

Eurythmy and Language Awareness

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Can eurythmy be a method of strengthening the development of language awareness in 6-7 year old children?

Modern research of the human brain suggests that the neurological development in children and their motorical development are closely connected. The brain of a newborn child is developed through movement and sensory stimulation, which activate and connect different parts of the brain as well as its two hemispheres. Primarily, a child's ability to move is governed by primitive reflexes. With time and practice these are gradually integrated into the nervous system and successively taken over by the child's own will.

The brain can be divided into three main parts:

1. the brain stem (where the primitive reflexes are controlled)
2. the limbic system (center of emotions, memory, play etc)
3. the neocortex (the mental part)

According to the antroposophy, a human being develops in 7-year periods. From 0-7 years the emphasis is on physical development, 7-14 years emotional and 14-21 years mental. Amongst others, this study investigates a potential connection between these three 7-year periods and the three parts of the brain. This three-stage sculpturing of the brain during childhood is the foundation of our motorical, emotional, mental and social abilities for the rest of our lives.

Eurythmy is an essential subject in the Waldorf Pedagogy's aim of supporting children throughout each of these three development stages. In eurythmy, the human being is required to use more than just physical movement - emotional, mental and social skills are all of utmost importance.

In this research the eurythmy teacher Paula Dissing and I have specifically examined the development of language awareness when practicing eurythmy. Children of ages 6-7 were participating in one eurythmy lesson a week for a year. At the beginning of the year the children were required to complete a language awareness test and a self portrait drawing. This was repeated at the end of the year and the difference was recorded. The eurythmy teaching was mainly focusing on phonological awareness, for instance hearing the number of syllables of a word, which sound a word starts with and which phonemes a word consists of. In the teaching rhymes were used such as:

“Den slingrande svarta snoken simmar snabbt och smidigt till söderhavsö, söker sig mot stranden, stannar och solar i sanden, stopp.”

“Många maskar myllrar i marken, mjuka missar jamar och myser, hemliga tomtar smyger mjukt, mystiska magiker med mystisk magi.”

The results show that the children improved in language awareness and drew more detailed self portraits after having practiced eurythmy. (The study is in Swedish.)