

Eurythmy with Young Children

• Nora von Baditz

This excerpt is from an undated, out-of-print booklet called "Ideas and Encouragement for Teaching Eurythmy," translated by Pauline Wehrle. We are grateful to Estelle Bryer for bringing it to our attention and to the Rudolf Steiner Library in Ghent, NY for finding a copy and making it available for borrowing.

Eurythmy with the little children under the age of seven began because Dr. Steiner told us "If one does eurythmy with little children under seven they acquire an ego force that neither school nor karma can give them." The day after he said this I began with a few little ones. The only indication for the build up of the lesson for this age was: One should do "primitive eurythmy."

Now Dr. Steiner has said of eurythmy in general that it unites us with those forces which are working in the child during the first three years of his life. Whoever has reflected on the first three years and has also studied *The Spiritual Guidance of the Individual and Humanity*, among other books on the subject, will be able to fit the two together and judge of what tremendous value it is to do eurythmy with the child as early as possible.

Eurythmy can begin about the third year, when the child wants to join in of his own accord, sometimes a little earlier, and does the first elements of eurythmy in a form corresponding to this age, with images arising out of joyful love. Little elves whisk by—the children do a lot of tiny steps on their toes to light, gentle music, and do shorts with their hands. Then dwarfs with bent backs come stamping, hammering silver and gold with their clenched fists as the music gets stronger.

As teacher one notices straight away that the children can still have an almost transparent heavenly lightness in the quick movements, and that as a grownup one has to enter into this light sun-filled world of movement. Dr. Steiner expected that, before starting to teach, the teacher should always leave all his worries and thoughts concerning his own life behind him, but where these lessons are concerned, it is of

very special importance. For the teacher has to be so cheerful, so full of creative joy that she is vital almost to the point of sanguinity. Never expect anything from the little ones in the way of achievements, or for that matter corrections, which would be quite impossible anyway. They should just live happily in the world of eurythmy.

One is reminded by the word "primitive" how simple it all has to be. It was difficult to discover what is meant by "primitive eurythmy." But the little ones themselves showed exactly what was suitable for them and one learnt from life. Everything that demanded more faculties in the way of thinking or counting was rejected, that is they could not do it. I was enlightened in this way when I wanted to do a short-short-long rhythm: some did four shorts, others three shorts, two longs. And I realized I could not expect that of them, but I must remain in the elements, that is just shorts or just longs. Then it went very well. The longs became giants with long powerful strides. The shorts were little dwarfs with nimble feet. The children loved it! They must be left quite free, I thought, to let them live their way into it, each in his own way. The will, which is the basis of this age, must also be protected in the lessons, and the children must never be forced into anything. Just let imitation work, the loving imitation of movement they enjoy.

In answer to the question as to why the little ones and the lower classes should only have eurythmy once a week, Dr. Steiner said: "The children should live in joyful anticipation. They should look forward to the lesson, and it should be harmful if that were not the case and they were overfed with eurythmy." Anyone who has introduced little ones in the right way to movements in which they are quite at home can experience this joyful expectation.

Without naming the sounds at all, they are woven into the happenings in the lessons. The work with little children consists mainly of workmen's games and fairy tales. When I asked Dr. Steiner whether it would be all right to do fairy tales in eurythmy with this age,

he replied: "Yes. That would be very good, but the fairy tales should be done in rhymes, never in prose." So short fairy tale poems like "Briar Rose," "Snow White," or "The Frog Prince" can be done with a lot of rhythm and just a few sounds.

The workmen's games given for the kindergarten change their forms in eurythmy. The dynamic of the work on the earth is presented in rhythm and eurythmic movement. Thus, the shoemaker hammers the nails into the soles of the shoes with little hammer beats. The postman carries the parcels with heavy steps. Although the little ones couldn't name the sounds, they do them in imitation of the activity of the work. Just as they do not read and write at this age, neither is the child introduced to a head understanding of the sounds and tones, but he lives with them and sustains them through the primal element of rhythm.

The soul food in the fairy tales and the strength which leads the children down to earth in the work movements is of special help to children under the age of seven. Besides this, it is essential to do the *interval of the fifth*. First of all, they move to music, and then comes a fifth and they listen to it, are happy to recognize it, and do the lovely round movement with enthusiasm. It can be called the "golden gate." That is appropriate, and the children love this name that arose out of the lessons. The teacher knows as well what formative importance the fifth has up to the ninth year: "The world helps to form man," "Man within the divine," "the experience of the fifth is man becoming conscious within the world order." The eurythmy teacher should show them a large fifth gesture reverently.

Dr. Steiner's indication that the little ones should do a lot of *B* gives rise to a variety of possibilities. He describes the eurythmic *B* as a movement in which one puts one's arms protectively and lovingly round something—and he named a small child. How the children love doing it! One of them stands in the middle and the others lay their arms and hands over him to protect and shelter him. Outside, the wild wind blows (done by the teacher) and the rain pours down, and one of them looks to see: no, the child has not been buffeted by the wind, no the rain has not made him wet—they cheer each time! They all want to be protected like that. It is clear that this sound belonging to the zodiac sign of the Virgin encloses the child that is struggling with the difficulties of incarnating as though with a heavenly cloak of blue.

A supplementary indication says that *B* can also

be placed around an object. So I took a cushion and threw it, a child caught it, and his arms actually lay in a perfect *B* around the cushion. What joy! Everyone wanted to embrace it; if the cushion fell on the floor it cried out (done by me) and they were all eager to pick it up and embrace it. One can bring the *B* in many ways.

It is not good to do an *I* (ee) sound at this age, for it would make them egoistic, so leave it out. You can also understand this when you know that the primal virtue of gratitude should be the fundamental force of the child's life up to the change of teeth. The love of God will arise later on out of this gratitude. Gratitude should grow with the child as the body grows. To stress the ego by means of the *I* movement would not be suitable yet.

As everything at this age is orientated toward removing hindrances and helping the physical, bodily nature to develop healthily, the lesson is built up in such a way that, without the child noticing it, the eurythmy penetrates every part of the body to enliven and strengthen it. The abundance of etheric life forces in eurythmy stream into the feet, preventing flat feet; stream into the fingers, draw from the teeth the excess of life which would cause decay, expand the chest, regulate the breathing, stimulate the metabolism. In short: they bring health. In joyful creativity, the teacher is aware of this effect. He takes care to see that light, freshness and love fill his own soul, so that only health-bringing forces touch the children. For the soul impulses in the environment are constructive or destructive forces in the development of the organs, tissues, circulation, etc.

It is necessary to bear in mind the three stages in the life of the child. Around the age of two years and four months, the stage of development of the head-organism is completed. Around the age of four years and six months, the etheric body frees itself from the rhythmic system and the chest. And towards the seventh year, the metabolic-limb system has been formed by the etheric body.

When one receives the children for eurythmy they are just at that age when the rhythmic system should be developed by dance-like movements. Rhymes in which the rhythm and not the word content is predominant are, according to Dr. Steiner, formative for the child. (Suitable ones can be found among very old texts.) Rhymes for the beating of longs or shorts, with clapping or tapping can also be used. The whole lesson is built on such rhythms.

Towards the fifth year, the children require more

energetic movements suitable for the development of the limb system. This can be allowed, for these bigger children can be given more difficult work.

Whoever teaches eurythmy to this age group should concern himself with the remarks in the pedagogical courses and the book *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science*. All the teaching is based on warmth, real warmth of love being necessary for the healthy development of the child and joy should be there too, bringing light in which body, soul, and spirit can flourish.

It is obvious that a lot of other things besides fairy tales and workmen's games can be done. After all, there is free scope for the imagination. A great deal can be given to children with such a beautiful old poem as:

*When the little children sleep
All the stars awaken,
Angels bright from Heaven come
And till dawn has broken
They will watch the livelong night
By their beds till morning light.
When the little children sleep
All the stars awaken.*

How much the little ones like crossing their arms reverently over their hearts afterwards. Then, keeping it "primitive," contraction and expansion can be done

in such a way that the child forms a bird's nest with both hands, and the little birds are quite quiet inside, for they have not come out of their eggs yet. They look through the tiny opening—listen—all is quiet. Then suddenly they hear: cheep. . . cheep. . . one flutters out a little way (like laughing with the fingers) and goes back to the bird mother. Then two; fly up to the sun, warbling as they go. This first beginning of the power of initiative delights them all. Another tiny bird can hop about on the rod (then the fingers dance on the rod, but do not do Qui-qui yet).

No fixed forms come at this age as yet. Geometrical forms like the triangle and pentagon, spirals and eights belong to the curriculum of the first grade. So let the little ones jump about quite freely in natural simplicity.

Do not fight shy of having quite a large number of children in a lesson. I began with fifteen children and went on taking them until there were eighty. There was not the slightest difficulty. They all imitated the teacher and were happy to be doing eurythmy. Because of shortage of space I had to divide the group when there was a further increase in numbers. The more courageous, natural and down-to-earth one's attitude is the more devoted the children will be to the work.

Nora von Baditz taught eurythmy to young children in the time of Rudolf Steiner.

