

Waking up to learning with copper rod exercises

Copper rod exercises can serve the developmental needs of grade school children... first through eighth grade (and beyond):

- Physiology that supports writing and reading - radius and ulna
- Direction, rhythm and sequencing - related to math
- Proprioception and balance - one of the "Multiple Intelligences"
- Working with anticipation; social skills

MATERIALS

Larger home improvement outlets carry 8 foot lengths of 5/8" copper tubing in the plumbing section, and plastic caps to cover the ends (use a little glue to keep them in place). Use 32 inch length rods for first through third grade, 36 inch lengths for older grades. See diagram on pg. 3 for cutting.

SETTING

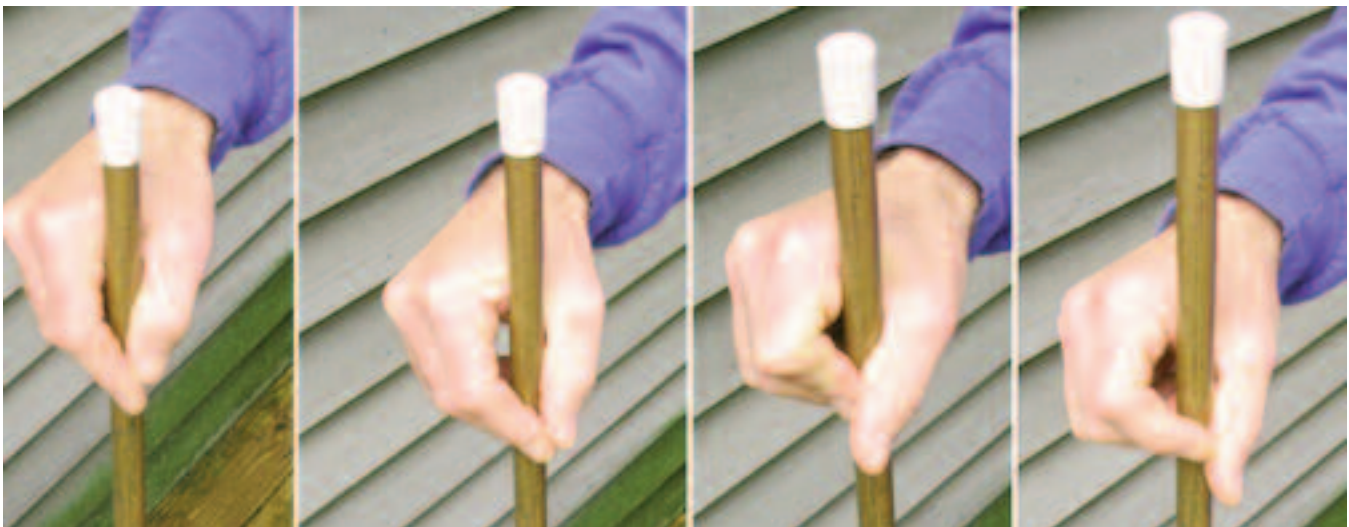
Rod work can be done in a gym, resource type room with carpeting, or classroom with desks pulled out of the way.

MOOD

Copper rods are upright and dignified, meant to set a mood of noble readiness. Therefore, don't allow them to be in any other posture (i.e. the almost inevitable sword fighting). "NO Free Play - and free play is anything the teacher doesn't give as an activity." Check your own presence and posture frequently (remember our two posture exercises for adults). Be prepared with a sequence of activities, but also be prepared to shorten it if the class cannot hold the mood. I strive to uphold the axiom that children will best do what I'm "hoping" if I have the strength to resist "asking". This is a class that needs to be quiet (falling rods make enough noise) and well held, using your example of proper technique for imitation. Project your physical presence, and use few, if any, verbal directions. If there is any misbehavior, take away the rod and have the student sit out to watch for the remainder of the exercises.

BEGINNING - for every age

1. Arrange the class in rows or a circle, with at least one foot of clearance between finger tips (more is preferable). Teacher (perhaps with an especially well behaved helper) goes to each student and tosses a rod with upright toss. Student then takes



rod and balances it on head. To distribute the rods, wait for proper mood and posture, and require precise imitation of your methods. Eye contact and arch of throw are important. Observe the catch: does the student duck or shy away from the throw?

2. Balanced stepping. Verse is good up to age 9. Older children can be tasked to turn once around.

I lift my leg, I stretch my leg, I plant it firm and light.

I lift again, I stretch again, my pace exactly right.

With care I go, so grand and slow, I move just like a stork.

My eyes are bright, my head upright, pride is in my walk.

3. Head-balance to hands in front (later hands catch in back): Hold your hands in proper position and wait for all to imitate (no verbal directions are given other than “one, two, three..”)

ARM AND HAND EXERCISES

1. Rod rolling on arms: A very important developmental exercise for 1st and 2nd grade (can continue into 3rd grade without the song). With arms outstretched in front, slowly roll the rod to the finger tips, and then back to the neck. Notice if there are children who have trouble keeping their palms “sunny side up” (delayed development of radius and ulna) and quietly, indirectly encourage this awakening. Use “Skye Boat Song” or “Row, row, row your boat”.

2. Over and under the hands: Catch from palm to back of hand (and/or snatch on way down) using a nursery rhyme or verse for beat. (I like “Jack and Jill..”)

3. Finger finder: both hands on top of the rod, then under the rod; successively lift indexes, middles, rings and pinkies (same order both over and under!).

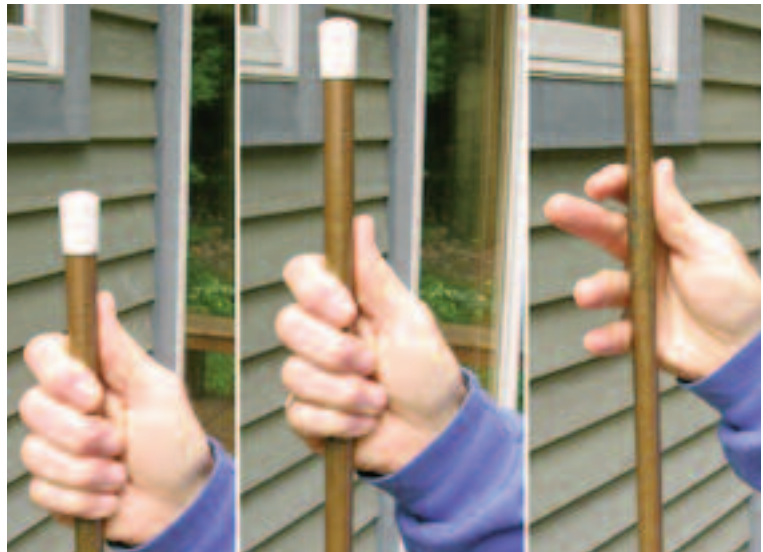
Verse: Pep/per and salt... Pep/per and salt...Over and under and never a fault. Pepper and salt.

4. Hand grip “tree climbing” exercises: Palmar; Pencil; Drop and catch; “Copper rod crocodile”.

5. “Making the soup” (alternate pencil and palmar grips as appropriate): stir the soup (don’t call on the kids whose ingredients will be too creative); turn on the fans in the hot kitchen; put the spoons back on the shelf.

6. Individual or partner rhythmic tossing:

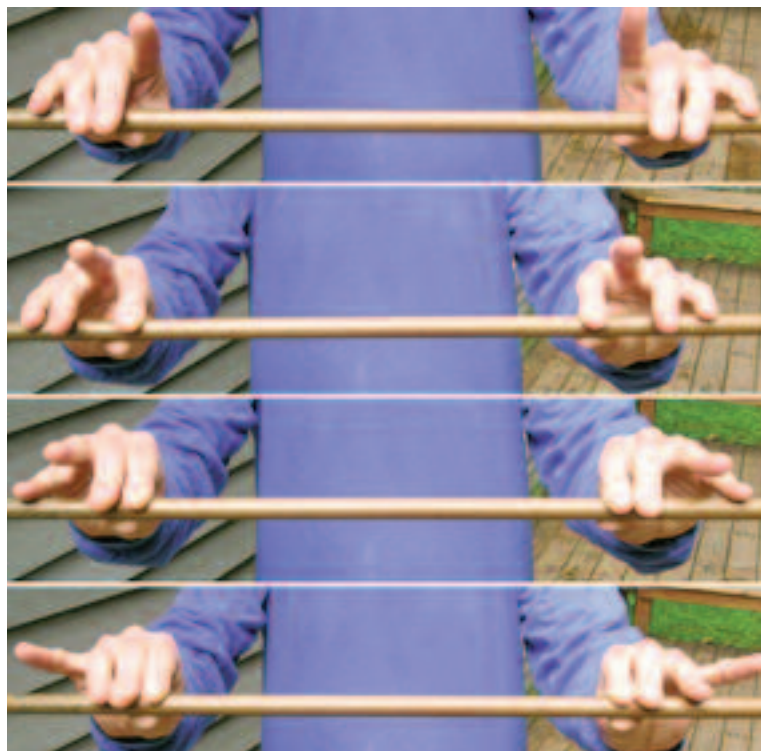
Brave and true, I will be,
Each kind word, sets me free,
Each kind deed, makes me strong,
I will fight, for the right,



I will conquer the wrong. 1, 2, 3....

Rhythmic tossing exercises can be made quite challenging for older students, by variations of passing and then throwing. The rods must remain in the vertical position for this to be safe. Partners can also work together on times tables, instead of verses.

7. Rod ‘juggling’ with a partner. One partner has two rods, and will make all throws to the same side (i.e. always passing the rod in right hand to partner’s left hand, always passing the rod in left hand to partner’s right hand). The



other partner will always have one rod and will throw across (right to right, left to left).

TO STRENGTHEN POSTURE AND SEQUENCING

Marching speaking memory rods: Marching forward with rod held vertically in front (right hand on top), then backwards with rod held behind back vertically along spine, or horizontally along shoulders (for posture). One step per number or beat. Examples: Mary had a little lamb forward and back, each time leaving off one more word; also -

Times tables or alphabet forward and back, or a memory sequence, such as 1-2-3-4 1-2-3-4 1-2-3-4 1-2-3-4 1-2-3-4... (step back and shift rod to horizontal in front on underlines)

FOOT & FLOOR EXERCISES

Most of these must be done on carpet or tumbling mats, in bare feet. Waking up the feet brings wakeful thinking. Also, tension in the hands can be released through foot exercises.

1. Jack and Jill jumping sequence (up through 3rd or 4th grade). This must be done on carpeting or mats, in bare feet. Take note of children who can't do these without significantly turning their torsos. Use hands on hips or arms extended.

Two feet together front and back; alternate feet front and back; two feet side to side; alternate feet cross front and back. (Some children will have difficulty alternating right foot front, left foot front. This is a pointer to learning readiness.)

2. Stepping rhythm #1 "Jack be nimble..." stepping. Repeat several times for front and back.

3. Stepping rhythm #2. Vary pace and voice to add excitement

Stepping over stepping stones, 1,2,3,

Stepping over stepping stones, just like me.

The river's very fast, and the river's very wide, (hand gestures)

And we're stepping over stepping stones to reach the other side.

4. "Snails Journey" - slowly inching over rod with bare feet. A real waker-upper!

5. Foot toss to hands - balance middle of rod over foot, and use foot to toss rod up to hands (rod should remain horizontal).

6. Drawing a circle - grip the rod between big toe and next toe, balance on other foot, and trace a circle with rods.

ADDITIONAL BALANCE GAMES

1. Circle pass (grade 2 and up): Students in a circle with right pointer finger on rod held vertical on floor. Teacher says "ready...set...go!" and each student steps to next rod (no leadoffs!) Difficulty can be increased by increasing size of circle or having them step to second rod.

2. Rod balance on palm or finger tip (4th or 5th grade). This requires a lot of space, and students who can be trusted not to race around and crash into others.

COLLECTING THE RODS

Remember that the mood set here will affect the mood at the beginning of the next session.

1. Reverse the beginning. From balanced on head to drop to arms to right hand throw to teacher's right hand.

2. Trace the circle in toward the center (no one's first, no one's last).

Feel free to add or subtract exercises as you gain confidence and respond to the needs of your students. Any verse or poem that fits can be chosen; start with classics and old favorites, so that you don't have to worry about memory.

Good luck and have fun!

