

Classroom Exercises to Support Learning Capacities and Readiness

The following exercises and activities are highly recommended as part of a primary grades teacher's repertoire of ways to help every child be ready to do his or her best, every day. Experience has shown that students who receive these activities are able to move ahead 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 deskwork - enhancing focus and attention. Setting the stage for harmonious receptivity to new material.
- Bodily/kinesthetic and spatial integration.
- Strengthening the will.

You will need to refer to "The Extra Lesson", and "Take Time"; most of the following are taken from or based on these two essential books. <http://www.movementforchildhood.com/resources.pdf>

Part 1. Educational support activities recommended for rhythmical repetition over time

Children - especially in earlier grades - are well served by a daily and weekly rhythm... in other words, when "Monday is jump rope day, and Tuesday is copper rods day", etc. In this way, new or strengthened capacities can be harmoniously integrated over time.

These activities are perfect as a ten to twenty minute "warm-up" period in the morning. They are meant to be repeated over a period of time given with each. **A chart of how the activities in this section might be arranged as once-a-weeks can be found at the end of this article.**

Note - The grades given below indicate the youngest age at which the exercise is appropriate, e.g. "Grade 2 and up" indicates an exercise to start with 8 year olds or almost all 8's, not with a class of mostly 7 year olds. If students have not been given them in the youngest grade indicated, then these exercises would be appropriate for older grades up to 8.

Balancing Lemniscates Form Drawing

For Grades: 3 and up

Strengthens/supports: Eye-hand coordination, spatial orientation, engaging the will

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 6 weeks

Source: "The Extra Lesson" page 144

Outline: A continuous-pattern form drawing that calls for harmonious movement, care and judgment.

Ball & balance

Ball Twirling

For Grades: 2 and up

Strengthens/supports: Bodily-kinesthetic integration, spatial orientation, fine motor control, readiness for learning

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 12 weeks, or in a 6 week block rotation

Source: "The Extra Lesson" page 125

Outline: Students stand in a circle, each twirling three balls (see book), The movement patterns given for this exercise will also help solidify the child's harmonious laterality. This exercise takes very little time, and could be included as the last activity with the Bean Bag sequence from "Take Time" or as a warm-up before form drawing.

Bean Bag Sequence from “Take Time”

For Grades: 1 and up

Strengthens/supports: Spatial orientation, and stimulation of awareness of space around the body

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 12 weeks, or in a 6 week block rotation

Source: “Take Time“ pages 44 to 60

Outline: Spatial orientation — or forms in space — must be mastered before a child can hope to get down to shapes and forms which create letters on paper. These exercises, and the order in which they are given, lead the child to make an inner action to bring about outward movement, and to move from inner to outer.

Clay Ball Progression

For Grades: 1 and up

Strengthens/supports: Posture, fine motor control, rhythm and breathing, engaging the will

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 6 weeks, for one or two 6-week blocks a year

Source: Various

Outline: I learned the basis for the following version of an exercise with clay from Nettie Fabrie, now a remedial teacher at Seattle Waldorf School. Allow about fifteen minutes.

Students stand in a circle, with a container of soft clay in the middle (or several containers for quickness of dispensing). A few at a time come in, and each takes a lump of clay that is “bigger than a large grape, and smaller than a golf ball.” As students return to their spots in the circle, they may begin work. To some extent, students will reveal their personalities in the choices they make for amount; in any event, students are not to be allowed to return for more, or to give back any. They are to use only fingertips for shaping. I suggest you give a hint that the first order of business is to smooth out the clay, because cracks will quickly harden and become difficult to eliminate.

An important part of this exercise is to have students stand with feet slightly apart, weight distributed and with good posture maintained. Once all have clay and are underway, expect/require silent work no matter how large the class. Occasionally, a student whose work is very good, can be given the honor of walking quietly around inside the circle to show others his or her achievement in progress.

First lesson - model a ball/sphere with fingertips of both hands, in front.

Second lesson - a sphere with writing hand, in front.

Third lesson - a sphere with other hand, in front.

Fourth, fifth and sixth lessons - a sphere as above, behind back. Allow occasional looks.

The preceding can be done in First Grade or later. In Second Grade, if the sphere sequence has been done, then progress to cubes, and in Third Grade, to pyramids. I have also brought this activity back in 6th or 7th grade in a more mentally challenging mode, by having the students form a sphere, and then telling them to turn it into a Platonic solid, for which I describe the facets but don't name, e.g.: “six equilateral triangles” or “four squares and eight equilateral triangles.”

When student/s have finished to your satisfaction, clay is returned to the container and pressed back into the supply.

I have seen a similar activity described in an old-time book of party games, in which the participants are each given a mystery object such as a bolt or nut to hold behind their back without looking, and then to attempt to model it. I have used this as a one-time game in older grades up to 8th Grade.

Copper Rod Exercises

For Grades: 1 and up

Strengthens/supports: Benefits above, plus fine motor control for handwriting

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 12 weeks, or in a 6 week block rotation

Source: See “Waking up to learning with copper rod exercises” on this website

Outline: Copper rod exercises can serve the developmental needs of grade school children...

- Physiology that supports writing and reading - development of fine motor control through the radius and ulna
- Direction, rhythm and sequencing - related to math
- Proprioception and balance - one of the “Multiple Intelligences”
- Working with anticipation; social skills

Cross-Step Ball Bounce

For Grades: 2 and up

Strengthens/supports: Movement patterns, midline crossing, eye-hand coordination

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 6 weeks, once or twice a year

Source: "Take Time" page 86, enhanced by Mary Jo Oresti of AHE

Outline: I learned this activity from Mary Jo Oresti. In addition to the stepping movements carefully described under "Crossways Walking" in "Take Time", a tennis ball or other small bouncing ball is added. The ball starts in the hand on the same side as the foot that is in front, i.e. if the left foot is crossed over to the front (so that it is on the right side of the line) then the ball would start in the right hand. The ball is then tossed down to bounce in the space to the left of the line, and caught by the left hand. Then a step is taken to place the right foot in front (crossed over to the left side of the line) and then the ball is tossed (by the left hand) to bounce in the open space to the right side, and caught by the right. Observe and help that students are able to continue this crossing pattern without switching the hand holding the ball, so that the tossing or stepping becomes homolateral.

Drawing Circles with the Feet

For Grades: 1 and up

Strengthens/supports: Spatial orientation, bodily/kinesthetic integration, balance, rhythm and breathing, engaging the will

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 6 weeks, for one or two 6-week blocks a year

Source: movementforchildhood.com

Outline: Materials and setup - crayons and large paper. For crayons, red and blue block or stick crayons. For paper, ideally a roll of paper at least 24 inches wide; a long enough strip or strips so that each student has a space in front of him or her to work, but close enough to adjoining students so that they can rest hands on each other's shoulders for balance if they want to. If the paper is at least 36 inches wide, then students can stand on each side of the strip of paper (this makes the activity a little nicer). The paper is to be taped to the floor about every 18 inches. If you have a parent in your school with connections to a web offset printer, you may be able to get a donation of "tail ends" of rolls that would be perfect. Otherwise, large sheets of paper may be used - this just requires more taping.

Method - The end result desired is a good size red circle on the right, half overlapped by a similar size blue circle on the left. (Size should be as large as student can make without reaching too far and losing balance. Most students will naturally make a 12 to 20 inch diameter circle.) Begin by having students join you in drawing in the air just above the blank paper, a large counterclockwise circle with right feet (no crayons yet). Observe and correct those who use left foot; or who trace clockwise. When the whole class is moving rhythmically together with this warmup, then give permission to place the red crayon between the big toe and the next toe, to balance with neighbors if desired, and to begin and continue drawing until you signal to stop (several minutes). When the time seems right, have class stop and rest in place; then repeat above clockwise with left foot, first in air, then with blue crayon. Finally, have each student, in open space above or below circles, write his or her name, with free choice of foot and crayon.

Note - if you have a large enough room and enough paper, it is nice if students' first experience of this exercise is together with a grade who have done it before; then you can have the experienced students stand ready, with a space between each for a first-timer to join in.

Observations - Can student maintain direction, and a drawing that is more like a circle than a bird's nest?

Five Painting Exercises with a Left-to-Right Component

For Grades: 1 and up (see "The Extra Lesson" for age instructions for each)

Strengthens/supports: Spatial orientation for reading and writing

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 12 weeks, or in a 6 week block rotation

Source: "The Extra Lesson" pages 161 to 172

Outline: "The Extra Lesson" describes four painting exercises which consist mainly of or include careful left-to-right strokes filling the entire paper. Harmonious integration of this movement pattern is critical to the development of stress-free reading and writing. These painting exercises given by Audrey McAllen, are: The Eye-Hand Painting Exercise, from 6 1/2 years old;

The Blue and Red Spiral Exercises, from 8 years old; The Secondary Color Exercise, from 9 years old; and Magenta and Viridian Painting, from 10 years old.

I learned a simplified painting exercise for this movement gesture, from Nettie Fabrie, now a remedial teacher at Seattle Waldorf School. With wet painting paper, and with all students waiting to begin, each dips his or her brush once (only once) and waits for the teacher to indicate it's time to start the first row (left to right, starting from the top) by slowly saying: "Left to right, and lift." The teacher allows time for brushes to carefully paint one row at the top and to move back to the left and poise above the paper, and then again quietly and slowly says "left to right, and lift." The quality of the teacher's calm, steady voice is an important part of this healing, calming exercise. The painting continues as one band slightly overlaps the one above it, with the color getting progressively weaker as the rows move down the page. I would recommend starting this version in the first months of First Grade. In this way, you have a total of five whole-class painting exercises for variety over the course of the first four grades. You can see an example of how to plan this out, in the charts at the end of this article. The Blue-Red Perspective Exercise, from 11 years old, would be a natural follow-on in Fifth Grade.

Juggling

For Grades: 3 and up

Strengthens/supports: Eye-hand coordination, spatial organization, movement patterns

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 6 weeks, for one or two 6-week blocks a year

Source: Traditional

Outline: I've had success having students begin with one ball or bean bag, tossing it back and forth until able to toss continuously while talking with a friend; then add a second ball until they can be tossed symmetrically back and forth while chatting.

Jumping Rope

For Grades: 1 and up

Strengthens/supports: Readiness for deskwork - enhancing focus and attention. Setting the stage for harmonious receptivity to new material. Bodily/kinesthetic and spatial integration. Strengthening the will.

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for at least half a year - great for Mondays to help class settle down to work.

Source: Traditional

Outline: All children need to progress through the following steps to mastery.

A. Large rope(s) with helpers or partners swinging rope - start with a swaying rope, progress to a swinging-over rope, master jumping to traditional rhymes with added movements such as touching the floor, clapping hands; finally, ability to Double Dutch.

B. Individual rope - start with walking/stepping over, progress to jumping with a double hop; add backwards, crossing in front, crossing from the back. Add jumping with a single hop only after 4th Grade.

Certain students can also benefit from jumping rope when they need a time out from the classroom.

Moving Straight Line and Lemniscate Drawing

For Grades: 2 and up

Strengthens/supports: A calming, focusing activity that helps develop proprioception, balance, and spatial orientation

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 12 weeks, or in two 6 week block rotations

Source: "The Extra Lesson" page 147

Outline: A continuous-pattern form drawing that calls for harmonious rhythmical movement. This is one of the most important exercises given in "The Extra Lesson".

Painted Lemniscate

For Grades: 2 and up

Strengthens/supports: Courage and harmonization

Rhythm and duration: Once a week for 6 weeks, for one or two 6-week blocks a year

Source: "The Extra Lesson" page 170

Outline: A painting exercise to promote proper movement patterns and preparation for classroom work.

Painting Handwriting**For Grades:** 1 and up**Strengthens/supports:** Eye-hand coordination, fine motor control for penmanship, foundations for literacy**Rhythm and duration:** Introductory lessons in a 6-week block; then as part of Main Lesson Book**Source:** "The Extra Lesson" page 179**Outline:** See expanded lesson suggestions on this website under Exercises for reading and writing: painting handwriting, shaded drawing

Painting handwriting can be used to help develop a loving relationship to letters, the alphabet and writing and reading. Once good ability has been developed, it can be brought into many Main Lesson Book pages for titles, or entire paragraphs.

Shaded Drawing**For Grades:** 1 and up**Strengthens/supports:** Willpower and awakens**Rhythm and duration:** Introductory lessons in a 6-week block; then as part of Main Lesson Book**Source:** "The Extra Lesson" page 158**Outline:** See expanded lesson suggestions on this website under Exercises for reading and writing: painting handwriting, shaded drawing

Shaded drawing engages the will, and helps to wake up thinking capacities. Once good ability has been developed, it can be brought into many Main Lesson Book pages for illustrations.

Spatial Lemniscates Form Drawing**For Grades:** 3 and up**Strengthens/supports:** Eye-hand coordination, spatial orientation, engaging the will**Rhythm and duration:** Once a week for 6 weeks**Source:** "The Extra Lesson" page 146**Outline:** A continuous-pattern form drawing that calls for harmonious movement, care and judgment**String Games (Cat's Cradle)****For Grades:** 1 and up**Strengthens/supports:** Spatial orientation, fine motor control**Rhythm and duration:** Once a week for 6 weeks**Source:** Traditional**Outline:** String games have been played on every continent for many hundreds of years. One source for books of these games (and many others) is the bargain-books publisher Dover, (doverpublications.com) which offers FASCINATING STRING FIGURES, International String Figure Association; and STRING FIGURES AND HOW TO MAKE THEM, Caroline Furness Jayne, 1906.**Threefold Spiral****For Grades:** 1 and up**Strengthens/supports:** Bodily-kinesthetic integration, spatial orientation, readiness for learning**Rhythm and duration:** Once a week for 12 weeks, or in a 6 week block rotation**Source:** "The Extra Lesson" page 127**Outline:** A calming, quieting activity that will help the entire class, and will be especially helpful for nervous, fidgety students; and for children who experience sleep problems.

Wool Winding**For Grades:** 1, first term of 2**Strengthens/supports:** Body geography, fine motor skills for writing and reading**Rhythm and duration:** Once a week for 6 weeks. Two blocks in First Grade, one in Second**Source:** "The Extra Lesson"**Outline:** Experience with asking children to draw a picture with a person, a house and a tree shows that the majority of 6 and even 7 year olds have not fully come into their limbs; usually arms are drawn without hands, and legs often without feet. In addition to the movement benefits of this exercise, it helps the child develop this aspect.**Writing with the Feet****For Grades:** 1 and up**Strengthens/supports:** Brings students into their limbs and will, assists with handwriting, especially for those with tension**Rhythm and duration:** Once a week for 6 weeks, for one or two 6-week blocks a year**Source:** "The Extra Lesson" (several references)**Outline:** Tape large paper to floor; student uses large pencil or a stick crayon between toes. Begin with writing name, alphabet or numbers, progress to form drawings, reading words, etc.**Zoo Exercises - "Zoorobics and Crawlathenics"****For Grades:** 1, 2**Strengthens/supports:** Crawling is vital to completion of all early-childhood developmental tasks.**Rhythm and duration:** Once a week for 12 weeks, or in a 6 week block rotation**Source:** "The Extra Lesson" pages 109 to 113.

See expanded lesson suggestions on this website under Zoo-robics and Crawl-athenics.

Outline: See also Association for a Healing Education publications; traditional tumbling books; refer to page on this site - How much creeping and crawling does it take to prepare a child for school and life? Many child development specialists believe that tens of thousands (perhaps as many as 50,000) crawling type steps are needed to properly myelinate the brain for academic readiness. Given today's popularity of strollers, walkers, baby bouncers, backpacks, etc. it is unlikely a modern infant/toddler will take that many crawling steps.**Part 2. Give your students a break! Educational support activities for mid-lesson wake-ups**

A number of very helpful supplementary exercises for whole classes are to be found in the Resource Teacher's Developmental Exercise Manual (Vols. I and II), available through the AHE website.

The following exercises from "The Extra Lesson" may be used at any time, including as a break from deskwork.**Ball Twirling Exercise** (Gr. 2 and up) – a calming/integrating exercise that takes about 4 minutes; helps with focus, rhythm, development of reading and writing.**Above/Below & Left/Right Ball Integration** activities from "The Extra Lesson" (Gr. 2 or 3). These activities assist with rhythm and the development of midline crossing.**Cubes Between Fingers, Marbles Between Toes** (Gr. 1 and up) – Activities to bring awakesness and Touch sense.**Foot drawing and writing exercises** (Gr. 1 and up - no limit!) – for developing handwriting; to relieve tension in writing.**Lifting One's Weight** (Gr. 1 and up); **Whole Body Exercise** (Gr. 4 and up); and other posture and balance activities – general posture/standing and stretching exercises – a progression of movements to bring awakesness as part of morning activities or anytime a 'wake up call' is needed.**Tracing and Coloring Hand**, (Gr. 1) – A calming activity that helps with laterality confirmation. (I always do this activity at least once with each First Grade.**Activities to Release Tension in Arm and Hand Movements** - pages 140, 141.

Sample suggested block system for Morning Support Exercises

The following charts for Grades 1 through 4, are given as an example of how exercises for the whole class can be integrated into a regular lesson plan, optimally at the beginning of the school day, and worked at with a beneficial rhythm over the course of a term, a school year, and a school career.

First Grade - exercises appropriate for ages 6 and up

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Block 1	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Left-to-Right Painting	Zoo Exercises
Block 2	Clay Ball	Threefold Spiral	Writing with the Feet	Wool Winding	Introduce Shaded Drawing
Block 3	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Left-to-Right Painting	Zoo Exercises
Block 4	Clay Ball	Threefold Spiral	Writing with the Feet	Wool Winding	Introduce Painting Handwriting (basic shapes)
Block 5	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Eye-Hand Painting	Drawing Circles with the Feet

Second Grade - exercises appropriate for ages 8 and up

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Block 1	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Eye-Hand Painting	Zoo Exercises
Block 2	Moving Straight Line & Lemniscate (1&8)	Threefold Spiral	Writing with the Feet	Painting Handwriting exercises	Wool Winding
Block 3	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Blue and Red Spiral Painting	Drawing Circles with the Feet
Block 4	Moving Straight Line & Lemniscate (1&8)	Threefold Spiral	Writing with the Feet	Painted Lemniscate	Shaded Drawing practice (alphabet booklet)
Block 5	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Cross-Step Ball Bounce; Ball Twirling	Blue and Red Spiral Painting	Clay Ball

Third Grade - exercises appropriate for ages 9 and up

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Block 1	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Blue and Red Spiral Painting	Cross-Step Ball Bounce; Ball Twirling
Block 2	Moving Straight Line & Lemniscate (1&8)	Threefold Spiral	Writing with the Feet	Painting Handwriting exercises	Drawing Circles with the Feet
Block 3	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Take Time Beanbags	Secondary Color Exercise (painting)	Cross-Step Ball Bounce; Ball Twirling
Block 4	Moving Straight Line & Lemniscate (1&8)	Shaded Drawing practice	Writing with the Feet	Painted Lemniscate	String Games (Cat's Cradle)
Block 5	Jumping Rope	Copper Rods	Juggling Intro.	Secondary Color Exercise (painting)	Clay Ball

Fourth Grade - exercises appropriate for ages 10 and up. If class has had all or most of the rotation of exercises as given in the previous tables for Grades 1, 2 and 3, the teacher will need to gauge which exercises are still most needed before the class rounds the bend toward middle school. In any event, the items marked with an asterisk are important as completions of a progression sequence.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Block 1	Jumping Rope	Moving Straight Line & Lemniscate (1&8)	Juggling practice * Ball Twirling	* Secondary Color Exercise (painting)	Drawing Circles with the Feet
Block 2	Copper Rods	Writing with the Feet	Clay Ball	Painting Handwriting exercises	Shaded Drawing practice
Block 3	Jumping Rope	* Form Drawing - Spatial Lemniscates	Juggling practice * Ball Twirling	* Magenta and Viridian Painting	choice
Block 4	Copper Rods	Writing with the Feet	Threefold Spiral	Painting Handwriting exercises	choice
Block 5	Jumping Rope	* Form Drawing - Balancing Lemniscates	* Ball Twirling	* Magenta and Viridian Painting	choice