

Fun with Fine Motor Skills



10 Activities That Strengthen Hands & Fingers & Promote Fine Motor Development

No Fine Motor Skills? What's the Big Deal?

Early childhood teachers tell me on a regular basis that young children are seriously lacking in fine motor control these days.

The children can't grip a crayon or paintbrush. The children can't use scissors. The children can't tear the paper off a straw!

On and on it goes – much of it coming from kindergarten and first-grade teachers. And the sad part is, this doesn't surprise me at all.

Children who grow up swiping instead of coloring, cutting, and painting do not develop the fine motor skills they need to hold a pencil and write. To button and unbutton their clothes. To properly hold a utensil for eating. To grasp, squeeze, and release a stapler or bottle of glue. Etc., etc.

Such tasks may not seem like a big deal to those who see children's future success in terms of what they will be able to do digitally. But we only have to stop for a moment and ponder the frustration of being unable to unbutton a shirt with ease. To fill out a form with a pen. Or to manipulate a knife and fork – particularly in public.

A stronger argument is that children without fine motor skills have very little chance to become celebrity chefs, fashion designers, or house flippers. With the popularity of such television shows as *Top Chef* and *Chopped*, we can all relate to the need for expert knife work. *Project Runway* has brought to light the finesse required for sketching, cutting, and sewing. And anyone who's watched Chip Gaines or Tarek El Moussa on *Fixer Upper* and *Flip or Flop*, respectively, has witnessed the success that can result from swinging a hammer and driving a nail.

Becoming a sports hero may also be problematic. It's difficult to manipulate a baseball, golf club, or tennis racket when you don't have enough strength in your hands and fingers. This is all too likely, considering the reports I hear about children without the strength even to tear a piece of paper!

And then there are the surgeons. They may not be publicly famous, but surgeons are both well respected and well paid. However, they'll be neither if they don't also have well developed fine motor skills. There are few professions, in truth, that require as much precise handiwork as that of a surgeon.

I recently saw an article quoting Roger Kneebone, a professor of surgical education in London. In it he contends, "New medical students have spent so much time on screens that they lack vital practical skills necessary to conduct life-saving operations."

Dr. Kneebone is part of a campaign working to return more hands-on creative subjects to the curriculum, which he states have a positive effect on the tactile skills necessary for a career in medicine or science. And, I might add, in cooking, fashion, carpentry, or sports.

I don't know what it will take before we realize that the "old stuff" (crayons, play dough, blocks) holds more value than the shiny new digital stuff – with fewer inherent dangers. But perhaps I can hasten that realization by pointing out that hours spent glued to the screen will do nothing to help develop and refine those tactile skills to which Dr. Kneebone referred. Those fine motor skills that will enable children to become capable of handling the life and professional tasks requiring them.

Run, Jump, Climb, & Swing!



You might wonder what all of the large-muscle activities listed in the title have to do with fine motor skills! Well, most people don't realize that motor development occurs from the top of the body to the bottom, from the inside (the trunk) to the outside (the extremities), and from the large muscles to the small!

This means that unless the large muscles are developed and strengthened, the small muscles won't follow suit. This isn't an option; it's nature's plan! And it's why so many experts contend that the best way to help children learn to write is by letting them climb trees and swing from monkey bars!

The Possibilities!



- color and draw
- cut with child-sized scissors
- squeeze a bottle of glue and glue things together
- construct block towers/build with Legos
- assemble puzzles
- play with small manipulatives
- fit pegs into holes
- mold clay or Play Dough
- paint with fingers and brushes

Make It Rain!

- The children stand one behind the other, facing in the same direction.
- Each places her or his hands lightly on the shoulders of the player in front of them.
- The rain has begun to fall softly, which means the children patter their fingertips very gently on the shoulders of the person in front, while simultaneously tiptoeing around the area.
- Now, the rain is beginning to fall a bit harder, which means the children's movements should become a tiny bit more forceful.
- Continue this process until there is a thunderstorm. But be sure the children use fingertips only and not hands.

Hands-Hands-Hands!

Here's a song called "Hands-Hands-Hands," from my book *Preschoolers & Kindergartners Moving & Learning*. Use the lyrics as a poem, inviting the children to act out the lines.

Would you like to have some fun with your hands?

There are many things they can do.

They can push and pull and lead a band,

And that's just to name a few!

They can make fists that shake in the air

When you're as mad as you can be.

They reach out to show someone you care

By touching him tenderly.

A hand is something that bounces a ball

And it turns the page of a book.

It dials the phone when you make a call

And puts it back on the hook.

With your hand you pet your favorite cat

And feel the softness of fur.

It's your hands that hold your baseball bat

And with a spoon help you stir.

Can you show me a drummer when she plays

Or somebody scrubbing pans?

Can you think of a few other ways

That you just might use your hands?

Hands-Hands-Hands II



Here's the chorus of the previous song. Invite the children to open and close hands 3 times during the 1st and 3rd lines and to demonstrate the actions of the 2nd and 4th lines. Speak the words as slowly as you need to so that the children can experience success with them.

*Hands-hands-hands
They shake and scold and pat.
Hands-hands-hands
They wave and pray and clap.*

Curriculum Connections: Body-part identification is a *science* concept, while the lyrics, active listening, & word comprehension fall under *emergent literacy*.

“Where Is Thumbkin?”



You sing the lyrics in blue, while the children hide fingers behind the back until it's time to sing the responses (in white).

Where is Thumbkin [pointer, middle finger, ring finger, and the whole family]?

Where is Thumbkin [etc.]?

Here I am, here I am!

How are you this fine day?

Very well, I thank you.

Run and hide, run and hide!

Curriculum Connections: Body-part identification falls under the content area of *science*, while the lyrics & active listening bring in *emergent literacy*.

Counting Fingers



Ask the children to make a fist. Then, as you very slowly count 1-2-3-4-5, have them display their fingers, one at a time. Then reverse, counting backward, with the children “closing” one finger at a time. Repeat a few more times, gradually increasing the tempo. (Note: This may be hard for some to coordinate, but it’s still fun and will come with practice!)

Curriculum Connections: Counting is a component of early *math*.

My Fingers

Sit with the children and read the following poem, asking them to act out the lines as appropriate.

*I have 10 little fingers,
And they all belong to me.
I can make them do things –
Would you like to see?
I can shut them tight
Or open them wide;
I can put them together
Or make them hide.
I can make them jump high;
I can make them jump low;
I can fold them up quietly,
And hold them just so.*

Curriculum Connections: Poetry, of course, falls under the heading of *emergent literacy*. Exploring the limitations & capabilities of body parts constitutes *science*.

See My Hands



Ask the children to sit and move their hands and fingers in the following ways:

- stretching hands and fingers as wide as possible; bending them into tightly clenched fists
- moving fingers in and out very fast; very slowly
- clasping hands together and moving them up and down; in and out; side to side
- turning hands from front (palms) to back
- making circles with hands without moving arms

Curriculum Connections: Becoming familiar with the capabilities & limitations of body parts constitutes *science* for young children.

My Hands Can...

Ask the children to demonstrate the following:

- how their hands would look if they were frightened; happy; mad
- calling for someone to come get them
- patting an animal
- pushing; pulling
- clapping
- scolding
- fanning
- writing
- painting
- playing piano; guitar
- directing traffic
- waving goodbye

Curriculum Connections: Body-part awareness falls under *science*, while acting out feelings constitutes *social studies*.

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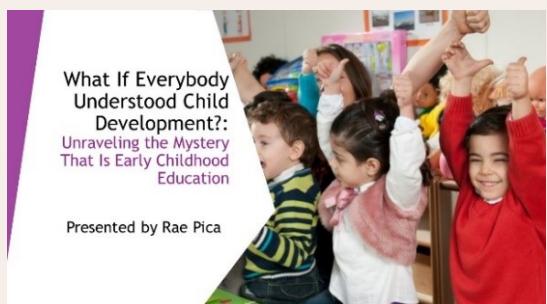
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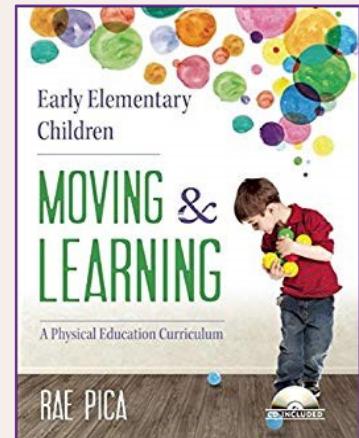
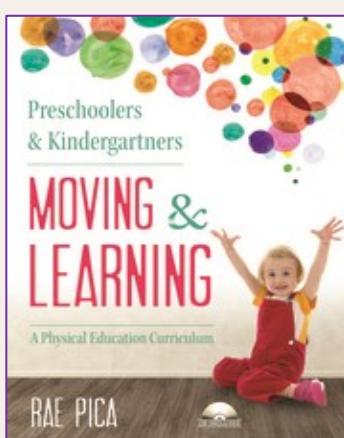
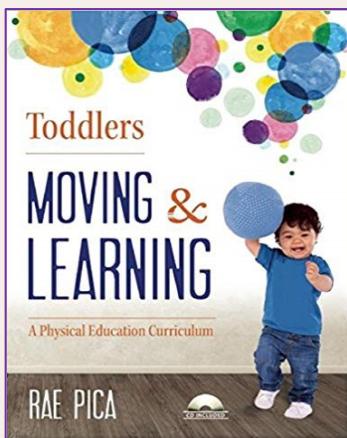
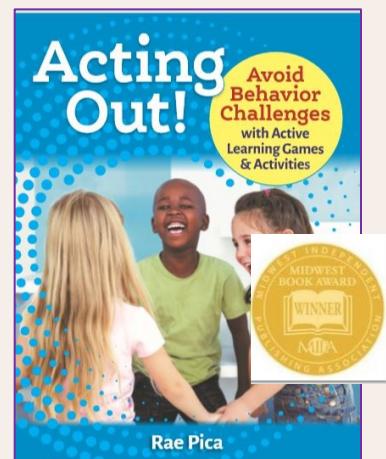
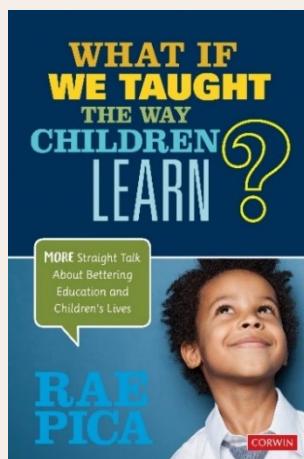
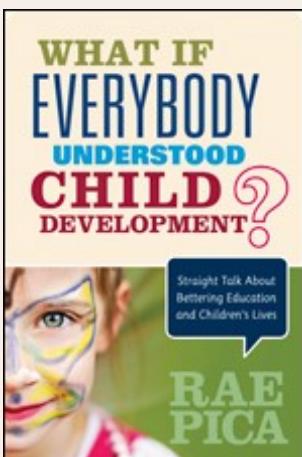
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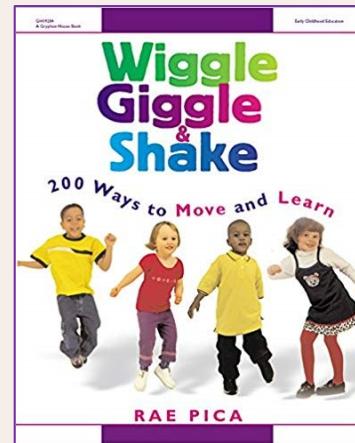
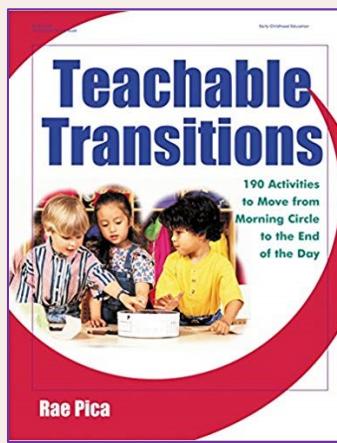
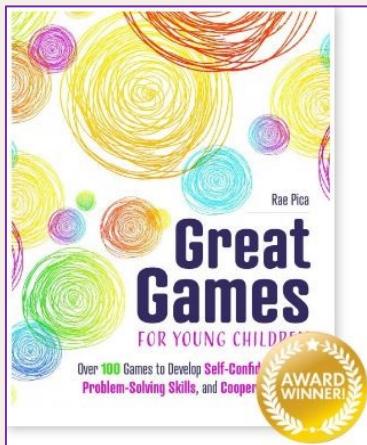
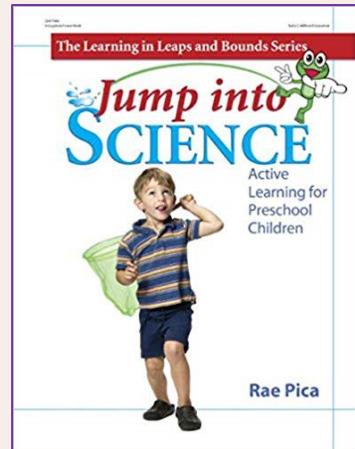
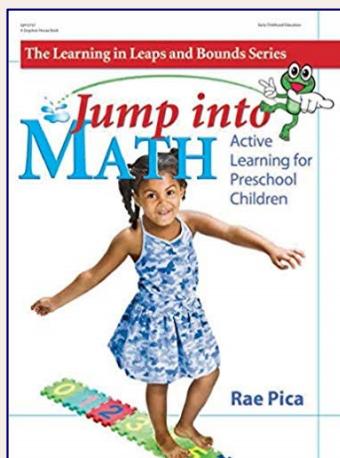
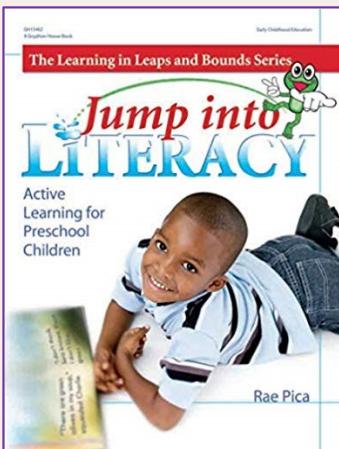
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