

Association for a Healing Education

www.healingeducation.org

What is The Extra Lesson?

In our work with the children in the Waldorf school we strive to create a complete picture of each child so that we can best meet his/her needs. Part of the process may include family visits, medical history taking, review of previous school records, including testing, and discussions with all of the child's teachers. An additional component of our program is called the Extra Lesson, which derives its name from work begun in the 1970's in England, by Audrey McAllen. Taking up Rudolf Steiner's many lectures about the developing child, she was inspired to develop a first lesson of assessment techniques and then a curriculum of movement, speech, drawing and painting exercises for children found to have learning barriers.

Strengthening Capacities with Individual Students

Development of the first 7 years normally produces for the child: spatial orientation, movement coordination, and the ability to change sight perception instantaneously between three-dimensional and two-dimensional space. These elements, together with good "body geography" and confirmed dominance are the results of the child's movement exploration in relation to his body and environment. By age 7, they should be functioning subconsciously and therefore be at the child's command. They are the fruits of the first 7 years of life, and are the capacities on which the teacher needs to

draw on if the child is to learn. Without these faculties, no curriculum—even a Waldorf curriculum—fully works. We also address such possible problems as retention of early reflexes or ambidexterity, lack of good body image, lack of spatial orientation, inability to make mental pictures of sense impressions, and dyslexic symptoms.

Strengthening Capacities with Whole Classes

In seating a student behind a desk at the beginning of first grade, we as teachers and parents are hoping or expecting that the child is ready, or soon will become ready, for classroom work. But realistically, every child will struggle with some aspect of this new environment: it might be a challenge to sit in balance on a chair, or to listen quietly, or to muster the fine motor skills for writing. It bears repeating: every child can be helped in some way to reach his or her full potential, during this move to the new civilization into which he or she has now been placed by parents and teachers.

Because of this fact, certain exercises and activities described in "The Extra Lesson", and in other education books with practical exercises, are highly recommended as part of a teacher's repertoire of ways to help every child be ready to do his or her best, every day. Experience has shown that classes of students, from early childhood through high school, who receive these activities are able to move ahead

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more solidly. Benefits of these exercises -- if done regularly and with the indicated rhythm -- include:

- Foundations for literacy - developmental capacities for all aspects of language.
- Foundations for numeracy - the math/logical and spatial intelligences (?in motion.)
- Readiness for desk-work - enhancing focus and attention. Setting the stage for harmonious receptivity to new material.
- Bodily/kinesthetic and spatial integration.
- Strengthening the will.

Teacher Resources for Working with Whole Classes

Two essential books are “The Extra Lesson” and “Take Time”. A third extremely practical book is "Education and Teaching as Preventive Medicine", published by Persephone Press for the 2002 Kolisko conference and collated by Irene Groh and Mona Ruef. This book is out of print as of this writing, but copies may be found through the website for Canadian Waldorf schools - <http://www.waldorf.ca/> - and via a number of European web outlets.

A website article describing how to incorporate remedial exercises in the daily rhythm of primary grades is available at <http://www.movementforchildhood.com/classroom.pdf>

