

5. Adult Learning in Teaching Speech Formation

by Enrica dal Zio

We are only in the very early stages of applying the seven steps of adult learning in this field, but initial experience is very promising. A course usually involves developing a theme, something from literature, into which we enter and which we want to use as we learn speech formation. It may be a poem, a fairy tale, or anything else.

In the *first step* (breathing in for the participants) I read the text aloud and we then try to reproduce it together. The participants do this in their own words, striving to stay as close to the content and the author's or poet's manner of expression as possible (breathing out). In his lectures on speech formation² Rudolf Steiner recommended reproducing a text in one's own words in this way to help the participants really unite with the content.

I have found that this also creates a comprehensive view that continues on in the background in later parts of the process when details are worked on and digested.

In the *second step* I then ask the participants to write down what has impressed or moved each one the most. Often they mention specific passages or images, or something about how I expressed a passage in the way I read it aloud, for example with a special sound or gesture. I note down in detail all the points brought up by the participants, and if the group is a large one I try to summarize them in order to find what they have in common or where the emphasis lies.

Frequently the transition from the second to the third step takes place almost immediately. I have to be very alert to this moment since it marks the point when I have to select a few of the items expressed in the 'relating' process so that I can lead them across into the 'digesting' process. This item or

these items then provide the focus for several further sessions or lessons with the group.

In the *third step* (digesting) I generally get the participants to practise a number of breathing and speech exercises to prepare their speech instrument for the task of artistically digesting the content. I then take the item or items selected in the second step in order to carry them across into the digesting process. For example we might work on the item by means of speech sounds in exercises that deepen the relevant consonants and vowels. We search together for the main gestures in the item. Or we express the item by means of drama, shaping the various characters and events. First I explain how this might be done and then we put it into practice together. I correct the participants' artistic expression if it does not correspond to the content.

I had an especially gratifying experience during a recent course when we were trying to express in drama one of the passages we had selected during the relating (warming) stage. Almost all the participants were actively involved in an intense debate about which soul-nuances were correct for each of the figures. Looking around me I noticed to my delight that we were now 'well and truly into digesting'.

I have so far only reached the *fourth step* in a few courses. At the end of the digesting step we come together once more while each individual considers what new discoveries he or she has made. We tell each other about them and I help, or we help one another, to identify them better. Then I lead the participants on to the *fifth step*. I describe how one can go even more deeply into the item or items if one can find a suitable exercise which can then lead on to acquiring a new capability.

At this point a number of participants have felt joyful because they had the feeling: 'Now I have something concrete that I can take home with me from this course, something that I can continue to work on in practice.'

This is as far as I have progressed to date. My impression is that it makes quite a difference to the participants whether I work out the entire course in advance or whether we con-

struct the content together out of a mutual warming process (second step). By this latter means the course develops into each individual's own way of working artistically on his or her own personal theme. In addition new depths are reached in what goes on during the course. A learning community comes into being which provides considerable support for individuals in overcoming their own learning blockages.

Of the 12 who had enrolled, nine attended. In advance of the weekend I had made it clear that the method would be

From Coenraad van Houten: "Practising Destiny" originally published under the title *Erwachsenenbildung als Schicksalspraxis* by Verlag Freis Geistesleben, Stuttgart 1998.