Most people think that you need to have good gross motor skills in order to get really good, refined fine motor skills. That's not entirely true because both gross motor skills and fine motor skills develop simultaneously as they're growing. So if you watch a baby, if you put them on their back, they start reaching out with their hands. So a lot of emphasis is put in the early years on tummy time, whereas we also talk about, "Children need to be on their back." So the reason to think about is when they are on their tummy, the children use their hands to support themselves. So if they are on their tummy, they're pushing on their hands, so they're weight-bearing. If they're pushing on their hands, then they can't, of course, use their hands for play. So there needs to be a balance.

So they both are kind of dependent. So they need to learn to develop a stable base of support so that they can sit, sit up, so that they can walk, so that they can do things, gross motor skills. But at the same time, they need to use their hands as well because through the hands... I always say the hands are the key to learning. So the hands lead us to learning. The hands learn us to control, to express, to play with our environment. So they're really important, that children have those experiences quite early, and they start that quite early. They start reaching out at four months, they're able to grasp, shake, and play with a variety of materials very early in the zero to six months of their lives.

So in some ways, as much importance as is placed on tummy time, I think we need to start thinking of fine motor development very early as well. Are we actually presenting children with those different materials of things that they can touch and feel, and reach out to? So when you're changing nappies or when... what have you provided for children? Because that's when they're on their back, that's when there’s excellent opportunities for exploration. So during those times, we have to see that we balance both gross motor and fine motor skills. So while we are really mindful of whether the child is not able to crawl, not able to sit, not able to walk, are we also looking at, are they reaching out? Are they actually holding with their full palm? So we call that a palmar grasp. Or are they now moving on to the digits? Are they able to hold things with their fingers, with their fingertips? That's how you will look at the development of fine motor skills.

And then, it comes in context with play, and their development. So the best way children learn is through play. So in their play, you can set up a variety of things where you can see how their fine motor skills are going as well. So just a reminder, that equal importance for gross motor and fine motor skills in the early years is that's what we kind of, really helps build the experience. It kind of fits really well with the Victorian Early Years Learning Framework as well. Because in that, if you think about the well-being, children have a strong sense of well-being, and that is by doing. So the more they do, the more they feel that, "Yes, I'm great," and they start developing a little identity, and a sense of well-being through doing. So doing is through their hands. So it's really important that they feel, and get to do, and explore, build, and create, and express through their hands.

Development is proximal to distal. That's the way the brain learns. So to some extent, yes they need... But you can still sit a child on a highchair, and get them to explore with their hands. So being mindful that, yes, the proximal stability in lying down is that, "Can they lie down, and play with their hands?" So that is, they need a nice stable base so that they can... So that's why we say, "Proximal stability is needed," but that doesn't mean that they won't use their hands till they learn to sit, or till they learn to balance themselves.

So the hand strength, it goes hand in hand with the fine motor skills, and we look at weight-bearing and weight-shifting. So how are they using their hands? Without the hands, they won't even learn to crawl, or they won't learn to walk. So they use their hands a lot for stability, as well as for manipulation. So as you can see outside, they will engage in those climbing experiences, in swinging, in monkey bars, and things like that.

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