



Getting to know EVEN MORE about you!

Abe (13 months) developed an irritating habit during mealtimes. He would drop his beaker and finger food. His mum, Miriam repeatedly asked him to stop. He didn't. She began to lose patience and concluded that he was "just naughty". She talked to Gemma, his childminder, so that they could share a strategy and put an end to this irritating behaviour. None of their strategies seemed to work and simply fuelled their belief that he was being unreasonably naughty. Mealtimes were tense!

Gemma then came across 'schemas' in conversation with a friend. The friend explained how young children's repeated actions shine a light on what is going on internally. She talked this through with Miriam and they both researched some more. They realised that he liked to drop things, bob up and down, use sticks for drumming... Abe's mealtime behaviours were a continuation of how he played at other times and could be interpreted as a pattern of repeatable behaviours. Almost everything he enjoyed doing involved up/down movements.

They found an article listing a number of common 'schemas' found in childhood. They agreed he probably had a 'vertical trajectory' schema.

This small realisation transformed life for everyone. Gemma and Miriam looked to see what activities they could provide so that his schema-driven behaviour could be expressed positively. Up-and-down play included:

- Removing the stairgate occasionally so he could climb up and down the stairs safely.
- Making chutes out of guttering so his toys could slide down.
- Giving him her crochet hooks which she used as drumsticks.
- Bouncing games... a favourite was a piece of stretchy lycra, which was a trampoline for toys.
- Finding surfaces that were suitable and safe, on which he could drop different objects (keys, fir cones, balls of wool) onto different surfaces (tin/plastic/wood/tiles...)

WOW – the results were immediate and astonishing! Now, whenever Abe dropped his food, Gemma would say, "You do like dropping things, don't you, Abe? When you've finished eating, we can play some dropping games".

Repetitive play patterns

Understanding children's repetitive play patterns is an insight that parents, practitioners can 'see' and relate to with ease. Usually because they can see how it relates to a behaviour that is otherwise infuriating!

These patterns are usually referred to as 'schemas'. Since the early 1900's theorists, such as Piaget introduced the idea that schemas are biological, revealing something internal that explain something about how children learn. Adults who understand that every child is born with a prominent schema (which evolves as we mature), noticing them is a valuable tool to help us interpret their behaviour and partner with their intrinsic learning style.

This is true for both adults and children.

I have a strong **rotation schema**. I doodle in circles, consider a problem from all sides, I prefer the art of Delaunay to Mondrian. And... I MUCH prefer to circular routes when

walking or cycling. My husband, on the other hand, is very happy with there-and-back walks because he has a different schema. Our different schemas are obvious when shopping. I will walk around town, checking prices, reflecting on options, before buying. And often this results in going back to the shop I started in! My incredulous husband, who is far more straight-lined (**trajectory schema**), usually sees what he wants in the first couple of shops and is in and out of town in no time!

Understanding our different schemas has certainly done much to promote marital harmony.

Take a little time to...

Press pause on the title sequence of a favourite TV show or film. Look closely at the visual images

Ask yourself...

- ❓ Do the graphics play with circles, form enclosures or blocks?
- ❓ Do they link graphics sequentially, with arrows or lines?
- ❓ Does the image transform into something new?

This is a fun way to focus on what might be the dominant schema of the designer behind visual title sequences.

We can do the same with people's choice of clothing, home décor, displays...

What is a schema?

A schema can be understood as repetitive play patterns through which children assimilate (take in) their experiences and serve as a framework for organising and learning through them. Schemas are biological. They are dynamic. They evolve, develop, mature, and transform, although dominant schema(s) are retained through a person's lifetime.

The younger the child, the easier it is to notice and name a schema. Carers can then prepare the most suitable activities for their child(ren). The list below is not exhaustive, but include the most typical schemas we might see in young children:

- Trajectory (vertical, diagonal, or horizontal)
- Rotation
- Enveloping
- Enclosure & containing
- Transporting
- Positioning (orientation)
- Connection
- Transforming



What might we notice...

Mae (15 months old) always took her finger food off the plate and squashed it under something (her dish or cup). She enjoyed her meals but would always eat the food she had stashed (and squashed). Both Mae's parent and key person verbally encouraged (nagged!) her to stop and just "eat from your plate nicely."

Until... one day... Mae's key person wondered, "do you think she might have an enclosure or containment schema?". As soon as she said this, Mae's irritating behaviour patterns could be re-interpreted. After this, Mae's carers noticed more 'evidence'... she would take the books out of the browser box and climb inside. Better still, she liked to then place fabric over her so that she was completely hidden.

Children's behaviour patterns and repeatable actions reveal their schemas. Observant adults have a window into understanding how they learn. Getting to know a child's dominant schema is another tool which can help unlock what are children's internal motivations and learning styles. We can use them to help us better support their development.

How to support repeated play patterns...

Having identified and named the schema, Mae's key person began to review the resources in the room so that her schema-driven behaviours could be managed and supported.

She made:

- dens
- boxes inside boxes, including a Russian doll
- hiding 'treasures' inside under cushions and mats
- cardboard boxes to climb into

She planned a range of activities all with containers or enclosures - craft, music, movement, small world play. Mae used the farm set to sort the animals into pens and squeeze them into barns.

As she did, Mae was learning about volume and capacity – which barn was big enough for the cows? The possibilities were endless, and she progressed across every area of development.

In the audio, Jo talks about how she had only recently noticed her daughter's *positioning* schema after she had been making a model with her dad (see example).



Schemas and windows of opportunity... the difference

Schemas are NOT the same as windows of opportunity (audio #2). A dominant schema is more of a constant thread through someone's life... whereas windows of opportunities are transient, periods of time that children pass through in their early years.

Carers who choose to get to know their child's intrinsic motivations, will find both vital tools.



Recognising which ‘window’ a young child is passing through at any given time means the adult can support **what** the child is intrinsically motivated to practise. Children will absorb as much as their environment allows whilst passing through them.

Understanding their dominant **schema** means that the adult is equipped to know **how** their child(ren) will learn best. Using BOTH tools help the adult to work with the child, minimising power struggles and optimising their development.

Marc wanted to plan meaningful activities for a group of children. He knew that several of them were especially sensitive to colour (a Window on Senses). He decided to consider their differing schemas and so that children with different schemas could explore colour in schema-related ways:

Trajectory	Mixing colour shades to paint in stripes Outdoor easel in the rain
Rotation	Colour wheel Colour spinners
Enveloping	Symmetry painting Covering objects with coloured translucent voiles
Enclosure/containment	Colour mixing food dyes in jars Sorting colours into sets
Transporting	Using basters and pipettes to add colour Straws, colour and water
Positioning/orientation	Grading colour cards Positioning rainbow colours
Connecting	Texture printing Matching objects to colours
Transforming	Coloured iron filings moved with a magnet Marble painting

Managing undesirable schema-driven behaviour

It is important to understand that young children’s schemas are morally neutral.

Abe’s unacceptable behaviour was not changed through Gemma’s and Miriam’s pleas, words, and nags! His behaviour only changed after they noticed his repeated patterns of behaviour and provided him with activities that gave his schema a suitable outlet.

The same behaviour became acceptable in a different context. Children can be deflected from unacceptable actions by simply...



Changing the Environment, NOT the Child

Together, the attention of both adult and child is now re-directed to something positive resulting in exploring together and enjoying new discoveries.

Share with other carers...

In our experience, sharing our understanding of schemas with parents and carers is relatively simple... Often the repeated behaviours are irritating for adults, so sharing this perspective is welcomed as together we begin to reinterpret their child's (irritating) repeatable behaviours. By sharing the schema 'key' and celebrating the positive, all carers, practitioners and parents can work as allies to support their child(ren).

Practise a little...

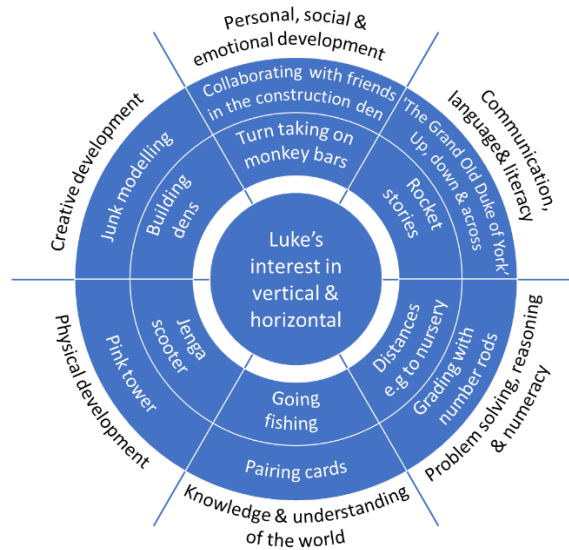
Below is **Luke's Possible Lines of Direction**. He has a trajectory schema and it shows both his setting and parents understand **how** he learns. Why not make one that best fits your child's schema?

Brainstorm more schema-related activities with someone else who knows your child well.

Complete your own PLOD (Whalley, 2009) for this child.

Then identify which Window of Opportunity they are currently in (**what** the child is driven to practise - NOW).

Share your ideas with colleagues & carers. If in a setting, include these shared ideas into your planned 'next steps' for your child.



CELEBRATE & SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OTHERS ON THE MEMBERS FORUM!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones &

Delving a little Deeper

See website for details.

A Little further reading...

Arnold, C., 2010, *Understanding Schemas and Emotions in Early Childhood*, Sage Publications Ltd., London

Louis, S., Beswick, C., Magraw, L., Hayes, L., 2010, '**Again, Again**', A&C Black Publishers Ltd., London

Whalley, M., 2017, (3rd edition), *Involving Parents in their Children's Learning*, Sage Publications Ltd., London