

## *How Eurythmy Works in the Curriculum*

*An Answer to a Question Asked by an Elementary School Parent*

The 'blueprint' of the idea behind a Rudolf Steiner school lies in the planning for each subject to be taught in relation to the right age of the child. This 'Waldorf School Curriculum' is a living organism, guiding the teachers in a broad and creative way, from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, and emphasizing the importance all along of applied imagination. Eurythmy comes in as a great help at every age level. In eurythmy we learn to control movement by means of rhythm and form. Eurythmy is controlled movement.

Practically every eurythmy lesson in all the grades begins with the forming of a circle—not just standing in a circle but actively forming it together, the teacher and all the pupils present. It is an image of wholeness in balance; it combines form, movement and rhythm in one gesture. As soon as the circle begins to move, swinging to the right, to the left, in toward the center—becoming very small, or out toward the periphery—becoming larger and larger, there is rhythm. The circle, as a balance between all these directions, contains every possible rhythm. Rudolf Steiner speaks about rhythm as 'the healer'; we try to have rhythm in everything we do in school, particularly in the elementary school years.

The swinging rhythms we do on the circle can lead us directly into the musical part of eurythmy, tone eurythmy, and at the same time can give us structure and form. The better we learn to mould the form, the more we are free to swing and sing rhythmically in the movement. If we can build a really firm eurythmy circle together, we can also let the 'builders' run loose in a free eurythmy swing and quite easily bring them back to order. In the lower grades it is better that each child has his own definite place on the circle line, whereas it is good for the older children to stand in different places and thus have to create a new circle every time. They will then benefit from

the selfless activity employed in forming a harmonious circle together with everyone else in the class. It may take time but it will give strength to the continuation of the lesson.

These rhythmic movements on the circle are done in a very simple way in first and second grade. Gradually the children become able to develop more complicated rhythmic form-patterns in the following years.

In the first grade we work with the colorful pictures of the fairy tales, whose rich material is needed at this age to nourish the imagination. The king and queen are given their dignified steps and eurythmy gestures. The changing over from the rushing of the wicked witch to the graceful movement of the princess is in itself a powerful rhythm. This approach to rhythm, the lively change from one quality to another, rather than by clapping or stepping out syllables with the feet, is altogether fitting for this age, when the children still dwell in dreamy pictures.

To make them experience the change from contraction to expansion, the teacher might let the children dive into and live for a long while in the element of contraction and then let them realize the relief of expansion, a change from the picture of something dark, heavy, narrow, tight, or sad into the opposite, bright, light, wide: letting them perhaps as dwarves crouch down and with tiny, tense steps hammer their way through a narrow passage . . . and then come to a bright opening where, becoming swallows, they can soar out over the sunny meadow in free-flowing flight.

These fairy tale images will then also suggest an immediate movement of the various consonants and vowels, without naming them as letters. Even in the second grade, where we continue with fairy tales, adding the fables and legends, we avoid giving a movement the name of a letter, waiting rather until the child is ready to discover it himself. In that way he will be able to enjoy the movement with an aura of imagination around it, instead of dropping it down to the level of intellect. The animal stories lend themselves particularly well to the experience of the movement of a consonant. We can characterize each wonderful animal in a concrete manner right down into our feet. There is a whole world of intangibles in

the difference between the child who performs the mighty D . D . of the elephant foot being placed on the ground, and the child depicting the dainty d . d . d . of the hopping robin, the sneaky n . n . n . of the fox or the heavy, warm B . B . of the good brown bear.

As we continue the rhythmic work in second and third grades, we can also make use of nursery rhymes which bring all kinds of rhythms both for stepping and clapping, as well as a rich variety of words and images. It is now time to become more secure with regard to left and right, and we can use the ringing, swinging bells of so many nursery rhymes to develop quite skilful changes from left to right,—even with two children together, swinging in various directions and rhythms.

In the third grade these exercises are brought further, expanding the movement to a larger reach and better control. The third-grader's imagination reaches right up to heaven with the Bible stories, as he learns at the same time to build his house here on earth. He also experiences these two 'reaches' in eurythmy, where his movement can swing out freer at this age than later on when the intellect may hold him back. It is expanding and freeing for the children to move and breathe eurythmically with the glorious largeness of the psalms, while at the same time they are learning precision and firmness in rhythmic stepping with their legs and feet.

These two opposite reaches can come closer and closer in the development of the child until he wakes up to a stronger self-awareness (and often becomes a nuisance to himself and others!). The far reaches change as the fourth-graders come a step further down to earth and now learn about the difference between man and animal . . . or, in the language of eurythmy form: they come into the square. The squareness is a rather rigid condition in which the fourth-grader can be guided to 'controlled freedom' in becoming aware of the four directions of space . . . in geography they are learning about their home town. In eurythmy, moving forward is an entirely different experience from moving backwards or sideways; in moving to the right, the child will feel strength and upsweep; in moving to the left, he can express inwardness and stillness. Working up to a certain security within the squareness and the four direc-

tions, the fourth-grader slowly develops into a fifth-grader and will then be ready to free himself from the square and from the circle.

There will be less and less the need to face the center of the circle or the need to be sustained by the class unit represented in the circle. He may now stand in a place where the four directions meet, within himself, freed from the class unit, facing forward. This is rather an important moment in the child's development . . . when he begins to look differently at the world around him. He is still 'behind the fence', as it were, but beginning to peep over it into the world.

In this transition toward self-awareness the child is getting ready for the rod exercises, for which up to now he has been carefully prepared, without getting into any particular 'body correction.' The fifth-grader excels in rod exercises as he grows more firmly into his body. He now reaches out to the palm of his hand, so to speak, and from now on we can require more active forming with the hand. In the work on dramatic poetry or music and in the experience of major and minor music, we have a wonderful opportunity to let the children enjoy the two contrasting forces of expansion and contraction that are alive in man. The fifth grade corresponds to the age of the balanced Greek, and we swing easily in the harmonious lemniscate (one of the eurythmy forms suggested by Rudolf Steiner), realizing that the supple grace will soon disappear when the children reach the sixth grade.

The sixth-grader has come even deeper down into his body and is open to law and order (in spite of his violent opposition toward it!). The curriculum calls for Roman history and geometry. In eurythmy we deal with geometric forms in all variations. The work we have done up to now with geometric forms has been more out of a sense of flow; now in the sixth grade we concern ourselves with the shaping and the precision of the form. The underlying laws, too, of a poem or piece of music are being studied and brought out in eurythmic movement. This can lead us to the understanding of the ballad form, which is scheduled for the seventh grade and which gives the boys and girls full opportunity to express the soul-filled moods of poetry. The children at this age experience intimately the

realm of the inner soul-life, at the same time that they are brought into contact with the laws of the star world in the study of astronomy. Both realms, inner and outer, can be expressed in eurythmy, the one through definite gestures characterizing a variety of soul moods and soul conditions, such as expectation, inwardness, hope, longing, love, etc., the other through moving in geometric forms or according to the grammatical structure of language.

The eighth grade is given the opportunity to develop further in this direction and to work strongly at the sculptural quality of language from many different aspects. This can awaken the eighth-grader to a balance between the outside world around him and the inner turmoil in which the girls and boys so often find themselves at this age. The work with these opposites helps to lead them to the inner security so needed when they reach high school age.

In the high school classes, the young people follow the poets and poetry of the various historical epochs. Now they can approach eurythmy with more artistic detail: expressive positions and movements of feet and hands, the heightened use of the laws of color, a deeper study of music; everything is raised to a more conscious level. As the curriculum moves forward in a spiral fashion, it touches again on the elements already studied in the lower grades.

Now it becomes more and more evident that eurythmy is not just a study for itself, as an intriguing school subject, but it is the means by which every child can be helped in his whole development. Thus throughout all the school years the eurythmy curriculum follows closely the main lesson curriculum, for this is adjusted to the development of consciousness at the various stages of the child's life.

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