

## **Eurythmy with people who cannot imitate/copy**

By Angela Ralph, Scotland, 2021

Aspects to consider when working with people with special needs:

- How can the person experience best the quality of the eurythmy movements?
- How can the person attain and maintain a high level of focus and engagement?
- How do we build up the relationship in which the person feels trusting and safe?
- Behaviour is **communication**! What does the person want to communicate? How do you communicate ensuring the person understands what you want?
- What is the best means of communication (e.g. words, sentences, singing, pictures, symbols, gestures or just going ahead with movement)?
- If the person appears to speak and understand, consider that there might be a lot less ability to understand than you think. Use simple words and instructions.
- Processing is often very slow. Give people time to understand what is asked of them.
- When working with images consider how helpful this is for experiencing the movement or if it is a distraction. Many people with special needs can only focus on one thing at a time.

### **Movement**

- How do you impulsive, initiate movement: speaking sound/words, singing sounds/words, accompanying words or silence (in the case of echolalia)?
- Where do I or the class assistant stand/sit in relationship to the individual (e.g. in front, next to or behind)?
- Is it easier for the person to do eurythmy in standing, walking or sitting down (on a chair or on the floor)?
- How much physical support/guidance does the person need?
- If physical support is needed, where does the person's own movement impulse begin? Do you only need to give the shape of the movement or guide the individual completely?
- Does the person imitate your movements or do he/she copy any movement including your cough or sneeze?
- Does the person 'ride' on your movement and you need to consider to let the person move independently?
- How often does an exercise need to be repeated?
- Does the person need some time out between the exercises where they are allowed to pursue stereotype movements or ticks (very important to consider when working with ASD individuals)?
- Be **patient** – building up a relationship can take a long time. Progress can be slow, but every little matters and is a big step.

## **How do you support the person to experience eurythmy movements if he/she is not able to copy or imitate and has limited cognitive ability?**

To begin with it is helpful to observe the individual and assess how much own engagement is present in the eurythmy movement. Even if it is not obvious there might be a slight lift of the shoulder or arm wanting to go into the Ih movement or a flailing of arms wanting to go into Ah.

Sometimes if there is no recognisable movement impulse, the emotional expression might be showing the quality of the eurythmy movement. For example, over excitement and laughing during F an H or tension and anger during Eh ...

A creative response to chaotic movement and lack of imitation could be to observe which eurythmy movement or sound quality lie in the chaotic uncontrolled movement of the individual and then use these for the relevant sound in the poem or exercise. May be flailing arms could be a H, kicking feet a F or D, fiddling with a string S. Here creativity is boundless, as long as you can experience the essence of that particular movement in the so-called uncontrolled movement.

When you or an assistant physically guide a person, ask yourself where does the movement start. Does guiding and sometimes unfortunately pulling hands really give a valuable experience of the eurythmy movement?

### **Here are some suggestions of how to support people doing eurythmy movements:**

Some ability to imitate and some own movement impulse:

Often I found it helpful to show the movement first making sure beforehand that the person is engaged and focussed. Often the movement then lives already strongly in the space around the person and just a light touch on the fingertips while standing/sitting in front can help the person to feel secure and do their own movement while you give the shape via the fingertips.

Less ability to imitate but a bit of own movement impulse:

If the previous approach is too challenging, you can have the whole hand on your **flat palm** and guide the movement, avoid pulling and pushing but always sense how much movement comes from the person themselves and then gently guide into the eurythmy movement.

No imitation, but relaxed limbs and cooperative and engaged

If the flat hand support is too difficult, it can be helpful to gently rest the lower arm and elbow on your hand and most likely fully guide the movement. Although this can be done while positioned in front of the person, I found it more helpful to support this way from behind if it works size wise. This also gives the possibility for the person to watch the movements of the eurythmists.

If the person is small enough you can do the fingertip and hand touch support also from behind so that the eurythmist can be watched. Rods have been also helpful in my experience with the above two. M both gripping the rod gently moving to and from, R both touching the rod, W the same.

Limbs rigid and/or heavy no own movement cooperation

If this is the case, I often found it helpful to do some eurythmy movement on the person. I found this does not work with every sound. For example, L gently touching around the shoulders, M gently moving up and down the arms, D touching shoulders or knees with a flat hand, R around the arms while touching some. Eh any touching, Uh some deep touch moving along the outside of the arms and legs (experience of parallelity).

As most of these methods involve quite a bit of physical touch and interaction it is important to be familiar with the guidelines of your country and workplace regarding physical touch and support.