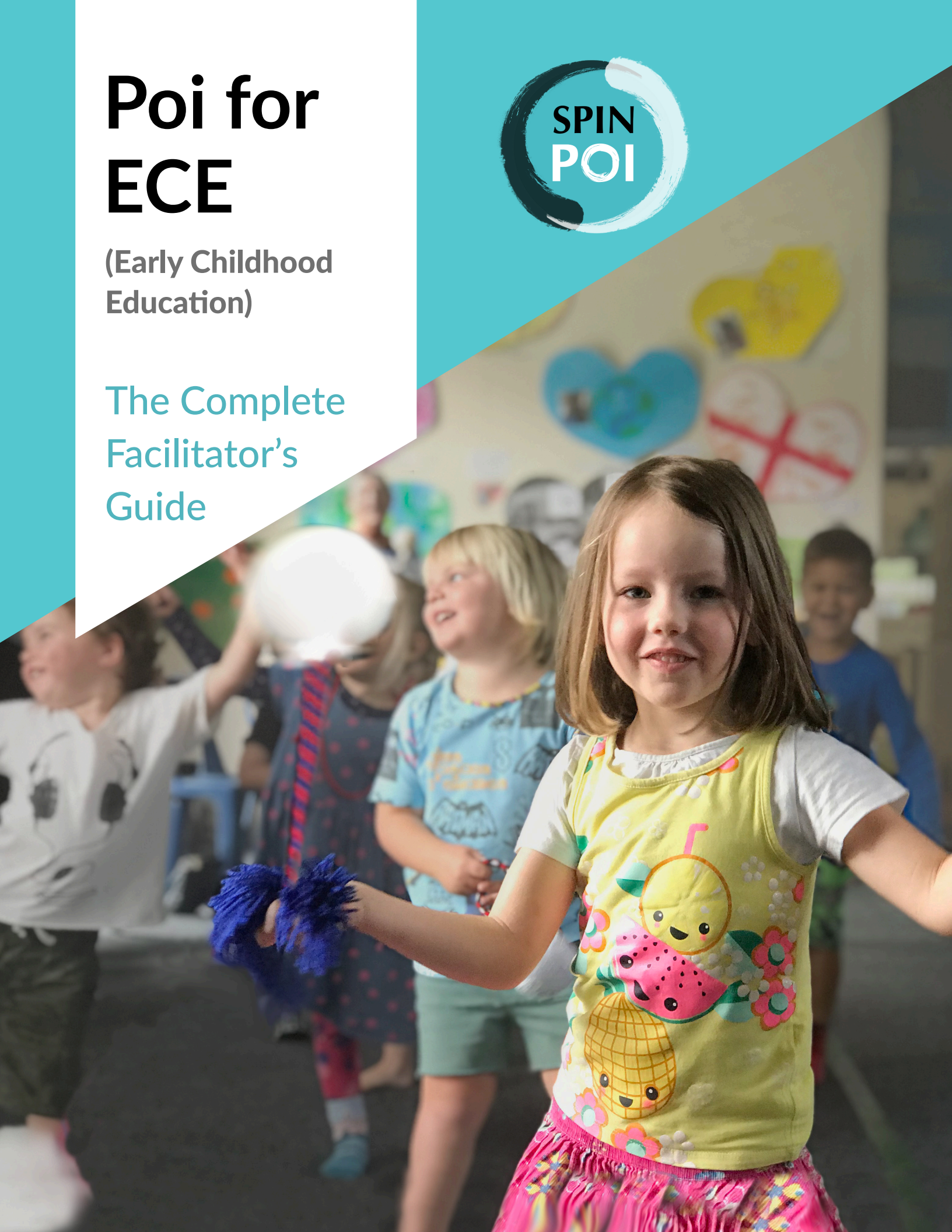


Poi for ECE

(Early Childhood
Education)

The Complete
Facilitator's
Guide



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Look for these symbols throughout the guide:



Click anything with an arrow to be taken to a video or webpage with more information.



On pages with this symbol, flip to the back of the guide to find a corresponding printable activity.

What is Poi?

Poi is a ball or a weight at the end of a flexible cord which is swung in circular patterns around the body. Poi originated with the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand. The first poi were made by wrapping the leaves of harakeke (New Zealand flax) around the soft down of raupō (a wetland plant also known as bullrush) to form the ball. Harakeke fibre was used to weave the cord. It is believed poi were originally used by Māori men to train strength and flexibility, and by Māori women as a form of entertainment.

Today, people of all cultures, ages, and abilities are practicing poi as a form of play, performance, and exercise. Contemporary poi come in all shapes and sizes, including poi that glow and poi you can light on fire! Poi also continue to play an important role in Māori culture, and can be seen in kapa haka (Māori performing arts).

Learn more about the history of poi by clicking the video link.

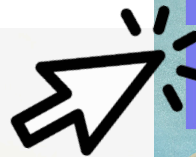
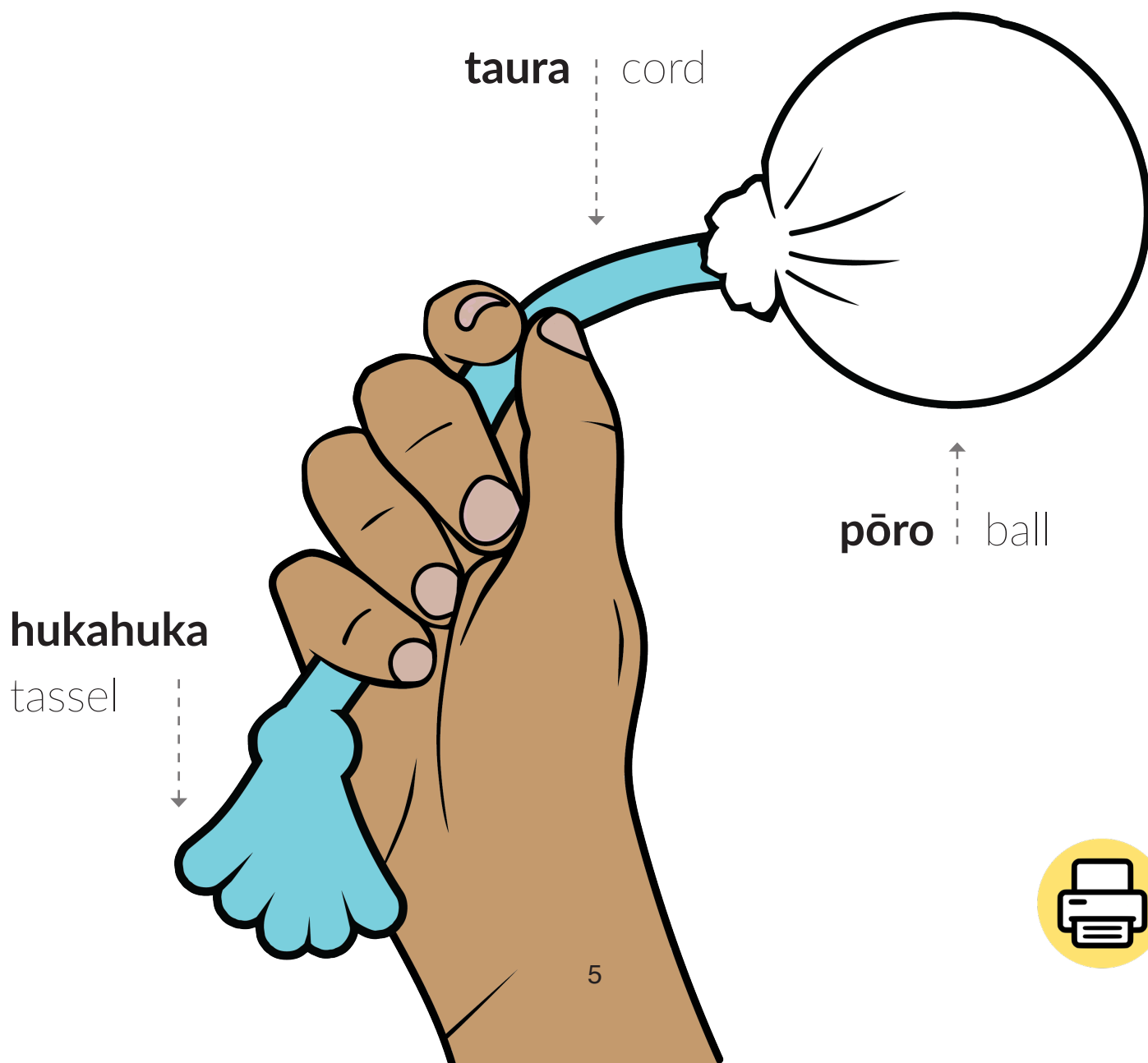


Image of early Māori poi made of harakeke (New Zealand flax)
Image courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Know Your Kupu

Learning the kupu (words) for the parts of the poi in te reo Māori (the Māori language) is a great way to preserve and celebrate the history of poi. Three parts you can practice saying are “pōro” (the ball or head of the poi), “taura” (the cord), and “hukahuka” (the tassel). If you need help pronouncing these words head over to the [Māori Dictionary](#) and type the word into the search bar to bring up an audio recording.



The Benefits of Poi for Early Learning and Development

Poi provides a unique mix of physical movement and cognitive stimulation that can foster a wealth of opportunities for developing motor skills, coordination, bilateral integration, motor planning, and other key learning outcomes. Poi is also unique in that it is a repetitive and rhythmic movement. Activities such as poi that involve synchronization to a beat and coordinated rhythmic movement are linked with improved self-regulation, body awareness, speech development and auditory perception.¹

As a form of play, poi creates a safe space for children to improvise, innovate, practice new skills and explore their imagination. Play has profound health benefits and is key in sculpting the brain and fostering innovation, adaptability, and resilience. Play is also essential in developing social skills and can reinforce patterns to optimize the learning process.²



Physical

Poi is a great way to get that blood pumping and can help fine-tune motor skills and foster muscle development.



Cognitive

Working out challenging poi movements or poi routines requires attention, memory, and problem solving.



Social

Playing poi together fosters important social skills such as communication, working as a team, and active listening.

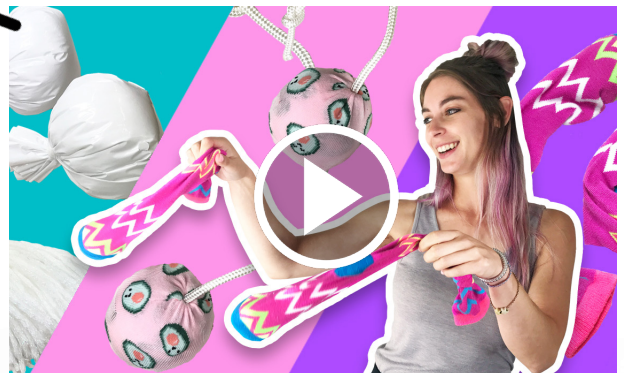
1. Williams, K. E. (2018). Moving to the beat: Using music, rhythm, and movement to enhance self-regulation in early childhood classrooms. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 50(1), 85-100.

2. Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Poi Making

Poi making as a craft activity enables students to enter a world of imagination, and is a great opportunity to develop fine motor skills, unleash creativity, and work on identifying different shapes, colors and textures through a variety of materials. The following pages will explain how to make 2 different styles of poi: sock poi and contemporary Māori poi. Both are suitable for all ages and abilities, and printable instructions with diagrams are included. At the end of this section are ideas for how you and your students can expand upon these traditional poi making techniques to truly bring your poi to life through silly, whimsical, and unique themes and characters.

Learn more about how to make poi
in this easy DIY poi making video.



Sock Poi

Sock poi are the quickest and easiest type of poi to make. They are also very durable, easy to wash, and can be as heavy or light as you please. Sock poi can be made from any ordinary sock by simply adding weight (such as rice) to the bottom of the sock. A knot can be tied at the top to prevent the weight from spilling out and provide additional grip.



Weight

Approx. 70g works well for most, but weight can be easily customised



Durability

Very durable, as long as a sturdy sock is used



Wash-ability

Remove the weight and socks can be easily washed



Time to make

Approx. 2 min per pair



Cost to make

Approx. \$9 per pair (depending on the price of the socks)

How to Make Sock Poi

Materials

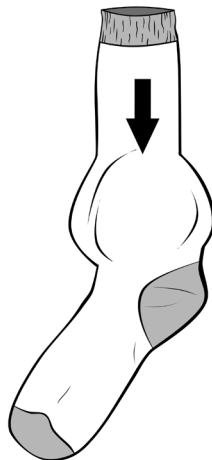
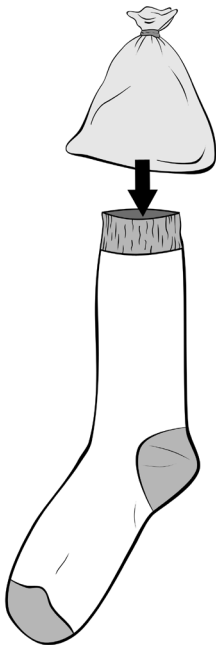


Sock poi can be weighted with a variety of things. If you want them a bit heavier, rice or plastic pellets work well. If you want them a bit lighter, a rolled up sock will do the trick. Whatever you choose, make sure it's soft (no hard rigid objects such as tennis balls!). If you are using something loose like rice, and are planning to wash the socks frequently, place it inside a pouch or bag. This will make it easily removable.



For the poi itself, ordinary knee-high socks work best. A shorter sock can be used, but the additional length allows students to choose where they would like to hold the poi - hold more toward the foot and the poi will be shorter, hold more toward the ankle and the poi will be longer. Since there is no "one size fits all" poi, having these options is helpful. Make sure to use a regular sock and not tights or pantihose, as these are too thin and stretchy. And don't worry about the heel of the sock sticking out, once the poi is twirling the momentum will straighten it out and you won't even notice.

Assembly



Māori Poi

Making Māori poi is an opportunity to connect with and learn about the origins of poi and te ao Māori (the Māori world view). The Māori poi shown in this guide are modelled after the poi used for kapa haka (Māori performing arts) in New Zealand today, which have evolved from the traditional poi used hundreds of years ago.



Weight

Typically very light, though weight can be added



Durability

If not made well the head can separate from the cord, otherwise very durable



Wash-ability

Plastic head is easy to wipe down. Yarn cord can be difficult



Time to make

Approx. 20 min per pair

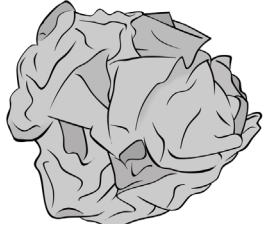


Cost to make

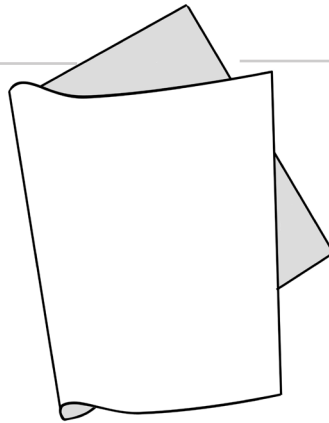
Less than \$5 per pair (head can be made of all recycled materials)

How to Make Contemporary Māori Poi

Materials



To stuff the head of the poi, use crumpled newspaper, plastic bags, or stuffing/foam from a pillow or the craft store. For additional weight a pinch of rice can be added.

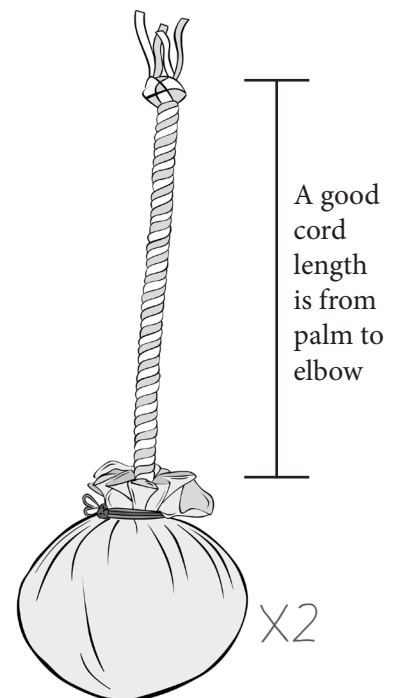
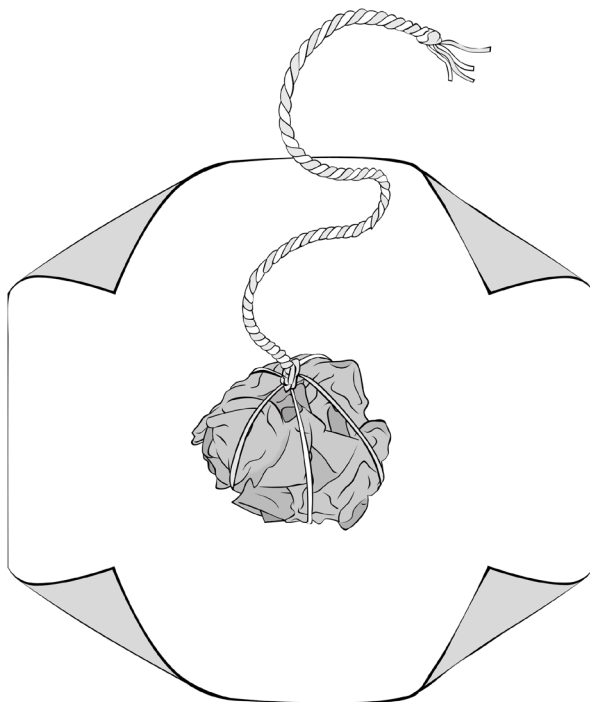


Plastic will be wrapped around the stuffing to hold it in place. Ordinary plastic bags, trash bags, or a plastic table cloth will work well.



Use yarn to braid a cord however you please, such as a simple 3 strand braid. Tie both ends off with a knot, but leave long tails at one end; these will be tied around the stuffing to keep the head of the poi and the cord connected.

Assembly



Tie the long tails on one end of your cord around the stuffing to connect the two. Wrap your plastic tight around the stuffing to form a ball. Tie the plastic off at the top with yarn or tape. This is easiest with two people, one person pulling the plastic tight and the other tying or taping the plastic off. Cut off excess plastic, leaving a little sticking out at the top for decoration if desired.

Create Your Own Design

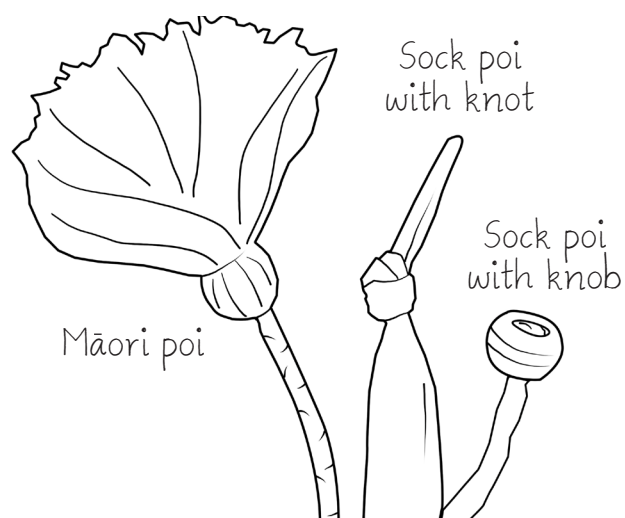


Creating your own poi is a great opportunity for students to explore their imagination, style and creativity. When it comes to the design of the poi, the sky is the limit! Bring your poi to life with button eyes or fabric tails. Experiment with dye or fabric markers. Provide a wide variety of materials and create a space for students to explore their imagination and discover a world of experimentation, invention, and self expression. Flip to the end of this guide for the Create Your Dream Poi coloring page. Students can use this page to plan and design their poi before bringing them to fruition.



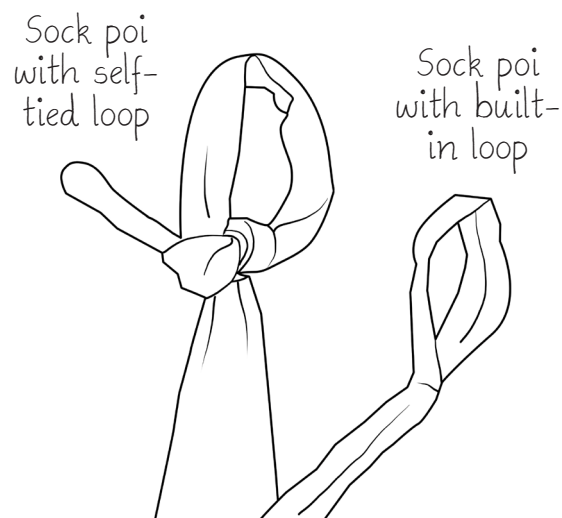
Holding Your Poi

How a student holds their poi can really affect how comfortable they feel while playing poi and their ability to achieve certain poi movements. Just like the poi themselves, there is no “one size fits all” poi grip, but this section aims to give you a starting place with two common poi grip styles: handle and loop. You and your students should play around to figure out what’s comfortable, considering factors such as wrist and finger mobility, grip strength, and tolerance for friction against the skin. More often than not, the way a student holds their poi naturally will be the way that works best for them. Keep in mind certain grips might work well on certain planes or for certain movements, and not as well for others, so don’t be afraid to change grips throughout each lesson.



Handle

This includes any poi that has a gathering of material at the top which forms a handle you can grip. This could be sock poi with a knot you tie yourself, a silicon handle, or the gathering of yarn just below the tassel of Māori style poi.



Loop

This style is comprised of a loop of fabric at the top of the poi. You can create a single loop yourself on any sock poi by making a loop of fabric and tying it off at the bottom with a couple knots.

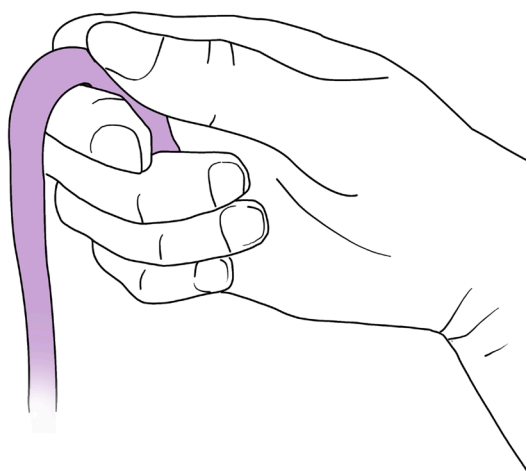
Handle

Pinch Grip

Who: Anyone with no known grip strength issues. This grip is a great starting place for most ages/abilities.

How: Pinch the handle between your thumb and index finger. The poi cord will drape over your knuckles.

Benefits/Limitations: The pinching action can make it easier to have fine control over poi movements, however, some students may find pinching to be tiring. The poi can also rub on the knuckles with this grip, which can sometimes be solved by having the student move their wrist in a more pronounced circular motion when spinning the poi.

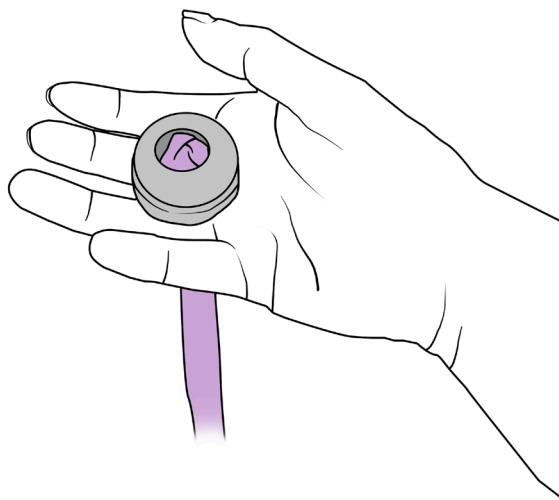


Open Grip

Who: Those with weaker grip strength or anyone who would like to relax their hand while moving the poi.

How: Turn your hand palm up. Slide the poi cord between your ring and middle finger, or your middle and index finger, depending on personal preference. Rest the handle close to your palm. The poi cord will hang down from the knuckle side of your hand.

Benefits/Limitations: Easy on the hand as it requires less active effort to hold than pinch grip. Because of the relaxed hand position, the poi can easily fly off of the hand if a student gets too relaxed or doesn't have enough grip strength to keep it in place.



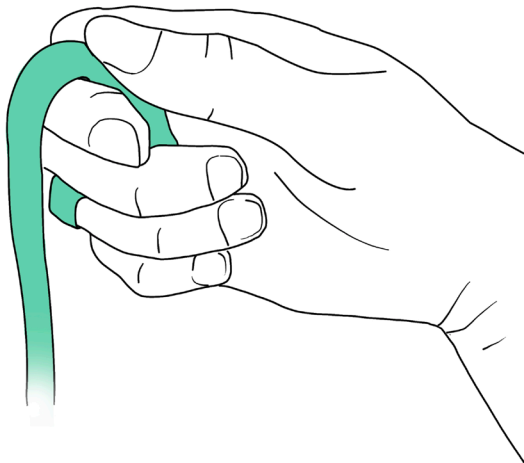
Loop

Pinch Grip

Who: Anyone who likes pinch grip with handle style poi, but wants an additional level of support.

How: With your hand palm down, slide the loop over your ring finger. Pinch the cord between your thumb and index finger. The poi cord will drape over your knuckles.

Benefits/Limitations: Pinch grip with a loop has all the same properties as with a handle, but with an additional level of grip support provided by the loop around the ring finger. The loop can create a more supported feel, and can be good for students who are working on strengthening their grip or need assistance maintaining a consistent grip over a period of time.

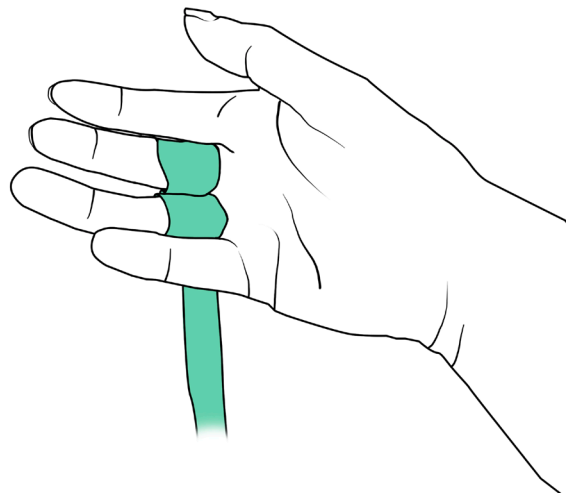


Open Grip

Who: Anyone with very limited grip strength.

How: With your hand palm down, slide the loop over your ring and middle finger, snug to where your fingers meet your palm. Grab the cord with your other hand. Keeping tension on the poi cord, rotate the poi and your hand together until your palm is facing up. Drop the poi cord between your ring and middle finger, so the cord now hangs down from the knuckle side of your hand and you have created two loops around your fingers.

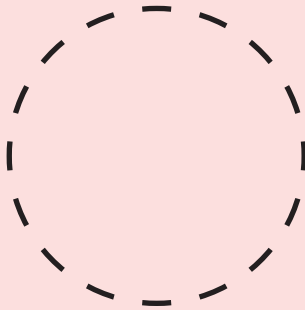
Benefits/Limitations: When the poi spins, gravity will cause the loops to tighten, making it very secure and requiring little holding on. Not ideal for movements that requires letting go of the poi (e.g. passing it hand to hand), as it can be cumbersome to get the poi on/off the hand.



Poi Movement Theory

The following pages will explain the theory behind all poi movement. While it is not important that your students understand this theory or the corresponding language, it is important for you as a facilitator to study these concepts carefully. By understanding poi movement theory, you will gain access to an important framework that will enable you to not only gain control over your poi, but to create infinite combinations of exercises for your students.

Modes of Movement



Spinning



Swinging

Building Blocks

Plane

Where the poi are in space (i.e. flat in front of you, parallel to the floor)

Timing

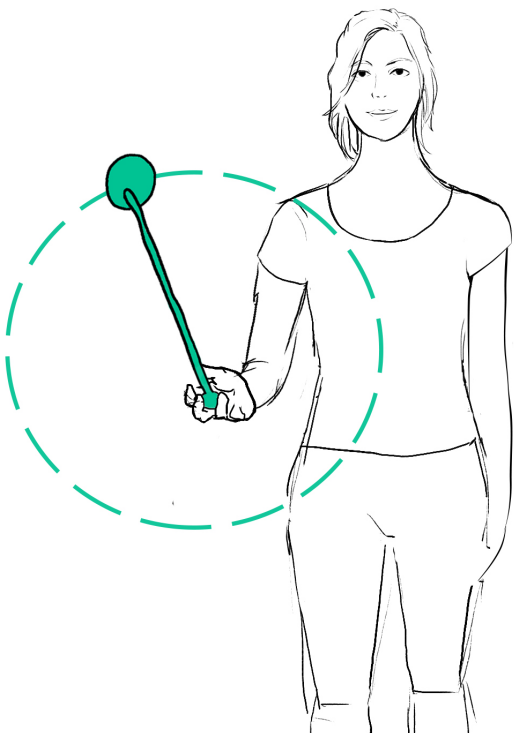
How the poi are moving in relation to each other (i.e. together or split time)

Direction

Which way the poi are moving in relation to you (i.e. forward or backward)

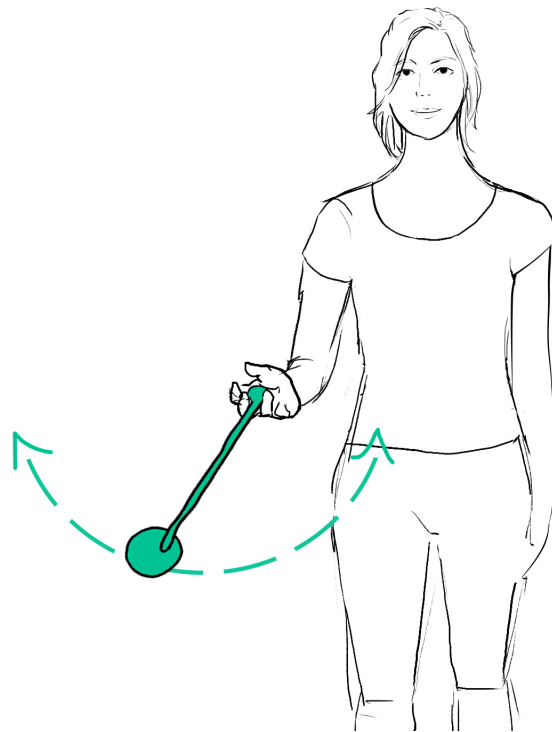
Modes of Movement

There are two main modes of poi movement: spinning (the poi travel in a full circle) and swinging (the poi move back and forth like a pendulum).



Spinning

Spinning the poi in a full circle is the basis for most poi movements. Sustaining the orbit of the poi can feel like hard work at first, but once coordination is mastered the movement becomes quite gentle. When spinning the poi, focus on making small circles with your wrists and relaxing the elbow and shoulder.

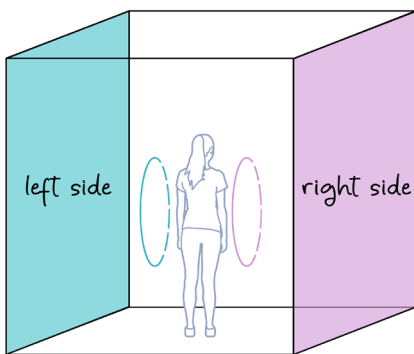


Swinging

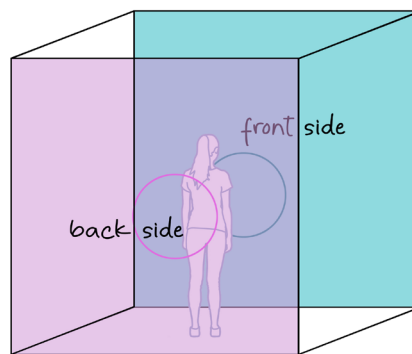
Swinging the poi back and forth, also called a pendulum, is a less vigorous motion than spinning. Swinging can range from a very small pendulum using fine motor control, to a large pendulum using your whole arm. Swinging is a nice way to begin and end a session. It is also very useful for participants who may have difficulty in sustaining spinning.

Planes

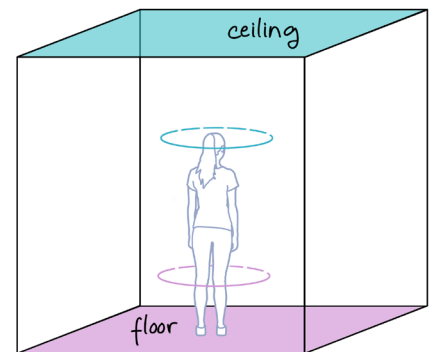
Planes describe where the poi are in space. Some common planes are right/left side, front/back side, and ceiling/floor. You can imagine these planes as the 6 different sides of a cube.



left/right side



front/back side



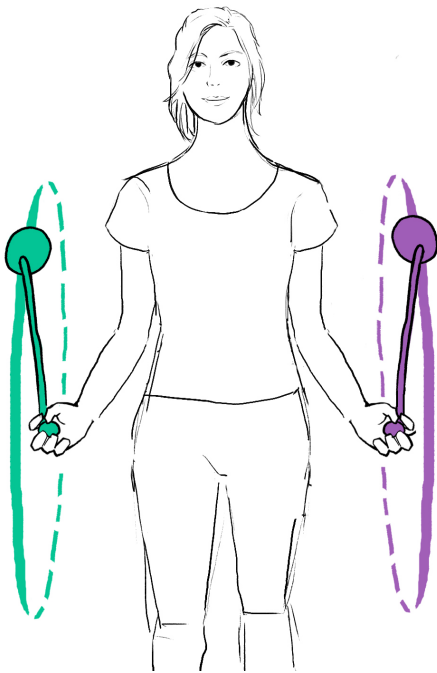
ceiling/floor

Incorporating planes into your teaching will provide structure and challenge, as well as help build awareness and control of the poi. For example, saying “let’s spin both of our poi” is a fun way to play. But saying “let’s spin both of our poi flat in front of us” provides a more specific physical and cognitive challenge. In addition, planes are an integral part of mastering more advanced poi movements. If someone is having a difficult time with a move, it is often because they are on the wrong plane.

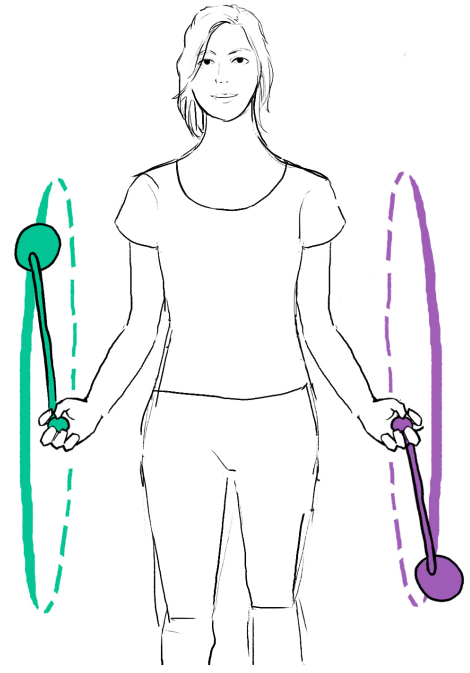
Depending on the age and ability of your students, staying on a certain plane might be too difficult, and that’s ok! As a facilitator, understanding planes is just one more tool for your toolkit that you can use if and when desired.

Timing

Timing describes how the poi are moving in relation to each other. The two main timings are “together” (poi moving together) and “split” (poi are alternating).



Together time

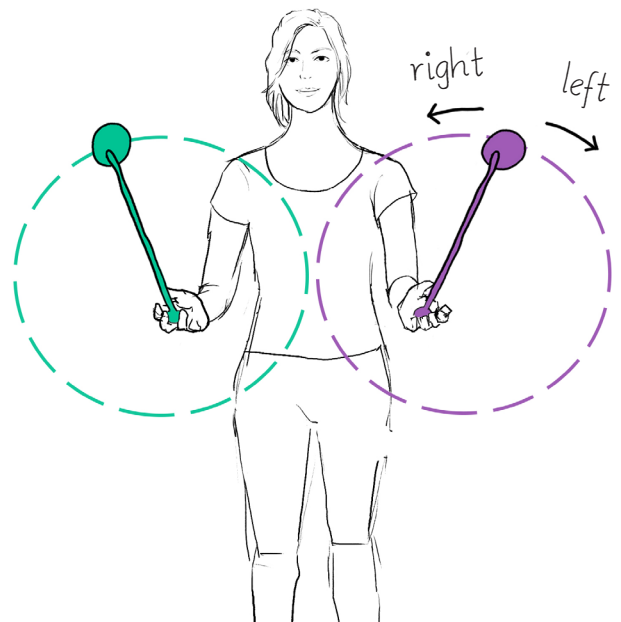
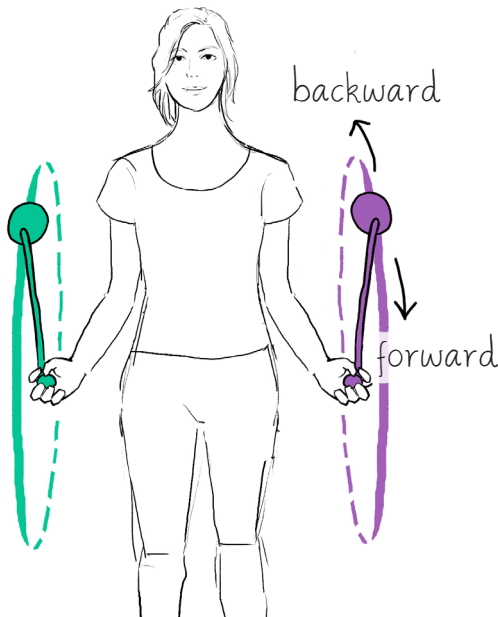


Split time

Getting two poi spinning in general can be challenging for some students. Trying to control the timing is even more of a challenge, specifically split timing or getting the poi to alternate (which feels kind of like twirling double dutch jump ropes). For students that have trouble spinning two poi in general, don't worry so much about the timing. For students that are able to spin two poi, have a play with together and split time. To get into split time, it can help to first try it with just your hands. It should feel like you are pedalling a bicycle. It may be tough at first, but don't give up! Split timing, like all poi movements, can be achieved with practice.

Direction

Direction describes which way the poi are moving in relation to you. In right/left plane this is forward or backward, and in front/back and ceiling/floor plane this is right and left, or in and out.



In right/left side plane, the poi can either be traveling away from you at the top of their orbit (backward), or traveling toward you at the top of their orbit (forward). An easy way to check if the poi are traveling forward or backward is to imagine them hitting you (or actually hit yourself, gently!). If the poi are traveling forward, they will hit you in the leg. If the poi are traveling backward, they will hit you in the shoulder. When spinning two poi in right/left side plane, there are 4 direction combinations: both poi forward, both poi backward, right poi forward left poi backward, and left poi forward right poi backward.

In front/back plane or in ceiling/floor plane, the poi can either be moving to your right or to your left. When spinning two poi, there are 4 direction combinations: both poi right, both poi left, right poi moving right and left poi moving left (you can also think of this as both poi traveling outward), and right poi moving left while left poi is moving right (you can also think of this as both poi traveling inward). Ceiling/floor plane has the same combinations as front/back plane (right, left, inward, outward).

In Summary

Every poi movement is a combination of plane, timing, and direction. Add the two modes of movement (swinging and spinning), and you have infinite possibilities for poi play. Below is a quick reference for the different combinations of timing and direction. Try all 4 of these combinations while spinning two poi in right/left, front/back, and ceiling/floor plane. This will help you gain a better understanding of how the building blocks can be combined to create exercises that will keep students of all ages and abilities engaged, challenged, and having a good time.



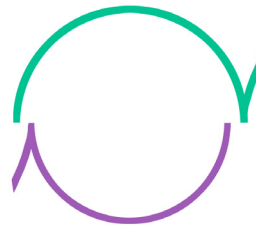
Together Same

Poi moving in the same direction at the same time



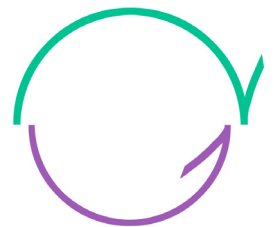
Together Opposite

Poi moving in opposite directions at the same time



Split Same

Poi moving in the same direction with split timing



Split Opposite

Poi moving in opposite directions with split timing

Want to learn more about poi movement theory?

Check out the SpinPoi beginner poi resources including the comprehensive Poi Fundamentals Course and video tutorials on more advanced moves.



Preparing For Your Session

Below are a few key tips to help ensure your poi sessions get off to a happy and safe start.

Clear the area

Spinning poi takes more room than most people anticipate, and sometimes the poi do accidentally go flying! Therefore, it's important to have a wide open space that is clear of breakable items.

Respect the poi

Poi is an exciting activity, therefore before you begin it can be helpful to take a moment to slow down and remind your students that the poi are a special Māori taonga (treasure) and that they should be treated and handled with respect.

Prepare your playlist

Poi is innately rhythmic, and the right music will ensure everyone is twirling to the beat. Take some time to build your own playlist, or check out the [Poi Routine Pack](#) for 6 original songs you can incorporate into your session.

Spread out

Ensure there is enough room between students so they can participate safely and avoid collisions with their neighbors. As a rule of thumb, each student should be able to stretch their arms out wide and spin in a circle without bumping into anyone.



Say a Karakia

In Māoridom a Karakia, or an incantation/prayer, is often said before or after undertakings to help ensure good fortune, spiritual guidance, and protection. Saying a Karakia is an important part of acknowledging poi as a Māori taonga (treasure) and paying respect to te ao Māori (the Māori world).

Try saying the following Karakia before each of your poi sessions. The last word in the line, “Haumi E, Hui E, Taiki E” (pronounced tie key aye) should be spoken by everyone in the group, as it is used to signal that the group is united and ready to move forward together.

Karakia Timatanga (Opening Prayer)

Mā ngā Atua Māori, e tiakina, e arohaina i ahau,
ma rere tōtika a te mahi pai.

Mā te rere a te poi, ka tau ai, te mauri ki roto i a tātou.
Haumi E, Hui E, Taiki E.

May the Māori Gods protect us, love us,
and guide us in doing good work.
Let the flow of the poi give us energy and life.
Join, Gather, Unite.

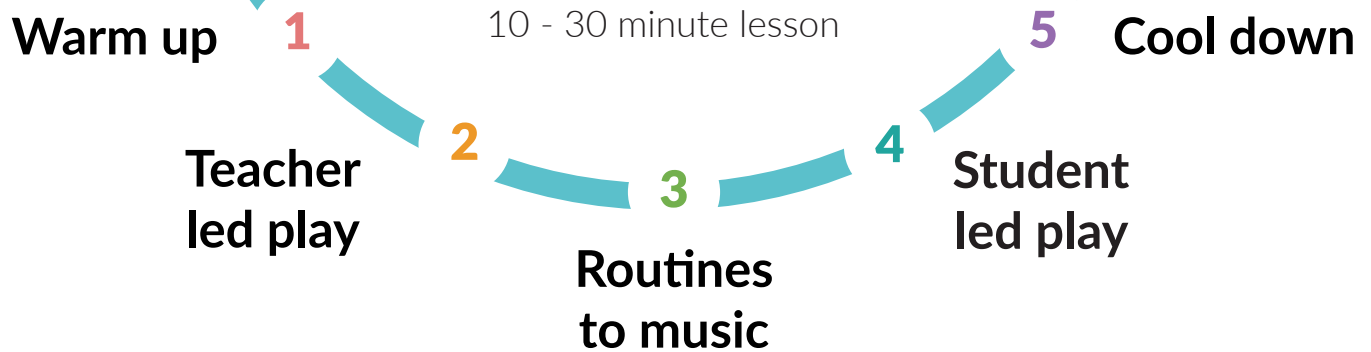
Visit the website for a recording of this karakia which you can play to begin your sessions.



www.spinpoi.com/karakia



Structuring Your Session



While the structure of your sessions is up to you, the following format generally works well across all ages and abilities. The duration of the session depends on how you'd like to incorporate poi into your schedule. For example, you might do 10 minutes every morning to start your day, or perhaps you have a 30 minute session twice a week.

1 Warm up

Begin with a warm up that involves the poi to help prepare students for the activity ahead and to gently exercise muscles and joints. This can be as simple as holding one poi in your right hand and balancing on your left leg, then trying it the other way around. The best warm-ups are fun and interesting - the more students are engaged by the warm up and pre-activity tasks, the more they will be engaged as the activity progresses.

2 Teacher led play

Teacher led play provides a space for fun learning opportunities through a structured activity. Use your knowledge of poi theory to create and integrate poi movements into existing games such as Simon Says or Musical Statues, or invent a new poi game of your own. Utilizing poi within these structured activities is a great way to develop motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and listening skills. Check out page 22 for some more ideas for play.

3 Routines to music

By participating in routines to music students will engage with rhythm, repetition, and dance while strengthening their kinesthetic memory. Check out page 23 for a routine to music that is ready to go, or try making your own routine to a song your students know and love. Keep the poi movements simple and easy to follow, so everyone can enjoy grooving to the beat.

4 Student led play

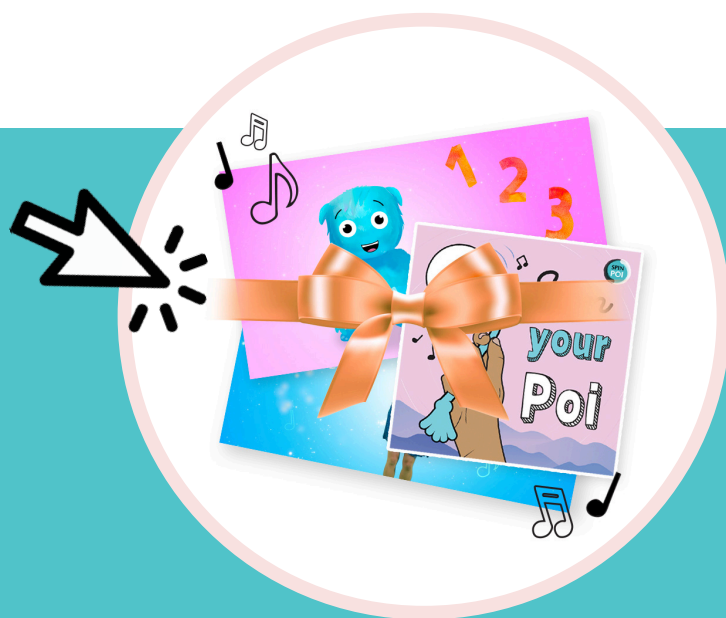
Student led play is the perfect opportunity for children to explore what they have just learned through the routines and teacher led play, while giving them the freedom to play in their own direction. Although student led play is intrinsically lead by the child, utilize positive reinforcement, open ended questions, and the proposition of new challenges to help maximize the students' development. A great way to conclude this section is to form a circle and allow each student to take turns being in the middle and demonstrating one poi move that they have learned/created. This allows each child to feel a sense of excitement and importance while working on patience and turn taking.

5 Cool down

A cool down period allows students heart rates to return to resting after a highly active period, and it calms children in preparation for the transition to the next part of their day. A simple way to look at a cool down is that it is a slower paced, less rigorous version of the activity. Try focusing on smooth, slow, controlled movements while holding one poi end to end in each hand.

Looking for a complete lesson plan?

The SpinPoi Pre-School Pack features 6 unique songs with accompanying videos that will take your students on an interactive poi journey from warm up to cool down.



Ideas for Play

Mirroring

Stand facing a partner and see if you can swing your poi back and forth at the same speed.

Skill pairing

Pair spinning your poi with other gross motor skills such as jumping, balancing on one leg, or skipping.

Invent your own poi move

Use the printable activity page at the end of this guide to create and name your very own move.



Follow the leader

Stand in a circle and take turns being in the middle and demonstrating your favorite poi move for everyone to try.

Stress squeeze

Try holding the head of the poi and squeezing the ball. Can you squeeze and release to the beat of a song?

Routine to Music Example: Spin Your Poi

Click to view the
Spin Your Poi video!



Spin Your Poi is a bi-lingual poi song in English and Te Reo Māori (the native Māori language). The song verses focus on the concept of opposites, and encourage children to embody this concept by spinning their poi high/low, fast/slow, and near/far. The choruses focus on free play and creative expression, and encourage children to create their own poi movements to the joyous lyrics of “Oh when I spin my poi I feel free!”

This poi routine is done with one poi only, making it suitable for younger and older children alike. For older children, it includes a few optional movements that are more challenging, such as catching the poi before the chorus, and spinning the poi in a smooth circle through the air during the lyrics “spin your poi through the sky like a shooting star.” To engage both hands in spinning the poi, the routine can be repeated in its entirety twice, or you can switch your poi to the other hand half way through.

Additional Resources

The last pages of this guide contain printable activity pages that correspond to the activities described throughout. For more information on working with poi and wellbeing you can visit www.spinpoi.com or email us at info@spinpoi.com. We look forward to supporting you in improving wellbeing, one orbit at a time.

About the Authors

Dr. Kate Riegle van West is a researcher, artist, and entrepreneur with a passion for play and wellbeing. She completed her PhD on the effects of poi on health, where she conducted the first scientific study in the world to investigate the effects of poi on physical and cognitive function. She subsequently Founded SpinPoi, and is the leading global exponent in working with poi as a therapeutic tool.



James Hutton-Ashkenny is a play specialist and educational author. His areas of expertise include training school staff in the art of play and working with special needs and high needs youth. James is also trained in Forest School pedagogy and has worked with Forest Schools across the UK and New Zealand to promote free range learning and the holistic development of children.



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Know Your Kupu (Words)

Can you trace the Māori words for the parts of the poi?

Taura

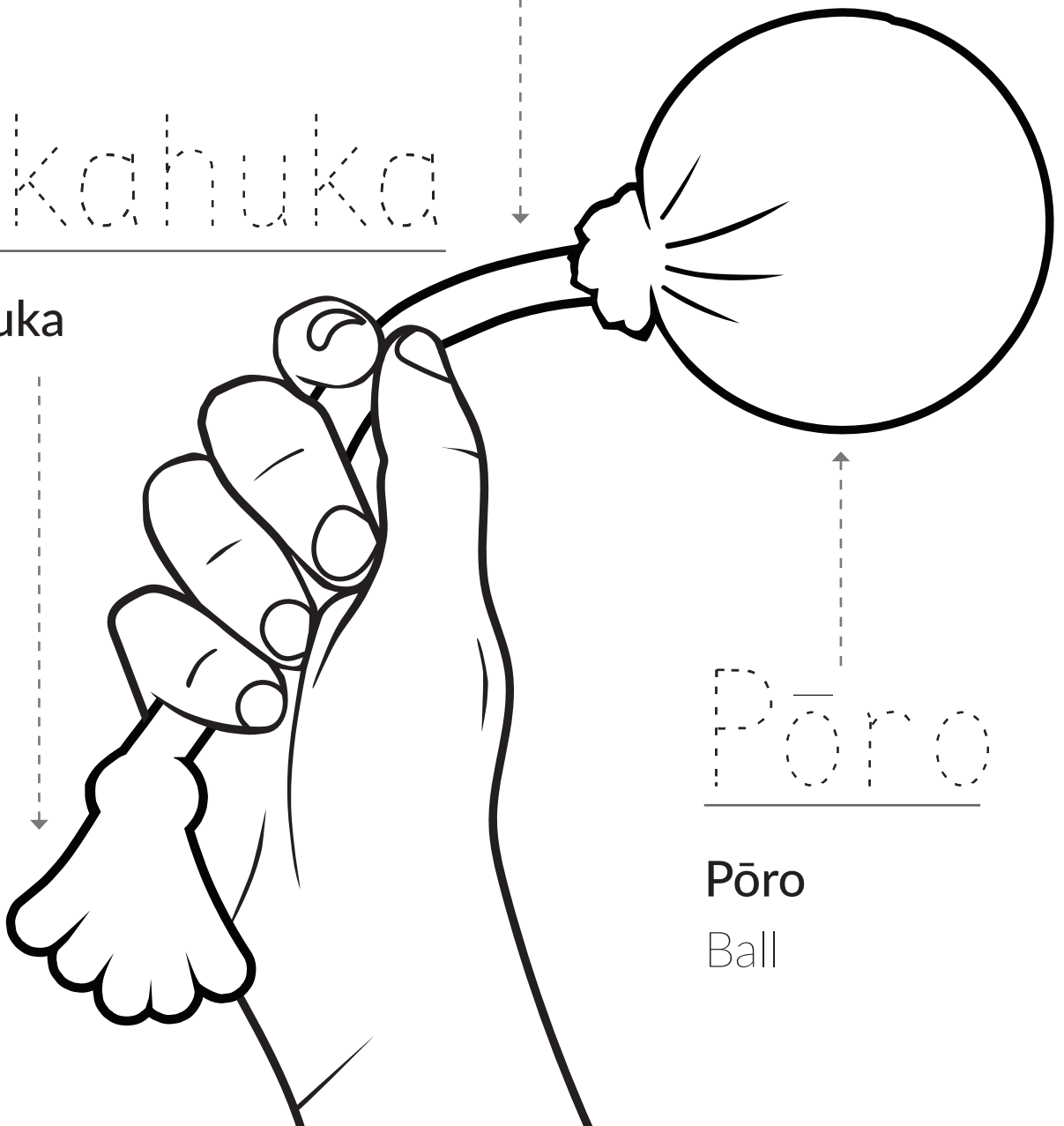
Taura
Cord

Hukahuka

Hukahuka
Tassel

Poro

Pōro
Ball



Create
your

dream
poi



Create Your Own Poi Move



★ The name of my poi move is:

★ My poi move is so much fun because I need to:

jump

spin slow

turn

twist

laugh

dance

stretch

smile

wiggle

sing

bend

skip

lay down

hop

spin fast

balance