

*Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 1,  
January–February 2004, pp. 3–6.  
© 2004 M.E. Sharpe, Inc. All rights reserved.  
ISSN 1061–0405/2004 \$9.50 + 0.00.

PENTTI HAKKARAINEN

## Editor's Introduction

*Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* was published for the first time in 1930. The second edition came out in 1967, and the third in 1991. Several “independent” variants were published later in Russia. The book was translated first into Japanese in 1972, into Italian in 1973, into Spanish in 1987, and into Swedish (from Italian) in 1995.

The text translated in this issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* was not included in Vygotsky's collected works as it is intended for teachers and parents as a popular scientific-psychological version. Vygotsky later developed the themes of the essay in his lectures and books. His analysis of creativity and imagination was continued in an article, “Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent,” published in 1995 in *The Vygotsky Reader*, edited by René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner. The text is based on his students' lecture notes. The theme of theatrical creativity was continued in the article “On the Problem of the Psychology of Actor's Creativity,” in 1932 ([Collected works], part 6).

What is the difference between the two texts dealing with creativity in different life stages? While both texts compare child and adolescent imagination, different aspects are emphasized. The “adolescent” article focuses more on relationships between conceptual thinking and imagination and inward orientation. “A child makes no attempt to hide his play, but the adolescent conceals his fantasies and safeguards them from other people's eyes . . . this is

tightly tied up with inner desires, incentives, attractions, and emotions within the adolescent's personality, and is beginning to serve this whole side of his life. In this respect, the association of fantasy with emotions is extremely significant" (Vygotsky, 1995, p. 284).

In spite of its popular style, the text contains theoretical ideas that are not expressed in Vygotsky's other publications. The text on children's drawings has been used as the theoretical point of departure in later Soviet/Russian books on children's artistic creativity. For example, the books of Valeria Mukhina (1981) and Iurii Poluianov (2000) elaborate upon the ideas offered in the booklet. The realism of imagination presented in the second chapter is the cornerstone of the methodological approach to developmental teaching elaborated by Volodia Kudriavtsev (1997).

Vygotsky's arguments are controversial and some of the themes are presented only in this booklet. Their importance is not in the traditional presentation of research findings, but in their potential to inspire new research. The idea of syncretism introduced in this text played an important role as a starting point in Gunilla Lindqvist's book (1995) on the aesthetics of play. Developmental play should follow aesthetic rules. Understanding the syncretistic nature of play opened up a new practical approach to creating play environments (play worlds).

The Vygotskian approach to syncretism is quite opposite to the Piagetian understanding. For Piaget syncretism means lack of analytic thinking and limited potential for dealing with the surrounding reality. Jean Piaget (2002) used the terms "syncretistic thinking" or "syncretistic scheme" to describe this holistic perception of the world. Children's thinking is egocentric and holistic. Subjective relations are dominant in their activity. The child may arrive at contradictory conclusions and cannot perceive details, analogical relations, or objective causes and effects. Everything can depend on everything, and the child always has an explanation for everything.

Vygotsky did not agree with Tolstoy's explanation on the nature of children's literary creativity, but saw the creative potential of syncretism. It is needed in all forms of creativity and especially

in artistic creativity. A syncretistic perception of the world is understood in psychological research as a primitive form, but it does not lead to primitive art in artistic activity. Syncretistic vision gives better aesthetic results than careful elaboration of details (Ehrenzweig, 1971). Syncretistic understanding is also needed in handling complicated wholes.

Vygotsky argues that there is a common root in all forms of children's art: "This syncretism points to the common root that unites all the different branches of children's art. This common root is the child's play, which serves as the preparatory stage for his artistic creation." Play has a special role in the development of artistic creativity and imagination. A challenge for pedagogical work is to develop a syncretistic basis for creativity and combine it with the development of analytic thinking.

The present text includes eight small chapters, each of which presents new aspects of imagination and creativity. The first three chapters attempt to define the basic concepts and mechanisms, and the last three chapters deal with specific domains such as literature, theater, and drawing. All of the chapters are presented in the form of dialogue with researchers of the beginning of the twentieth century writing on imagination and creativity. Vygotsky agrees and disagrees with them and constructs his own point of view. However, among the psychologists referred to, T. Ribot has a special status. His book, *On the Experience of Studying Creative Imagination*, was published in French in May 1900 in Paris and translated into Russian the following year.

This psychological essay is based on research carried out before 1930. But as usual there is no list of references, only the names of the authors are mentioned in the text without the names of their publications. We have tried to reconstruct the bibliography by using Vygotsky's other publications. In some cases it has been impossible to identify the author or the publication to which Vygotsky refers.

We hope that the publication of this essay in English offers new ideas to our readers.

## References

- Ehrenzweig, A. 1971. *The Hidden Order of Art. A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kudriavtsev, V.T. 1997. *Smysl chelovecheskogo detstva i psikhicheskoe razvitiie rebenka*. Moscow: URAO.
- Lindqvist, G. 1995. *The Aesthetics of Play*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- Mukhina, V.S. 1981. *Izobrazitel'naia deiatel'nost' rebenka kak forma usvoeniia sotsial'nogo opyta*. Moscow: Pedagogika.
- Piaget, J. 2002. *The Language and Thought of the Child*. 3d ed. London: Routledge.
- Poluianov, Iu. 2000. *Diagnostika obshchego i khudozhestvennogo razvitiia detei po ikh risunkam*. Riga: Eksperiment.
- Ribot, T. 2002. *Bolezni lichnosti* [includes *On the Experience of Studying Creative Imagination*]. Minsk: Harvest.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1995. "Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent." In *The Vygotsky Reader*, ed. R. Van der Veer and J. Valsiner. Oxford: Blackwell.

Copyright of Journal of Russian & East European Psychology is the property of M.E. Sharpe Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.