

Yoga for youngsters is all the rage

WITHIN minutes my face is flushed and I'm struggling to adopt the "cobra" position.

Our bendy instructor, Veronica Greene (39), reckons everyone in the yoga class should be able to lie flat on their stomach and touch their head with their outstretched legs.

And almost everyone does — with the exception of one — as my limbs wave hopelessly in the air.

Reminding myself that I'm only a beginner, I still can't ignore the sniggers from one of my new classmates.

What's worse is he, too, is here for the first time. Yet while I flail, he sails effortlessly through the session.

Gulf

With our mats right next to each other the gulf in our natural ability is plain for all to see.

All I can say is the lad clearly didn't get it from his father — because the show-off next to me is none other than my three-year-old son, Saul.

We've come along to the latest craze for nursery and school age kids, YogaBugs.

The class leader narrates a story with actions that just happen to be classic yoga positions which all the children follow.

It's the brainchild of London-based yoga instructor, Fenella Lindsell.

And if all this sounds familiar, Fenella and her business partner Lara

By Gordon Blackstock

Goodbody, entered BBC2's *Dragon's Den* programme in August seeking £200,000 funding to help get YogaBugs running nationwide.

But though the Dragons said they'd stump up the cash, the women reckoned the percentage of the company they demanded in return was too high and so they turned them down, leaving empty-handed.

As it is, the exposure they received on the hit show gave the business the boost it needed anyway.

Classes are now being run from Aberdeen to Brighton with more than 1000 instructors and 35,000 children attending.

Veronica, the instructor at our class, has been a YogaBugs instructor for 10 months.

Already a fitness instructor and adult yoga teacher, the mum-of-two discovered Yogabugs on the Internet.

"I thought it was a great idea. I have a five-year-old daughter, Natasha, and she was always copying me while I was practising my poses.

"Kids take to it so easily, so when I saw a company offering training to teach kids yoga I jumped at the chance.

"I imagined taking Natasha along to classes while I taught, but in practice it didn't quite work out that well.

"She'd try and teach the classes herself so I leave her at home now!"



We test two new classes for kids which are sweeping the country

Veronica runs two classes each week at a dance studio in the Queen's Park area of Glasgow.

"I only do a couple of classes because that fits in with my family life, but I could easily have enough work to do it full-time.

"I get inundated with calls to see if I could do classes in other areas of the city, but I just can't commit the time.

"You could dismiss yoga for

kids as being just another fad but I think it's much more than that.

"There are amazing benefits from it. It not only increases flexibility but also creativity and self-confidence.

Posture

"It can also have a positive effect on your immune system and improve your posture which will stay with you in later life."

As well as Saul and me, our group consists of four girls of around seven and a little girl of three.

There is also one other parent taking part and we exchange knowing glances as we're put through our paces.

A mum watching from the sidelines claims injury prevents her from participating — now why didn't I think of that too?

While a conventional yoga

■ Gordon and Saul are put through their paces by Veronica.



class striking a series of poses would probably lose the kids' attention too quickly, Veronica tells a great story to keep them interested.

Today it's about a snake waking up with a knot in his tail and we all take up the various body positions the snake and other jungle characters get themselves into.

That's followed by a game of musical yoga statues — a chance to redeem myself, because as my friends and family will testify, if there is one thing I excel at it's standing around doing nothing.

Competitive

And though I say it myself, I reckon I did indeed surpass myself — and certainly outshone that wee smartypants Saul!

Yet there are no prizes and no plaudits, only gentle encouragement for everyone.

Veronica tells me why.

"Kids become more competitive as they grow up anyway but our main aim in these classes for young children is to get them interested and looking forward to going to classes.

"The last thing we want is for them to be dreading going along because they're the worst in the class.

"Kids are naturally flexible, but one thing that develops throughout your life is balance so youngsters this age struggle to maintain positions like in the statues game. It's much easier for adults."



■ Mum Simone Charles with daughter Camille (2) and instructor Jeanne Jardine with Alek and their tatty dolls in foreground.

I CLOSE my eyes, relax and head off to Wobble Farm. Seeing the Giggle Tree I run freely towards it ready for my next big adventure.

I could be a penguin keeping warm in the South Pole, a plane flying in the sky, or a crocodile slithering on my belly.

No, I haven't had too many festive sherries — this is yoga for youngsters Tatty Bumpkin style!

Thought up in 2005 by yoga teacher Sam Petter and Sue Cheveley, a paediatric physiotherapist from Kent, there are now classes around the country.

The secret weapon in getting children involved is the Tatty Bumpkin doll. Children copy the poses he is bent into.

Jeanne Jardine has been teaching Tatty Bumpkin since September across West Lothian and in North Berwick.

She explains, "I was interested in doing

By Sarah Johnson

something with children and have been practising yoga for years, so when I heard about Tatty Bumpkin I thought it was something I could do.

"It allows children to use their imaginations, while at the same time keeping them supple and fit.

"Sometimes we go surfing, or flying with the birds, or pretend to be penguins, which is very popular right now. We're always exploring the senses.

"By concentrating on creating a story, by movement, singing and music we generally improve all the basic skills of numeracy, literacy and motor skills.

"Children are also taught how to relax

and calm down through breathing and visualisation techniques — great for getting them to sleep at night!

"The doll is easily manipulated into shapes and the children happily try to copy the positions Tatty gets into. It makes it easier for them to learn and they enjoy doing what Tatty does."

Originally from San Francisco, Jeanne moved to Scotland 11 years ago after marrying husband, Andrew. Both her children Ewan (8) and Alek (3) have benefited from yoga.

She says, "Maintaining flexibility, especially in boys, is so important in later life. If footballers did more yoga I'm sure they would have fewer injuries."

Jeanne tries to get parents to join in, as experts believe it can increase bonding. "The children love to see the adults being silly, too!" she laughs.