

Kim noticed that Austin was struggling making the 's' in his name. She sat beside him and showed him how to make an 's' in the air. On another piece of blank paper, she made a large 's' and had him trace it with his fingers, talking him through the orientation. She asked him to make one on his own, then big ones and small ones. As he was still having some hesitation, she made an 's' shape on his back so he could feel it and asked him to make an 's' on the paper. After he had made four or five, she asked him to choose the one he thought was the best (his choice was very close to the model). He then proceeded to write the 's' in his own name.

- **Instruction needs to go beyond the acquisition of isolated skills.** Repeated drill and practice are not effective strategies for instruction especially for young children. Printing letters in isolation does not connect the learning for children. Children need to be able to apply the strategies in the context of meaningful learning - thus write to develop a message. At this point as children are learning that talk can be written down, it is the message that is the priority.

No one teaching method or approach is likely to be effective for all children at all times... Good teachers make instructional decisions based on their knowledge of reading and writing, current research, appropriate expectations, and individual children's strengths and needs.⁹

There are many views about how children should learn to form letters and when this should happen. Educators have a responsibility to advocate for what is developmentally appropriate based on their knowledge of literacy development. As part

of advocating, sharing the information is just as critical.

A parent in the kindergarten class asked the educator why he wasn't teaching the children to print. He answered that they indeed do teach children about making letters but it doesn't look like what the parent might expect. It is part of things they do every day. He answered by sharing what happens in his program.

Thinking It Through

- What activities do I need to set up to develop the fine motor skills of each student?
- Am I providing activities that match the developmental needs of the students?
- What assessment opportunities have I provided for determining the fine motor skills of students?
- Which students require further support?

Health and Safety

Young children are becoming more independent, looking after their own physical needs - going to the toilet, dressing themselves for the most part except when needing help with difficult fasteners, taking care of their own belongings and becoming more responsible in keeping them safe.

They are generally very active and impulsive in their reactions to situations. As they mature, they begin to understand the need for safety and the rationale for some safety procedures such as looking for cars before crossing the street. Sometimes this understanding is a result of personal experiences.

Educators ensure that the classroom and the outdoor playground are safe environments for children. They must ensure that:

- The room is organized and materials are stored in a safe way to avoid children tripping and falling.
- Materials are safe and in good condition e.g., scissors are blunt, plastic containers are used in the water instead of glass containers, damaged wooden blocks have been removed to avoid splinters, wheeled vehicles are operational, and harmful objects have been removed from the playground.
- Routines and rules support a safe environment e.g., wearing safety goggles when working with tools, adults are present with the use of heated appliances, spills are cleaned up to avoid slipping, children stop at the sound or sight of a signal, hats and sunscreen are worn outdoors, and children walk within the classroom and school.
- Supervision is in place for playgrounds especially those areas where children are climbing or hanging from bars and using certain equipment in the gym.
- Emotional safety is also of prime concern. The atmosphere, books that are read, discussions, and rules must all promote inclusion and diversity. Rules may be included, such as no name-calling or putdowns, with modeling and discussion to support understanding.

At this age, children are becoming more aware of safety and the need for safety. They can participate in discussions about:

- the safe use of certain materials such as scissors, electrical appliances;
- safe places to play and use equipment, and when to seek adult help;
- how to recognize potential dangers such as poisons, broken equipment, traffic;
- rules or routines that need to be in place for everyone's safety (cleaning up areas and putting toys away);
- what to do in an emergency (fire drill);
- what to do when they feel unsafe or threatened; and
- why it is important to follow routines and directions.

Benjamin and Elliot are sitting on the child-size picnic table and notice that it wobbles. They call the educator over. She says, "This is not very safe". She involves the children in thinking about the problem. "What does it need to be safe?" The children aren't sure so she says. "Look at it and see what you can find." Benjamin, "I found the problem. A nail is not there. It needs to get some new nails." Elliot, "Look, it needs to get more tightened here. It's very wiggly and making the top wiggly." She asks the children what should be done. They suggest putting a sign on it so others won't sit there and to tell the caretaker. The educator agrees but also suggests moving the table out of the area.

Adapting the Program

For children with special needs, it may be more reassuring to acquaint children with the playground or gym space beforehand so they can anticipate the space and what might happen.

Although young children can be part of discussions and making rules, it must be remembered that they may not always remember and will need frequent reminders e.g., standing clear of swings to avoid injury. They are also enthusiastic, eager, and easily drawn to new and

different situations that may mean safety is not a prime concern.

Safety is an issue on excursions outside of the classroom and if children are riding a bus to and from school. Children need to understand that seat belts must be worn in vehicles, the importance of following the group leader on a trip, and also when crossing the road. As in the school environment, they need to know how to stop and listen not only for directions, but also in case of an emergency or threat.

Secondly, there are routines that support good health within the classroom such as washing hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before and after eating, when coughing and sneezing, and covering their mouth when coughing. The use of visuals and discussion with children underline the importance and the rationale for this particular routine.

Young children learn through play. One way to approach the subject of health is to engage children in the creation of a doctor's office in the dramatic play area. Since the majority of children or their families have had experiences with health care, they have a great deal of personal experience to bring to the play. A visit to a doctor's office, or lab, will boost the children's knowledge and vocabulary. As children engage in role-play and use the materials, educators can listen and watch to assess children's knowledge and use experiences as 'jumping off' points for discussion. *Why do people go to the doctor's? What makes people get sick? When people say you're healthy, what does that mean?* As in all areas, it is useful to listen to the children's questions and follow their lead.

If educators have concerns about health and safety issues, there are avenues to follow. Contacting the school principal and the health and safety educator in the school will provide important feedback.

Nutrition and Young Children

Four and five-year-old children are developing more food preferences. They are recognizing different tastes and as their sense of independence grows they are making choices about food and wanting to choose. Some children's experience with a wide range of foods may be limited so it is important to provide the experience at school, especially with foods rich in nutrients. A goal of any nutritional focus is to begin to support children in making healthy choices in food. Overall, there is a need to connect or show the relationship between good health and healthy eating.

One of the challenges for the kindergarten educator is to make the topic of nutrition relevant and meaningful for young children. Educators only have control over what happens in the classroom not what happens in the home. Home circumstances vary and food choices may be related to economics, cultural preferences, family dynamics, or particular situations.

This is a vulnerable age for developing attitudes toward one's body image. Discussions must not centre around diet and fattening foods, but rather healthy choices.

Knowing that children are concrete learners, the focus on nutrition needs to include hands-on experiences. It is not enough just to have discussions, sing songs and learn poems about nutrition. Children need to be engaged in the planning, preparation, and serving of nutritious food, as much as that is possible in the classroom. For example, when children are involved in simple taste tests of different vegetables and fruit, children learn the food name, can discuss their preferences and learn about the importance of these foods to a healthy diet. An excellent time to talk about food safety, cleanliness and safe use of cutting tools is while preparing food.

Engaging children in planting vegetables creates opportunities for looking at vegetables from seed to plant, and for talking about the edible parts of plants, how they might be used, and why these plants are important nutritionally. Some schools are fortunate to have classroom/school gardens where children can be involved in producing and harvesting food. Using vegetables for cooking, such as making vegetable soup, creates another focal point for discussion about changes in vegetables and how vegetables are used to create different types of food. A visit to a local garden or farm provides an opportunity for children to see where their food comes from, how it grows and learn about choices of food and why those particular plants are grown.

The focus on nutrition goes beyond the experiences in the classroom. It is an issue that affects everyone. It would be beneficial for the school and classroom to communicate with the home about the focus on nutrition and why that is important. Depending on the parent community, information about nutrition may be a focus for a parent meeting or included as part of a meet the educator event (public health personnel may invited to speak). Information might also be included in newsletters home, for example, what we are learning about food and why it is important. As well, nutritious recipes that the children have made could also be included for making at home. As educators communicate with parents, they need to aware of, and sensitive to, cultural and religious practices with certain foods.

The Educator's Role

Biology plays a role in physical development, but so does the environment. In a classroom, it is the educator, the more 'competent' person, that provides the scaffolding in relation to the child's zone of proximal development. These supported

actions provide the conditions for children to achieve success in acquiring certain skills.

Educators establish the climate for learning with their enthusiasm, support, positive, and inclusive approach whether that is inside the classroom or outdoors in the playground. Planned experiences for physical activity, as with other areas, reflect educator goals and values. Inclusive, supportive environments promote children's emotional health and well-being. Children can develop a positive self-concept, develop strategies for coping and for stress, become better able to adapt to change, and can act more independently.

In setting goals, the following ones for physical activity could be:

- a positive attitude to self and physical activity;
- confidence in physical abilities; and
- competency in physical skills.

Although it is commonly believed children automatically develop motor skills as their bodies develop, maturation only means the child will be able to execute most movement skills at a low performance level. Continuous practice and instruction are required if the child's performance level and movement repertoire are to increase.¹⁰

An educator's role is multi-faceted. Educators:

- learn about each child's health, physical development, and abilities;
- engage other adults as necessary and appropriate to provide support for children with physical challenges;
- provide specific feedback to support the development of children's particular skills;
- encourage children's attempts to learn and provide demonstrations as appropriate;
- provide experiences where children can make choices;
- introduce vocabulary associated with children's movements;

- plan experiences and activities where children can be successful, thereby promoting confidence and competence;
- plan experiences and activities to extend children's leaning regarding specific skills;
- comment and question to support children's thinking and problem solving about e.g., position, direction, change.

Children are physically active beings and have an innate need for physical activity. They also need the freedom to explore outside in the fresh air. Time, space, materials, and equipment are important considerations for planning.

Time and Opportunity

Every day, there needs to be a time for physical activity and movement whether that is outdoors, inside in the gym, or in a designated space in the classroom. The schedule of the day is structured with a balance of active and quiet times. Quiet times are important after vigorous exercise so children do not become overtired and over-stimulated.

Children also need time and opportunity to practice and integrate the skills they are learning. In other words, repeated experiences, for

example, kicking a ball to a partner, kicking it through a pathway of cones, kicking it at a target on the wall. Some children will need more time than others to develop the skills.

Space

The classroom organization includes a large uncluttered space for movement activities - enough space to accommodate the number of children in the group. Kindergarten classes also need access to space whether that is in the gym or a designated physical activity room for gross motor activity such as running, skipping. The large space allows for continuity in movements so children can practice their emerging skills and develop strength and endurance.

Space should also accommodate centers that promote fine motor development such as the collage, painting, writing/drawing, puzzles, and building materials.

The classroom may also be able to accommodate a centre or location for exploring and practicing particular physical skills, e.g., throwing beanbags at a target and walking along a pathway either using a thick rope or a safely constructed balance beam.



Materials/Equipment

Materials need to be interesting and challenging so that children can develop skills.

It may be helpful to think of the goals or purposes of the equipment when planning.

Goals / Purpose	Equipment
Locomotor skills and promoting sense of physical accomplishment	Tricycles, scooters, skipping ropes
Eye-hand coordination	Balls of different sizes, bean bags for throwing and catching
Balance and endurance	Skipping ropes, a balance beam, wooden blocks with ropes for walking
Space Awareness	Hoops, chalk lines, cones, or ropes for moving in and out of, around...
Manipulating Objects	Long sticks or light hockey sticks for moving balls within a space or at a target, scoops for catching, light rackets or paddles for striking balls
Co-operation	Parachute (large piece of cloth)



Possible outdoor activities to promote physical activity and develop gross motor skills

Experience	Purpose of Physical Activity
Using a bucket of water and large paintbrushes, children 'paint' the walls, fence, or paths.	– strengthening muscles with large arm movements, developing self-expression and creativity.
Using a parachute or large piece of light cloth, children hold the edge and co-operatively engage in different movements (large movements up and down, shaking and making ripples, bouncing small balls or stuffed animals and keeping them on the parachute or bouncing them off, holding the parachute at waist level and lifting it up so one child can change position while the parachute is up).	– coordinating and controlling body movements, problem-solving, learning about timing and planning and developing co-operation skills.
Using ribbon sticks or making their own using crepe paper, children use the 'ribbons' to create different movements (make it look like a wave, a wriggling snake along the ground, a large wheel going round and round, finding a way to go high). Put the ribbon in the other hand and try the same movements.	– controlling movements, experimenting with timing and rhythm, and developing spatial awareness.
In a snow-covered playground, children play follow the leader, making tracks with different movements. Their partners have to follow the tracks and make the same movements.	– balancing, exploring different movements, using energy.
On a sunny day, play shadow games. Children follow the leader's directions (make your shadow as tall as you can, make it go beside you, make it move quickly/ slowly, make it jump...).	– problem-solving, learning vocabulary, controlling body movements, developing spatial awareness.
Creating simple obstacle courses, children use different skills as they follow the course (running in and around the cones, hopping into the hoops on the ground, balancing along the chalk line, jumping over the ropes on the ground...).	– expending energy and developing strength, developing control of movements and spatial awareness.

Activities to promote fine motor skills include:

Building Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – selecting those with pieces that join together or connect for pinching and grasping. – with pieces that stack for promoting spatial relationships, preciseness, balance, and eye-hand coordination.
Scissors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – child-sized, blunt for safety with a smooth cutting motion. – both right and left handed.
Paintbrushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – large for grasping as children develop finer control. – small for more precise movements.
Pencils, markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – large for easy grasp as fine motor control is developing.
Plasticene, play dough, and clay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – access to all three at different times throughout the year. – for children to pinch, mould, roll, and develop strength and fine muscles.
String and beads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – of various lengths and sizes to promote eye-hand coordination.
Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – large sized for painting and a variety of sizes of blank paper to accommodate large arm movements.
Puzzles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – of various styles with knobs for grasping and lifting out for children developing fine motor control, large pieces for fitting into spaces as spatial awareness is developing, puzzle pieces with one image per piece and puzzles with pieces that have a partial image.

Problem solving

Children are becoming familiar with how their bodies move and how they might control their movements. Educators can support their problem-solving and creativity during these experiences by asking open-ended questions such as *what other way can you make a bridge with your body?* or by using open-ended directions that require interpretation, such as *make a scary statue.*

Developing Language

Movements have specific vocabulary (jump, wiggle, crawl). To interpret directions, children must understand the vocabulary. Adults have a role to play in supplying vocabulary as necessary.

Spatial awareness, an important concept in mathematics also has specific vocabulary (over, beside, high...). Books such as *Rosie’s Walk* or *Going on a Bear Hunt* may be used in combination with the physical activity to provide a context for the vocabulary.