

You Can... **Develop children's ability to keep a steady beat**

The ability to keep a steady beat is essential to listening and learning, so activities that develop beat competence should be part of any course in listening skills.

Thinking points

- Research has shown that one of the most significant indicators of children's success at school is the ability to keep a steady beat. It is clearly connected with:

- bodily coordination and control
- the patterning of information in the brain
- overall listening skills.

Auditory memory depends to a large extent on beat competence: think of the way we use beat in counting, in reciting the alphabet, the months of the year, and so on.

- All the activities in this section on music, movement and song should help develop beat competence. A teacher in Finland, where music and song are threaded throughout the school day, explained that 'Music trains the mind to pattern and the ears to sound.' Both very important for listening!

Tips, ideas and activities

- With younger children, introduce:
 - 'Copycat': You model a simple beat (for example, clap your hands twice, tap knees twice, and so on) and ask children as a group to copy you. Gradually introduce slightly more complex rhythms (for example, clappety-clap, clappety-clap, clappety-clappety-clappety-clap). When the group is good at it, ask individual children to model sequences.
 - 'Chopsticks': Give each child a paper plate and a chopstick, and sit them in a circle. Ask one child to use the chopstick to tap a simple rhythm on the plate, then get the others to copy it. Develop 'chopstick conversations' where one child (or half the group) taps out a rhythm, and another child (or the other half of the group) taps a 'reply'.
- Use raps for teaching, such as the 'Punctuation Street Rap' on photocopiable page 56. Encourage the children to make up simple raps featuring information learned across the curriculum (such as the Water Cycle Rap). Get the class performing these with plenty of body movement, clapping, etc.
- Encourage clapping games and rhymes. These are excellent for coordination skills, and many include cross-over movements that help make connections between the two sides of the brain. There are many examples in Jenny Mosley's book *Clapping Games* (Positive Press), and in 'The Spelling Song' on photocopiable page 57 you can use a mixture of clapping (with words) and high-fives (with the 'yeahs' in the chorus).
- Encourage children to learn to skip and to chant skipping rhymes, such as: *Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper* or the old cherry-counting chant: *Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief*.
- Almost every musical activity (especially dancing and marching – see page 27) involves a steady beat. Encourage children's awareness by clapping, foot tapping and making other rhythmic movements yourself when teaching them.