repetitive activities and problem-solving, which is an important skill for children to develop. By recognising and supporting their schemas, children can practice and refine their problem-solving abilities.

Schemas are not only about physical play but also relate to emotional and psychological development. Recognising a child's schema can help you to understand a child's emotions, need and desires, leading to more effective emotional support. Recognising and documenting a child's schemas can serve as a valuable tool for assessing their development and planning activities that align with their interests and developmental goals.

Identifying schemas and how practitioners can plan for their children

Trajectory Schema

Helps with understanding concepts like distance, speed height or cause and effect. Children presenting with this schema will often throw, drop and roll objects. Ideas to extend this schema could include: throwing games, cars and ramps, running water.

Transporting Schema

Helps children develop their gross motor skills and spatial awareness. Children presenting with this schema will often move objects from one place to another. This can involve carrying, pushing and dragging objects. Resources that can help this schema include: bags, baskets, trolleys, pushchairs and activities that involve scooping and pouring. If you have a child in your setting with a transporting schema, you will rarely find resources in the places you put them!

Enclosure / Containing Schema

Helps develop children's understanding of boundaries and containment. Children presenting with this schema enjoy placing things inside other things or creating enclosed spaces. Resources that can help children with this schema include: blankets and throws, large boxes, containers and pots with lids.

Enveloping Schema

Explores the ideas of covering things, spaces and themselves! Children presenting with this schema will often: dress up in hats and scarves, often covering their whole face or when using paint will apply several layers of paint on the same piece of paper and then may fold the paper several times. They may even cover their pets with boxes or blankets! Resources that can help children with this schema include: dressing up clothes, wrapping paper and envelopes, camouflage fabric, cellophane and clear transparent paper, dens and tents.

Rotational Schema

This schema helps children to understand how they/objects turn. Through this they are gaining an understanding of cause and effect. Children will be fascinated by spinning objects or anything that rotates, such as wheels or fans. Resources that can help children with this schema include: fans/windmills, Cogs, wheels of all description i.e. cars bikes, pushchairs. Roundabouts and mixing ingredients with a spoon.

Collecting Schema

This Schema helps with categorisation and organisation. Children will like to collect objects and organise them. Children will be seen collecting items wherever they go i.e. rocks/pebbles/stones, they may then categorise them in shape, colour or size. Resources that can help children with this schema include: Any loose part resources that children can make collections of and allow them space to sort and display their collections. They will make the connections themselves and sort to their own agenda.

Connection Schema

This schema helps develop problem solving and fine motor skills. Children presenting with this schema, will enjoy putting things together and fastening objects and tying things together with string. Resources that can help children with this schema include: elastic bands, ribbon, string and cable ties, pipe cleaners and sticky tape. Objects that can be taken apart (old phones or clocks). Train tracks, Duplo or any other construction resources.

Oriental Schema

This schema allows children to see things from a different angle, learning about height, weight, width and balance. Children presenting with this schema may turn objects and themselves around and upside down, possibly run up the slide and enjoy being at the top. Resources that can help children with this schema include: Puzzles or activities that require pieces to fit into an exact space, sand timers, construction toys like Duplo/Lego or magnetic shapes/blocks. Maps and globes.

To Conclude

To help children to progress in their learning and development and reach their full potential, You need to be aware of how children learn and observe the ways they are doing this. Using the information you have gained you can plan for the next steps in their development. This will ensure that they are building on what they already know and assisting them to take their learning to the next level.

About Us

Childminding UK has been supporting childminders for over 30 years. Formed in 1991 by and for local working childminders in Northamptonshire, we now support childminders across the country. A registered charity, we are the only national organisation that solely supports childminders and we have recently achieved the Princess Royal Training Award for 'Ensuring high quality childcare through training and support'. All staff are experienced childcare professionals and have been childminders

themselves and our trustees are working childminders or have knowledge of childminding, so we have a good understanding of the sector. If Childminding sounds like something you might be interested in, please contact Childminding UK on 01536 210685 or email info@childmindinguk.com for advice and support.