

Extra Lesson¹

First Grade Readiness Screening and Second Grade Assessment

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The capacities needed for learning lies in the developmental process of the first seven years of a child's life. Normally, early childhood through the development of the lower senses provides for the child: movement coordination, spatial orientation, and the visual perception to move between two and three-dimensional images effortlessly. This, along with good body geography and established dominance are the foundations for learning. The Extra Lesson addresses the needs of a struggling student by first assessing what areas of development might be weak or missing, and then offering a series of exercises to further develop those areas.

The Extra Lesson was developed by Audrey McAllen, in England, during the early nineteen seventies. She was an experienced Waldorf teacher who had been inspired by Rudolf Steiner's many lectures on the developing human being and her work with children who had learning difficulties. It was out of her teaching experience, her deep study of Steiner's work, and her observation of children with needs that Ms. McAllen developed first an assessment, and then a curriculum of movement, speech, drawing, and painting exercises to support the further development of children who are struggling in the classroom.

The Extra Lesson is meant to be used as one part of a solution with other interventions, which might include: nutritional/diet support, osteopathy, therapeutic eurythmy, art or music therapy, and, for older children, academic support. Ideally, an individual student will have an Extra Lesson once or twice per week for an hour, as well as a short daily home practice. A typical lesson often consists of floor exercises, speech work, form drawings, beanbag and ball exercises, working with copper rods and balls, and it concludes with a painting lesson.

The Extra Lesson is not designed only for individual children, it can also greatly benefit an entire class. Much of the Extra Lesson work can be used in addition to other exercises such as 'Take Time' in the classroom to support every child's ability to learn, focus, and engage socially. Many of the exercises can also help a teacher bring focus and concentration to a class when

needed. If possible, it is helpful to have another teacher come and serve as an extra set of eyes to help observe a class while doing the exercises to reach a clearer understanding of what a class teacher might want to focus on.

Not all schools are fortunate enough to be able to employ an Extra Lesson specialist full-time. Some schools have an Extra Lesson teacher work on a part-time basis, say two days per week, or employs a specialist for a block of time to do the screenings for both first grade readiness and the second-grade assessment.

Exercises the teacher can do in the classroom with the whole class

Note: some of these exercises can be done with the class with the students standing behind their chairs or in a circle. Others will need more space for movement, especially the exercises for integrating the early movement patterns.

To support the development of body geography:

Simple Simon says, asking the students to touch parts of the body, with both hands, right or left hand crossing over, e.g., place your pinky from your left hand on your right big toe.

To support the development of spatial orientation:

- **Bringing awareness of left and right:** Two soft felt balls, blue and red. Students have one in each hand. Ask them to throw up the one in the right hand while passing the ball in the left hand to the right hand, catching the returning ball in the left hand.
- **Awareness of above and below:** Students hold ball in each hand and throw it under the right leg and catch it with the same hand, then throw the ball in the left hand under the left leg and catch with the same hand. When rhythm is established, students walk forward and backward while saying the times tables.
- **Awareness of forward and backward:** Students grasp a copper rod vertically with the right hand above the left at arm's length and walk forward and backwards counting out loud or saying a chosen sentence, stepping on each number or word. Change the position of the rod to behind the

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back with the same walking and speaking. For very bad posture: hold the rod horizontally across the shoulders.

To help establish dominance:

For the hand: Games such as looking-aim, skittles, throwing rings over a hook. For the foot: hopping and stamping with the dominant foot.

To integrate early developmental movement patterns:

Note: *These exercises can be done with the whole class taking turns on the mat on the floor, lining up to take their turn. Working with half the class is best while the other half is busy with something else, otherwise it may take too long for the children to take their turn. In some schools the movement teacher incorporates these exercises into the movement lesson, or the school employs an Extra Lesson teacher who works with the class say once a week.*

- *Creeping on the floor like a lizard*, using both arms and legs with stomach on floor
- *Caterpillar crawl*: lying on the back pushing with heels backwards along the floor without the help of the arms
- *Circus seal*: students lie on mat and roll along, keeping their body straight and hands up above head. You can make this progressively more challenging by placing a beanbag between the knees or feet and as they roll along the beanbag needs to stay in place.
- *Eagle*: Students lie down on their stomachs and first place their arms at the sides. Ask them to slowly raise their arms up with hands under their shoulder blades as though spreading their wings, lifting head and also lifting their legs that need to be kept straight.
- *Roly Poly*: Students lie flat on their backs, bring their knees up towards their chins, clasp the knees around with a two-handed clasp and rock the body back and forth, keeping their balance
- *Crabwalk*: Forwards, backwards and sideways, keeping bottoms off the mat.

To integrate the horizontal and vertical midlines:

Wool winding, skein twisting, braiding and modeling with beeswax, juggling, table tennis, sweeping.

Other exercises the teacher can do with the whole class

- *Stretching and lifting*: With eyes gazing straight ahead, ask the students to lift the toes as high as they will go without the soles of the feet lifting from the floor. Now ask them to lower the toes and press them hard against the floor gripping it as strongly as possible. Repeat twice more, the raising the heels, stand on the toes, with the ball of the foot up from the floor. The hands should remain at the side of the body. This exercise helps to release tensions and to experience the lifting element in which the will forces are working. It also helps the student with spatial orientation.
- *Bouncing balls*: Each student has a ball in each hand, bounces the ball from the one hand on the floor and turns the hand and catches it with the same hand, then repeat with the other hand. Alternating hands, the students count forward to a given number and then back again. This exercise brings great flexibility between the stretching and lifting element and requires will forces and concentration.
- *An obstacle course*: For the young children an obstacle course is a wonderful way to get them to crawl under and jump over objects, as well as squeezing and wriggling through a narrow tunnel. You can include a station where the students have to use fine motor skills such as turning pennies or buttons over from one side to the other; include also the bunny hop, hopping through rings, balancing along a balance beam – in short whatever you can come up with that challenges the students. In the very early years, a story to go along with the journey through the obstacles is ideal. (Try pairing up children and have one lead his blindfolded partner through the course.)
- *Writing with feet*: This is a wonderful exercise and can be done in the classroom while the students are seated behind their desks. Each student has a slate on the floor in front of their feet and a white piece of chalk between their big toe and second toe. Each student practices writing their name on the slate in front of them. This can be very challenging for some who will need encouragement as you circle around the room.
- *Finger walking on a rod*: Each student holds a rod horizontally with two hands and the fingers move to the side and back again to the middle. Variations include holding the rod vertically with one hand and moving the fingers up and down.
- *Painting the lemniscate (the figure of eight)*: This is a painting that can be done in a regular painting

lesson and is a marvelous exercise. First paint a large figure of eight, *horizontally*, in yellow. Then fill in the left center loop with cobalt blue and take this across the yellow to surround the outside of the right-hand loop of the figure of eight. Next fill the right-side center with red and paint this across the yellow to surround the outside of the left hand loop. The painting movements should be from above to below,

- *Form drawing:* There are many forms that can be drawn here, but one of the special forms that McAllen created is the Flower Rod Exercise. This form is also a lemniscate, drawn vertically with a centering line. McAllen states that “In this exercise we can see if the student has the capacity to move inwardly from the convex to concave mirroring and the willingness to be receptive.”

NOTE: *There are many other exercises in the Extra Lesson book that are best left to the Extra Lesson specialist who can work with the students individually. For further reading and understanding of the above exercises, see Audrey McAllen’s Extra Lesson book.²*

Home Program:

Some activities that support a child’s capacity for learning at home or at recess, include:

Activities for vestibular stimulation:

- Play with a large beach ball – lie on it, under it, place feet on top while holding a pushup position (with supervision)
- Rolling and sliding in a box down a hill, wheelbarrow rides
- Balance boards, trampoline jumping
- Merry-go-rounds, swings, slides, teeter totter, Jungle Jim
- Climbing up stairs and jumping down with feet together
- Hammock play
- Jumping rope games

Activities to improve tactile perception:

- Playing with varied textures: sand, clay, paint
- Draw on a carpet square with chalk – numbers, letters, shapes, tic-tac-toe, and erasing chalk with hands, feet, and forearms
- Find common household items such as a key, paperclip, marble, silverware, cork, pencil, nail,

etc. (can use pairs of items) and hide them in a box of millet, having the child identify or match each object while blindfolded. Provide a box of mixed beans for the hands and feet to sift through.

- Drawing in the sand with hands or feet
- Massage with lotion or a firm pressure rubdown after bath time and before bed

Activities to improve gross motor skills:

- Crawling on all fours through hula hoops, under tables, etc.
- Hitting a balloon on a string
- Swimming
- Shaking sheets/towels out for spreading and folding
- Drawing/writing upright on a chalkboard or easel
- Chores such as carrying trash, raking, carrying and washing dishes, moving furniture
- Jumping over obstacles, lines, and cracks
- Jumping with one or both feet
- Ball throwing and catching
- Hula hoop
- Balloon volleyball
- Simon says
- Follow the leader
- Tug of war

Activities to improve fine motor skills:

- Kneading dough and mixing batter
- Using a hole puncher
- Wringing out clothes, face cloths
- Hanging up clothes using clothespins
- Using cake decorating tools
- Stretching rubber bands around an object
- Stringing beads, macaroni, cheerios, straws, paper clips
- Finger puppets
- Paper folding/origami
- Flicking coins or ping pong balls into a cup
- Turning over/shuffling cards, checkers, and coins

Activities for perceptual skills:

- Sorting a deck of cards, beads, buttons, or shells by shape, size, and color
- Sorting laundry socks
- Copying designs with pipe cleaners, toothpicks, popsicle sticks, coins, playdough
- Pick out items on a grocery list

² Audrey E. McAllen, *The Extra Lesson: Movement, Drawing, and Painting Exercises to Help Children with Difficulties in Writing, Reading, and Arithmetic*, 6th edition (Fair Oaks, CA: Rudolf Steiner College Press, 2013).

- Itsy bitsy spider song with hand movements
- Simple Simon
- Construction toys such as Legos, waffle bricks, Lincoln Logs
- Pin the tail on the donkey

Activities for visual motor skills:

- Use a paint brush or giant chalk on slanted surface
- Cutting with scissors
- Using a squirt bottle
- Using an eyedropper with colored water to paint on paper
- Rolling, tearing, or crumpling colored tissue paper to stick onto clear contact paper
- Stringing beads, macaroni, straws, paper clips, cheerios
- Picking up rice, popcorn, or other small objects with tweezers
- Using chop sticks
- Pinching clothespins with thumb and finger tips
- Sealing zip-lock bags
- Crawling on all fours, rocking back and forth in this position
- Swinging on swings and playing on monkey bars

The Extra Lesson Assessment

A general Extra Lesson assessment may be requested at any time during the elementary school years. A student may be referred in any of the grades, especially as they arrive in the middle school years when the work becomes more challenging. New students are given some time to settle down in the class and their new school environment and often have to catch up on their artistic work as well as at times academic work. At times, teachers will refer a student for a school district or a private neurological/cognitive evaluation that goes beyond the Extra Lesson Assessment.

A general Extra Lesson assessment looks at the student's physical development, gross and fine motor skills, dominance, integration of early movement patterns, body geography awareness, spatial orientation in space and time, finger grip and posture, writing, reading, spelling, math, form drawing, listening and hearing, speech, eye-tracking, short term memory; it usually finishes with asking the student to draw a person, house, and tree picture. Observations are made as to how the student cooperates, follows instructions, relates to the assessor, moves around in the room, and manages all the assignments (see additional notes on *criteria for observation* below).

In addition, there are two mainstay Extra Lesson assessments that take place every year, one for first grade readiness and the other for a general development progress check.

First grade readiness screening

This screening is provided for children who are chronologically ready for first grade and who have been deemed by the Kindergarten teachers to be ready for formal instruction. It is also an assessment for prospective students who come from other non-Waldorf schools. Over the years, Waldorf schools have developed various modes and processes for this assessment; how it is handled and organized will vary from school to school. The following process is an example of how it *can* be organized.

The Kindergarten teacher(s) present the class of children to the faculty in January and give an outline of the potential students who are ready to move on to first grade. This is followed by the organization of the assessment by the Care Group chair and a team consisting of the leading teacher and observers. The eligible students are split up into groups of four or five and a suitable time is set for the assessment.

The assessment

Students are fetched from the kindergarten in small groups and led to the Eurythmy room or other suitable space where the lead teacher and the observers are waiting for them. They have prepared and set up the room with a balance beam, rings on the floor, jump ropes, bean bags, crayons and paper by a bench in the corner, etc. The lead teacher greets them and begins the storytelling while the children travel around the room, balancing over the bridge, tossing bean bags, hopping on one foot along the rings, bending over to go under a chair, stepping up and over a chair and so on. The observers each have a couple of students to watch, and they take notes on each. They look for various criteria: dominance, fine and gross motor control, listening and focusing ability, crossing midlines, being able to touch the left ear with the right hand stretched over the head, ability to move with the group, the person-house-tree drawing, as well as a form drawing and other aspects.

The follow up

A meeting is arranged as a follow up to the assessments and the team discusses the findings together with the admissions director. It can happen that a particular student is deemed not quite ready, and a request may be made for a follow up assessment in May with some physical exercises, such as jumping rope, suggested for the student to work on before the re-assessment. Most often, the Kindergarten teachers have a fine sense of

which children are ready, and for the most part the assessment is a confirmation of the students' readiness. There are times when parents deem their child ready, while the teachers feel she needs more time. This calls for careful mediation between the parents and the Kindergarten teachers.

Students from other schools

At times it is possible to have students from other schools that are applying for first grade to be assessed with the group from the 'in-house' Kindergarten(s). This can be coordinated with the admissions director. Some teachers prefer to do the screening with individual students; other teachers prefer to do the screening in small groups so that the social interaction of the student within the group can be observed.

The second-grade assessment

This assessment is also under the purview of the Extra Lesson and takes place during the second half of the second grade. After giving the student time to settle into the class and to be introduced to writing and reading, as well as all the other subjects, it is time to take a reading on how the students are developing their physical and academic skills. The assessment is similar in some ways to the first-grade readiness assessment, with the addition of assessing for early (primitive) reflex retentions, and the newly acquired skills such as spelling, math, reading and writing. The other big difference is that the students are each assessed individually and not in a group. Typically, the assessor is an Extra Lesson specialist who schedules an hour for each student.

Criteria for observation

- Dominance: is it established? Is it mixed? Are their signs of ambidexterity?
- Gross motor skills: jumping rope, running/ accelerating/dead stop, high jump, long jump, throwing and catching a ball, kicking a ball, hopping on one foot, hopping on two feet, balancing on a beam or rope
- Fine Motor skills: threading a needle, turning pennies over
- Toe dexterity: picking up jewels with toes, writing name with pencil between toes
- Spatial orientation: backwards, forwards, sideways, centered, diagonal
- Time of year: season, weekday, yesterday and tomorrow
- Sense of symmetry: Form drawing, simple symmetry vertical and horizontal, crossing midlines
- Math: simple computations showing understanding of all four processes

- Writing: alphabet in order and in caps and lowercase—any reversals? hesitation? repeatedly having to start all over again from the beginning?
- Numbers: any reversals?
- Finger grip: correct? poor?
- Writing a sentence: does it have a verb and a noun? hesitation?
- Spelling: list of typical words covered in class
- Reading: list of typical words covered in class
- Person-House-Tree drawing: Are all three elements there? Is there a ground and a sky/sun? Is the figure three-folded? Does the house have windows, a door with a handle?
- Reflex retention check: Does the neck move freely sideways and the head up and down? bilateral integration etc.

The follow up

The Care Group team meets with the class teacher to discuss the observations and any resulting concerns from the individual assessments. This discussion may also include any behavior or social concerns in the classroom or out at recess. Recommendations may be made for students who are showing challenges with any of the criteria assessed, such as reading challenges. Further recommendations can refer to music or art therapy, therapeutic Eurythmy or Spatial dynamics.

Observations on each student are stored in the student's file and generally kept as in-house information.

Maggie Scott's passion for Waldorf education began with the birth of the eldest of her four daughters, nearly twenty years ago. After attending the Rudolf Steiner College for both her class teaching and Extra Lesson education, Maggie has worked in Waldorf schools teaching in the kindergarten, as a class teacher, and as the director of educational support programs. She currently runs the Cabinet Mountain Cooperative School, a Waldorf inspired program, in northern Idaho.

Elizabeth Auer. See bio on page 27.