The importance of routines is really underrepresented in real experiences, or in the real practice. Fine motor skills need to be done in the context of their everyday routines, with participation in mind. We read a lot about in research, and we know now that children learn through their routines. And all of our interventions, so I'm an occupational therapist by trade, and I know that if I don't look at routines, I'm not serving the population that I work with.

When you think about children entering the room, what are some of the things that they can do that support their fine motor skills? They can hang their bag. They go looking for their names. They can use their hands to say hello. They can go and write something, tick something off. Give them some activity to do, and they can put their lunchbox away and they can put their other belongings, so they know, if there are labels and drawers, and they have to manipulate them. So you can really go and see how just by entering there's so many opportunities that you see the children engage in. Setting up meals in your services could look like, first stacking, unstacking cutlery, planning quantity, or amounts of food. So there's a variety of experiences just there. Then cleaning the tabletop, then packing up all the plates.

So you can't do any of that without fine motor skills, as you can see. But if we are mindful of that and think about children who miss out on those opportunities of writing and drawing outside, this is where you can really get them involved in setting up your meals. The other things we like to do is packets of food. So if they bring their yoghourt bottles with little screw caps, or if they have to cut open a bar. So things like that are real opportunities. In fact, we write a list of these opportunities to the families and the childcare educators so that they can follow through with children.

The mealtimes, again, is a really good opportunity for them to develop that independence. So they watch each other, which is absolutely magical. So if one is expected to go and put their cups away or go and put their plates away, and there is a routine going, they will just follow it, and the repetition. So the brain learns through repetition. So you don't even have to do it. You've got to set your routine and set an expectation that children will participate in those different routines.

We love toileting skills because it, again, offers a range of opportunities. And we look a lot at dressing skills. And so, dressing involves a lot of fine motor skills, but the feeling of independence and the privacy. And so it's a sense of self control to be able to manage your toileting skills. So it's a great opportunity for them to be able to do some undressing, dressing, wiping, cleaning, washing hands. So there's like several opportunities already there that you can see that are wonderful. And now with COVID, there's all this other things that they've learned. So then they also have learned to sanitise and stuff like that. So again, all those fine motor opportunities around the toileting routine are absolutely, I would say, a treasure for practising fine motor skills.

And you can start quite early. So I know when babies are just like one to two, when you're doing their nappy changes, we involve them in getting their nappy, giving it to the educator. So starting those fine motor skills really early. And as some of the children might be quite sensitive to different textures and sounds and temperatures. So you see how that activity around the bathroom actually helps them not just learn about the whole skill, but develop their hand skills. As you were saying before, pressing the hand soap or rubbing the hand soap on their hands, it's such a great opportunity for them to know where their fingers are, where their hands are, how the soap feels like. So those sensory experiences go hand in hand with the fine motor skills as well.

So, always using those opportunities to grow the overall learning experiences. So again, I go back to how the hands actually help the overall learning of children. So they learn about temperature. They learn about texture, they learn about sequencing. So first the feet have to go in. Then you pull it up to your knee and then you pull it up to your hip. So those are the sequences that they learn as well in dressing skills.

Setting up for rest time, bringing the mattresses, getting an idea where to place them. So placement, again, it's a bit of heavy work. So we know from research that heavy work helps children feel calm and relaxed and, of course, a sense of responsibility, but at the same time, setting it up, planning space, planning the materials, and then using your fine motor skills. So there are different grasps involved in different activities. For example, when you hold a mattress, you use like a more finger strength grasp. You don't use all your palms, but then when you make your blanket, you flatten it, then you use your flat palms. So there are different opportunities. And I won't go into each one of them, but we do look at all of those when we are planning for developing fine motor skills.

One of the things you do really well is you share with families, through photos and pictures, the daily things that the child has experienced. So highlighting some of that in the notes, talking to families about, "Today we did this and we practised this." I think it's really important. Just as much as educators always inform families if the children are not walking, not crawling, not doing those gross motor skills. In the same way, if we can just point to families that, "Look, we are really working on fine motor skill development at the same time. Then, can you practise these? Today, we did this during cooking or during mealtime or during rest time. We saw that." And so then the family goes, aha, I can do the same at home as well during those routines. So you're kind of creating different opportunities for practising, which is what the brain loves. Each of those experiences not just shapes their cognition, but also helps their fine motor skills.

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