

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Main Lesson and Block Periods

Mention has been made in another flier (Rhythms and Structures) of the need to relate material to certain rhythms. The approach we recommend in this regard uses Waldorf pedagogy as its source and is, therefore, "Waldorf inspired" although it has been modified for our approach.

The "main lesson", which is taught in block periods, forms an integral part of our approach. Each day begins with the main lesson which lasts about two hours (it would be shorter for children at the lower end of primary school). The different academic subjects are studied each morning as a main lesson, over a period of three to five weeks; the most common length of time is four weeks. The main lessons take up most of the morning period and are taught right through from Class 1 (6+) to Class 12 (18+). The content of the main lesson will consist of different subject matter according to the age of the children taught and each teacher will use the time in a variety of ways. Usually some sort of narration will occur followed by some type of creative, practical or artistic activity.

The length of the main lesson gives sufficient time for this to happen. It is very reassuring for children, particularly for some temperaments, to know that they need not hurry. They can settle down and become accustomed to the subject matter. If there are particular difficulties they will know that they will have a period of time to adjust and then to tackle the problem.

The period of time involved also means that children can produce work that is a true and clear indicator of their academic, creative and artistic ability. It is a measure of the pride that children take in preparing and working on their main lesson books that it is extremely difficult to obtain examples of their work. They will not part with such books for they have taken great care and considerable thought and effort in their production.

The following gives a somewhat over-simplified outline of main lesson work. Throughout the Lower School emphasis is on a thematic rather than a subject approach. The thematic approach covers, in Classes 1, 2 and 3, such subject areas as English, Mathematics and what was referred to in earlier times as Home Surroundings and Nature Study. A more appropriate name today would be Environmental or Social Studies.

The thematic approach, in Classes 4 to 12, covers the following: English and Mathematics are retained as Main Lessons; Art (as applied to the main lesson), aesthetics and history of art are taught as half the English content in Classes 9 to 12. In Classes 4 to 12 Environmental Studies as a subject is omitted: History, Geography, Nature Study, Physics and Chemistry replace it although Physics is not introduced until Class 6 and Chemistry until Class 7.

Each lesson subject is taught in blocks enabling revision to occur at the end of each year. The total period for the main lesson subjects is divided approximately into four so that revision can occur in the last quarter. In other words the main subject matter is covered in the first three quarters and in the last quarter (usually a little less) the teacher systematically revises the content of the other three quarters. When this is done at the end of the year in the different subject areas integration and "wholeness" occurs.

The main point is not to develop and support the memory of children (although this will occur) but to develop qualities that relate to the inner being and psyche. In our society continual fragmentation and experience of changing impressions occur. Even though we are caught up in this rapid turnover each one of us would find it hard to accept a modern school curriculum with its rapid and continual change of subjects over very short periods of time. Our approach counters this imbalance in a format appropriate to the development of children.