

Why Do Our Schools need Eurythmy? An Introduction to Eurythmy and Its Healing Influence in Schools

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April, 2011

One of the first questions parents ask when they come to learn about a Waldorf school for their child is about the movement art taught in most Waldorf schools: eurythmy. What is it? Why does my child have to do this? After many years of working as a eurythmy teacher and in the administration of a Waldorf school, I find myself still answering these questions. Yet the answers grow and develop as the years pass and new knowledge both in science and education are bringing light to bear on the questions.

First of all, what is eurythmy? It is a movement art, living in the family of movement arts such as mime and ballet, yet standing midway between these two arts. It shares meaning and gesture with mime, yet it is married to sound rather than objects or recognizable actions, and shares the moving to music and words with dance, but seeks to follow the invisible movement within sound rather than move to it or juxtapose itself against it. It is the expression of the human soul through gesture and movement.

A student once asked: "Who thought this up?" after seeing the same gestures in the great art of the past. He had stumbled on the truth of the expressive gestures that artists such as Giotto and Michelangelo had mastered in their paintings. In the early part of the twentieth century, Rudolf Steiner pointed us toward these gestures to learn their meaning and to find a new art of human movement. He worked first with a young girl and then an ever growing group of interested artists to develop this new art of movement.

Eurythmy has developed over the years and has several unique qualities: it is an art form late to arrive; it is in its infancy, unlike music that has developed over thousands of years. Eurythmy, the hidden inner movement of the soul, emerged out of the work of a few individuals gathered around Rudolf Steiner and has become a worldwide art form practiced on the performance stage, in schools, in therapeutic settings, and in businesses and other social settings.

Eurythmy begins with human speech. The center of movement is in the heart/larynx area of the body and the gestures flow into the hands and arms primarily, but encompass the whole human form. Its name, "eurythmy" means beautiful rhythm, or harmonious movement.

Eurythmy began as a stage art, but soon people asked; this is beautiful and health giving, shouldn't we teach it to children? And so school or "pedagogical

eurythmy" was born. It found a home in the Waldorf schools in Europe and later in the Americas. Then the question was asked: Since this movement art expresses the whole human being, wouldn't certain movements strengthen the internal organs and relate to illnesses? "Curative" or "therapeutic" eurythmy was then developed with doctors and eurythmists collaborating and basing their work on Steiner's work in curative education. Unlike pedagogical eurythmy, therapeutic eurythmy is usually one to one, rather than group activity. *

All three types of eurythmy are appropriate in the school situation. Adults and children alike need to see artistic performances. It is then that the adult really is able to comprehend the scope of this new art. Children see what they are learning in a whole experience. They light up with enthusiasm on seeing such performances and are motivated to learn. Teachers have found the presence of a therapeutic eurythmist on staff is the greatest help in understanding and working with challenges that more and more children face.

Eurythmy is a door to the human heart and all its expressions in poetry, music and drama, and a pathway from the inner world of the human being to the expression in outer life that carries meaning and purpose. In a time when much of education is moving to test driven, informational teaching, eurythmy offers experiential, artistic and social learning.

What role does eurythmy play in the school? Healthy children take great joy in movement. They experience:

- Movement, music, poetry and stories in an age appropriate and joyful way
- Support and strengthening of language development
- Musicality and the power to listen
- Integration; the coordination of hands, arms, legs and spatial movement combine with eye, ear and balance, as well as thought processes.
- Intentional movement that creates complex neural development*2
- Focus. They feel how good focused attention is.
- Joy and a sense of freedom in movement
- Confidence and balance of the inner and outer social capacities
- The ability to work on problem solving collaboratively in their group
- Creative thinking and action based on such

A student once said: "Eurythmy helps us to become more human."

This is the best answer I know why eurythmy is needed in the schools. It meets the ever-increasing demands of children of today, in health of the body and the soul. Even when watching eurythmy performed, adults feel the harmonizing effect. Eurythmy strengthens the healing effects of its sister arts, music and speech, and brings the curriculum alive.

A last word again from one of a student:
"Eurythmy helps us breathe."

It is the breath that gives us life. Eurythmy is the breath of the school. The human being as part of the whole creation is communicated to the community in eurythmy.

If your school does not have a eurythmy teacher or one nearby, all is not lost. It is important to develop what I call "suction", where the faculty cultivates movement throughout the curriculum and the school. If the whole school comes into movement activities with joy, eurythmists notice this and are interested in working in such an atmosphere. How is this done? By including movement in the rhythmic part of the lesson, having two or three (minimal) recesses outside and a teacher present who can teach rhythmical playground games, teach folk dancing of all sorts, play party games for young children, and of course, create many movements, cooperative games, and life gestures for the little ones to imitate.

For more information on bringing eurythmy into your school, contact the author leonorerussell@gmail.com or contact Editor@EANA (Eurythmy Association of North America, www.eana.org). *3

* Another aspect of eurythmy, focusing on the social aspect of eurythmy, has been developed in Holland and is useful for groups who work together. Eurythmy-in-the-Workplace is sometimes done with school faculties, but discussion of this is beyond the scope of this article.

*2. See Carla Hannaford, *Smart Moves*, Great Ocean Press

*3. Available for eurythmy in schools

Kinesthetic Learning in Adolescence, by Leonore Russell, AWSNA Publications

Eurythmy, by Sylvia Barth, AWSNA Publications

Articles by Thomas Paplowsky, *Renewal Magazine*, AWSNA Publications

For more on eurythmy, go to the web; key word: eurythmy.