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Mimi Scheiblauber (1989-1968)

This text gives insights into Eurhythmics in the field of special education (or “Heilpädagogik“ – the term is used in German speaking countries) by focusing on the life and work of Mimi Scheiblauber. She was one of the first women in the German speaking countries to work with children with disabilities. She published her experiences and approaches in articles and films over several decades. The text also gives some background information on Eurhythmics in Austria and its connection to Scheiblauber.

Pictures of Mimi Scheiblauber and her work can be seen at:

<https://www.deutsches-tanzarchiv.de/archiv/nachlaesse-sammlungen/s/mimi-scheiblauber>

Historic aspects

The pianist Marie-Elisabeth (Mimi) Scheiblauber (*1891 Lucerne +1968 Zurich) attended the Eurhythmics training of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze in Dresden-Hellerau in 1910 and 1911 and worked with people with disabilities throughout her life from 1922 to 1968. She was influenced above all by her close collaboration with the Prof. Heinrich Hanselmann and by Reform Pedagogy. (Ring/Steinmann 1997, p 242ff) She is considered to be the pioneer of rhythmic-musical education in the field of education of the disabled and her approaches and working methods have hardly lost any of their relevance over the decades. In an impressive and touching way, the film "Ursula oder das unwerte Leben" (“Ursula, or the unworthy life”) (Mertens/Marti 1966) shows Scheiblauber in her practical work with a wide variety of children's groups and individuals, some with severe multiple disabilities. Her appreciative attitude towards each person and her working methods are portrayed in a multi-layered way in this film.

Together with Hanselmann – who became the first professor for “Heilpädagogik” in Europe in 1931 – and through his feedback, she developed her know-how in Eurhythmics for special needs education, simplifying the approach and focusing on the (sometimes) reduced movements expressions of the children she was working with. Several aspects became important to her, among this materials/objects and music as motivating agents that create ways of access for the people with whom she was working. Hanselmann was so impressed by the approach of Eurhythmics, that he dedicated a separate chapter to Eurhythmics gymnastics in his Book “Einführung in die Heilpädagogik” („Introduction to Heilpädagogik“) (1930) with the introductory words: *“I am convinced that this chapter will later on take much more space in a textbook on curative education”* (Hanselmann 1930, p. 522, translated by the autor).

Pedagogical work

Danuser-Zogg writes about "Scheiblauber-Eurhythmics" and states that it is a holistic method that starts with what is already present, one that is not oriented towards deficiencies or deficits. The individual working principles address people on all levels.

(Neikes/Danuser-Zogg 1998, p. 11) Elsewhere, the author explains that it is precisely the interaction of music and movement that makes the method so special and makes part of Eurhythmics actually indescribable. But it is precisely this 'indescribable' part that gives it its life, and it is thanks to this that it differs from other ways of working. (Neikes/Danuser-Zogg 1998, p. 93) Scheiblaue published the experiences and findings from her pedagogical practice (her work with disabled people), as well as scientific research results in numerous essays and specialist contributions, but mainly in the series of publications "Lobpreisung der Musik - Blätter zur Musikerziehung" ("Praising Music - Pages on Music Education"), which she founded in 1942. (Tervooren 2005, p. 136f) Some basic features of her valuable work are briefly presented here:

- Scheiblaue finds access to the human being through **music and movement**, whereby movement – as the beginning of all development and education – becomes the basis of observation: *"Movement is, as it were, the door through which one gains an insight into the constitution of the human being. It becomes a 'diagnostic tool' for those who know how to read it. Music opens the door to the innermost part of the human being; if chosen correctly, it becomes an educational means."* (Scheiblaue 1956 in Tervooren 2005, p. 138, translated by the author) With the temporal aspects of music the motor nervous system is trained and with the dynamic the expressive powers are stimulated. The sound of music affects the soul of the human being and the form orders and influences the spiritual. (Scheiblaue s.a. in Klein 2007, p. 233)
- The basic skills of **stopping, switching and persevering** can be practised in movement. These skills challenge and stimulate the senses and he thoughts: *"We can educate people through movement. To educate means: to enable someone to become capable of stopping, switching over, and persevering."* (Scheiblaue s.a. in Klein 2007, p. 233, translated by the autor)
- Special **materials/objects** (often called Scheiblaue-materials) offer opportunities for perception, experimentation and contact and thus take on a special significance in Eurhythmics, because through the materials the children can come into contact with themselves, but also with others in the group. Contact is established through concentrated work. Patience, allowing time and giving space for independent action with the materials are important principles for educators. (Neikes/Danuser-Zogg 1998, p. 21ff and Klein 2007, p. 233)
- Because of the variety of Eurhythmic tasks in and through music and movement, Scheiblaue brings them together in the following five **exercise groups**: Order Exercises, Social Exercises, Concentration Exercises, Exercises for Concept Formation, and Exercises that promote imagination and creativity. (Tervooren 2005, p. 138f)

Rhythmic-musical education is always *"in the service of human development. Education means leading people towards the goal of personality"*. (Scheiblaue 1956 in Tervooren 2005, p. 139) For Scheiblaue this means:

- Awakening the good dispositions of the "I" and bringing them to development.
- Guiding the "I" towards the "You" and developing the ability to fit into a community.
- Creating a synthesis of the first and second tasks and thus deepening the sense of responsibility in people towards themselves and others. (Scheiblaue 1956 in Tervooren 2005, p. 139f)

Methodological approaches

The following methodological impressions arise from the two Scheiblauder-films „Rhythmik“ („Eurhythmics“ 1956) and „Ursula oder das unwerte Leben“ (“Ursula, or the unworthy life” 1966):

- Clarity and calmness in her language
- A lot of music: she lets the music "speak" (by piano, flute), only a few sequences are without music
- She leads by singing and playing the bamboo flute and also joins in at the same time (while playing the flute, she mingles with the children)
- She leads clearly
- She only gives short spoken announcements, for example "Do what the music gives to you."
- She helps participants to arrive at certain qualities of movement through material
- She responds to situations
- Clear body language
- She uses different channels of perception
- Great emphasis on planning
- Staying with one thing and making something out of it
- Working step by step
- If something is not understood, then translate it into movement; go into movement (nobody is incapable of doing something)
- Materials/objects are important
- Music serves movement – more than the other way round
- Building is accompanied by music; this creates “form” (visual and auditory)
- Movement articulation is played very clearly and precisely on the piano; the quality of the movement is guided by the music
- Use of signals

The film 1966 starts with these three sentences: *"Because human beings develop, they can be educated. Because development is a process of change, it can be influenced. Because man changes throughout his life, his change can always be influenced."* (Mertens/Marti 1966, translated by the author)

Mimi Scheiblauder and Austria

Scheiblauder build up the Eurhythmics education in Zurich (Switzerland) and was mostly working there, but she was also no ‘stranger’ in Austria. There were several connections, collaborations and exchanges:

- There were connections to the head of the Eurhythmics school in Hellerau-Laxenburg near Vienna, Christine Baer-Frissell (1908-1932), from 1925 onwards.
- The paediatrician and ‘Heilpädagogin’ Hans Asperger, for example, appreciated her approach to human personality based on activities supported and sustained by rhythm and music. (cf. Brunner-Danuser 1984, p. 176)
- For the Austrian kindergarten system of the post-war period, Agnes Niegl – in the Ministry of Education – was interested in and inspired by publications from Scheiblauder's school, which is why she personally invited Scheiblauder in 1952 for a

further training week for kindergarten pedagogues in order to provide ‘a new impulse’, (Witoszynskij/Schindler/Schneider 2006, p. 9). The years of further training events and the further cooperation with Scheiblauser or her students resulted in Eurhythmics education being included in the curriculum of the educational institutions for kindergarten pedagogues and after-school teachers throughout Austria in 1958, and from 1960 onwards, musical-rhythmical education became compulsory in kindergarten seminars. (cf. Witoszynskij/Schindler/Schneider 2006, p. 9f.; cf. Brunner-Danuser 1984, p. 175f.) This is important to know, because you can still find some terms of Scheiblauser’s (for example ‘exercise groups’) in the actual curricula in compulsory schools in Austria:

- Rhythmic-musical education in preschool, mandatory exercises (1983-2023)
https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/schulpraxis/lp/lp_vs.html
- Rhythmic-musical education in preschool, mandatory exercises (from 2023)
https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Begut/BEGUT_29087208_1955_485A_9CB3_25E1CF5935D3/Anlagen_0001_3154420C_B800_4A10_9120_B1BB5D1_6EA36.pdf (p. 43ff.)
- Rhythmic-musical education in schools for deaf children and children with hearing impairments
https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2008_II_137/COO_2_026_100_2_440356.pdfsig (p. 39f.)

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