



## **Something made me do it**

Have you ever had to urge to do something, something that your sensible rational cognitive brain tells you is entirely inappropriate for someone your age, but you go ahead and do it anyway because you just have to? Can't think of anything? What about throwing leaves, stones, sand or acorns for the hell of it, or when you are swimming, filling your mouth up with water and spitting it as far as you can? Singing in the supermarket? Buying yet another pair of shoes not because you need them but because you collect them? Repegging-the-washing-when-someone-has-pegged-it-up-and-even-though-it-will-dry-the-way-they-did-it-you-can't-stand-their-idea-of-order? Any one of these earn a tick from you? Good. You are alive and well, still responding to the deep urges wanting to be expressed through you.

### **The urge**

Just as trees have the 'urge' to send their roots downward and their branches to the places where leaves can access the most sun, human beings have non-volitional urges which drive the growth and development of the mind-brain-body. Among the many human urges are urges which drive the **play** of humans, and these urges are universal. It doesn't matter if the stork puts you down in Tierra del Fuego, Aotearoa-New Zealand or Baffin Island; these same urges will drive your developmental play because they are a part of being human. Technically these play urges have been called "schema" or "threads of learning". We want to call them "urges" because there is the sense of getting out of the head and deep into the viscera, from whence these visceral messages more likely emerge: gut feelings, gut knowings, gut promptings.

### **It feels good**

If you are aware that you are not a centipede, if you own enough shoes for a centipede and yet **still** you buy shoes, you will know that it is not always easy to do the logical-rational when you know you'll get a buzz in the pleasure centre of your brain doing the illogical. How much more tricky must it be for children to resist urges coming through them, even when they are aware that actioning the urge is not a such a great idea in the circumstances? Indeed, actioning the urge could land them in deep trouble - but still the urge wins out. Boom! They throw the block and it hits another child on the head. "Something made me do it."

### **Plan for the expected**

It doesn't really matter to us what makes us do it, but it does matter that we are aware of what it is we are likely to do. I say 'we' because although we need to know about urges to set up a more successful early childhood programme suited to the design of human beings, we still have many of the urges alive and well in us. Not too many adults go to the beach

and return home without a collection of treasures. The ancient **collecting urge** lives on in most of us, even though these days it is rarely about ensuring our survival as it once was for our ancestors. The urge every child has to make huts lives on in adults when we play huts in camper vans and caravans. Both are just glorified huts on wheels. So lets start with these two urges.

### **Gathering**

Gathering is an urge that begins before the first birthday, and by that birthday children can 'gather into sets' objects which have up to three common properties from their way of viewing things. This means that the so-called 'heuristic baskets'\* (with just one or two of an object - say one shell, one pinecone, one turned wooden rattle etc.), need to be augmented with containers of same objects aplenty. There could be a willow basket of small pine cones, a kete of pumice stones, another kete of flat beach stones, a clear plastic container of banksia cones, a wooden bowl of conkers ...\*\* Of course it is best when the children themselves gather the resources, that goes without saying, but in the meantime you can spirit beautiful objects into the environment until you get gathering expeditions underway.

In the past when we in early childhood have not provided for this urge, the children have gone ahead and done it anyway. Every early childhood teacher knows that the first place to look for missing puzzle pieces is in the handbags in the family corner. That brings us to the other half of gathering; something to gather your treasures into. Hands bags, baskets, eco cloth bags, buckets. As long as there is enough treasure and there are enough containers to gather the treasure into you, will see quality play as the children express this urge.

### **Hut making**

Hut making probably has its genesis in the hiding-enclosure urge. Infants love to secret themselves into small spaces and watch the world from there. As they grow older, the emphasis shifts to the making of these spaces, and so we provide what children need to make their huts. We are all familiar with the indoor 'blanket and sheet hut', and it gives us clues on what to provide. Large baskets with rolled fabric pieces, old saris, polythene, shade cloth ... \*\* Add in some rope, big pegs, some poles ... deliver a collection of cartons, and hut making will begin in earnest. The thing you will notice is that urges combine and the play becomes deeper and richer with the addition of imagination and more urges.

### **Jumping and running**

All children have the urge to jump and run once they get up on their two feet and master that incredible balancing act. When you and I were children, even though we knew we

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\* The word 'heuristic' simply means "allowing pupils to learn for themselves, [learning] obtained by exploration of possibilities rather than by following set rules." Collins English Dictionary. Using this definition, most of our baskets and play is heuristic. I do not favour using these terms in places other than assignments. Exclusive language does just that - excludes those not 'in the know,' for example, most parents.

\*\* Two asterisks means let your imagination run wild, the possibilities are endless.

weren't allowed to, even though we knew we would get into trouble, we still jumped on the beds and the furniture. Urges are mighty powerful. Too many children's spaces have nothing to jump on and nothing to jump off - so expect them to jump on your library couch, your feeding chair, the mattresses...\*\* They are very resourceful, they will find somewhere appropriate for jumping even if you don't agree about it's appropriateness. On the other hand, you could plan for jumping. How hard would that be?



### Construction and deconstruction

Hut making and hut dismantling fits this urge, and so does piling up the sand, the blocks, the cushions, the reels ...\*\* and pushing them all over again. Plan for piling and pushing, it is going to happen anyway. A concern that I have is that centres buy a little bit of this construction set, a little bit of that construction system, a little bit of this novel-stick-together system, and "Oh look! We haven't got this one. Let's buy the starter set of this one." The result is a mishmash of expensive, incompatible systems, and not enough of any one system to be able to sustain **quality construction**. Decide what system (or systems) you will go for then get a decent amount. My pick would be oiled wooden multiple unit blocks, at least two full sets, and Lego. As much Lego as you can afford without robbing a bank. I have been watching young children play for almost forty years now and these two systems are unparalleled in their play opportunities and benefits for children, in my opinion.

### Transporting

Budding carriers and carters need something to transport their loads with besides baskets and backpacks. Their urges are catered for when you supply generic wheeled vehicles, all sizes, but some large enough to transport themselves from A to B, as well as their friends.

This carting urge occupies children for hours on end as they transport their collections or construction materials to the settings of their play. They incorporate the urge into the play itself by becoming logging truck drivers and couriers.

### Throwing things

Yes, get used to it, throwing things is an urge that begins near to the first birthday. You can waste your breath telling children “We don’t throw things around here” or you can get real and plan for what is going to happen anyway. There is a major difference when you plan for the urges that impacts on every child: they are not constantly ‘in trouble’ for something that is natural. They have a legal fun outlet for the life force expressing itself through them. “I see you are into throwing, come over here to the balls and the barrel. See how many you can get into the barrel.”

### Climbing

When you think about it, all of physical development is response to the urge to balance in gravity. All the movements from the back are leading to ‘up’. So when you are up on your feet the only way to keep on going up is to climb, and climb they will. Climbing is poorly catered for in most centres - once again, sterile-expensive-commercial-fixed structures abound in most playgrounds. Study these two photos to see what challenge and learning is available when your urges to climb and construct can find expression together.



### Family making

The family making urge is provided for in centres - kind of. There are very few centres where adults understand that imagination is the key ingredient in quality play. In these rare centres adults provide **few props**, and those that they do provide are both **quality** and **‘open ended’** so that they ‘can be anything.’ A family corner set up so that it looks like a Briscoe’s advertisement leaves little room for imaginations to work, let alone grow and

develop. Generations of children have used sticks for cutlery and leaves for plates in their 'family corner huts'. They have used a log section for an oven, and then as the table. They have uses string for a door and acorns for money. Children are ingenious when it comes to imagining and play. In these days of so called 'educational toy' hardsell, what children need more than anything is not a flash toy new stove complete with food-blender. Rather, children desperately need adults who understand the genius of their imaginative play, and who will protect them from the commercial equipment which kills it.

### Circles and spirals

There's an deep urge to do circles and spirals. Circles and spirals are the shape of our blue-print DNA, of our planet, our growth patterns, the movement of Life and the heavens, it the dance of the galaxies. Circles and spirals are big so plan for them. You will see them turn up when artists first take up a crayon. So enamoured are they of this circling shape they will leave their explorations on walls, in library books - anywhere really. Better to get paper for them. Then there is the circling we all did out on the lawn: putting our arms out and going round and round and round - and eventually falling down dizzy. For aeons people have sung and danced circle dances. One song and one dance at a time, we can learn circle dances and dance them with our children. The urge to sing and to dance can be planned for too.

### Urges need expression

There are still more urges which are just as deep as these big urges, but they generally do not take as much room. Many of them are enabled when you provide for the urges covered so far. Think of the child who is in the grip of the **ordering urge**, he will line up all the trucks when he parks up outside the 'garage'. Or the child who lays out all the pipi shells in order of size. Children express the **posting urge** and many a block and felt pen has ended up posted into the reels outside. The **enclosing urge** sees kilometres of sellotape used to parcel up walnut shells and calendula flowers. Farms and zoos are constructed with enclosures for stone tigers, and bark alligators. Then there is the **water urge** that few children can resist, and there would be the **fire urge** too if people were brave enough to cater for it here as they do routinely in the forest kindergartens of the Northern Hemisphere. It's no use going off when someone in the grip of the water urge has the hose going *again*, or someone expressing the fire urge has the matches and a candle in their hut. Just remember, they have the classic defence: "Something made me do it." So how will you plan for it?

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Notes written for the course **Dance with me in the Heart • Level Two**, 2010.

Pennie Brownlee