

Movement in Education

From an Editorial by Daniel Bittleston, in the Summer 1979 issue of "Child and Man", published by the Steiner Schools Fellowship. Reprinted here for study purposes only.

When children's feelings and imagination are deeply moved—by a great story perhaps—they are usually physically quite still and peaceful, and one senses that a profoundly healthy process is taking place. Teachers are, in fact, very often striving to engender in children inward activity accompanied by physical immobility. Is there an equally healthy form of physical movement? When one observes physical activity accompanied by imagination, in the small child's games for example, the health is certainly there, but too often as the child grows up physical activity loses its imaginative counterpart, and is accompanied by an emptiness of feeling and thought.

This issue's theme deals with forms of physical movement that can be united with the very best in feeling and thought. Eurythmy—visible speech and music—is potentially close to every heart and mind. Bothmer gymnastics, a means of taking in hand the human relationship with gravity, levity and the three dimensions, aims to bring feelings, thought and will into harmony.

In a recent letter to a student, Liselotte Mann, who has taught both Bothmer gymnastics and eurythmy, gives a remarkable insight into the character of these two important new educational tools:

"In the sphere of will and movement, people are often unable to observe, and distinguish between, action (free movement); re-action (involuntary response); and adjusting action (voluntary response). A really free action is, for instance, the action of orientating the body in space, from the horizontal position in sleep, to the vertical position, when awake. This orientating the body in space and observing the three dimensions of space, as in Bothmer movements—first, in younger years, with the arms and then, when older, with the whole body, makes you realise that the movement is being brought about by your real self within your body and not by the purely physical reaction of your body. It therefore develops personal initiative and control from, and experience of, your spiritual reality. This

is even more essential, for the type of child you are helping, than the more emotional gestures of expression in Eurythmy. Free Gymnastics develops the relationship and control of the Ego, with and over the physical body; whereas Eurythmy develops the forming of integration between the life of the soul and the vitality functions of the body (as when you blush or become pale). To use a picture: to have the impulse to lift on to his feet someone who has fallen, comes from the Ego through practising Gymnastics; and to comfort him and say something loving, from speaking and singing with your body in Eurythmy. The coordination of mind and body is developed in both activities. Gymnastics encourages physical action and Eurythmy mental action. Gymnastics gives you the skill to guide your body in space, so that you can play it in Eurythmy as a musician plays his violin or other instrument. So Gymnastics should come first and bring to inward experience the ideal human design and divine plan, through which we perceive the living qualities of the different dimensions of Space. The different movements from below to above, or from right to left, or from back to front and vice versa, relate us to quite different functions in life."