How to play with fine motor manipulatives with your child

Types of play

- **Solitary play**
  - this may look like appropriate solitary play or self stimulatory behavior with toys, which may not always be appropriate

- **Parallel play**
  - The child plays alone but next to someone else. There may be some early sharing, such as playing with a toys with multiple pieces (e.g., sharing matchbox cars, animals on a jungle set, etc.), even though the peers may not interact

- **Cooperative play**
  - Reciprocal, back and forth play on shared toy (e.g., taking turns using one car on a car ramp, passing a ball)
  - Working together to create an outcome (e.g., building a train track, completing a puzzle)

Levels of play

- **Cause and effect**
  - Push button, something happens

- **Multiple step cause and effect**
  - Put in/put on, push button, something happens

- **Use of simple toys as intended**
  - Push car; pull wagon; roll ball
  - Assemble pieces (e.g. snap lock beads, stack blocks, connect duplos)
  - This is where imitation skills become critical

- **Early pretend play**
  - Put little people in bus; car in garage, animal in barn
  - Building different structures in imitation with manipulatives

- **Pretend play with language**
  - Vehicles sound ("choo " when playing with train; “whee” as person goes down slide)
  - More developed language as play becomes more advanced (pretending to cook; playing house)
  - Independently building representational structures (e.g., making an train using blocks)
• Consider your child’s current play level
• Consider your child’s fine motor skills
  o Sometimes fine motor deficits and motor planning difficulties make using fine motor manipulatives or certain toys more challenging. You want your child to be successful so toy choice may be important for a child with fine motor issues
• Modeling and imitation are important parts of learning to play
  o We use modeling to teach pretend play skills
  o Many higher level pretend play skills come from the child’s observations of others e.g., understanding that you can play house is based on a child “doing what mommy does”
• The activity should be a part of your daily/weekly routine.
• Have materials on the table/carpet to entice your child to come and play
• Focus on one action or play skill at a time (e.g., pushing the button to make something pop) or making animals “eat”
• Keep in mind the attention level of your child. After your child has followed your lead, let them lead or “do their own thing” for a bit.
• Even though the activity is instructional, HAVE FUN! Be playful and be spontaneous.

The following is an example of how you might play with fine motor manipulatives (see video example – could we link the “block lesson” we have here???)

**Simple assembly**

• Identify the number of blocks the child will be expected to assemble.
• Assist your child as needed to assemble the blocks (Point, Guide or Hand over Hand)
• Reinforce your child for completing small sets of assembly/play. Label what they did and be playful!
• Over time, increase the number of pieces your child is expected to complete or vary the type of structure. You can repeat this several times within a play session. It can be helpful to have small toys to have your child play after several trials of building.

**Imitating simple structures**

If your child is imitating your play, you can have them imitate what you make.

For a student with good imitation skills, you could begin this way:

• Have 2 sets of materials (blocks, playdoh rolling pin, etc.) available (one to model with, one for the student)
• Be sure you have the child’s attention and make a very simple structure (no more than 3-5 pieces)
• Say, “Your turn” or “You make one” and assist as needed (e.g., Point to the next block they need, Assist by helping them place a block, reinforcement for building
• Try to focus on just a few structures or play skills and repeat these each time you play with your child. This repetition is important for your child to learn.
• To encourage further “play”, have materials/toys available to use while playing. Examples: match box car to drive under the simple block bridge; or use another block to “pretend” to drive it under the bridge. Build a slide and have a person slide down, etc.

**Creative play (Gavin)**
If you have students who are beginning to build different structures on their own, it is important to continue to model a variety of building, to encourage creativity and spontaneity. When the fine motor materials are out, model new structures, use things that the child builds in creative ways, etc. Encourage peer to peer exchanges, requests, commenting, showing, etc.!