

Physical Activity and School Readiness Skills

Many facets of education are focusing on early interventions with regard to children's readiness for kindergarten. Looking at the preschool environment has recently been the focus of national attention with the emphasis on early childhood development. Physical activity and brain development go hand in hand. It was once believed that the brain and the body were separate entities, but recent research proves otherwise. Children learn while they are moving and playing; play is children's work! Preschool is often viewed as a socialization time, a time to prepare children for kindergarten and to prepare them for listening and following directions in a group setting. With academics presented even earlier than before, connecting movement with classroom activities plays a vital role. The integration of movement and classroom activities can be easily created. Key areas for movement and classroom integration are these:

Colors: Reinforce basic colors by visual discrimination

e.g.: Look at your poly spot/bean bag/hoop/ball; what color is it? Say your color out loud.

Shapes: Learning about basic shapes is an essential concept. Basic shapes include circles, squares, triangles, rectangles, etc. Many shapes are found in the environment. Many manipulative reinforce shape concepts; hoops can be used for circle identification.

e.g.: Look at my circle; can you make a circle using your hands/legs/body part(s)?

Sizes: Understanding the differences between big and small. The parachute is large, but a bean bag is small.

e.g.: Elephants are big, so they can't go through a hoop. Birds are small, so they can go through a hoop.

Distances: Processing information with regard to near, far, or close by.

e.g.: Let's throw a fluff ball and a beanbag today. Which one will land near and which one will land far away?

Patterns: Manipulatives can be set up in various patterns (ABAB or ABCABC) so children can begin to identify basic patterns. Children can actively hold manipulatives to form patterns that will reinforce patterns.

e.g.: One child can hold a blue hoop up high; the next child can hold a green hoop low; repeat pattern.

Art: Children can create art projects with simple items (seeds, pipe cleaners, pasta, etc.) that demonstrate their knowledge of shapes, sizes, pathways, etc. Fine motor control is developed during art with having to use the pincher grasp with fingers for picking up small items, painting, drawing, cutting, or pasting items. Many opportunities (like shaving cream play) are very tactile, involving the work of hands. Utilizing both hands at the same time will promote brain development on both sides of the brain.

e.g.: Our art project today is with shaving cream! I will put a little shaving cream on your desk. Using your hands, can you draw some different shapes? Can you draw with both hands at the same time?

Listening Skills: Children can be given multi-tasks to perform to engage their brain and body simultaneously. Depending on the level or skill of the children, two or four tasks may be given for children to perform.

e.g.: Here's a tricky one; listen carefully. Can you gallop, touch five different hoops, and then return to your hop and sit down?