



Large Motor Development for Infants and Toddlers

PURPOSE

To explore the meaning and importance of large motor skills as they relate to infants and toddlers.

DEFINITION

Before we begin, let's take a minute to define the term *large motor skills*. Large motor skills can be defined as the ability to control and coordinate the large muscles of the body. These muscles include those in the arms (biceps, triceps) and those in the legs (quadriceps) (Gale Research, 1998). To further explain the concept and development of large motor skills, let's take a look at a specific example.

EXAMPLE

Let's pretend you are observing infants in the classroom. As you watch the children, you make the following observations.

Cameron, a four month old, kicks her legs while sitting in a bouncy seat. Leon, a six month old, turns over from his stomach to his back. Rachel, ten months old, holds onto the shelf as she moves around the room. Austin, sixteen months old, is dancing by standing and bobbing up and down as music plays.

In each case the child mentioned is developing large motor skills through the activity in which they are participating. Let's take a look at each case individually.

Cameron, kicking in the bouncy seat – As Cameron kicks, she is developing the large muscles in her legs. As her skills develop, she will be able to have more control over her leg movements (Triesler & Tidman).

Leon, turning over – As Leon turns over, he is developing the large muscles in his arms, legs, neck and stomach (Triesler & Tidman).

Rachel, moving around the room – As Rachel holds onto the shelf and walks around it, she is developing the muscles in her legs. As her skills develop, she will be able to stand straighter and walk without holding on with both hands (Triesler & Tidman).

Austin, dancing to music – In order to stand and bounce to music, Austin must possess enough control and strength in his legs to be able to withstand the stress of being slightly off balance. With each bob, Austin is developing the large muscles in his legs and his upper body (Triesler & Tidman).

As you can see from the examples mentioned, a wide variety of common activities develop large motor skills. In addition, children of different ages will display varying degrees of development in relation to large motor skills.

HOW CHILDREN DEVELOP LARGE MOTOR CONTROL

Infants develop large motor control starting from their heads, moving down their necks, to their chests and tummies, to their legs, knees, and feet (Morrison, 1997). First, infants start turning their heads to specific sounds or other stimuli. Then the infants start to hold their heads up for longer periods of time. Next, the infants, lying on their tummies, push up on their arms. Gradually the infants begin to use their arms and legs to turn over (first from front to back and then from back to front). After a while, the infants use their arms and legs to push and pull themselves forward to where they want to go. Then they rise up on their knees and start crawling. From their knees, they start to pull themselves up to standing positions. While holding on to objects, they move around taking tentative steps. Then, slowly, they begin to let go and start walking. Before you know it they are off and running (Gale Research, 1998).

TRY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED!

Locate the following materials based on the age group with which you will be working.

three to six months – bouncy seats

six to twelve months – pillows

twelve to eighteen months – push toys

eighteen to twenty-four months – balls

Three to Six Months: Secure the child in a bouncy seat. Place your hands at the bottom of the child's feet and gently push up. This will invite the child to push against your hands with his/her feet, helping the large muscles in the legs grow.

Six to Twelve Months: Place the child in a sitting position and use small pillows to support him/her. Then encourage the child to reach for different things you hold in front. This will allow the child to strengthen back, neck, and stomach muscles to help him/her sit unaided. Note: Do not leave children alone while sitting because they can tire, fall over, and bump their heads.

Twelve to Eighteen Months: Sturdy push toys are a wonderful way to help infants develop balance and leg control as they crawl or walk around.

Eighteen to Twenty-Four Months: Place a soft ball in front of the child and encourage the child to lean over to push it with his/her hands. Older children would enjoy kicking the ball with their feet.

Use your notes to help you plan more ways to work with the children.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS THAT DEVELOP LARGE MOTOR SKILLS

There are many different types of materials that are designed to help the children develop large motor skills. See how many you are currently utilizing in your classroom.

- ★ *Balls*
- ★ *Push toys*
- ★ *Short/small climbing structures*
- ★ *Riding toys*
- ★ *Large stacking blocks*

Each of the materials mentioned above can help your children develop large motor skills.

SUMMARY

There are many different materials and activities that can be utilized to help young children develop large motor skills. As you begin to develop activities for your children, keep in mind that young children of the same chronological age often function on many different developmental levels. As the teacher, you need to observe each child carefully to see how you can adapt the activity to meet his/her needs. The most important thing is to remember that children develop large motor skills just like every other skill – at their own rate and their own pace. Your responsibility is to provide them with a variety of materials that promote development in this area through daily activities.

REFERENCES

Gale Research. (1998). Gross motor skills. In *Gale encyclopedia of childhood and adolescence*. Retrieved August 7, 2002, from <http://www.findarticles.com/g2602/0002/2602000281/pl/article.jhtml>

Morrison, G. S. (1997). *Fundamentals of early childhood education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Triesler, L., & Tidman, S. (n.d.). *Gross motor skills: Birth to 5*. Retrieved August 7, 2002, from http://childrenshosp-richmond.org/families/developmental/gross_motor_birth.htm

Follow-up Evaluation

Large Motor Control for Infants and Toddlers

Name _____ HRL Customer Number _____

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Complete the following to the best of your ability.

1. Define the term *large motor skills*.

2. List two steps children will go through as they develop large motor control.

3. Choose one of the materials on page 2 and describe how it could be used to help a child develop large motor control.

4. Give an example of how you incorporate large motor control activities on a daily basis.

5. Develop your own activity that could be utilized to develop large motor skills.

6. Provide the children in your group with several materials, such as balls, pillows, and small and large push toys. Observe the children as they attempt to use the materials. Record your observations below.

7. Look through the curriculum you use in your class and identify two activities the children completed this month that helped build large motor skills. If you cannot find two large motor activities, or you are not a HighReach curriculum user, design two activities of your own.

This Training Module is designed to be used in conjunction with the curriculum you are currently using in the classroom. Prior to completing the module, explore your curriculum plans and think about how the topic of the module fits into those plans. Throughout the coming months, consider ways in which you can apply the training topic to a variety of classroom activities. As with children, practicing new skills on a daily basis makes a big difference.

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