

Developing practice

To develop our understanding of how to teach pattern, we first increased our subject knowledge of pattern with the recognition that it is not just about repeating colours. Pattern is everywhere, including crucially in the natural environment, and includes anything that follows a predictable sequence (regularity or rule).

We researched ideas for pattern teaching and found an article written by Nicole Weinstein for Nursery World.co.uk called 'Enabling Environments: Boom, bang, boom', back in May 2014.

Initially we introduced pattern through music, particularly sound and body patterns that could take place quickly at transition points during the day, as well as at opportune times during carpet sessions. For example, clap your hands and tap your head repeated (AB pattern). The children would begin by joining in, then carrying on whilst the adult stops and then creating their own pattern for the other children to copy. As practitioners we modelled the 'unit of repeat' for the children and some became able at identifying it themselves.

In the environment we introduced pattern stations across EYFS 1 and 2 where children could see a range of pattern examples, have their work displayed and use a range of open ended materials during continuous provision (*right*). The resources included natural objects such as pinecones, stones, feathers and conkers etc. as well as resources such as pattern blocks (seen in picture, *right*) and Cuisenaire rods. We found it worked best to introduce resources in stages so that their use could be modelled. We also found giving the children a 'space' to create pattern (such as mats of different shapes and sizes) was also important to help children to contain their patterns (circle mat used, *right*).



Importantly, pattern links well with other curriculum areas and this was something we wanted to exploit further. It has always been there in our teaching but we have made more of an effort to highlight patterns to children in both the language and structure of rhymes and stories. Traditional tales such as 'The Enormous Turnip' and 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' as well as modern classics such as 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' by Michael Rosen were used alongside story maps to further highlight the pattern visually.

Impact

The impact upon the children was that they began to identify pattern indoors and outdoors where they hadn't necessarily brought this to the adults' attention before. They made their own patterns in interesting and creative ways. We found our children particularly liked making cyclical (closed loop) patterns (examples pictured, *right*). They have also improved in their ability to identify patterns in amounts (subitising), such as dots on a dice or card and the value of numicon plates (picture, *right*).



Key message

The most important thing we learned about pattern was that pattern is everywhere and it can be exploited in a variety of ways. It is important in the early years setting that all staff are on board and aware of how they can support children to notice a pattern and support children who choose to make a pattern. Although the area of pattern often takes a backseat to teaching literacy skills and the counting aspect of maths, it is actually crucial to children's development in these areas.

