

A–Z of teaching young learners: Physical action

What and why?

Physical movement is very important in a number of ways for young learners. Firstly, children probably spend more of their lives sitting in one place than more adults do. This can induce a sense of tiredness and thus can affect their learning. Secondly, young children need to move – it is through physical movement and contact that they develop a fuller experience of the world. It is entirely natural that children are far more ‘physical’ than adults – that is part of the way they learn. In language learning, we can harness this to help learning become ‘deeper’ and more memorable for the children.

Practical ideas

- If the children have already been sitting at their desks for a long time, start the lesson with some physical activity – perhaps an activity where they have to do what ‘Simon says’ (see ‘games’ in Extra activities), or a song with actions.
- If you want children to act out a story, encourage them to include action in it that is, not just saying the words, but moving arms and legs, making gestures, miming actions, etc.
- If the children are repeating some words after you, make an action which they can copy while they say the word. With some words, the action will be obvious (for example, for house draw a roof and walls in the air). For other words there won’t be an obvious action, but it is still useful to make some gesture. You can then repeat the gestures as a way of getting the children to remember and say the words.
- Mime is also a useful way to include physical action. If a child mimes a series of actions, perhaps ones that come from one of the stories in the course, the other children can say the words that go with the actions.