



Jordan has fun rolling in the play tunnel in the nursery grounds, wondering whether it's the world outside or his body that is spinning around.

He enjoys the challenge of pushing the tyres around and joining in games with the other children, contributing another tyre for the play.

PRACTICE IN PICTURES

# In a spin

Tyres are perfect open-ended resources and link well to children's schemas, as *Anne O'Connor* observes

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SIREN FILMS

Three-year-old Jordan is playing outdoors at nursery. He enjoys rolling around in the tunnel, watching the world spin by as he rotates his whole body over and over. Then he moves to play with the tyres. They are big and heavy but he soon has them under control.

There are older boys playing there too and he joins in with their game. The tyres become motorbikes and they 'drive' them around. When another child takes Jordan's tyre from him, he is at first perturbed, but he knows where there are more tyres and quickly resumes his play by going off to get himself another one.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

Jordan appears to have a particular interest in rotation. Not only does he like playing with things that go round and round, like the tyres, but he is

also interested in experiencing rotation physically, using his whole body.

Rotation is very important for the development of the vestibular system in a child's brain. Rolling over and over again inside the tunnel encourages Jordan's brain to connect with his eyes to interpret what he is seeing in relation to both his sense of body movement and his position. Is it the world outside the tunnel that's moving, or is it himself?

The sensations of movement and gravity are interacting with the messages that Jordan's brain is receiving from all his muscles and joints, particularly those from his eyes and neck, as he rolls around in the tunnel. These muscles are really important in helping to organise the vestibular system, because through such activities as spinning and rolling, the muscles learn how to compensate for the movement of head and body.



**FURTHER INFORMATION**

The stills are taken from Siren Films 'Two Year Olds Outdoors – Play, Learning and Development'. For more information, visit Siren Films at [www.sirenfilm.co.uk](http://www.sirenfilm.co.uk) or call 0191 232 7900

Young children seem to be instinctively drawn to activities that help build the vestibular system. Providing space and the stimulus for children to roll and spin playfully in ways that are comfortable to them is an important part of our role as practitioners. We know it's fun; we also know it's good for brain building. Knowing a child well and being attuned to their comfort levels and experience allows us to provide the right kinds of stimulus, and to assess the level of risk appropriate for an individual child.

2 Jordan displays his interest in rotation in other ways too – in his enthusiasm for the tyres and his pretend play about motorbikes. This would suggest that, in common with a lot of children, Jordan has a schematic interest in rotation.

Professor Tina Bruce describes schemas as 'integrated, co-ordinated networks of behaviour through which children gain access to knowledge and understanding, and sort out their ideas, feelings and relationships. They are part of the way the child's brain is wired' (Bruce 2005).

In 'All About... supporting schemas' (*Nursery World*, 2 March 2011), Stella Louis explains how schemas support children's learning. 'Children learn to do an action, which they are interested in repeating again and again,' she writes. 'Through this repetition, children gain the ability to gather and recall information, to organise and process their behaviour and thoughts, and so gain knowledge and understanding of many basic concepts and the world around them.'

As Jordan plays with the tyre, rolling it along, he is also pretending that his tyre has become his motorbike. As well as operating at a sensorimotor level (engaging all his senses and gross motor skills), the imaginary game of motorbikes stimulated by the tyre provides evidence of the schema functioning at a symbolic level too.

3 Tyres are a really useful resource outdoors, and are very popular with children. They are heavy to manipulate and move around by Jordan and his friends, who have to use all their muscles and a degree of skill to get them to do what they want.

In the film notes accompanying

'Two-Year-Olds Outdoors', Jan White describes how playing with the heavy tyres is actually good practice for pre-writing skills. 'Look closely at his hands and arms as he manipulates the tyres and consider how this play is developing feeling, strength and control in his fingers, hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and torso,' she notes. 'All these will be necessary for comfortable control and success with the use of pencils in later writing activity.'

4 When another boy takes his tyre, Jordan is mildly put out, but he handles the situation in a calm and resourceful way.

Jordan knows there are more tyres available and he knows where to find them. Sharing is a high-level skill at this age, and restricted resources can get in the way of sustained imaginative and collaborative play.

Tyres have lots of play potential and are usually fairly easy to come by. No matter how many you have, what is important is that settings, as in this one here, have an accessible place to store them. The children know where to find the tyres and, just as importantly, they know where to put them back at the end of the day.

Gathering up the tyres from around the outdoor area (and maybe even inside) and counting them all back in again as they are returned to their 'home' is a valuable part of the play experience. It also reinforces the value of resources – even things like tyres or milk crates that may have



**REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING**

- Bruce, Tina (2005) *Early Childhood Education* (Hodder Arnold)
- White, Jan (2010) Film Notes, 'Two-Year-Olds Outdoors – Play, Learning and Development'
- 'All about... schemas' by Tina Bruce (*Nursery World*, 6 June 2002)
- 'All about... supporting schemas' by Stella Louis (*Nursery World*, 2 March 2011; [www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/1057621](http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/1057621))
- Anne O'Connor and Anna Daly, 'In the swing' (Physical Development, Part 4, *Nursery World*, 15 January 2009; [www.nurseryworld.co.uk/go/physicaldevelopment/](http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/go/physicaldevelopment/))

been donated and are easily replaceable need to be treated with respect.

Positive early experiences in caring for equipment are enormously valuable. They will become even more so as settings find themselves operating on limited budgets. Creatively using materials that would otherwise be discarded is an equally important message that we need to hand on to this generation of children as our society ultimately becomes more environmentally aware.

5 Just like all other early years resources, tyres do need to be checked to ensure that they are safe for children to use.

Jan White recommends checking them thoroughly when you first get them, and cleaning them well. They will have to be stored somewhere dry (as in this setting where they are under the decking). This is to avoid water collecting in the inside rim – stagnant water may cause a health hazard. Add them to the list of equipment you check daily and wash them down weekly both inside and out (White, 2005). ■



**LINKS TO THE EYFS**

- UC 1.1 Child Development
- PR 2.3. Supporting Learning
- EE 3.2 Supporting Every Child
- L&D 4.1 Play and Exploration
- L&D 4.2 Active Learning