

*Fun with Math:*  
*Counting & One-to-One Correspondence*

10 Activities That Help Children  
Begin to Understand the Meaning of  
Numbers

Children are counting long before it has any meaning to them – before they realize that the numbers *represent* something. As a result of rote memorization, children are often able to recite the sequence of numbers before the age of three. One-to-one correspondence – attaching a number to each object counted – comes much later and must be modeled.

Preschoolers can mark objects as they count them; however, they have trouble keeping track of what they have and have not counted. Kindergartners can usually count at least five objects accurately, eventually learning to count six or more items by touching each item as they count.

One-to-one correspondence is a central component of the understanding of the concept of “number.”

The activities here begin with rote counting, reinforcing the sequence of numbers. We then move on to counting steps taken and more, all of which promotes understanding of one-to-one correspondence.

# Blast Off

This simple activity involves counting backward, but it's appropriate for even the youngest children and can help them advance from rote memorization of numbers to actual comprehension. Because the activity encourages children to move from a *low* to a *high* position, it also provides experience with those quantitative concepts.



Invite the children to squat low, pretending to be a spaceship on its launching pad.

Count backward from 10 to 1, with as much drama as you can muster. When you say, "Blast off!" the children launch themselves upward. Repeat as long as he stays interested!

# Body Parts



This activity matches numbers to body parts, meaning children don't have to count any higher than 10. Because it requires children to identify body parts, the activity also falls under the content area of *science*.

Invite the children to discover and point out the body parts they have two of (eyes, ears, hands, feet, knees, elbows, eyebrows, and so on.) How many body parts can they name? Which parts of the face come only in ones? (Possible answers include the mouth, nose, forehead, and chin.) How many fingers do they have? What else do they have 10 of?

# 1, 2, Buckle My Shoe



Read the nursery rhyme aloud, slowly, inviting the children to act out the lines. The nursery rhyme follows, with the actions below each line in brackets.

*One, two, buckle my shoe;*

[Pretend to fasten shoes.]

*Three, four, shut the door;*

[Pretend to shut a door.]

*Five, six, pick up sticks;*

[Pick up imaginary sticks from the floor.]

*Seven, eight, lay them straight;*

[Pretend to draw straight lines on floor.]

*Nine, ten, a big fat hen.*

[Put hands under arms & cluck!]

# Move Forward



Stand at one side of the room or yard, with the children standing at the opposite end and facing you.

Say a number from 1 to 10 (or to whatever number below that to which the children can count). The children then take that number of steps toward you, counting aloud as they walk.

Eventually, to give the children an opportunity to practice other locomotor (traveling) skills, replace the steps with jumps (two feet), hops (one foot), gallops, or leaps.

# How Many Steps?



Counting begins to go from rote memorization to an understanding of one-to-one correspondence when a child has something fun to count. This activity stimulates their natural curiosity, which gives them a reason to count!

Invite the children to stand on one end of the room or yard. Then encourage them to see how many steps it takes to get to the other side!

Later you can use this as an opportunity to practice other motor skills. Instead of steps, invite the children to discover how many jumps or hops it takes to get from one place to another.

## Count the Claps



Because this is also an active listening experience, it also falls under the heading of *emergent literacy*.

Sit with the children and, without counting aloud, clap your hands a certain number of times (starting with low numbers).

The children then clap out the same number of claps, counting aloud as they do.



# Treasure Hunt

For this activity you'll need several items with a unifying theme; for example, stuffed animals, plastic eggs, or plastic farm animals and a basket or tote bag for each child. Beforehand, hid the items throughout the room.



Tell the children what you've hidden, and let them go in search of them, basket or tote in hand. When a predetermined amount of time has passed (say, 5 minutes), the children bring the items found to the center of the room, where they empty the contents of their bag and counts the items.

You can also play this game outside, bringing the children into the fresh air and sunshine and making it a *science* experience. Just invite the children to discover how many rocks, or fallen leaves, as they can!

# Simon Says

There's no trying to "catch" or eliminate children with this version of Simon Says, which is an active listening (*emergent literacy*) experience as well as a math one.

Arrange the children in two separate lines or circles. Then, as "Simon," challenge the children to perform a certain number of actions. For example:

- Clap two times.
- Take three steps.
- Jump once.
- Count to five.
- Blink twice.



If a child moves without Simon's permission, he or she simply goes from one line or circle to another so continuing practice is possible!

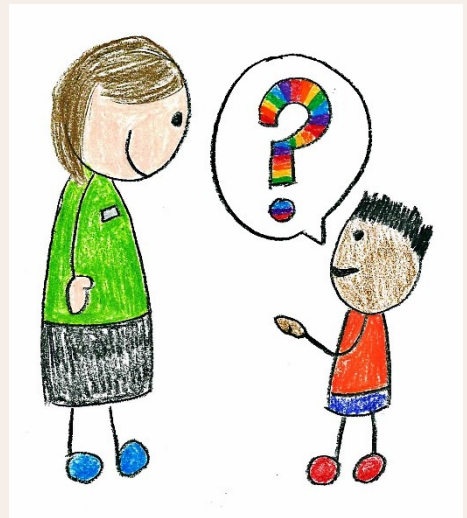
# Mother, May I?

Stand about 20 feet away from the children, facing them. Give them an instruction to take a certain number of a certain kind of movement; for example, "Take 5 steps on tiptoe" or "Take 3 jumps backward."

Before doing as directed, the children must ask, "Mother, may I?"

The game continues in this manner until the children reach you and, if they're willing, you can start all over again!

Later, when the children understands the game, the children can take turns acting as "Mother."



# How Many Parts?

With an activity like this, it's easy to determine whether or not a child may be having trouble with counting. However, because children think differently than we do, we first have to determine how they're counting before we decide they don't understand the concept. For instance, some children will count the foot as five body parts, and some will count the bottom as two!

Invite the children to place a certain number of body parts on the floor. (Only that number of parts should be touching the floor.) Once the children are in position, count aloud the number of parts each has touching the floor.

Repeat the activity, varying the number of body parts and sometimes challenging the children to use the same number but different parts. For example, a challenge to touch the floor with three body parts could result in two feet and a hand, two knees and an elbow, and so on.

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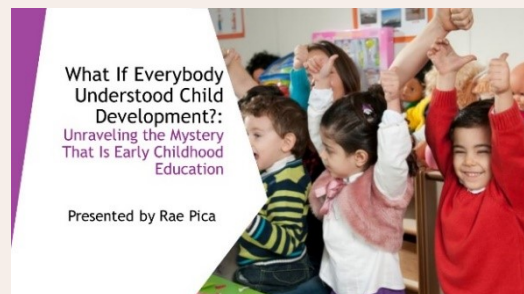
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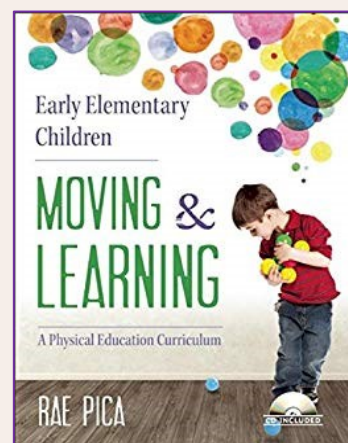
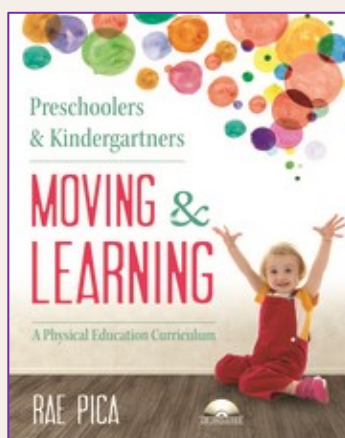
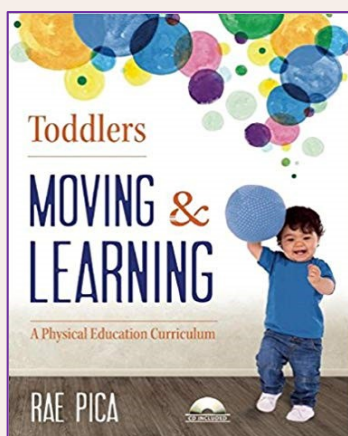
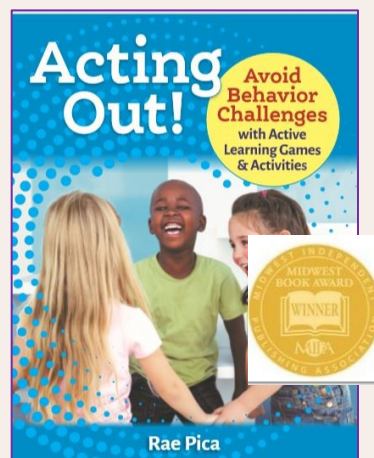
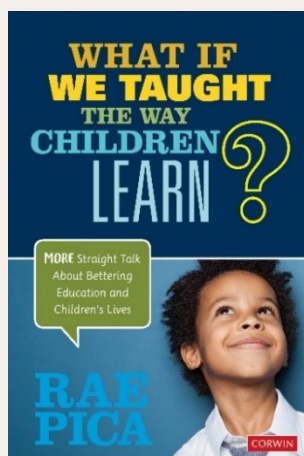
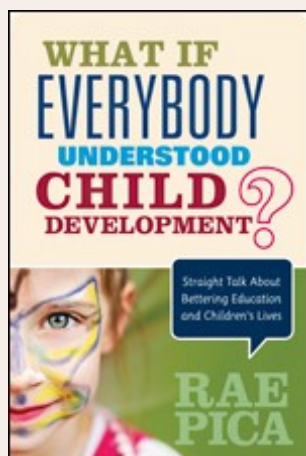


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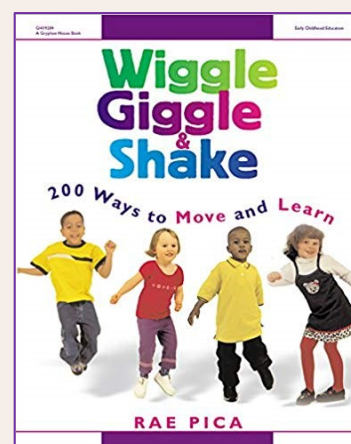
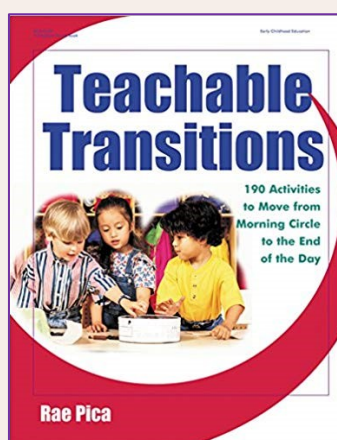
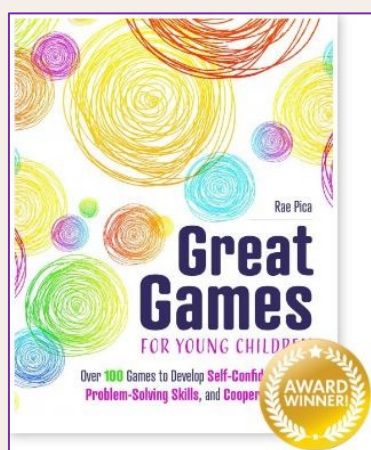
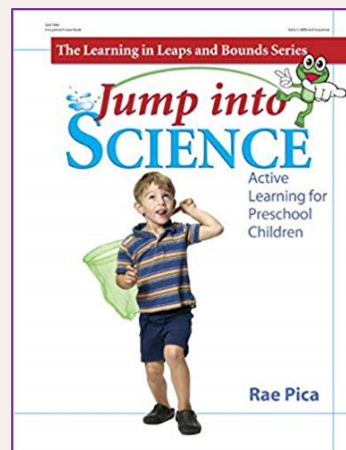
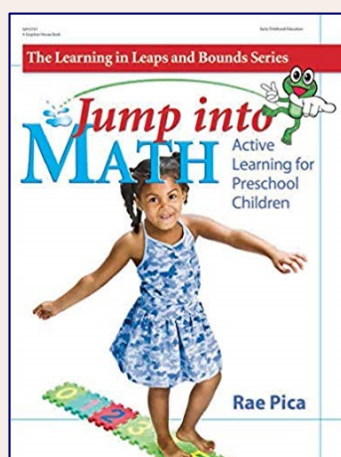
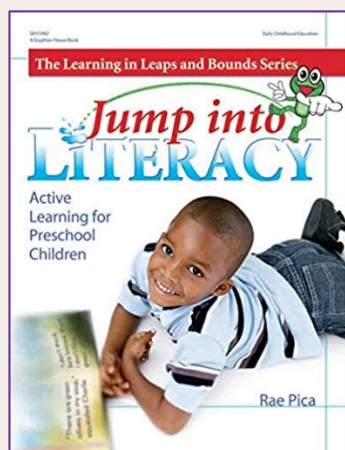


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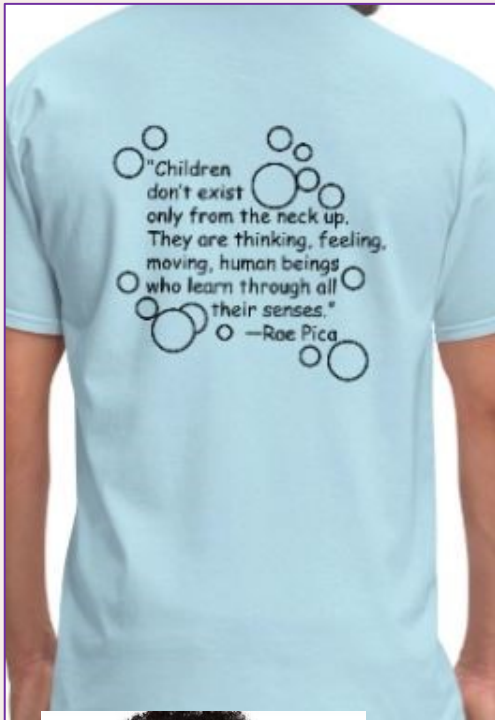
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# RAE PICA



Rae has been an early childhood education consultant since 1980. Dedicated to developing and educating the whole child, she is the author of 22 books, including the text *Experiences in Movement & Music* (in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition), and two of her latest, *What If We Taught the Way Children Learn?* and *Acting Out! Avoid Behavior Challenges with Active Learning Games & Activities*.

Rae is a former adjunct instructor for the University of New Hampshire and is currently a blogger, online course creator, and popular virtual presenter. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, Eric Jensen's Learning Brain Expo, state WIC organizations, education conferences, resource and referral agencies, and schools in 46 states and Canada are among those who have invited Rae to address their groups.

As a consultant, Rae has shared her expertise with such groups as

- ✓ Sesame Street Research Department
- ✓ Head Start Bureau
- ✓ Centers for Disease Control
- ✓ Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*
- ✓ Gymboree
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