

Case Study 3.3: Songs and action rhymes

Innocent is an experienced early primary school teacher in Tanzania who has recently begun mentoring two new teachers, Sarah and Cornelia, in the new pre-primary unit that has opened at his school. He lives in Mbeya and his first language is Bemba, although he also speaks both English and KiSwahili. Innocent knows that, as new teachers, Sarah and Cornelia do not have a lot of confidence in working with pre-primary children.

He decides to focus on simple local games – especially the kind of games that have songs or rhymes attached to them – as a way to encourage both teachers and children to make the transition from speaking and listening to reading and writing. He knows that games are a good way of making learning fun and that the ability to hear and predict rhymes will develop children's reading and writing skills.

One game involves getting all the children to stand up and to each find a little space for themselves (as they will need to do some bending over) and to then follow the actions of the teacher as she sings. As she names each part of the body, she touches it. So she taps her head with one hand, then she taps her shoulders with both hands, then her knees and then her toes with both hands and each time she sings the word.

Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes,
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes,
Two eyes, two ears, one mouth and one nose.
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.

The children really enjoy playing this game and singing this song because it:

- focuses their attention and practises vocabulary
- contains rhyme and repetition
- helps physical coordination by practising bending, stretching and two-hand coordination
- helps children to remember ones and twos and matching pairs (ears, eyes, knees and shoulders).

Sarah and Cornelia follow up this song with others they know in Bemba and KiSwahili.