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Fingergym™

Fine Motor Skills School Readiness Program

'Fingergym™ is all about trying' (Jack, age 5)

A hesitant little boy walked slowly into the room. For much of the morning he had sat at his desk, trying to remember how to hold his scissors and cut on the big black lines, listen to the teacher, and remember where to glue the picture and make his fingers hold the pencil to write his name at the top of the page. He wished that he could do these things easily like his friends. Then he heard music and a familiar voice saying, 'Hi kids! Welcome to Fingergym™ ...', and he knew that for just a little while he could practise all those 'tricky' things in a safe and encouraging place, where he could experience success and feel free to just have a go.

About the Program

The program promotes the development of school readiness skills such as the ability to:

- organise work space and tools
- maintain a sitting position
- be aware of other people and their needs
- follow visual and auditory directions
- ask for help if needed
- initiate and complete a task
- problem-solve and actively investigate cause and effect situations
- transition from one task to another
- maintain attention
- risk take or have a go

The program has been successfully implemented with:

- children who have already been assessed by an occupational therapist and are participating in a fine motor program outside of the classroom or school
- children in kindergarten and preschool and prep-aged children identified by teachers as demonstrating difficulty with fine motor skills, including reluctance to use a pencil or ineffective use of other school tools
- children with specific diagnosed disorders, including intellectual impairment, speech and language impairment, autism spectrum disorder, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
- children with fine motor weakness due to limited experience or opportunities to practise at home
- children with mild sensory integration problems, such as poor crossing of the midline of the body or tactile defensiveness
- children with visual convergence and eye-tracking problems
- children displaying anxiety over attempting new or challenging activities
- children displaying difficulty organising themselves, their belongings, or equipment
- children displaying difficulty in starting a task, staying on a task, or transitioning smoothly from one task to another
- children who have difficulty following instructions
- children displaying postural weakness or generally lacking in strength and endurance
- children demonstrating self-care difficulties with buttons, zips, shoelaces, and other fasteners.

Program Materials

Manual

Included in this manual is supportive basic theory about the development of fine motor skills and how important the acquisition of these skills are to a child's early feelings of success in the classroom and overall early academic performance, different options for implementing the program in your own unique classroom situation, instructions on how to prepare and set up for the program, 140 fine motor main activities plus many other extension activities, and appendices containing a 24-session sample program, a list of all of the fine motor activities contained in this manual, skills checklists, some activity photographs, and various reproducible program information letters.

Fingeryngles™ CD

This CD accompanies the activities and assists the children to transition independently from one activity to the next with a catchy musical cue and the voices of two animal characters: Fidget the Fingergym Frog and Mani the Mouse. There are three tracks on the CD. Track 1 is an introductory track, and tracks 2 and 3 have different running times for the program: 16 minutes on Track 2 and 26 minutes on Track 3.



Resource CD

The resource CD contains all of the documents included in the appendices of this manual so that they can be customised as required, and templates for suggested activities and awards. It is a valuable and time-saving resource for busy teachers.

Program School Trials

BRIEF REPORT -- The Fingerym Fine Motor Skills School Readiness Program School Trials

Eleven experienced teachers and teacher aides from the Brisbane area were invited to participate in a four to eight week trial program of the program in two forms – the full program and a reduced quicker version. The trial was not intended to be a clinical trial of improvements noted in student's fine motor skills, as benefits from practicing fine motor and other related skills have been reported elsewhere in the manuals. Rather, the purpose of the trials was to receive feedback on the perceived value and feasibility of the program and any additions or changes to make it easier and more appealing to both children and teachers..

Sixty-four percent of the teachers/aides in the trial program reported having 16 or more years of classroom experience, and 36% reported having 11-15 years of classroom experience. This group represented teachers/aides from Preschool, Year 1, Year 3, and Special Needs classrooms. The average classroom size contained 25.3 students. Along with typically developing children, teachers/aides reported that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), intellectual impairment (II), developmental disabilities (DD), Speech/Language disorders, learning disabilities (LD), attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADD/ADHD), English as a second language (ESL) and unspecified special needs were also enrolled in their classrooms. Teachers/aides also indicated that collectively, 3% of the children in their classroom received occupational therapy services.

Every teacher/aide reported positive and enthusiastic comments about the programs, and all indicated that they would, budget permitting, purchase the programs and would unequivocally recommend it to other teachers/educators. Some of the comments about the program included statements such as, "They [children] loved it- looking forward to every Tuesday afternoon. I would love to incorporate this into our routine next year!" Others said, "Saw improvements in a short time", "Good routine for II /special needs students" and, "children enjoyed the activities and it put a focus on writing". Another indicated, "It is an effective, positive program that shows children that we all improve with practice. That is important to learn!"

Children participating in the trial programs were reported to have, "Loved it! Asked when next session was, laughed during activities, and saw it as a "fun" activity not a learning activity." Another teacher indicated, "Children loved it, very much so" and another said that the children in her classroom, "Asked to keep doing the program after we had finished".

Seventy-three percent of the teachers/aides reported that the introductory, theory based chapters were helpful, and that organising the activities by categories was also a positive feature of the program.

For those teachers who reported setting goals for the participants, Strong Hands Activities, found in the Strengthening Activities section, Touch and Tell Activities- Arm, Finger, and Hand Awareness found in the Sensory Activities section, Hands at Work- Fine Motor Planning from the Fine Motor Coordination Activities section, Let's Doodle- Pre-writing and Pencil Control Skills in the Pencil To Paper Activities section, and Cutting Skills activities were the most important in terms of goal setting. While all activities categories were selected in terms of their worth and importance, the Fine Motor Coordination activities were frequently selected by teachers/aides (28%) as being the most useful in their classrooms.

Of the five teachers/aides who commented on the level of explanation provided for the activities, all indicated they were clearly explained, while seven who commented also indicated that suggestions for how to grade activities was helpful. One teacher indicated, "Especially useful when I tried activities with whole class- because everybody wanted to do Fingerym!"

Seven teachers/aides responded to questions reflecting on, based on activities provided in the manual, their ability to develop their own activities, the worth and quality of the supplies lists, and the explanation for the set up of Fingerym. All indicated that they were pleased with the information provided in the manual. In terms of developing new activities, one teacher/aide responded by saying, "I have done a few which seemed to work quite well." When asked, from the explanations provided in the manual, do you feel that you could set up a similar program, one teacher responded by saying, "using such a great program I could."

Overwhelmingly, teachers/aides shared with us that both they and the children "loved" the Fingerym CD, saying such things as, "Fantastic- we loved it!" and "Children loved it!" Of the seven teachers/aides participating in the Fingerym trials, 86% reported using the 3 minute track, and 14% the 5 minute track. All reported that children were attentive during the silences, and while it was most difficult for preschoolers, they were able to clean up and move on to the next station, as the music directed them to.

Although several teachers/aides reported that a 4-week trial was not long enough to see clear improvements in fine motor as well as behavior function, these teachers/aides still felt the program was good, and results would be noted in a longer time period. Of those reporting improvement, the most significant were in Fine Motor Coordination and Pre-writing and Pencil Control skills. In the behavioural domain, improvement in self-confidence, independence and initiative were observed in children participating in the program

When asked what teachers/aides liked best about the program, most responded that the CD was the feature they most liked. Other comments included, "tasks were well categorized, "children's eagerness to participate," "book well set out and helpful," and "it is a positive program that identifies problems that some children have and sets out how to solve them in a happy and respectful way," Finally, "The children have enjoyed the program. As a teacher aide the structure was excellent. I always felt I knew exactly what I was doing. "

A final comment a teacher shared about the program was, "Congratulations! The program is sensational. I would like to be able to start the year with this program."

Frequently Asked Questions

Is Fingergym™ suitable for the older children as well as the Year 1 and 2s?

Although designed with the needs of students up to age 8, by incorporating more academic based activities into the program, Fingergym™ can easily and successfully be adapted for older students. Using the rotations format as a base; especially the 5 minute CD track, is an ideal way to incorporate Fingergym™ into an older children's classroom. For some older students who still struggle with focusing on tasks, getting started on writing tasks, or completing a task independently, Fingergym™ can be very motivating.

Here are some Fingergym™ extension ideas for older children:

- Practise copying skills from a whiteboard or blackboard
- Adjective, noun, verb, etc. identification and treasure hunt using chopsticks or clothespins (Children identify word cards with designated parts of speech and retrieve and place them in a container using chopsticks or pins)
- Orally brainstorm ideas for a story and then write up an outline
- Follow written instructions to complete a simple art task such as origami
- Set up a series of upper extremity strengthening exercises such as push ups, crab walks, and wall push ups
- Help prepare some of the Fingergym™ worksheets for younger children such as tracing over the outline for mazes or cutting activities.
- Set up a series of simple math worksheets that are to be completed in 5 minutes

Is Fingergym™ suitable to be used in a single lesson of about 45 minutes once a week?

Optimally it is better to have more frequent sessions. Using the music CD, Fingergym™ can be run as either a 16 minute complete running time session or a 25 minute running time session. Note: add in time for setting up.

A single session is fine, if that is all time permits in your classroom, but you might not see the results that a regular program would facilitate.

Having purchased Fingergym™ would I need to buy other resources in order to successfully run the program?

One of the benefits of this program is that we have developed many activities that call for easily accessible, everyday materials that most teachers have right at their fingertips. However, for initial set up and organizational purposes we suggest purchasing several large plastic storage containers for all of the bits and pieces that you are likely to acquire as you implement the Fingergym™ program in your classroom. We have also included extensive supplies lists which can be posted on your classroom door. Parents might be able to provide you with some supplies that they have at home.

If your budget is tight we suggest that you go through the supplies list and determine which items you already have. Based on this list, select and implement the Fingergym™ activities that call for the materials that you have!

Does Fingergym™ have any provision for home practise sheets?

We have not specifically included home practise sheets. However the Data CD does contain printable cutting and drawing activities that children can take home.

Another suggestion would be to run a Fingergym™ parent information session to demonstrate some of the program's activities for home "practise," such as using chopsticks or the pegging activities.

Consider preparing a send home a list of the activities (and supplies needed) done on Fingergym™ day(s) for potential home practice.



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