

Outdoor Fun!

A young child with curly hair, wearing a yellow jacket and grey pants, is laughing and running in a grassy field. The child is the central focus of the image, with a blurred background of green grass and a path.

10 Activities & Games for
Cognitive,
Social/Emotional, &
Physical Development

There are so many reasons why children should spend as much time outdoors as possible. It's the best place for young children to practice and master emerging physical skills and to experience the pure joy of movement. It's the place where they're likely to expend the most energy – and where they can engage in loud and messy behaviors considered inappropriate for indoors!

The outside light stimulates the pineal gland, which is the part of the brain that helps regulate our biological clock, is vital to the immune system, and simply makes us feel happier. Outside light triggers the synthesis of vitamin D. And there are studies showing that a lack of outdoor light lowers student learning and productivity.

Then, too, there's the aesthetic value of the outdoors. Because the natural world is filled with amazing, sights, sounds, and textures, it's the perfect resource for the development of aesthetics in young children. Because aesthetic awareness means a heightened sensitivity to the beauty around us, it's something that can serve children well at those times when, as adolescents and adults, the world seems less than beautiful.

Finally, there's one very basic reason why children need to experience being outside: humans evolved in the outdoors. Thus, we have a link with nature that can't be replaced, and in fact will be atrophied by technology.

Bubble Chase

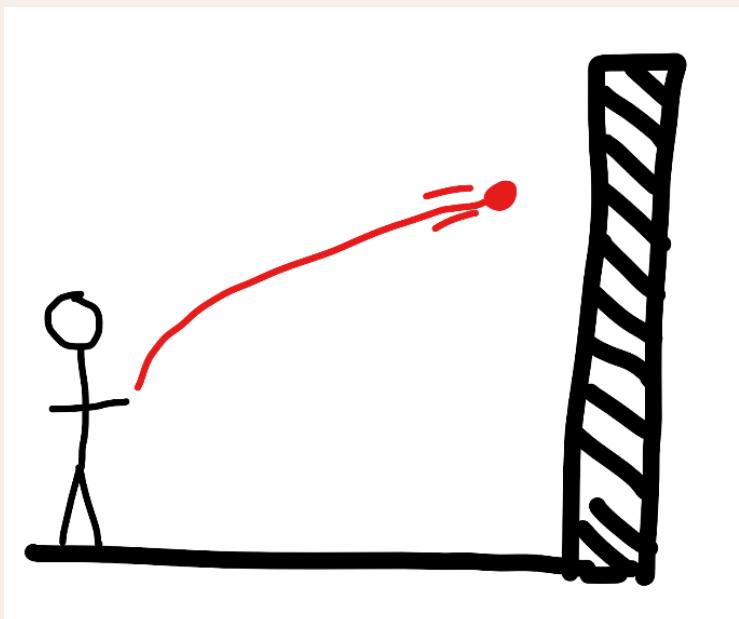


Simply blow bubbles and invite the children to catch them!

Later, you and the children can count each bubble popped in succession.

Curriculum Connections: Flotation and evaporation are *science* concepts, while counting falls under the heading of *math*. Running and jumping build muscular strength and endurance (*physical education*).

Wall Ball



For this game you'll need one large, lightweight ball per child and a windowless outside wall.

Invite the children to stand facing the wall, perhaps starting only a foot away from it. Give each child a ball and explain that all they have to do is hit the wall with the ball. After each throw, they can choose to move a bit further away from the wall to increase the challenge.

Curriculum Connections: Cause and effect are *science* concepts, as is the concept of *ricochet*.

Bottle Bowling



You'll need 2-3 large, empty plastic bottles and a beach ball or large playground ball for this activity.

Arrange the bottles in close proximity, and give one child the ball, which she rolls in an attempt to knock the bottles down. The children take turns doing the same.

Curriculum Connections: Cause and effect are *science* principles.

Ring Toss

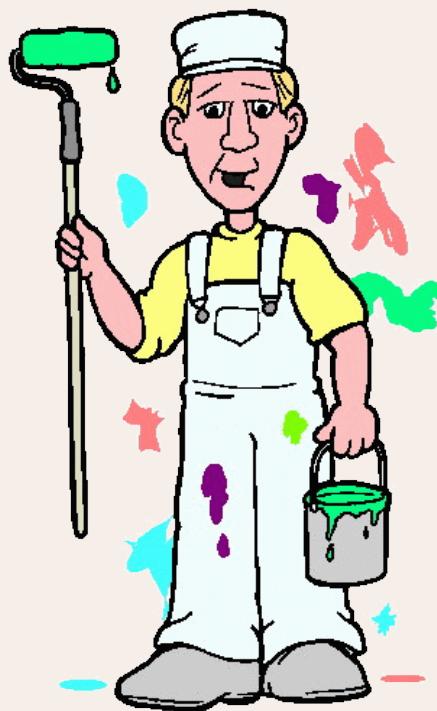
This game requires at least one large, plastic bottle or plastic cone and plastic hoop.

Simply encourage the children to stand a short distance from the bottle or cone and to try to toss the hoop over it.

Curriculum Connections:
This activity reinforces the concepts of *over* and *around*. As prepositions, they fall under the content area of emergent literacy. As positional concepts, they are part of geometry (*math*).



House Painting!



How about “painting” the outside of your building or home? Give each child a bucket of water and a paintbrush and let them at it!

Curriculum Connections: This simple activity teaches lessons in absorption and evaporation, which fall under the content area of *science*. It also provides children with much-needed exercise for the upper torso (*physical education*).

Touch It!

Call out “Touch green!” The children then run to touch something in that color.

Repeat with as many other colors as you can see.

You can do the same thing with shapes (round, flat, etc.) or textures (rough, hard, smooth, soft, bumpy, etc.).

Curriculum Connections: Color, shape, and texture identification make this an *art* activity. Listening skills fall under *emergent literacy*.



Three-Legged Creatures

Two children stand side by side with inside legs gently tied together with a scarf. They then see how many steps it takes to get from one side of the yard to the other!

Later, for more challenge, they can discover what other locomotor (traveling) skills they can perform on three legs. Possibilities include jumping (in this case, on three feet), hopping (on two feet, lifting either the inside or outside legs), and galloping (with either the inside or outside feet leading).



Curriculum Connections:

Counting is a *math* concept, while the cooperation involved falls under *social studies*. Practice with locomotor skills is *physical education*.

Kangaroo!



This game requires one smallish-sized ball per child.

Challenge the children to jump from one side of the yard to the other while holding the ball between the knees! If a child drops the ball, he just picks it up, puts it back between his knees, and starts again.

Curriculum Connections: This simple activity reinforces the concepts of *up*, *down*, and *forward*, which are positional concepts falling under geometry (*math*).

Footsie Rolls



If you have a lawn and don't mind a few grass stains, this is a challenging but hugely fun game! (You can also play it indoors if you have the space.) Pairs of children lie on their back, with the soles of their feet together. The object is to see how far they can roll without your feet breaking contact!

Curriculum Connections: Impetus and momentum, both of which are required in this game, are *science* concepts, while the cooperation involved falls under *social studies*.

Ready, Set, Jump

Select a starting point and two spots in your yard, somewhat equidistant from the starting point, that can serve as markers (for example, the swing set, the oak tree, or the end of the fence). At your signal, the children walks rapidly toward the first marker and then jump from there to the second, and finally jog back to the starting point. You can repeat these actions as long as the children stay interested, or you can substitute any other locomotor (traveling) skill with each round of play.

Curriculum Connections: Spatial awareness is part of both *art* and *emergent literacy*. Falling under *physical education* are the practice of locomotor skills, as well as the cardiovascular endurance and muscular strength and endurance.

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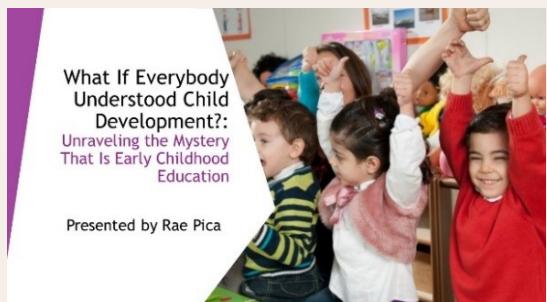
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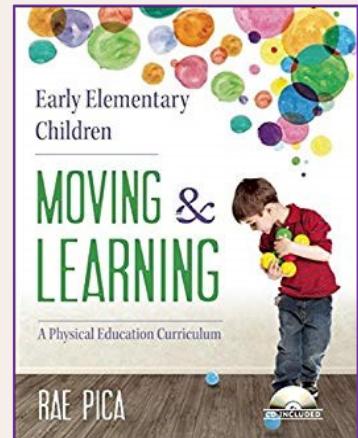
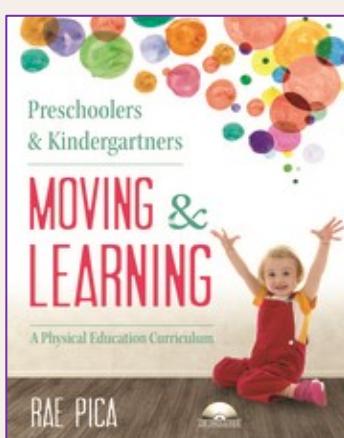
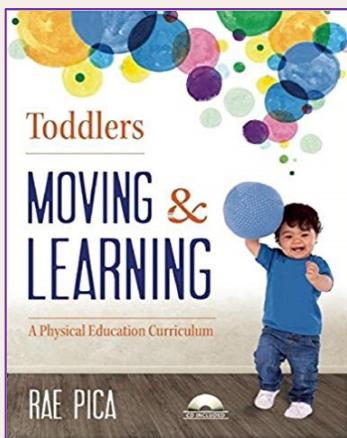
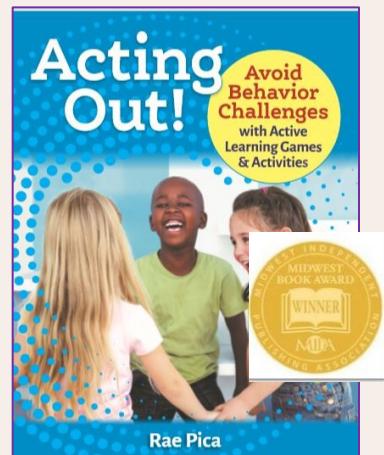
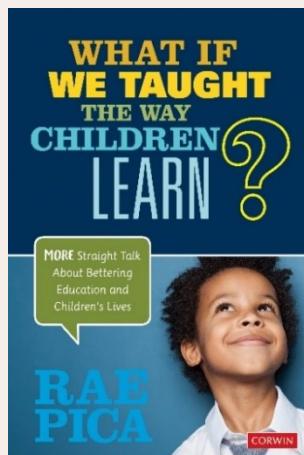
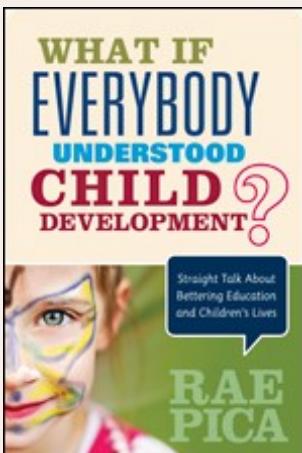
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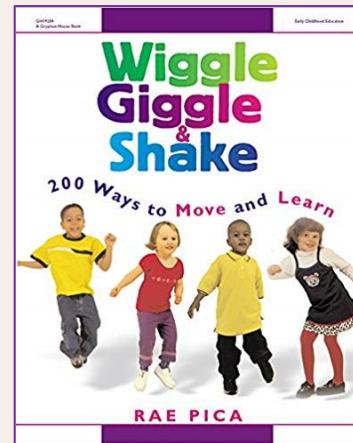
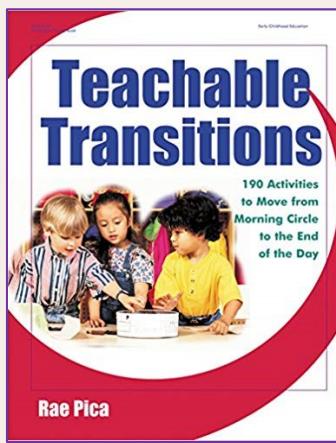
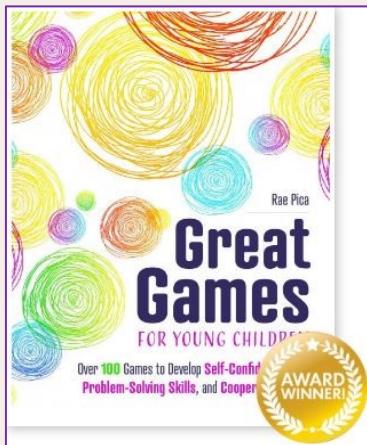
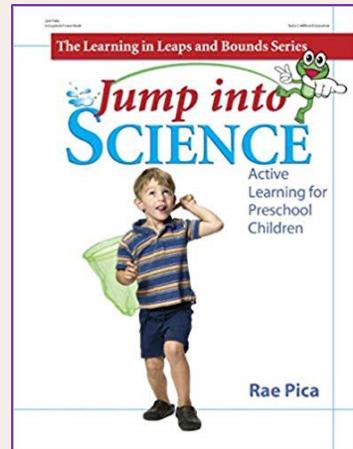
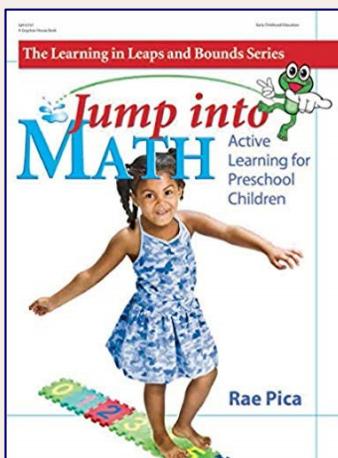
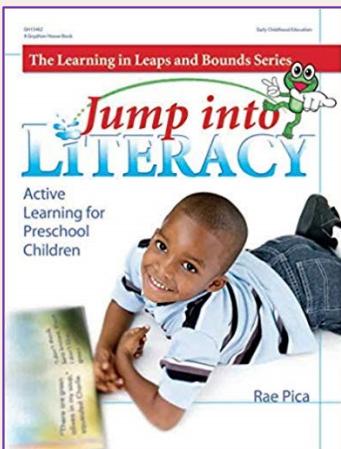
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A PLAYFUL WAY TO EDUCATE & ADVOCATE!



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 5th 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
- ✓ Hasbro
- ✓ Mattel
- ✓ Nike
- ✓ Bright Horizons
- ✓ Canadian Broadcast Corp.
- ✓ Chicago Children's Museum