



# Active Insight: Evidence in Action



## Tip #833: Movement-Based Vocabulary Learning

### Overview

Connecting new vocabulary to physical movement creates stronger memory traces and gives students a kinaesthetic anchor for abstract language. When students perform a specific action each time they hear or use a new word, the physical experience reinforces the meaning in a way that visual or auditory input alone cannot achieve. This approach is particularly effective for subject-specific terminology in HPE, science, and mathematics, where precise language is essential for understanding and communication.

### Key Teaching Ideas

Vocabulary-movement integration works best when the physical action is directly connected to the word. For example, students learning the word "acceleration" can perform a movement that starts slowly and builds speed, making the concept physically felt. Teachers can introduce three to five new terms at the start of a lesson, assign each a movement, and then use those movements throughout the lesson as a quick comprehension check. Returning to the vocabulary at the end of the lesson and asking students to demonstrate the movement and explain the meaning helps consolidate the learning.

### Practical Application

- **Action-Word Warm-Ups:** Introduce five new vocabulary words at the start of a lesson and assign each a distinct movement; students perform the movement whenever they hear the word during the lesson, reinforcing recognition through physical response.
- **Vocabulary Relay Races:** Teams compete in a relay where each runner must correctly demonstrate the movement associated with a vocabulary word before tagging the next player, combining physical activity with word recall.
- **Definition Charades:** Students are given a vocabulary card and must convey the meaning through movement alone while their team guesses the word, developing both physical expression and language comprehension.
- **Word Wall Movement Breaks:** During a lesson transition, point to a word on the classroom wall and ask students to stand up and perform the associated movement before sitting back down, using brief physical activity to reinforce vocabulary.



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- **Movement Glossary Creation:** Students collaboratively create a class glossary where each term is accompanied by a photograph or drawing of the movement that represents it, building shared vocabulary through physical and visual association.

## Next Steps

Resources on movement-based vocabulary learning and literacy integration in HPE are available at [Active Education Australia](#). [Anywhere PD](#) covers cross-curricular HPE tasks that support literacy development.

## References and Research

1. Kuczala, M. (2015). *The Kinesthetic Classroom: Teaching and Learning Through Movement* – Explores how purposeful movement enhances memory, engagement and academic learning by connecting physical activity with cognitive processes.
2. Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Version 9.0) – Establishes learning through movement as a means of developing movement competence while strengthening literacy and cross-curricular learning.
3. Australian Sports Commission. (2019). *Australian Physical Literacy Framework* – Explains how physical, cognitive, psychological and social capabilities develop together through meaningful movement experiences.