

Schemas in Areas of Play

Schemas are a way of talking and thinking about patterns in children's thinking and play that help us understand our children's passions better. We at Wilton Playcentre (Wellington Association) talk about schemas to help us deliver Te Whaariki more easily: schemas can be difficult to see; a child can demonstrate one, or several, or no schemas at a particular time. But we find schemas help us to interact with our children, to have engaging and sustained conversations about the ideas they might be exploring, and to support their exploration of their ideas by supplying a variety of activities that might be relevant, and by feeding in appropriate language and questions to support their thinking. I think schemas are extremely useful because children's passions are what drives them to become most deeply engaged and deep engagement is what we need to identify in order to support and scaffold children's learning most effectively.

Reference: Harper, Susan "Schemas in Areas of Play" first published as pages 18 and 19 in the Playcentre Journal Issue 121: Spring 2004. Ministry of Education Crown Copyright as Wilton Playcentre was a Centre of Innovation at the time.

<i>If a child is passionately interested in items in this column:</i>	They may well be exploring this schema:	<i>And so they might want to use these areas of play in the following ways:</i>							<i>And here are some problems you may have.</i>
		Blocks, Puzzles Manipulatives	Storytelling Dramatic	Carpentry Junk Collage	Paint Finger-paint	Physically Active, Music and Movement	Playdough Clay Cooking	Sand Water	
Picking things up, moving them, and putting them down or dumping them. Perhaps using pram, bag, basket, truck or wheelbarrow. Usually has full hands	Transporting	Train set, vehicles, moving the materials in vehicles, sometimes dumping instead of unloading.	Shopping with loaded bag or trolley. Journeys, moving house, wheelbarrows, bags, pockets, suitcases, pushchairs, picnics, large shoes on feet.	Moving items from e.g. shelves to table. Pulleys, building sites with wheelbarrows and tool aprons. (safety issue: transporting tools).	Work may portray transporting. Carrying paint pots in carrier.	Moving things, self or others in wheelbarrows, prams, trolleys. Carrying things, moving big things. Helping get equipment out. Wheels on the bus.	Moving playdough from place to place in toy kitchen or to somewhere else in the centre.	Wheelbarrows, moving sand. Buckets, containers and jugs for moving water, watering plants around the place.	Lost objects. Moving things to inappropriate areas, need places to take stuff (e.g. sand, water, paint, finger-paint, tools) to. Picking up yucky things in order to move them. Dumping.
Materials which change shape, colour, consistency. Nothing stays clean.	Transforming	Inventing different ways of using the materials.	Dressing up, taking on roles of animals or imaginary characters, wearing masks and wigs, face painting.	Gluing, sticking, painting constructs.	Paint and colour mixing. Painting self. Painting dye over wax crayon.	Pretending to be e.g. animals by changing gait, posture etc. Window cleaning, washing down messy play tables.	Making dough. Clay hardening. Most cooking involves transformation.	Wetting, freezing and melting. Adding colours to water, sand and water to each other, smoothing and raking sand. Making froth and bubbles.	Mucky messes and other adults disapproving of you allowing such mucky messes, changing clothes frequently.
Horizontal, vertical and diagonal movement of things and of self. Things fly through the air, child moves at a run.	Trajectory	Building and knocking down. Mobilo ladders. Marble runs, garage ramps, angled planks. Pushing cars off tables.	Fire engines hose + ladders, spaceships, submarines, window cleaning, aeroplanes, building site, cash register drawers.	Sawing, banging, hammering, and tearing.	Flicking/throwing paint, painting on easels and floor. Energetic fingerpainting. Work may include vertical, horizontal, or diagonal lines.	Climbing, slides, swings, trolleys, throwing, kicking balls, stepping up and down, lying flat, rolling, ramps, sloping walls, trikes, waterslide.	Rolling pin, banging, hammering, poking, chopping, mashing, pouring, sprinkling.	Knocking sand castles down, digging, ramps, slides. Squirting, pouring, sprinkling, lading, tubes, sink or float, pipe systems, hoses popular.	Inappropriate biffing e.g. hard objects, things that splat, dinner. Vigorously swooshing a prepared activity off a table.
Things that turn, loves wheels and/or balls. Exploring curved lines, loves circles.	Rotation and Circularity	Cogs, wheeled vehicles, helicopters, screw tops, winding and unwinding, turning keys in locks. Train track in a circle.	Pretending to be or be in washing machines and dryers.	Taps, screw tops, wheels, cogs, drills, screwdrivers.	Moving hands in circles in fingerpaint, rollers, rolling painty balls. Making spirals, circles, faces.	Whirling, tops, dancing, hoops, Ring-a-ring-a-rosy. Turning a parachute. Moving in circles, windmill arms, riding trolleys and trikes in circles.	Rolling out. Pastry wheels, mixing, stirring, whisking, a blender. Egg beaters.	Water wheels, wheeled vehicles. Cement mixers.	Turning dials (heaters, clock hands, stereo volume, toaster knobs).
Surrounds things. Likes getting inside a defined area e.g. a block building, tyre or barrel. Gets into boxes. Covers completely, wraps up. Hides. Gets into boxes and closes lids.	Enclosure and Enveloping	Wooden blocks make enclosures for self or objects; houses, cages etc. Animals in fields, dolls- house, Lego boundary wall on base plate, Russian dolls, inset jigsaws, posting boxes.	Dressing up in face-paint, layers of clothes, bags, and hats. Hiding in caves, beds for dolls and self. Getting under piles of clothes, blankets or cushions. Pretend parcels, pregnancies, buried treasure.	Toys in boxes. Wrapping paper around objects. Layers of collage. Papier mache	Frames pictures, covers painting completely with paint, covers name up. Paint on self, toys, walls. Face-paint.	Dressing up, tents, huts, tunnels, barrel swing, parachutes.	Playdough in or over toys. Wrapping clay round stones, making clay caves. Peas in pod, eggs, onion, samosas, icing, spreading, buttering. Food in packets.	Filling containers, including pliable ones e.g. balloons. Tea sets. Burying things, holes, dump trucks, cement mixers. Volcanoes.	Lost and hidden objects. Taking bags everywhere. Wearing too many layers.
Joining things together. Ties things up.	Connecting	Train tracks, engines and trucks, Mobilo, Meccano, Lego, jigsaw puzzles.	Human train, holding hands, tying people up with dramatic play rationale.	Gluing, sewing, sticky tape, staples, string etc. ties things up. Paper chains, beading.	Connecting patches of colour. Using lines to connect parts of the picture.	Ring-a-ring-a-rosy, follow the leader, Conga lines, Dem Bones.	Gathering dough into bigger lumps. Joining bits of clay with toothpicks.	Connecting hose to tap, joining tubes or pipes to make a watercourse.	Ties things up, trip wires, knots, shoelaces.
Opposite: Takes things to pieces and/or scatters the parts.	Disconnecting	Building and knocking down towers. Spreading out Duplo, Lego, Mobilo.	Undressing: undoing shoes, unbuttoning, unzipping.	Cutting up. Tearing. Taking old appliances to pieces.		Spreading or scattering things.	Cutting playdough and clay. Pulling mandarins to pieces. Rubbing butter into flour.	Smashing ice, sand castles.	Emptying out tidied collections. Taking working appliances to pieces.