

72 - 5 Ways Educators Can Improve Children's Motor Skills: Just a Piece of Paper and Masking Tape

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Twice a month, we come to you with a 10-minute professional development inspiration that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

Today, we are so glad to have Robin Papworth with us. Robin is a pediatric exercise physiologist with that master's qualified developmental educator, phew, that was a long one, with 10 years' experience working with children who have sensory difficulties, motor development delays, and learning challenges.

Robin is known for her Play, Move, Improve, Facebook, and Instagram profiles, where she shares easy-to-follow strategies, and knowledge with early childhood and primary education teams around the world. Robin, welcome, and I just want you to share with us, can you give us your actual title without messing it up?

Robin Papworth: Oh, good. Thank you so much for having me.

It's officially a developmental educator. Master's qualified means that I did a master's after I completed my exercise physiology degree, but it's okay. In Australia, the children call me the play lady, so you can just call me that.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: So now that we have you here, and we've formally introduced you, I am going to welcome the play lady, who we are thrilled to have on today, Robin, welcome.

Robin Papworth: Thank you so much. So excited.

Thank you.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Robin, I love that, the play lady. That is so cool.

I would love to be the play lady in my school.

Robin Papworth: It's pretty fun to be able to play all day. It's a good job.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Exactly. So, we know that all children learn differently and develop differently, so I'm excited to hear about your background, on things that you've done with children that build the key motor skills. So, tell us first what the key motor skills are, and how as a teacher or you, as the play lady help develop those with play.

Robin Papworth: Yeah, absolutely. So, I tend to put everything into fives because five is an easy number to remember. Of course, there's more than just these five, but the first thing that I look at is what's called visual tracking.

So, all babies start with the ability to move their eyes, actually learn how to move their eyes in utero, which is pretty amazing. So visual tracking is number one, visual tracking we need for things like reading and balance. Number two is core strength.

So being able to keep our body up against gravity, because you'll see that a few children who struggle with their motor development are what I call quite floppy, so they struggle sitting up nice and tall and moving their body nice and strong. The next one I call is spatial awareness. That's how we see making sure children aren't bumping into other people or bumping into furniture.

The fourth one I really work on, is a skill called vestibular balance. So vestibular balance is when I put my head upside down, I don't lose track of where I am. And then the fifth one I really like to work on, is crossing the midline.

Crossing the midline is a skill where I can take one part of my body and put it to the opposite side of my body, with a nice smooth coordination. But I can explain it more in detail, don't worry.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Sorry, Steph, I'm jumping in.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Go ahead.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: I love that you said that. I've been to a training called Bala-vis-X that crosses the midline.

Have you heard of that?

Robin Papworth: Yeah, amazing. Yep.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: I love it.

I used to do it with my kids in my classroom. So cool. Okay, very cool.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: So, and I'm visualizing this because I don't have this experience in my background. So, this is just really great for me to be able to visually work through. So, educators listen to our podcast.

How can our educators begin to help children develop these skills in the classroom?

Robin Papworth: Yeah, absolutely. So again, five activities, five activities for five motor skills. I really encourage all children to start it from the time they get to kindergarten.

So, if you imagine they take their backpack off, and then this is where the activities begin. And why I start it from the minute they get in, and the minute they walk through the door is I wanted to just share with you a little story about my son, Hugh. So, my son has a condition called dyspraxia.

It's a movement disorder. And at kindergarten, his teacher had no idea that he had dyspraxia, because he would just avoid movement in general. So, he'd always be sitting at the train corner playing with the trains or sitting at the art and craft table playing art and craft, but he would always avoid the play equipment, the ball sports, he'd avoid all of it just by being so cute and charming.

So I would really encourage every child to, if you imagine a doorway, you're just about to start your day, and in your doorway, the first thing you try and do is you put a masking tape strip down on the ground, and you just jump over that masking tape strip. It seems so simple, but we're checking that every child can jump over a masking tape strip. When we jump over a masking tape strip, we are using things like visual tracking, spatial awareness, core strength, those things we were talking about before.

But it has to be done, every child has to do it. So, we can't have a Hugh that avoids doing it. Other strategies that I encourage is when we're in our group time.

So, when we're in our group time, all sitting together, we can do activities like crossing the midline, by simply just tracing our opposite ear with our pointer finger. This is all on my website if you ever need, and I can send you some activities as well. It's trying to do it as part of your normal routine already.

I don't like to add in a whole 20-minute program. I like to just look at your current routine. When the children take their backpacks off, they jump over a masking tape line, or as the children come to sit down in group time, they trace the opposite ear with their pointer finger.

We're building up those motor skills without educators having to go above and beyond.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: That's amazing. So, I'm trying to visualize all this stuff because I want to be able to do it with my nephew.

Robin Papworth: Awesome.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, is there a place that teachers and families can actually access materials? Or you talked about your website. Where else can they go? I want you to share your website with us too, but where can families go to get these ideas?

Robin Papworth: Yeah, absolutely. So, I've been really passionate about making it accessible.

So, I use my Facebook page for lots of free ideas. I know there's another amazing OTs and speeches out there that do similar. I think it's really important for educators to use the resources we have and use social media for good.

So, my Facebook page, Play, Move, Improve, has so many different activities and reels and videos for them to copy. My main strategy for educators is to always just focus on one skill for the day. So in their head, you go back to one of those five skills, and you go, okay, so today I'm going to work on visual tracking.

And we just set up activities with that thought in mind. So, I think, okay, visual tracking. I'm going to have the children come to the door of kindergarten and they're going to follow a torch.

I'm going to hold a torch in front of, just above their eyes, not at their eyes, I don't want to shine it in their eyes, I just have it near their body, and I just get them to look left, look right, look up, look down, they're following this torch. Then I know, okay, great, I've done a visual activity, excellent, off we go. And then another activity I might do is in the home corner, we might have a torch again and we might do hand puppets, for example.

You know how you shine the torch at the wall, and you make shadows with your hands? Again, we're using visual tracking for the day. Not every child has to do the hand puppets, but we want to make sure that every child at least does a visual tracking activity, if that's the goal we have. I think sometimes educators can feel we have to fix everything, and we have to have a...

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes

Robin Papworth: Absolutely.

Where I like to just make it super simple, pick one, and then at least if we've given an entry, I call them entry activities, at least if we've entered kindergarten with an entry activity for one skill that day, then we've done an amazing thing.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: You know what I love is the fact that these are manageable. These are manageable for our families, these are manageable for educators, these are just manageable.

I think that makes more of a pathway for the buy-in and for people, individuals, to try them with our littlest learners. We have the resources now; we have your Facebook and your Instagram page. How can we get families, and I guess

educators also, to just really understand how to bridge that homeschool, home environment connection and do these at home? The importance of that, I guess.

Robin Papworth: Yeah, absolutely. For families, I always encourage them that we need to put away the perfection card. I think sometimes Pinterest can make us feel like we have to have this perfect play set up and this perfect...

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yes, yes.

Robin Papworth: Exactly, but the brain actually doesn't care. The brain does not care about perfection. The brain, once you've created that movement for the brain, it has no idea whether you've used a beautifully designed play space, it just knows that you've put the body through that movement.

So, first things first, I tell families, please put away the perfection card. And all we need is masking tape and a piece of paper, that's all we need. We need a strip of masking tape, there's so many activities you can do with a strip of masking tape, jumping for one of them.

You can trace a ball along a masking tape line, you can run cars along masking tape lines. A piece of paper you can turn into a ball pretty quick, you can scrunch it into a ball and you can throw it at different letters and colour, flashcards on the wall, anything is really possible with masking tape and a piece of paper. It's giving families that permission to be playful and that permission to take away the expectation that it has to be perfect.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Robin, all of this is so important because I think, like you said, Pinterest gives you so many ideas and you're trying to do all of them and you want to do all of them and you want it to be perfect and we just need to know as teachers to take a step back and it doesn't have to be beautiful, they're still going to learn it. So, as we wrap up, what are three takeaways for our listeners that you want to leave everyone with?

Robin Papworth: Yeah, absolutely. So, I'd really love for families and educators to know that there's this really important part of your brain called the cerebellum.

Don't be too worried about the name or how you spell it. The cerebellum is just above the brainstem, just at the bottom of your brain and it's controlled, your movement, it's for your movement. And if we don't get this cerebellum activated and we don't give our body movement, then there's been studies that it can have challenges with kids being able to predict what's happening next or to feel anxious about what's happening next.

So, the cerebellum is really important to activate. So, please add two minutes of movement into your day every day to activate that cerebellum. That's my real number one takeaway for families.

I'd also like to encourage educators to just focus on that one task, one motor area for that day. You can focus on just one and you know that you're really getting to the children like you that tend to avoid movement. And then the third one is just, let's go back to the basics.

Let's go back to the very early milestones that we know children need. That is being able to move their eyes left, right, up and down. Being able to roll both ways, being able to sit up nice and tall with that core strength, which we could talk about for another 20 minutes, but we've got to go back to the basics.

So, rather than meet the children where we think they should be at because of their age, just go back to the basics and make sure they've got that foundation first.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: And I think the core sounds silly, but I think the core as an adult is something that we might have back problems or hip problems and really those aren't the problems. It's the weekend of the core, you know, so it's so crucial.

I love that.

Robin Papworth: Yeah, for sure. And what I love is there's a word called neuroplasticity just to finish you off.

And neuroplasticity is the fancy word that the brain can keep learning, and the body can keep learning. So, please, no matter what age we are, that core strength, those visual tracking skills are so important.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah, that's huge.

Okay, so we always leave our listeners with a challenge. What can you present us with for this? Oh, yes. So, I have five activities to do, and I've got it on.

I'll send you the link and I can give you the PDF as well. And these five activities I would love educators and families to do straight away. So, start with jumping across masking tape.

It's got some fun spinning, rolling, upside downplay. So, I'll send that to you and that's my challenge for our families and educators. Let's just get it done.

Let's just do these five activities and I'd love to hear how you go.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Okay, folks, you heard it here. Robin told us get it done, practice some grace with yourself and let's just do this.

I have to tell you, I am excited. I feel like I'm ready to go up and do some of these myself as a grown up. Robin, thank you so much for taking the time with us today.

Honestly, it was such a pleasure, and we learned so much.

Robin Papworth: Not a problem. Thank you so much for having me.

I really appreciate it. Thank you, everyone.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Bye, Robin.

Robin Papworth: Bye-bye. Thank you.