

AUDITORY (+ VISUAL) TRAINING DURING EXTRA LESSONS

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SEE BELOW FOR PRACTICAL WORK w. WLS c3s6 (end year 2)—July 2025

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Many of today's students struggle with remembering a sequence of instructions. Some of these same students do just fine remembering the stories that the class teacher tells, so (s)he may not be aware of the child's difficulty with auditory processing/memory. The reason the story is remembered is because these children are able to create an inner picture of the events of the story, while easily forgetting the steps involved in performing a long division problem or the three tasks the teacher has just given the class ("take out your colored pencils and green main lesson book, opening it to the third page.")

Of course, we also have children who can't seem to remember (or simply don't "hear") the different vowel sounds and the letters connected to them. What is the source of this difficulty with auditory processing that seems to be increasing by leaps and bounds? This is hard to determine, but one possibility is the overuse of ultrasound during pregnancy when the fetus's ears are still immature (see Judith Bluestone's The Fabric of Autism, note bottom of page 66). Another cause is probably the bombardment of the sense of hearing by more and more loud technical sounds in the household as well as the world outside. When is it really quiet in your environment...? (Btw, today's refrigerators may use less energy, but they are louder than they used to be, and we can't close our ears—like we could close our eyes to offensive/overwhelming sights).

During the Extra Lesson I use various approaches to support further development of **auditory** processing and memory. First off, remember what Rudolf Steiner says, in Balance in Teaching, that we hear sounds with our limbs (muscles), understand (process) them in the rhythmic system, and remember them in our head. Just as we see **visual** impression with our head system, understand them in the rhythmic system and remember them in the metabolic-limb system. He says there is a "dove-tailing" of the visual and auditory within the rhythmic system; when this is working well we have children who learn to read and spell with ease.

In our work, we see children who aren't breathing freely; they either hold their breath and sigh it out or breathe shallowly, irregularly and/or rapidly. Often neck and shoulders are tense and the pencil is grasped with a tight grip. All the Extra Lesson exercises harmonize the breathing, as does the lesson as a whole; some particularly helpful exercises (besides the different painting series) to support deepening of the breath are the Grand Crawl, Threefold Spiral, Rod Rolling, Copper Ball exercise, Moving Line and Lemniscate (when done on large paper with the student swaying forward and back with rowing-like motions, feet placed flat and parallel on the floor, plus the back touching the chair's backrest at each 'backward pull on the oars'), and Right Angle Triangle exercise. When

done properly, these exercises visibly show you how the ribcage expands and contracts fully, leading the diaphragm to move more freely. This opening up of the ribcage and diaphragm changes the breathing, thus allowing the (middle) step of processing and understanding auditory and visual perceptions to take place more fully. When we breathe more fully, the cerebro-spinal fluid flows more freely; this fluid bathes the spinal cord and brain and Rudolf Steiner mentions that this is important for memory (Balance in Teaching, Lecture 3 (page 33 in my 1982 edition): "... we comprehend a pictorial process, ... through the fact that the rhythmic process, regulated by the heart-lung activity, is carried on through the cerebro-spinal fluid up to the brain.") In this same lecture, Steiner also points out that what has been comprehended through the rhythmic system (whether auditory or visual perceptions) needs to be "worked over" so memory can retain it. "This working over is linked to the metabolic system." He refers to the metabolic processes of the head in the case of **auditory memory** and of the metabolic-limb system in the case of **visual memory**. Metabolic processes are stimulated by activity, and in this same chapter Steiner remarks that we teachers must find a balance between "mere listening and active work on the part of the child". He says that in order for "mental digestion" to take place we must balance the watching and listening with "constructive work" where the will is activated. "... the will works into the metabolism, thus enkindling the capacity for memory."

Other ways to work more directly on auditory memory/processing within the Extra Lesson are the following, using the principle of **stepping and speaking forward and back**:

1. During the Above-Below beanbag/ball exercise (preferably having built up to using two beanbags/balls), once the movement is mastered so it is performed smoothly and with coordination (and this is very important before introducing the speaking part) have the child say a short sequence of the alphabet forward and back. The important point here is that the letter is spoken just as the beanbag or ball is tossed (not as it is caught, that is too late). To begin with expect the child to be able to do this for 2-3 letters, maybe A<->C or B<->D. Usually the child manages this forward, but when going backward starts to speak the letter with the catch. Keep working on this, telling the child to notice *when* (s)he speaks the letter. Once a short sequence is mastered, move to a longer one; thus you can continue progressing until the student is able to speak with the toss both forward and back for most of the alphabet. This makes a great exercise for home practice, as well—so in the lesson you are checking on how home practice has progressed.
2. When doing the Forward and Back Rod exercise (rod held vertically, see The Extra Lesson), give the student a short sentence (begin with three words, build to more as soon as able), if needed walking alongside the students. Usually I have the students step forward and back with both of us speaking and stepping the sentence once, then they and I step forward and back while they speak as able (I assist with speaking as needed). If they aren't able to step and speak on their own the third time, I have given them too complicated a sentence. Some examples: "I

- am Anna.” “I go to school.” “I am nine years old.” “Foxes run fast on grass.”
 “Pigs dig in mud.” “Black pigs dig in wet mud.”
3. The last two sentences above, and any others with several short vowel sounds, I use for children who need to work on these sounds and their letters. After the sentence has been spoken with the Forward and Back exercise, the student comes to the board and writes it out in cursive (assuming the class has been taught cursive, and with assistance as needed). IF the student is not ready for this step, teacher can ‘shadow write’ the sentence so it just barely shows and the student fills in the sentence using chalk.
 4. Next, the student moves back from the board a bit, in order to read the writing while stepping forward one step per word. Then it is read backwards while the student steps backward.
 5. Then the student turns the back to the board, stands in the center circle of a ‘vowel flower’ (a large paper with a five-petaled flower around a central circle drawn on it; each petal has a vowel written large on it). I now speak one of the short vowel words that has just been written on the board (in the above 4-word pig sentence: “pigs”, “dig”, “in”, “mud.”), the student repeats the word clearly, then says its short vowel sound **with** a jump into the applicable vowel petal.
 6. When needed and appropriate, the student now does the Above-Below exercise (one beanbag to begin with) while stepping forward and back as he spells each word I give him forward and back (same words as in vowel circle).

Sometimes a student needs the vowel flower, but is not ready for spelling the word forward and back; other times a student doesn’t need the vowel flower, but needs to work on spelling forward and back, even words that don’t have short vowels in them.

In this way, when the students are ready, you can bring creative tutoring into your Extra Lessons, as Audrey gives us ideas for in Chapter 6 of The Extra Lesson.

Faithfully having students do the above forward and back stepping with moving exercises works wonders for their auditory memory. Rudolf Steiner suggested to teachers that children repeat speech exercises backward (Conferences with Teachers, Volume I). As a class teacher I had students with shaky memories perform stepping forward and back exercises, making the sentences longer and longer as they became more able, in front of the class as a ‘pedagogical exercise.’ A few students at a time performed various exercises in this way in front of the class, exercises for their particular individual needs. (More about this at another time.)

OUR PROCESS ON JULY 31, 2025:

USE COPPER ROD, 2 BEANBAGS, DRAW VOWEL FLOWER (ON FLOOR),
 READY BLACKBOARD, GIVE SENTENCE “PIGS DIG IN MUD”:

1. WITH ‘FORWARD-BACK ROD’: SAY SENTENCE FORWARD-BACK w.
 STUDENT 1X, CONTINUE WALKING W. STUDENT FOR ANOTHER 2Xs—
 contribute speaking as needed to keep walking at steady pace.

2. TEACHER SHADOW WRITES CURSIVE SENTENCE ON BOARD FOR STUDENT—> STUDENT WRITES SENTENCE USING CHALK
3. STUDENT BACKS UP FROM BOARD—>READS SENTENCE WHILE STEPPING 1 STEP PER WORD: FORWARD + BACK—3 TIMES
4. WITH BACK TO BOARD: STUDENT STANDS IN CENTER OF FLOWER, SAYS EACH WORD OF SENTENCE ONE AT A TIME—>AFTER EACH WORD JUMPS INTO RELEVANT VOWEL PETAL WHILE SAYING SHORT VOWEL SOUND IN WORD+ON PETAL
5. KEEPING BACK TO BOARD: STUDENT SAYS THEN SPELLS EACH WORD OF SENTENCE FORWARD-BACK WITH TOSSING OF BEANBAG IN ABOVE-BELOW BEANBAG EXERCISE. NOTE: NAME OF VOWEL SPOKEN WITH TOSS OF BEANBAG (ie, GENTLE CATCH IS SILENT).

—ENDED WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND CLASSROOM WORK FOR STUDENTS WITH HANDWRITING DIFFICULTIES—INCL. USING WEIGHTED BALL FOR TWO-HANDED TOSSING BACK-AND-FORTH w. TEACHER. ADD COUNTING/SPELLING AS NEEDED. STUDENT CAN STAND **STEADY** ON BALANCE BOARD. USE OF SHORT PENCILS w. SOFT GRAPHITE LEADS.

—MNEMONIC AIDS FOR SHORT VOWELS: **apple**, hand behind ear as if to hear better, itsy-bitsy imp, fingers on chin w. mouth opening, both arms up

—Silent & noisy “twin” consonant sounds: f/v, s/z, ch/j, sh/ ‘j’ or ‘z’, k/g, t/d, p/b, th/th