

Supporting schemas

Understanding schematic behaviour can help you meet children's interests and extend their learning out of doors, says Learning through Landscapes...

Why do children wrap themselves up in layers of clothes? Line up rows and rows of the same object? Develop fascinations with throwing or hiding? Repetitive behaviour like this is known as schematic behaviour, and while it may seem odd, it is in fact a learning mechanism. Through repeated, sometimes compulsive actions, children are discovering the underlying structure of the world around them: if this happens this way, does it also happen that way?

Being able to recognise schemas when they are exhibited enables practitioners to extend a child's learning by matching curriculum content based on a child's individual interests. Because the child is deeply

interested they will be very involved, and make good progress in their own learning.

Take it outside

Good quality outdoor play has many features that allow children to follow these patterns of activity and make the best use of their natural learning drives and behaviours. These include:

- space to move around freely and play on a large and small scale;
- open-ended resources that can be used spontaneously;
- opportunities to come back to activities repeatedly.

But what does schematic behaviour look like, and how can you support it outdoors?

Your role

EARLY YEARS PRACTICE IS MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN IT SUPPORTS CHILDREN'S NATURAL LEARNING BEHAVIOURS AND PATTERNS...

Observing: When you observe children over time you will begin to see patterns. Use a digital camera to capture what might be significant behaviour.

Supporting: Subtly support a child's actions, offer resources and plan experiences that will motivate them to explore further.

Extending: Plan resources and opportunities to extend the child's experience and use of a schema, at the child's pace.

find out more

Learning through Landscapes offers a range of services to support outdoor learning and play in the early years. Its membership resources and publications provide a regular supply of fresh activity ideas, and it offers on-site support through advisory visits and half-day, full-day or twilight training sessions for nurseries. Visit ltl.org.uk



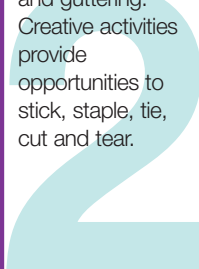
Transporting schema

Children enjoy repeatedly moving resources, and themselves, from one place to another. Providing blocks, puzzles and vehicles will encourage them to pick up, move along and put down objects. Being physically active outdoors and using wheelbarrows to move sand will also support this behaviour.



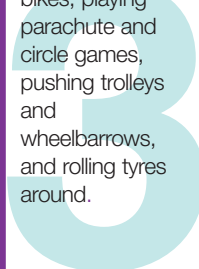
Connecting schema

A child enjoys tying string to crates to drag them around, or wants to weave ribbon in and out of resources. This involves investigating how materials can be linked and their relationship to one another. Water play offers children the opportunity to practise connecting pipes and guttering. Creative activities provide opportunities to stick, staple, tie, cut and tear.



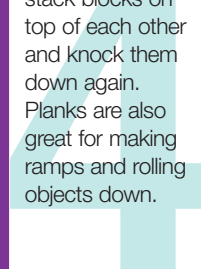
Rotational schema

Children display a preference for turning taps on and off, winding and unwinding string, and playing with hoops. They may also be fascinated with the physical experience of twirling and twisting the body, and rolling themselves down a hill. Also use your space for bikes, playing parachute and circle games, pushing trolleys and wheelbarrows, and rolling tyres around.



Trajectory schema

A fascination with the horizontal, vertical and diagonal movement of things, and self. To be able to explore this schema, children need to experience space and how movement occurs within it. Outdoors there is plenty of space for children to stack blocks on top of each other and knock them down again. Planks are also great for making ramps and rolling objects down.



Enveloping /enclosing schema

Children particularly interested in wrapping themselves up, covering and hiding items, or getting into boxes and closing the lid. Children get deeply involved in exploring how they and items can be inside objects. Provide den-building equipment, dressing up clothes, blankets and pieces of fabric. Barrels and tunnels are good for hiding in.



Transforming schema

Children are fascinated by how materials change their state and enjoy mixing substances together. Changes in the seasons offer children opportunities to experience rain, freezing conditions and melting ice. Offer materials such as sand, mud and soil for mixing and discovering how materials change consistency when wet or dry.

