

## CHALLENGES and OPPORTUNITIES

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Therapeutic Eurythmy (TE) addresses social, emotional, psychological, behavioral, developmental, as well as physical health issues, all of which underly educational concerns. Although it sounds wonderful that TE can do all this, it also presents our first challenge and opportunity to explain how this is possible. This movement therapy which developed from the work of Rudolf Steiner, and which he placed into the Waldorf Schools, was greatly valued by Dr. Steiner because it addresses the whole human being through an understanding of anthroposophy. Although the Waldorf School setting presents a great opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of TE, it has become a significant challenge here in America. In fact, we are seeing more and more schools without regular eurythmy in their offerings.

What we are finding, instead of the more wholistic approach possible through TE, some Waldorf schools choose specific, often traditional educational support approaches. These include tutoring, speech therapy, counselling and occupational therapy, as well as a whole range of less expensive movement activities such as folk dancing, yoga, Handle work and the anthroposophically oriented Spatial Dynamics and Extra Lesson work. Main-stream approaches are often easier to relate to or explain to parents, and that brings about the result in some schools that teachers and educational support coordinators are overlooking what can be offered by Therapeutic Eurythmy. This is becoming more and more a challenge to our work.

On the one side it is a question of how much the teachers recognize the unseen formative forces, the soul and the spiritual nature of the child which make up its inner being, i.e., the three higher members of the human being which through anthroposophy we recognize alongside the physical body: the etheric, the astral and the ego-organization. The Therapeutic Eurythmist especially addresses the child with these in mind. But sad to say, the degree to which a Waldorf School actually practices the deeper aspects of Dr. Steiner's philosophy of education and his spiritual philosophy which is living in anthroposophy, varies greatly in our time.

Conversely, it is a question of how the first challenge and opportunity stated above can be answered in a way that the modern person can understand and appreciate. This is a challenge for us TEs. Can we articulate why TE is effective for all these many realms of concern to a public which is increasingly trying to isolate specific issues and deal with them individually?

I would like to illustrate how this might be done. During the formative years of childhood, directed downward from the head into the rest of the body, all our neurological systems are in the process of developing. In time and with lots of repetition the child establishes these neurological systems and the neuro-pathways to activate them successfully *through his or her own movement*. Rudolf Steiner related the importance of four of these neurological systems by using the term 'body' senses. He called them 'Balance', 'Self-movement', 'Well-being or Life' and 'Touch', and they refer to the Vestibular, Neuro-muscular, Autonomic and Tactile systems, respectively. Through anthroposophy we can make the following relationship with the four members of the human being evident. The Ego-organization with its executive and coordinating function we see reflected in the Vestibular (Balance) System. We can explain or understand the neuro-muscular system, where we fine tune our sense of Self-movement, when we see its relationship with our Astral Body (our motion/emotion body). With the Autonomic Nervous System, we can also recognize our astral nature active in the Sympathetic or Fight/flight N S, while our restorative, plant-like nature, our etheric nature, is more active in the Parasympathetic N S, calming us down and informing us with a sense of Well-being or

Live in our body. Lastly, we experience our Physical Body strongly in our Tactile System, which gives us solid grounding and allows for the finest differentiations of the world around us through the sense of Touch.

What Rudolf Steiner left for us to discover and to articulate is how these body senses or neurological systems are especially stimulated and developed as a side effect of the enhanced gestures, jumps and leg movements of TE. By practicing TE one is constantly in the process of integrating the four members of one's being, even as the therapist is addressing one or the other specific condition. This is why TE is so very effective and why it is especially appropriate in the Waldorf School where this integration is also being attempted pedagogically!

Although Educational Workshops may address these things along with many other specific aspects of TE, parents and teachers who have understood how TE works move up through the grades and graduate, often leaving the school after a number of years. Also, not every parent and/or teacher comes to any single workshop, so it is a gradual and ongoing effort to reach more members of any one Waldorf community. Finally, it is through persevering and continuing the actual sessions, themselves, which in our time of economic cuts can be very challenging, that we can continue to bring the health-giving effects of TE into the Waldorf environment.

These are the challenges and opportunities which can affect not only the extent to which Therapeutic Eurythmy can be appreciated and therefore supported in Waldorf Schools, but they can affect all aspects of the entire school community, and ultimately the whole Waldorf Movement.