



Schema: is the technical term for play urges. You know, when you ask your child to stop jumping on the couch and they look at you and keep doing it! It's not necessarily that they are defying you but that the urge to jump is just too great. They continue to look at you as you are their safety net. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule and sometimes they know that their parents don't want them to do something, but they just can't help themselves.

Maybe you have gone for a walk and your children are so engrossed in the drain down the road, posting sticks that your suggestion to keep moving feels like it has fallen on deaf ears...for the 10th time. They are acting out the schema of posting and understanding the schema called elements – more on those shortly.

What I have found is that the more parents and teachers understand what these schema or urges are, the less battles there are. Why? Because when you can recognise what the urge is that they are following, you can either leave them to it, redirect it, suggest alternatives or provide other ways for them to play out that urge. For example, do you sometimes find stones, leaves, twigs, nuts etc... inside your children's pockets? Gathering/Collecting is one of the urges that children love to follow. My youngest is very into that now, so I tend to bring a bag with us to places we go so she can put her collections in the bag.

Why is it important for them to follow these urges? In simple terms, they are signs of brain development. They are the building blocks of the brain and by following these urges children are making connections in their brains to help with their learning and development. Enabling children to follow or play out these schema means you are essentially helping their brain to develop into the best brain it can be. The opposite is also true.

The more we know about them, the more we can recognise and support their play urges which in turn helps support their development.

There are many opportunities for schema to play out in an outdoor setting. I feel that schema link well to the concept of child led play as essentially when children are leading their play, there will most likely be a schema in there somewhere. Nature Play is an ideal opportunity for children to play out their urges and develop their brains.

Here is a list of 20 Schema with a brief description of what that might look like and ways they can be played out.

Enclosure -getting inside something e.g. huts, boxes, shelters, bags, washing baskets OR eggs in carton, making pens for animals,

Gathering/collecting – Gathering items of interest or starting collections with those things e.g. pebbles, stones, shells, sticks, pinecones, leaves. Sometimes there is 'Indian giving' involved (giving a stone to you and then taking it back)

Transporting – carrying what you have collected to another place or moving something from one place to another. E.g. trolley, wheelbarrow, basket, bag, pocket, bucket, push chair

Deconstruction – Taking something apart, knocking it down, wrecking it. E.g. blocks, Duplo or Lego, stones, tee pee huts, piles of leaves



Construction – Putting something together, constructing a model / 3D model. E.g. using clay, sand, dirt, sticks, stones, branches, cones, leaves, pine needles, plywood, nails, planks of wood, tarpaulins, blankets, sheets, pellets

Enveloping / Covering / Burying – Making something disappear or put something under something. E.g. using leaves, soil, sand, sticks, stones, sheets, linen, bedding, paper, cello tape. Use a spade for partial burials

Families – Creating families with people or other items that represent families. E.g. people, dolls, stones, sticks, animals, pillows, blocks, Lego

Posting – Putting something in a space or hole (develops spatial intelligence). E.g. balls, blocks, toy animals, paper in a slot, clothes in a basket, pipe cleaners in a colander, cups, cylinder, acorns into a tree

Trajectory – Throwing something, dropping something, planned or unplanned. Balls, stones, sticks, sand, dirt, leaves, cones, acorns, soft balls, bulls' eye, self (climbing up and jumping). Perspex by sandpit can be useful for throwing sand

Climbing – leaving the ground using hands and feet to pull up. E.g. small platforms, steppingstones, logs, stumps. Crawlers – cushions, pillows, low platforms. Have furniture that is stable, and you are ok about it being climbed on

Jumping – using legs to bend down and push off the ground into the air. Have safe landing areas inside and out where they can test their abilities

Wrestling – Tumbling on the ground in close body contact with one or more people

Running and Chasing – Moving legs fast where both feet end up off the ground. Running after another person to catch them. Some animals play chase for fun

Tug of War – the act of pulling on something while one or more people pull on the other end. Learning to stand their ground using personal power which is critical for wellbeing

Transforming – The art of changing something in form, nature or appearance. E.g. water, soil, sand, stones, leaves, flour/water/salt/yeast, bread to toast, wool into socks. Use real world projects

Orientation – The act of looking at things from a different body perspective. E.g. baby lying, rolling, tummy time, sitting. Child lying, back, side, hanging, over shoulder, up high, dangling, crawling backwards. Can evolve into an intellectual mental attribute

Rotating – The act of turning around as a person or an object. E.g. spinning in a circle on polished floors. Spinning grows brain connections and it alters the way we feel (meditative)

Balancing – establishing a relationship to gravity by oneself or with an object. Babies get a strong core by kicking and rolling. It's essential to crawl, walk, run, jump, hop, skip, climb, balance on edges, hop over stones. Objects like blocks, stones, boxes

Patterning – arranging things in patterns, making patterns. Play unfolds the patterns of intelligence. E.g. decorating sandcastle, sorting, organising, classifying by colour, shape, size, kind, number



Element play – Playing with water, earth, air and fire. Urge to poke a stick in a fire. Fire drum, camping stove, BBQ. Water – watering plants, hoses, water pump, water wall, cleaning, dishes, sink, puddles, shallow stone water courses. Earth – mud pits, gardening, sandpit. Air – swings, jungle gym, kites, planes.

Reference: <http://www.nature-play.co.uk/blog/schemas-in-childrens-play>

Reference: The Sacred Urge to Play by Penelope Brownlee

Reference: <http://www.flyingstart.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Schema.pdf>

Schemata were introduced into psychology and education through the work of the British psychologist **Sir Frederic Bartlett** (1886–1969).

Loose Parts Play

Loose parts facilitate communication and negotiation skills when added to an outdoor space (Maxwell, Mitchell and Evans, 2008). Benefits of playing with loose parts include increasing levels of creative and imaginative play, children play co-operatively and socialise more, and children are physically more active. (Hyndman, Benson, Ullah and Telford, 2014)

In **play, loose parts** are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials. **Loose parts** can be natural or synthetic.

Loose Parts Brainstorm:

Risky Play – 8 Elements

- Great heights
- Rapid speeds
- Dangerous tools
- Dangerous elements
- Rough and tumble
- Disappearing/getting lost
- Vicarious
- Impact

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Learning injuries and life altering injuries

There is a difference between life altering injuries and learning injuries. We are trying to prevent the life altering injuries. Scratches, bruises, cuts, bumps and even some broken bones fall under learning injuries.

Risk Profile

When looking at our own risk profile we are considering if we are more of a risk taker or more risk adverse. It is a continuum so we can sit anywhere along the continuum and it can change depending on the situation.

Being aware of our risk profile is important as it can have an impact on the children we work with. For example, if you are more of a risk taker, the children may engage in activities that put them more at risk of significant harm. If you are more risk adverse, the children can become restricted in their activities and not able to develop themselves due to the restrictions.

Being able to identify what your risk profile is and the impact it has on the children you work with is a wonderful skill to have. Sometimes that might mean keeping quiet and just watching and other times that might be questioning the risks that are present and stepping in more.

Risk adverse

Risk Taker





What Schema, Loose Parts and Risky Play are available?

What's missing?

Other Questions:

- What would make it more interesting for children's play?
- Are different skill levels catered for?
- What do different ages need?



Things to think about:

- What are the similarities between your site and this one?
- What are the differences?
- What could you adapt to do on your site?
- How can you use what you like here in your own setting?
- What do you need to do at your site to make it happen?
- What are the barriers and how do you more through or around those?

Things to find or do

- Find a little hide away
- Find a hidden walk
- Find and/or balance on a log
- Find something to jump off
- Find something to swing from
- Collect 5 natural treasures
- Throw something to make a splash
- Find something to bury
- Run across the field with your arms stretched out
- Go for a barefoot walk
- Get to know a leaf or a stick
- Hug a tree
- Make a special wand
- Play with a stick
- Find something to construct with and make a mini 'construction'
- Make a mud pie
- Create an mandala
- Make a boat that floats
- Make a basket out of natural resources
- Make a fishing rod
- Make a nest
- Collect some hard loose parts and try and balance them on top of one another