

Working with Groups of Children

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Background:

In 2007, from February to June, we had the opportunity to work with a group of children that attend a special day care program at "Associação Comunitária Monte Azul", community center serving families in a Sao Paulo slum. They attend that special group at ACOMA in the morning and then go to the public school in the afternoon for 4 hours. They were all from different grades depending on their ages (7 through 14). The day care program at ACOMA included 2 meals, breakfast and lunch, and various activities including painting, seasonal storytelling, singing, music, hand crafts, and form drawing. The teachers and care givers were all trained in Waldorf Education.

We decided to work with a group of 25 children for a semester. Due to the specific age group of Extra Lesson exercises we divided the class into 2 groups: 7 to 10 year olds and 11 to 14 year olds. It was a volunteer job for all of us. We had a good deal of help: a special room, some materials for painting, the group of children, and work from the people at ACOMA. We were all very grateful for their support, which enabled us to perform this important work as well as learn valuable lessons! In November 2007 we were able to present a report on our work at the 8th Bi-Annual Brazilian Anthroposophic Doctor's Congress.



Working with the Children:

We began the work by writing a letter to the parents of children explaining the nature of our proposed project, informing them of the dates and asking for permission to work with their children. Parents were given a small questionnaire with some basic information which would add to our files. A teacher often had to help some of the families fill in the forms because of their own reading and writing difficulties. We then began the Extra Lesson Assessment of each of the 25 children, which took 4 weeks to complete. Five professionals worked for 2

and half hours, once a week, with each group getting one hour of work per week. We chose an abbreviated assessment format, working in stations with the following elements:

- Handedness Pattern
- Reflexes, Bean Bags, Eye Tracking
- Balance Check, Mirroring Exercise
- Body Movement for Person/House/Tree drawing, Eye Color Affinity, Cross Test, Flower Rod

Procedure:

Each professional involved saw all children in at least one station, but not for the entire process of Assessment. We needed to take notes very objectively and specifically describe all the aberrations we might have seen. That was a huge exercise for us. Each professional wrote five reports for the Assessments, based on his/her observation of one activity station, plus the notes taken by colleagues in the other three stations.

With the compiled data we prepared two lesson plans to work with each age group of children. We tried to attend to most of the difficulties we found, and included at least one of the core Extra Lesson exercises in each plan. Through Rachel Ross's suggestion, we also included some ideas from our Spanish colleagues who were being guided by Joep Eikenboom, a presenter in the international training programs. We worked for six weeks with the first lesson plan, and then a second lesson plan for other six weeks. During the second period we managed to have 10 children be seen by the Anthroposophic Doctor that worked at "Monte Azul", addressing their specific difficulties. They all received appropriate medication and/or indicated special medical programs. Joep Eikenboom came to Brazil in May, and visited the group working, giving us permission to use an exercise he has created, which was wonderful for the group.



First Lesson Plan: March / April

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|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 7 to 10 year olds | 11 to 14 year olds |
| Rotation Exercises | Rotation Exercises |
| Lifting One's Weight | Lifting One's Weight |
| Ball Twirl | Ball Twirl |
| Rod Rolling / Eye-Finger | Rod Rolling / Eye-Finger |
| Sun in the Blue Sky Painting | Moral Color Painting |

Observations:

We began with painting first in order to alternate the lessons within the groups and maybe work with more children; however, we learned that one cannot work with the physical activity after painting – the children became too calm and easy and couldn't concentrate. They were not able to perform the exercises correctly.

Second Lesson Plan – May / June

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| 7-to-10-year-olds Copper Ball Spiral Whole Body – Pummeling Annymic Painting (by Joep Eikenboom) | 11-to-14-year-olds Copper Ball I & 8 Whole Body – Pummeling Red – Blue Perspective Painting |
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**Observations:**

We were able to take part in the medical appointments together with each child and parents. We added the information we had in our Assessment Reports, and the lessons to the medical history and diagnosing. Dr. Maria Luiza Levy, a pediatrician, found our information very helpful and important to her work. As a result, she sent other children for Extra Lesson Assessment. This project also gave us the opportunity to talk to the parents about the changes they might have seen in the child due to our work. They all reported that their child was more present, paying more attention to life and school. All of the participating children began to get better grades in school and test results. They felt happier, more secure and grew in self-esteem. Some children said they could better understand Math and/or Language classes in school. We realized that it is possible to achieve good results and maintain the quality of our individual work when working with groups.

The children, together with their teacher at ACOMA, Iva dos Santos, presented poems, singing and a Cello and Flute performance as a thank-you celebration for us on the last day. We will never forget handmade keyholders we received as a gift from these children.

Participating Teachers/Therapists, all trained in the Extra Lesson:

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| José Amadeu Piovani – Art Therapist | Rosana Cristina Torlay – Speech Therapist |
| Maria Christina Casella – Art Therapist | Rosana Tieka Brancucci – Physical Therapist |
| Maria Eugenia Obniski – Chirophonetics Therapist | |