Project Title
Finding different ways to implement children’s fine motor skill practice through a play.

1. **Overview of the teaching context and action research aim/s**

The context for which I am undertaking my research is in a kindergarten classroom at a small private school in one of the southern metropolitan suburbs in Perth. The heterogeneous classroom has 19 students in it and the students come from many cultural backgrounds. The school is situated in a low to middle socio-economic area and as the school is a Christian college, it uses many Christian values as a foundation for their teaching. For most of the students in this classroom, English is their first language however there are a few students who speak English at school and their cultures language at home. In this classroom I will be focusing on the aims outlined in my first assignment which are: find useful and practical strategies that help me implement fine motor skills practice in play, educate myself on how important fine motor skills are within an early childhood setting, and create provocations/sequence of provocations or play-based experiences that enhance children’s fine motor skills. However my overall aim for this project is to find different ways to implement children’s fine motor skills practice through play.

2. **Identification of the strategies undertaken to achieve the aim/s**

The strategies for my plan outline in assignment one are collaborating with my mentor teacher, self-assessment, further research into fine motor development and utilising the schools resources. During cycle one I have only used two of the four strategies (collaborating with mentor teaching and utilising the schools resources). I did not complete a self-assessment after cycle one due to poor time management and going on prac however I hope to do this after both cycles two and three. I will also be researching further into fine motor
skills development over the next two cycles. By using these two strategies in my next two cycles, I hope to achieve all my project aims; in particular creating provocations that enhance children’s fine motor skills.

3. Discussion of the data collection and data analysis process

For this study, I decided to focus on eight students in two groups of four. Before my first visit, I met up with the classroom teacher (Mrs Jones-pseudonym) and told her what I was going to be doing in her classroom and told her that I had planned to focus my study on eight students. I asked Mrs Jones if she could choose eight students for me, making sure there was a range of academic abilities so I could use this when reflecting and reporting on my research. She chose the students and gave out the permission slips; I was now ready to commence my field work.

Mrs Jones gave me a desk to set up my provocation on (as well as having other provocations set up around the room) for about an hour between recess and lunch. In this time, students were free to walk around and do whatever they wanted to as long as they came to me once, in particular the eight students I was focusing on. On my first visit which was provocation #1 (28/4/2015), students were given an amount of play dough, rollers and cutters and were asked to make some shapes with the objects provided. On my second visit which was provocation #2 (30/4/2015), students were given an amount of play dough and were provided with a range of placemats and were asked to choose a mat and then follow the instructions on it.

I was not sure what to expect before I started my first provocation. I did not know if the students were going to be excited, bored or even happy to come to my table. However once it got underway, I realised the students were quite comfortable playing with the play dough and
this made me feel more relaxed. I sat at the table with them and while the students were interacting with the play dough, I took anecdotal notes and recorded my observations (see appendices A and B) and to ensure my eight students had taken part in the provocation, I used a checklist. There were times when I was watching when I forgot to take notes because I was so engrossed watching the students use the play dough, it really was fascinating seeing them concentrate but also that sense of accomplishment once they had made a shape. They would say something along the lines of “Miss Gigengack, look what I made.” It made me feel good about myself knowing I had the students engaged in my activity.

4. Discussion of the preliminary findings

Both times I was in the classroom during cycle one, I wrote down the names of all my focus students and wrote anecdotal notes and observations down of what they did, how they did it and if they said anything interesting in the process. This is my one item of evidence and is in the appendices (see appendix A and B).

These are my findings for each individual visit:

Provocation #1 (28/4/2015)-I noticed that most of the students were quite good a using the tools (rollers and cutters) to make shapes however I also noticed some unique ways of making shapes. One of the students placed a cutter in front of her and put the play dough inside the cutter instead of rolling it first and then cutting it out. A few students did not hold their rolling pin correctly and others struggled with rolling out the play dough, some students did not even use the tools but instead just used their hands to play with it. However whether they used the tools or not, the students were still using their fine motor skills which I believe is most important.
Provocation #2 (30/4/2015)-Most students started making their placemats however they quickly got bored of it and wanted to do their own thing with the play dough (each placemat had something to make. E.g. Making a snake/snail/ octopus tentacles). A few of the students rolled snakes in their hands in the air while others rolled it out on the desk. Some of the placemat tasks were a bit more complex than just rolling and cutting and some of the academically lower end students struggled with this exercise. Overall this activity still worked on improving their fine motor skills but not to the extent that the first provocation did because they lost interest in it. Overtime as they develop their skills they may learn to enjoy this activity more.

Overall I believe every early childhood setting should have play dough set up in their classroom every day (or at least 3 times a week) and as it is a good way for students to development their fine motor skills. As I have seen from my findings, there are no boundaries with play dough, students never get bored of it and they are always doing new things with it. Mrs Jones told me that every day she puts out the play dough and that every day there are students sitting there playing with it. Completing cycle one has affirmed my beliefs about the use of play dough in early childhood classrooms and in the future I will be using this in my classroom every day. Of course I will change how they use it (providing students with different objects to play with it e.g. straws, toothpicks, beads, rollers, cutters, placemats, cups etc.). Another thing I have noticed is that children’s imaginations go beyond yours; you can think of all the possibilities of how to use something however they will generally always think of somehow else to use it and that is beautiful.

5. Critical Reflection on future strategies/action to be undertaken to achieve aim/s
What I planned to do: create two engaging provocations using play dough. The first one was going to be using rollers and cutters and then I was going to plan the second provocation based on how the first one went.

What actually happened: I followed my overall plans by planning the second provocation based on how the first one went (I decided to use the placemats instead of using the rollers and cutters again) but how I expected it to go and how it went on the day were slightly different. I thought the students were going to be really engaged in using the placemats because it was more structured however they were less engaged. I believe this was because they were made to follow instructions instead of free play. “Viewing children as active participants and decision makers opens up possibilities for educators to move beyond pre-conceived expectations about what children can do and learn.” (Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF], 2009 pg. 9)

What can I do differently next time? Follow my strategies that I had in place from the beginning especially self-assessment because it is a good insight into your own learning Brady and Kennedy (2012) and also allow the provocations to be open minded so the students are not limited in anyway. Also, when planning and teaching, it’s important to “demonstrate the activity first so children understand what to expect” (Glenn, Cousins, Helps, 2006, pg. 55). I know I didn’t do this with my second provocation which might have helped with the students engagement if I did this properly first.

Word count: 1557
References:


Appendix A: Day 1 Anecdotal Notes and Observations

Day 1 - Rolling play dough + cutting

Group 1

- Struggled to get it out of shape
  "I'm going to make a funny face!"

- Struggled with rolling, "Look at my fingers", just played with play dough
  (good fine motor skills)

- Struggled with rolling, "I need help from you. I can't really use the dough"

Group 2

- Struggled with rolling, "Good hand grip"
  (good at cutting out shapes)

- Can't feel the help from me. Tell me what they were (and gonesounds)
### Appendix B: Day 2 Anecdotal Notes and Observations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1 Observations</th>
<th>Group 2 Observations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucy's behavior: Quite difficult but she really enjoyed the activity and made nice shapes.</td>
<td>Bicycle placement: Really efficient at rolling out balls of clay. He also helped others and finished his task quickly and efficiently.</td>
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<td>Steering placement: Used roller incorrectly to make stars and then used cutter. Struggled to make shapes. Used play dough on the mats to create shapes.</td>
<td>Monkey placement: Just got one piece of clay dough and seemed confused. He needed more practice with his motor skills.</td>
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<td>Snake placement: Rolled in hands on the back of the class, then proceeded to mold it into a ball. Used big shapes and little pieces.</td>
<td>Dog spot placement: Used cutter to make circles. Arrived second. Showed him how to roll a ball but got distracted and gave up. Wanted to make a dinosaur instead used fins to do this.</td>
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<td>Bicycle placement: Just used roller correctly but then decided to use hands. Attempted to make shapes but made it too small and gave up.</td>
<td>Autumn placement: Very good at rolling with hands (used it with one hand even) needed very good control. Made small one too.</td>
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