

Christoph Jaffke

# THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF ENGLISH

A Hands-On Approach to the Waldorf Way



Prof. Dr. Christoph Jaffke attended the Rudolf Steiner School in Wuppertal and after studies in Tuebingen, Cologne and Edinburgh, began teaching English at a Waldorf School in Stuttgart in 1967. He is one of the most experienced English teachers in the Waldorf movement. In 1976, he founded the series *Materials for Language Teaching at Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools*. Since 1975, he has been involved in training English teachers at the *Freie Hochschule Stuttgart, Seminar for Waldorf Education*. In 1994, he published the first scientific study on the theoretical background and methods of foreign language teaching in the lower grades of Waldorf schools and in mainstream schools. In 2005, he was a visiting professor at *Hiroshima University*, and the following year at *Aoyama Gakuin University* in Tokyo. In September 2006, he became one of the co-founders of the fourth Waldorf School in Stuttgart, where he taught the lower classes until 2011. In 2012 in Guangzhou, he and Monika Boyd instituted the annual *Conference for Waldorf English Teachers in China*. His international teaching, lecturing and coaching engagements have also taken him to these countries: Argentina - Armenia - Austria - Brazil - Columbia - Denmark - Egypt - Estonia - Finland - France - Georgia - Guatemala - Hungary - India - Indonesia - Israel - Korea - Malaysia - Mexico - Myanmar (Burma) - Norway - Peru - Poland - Russia - Singapore - Slovenia - Spain - Switzerland - Taiwan - Thailand - The Philippines - Vietnam

Contact: [christophdrjaffke@email.de](mailto:christophdrjaffke@email.de)

[www.christophjaffke.net](http://www.christophjaffke.net)  
(from 03.2021)

Only that is educational - really, truly and in accord with nature - which involves the whole strength of human nature as head, heart and hand.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

*Swan Song* 1826

The guiding principle that the educator and teacher must pay particular attention to is ensuring that the whole person is involved.

Rudolf Steiner

*Practical Advice to Teachers* 1919

The human being is a whole and must be treated as a whole.

Rudolf Steiner

*Soul Economy and Waldorf Education* 1922

Until they are nine or ten, children still bring to school so much imaginative imitation that the language being taught is absorbed by the whole person, not only by the mental and spiritual forces.

Rudolf Steiner

*A Modern Art of Education* 1923

We must begin to escape the inherited tyranny of a focus on linguistic form, and even go beyond the limitations of communicative/pragmatic analysis, if we are ever to achieve a truly holistic perspective on the process by which children acquire a second language.

M. Saville-Troike

*Cultural Input in Second Language Learning* 1985

Language learning and language training must ... not be limited to the teaching of linguistic means, but must also focus on physical expression as a natural and central component of communication.

M. Sambanis/M. Walter

*In Motion - Theatre impulses for language learning: From the latest findings of neuroscience to concrete teaching impulses.* 2019

## Preface

This book is based on my work experience of over 50 years as a Waldorf English teacher and on the insights from my academic research on foreign-language teaching at primary-school level in the early 1990s. I am immensely grateful for the many years of cooperation with my colleague Magda Maier, without whose support the series *Materials for Language Teaching at Rudolf Steiner (Waldorf) Schools* would not have become a reality. I am no less grateful to Janet Meier, with whom I conducted in-service seminars in Stuttgart for many years. I gratefully adopted countless ideas from her lively, rich repertoire. In recent years, Beate Langer of the Waldorfschule Silberwald has generously allowed me to observe her lessons, which were always a source of inspiration.

My gratitude also goes out to the many prospective English teachers I worked with at the Waldorf Teacher Training College (Freie Hochschule • Seminar für Waldorfpädagogik) in Stuttgart, to the colleagues I coached during our annual *Waldorf English Week* since 1997, to all the colleagues who attended my seminars and workshops in Europe, South America and Asia and to all the pupils I taught at the Freie Waldorfschule am Kräherwald (1967-2000) and the Waldorfschule Silberwald (2006-2011). Model lessons I was asked to give in various countries as far afield as Mexico and Vietnam added another dimension to my own learning experience.

This book is not intended to set up any kind of *binding* curriculum of what should be taught to Waldorf classes at any particular stage. It is rather meant to help those

colleagues who have not yet had much experience in teaching English in classes 1 to 4 and who are often looking for poems and songs that have proved their worth.

To some experienced Waldorf teachers of English this collection might serve as an incentive to make available for a future edition material that they have successfully used in their classes.

If anybody knows the author of any verses listed as anonymous in this collection, the author will be glad to receive relevant information for inclusion in a later edition.

Rowena Certain, Andrew Wolpert and James Caffrey have all been most helpful in raising the English text I had initially produced to an acceptable language level and by spotting countless misprints. Philomena Beital in her usual rigour eliminated the remaining discrepancies and anomalies.

My brother Hans-Georg spent endless hours setting the notes of the various melodies.

Scottie Mitchell has made her musical talent available and recorded the melodies, so that most of the tunes in the book can now be listened to on a smartphone (see the alphabetical list in the appendix: *Index QR-Codes to Sound Files*). Judit Stott helped me to add some songs recorded during seminar sessions.

Peter Morris contributed invaluable support by putting together the various indexes.

Clara Nothdurft contributed the illustrations for *Two Sailors* and *The Big Ship Sails*. She also designed the cover of the book.

Floris Books, Edinburgh, kindly granted copyright permission for two stories from *Hay for My Ox and Other Stories: A First Reading Book for Waldorf Schools* by Isabel Wyatt.

Peter Oram (†) gave copyright permission for several of his pentatonic songs.

# Contents

Why Teach Foreign Languages in the Lower School

Educational Framework: Teaching Environment and Range of Subjects

The Foundations of Foreign Language Teaching at Primary School Level

Developmental Stages: Years 6/7 and 9/10

Movement - Imitation - Language

“My Child Doesn’t Understand”: Cognition - Memory - Learning

The Parents’ Role

Which Teacher? What Training?

Developmental Stages and the Curriculum for English

First Grade

Second Grade

Third Grade

Fourth Grade

Stages and Aims of Teaching: Assessment and Evaluation

Practical Aspects of Foreign Language Teaching: Methodical Considerations

Direct Method

Gesture and Movement

Poetic Components and Everyday Language

Storytelling



Choral Speaking and Dialogue; Communicative Aspects

Social Aspects of Teaching and Learning

Lesson Structure and Long-Term Planning

Starting to Write and Read

Grammar

Aspects of Vocabulary Work: 'Words in Context'

Repertoire Selection: Groups of Material

Action Rhymes

Praise and Prayer

Time and Seasons

Wind, Weather – The Elements

Animals

Plants

Finger Plays

Counting-Out Rhymes

Number Rhymes

Jump-Rope/Skipping Rhymes

Fun in Sound and Rhythms

Little Rhymed Dialogues

People and Occupations

Daily Activities

The Value of Games

Introducing Dialogue

    The English Bag

An 'Every-Day Conversation' – Poetry-Based

Selected Classroom Games

Clapping Games

Singing in the Lower School

    Pentatonic Songs

Songs and Rounds

Action Songs and Singing Games

Some Stories to Tell and Act in the Lower Classes

Funny Bunny Rabbit

The Gingerbread Boy

The Pancake

The Goat Boy

The Old Woman And Her Pig

The Poor Farmer

Stone Soup

The Three Wishes

How Jack Went To Seek His Fortune

Ripe Plums In Spring

The Prince Who Kept Pigs

The Three Billy Goats Gruff

The Stolen Smells

The Three Little Pigs

Goldilocks And The Three Bears

New Topics in Grade 3 and 4

Further Reading

Selected Tongue Twisters Two and Speech Exercises

## **Appendices**

Two Essentials for Learning A Story

Periodic Language Teaching

The Language Spirit in Foreign Language Teaching

References

Sample pages from pupils' *First English Book*

Indexes:

Complete List of Repertoire  
Repertoire by Groups  
QR-Codes to Sound Files

# Why Teach Foreign Languages in the Lower School

One of the striking features of the first Waldorf School, founded by Rudolf Steiner in Stuttgart in 1919, was that all pupils from Class 1 upwards were taught two foreign languages. Prior to that, foreign language learning in German schools (starting in Class 5) had been the privilege of children belonging to middle and upper class families. What reasons did Rudolf Steiner give for introducing foreign languages for all children at this unprecedented, early age? These were certainly very different from the pragmatic reasons for teaching and learning foreign languages that have become increasingly important in society throughout the decades since then.

To begin with, Steiner emphasized that anything children are taught at school should be based on genuine anthropology. In other words, a true understanding of the developing human being and his inherent talents should be at the heart of all teaching and education:

The Waldorf School is not a reform school like many others, which are founded because people think they know where the mistakes of this or that kind of education and teaching lie; but it has arisen from the thought that the best principles and the best will in this area can only become effective when the educator and teacher is a true expert of the human being.

We should not ask: What do we need to know for the social order that exists, but what is in our disposition

and what can be developed in us? Then it will be possible to bring new forces into the social order from the growing generation. Then, in this order, life will always be what the full-human beings entering it will make of it.<sup>1</sup>

During one of the first discussions about the possibility of establishing a school for the children of the workers of the Waldorf Astoria factory in April 1919, Steiner already stressed the great importance of “taking up foreign language teaching from the lowest school level.”<sup>2</sup> It was important for children to “grow into the other language purely through imitation and in full development of their child-appropriate linguistic capability” before even thinking of having a foreign-language book in their hands, and that this should happen at an age when they still had sculpturally malleable organs to be receptive to the differentness of the other languages.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the pragmatic reasons for introducing foreign languages, Steiner’s focus was fundamentally on pedagogical aspects: The encounter with other languages should not only serve to extend the individual’s horizon in a formal manner. It should also enrich and diversify his inner life, nurturing his very soul.<sup>4</sup> It should be understood that “the different languages of the world influence human beings in completely different ways and reveal different human aspects.”<sup>5</sup> We become more universal when we learn other languages.<sup>6</sup> The child should get to know the objects in his environment anew in the foreign language.<sup>7</sup> It was vital, so Steiner maintained, to introduce languages other than one’s own as a means of balancing whatever one-sided influence any particular language exerted on the developing child.<sup>8</sup> By getting to name and recognize the objects in the world around him in a new way through the medium of a foreign language, every child would be given

the opportunity to break free from the confines of his mother tongue.<sup>9</sup> Education of this kind would help to prevent children from growing up into narrow-minded, nationalistically prejudiced adults.

In view of the ever-increasing nationalist tendencies in the present-day world, it appears peculiarly relevant that in 1922 Rudolf Steiner wrote that it was one of the most urgent tasks of the present day that, in view of a tendency towards the separation of nations on the basis of their languages, a striving for tolerance and mutual understanding should consciously be promoted.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the different languages in our world shape the inner life and viewpoints of their speakers in their own ways - revealing unique and widely varying aspects of human nature - had to be taken into account in education.<sup>11</sup>

This view strongly coincides with the idea of the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt that inherent within every single language lies a distinct and characteristic way of looking at the world:

The whole manner in which objects are subjectively perceived inevitably forms the structures and usage of language ... The individual word is created by this perception. It is not an imprint of the object itself, but of the picture it creates in the soul.<sup>12</sup>

This concept of language - within the context of early foreign language learning - has been gaining ground in recent decades, for instance in the work of the Russian psycholinguist A. A. Leont'ev, who repeatedly emphasized the importance of learning a foreign language not merely in order to acquire a new communicative tool, but rather as a means of opening up a new world and encountering a new culture.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that a hundred years after the introduction of early foreign language teaching in the first Waldorf school the renowned German Goethe-Institute should - at long last - arrive at the following positive attitude towards early foreign language learning:

The particularly favourable learning conditions for young children in terms of language acquisition continue to be the main argument for foreign language teaching even in kindergarten and primary school.

Young children build up networks in the brain more quickly, which makes learning easier. Through the use of movement and games, for example, phonetics can be learned and consolidated in a mother-tongue-like way.

... Early language learning seems to have a beneficial effect on learning in general through the development of children's own learning strategies.

Early foreign language teaching can use the child's age-appropriate psychological characteristics such as curiosity, need for communication as well as willingness and ability to imitate. Instruction offers the child an opportunity to develop in a variety of ways and promotes a positive attitude towards foreign languages.<sup>14</sup>

## **Educational Framework: Teaching Environment and Range of Subjects**

As early as 1920, Herbert Hahn, one of the teachers in the first Waldorf school, pointed out that “what is special about foreign language can only be properly understood and appreciated if one considers that the whole Waldorf school is its prerequisite with everything that happens in it.”<sup>15</sup> And one of the early state inspectors of the school stated in his report:

One thing must be expressly emphasized at the beginning: Whoever enters the Waldorf School for the first time and has not already been informed about important and essential things by studying the pedagogy and literature of the school, sets foot in completely unknown territory, and cannot do justice to the school and its work if he is not filled with the good will to get to know the particularities of the psychological and pedagogical foundations of this school thoroughly and without prejudice and to understand its own life, which is inherent in this school and which has also been granted to it by the authorities ... Anyone who cannot take this view will not arrive at an objective judgement about this school, which is so very different from the usual framework.<sup>16</sup>

This is not the place to go into such details, but a few distinguishing features can be mentioned:

The school day during which foreign language teaching at the primary level of a Waldorf school has its place, differs



considerably from that of mainstream elementary schools. Every morning, the pupils first have a block lesson, the so-called Main Lesson. This is given at the lower and middle levels by the class teacher and lasts between ninety and a hundred minutes. The class teacher usually leads her class through the first eight years of school. In the successive three to four-week periods of the main lesson, the basic areas are progressively developed: writing and reading, arithmetic, at later stages history, natural history, anthropology, geography, geology, astronomy, geometry, algebra, physics and chemistry. The fact that a class stays in the individual teaching areas over several weeks and picks up what has been dealt with on the previous day, enables the children to connect intensively with the content. In this way, the principles of concentration, rhythmic repetition and consolidation are served.

Regular painting and drawing are also part of the main lesson in the lower and middle school as well as daily practice in singing, playing the recorder and recitation of literary texts in the mother tongue.

The main lesson is structured in such a way that the pupils are addressed on all three levels of soul experience. The *rhythmic* part at the beginning of the main lesson, in which daily recitation and musical exercises are practised, involves, above all, the pupils' *feeling* life. The *cognitive* component characterizes the middle part of the lesson block, while the *will* realm is addressed more in the so-called working part (e.g. writing or drawing). The pupils do not use textbooks, but instead keep their own main-lesson books, whose texts in the middle school are usually provided by the teacher, but are designed by the pupils more and more independently over the years. In the lower and middle grades, storytelling usually completes the main lesson. The teacher takes the material for the stories in the first school year from fairy tales, in the second class from

fables and legends, in the third school year from the Old Testament and in the fourth from Norse mythology. Waldorf education sees itself in the selection of narrative material in accordance with K. Egan and his insistence on *beginning at the borders and winding slowly inward*.<sup>17</sup> In the main lesson periods, local history and regional studies do not start until Class 4.

Every day, the pupils practise taking in and orally reproducing the content of these narrations in their mother tongue, and perhaps even improvising them in scenic acting. In this way, they develop the necessary skills to also profit from storytelling in the foreign language lessons.

The so-called Main Lesson given by the class teacher is followed by lessons given by subject teachers. This area includes the two foreign languages, which are taught at most Waldorf schools, each with three weekly lessons, as well as practical subjects such as needlework and sports, artistic subjects such as music and eurythmy. The subjects complement each other. Research at the Soviet Academy of Science in Leningrad in the 1960s confirmed the close connection between manual dexterity/fine-motor skills and language development.<sup>18</sup> Thus, from the beginning, foreign language teaching in Waldorf schools also benefits from needlework and later on from handicraft subjects.

The close relationship between linguistic and musical skills is also taken into account in the educational concept of the Waldorf School. In accordance with Steiner's suggestion, *all* children – not just the musically talented – should have music lessons from the first year of school onwards, including instrumental music and singing. In the lower classes all children play the recorder. Many pupils also have individual violin, cello or piano lessons, for example. Auditory studies have shown that a significant relationship between general auditory discrimination and musicality is

already evident in third-graders.<sup>19</sup> Within the context of movements and sounds, of course, Steiner's newly introduced art of eurythmy plays a decisive role.

A language teacher in the lower school has to be aware of the larger context within which she teaches her particular language. There is the other foreign language to consider, and all the other subjects - apart from main lesson - that the children have in the course of a week. A language teacher should have a realistic picture of what the children are doing in the other lessons, because it will have an influence on the material she herself chooses. For instance, there will be less need for a great deal of movement in an English lesson if the class has already had eurythmy or sports on the same day. Similarly, the amount of singing will be reduced on days when the children have their music lessons.

The number of weekly language lessons taught in the first few years has to be looked at from this point of view. The timetable of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart included three lessons per week for each foreign language. A survey carried out in Germany several years ago, showed that only about 25% of the Waldorf schools still offered six foreign language lessons per week in the first three classes. This highly regrettable reduction of the weekly language lessons to two (per language) is often the result of financial constraints or of staffing problems. In some schools this has even led to the even more regrettable situation of the second foreign language not being introduced until Class 2 or 3.

The teacher of a Class 1 or 2 will often find that it is asking quite a lot of the children to be and remain immersed in the sounds of a foreign language for a full forty-five minute period. Therefore some schools have introduced shorter foreign language lessons, lasting about twenty minutes for

each language, possibly five times a week and often incorporated into the same forty-five-minute period. This has turned out to be a very helpful arrangement, even if it means a class has two different teachers and two different languages within a relatively short time span. Experience has shown that the prevailing sanguine temperament of this age group makes this possible.

Usually at intervals of several months, the classes of a Waldorf school gather for school festivals - originally this was a monthly celebration. On this occasion, all the pupils contribute something from their on-going work. Performances from the mother-tongue work of main lessons, from music and eurythmy are included. An eleventh class may recite a passage from Shakespeare, a first class perhaps performs a singing-game in the foreign language they are learning, and a seventh or eighth grade may recite a ballad. These festivals are often framed by performances by the school orchestra and choir. This gives all pupils from the first school year on a vivid picture of what the other classes are able to do.

Another distinguishing feature of Waldorf education is the type of school reports. Each pupil receives a certificate at the end of the school year in the form of a text report commenting on each subject separately. For the foreign language area, the student's individual learning ability is characterized, her auditory, visual or motor access to the language and her ability to pick up what the classmates achieve. In addition, grades are issued based on the usual performance levels for graduating pupils. Some examples of such reports are to be found below.

# **The Foundations of Foreign Language Teaching at Primary School Level**

## **Developmental Stages: Years 6/7 and 9/10**

At the beginning and end of the period in which foreign languages at Waldorf schools are only taught orally, two turning points in physical and mental development play a special role, the 6th/7th and the 9th/10th years of life.

Soon after the Second World War, there were people in Germany advocating early foreign language teaching in primary schools. One of the pioneers of this movement, F. Leisinger, spoke of the “astonishing receptiveness” of the primary school child, which he thought was particularly beneficial to foreign language teaching:

The children’s interest is varied, strongly emotional, and turns to everything new, if it is lively and filled with feeling. The ability to imitate is at a peak, the indiscriminate openness to the world is still preserved, the ability to remember whatever is connected with sound and movement remains excellent. All of this is obviously a last wave of the innate ability to acquire language in general, which enables the unreflecting linkage of things and processes with sounds and designations. This is the essence of natural language learning which decreases as, age-appropriately, the child’s intellectual development progresses.<sup>20</sup>

From the point of view of cognitive development, the beginning of the stage of “concrete operations” is located at

about the age of seven (J. Piaget). The child can now “deal with the material of perception reproduced in the imagination without any interrelationships.”<sup>21</sup>

For the whole of the first seven years, Steiner (1920) underlines the outstanding significance of spontaneous, *instinctive* imitation: “In the period from birth to the sixth, seventh year of life, we are inclined to surrender completely to the nearest human environment for all that is to be educated in us and to shape our own developing powers out of the imitating instincts.” “What the child sees, hears etc., excites in him the urge to do the same.”<sup>22</sup>

This type of immediate imitation changes when the child reaches school age. In this respect, Steiner’s representation corresponds to that of Piaget. The result is the “transformation of the imitative instinct into appropriation power due to a natural authority relationship.” There is now a “conscious acceptance of what affects the child from the educator and teacher on the basis of a self-evident authority.”<sup>23</sup> In another context, Steiner describes the situation before and after the change of teeth as follows: “Before this age, the child imitates in order to make his own being an after-image of the environment; upon entering this age, the child does not merely imitate, but the other being is taken into his own being with a certain degree of consciousness. But the imitative instinct remains ... until about the ninth year.”<sup>24</sup>

Piaget, who investigated the phenomenon of imitation very thoroughly, came to a differentiation within the individual stages of the child’s development. Only after the age of seven or eight can we talk of conscious imitation. Piaget also uses the term “reflected” imitation for this.<sup>25</sup> It is obvious that the new relationship to one’s own group and to individual reference persons also plays a role here. According to more recent investigations, the ability to

imitate is still of great importance, even at primary school age: "Up to the age of eight to ten years, i.e. in pre-school and lower school classes, children are particularly adaptable; their organism has not yet lost its plasticity; they are increasingly looking for social contacts and caregivers. These are favourable conditions for the consolidation and habitualization of imitated behaviour."<sup>26</sup>

A very revealing discovery for this developmental stage was made by Piaget when he investigated the age at which "the child can differentiate between the words and the things they describe". Are the names in the subject or object? Are they signs or things? In the first stage, up to the age of about six to seven years, the child is convinced that the names come from things. They have been found by looking at things. Learning a name can penetrate the essence of a thing. "As soon as the name is found, no more problems arise ... The name seems to be part of the essence of things... Children do not succeed at all in distinguishing between the word and the thing."<sup>27</sup> In the second stage (seven to eight years) the child discovers a 'difference' between the signifier and the designated object or between thinking and the things that one thinks. The name detaches itself from things, but the child does not yet locate it in the thinking subject, which leads to a mixture of name and thing. "The name is in the air, it surrounds the people who use it. Other children say it's *not in any particular place* ..."<sup>28</sup> In the third stage, the child discovers "that the names are in us and come from within. The child immediately says the names are in her head. From now on the names are no longer connected with the things."<sup>29</sup> This stage is reached at the age of nine. With this developmental step, the child leaves the stage at which she felt directly connected with her fellow human beings and the objects in her surroundings.

From a medical point of view, the child reaches a harmonious balance between breathing and blood circulation at the age of nine. One school doctor considered the changes in psycho-physical constitution at this age to be so fundamental that he spoke of the child as “moving into his own house”.<sup>30</sup>

Children in their ninth year of life are not only able to distinguish between the left and right side of the body when standing, but also when walking. As one educational expert put it: “They now come through the inner experience of the vertical centre to experience their own symmetry.”<sup>31</sup>

Together with these physiological developmental steps, the transition from the mythical experience of the world to a dynamic, more realistic experience is also taking place. The child gradually moves from a dreaming experience of the world until she finally arrives at the immediate concrete experience of place and time.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of the second seven-year cycle, Steiner repeatedly uses the term “authority”. In this context, it is important to stress today that this only refers to the legitimate feeling of authority. An authority understood in this way is only valid if it is perceived by the child as credible. The adolescent child experiences the support of his inner aspiration for freedom not only in “being allowed to do what he wants” – this can also lead to insecurity and fear – but in the consistent direction of responsible acting and behaviour of the adults. The more “this authority becomes what it wants to be, a leader for freedom, the more it will develop in itself a desire to make itself dispensable, to make itself superfluous. The ultimate goal of true education is the moment when it has become unnecessary ... ”<sup>33</sup>

The noticeable decline in the ability to imitate from the age of nine marks the second important turning point in the development of children in the period we are concerned



with here. Towards the end of this developmental period, their view of the world becomes objective. The child now tends to reflect on herself, her fellow men and the things and processes of the outside world. There is a sharp divide between perceived reality and imagined fantasy world. The attentive observer of the child sees a subtle change: “The detachment of the ego from the environment becomes clearer; now self-criticism as well as praise for others become possible. A slight distancing from the parents as well as from one’s own childhood often occurs at this time.”<sup>34</sup>

\*

According to Steiner, the “change in the ninth and tenth year of life” was given far too little attention in the pedagogy of his time.<sup>35</sup> He attached such importance to the child’s developmental progress during this period that he compared it with the world-historical significance of the crossing of the River Rubicon by Caesar. According to Steiner, the child between the ninth and tenth year is busy with this ‘crossing of the Rubicon’: “Up to this point in time, the child differs little from her surroundings. For the child’s sensation, the world and she herself belong together.” “At this age ... the child instinctively learns to distinguish herself from the outside world. Before that stage, the ‘I’ and the outside world flow into each other ... But between the ninth and tenth years the child learns to say ‘I’ with full consciousness. She learns this earlier, but now with full consciousness.”<sup>36</sup> And there is no going back.

For early foreign language teaching, the stage of development described above is also particularly important in that scientific research has confirmed that children after the age of 9 to 10 years no longer have the particular sensitivity that enables them to acquire a near-native pronunciation of foreign languages unconsciously and

imitatively. As early as 1978, H. A. Whitaker stated from a neurolinguistic perspective: “An important lacuna in our understanding of the maturation of the brain as it relates to the acquisition both of language and of other cognitive functions is the characterization of what physical changes occur from about seven to nine years of age. Development evidence clearly indicates that there are both cognitive and linguistic milestones during this age period.”<sup>37</sup> In Waldorf education, the fact that the child’s imitative faculties decrease rapidly between the ages of six and ten is one of the reasons for getting children to start learning foreign languages well before puberty.<sup>38</sup>

The Waldorf School curriculum takes into account this development of the child towards a heightened self-confidence, a critical, emotionally-supported distance from its surroundings in a variety of ways. In foreign language teaching, this step is followed by a change in method: in addition to the purely oral work of the first three school years, other forms are now added. The first step towards a more conscious experience of the other languages, towards a “view from the outside” is taken with the introduction of writing the first foreign-language texts, usually at the beginning of the fourth grade. This process will be described in a later chapter.

## **Movement – Imitation – Language**

The decisive factor for the first three years of foreign language teaching at the Waldorf School is that the faculty of imitation of the younger child persists until about the age of nine to ten. What do we mean by imitation? R. Oerter established a model to explain the phenomenon. According to this, “the reason why a child at a relatively early age can transform the perception of a movement or another form (even trees and houses are imitated) into its own movement

lies in the joint coding of visual and kinesthetic information.”<sup>39</sup>

American studies in the 1950s and 1960s have shown that there is a direct connection between spoken language and the movements of the body that accompany it. The kinesic research of R. L. Birdwhistell investigated the movement sequences that are perceptible to the naked eye, the so-called macro-movements. The same author estimates that between five thousand and ten thousand items of information per second are exchanged between two speakers.<sup>40</sup>

Medical observations added to a new understanding of the important role of imitation for human development, especially in early childhood. The German paediatrician A. Nitschke made an intense study of “imitative” movements. This led him to speak of “motor co-movement” which he found to be highly relevant not only for the development of the speech organs, but also for understanding: “The ‘going along’ of one’s own motor function with that of other living beings ... represents a primary process that not only decisively promotes the learning of movement forms, but is also of fundamental importance for the understanding of the mental states of others. The [synchronic] co-movement ... is the basis for the understanding of others.”<sup>41</sup>

Nitschke’s findings were confirmed by research carried out by the Americans W. S. Condon and W. D. Ogston, who discovered that speech and the tiniest body movements are completely synchronized and rhythmically coordinated, both in the individual speaker himself and between speaker and listener (*micro-kinesis* and *synchrony*). This was the result of years of analysis in slow motion of film and video footage at a rate of 48 frames per second. This technique enabled a comparison of speech segments and minutely small movements of the individual parts of the body, micro

movements, from head to toe, including eyes, eyebrows and mouth within a time frame of 0.02 seconds.

Both speaking and listening are processes of the same biological organism. There may be basic biological forms, particularly rhythm forms, underlying both ... Listeners move in precise synchrony with the articulatory structure of the speaker's speech. This has been called interactional synchrony ... As rapidly as within 50 milliseconds the whole organization of change of the body motion of a listener reflects the organization of change in the incoming speech. With the ongoing emergent flow of each 'different' sound form in the stream of speech, there is a parallel emergence from the listener's body of sustained organized movement. This is an incredibly precise and delicate tracking process.<sup>42</sup>

The listener appears to have neural rhythms similar in nature and organization to those of the speaker, so that when these are expressed in the speech patterns emitted by the speaker as sound waves, they are eminently suited to be receptively tracked by the listener.<sup>43</sup>

Here is an example to illustrate the details of the connection between language and movement. In a conversation between two male adults, one of them uses the word 'why'. While the word was pronounced, nine pictures were taken on the film. The analysis of these images shows the following motion sequences:

As subject B articulates the /u:/ ... his head moves right, forward and down slightly; while his eyelid begins to come down very slightly at the onset of the eye blink; while his brows go up slightly; while his mouth opens; while the trunk moves forward and

right; while the right shoulder is locked, i.e. remains relatively still; while his right elbow extends; while his right wrist flexes slightly; while joints B and C of the index finger extend slightly and the finger adducts slightly; while joints A, B and C of fingers 2, 3 and 4 flex; while the thumb remains relatively still. Almost all of the above body parts sustain their direction of movement precisely across the emission of /u:/ then change to a new direction together at the onset of /a:/. The right elbow, however, sustains its extension across both the /u:/ and /a:/ where it then pronates. Fingers 3 and 4 sustain their flexion across the first aspect of the word *why* ... <sup>44</sup>

While the normal person is talking, his whole body “dances” in an exact and ordered sequence, which corresponds to the speech articulated by him. The body moves in patterns of change that are directly proportional to the articulated pattern of the stream of speech ... This is called *self-synchrony*.<sup>45</sup>

The listener moves in such a way that her movements are synchronized by following the same principles as the speaking person’s behaviour. The movement ‘units’ are created either by a different part of the listener’s body moving than that of the speaker, or by the same part of the body moving in a different direction than that of the speaker. In any case, the direction of movement remains just as long as the direction of movement of the speaker. It also changes when the speaker’s direction of movement changes. ‘Interactional synchronicity’, i.e. the same sequence of a spontaneous and an induced movement, is precisely defined by this uniformity (isomorphism) of the processes of change between the speaking and listening. At normal speed of motion processes however, this similarity is hard to detect.<sup>46</sup>

Condon explains the close connection between speech and micro-motion - also between speaker and listener - as follows:

Speaking and listening are processes of the same biological organism. Maybe there are biological basic forms, especially rhythmic sequences, which are based on both ... Whoever listens to another, moves in exact temporal harmony (synchrony) with the structure in which the speaker articulates his or her language. This has been referred to as "interactional synchrony", i.e. the similarity of time between two interrelated activities ... Within the tiny period of 50 milliseconds, the entire "changing organism" of the listener's body movements reflects the "changing organism" in the language stream approaching it. This is an incredibly precise and delicate tracking process.<sup>47</sup>

The listener appears to have neural rhythms similar in nature and organization to those of the speaker, so that when these are expressed in the speech patterns emitted by the speaker as sound waves, they are eminently suited to be receptively tracked by the listener.<sup>48</sup>

The observed micro-movements, which occur synchronously with the speech progression, are not known to the speaker or the listener. They only occur in healthy, normal speakers and listeners. The movements are clearly asynchronous in the pathological range - in children with developmental disorders, dyslexia, aphasia patients, autistic and schizophrenic patients. This interactional synchrony can already be observed only a few hours after the birth of a child:

The baby is apparently born with almost the same developed abilities to discover differentiated