Mary Holwell:

I wonder if you might like to share some very concrete and practical strategies that educators could put in place to support children's motor development. We know people like to go away from a webinar with some ideas about what they might do, so I wonder whether over the next couple of minutes, you might like to share a couple of strategies?

Anoo Bhopti:

Yeah. So I've been sharing a few, but I think just be mindful that young children are physically active every day. And physical activity plays a real big role in their development than what we thought before. So just being mindful that children get... And also that physical activity helps them, not just for language and movement, but also for memory perception, attention, emotion. So when you plan, I think the important thing to remember is, intentional planning of your rooms. So if you kind of set up activity tables and activities, and I know you don't want to set up too much because you want to take the child's lead. And here's where I tell you that yes, take the child's lead, but take a bit of lead in being intentional, in what you want them to do.

Anoo Bhopti:

So I'll just give you a few examples that I kind of use. So if you are on the floor and you know that a particular child is always going back to the Twinkle Twinkle Star book and will not do anything else and you want them to engage with another child, and you want them to walk a little bit more and get up from where they are. So plan the Twinkle Twinkle Star book in a different area with another child, so that you've used their interest, but you've guided them to walk to a different area and be with another child. So things like that will require for you to think about how you can plan and intentionally you can plan things in your rooms.

Anoo Bhopti:

For infants, babies, even before they're able to move, you could think about some supervised interactive flow based play, so that you're around and you leave them and have some toys, so you're encouraging them to reach, to push on their hands, or what are you wanting them to do. 30 minutes of tummy time over the course of the day and while they're awake, moving their legs and arms and reaching and grasping for toys. So they are really good ones for little babies. And once they are moving, then how can you do more crawling? So can you set up a little obstacle course for them to navigate? Put some cushions and soft toys, so they have to do that.

Anoo Bhopti:

Pulling up to standing is something we want them to do very early. So can you have little that height that they have to stand up and put their toys up, so you're enticing them to stand up and walk.

Anoo Bhopti:

And then for toddlers, they love to run around and of course that's great. But then there are always those few who never want to do any physical activities.

Anoo Bhopti:

So running, playing ball games, setting up races, setting a bike, twirling and jumping, kind of creating jumping opportunities, dancing opportunities, skipping opportunities, children don't know how to skip. It's really sad. In prep. So we did a little study of preppies and grade one and two children, and they really could not skip and skipping is part of all our assessments, which is really sad, so if you can get there early.

Anoo Bhopti:

Then for preschoolers three to five years, so the more active the better. So again, kicking, throwing, obstacle courses, but you people have really nice sandpits and you've got these rich environments, so how can you kind of make them even more, engage them more, not just movement, but we were talking about the scripts and sequences of play. So how can you use those things and make them richer for them?

Anoo Bhopti:

I'll tell you an example, a little girl that I work with, she bumps into things and she needs more movement practice, because she's not aware of where her body is. So when I did the childcare visit, I found a big sandpit with lots of holes and the boys were digging and there was lots of little... And we wanted to set up an obstacle course for her and she loves the sandpit. So we took her to the sandpit and we left her there with the boys, so now she was with a group of children and we gave her some digging equipment, but also unknowing to her, she was doing this on uneven surfaces, that she was trying to walk over. And so we got our goal where we wanted her to have more balance and yet she didn't stand out as if she's doing something different.

Anoo Bhopti:

So you know how you said that my main thing is inclusion and participation, so I always want children to look as if they're all part of the gang of the same group of people and they are a gang, aren't they? Because they have their... And they're pretty inclusive. Most children are. So when I go and I sit with the child that I'm working on, for example, the other children will say, "No, no, no, she doesn't like that. She likes this." So they know each other, so we can tap into that and plan skills and activities intentionally, so the one who likes to be the helper can be the parallel play person or can be the social interaction in person and they can lead, join.

Anoo Bhopti:

So I think those are kind of some tips that would help you set up so you can have that serve and return and you can have those real rich interactions.

Mary Holwell:

I think that's really useful. And I think that idea of intentionality is important for us to keep hold of. That we have a goal and we might think of one way that we want to try and achieve that way, but it doesn't work for some reason, but we don't need to let go of that goal. We can find another way of achieving it. For example, the uneven surfaces in the sandpit.

Mary Holwell:

I thought of something else while you were talking and it speaks much more to the slightly older child of about four years of age. And I worked at one stage in a centre where I had a large number of boys and I was struggling to engage some of them in some fine motor skills, but they were developing really elaborate scripts around dinosaurs, dragons and Kings and Queens and all sorts of things. So I decided that we would need to make the costumes that went alongside that. So they made helmet type things with flames coming out their mouths and tails with little spikes attached to them. So the purpose of their fine motor involvement was very meaningful for them and I think that's what we need to think about sometimes. Finding that entry point that you spoke about before or the lever, the hook, that gets us to ensure that all children have had all of those opportunities that will lead them down those pathways, so I'm really appreciative of that.

Anoo Bhopti:

That's such a great idea.

Mary Holwell:

Yeah. Just looking at the time and thinking, I might just very quickly ask you, is there one particular message that you'd like to send to educators as a kind of a take home message for the evening? And then I'll hand my colleague, Karen, for a moment.

Anoo Bhopti:

Yes, great. Yeah, I thought about this a little bit and I really want you to remember three things when you work. And one is that your experiences help build the brain architecture, so that's number one. So don't forget that, that you are actually helping these children's brains to grow and this is highest in the early years. Zero to six is when they're like that sponge that you left in your sink for two days and it's hard and then you pour water and then it just expands. That's them. So remembering that that's what you bring, remembering the serve and return-

Mary Holwell:

We have a big responsibility.

Anoo Bhopti:

Yes, yes. But also, how special is it, isn't it? It's so special and then the serve and return interactions so that when they look at you, if you can respond. Whatever it is, don't lose that. That is a magic opportunity. So make the most, and look for those serve and return interactions.

Anoo Bhopti:

And lastly, don't forget about the toxic stress if they're having those things. So you're very good at playing with them and developing their skills, but just being mindful that there'll be children in your centres who are going through something or the other at home that we are not able to pick up, so we rely on people like you all to be mindful of these stress responses that you see and just keep track of that. So, yeah, and enjoy, and really engage and enjoy with their play skills and hug them if they want to hug and engage that they need an adult who they can completely trust and you might see this already, you'll wonder why some children are attracted to you, and they do that. They kind of have their favourites, so just nurture that relationship.

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