

# Play Our Part



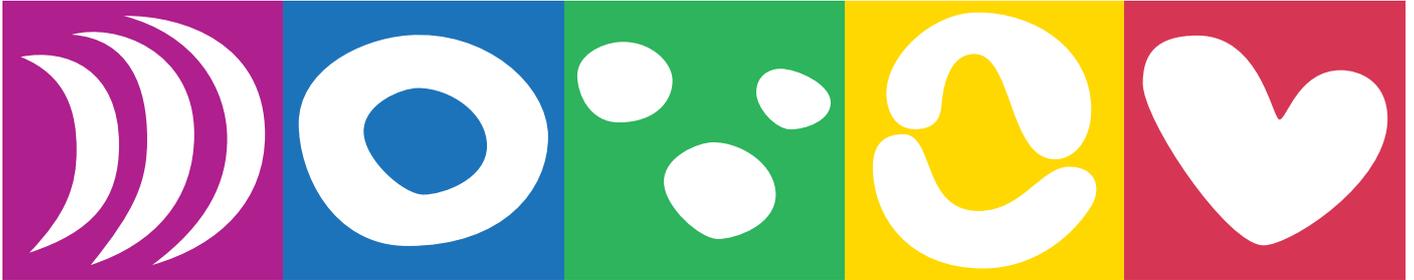
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# Getting Started with Playful Learning:

## 'Quick Wins' for Teachers



# Advancing Learning through Play in Early Childhood Education



## Who are we:

The LEGO Foundation-funded **Play Our Part (PoP)** initiative is a community of practice made up of three early childhood education (ECE) implementers - **VVOB - Education for Development, Plan International, and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)** - working to strengthen Learning through Play (LtP) instruction and holistic learning in schools and centers. The initiative uses a multi-level approach, engaging schools, government institutions, and communities.

## Engage in our Resource Package:

**Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)**, as PoP's Learning and Design Partner, authored this research package to consolidate implementation findings into credible recommendations and guidance for those implementing—or considering implementing—ECE and LtP programs. PoP implementing partners contributed findings and insights from their programs, with support from the LEGO Foundation. We invite you to explore these resources and join us in bringing the LtP vision to life.

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## What are ‘Quick Wins’?

Playful learning ‘Quick Wins’ are fast and effective ways to help teachers successfully try out Learning through Play (LtP). While teachers will need time to fully develop LtP skills, it’s valuable to provide a strong initial experience for those new to the methodology. This initial experience should demonstrate what LtP looks like, build the belief that learning happens at the same time as during play, and provide some strong activities that are ready for use in real classes. PoP programs found that this can be achieved by immersing teachers in playful methods, sometimes called ‘LtP for adults’, where teachers experience playful learning and teaching firsthand as participants.

## Why take an immersive approach?

An immersive approach is effective as it can serve a number of objectives for getting teachers started with play. It can maximize the time you have for modelling LtP methodologies—each step of the training serves as an example that teachers can apply. It offers a visual and concrete means of understanding the basics to LtP, while allowing teachers to experience the emotional and cognitive benefits play can offer for learning. It can impart a sense of passion and emotional connection with LtP that goes beyond just an intellectual understanding of playful methods. Teachers even point to immersive play as a reason for trying and continuing with LtP:

“The reason I tried this new teaching approach is because I found that it is the best for me as an adult. Whenever a teacher would teach using playful learning, I would grasp it faster and never forget.”

“I did [playful learning] myself to see where the child is distracted or not and I saw that he’s not distracted. This helped me a lot.”

“I will use ‘playful learning’ because I liked it myself, I don’t get tired of it, the children liked it and I also feel happy, I will continue using it indeed every time I will be teaching in nursery.”

While just a first step in the longer road towards LtP mastery, ‘LtP for adults’ can create strong first impressions that drive longer-term changes in teaching. For more information about how to design your overall teacher professional development program, see our [TPD Guidance resource](#).



# What is in the resource?

This resource puts at your fingertips our best guidance for leading playful experiences with early childhood education (ECE) teachers and a collection of project-tested play activities. While PoP programs found that ‘LTP for adults’ can be used to successfully engage other stakeholders, such as head teachers, government officials, and parents, this resource focuses on engaging teachers. If used for other stakeholders or longer-term skill development, adjust activities and question prompts accordingly. The following sections should be consulted based on your needs:

## Guidance for Training Teachers to successfully use Play

Design how you will train teachers

Get tips for better demonstrating playful teaching

Give teachers guidance on how to easily incorporate play in their classrooms

## Quick Wins Playful Learning Activities

Explore examples of play activities

Select those which can be appropriately adapted to your curriculum, environment, and teacher skill set.

# Guidance for training teachers to successfully use play

*This section offers key pointers to enhance your early engagements with teachers, ensuring they experience, reflect on, and begin to apply playful learning firsthand. These recommendations are informed by the PoP programs’ experience and are designed for use during training activities. It is recommended to adapt the questions and considerations to align with your specific training context and programmatic goals.*

**Model the activity visually, and allow teachers to remodel it for their peers.** Seeing both experts and peers leading play activities can help make abstract concepts more tangible. Child-centered methods and play in the classroom were both novel concepts in PoP contexts, so teachers greatly appreciated having visual examples of playful learning and teaching.

**Highlight both the learner experience of play, and the teacher's role in planning for and tailoring activities to their classroom contexts.** This helps teachers see how play can benefit learners emotionally and cognitively, while also prompting them to think about how they can create these opportunities for their learners.

**Engage teachers to experience the activity as a learner:** This means getting teachers to reflect on and discuss how the playful learning affected their emotions, engagement, and thinking processes. Consider asking:

- What does playful learning feel like? Would your learners enjoy it, and why?
- To what extent did the learning feel active, and how did this affect your experience?
- What different types of learning did you do during the activity?

**Engage teachers to start planning for their classrooms:** This means prompting teachers to think



about how they can apply the activity with their own unique learners. Consider asking:

- What materials could you use that are already available in your class or community?
- What adaptations would you need to make to ensure the activity works for different learners in your classroom? (eg. older / younger, learners with disabilities, varied backgrounds, boys / girls)
- What challenges might you have in managing behaviors or 'rules' during the activity, and how would you address them?

**Prompt teachers to connect activities with specific learning goals.** Play is fun and teachers should enjoy the experience, but make sure to maintain learning at the center of the immersion. Since they may naturally be drawn to the physicality of the activities, focus teachers on how the activity can be used to strengthen specific skills or cognition. It will take time to master this skill, but getting teachers to start making decisions about what can be taught through play is an important shift in mindset. Consider asking:

- What skills are strengthened by doing the activity?
- What ECE curricular themes or competencies can this activity help teach?
- What questions would you ask your learners during the activity to help them express their learning? What about after the activity to promote reflection?
- Highlighting holistic skills, such as social interaction or physical development can help open teachers to a wider-range of learning outcomes that are possible from play.

**Put it all together so the teacher experiences the training content in a similar manner as they would teach a lesson and as if they were real learners in a classroom.** This enforces that play is not just an 'energizer' but a core learning activity. Use the opportunity to model how to teach through play, and engage teachers in practical questions about how they can do it in their own classes.

We've put some of our own recommendations into a sample 'script' below that could be used with any of the activities in the **Quick Wins Playful Learning Activities** section in this resource. Be sure to modify questions to meet your training needs and context.

#### 1. Set the scene for the playful learning activity:

- "For the next activity, please imagine we are in a classroom, and we have our daily routine, and I'm your teacher today."
- Conduct the **Quick Wins Playful Activities'**

'Introducing the Activity'

- Ask teachers about their level of intrigue and expectations for the activity.
- #### 2. Do the activity:
- Conduct the **Quick Wins Playful Activities'** 'Doing the Activity'
  - While doing the activity, take pauses to ask of the learner's experience,
    - i. What does playful learning feel like?
    - ii. What skills are you using while you do the activity?
    - iii. What are you thinking about while you do the activity?
- #### 3. Reflect on the activity:
- Conduct the **Quick Wins Playful Activities'** 'Reflecting/Closing'
  - Explain your teaching process out loud: "I introduced the activity by showing you items that you have in your classes. I let you be active by... (describe the activity). I ended the lesson by asking you to reflect with an open-ended question."
  - If not already discussed, consider prompting teachers to start planning for the activity:
    - i. What curricular competencies could the activity help you teach?
    - ii. What would you ask the learners about during the activity to help them understand the lesson? What about after the activity?
    - iii. What challenges might you have in managing behaviors or 'rules' during the activity, and how would you address them?
    - iv. What adaptations would you need to make to ensure the activity works for your particular learners? (e.g. young learners, learners with disabilities, etc.)
    - v. What would you need to do to prepare for this activity in your classroom?
    - vi. What materials do you have that you could use to do the same activity?





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# Quick Wins Playful Learning Activities

In this section, you will find a range of successful activities for onboarding teachers to Learning through Play (LTP). Sample activities have been selected based on their potential for creating an immersive experience with teachers, and for their success in real classrooms around Zambia, Uganda, and Rwanda.

The activities may not be perfectly aligned with your curricular standards, and they may not feature the materials which are most available in your local environment. **It is recommended to:**

- **Adapt PoP activities** so they directly address the **ECE themes and competencies** that are relevant for your teachers.
- **Substitute materials** for those that are locally **available**, so that teachers see activities as feasible.

# Spark Creativity

## Learning objectives:

### Content theme:

Home: Exploring different ways to use household items

### Competencies Developed:

Simple problem solving: exploring multiple solutions  
Cognitive flexibility: adapting a familiar object for new uses

## Preparation:

### Materials:

Everyday objects from the home e.g. spoons, forks, bottles or cups

### Class set-up:

Ensure that the classroom has space for group work

## Introducing the activity:

1. Introduce how this game aims to encourage participants to find new and creative uses for everyday objects.
2. Divide participants into teams of 3-4 people.
3. Give each team an everyday object, e.g., spoon (the objects do not need to be the same).
4. Explain instructions: Each team needs to come up with as many functions as possible for their object. They get one point for each function, e.g., A spoon can be used: for eating; as a mirror; to carry objects; to touch something from a distance, etc.

## Doing the activity:

5. Give participants 5 minutes to come up with as many functions as they can. [It is supposed to be a bit challenging to come up with different ideas]
6. Have each group share their list of functions, and award points. For large classes, it may be useful to ask each group to choose 1 presenter who will share the group's ideas.
7. Announce the winner!

## Closing the activity:

8. Ask learners, what is one object you've learned to use in multiple ways? What are two different ways to use it?

## Adapting the activity for other learning objectives:

### Other themes:

Change the items to target a new theme, or combine objects from two and compare them (e.g. outdoor vs indoor items)

### Other competencies:

While giving instructions, put extra focus on a particular skill:

Listening comprehension: challenge learners to listen and repeat all the uses named by a team

Simple operations: put focus on awarding +1 points or counting 'uses' for each item



# Story telling

## Learning objectives:

### Content theme:

Story telling: Telling a themed story from beginning to end using a picture as a prompt

### Competencies Developed:

Expression: telling an original story

Listening Comprehension: listening and connecting to the prior sentence

Peer Relations: turn taking and sharing the role of speaking

Cognitive Flexibility: adapting to the changing story

## Preparation:

### Materials:

A printed copy for each group of the picture attached

### Class set-up:

Ensure that the classroom has space for group work

## Introducing the activity:

1. Introduce the activity by saying: "There are many different stories. Can you tell me a story we have read or listened to here in class?" or "Can you tell me what your favorite story is?"
2. Today you are going to help me make a story and we will create it together!

## Doing the activity:

3. Sit in a circle.
4. Show the picture and say: "Once upon a time

there was..." If there is a learner with a visual disability (or you want to practice listening / imagination), set the scene verbally (e.g. "a happy child runs on a grass field with other children").

5. Ask the children next to you to say something that he/she can see happening in this story. Ask one more child to share what he thinks is happening.
6. Divide the children into smaller groups and give them a copy of the same image. Ask the groups to continue together to make their story of what happens next in the story, ask the children to take turns.
7. Walk around and help the groups if needed.

## Closing the activity:

8. Group the children in a circle again.
9. Thank the groups for their beautiful and creative stories!
10. Ask the children: "Who will you tell your story to? Why?" Listen to a few participants share.
11. Ask the children: "What was difficult to create a story?" Listen to a few participants share

## Adapting the activity for other learning objectives:

### Other themes:

Use pictures that relate to a specific themed location (eg. a photo of a marketplace or school). Encourage vocabulary fit to the location.



# Measurement corners

## Learning objectives:

### Content theme:

Use a variety of themes at different corners: Home (kitchen items and clothing), Environment (natural items), School (class items), etc.

### Competencies Developed:

Comparing quantities and sizes: measuring objects and using comparatives to describe differences in size  
Sorting and classifying: grouping objects by weight, length, and size

Expressive vocabulary: descriptors for weight, length, and size

## Preparation:

### Materials:

At each corner, place a range of themed items. Aim for different sizes, materials, and colors. Ideas include:

Kitchen Items: bottles, cups, spoons, plates, cooking pots, boxes, food items, etc.

Clothing & Fabrics: clothes, shoes, shoe laces, accessories, etc.

Environment: stones, sticks, leaves (dry and fresh), etc

Class materials: books, pens, pencils, chairs, rulers, bags, etc.

### Class set-up:

Set up the room as in the table below. Draw a line in the middle of the room to divide the left and the right side.

Front of class	
Corner 1	Corner 2
Corner 3	Corner 4
Corner 5	Corner 6
Back of class	

## Introducing the activity:

1. Play a quick game of Mingle as a warm up to the idea of 'grouping': Children walk around greeting each other, until the teacher says a number. At this moment, children quickly make groups so the total number of children in the group matches the number. Stop children after a short time, and those who have found a group with the correct number win. Repeat.

2. Engage learners with a challenge. "Today, I need your help! Can you help me?" (Encourage responses from children.)
3. Take children to Corner 1 and 2 where mixed materials are placed and have a small number of children demonstrate sorting. "Look at all these materials! They are all mixed up. Can you help me sort them out? Let's put all the big things in this box and all the small things in that box."
4. Make sure children understand the task and encourage them to participate. "Great job, everyone! How did you decide which things go where? What other ways can we sort things?"
5. Continue at Corners 3, 4, 5, and 6, having children demonstrate how to sort by length (long and short) and weight (heavy and light).

## Doing the activity:

6. To get into groups, play the Mingle game so that there will be 6 total groups (Class size ÷ 6 corners = your number). Once the children form groups, guide them each to a corner.
7. Encourage children to start sorting like in the demonstration.
8. Observe and guide children with critical thinking as they sort in their corners.
  - Ask open-ended questions to trigger children's thinking, such as:
    - "How do you know?"
    - "Do you agree? Why or why not?"
    - "What could help us decide?"
  - Encourage discussion and dialogue, reinforcing key vocabulary:
    - Compare heavy, light, long, short, big, small.
    - Introduce new words by naming objects children may not be familiar with.
9. Identify groups that need more or less challenge and adjust the activity's difficulty by:
  - Narrow/increase the difference between objects (e.g., two items of nearly the same size).



- Extend the task by asking children to compare themselves (e.g., "Who in this group is the shortest/tallest?") or introducing how to measure using hands or an object
  - Increase/reduce the number of objects or time given to classify
  - For those struggling, ask more explicit questions instead of expecting them to classify independently (e.g. "Is this one bigger or smaller?")
10. After 5 minutes, clap your hands to signal the transition and ask children to return the materials to a big pile so the next group can use them.
  11. Rotate children to a different corner on their side of the room so they are doing a different kind of comparison.
  12. Continue observing & facilitating again.

## Closing the activity:

13. In a circle, gather all learners and let them share their sorting experiences in different ways (speaking, drawing, acting).
14. Test their understanding. "Let's think, who would be the shortest child in this class? And what would be the heaviest thing in our class? And what is the biggest thing? Is the biggest thing also the heaviest?"
15. Encourage learners to express their learning. "What did you learn today?"
16. Ask for learners to share their opinions. "Which corner did you like most?"
17. Celebrate contributions: "Great job, everyone! You are all fantastic sorters!"

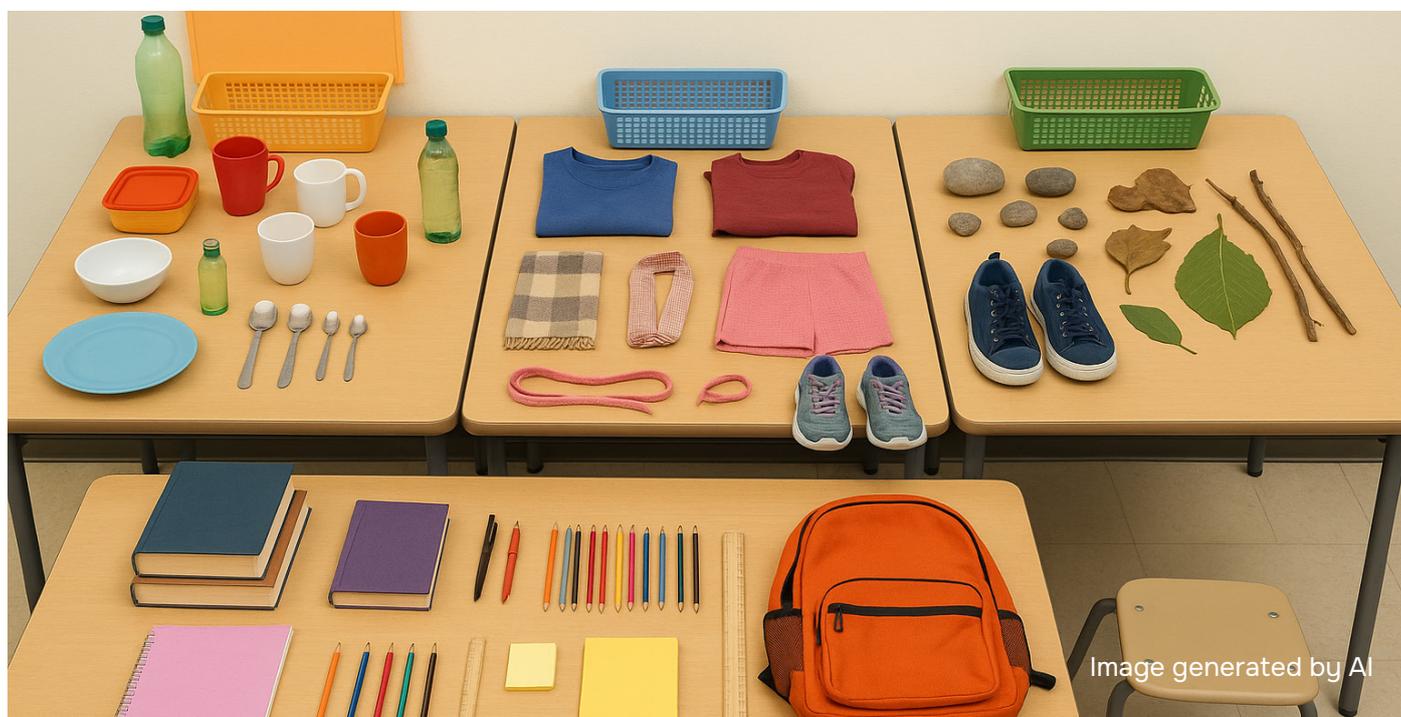


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# Building a Human Body

## Learning objectives:

### Content theme:

The human body: Identifying body parts, locating them on a body, and discussing their function.

### Competencies Developed:

Vocabulary related to the body, appearance, and function

Fine-motor skills for cutting shapes

## Preparation:

### Materials:

Scissors, manila paper, colours, paints, brushes, and bigger paper on which the body will be pasted. Prepare cut outs of different body parts for the children to colour, stick etc. Older children can cut out body parts by themselves.

### Class set-up:

Determine if the activity will be done as a whole-class, in groups, or individually. Prepare appropriate space(s) with a big paper where the body will be pasted.

## Introducing the activity:

1. As an energizer, have children stand and move different body parts, such as, "Shake your legs. Now move your head."
2. Show children a body part cut-out, and ask them where it goes on the body.
3. Demonstrate how to paste the cut-out onto the paper.
4. Give the instructions that children will:
  - Go to their workplace
  - Make sure they have 1 big paper, body parts, scissors, colors, and paste
  - Identify the body part cut-outs and their function (together, if in groups)
  - Paste all the cut-outs onto the paper to make a body.

## Doing the activity:

5. Either as a whole-class, small groups, or individually, send the children to build their bodies. For young children, provide pre-cut body parts.
6. Circulate the room and ask children inquiry questions about the body:
  - What is the name of that body part?

- What do you do with that body part? (specific to the child)
- Where is that body part on your body? Show me it.
- How do you know that picture is the body part? What do you see?
- What color is that body part?

## Closing the activity:

7. Allow children to share their work with the class:
  - What is the name of your child?
  - What does the child like doing?
  - What body parts does the child use to do that?
8. Reflect with learners about new body parts that they learned today
9. Display learners' work in the classroom (or help them display it themselves)
10. If time allows, use the images for another activity and 'dress' the bodies with different colored clothes.

## Adapting the activity for other learning objectives:

### Other themes:

Adapt to a range of themes by using different cut-out images (eg. household objects and where they go in the house)

### Other competencies:

Vocabulary for colors and clothing: have the children 'dress' their body with colored paper. Discuss the colors, clothing names, and places they go on the body.



# Shapes of Letters

## Learning objectives:

### Content theme:

Literacy and language: emergent literacy skills for identifying letters, grouping similar letter shapes, sizes, or colors, and building individual letters with small objects

### Competencies Developed:

Sorting and classifying: grouping by letter/shape, color, size  
Letter Identification: comparing shapes and lines of different letters  
Fine Motor Skills: forming letters with small objects

## Preparation:

### Materials:

Provide materials that show alphabet letters: foam, magnetic, or cut-off letters, letter blocks, or bottle caps with written letters. If possible, it will help to have letters of different size, color, and material. Bottle caps, small stones, or leaves are especially good for building letter shapes.

### Class set-up:

Set up a table or group space where the children will have enough room to manipulate materials for making letters. Make sure there are plenty of materials at the group spaces. If the class is large, consider moving some groups outdoors.

## Introducing the activity:

1. Explain to the learners that we will be learning about letters, and their different shapes.
2. Ask learners to say some of the letters they've already studied.

## Doing the activity:

3. Start with the learners in small groups.
4. Instruct learners to sort the letters according to the criteria below, giving plenty of time for working at each step:
  - Work in groups and sort the letters by shape.
  - Work in pairs to sort letters by color.
  - Work individually to sort letters by size.
5. While learners are sorting, observe how they are working, and ask questions to have children explain what they are doing, such as:
  - Tell me about the groups you are making.
  - Why are these items in this group?
  - How do you know this object belongs in this group?

- What is the difference between these two groups?
6. Using the available materials, demonstrate to learners how to build a letter using small objects, such as "c" or "t", and instruct learners to make their own letters in their group.
  7. Move around the room to help students who need guidance or support.
  8. Ask learners to try putting more than one letter together. If there is time, challenge groups to build a certain number of letters within a time limit.

## Closing the activity:

9. Gather the class to review what they have learnt and reflect on the challenges
10. Refresh learners' memory on the shapes and lines that form each letter.
11. Showcase learners letter building creations to reinforce learning, encourage self esteem and confidence.
12. Be sure to make note of areas where learners may need additional support.

## Adapting the activity for other learning objectives:

### Other competencies:

Replace letters with numbers and build number identification skills.

Extend the activity with other kinds of objects for building letters, such as clay, sticks, or even ask children to make letters with their bodies.

Extend the activity with word cards, and have groups build an entire word.

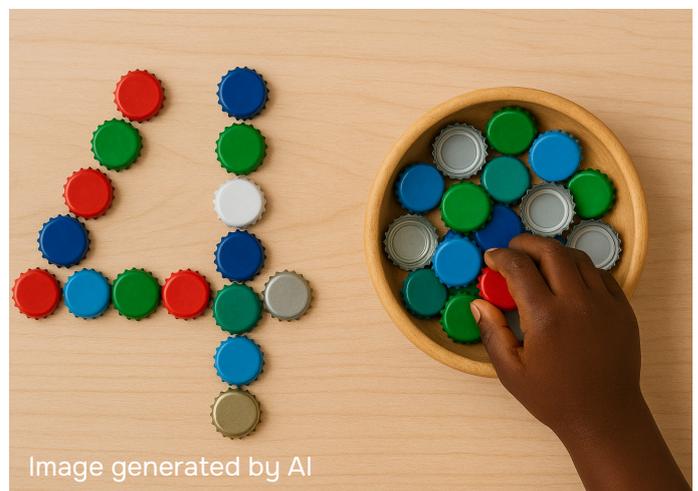


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