
Moving Toward Independent Thinking

~ Alice Stamm

Kindergarten educators, parents, and caregivers are aware that children move first, then speak, and then think, as their development typically unfolds. The work of the young child in coming into uprightness involves complicated, integrative movements, which awaken a mood of awe and joy in the observer. Remember the unique joy felt in that first moment of seeing the child standing and taking that first step? Out of this movement comes the accompanying sounding of the vowels, registering the child's reaction to the world around. Next come the first consonants, such as "mmm," describing the mother and mothering, perhaps, as well as daddy. These sounds acknowledge the experience of stepping forward to explore the world.

The universal world of sound, with the possibility to speak every human language, first surrounds young children; gradually, through imitation, the mother tongue emerges. Through imitation, not only sounds and syntax, but also the moods around what is spoken come into the young child. New sounds achieved awaken joy in their practice and placement, like new tastes. Later on, how words are placed and form relationships with one another brings forth meaning, intention, and communication.

Teaching eurythmy and developmental movement exercises has allowed me to become very aware of the relation of movement to speech. The body moves and speech moves along with it. We all know how a misplaced word in a story or poem can cause justifiable kindergarten wrath! The rhythm of a

poem can carry the words, and this acts like a balm for the child, as movement and speech work together. In this way, meaningfulness arises through what the child is imitating.

In our time, the power to imitate is sometimes lacking or very minimal. At these times, I will often say to the children, "See if your arms can do what my arms are doing!" Through repetition, the story unfolds, and their arms follow mine, with large, slow gestures, each sound almost telling a whole story. Eurythmy's great gift is to bring the rhythmical picture quality of the sounds of language. We can all develop our sense for this quality, not only eurythmists. Even just a little movement in this direction, if felt with the heart, can be beneficial.

Through rhythmical movements we prepare the children to think livingly and creatively in the high school years, thinking for themselves, as the kindergarten children kept watch over the storyline.

The goodness of what we say, the beauty in how we say it, and the thoughtfulness of our intentions help our children to grow healthy and strong life bodies. All of this comes out of the mystery of movement bringing forth speech, and speech giving birth to thinking, through the power of imitation. ♦

Alice Stamm *has been teaching eurythmy since 1975. She began her eurythmy training in Eckwälden, Germany and finished with Else Klink in Stuttgart. She serves as eurythmy faculty with Gradalis teacher training seminars.*