**Seventh and Eighth Grades Developmental Overview**

The path of the elementary school curriculum of Waldorf education offers a magnificent journey from first through eight grade.\* I am constantly amazed at the changes that children go through in this eight-year period. They arrive in school at 6 or 7 years old, wide-eyed and full of wonder. Often they have very little impulse control, barely know their right hands from their left, and have only just begun to develop social skills and self-awareness.

Looking back to first grade, we remember that the key educational principle is that from age 0-7, the child is just beginning to work on their physical body. We have allowed the very young child to postpone intellectual learning until the first “change of teeth” occurs at about age 7, indicating that the child has worked through all the systems of the physical body. That effort required the complete attention of the etheric, or life body, but by age 7, a portion of that etheric body can be set free from its pure organic tasks and can now work in a body-free state.

From age 7 onwards, the growing child must gradually develop the skills to be able to use these freed etheric forces to *make inner (mental) pictures, to reflect on things, and to remember them.* For this reason, it is so important that the young child does not have “pre-fabricated” mental media images filling their minds, but that they hear stories and lessons and make their own inner pictures. Only in this way will they grow the capacity for free and independent thinking as adults. The eight grades of the Waldorf curriculum grow these skills step by step, meeting the child at each age with new content that evolves as the children grow and become more “earthly.”

By seventh and eighth grade, the children become teenagers, 13 and 14 years old. They reach the end of this second 7-year cycle, and should now carry a healthy and lively interest in the world around them. They should be able to have basic skills in arithmetic and geometry, as well as in the sciences: biology, mineralogy, physics, chemistry and anatomy. They should have good language skills and be able to write logical compositions. They should have a good sense of their place in time and space, understanding history and geography as well as our present age. They should be able to do research projects on all manner of topics, and create projects with a fine sense of beauty and skill.

Of course, we experience that these teenagers are no longer the wide-eyed innocents who began the journey eight years ago. No longer do they blithely hold our hands as they walk down the street. In the process of arriving at this point of being able to think about things and reflect on them, they have begun to create their own inner world. They begin to feel the inklings of new feelings. For many of them, melancholy and moodiness set in. Others may hide feelings of loneliness and fear behind masks of nonchalance. They turn much more often to their peers for advice and discussion than to their parents. The impact of the media and social norms begin to play an enormous role in their lives.

All these qualities mark the beginning of the third 7-year cycle, which rule ages 14-21. In this cycle, during the years of high school and beyond, youth begin to develop a very highly differentiated emotional life. They are served in the high school curriculum by strong intellectual clarity and richly nuanced feelings.

The seventh and eighth graders are poised between these two phases of childhood and youth. In eurythmy, as well as in their other arts, they can often accomplish beautiful work with coordinated movements and expressivity, but I can see that they are largely only able to *imitate* me, even as they can as yet only *imitate* the thought processes of their elders. They now have rich potential to develop in the next seven-year cycle, but they are only at the beginning of understanding themselves.

In my curriculum for seventh and eighth graders, I offer almost all of the basic walking exercises, the spatial forms and the rod exercises. Each of these exercises can be further develop by the home-school parent and the child, and used as part of the daily exercises. I recommend doing 5-15 minutes of concentrated eurythmy each day throughout the year, or, alternately, doing seven-week blocks of eurythmy and three to four times a year, and choosing other movement activities in the intervening periods. Once again, parent and child should be equally diligent in developing eurythmy skills. By this age, the parent and child can collaborate on the exercises as equals.

If at all possible, parents should attend eurythmy workshops, to learn how to bring the sound gestures to their children and to learn how to do poetry and music with simple forms. Please contact me if you are interested! *Pliease contact me through my website at* [*info@eurythmyonline.com*](mailto:info@eurythmyonline.com) *to arrange for live courses in your community to learn poetry and verses for your homeschooling project.*

\*It seems that there might have been substantial grounds to make the Waldorf school curriculum only a seven-year journey, to suit the pattern of the seven-year life cycles. However, because already from the beginning the original Waldorf school had to adapt itself to the mandates of a state educational system that dictated that elementary schools should have eight grades, the basic Waldorf curriculum also is an eight-year journey.