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CHAPTER III. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

In elaborating the scientific basis of preschool education, researchers have been guided by the overall objectives of communist education, proceeding, first and foremost, from the specific features of the early stages in the physical and mental development of the child.

Children differ from adults by virtue of the incompleteness of their bodily structure, the immaturity of many of its functions, and the limited nature of their physical and mental powers and abilities. The child must travel a long path of development in order to make the transition from a helpless being requiring constant care to an intelligent member of society. This development includes the physical growth and maturation of the body and the formation of mental properties and abilities through the assimilation of social experience, which, at any stage, depends upon the kind of experience that is assimilated and the specific nature of such assimilation.

The social experience that is fixed in the material and non-material culture of mankind has a great many different facets; only a small part is purposefully and systematically transmitted to the child in the form of organized teaching. In all stages of development, the child receives experience spontaneously, through various forms of contact with the people around him, in everyday life and in various activities. The younger the child, the greater the proportion of spontaneous learning about

mankind's accumulated social experience and the more difficult it is to evaluate the role that spontaneous forms of learning play in the formation of mental properties and abilities.

Not by chance have the early stages of childhood served as the basis for the proposal of numerous naturalistic conceptions, which have ascribed the decisive role in the mental development of the child to the maturation of the nervous system or to adaptation to the natural and social environment and which have viewed age-related psychological characteristics as the "eternal" traits of childhood that are independent of living conditions and upbringing.

A substantial blow has been dealt to such concepts by the research that has been conducted in recent decades by Soviet and progressive foreign scholars who have brought to light significant resources for early childhood and preschool development. This research has shown that, when conditions of upbringing change, children can learn knowledge and skills, and forms of cognitive activity can be formed in them that were previously considered beyond their reach.

However, in itself, recognition of the decisive influence of living conditions and upbringing and of the influence of the assimilation of social experience on mental development in early childhood and the preschool years does not answer the question of the specific properties of age and its significance for subsequent stages of development. Analysis of the conditions of child development and the factors engendering those conditions will help us understand this fact.

The conditions underlying the mental development of the young and preschool-age child differ from the conditions that influence the development of children in other age groups because of the child's position in the system of social relationships and the nature of the child's contacts with the surrounding world and those types of activity in which he realizes his attitude toward the world.

From birth until the time the child enters school, there are no serious social responsibilities. This is the time of the child's greatest dependence upon adults. The sphere of the child's con-

tacts is limited to close friends and relatives and, later on, to his peer group. These contacts are primarily personal and intimate, based on emotional contact. Adults satisfy a child's needs, irrespective of his behavior and performance.

The child's activity in which social experience is assimilated is not directed specifically toward that assimilation; it is a by-product.

It would seem that all the conditions indicated are extremely diffuse, that they do not regulate the course of child development, and that they permit (if only because of the absence of a unified system of fixed demands) innumerable individual variations. But it is in the early stages that mental development is indeed most intensive and, most importantly, uniform: the natural replacement of one stage by another is seen most clearly at this time. Consequently, existing conditions quite unequivocally determine the basic line of mental development. Early and preschool childhood is a concrete historical phenomenon that is tied directly to the level of the development of society's economic production. Ethnographic and historical evidence shows that in a primitive culture children participate in labor activity literally from the time they take their first steps, occupying an appropriate place in the societal division of labor. Childhood, as we know it, came into being when children were excluded from adult labor, when labor began to require a high level of preparation and the qualities that are needed by a participant in contemporary economic production.

Thus, the place of the young and preschool-age child in the system of societal relationships and his characteristic types of activity and interrelationship with the surrounding world originated at a certain stage of social development under the influence of a spontaneously extant but objectively necessary system of demands associated with his preparation for participation in the life of modern society, in economic production.

A detailed analysis of the developmental significance of the forms of children's contacts and activity and the educational potential contained in these age stages will promote a true understanding of the tasks of education in early and preschool childhood.

1. Infancy

The human child is considerably more helpless at birth than the young of animals. Assuming careful nurturing, the inborn unconditional reflex mechanisms of the child secure only survival and the operation of the basic [physiological] systems (respiratory, circulatory, temperature-regulating, and digestive), but not the development and improvement of the characteristically human forms of behavior. The following fact is highly illustrative from this point of view. The child's atavistic reflexes of "clutching" and pushing with the legs, which many researchers have regarded as basic for learning to reach and crawl, are not such in reality. As shown by the data of Soviet researchers, these reflexes and the corresponding actions possess a different afferentiation and motor structure; what is more, some of them die out entirely by the time the others are beginning to form.

A newly born child is in continuous contact with adults from the very beginning. If his inborn organic requirements are sufficiently satisfied, they soon lose their central significance and give way to new requirements — for the impressions, exercise, and contact with adults that are the basis for mental development. Even though the need for communication arises in a contact situation that is directed toward the satisfaction of biological requirements, it is not a derivative but, subsequently, forms anew as a primary social requirement.

This first type of leading activity — contact with adults — develops along with the formation of new requirements. Initially, it is of a directly emotional character. By the second month of a child's life, an adult's smile and words evoke positive responses: the child calms down and concentrates his attention on the adult; after some time, he smiles and coos and becomes more energetic in his motor activity. By the age of two months, the child has formed a characteristic, complex reaction, which includes all the components enumerated and is known as the animation complex [kompleks ozhivleniia]. The animation complex forms as reactive education and soon becomes activity that

is intended to arouse the attention of adults and to maintain contact with them.

In the second half-year of the child's life, there is a marked change in his social relationships. Direct emotional contact between an adult and the child begins to give way to contact based on other objects, in particular, toys. Initially, the child is prone to focus his attention only on objects that are shown to him by a grownup. The adult gradually "leads" the child into the world of objects and forms the child's attitude toward this world. Such contact takes the form of joint activity in the course of which the adult demonstrates to the child elementary actions and helps the child perform them. Joint activity is the major way in which the child is influenced in his first year of life.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance that social contacts hold for the child's mental development. Both Soviet and foreign literature contain abundant evidence of the consequences of so-called "hospitalism" [gospitalizm], when a child is reared with deficient social contact. Although the child may be well cared for, there is a lag in the development of motor skills and speech; such children become sluggish and indifferent to their surroundings.

In the process of social contact, an adult satisfies not only the child's developing need for such contact but all the child's other needs — in particular, the need for new impressions and for motor activity. Social contact is the basic source of various kinds of impressions (visual, auditory, tactile) and, more important, is the organizational factor underlying these impressions. With the help of adults, the child learns how to hold his head up, crawl, sit down, and, finally, stand up and take his first steps. In the third or fourth month of his life, he tries to grasp objects and gradually develops an understanding of distance and of the position of an object in space and its shape and size. The child is instilled with perceptual models that direct and regulate grasping motions and, later, the simplest manipulation of objects. Adult actions become an object of imitation that begins to take shape in the first months of the child's life. Imitation plays a special part in mental development. The child

proceeds from external forms of imitation to internal forms, which become the basis of the child's understanding of the actions associated with objects and subsequently of the objects themselves. Through social contact, the child is also prepared to master speech. His hearing of speech sounds develops, and his voice reacts. The child coos, babbles, and finally utters his first words.

Social contact is the child's leading activity for a relatively short time. Even in infancy, quite complex manipulations with objects are performed; the child can be taught to perform certain actions demonstrated by grownups and can transfer the use of an assimilated action to a new object. But manipulation is directed only toward use of the external properties of objects. The transition from infancy to early childhood is associated with the development of a new attitude toward the world of objects: the child begins to view them not merely as objects suitable for manipulation but as things that have a definite purpose and a concrete mode of use — a function that is assigned to them in his social experience. The child redirects his interest to the mastery of more and more new actions with objects. Activity involving objects becomes the leading form of activity throughout early childhood.

2. Early Childhood

The specific features of object-related activity, compared with manipulation, are determined by the fact that the function of things is not an external property and cannot be elicited through attempts to apply the actions that the child is able to perform. Function is mastered only in the course of purposeful or spontaneous learning.

Mastery of the world of objects in early childhood is directly associated with the formation of specifically human abilities. Although the child's perception of objects begins to take shape in infancy, that perception remains extremely limited, directed toward the identification of those properties of an object that appeal to the child and that conform to the child's extant motor

skills. When children carry out actions with objects, for the first time, they must take into account the properties of objects in relationship to other objects — their objective qualities. This is evident when the child begins to master related actions in which he brings two or more objects (or parts) into definite spatial relationships with one another — for example, closing boxes with lids, fitting figures of certain shapes into appropriate slots, and putting together and taking apart pyramids, Matreshka dolls, or other play objects. Initially, with an adult's assistance, the child masters ways of comparing objects and of selecting necessary combinations with the application of external techniques (attaching, stacking, etc.). External means are the basis on which the child forms his perceptions that give an initial orientation in the performance of object-related actions. The child then proceeds to make visual comparisons of properties, and, in the child's eyes, these properties become the permanent features of objects, upon which the possibility and mode of performance of various practical actions depend. The child begins to accumulate ideas intensively, ideas that comprise a foundation for the subsequent development of figurative forms of cognition.

Folk pedagogy has wisely taken into account the part that is played by the mastery of comparative actions in the child's mental development. A significant percentage of the toys dating back to a time when research knowledge about the object-related activity of children was totally nonexistent allowed the child to perform comparative actions.

In addition to developing his perception in the process of mastering object-related activities, the child also develops the basic components of reasoned thought. In object-related activity, for the first time, the relationship between objects and the possibility of using one object to influence another are apprehended. The child's mastery of the simplest implements — a spoon, pencil, dustpan, etc. — with adult assistance is of particular importance here. Such action is indirect. It requires a basic restructuring of the child's movements and adaptation to the logic of the implement, as well as the establishment of

the implement-object relationship, as a result of which the goal of the action is attained. Starting with assimilation of the actual types of such connections, which are conveyed to the child by adults, the child subsequently reproduces them under new conditions in the process of resolving new problems.

In the development of the child's reasoning, as well as in the development of perception, the resolution of problems through an external probing of objects, involving visual and operational thought, is replaced by the resolution of problems on an internal plane with the aid of images — visual and figurative thought. The development of figurative forms of thought is based on the development of primary generalizations. The child does not, by any means, assimilate the general meaning of the words that he learns to understand and use from grownups all at once. Initially, the child develops the ability to generalize about objects operationally — through action; subsequently, this ability is reinforced in words. These first generalizations have a functional nature, and the object-implements are their "carriers." After the child has mastered a concrete mode of action, with the aid of an implement, the child begins to use it in different situations and masters its general meaning for resolving a certain type of problem.

One important aspect in developing the child's object-related activity is the change in the connection between the action and the object. In the manipulation stage, the action is "indifferent" to the object. The child can perform the manipulations he knows with any object. In the process of mastering the function of objects, a strict one-to-one relationship is established between the action and the object: the object can be used only for its specific purpose. Finally, the child returns to a free use of the object at a new level: the child is familiar with the basic function of the object. Thus, action acquires a relative independence. One basic achievement of early childhood is the inception of the signal (symbolic) function of consciousness. When a child begins to perform an action without an object, or with an object that does not correspond to that action, the action loses its practical meaning and becomes the representation or de-

picture of real action. If a child "drinks" from a block, this is not drinking but the representation of drinking. The designation of an action is followed by the designation of the object and by the replacement of one by the other. The block is thus used as a cup. But in early childhood, the child is unaware of the replacement and does not assign to the substitute object the name of the object replaced. Such consciousness is not a prerequisite of, but the result of, performing actions with substitute objects. This consciousness attests to the transition to a new, typically human type of knowledge about reality, knowledge that is mediated through signal systems and that promotes the development of new types of activity: role play and productive activity (drawing, design, etc.).

However, inception of the signal (or symbolic) function of consciousness only prepares the operational-technical side of new types of activity, and a [new] level of mental activity is required to make the transition to them. They are mastered under the influence of changes in the personality-motivational sphere.

In early childhood, the child is "fused" with a situation, with other people. The child does not distinguish himself from his own actions and from the conditions in which they are carried out. In the third year of life, he separates himself from others. He becomes aware of himself as the constant source of wishes and actions: he has his first encounter with self-awareness. A substantial part in the development of self-awareness is played by an awareness of the desires that emerge as the child's own wishes and may or may not coincide with the demands of adults, the formation of a plan of ideas and motivations for action that are directed toward imagined rather than real objects, and the growth of practical independence and the capability of performing various actions unassisted by adults.

The inception of self-awareness causes the child's attitude toward adults to change. For the first time, he wants to behave like a grownup, to fulfill an adult role, to have a grownup's mastery over things and events. The fact that the child has increased possibilities brings him into conflict with previously

existing forms of contact and activity. This contradiction is called the three- year- [old] crisis, a crisis that basically means the child's demanding independence and placing his desires before those of grownups. However, the awareness of greater potential does not correspond to actual potential; the children are not placed on a par with grownups, able to perform "grownup" activity. Therefore, role play, in which the child plays at adult activities and interactions, helps resolve the crisis and satisfy the child's need for a new type of participation in adult life (participation on an equal footing with adults). Role play, to which the child turns at the end of early childhood, becomes the leading type of his activity. In role play, the child's basic needs and interests are expressed, new personality traits are developed and mental qualities improved, and new types of child activity are born.

3. Preschool Age

A unique feature of role play is its figurative, symbolic nature. Children assume certain roles (usually adult roles), as if they were someone else; they perform play actions that imitate the people they are portraying and, to one degree or another, use substitute objects that frequently have little similarity to the corresponding objects in the adult world, but make it possible to perform play activity. Play activities are emotionally saturated, appeal to the child, and have deep personal meaning. Child's play is social in its origin, content, and structure (unlike the games of young animals).

Role play differentiates between the subject matter — that area of reality which is depicted in play — and the content — the activities and personal interrelationships that are singled out in this area of reality. Both the subject and the content of children's games change substantially throughout preschool childhood. Family life, the labor activity of grownups, and important events are the subjects of games. The variety of subjects depends on the breadth of the sphere of activity with which the children are acquainted. Three- and four-year-old children

take the subjects of their games from their immediate environment (family or kindergarten). Five- and six-year-old children reflect all kinds of adult activity in their games (mail delivery, railroads, stores, space travel, school, etc.). But, even within one area of subject matter, children of different ages single out various content. They proceed from the portrayal of individual actions involving objects to more and more complex interrelationships between people. The depiction of individual actions loses its significance and acquires a stable nature; realization of the rights and obligations corresponding to each role becomes paramount: acting out a doctor's attitude toward a patient, a teacher's attitude toward a pupil, etc. In addition to a portrayal of the external social hierarchy, the children also depict the morally determined interrelationships of people in their games.

Along with changes in the content of play, the structure of play — which is determined by the aggregate of roles that the participants in the games have assumed — develops and becomes more complex. The children proceed from a small number of roles and a single-valued subordinate relationship (mother-daughter) to games in which several roles may be of a complex, subordinated nature (physician, nurse, parents, sick children, other children).

Play is the first and basic type of the joint activity of preschoolers. The need to depict joint adult actions and their interrelationships requires that several roles be incorporated in a game, unifying several participants in play and their interaction. This gives rise to two types of interrelationship in games: role-play relationships, corresponding to the content of a game, and real relationships in which the children act as partners carrying out a common task. The real relationships are carried out outside a game, incidental to it (before play starts and during the breaks that result from the need to coordinate future activities), or in the course of a game, intertwined with the interrelationships within the game. Forming the group of players, choosing the subject and content of the game, the assignment of roles, and the distribution of the mate-

rial to be used, discussion of the rules of behavior required in a given role, etc., may be the subject of real relationships.

The developmental significance of play activity is multifaceted. What is more, each individual facet, and all of them combined, contribute to the formation of the child's psyche.

In its expanded form, role play is a model of the adult social relationships that interest children and become the object of their activities. Therefore, play is also a means of orienting their thinking in such relationships.

At the same time, the figurative and symbolic nature of the depiction of adult activities and relationships in games leads to the development of figurative thought and imagination. The child at play gives the substitute object a name and treats it accordingly. When he plays with one object, he depicts an action with another, which promotes improvement of the signal function of consciousness and the formation of conceptual thought. In the course of development of the game, the reproduction of familiar actions and situations gives way to the creation of new situations, and elements of creative imagination enter the child's activity. Initially, imaginative play is continuously connected with the activity itself; such imaginative activity on the part of the child is internalized by the end of the preschool age period. The play of older preschoolers is frequently internalized. They imagine a situation and actions within the situation, but do not perform them in actuality.

The actual relationships that form in the course of play are a true school for social contact with one's peers: the children learn how to coordinate their opinions and behavior and to acquire the skills of mutual understanding and help. The initiators and organizers of games develop organizational abilities. The formation of the child's internal world and the formation of his personality — a process that began in connection with the mastery of object-related activity — continue in play. The most significant aspect of this process is the volitional regulation of behavior and the shared subordination of motives. The young child's behavior is impulsive, primarily influenced by emotions and wishes. The child's separation of the self from others

on the threshold of preschool childhood is limited to an awareness of the very fact of his existence, which does not lead automatically to an integration of the child's consciousness and behavior and is only the prerequisite to this integration.

When a child interacts with other children in real and imagined situations, he is compelled to subordinate his actions to particular demands that stem from the overall sense of the game being played and to regulate his behavior in conformity with his role and the role of others and with the game's rules. At the end of the preschool age period, children typically attach more and more significance to observing the rules of a game. They also make the transition from hidden rules, dictated by role interrelationships, to open rules that directly regulate the course of a game. Following the rules becomes a basic feature of the game around which the actual interrelationships of its participants are focused. As a result, the regulation of behavior, in accordance with the social norms and models that are contained in role relationships, merges with behavior regulation under the influence of peers in real relationships. Interaction of these factors leads to development of the mechanisms for the volitional control of behavior and to the subordination of situational motivation to more significant motives, laying the foundation for the development of a continuous hierarchy of motives, which makes it possible to detect a certain directionality in the child's personality. The content of this directionality and the structure of the forming personality are determined by the entire system of upbringing and the child's interactions with adults and peers.

In the preschool setting, group play exerts a decisive influence on the character of the first social organization of children, which forms in the kindergarten group and can be called a children's society (A. P. Usova). As special studies have shown, these groups are very complex formations with a clearly defined microstructure, unique value orientations, and shared opinion. Since the group forms and is primarily realized in joint play, adults may influence its structure and value orientations through the organization and supervision of play. In turn,

the place a child occupies in the group and the group's opinion exert a very powerful influence on the formation of the child's personality. Behavioral stereotypes form in the group, and the child has the opportunity to compare his actions and qualities with those of his peers. The child develops his ability of self-appraisal and new elements of self-awareness. He develops an understanding of his identity, the qualities that he possesses, how those around him relate to him, and the reasons underlying their attitudes.

The so-called productive types of activity, the simplest types of labor and study, art activity, etc., form in close relationship with the child's play. The figurative character of these pre-school activities, the high degree of their emotionality, and the creative elements introduced by the child into his depiction of the world make them akin to play. Development of this type of activity takes the direction of mastering the creation and embodiment of a design that is directed toward obtaining a real product which will be positively evaluated by adults and peers. Productive activities make higher demands than play on the child's perception and promote the development of the latter. Like play, they influence development of the signal function in the child's consciousness, his figurative thought and imagination, and improve the volitional regulation of actions which under these conditions are determined by an image of the desired product.

4. Age-related Features of the Mental Development of Children in Determining the Tasks of Education

All the foregoing determines Soviet psychology's approach to the problem of the age-related features of the child's mental development and their consideration in the process of upbringing and education.

Age-related psychological characteristics are concretely historical and are determined by the child's position in society and by the upbringing and education system. Two basic consequences

result from this. First, age-related features must be viewed in connection with concrete conditions of child development. They can only be elicited with regard to children who develop under relatively similar conditions (i.e., within the framework of a certain culture, at a certain point of the historical development of society). Second, we should understand age-related features to mean not so much the mental traits that a child possesses at a given stage of development as the traits that can and should be developed in him.

Recognition of the leading role of upbringing and education in mental development does not alter the fact that at every age level upbringing must take into account the attained level of development, and especially the qualitative uniqueness, of mental properties and abilities that is characteristic for that stage and that is determined by the whole complex of the conditions of child development in modern society. It is necessary to consider this point but not to lower one's goals because of it; starting at this point, one leads the child further in his development.

The key to understanding the basic tasks of upbringing at the early age levels is provided by the points we have examined regarding the general conditions created by society for child development and the forms of social contact and activity corresponding to these conditions.

The distinguishing feature of the organization of the life of the child from birth until entrance to school is the lack of serious obligations to society and the associated absence of strict regulation of the child's activity by adults. Activity itself, in its typical forms, is nonspecific in nature. It is not broken down in accordance with the types of labor known to man or within areas of knowledge, although it is through activity that the abilities are shaped which a child needs later to make the transition to the activity of school work and, subsequently, to labor activity in school. This applies not only to social contact with adults and to activity involving objects and play, but also to drawing, design, and other types of productive activity that appear to be directly related to certain types of adult activity,

since the "child" variants are very remote from complex "adult" forms. All types of children's activity contain a very broad spectrum of problems of "general human" significance that relate, in principle, to any area of life and human labor. These are the tasks of social contact (in particular, verbal contact) and of establishing interaction with other people, the use of household items and the simplest tools, the planning of actions and implementation of ideas, the subordination of behavior to a model or rule, and the resolution of difficult situations that arise in joint activity. A distinguishing feature of child-type activities is the continuous penetration of them by conditions that are new to the child. New conditions do not require a simple reproduction of experience but a creative approach, not in the sense, of course, of the creation of socially valuable products but in a subjective sense.

The dominance of such types of activity in early and preschool childhood suggests that what is decisive at this age is the formation of the more general mental properties and abilities that are needed by every member of human society. Specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities, although they be learned by [preschool-age] children, are not a particular attainment of this age group and do not correspond with the basic significance of the place that has been assigned to the preschool period in the course of social development.

This means that the preschool curriculum must, above all, bear in mind general developmental goals and that the logic underlying the construction of this curriculum must proceed not from the logic of compartmentalized, academic knowledge [in the school subject disciplines] or from the conventional didactic principles [underlying the graded school curriculum] but from the formation of the most generally significant mental properties and abilities.

In infancy and early childhood, the tasks of upbringing examined from this point of view are relatively uniform. They reduce to the formation of those qualities that are the most **general** prerequisites to further development of all the specifically human mental properties and abilities (the need for social contact,

direct address [priamokhozhdenie], speech, the use of objects, basic forms of perception and thought, the separation of the self from others). These attributes will not determine the personal characteristics of the future individual; they are almost neutrally related to individual lines of development. All of them are subject to further reworking; the young child does not yet possess a structured inner world.

In preschool childhood, articulation of the tasks of upbringing becomes substantially more complicated. This is the period of the "actual formation of the personality" (A. N. Leont'ev), of permanent [personality trait] acquisitions. The mental properties and abilities form that belong to the structure of the child's personality, determining, to a greater or lesser degree, the entire path of further development. What is more, preschool childhood leads directly into school. It is a period of preparation, and the tasks of preschooling must be examined from the standpoint of the demands that school makes on the child.

Thus, determination of the tasks of preschool upbringing requires that its long-range significance be compared with its significance in preparing the child for the immediate future.

When we speak of the enduring significance of preschool age in forming the human personality, we must, first and foremost, emphasize that, owing to the forming of hierarchically arranged motivations, the basic type of personality orientation and the relative weight of various motivations within their hierarchical structure is determined. The interests of the communist education of the younger generation dictate the necessity of imbuing children with a social orientation from the very beginning, in contrast to a narrowly personal, selfish orientation. Of course, the hierarchy of motivations forming in preschool childhood should not be considered final and unchangeable. If the motivational hierarchy forms adversely, subsequently, reeducation of the individual will be necessary, rather than normal, positive development.

In addition to the formation of the individual's personality orientation in preschool childhood, certain types of social contact take shape, relations with other people form, and stereo-

types of social behavior develop. In accordance with the goals of communist upbringing, we must make maximum use of the Potential for developing in each child "communal qualities" (A. P. Usova) — forms of social contact and behavior within a collective that ensure cooperation and mutual help, creating the foundations of collectivism.

All this determines the direction of preschool upbringing as education focused on the task of laying the foundations of morality, instilling children with the morals that conform to the goals of our society and with the behavioral norms derived from them.

The contribution made by the preschool period to the mental development of the child consists of rapid development of the figurative forms of cognitive activity — perception, figurative thought, and imagination.

The conditions that coalesce for such development in this age period are unique because logical thought becomes predominant in emphasis during the school years. In adult perception, figurative thought and imagination are the basis for the mind's regulation of many types of labor, and they are linked closely to creativity in the realm of art and science.

L. S. Vygotsky pointed out the phenomenon of age-related sensibility — the particular sensitivity of children, at every Stage Of development, to the types of instruction that are designed to form particular mental processes and qualities. Numerous experiments in recent decades have shown that preschoolers are particularly sensitive to those educational influences which are addressed to figurative forms of cognition and lead to the development of these forms.

But all the mental properties and abilities noted — the hierarchical subordination of motivations, the arbitrary nature of behavior, and the figurative forms of cognition — are formed in types of activity germane to childhood (play, drawing, building and making things, etc.) and are the product of their development. Accordingly, the basic way to exert a pedagogical influence on the preschooler is the comprehensive stimulation and enrichment of these types of activity and the application of optimal methods to organize and direct them. This mode is

widely used by Soviet preschool pedagogy.

Simultaneously, one of the important attainments of preschool education in our country, and in other countries of the socialist community, is the introduction of the systematic instruction of children in learning activities, although these differ substantially from school lessons. First, their content is made up significantly of instruction in object-oriented, play-related, and productive activities. Second, the methods used in those activities that introduce preschool pupils to phenomena in the world of nature and in social life, the development of speech, etc., are based on the use of elements of play and productive assignments. And, third, learning activities are combined closely with independent activities; the latter are enriched with the necessary knowledge and ability required to play games, draw, make things, etc.

Can preschool education be coordinated with the task of preparing children for the school period of development that, from many points of view, is a kind of antipode to preschool education? The school changes the child's place in the System Of Social relationships and demands that he assume a responsible attitude toward schoolwork as a serious social duty; a high level of the conscious regulation of behavior is demanded, in cognitive activity and the development of logical thought. If we understand preparation for school to mean the timely inculcation of preschoolers with all the qualities that pupils must possess, then a shift "downward" into the preschool of particular school-related forms of education is required because the living conditions and activities that are characteristic of the preschool do not require such qualities and, consequently, in themselves cannot lead to their formation. Given such an approach, the task of preparing children for school inevitably clashes with the tasks of preschool education.

However, another approach is possible. The preschool experience should prepare children psychologically for school, creating prerequisites for the subsequent development of those new qualities that emerge in the process of education itself under the new conditions.

Play is a free type of activity; participation is determined only by the child's desire. However, formation of the mechanisms underlying volitional behavior control and the subordination of behavior to a system of rules create prerequisites for the subsequent inclusion of the child in obligatory, socially significant activity. Figurative thought, which forms in play and in productive types of activity, not only possesses independent value but also leads the child to the threshold of logic, to the assimilation of generalized and systematized knowledge. Research in recent years has demonstrated the illegitimacy of the view that the assimilation of logical forms of thought requires overcoming its figurative forms. In actuality, within the framework of figurative thought, the child masters the ability to reason consistently and begins to depict very general relationships and regularities in phenomena. The assimilation of concepts and intellectual actions of a logical type does not occur in a "struggle" with figurative thought but rather on the basis of its highest, generalized forms.

The orientation of preschool education toward formation of the most generally significant mental properties and abilities of the child and the maximum use of types of activities which are specific to the preschooler do not preclude the introduction of preschoolers to certain types of special teaching that enable children to master organized systems of knowledge and skills. An initial teaching of reading and writing and instruction in elementary mathematics have become traditional sections of the preschool curriculum, and the information conveyed to the children about animate and inanimate nature and social life is becoming increasingly scientific and systematic. However, the principal task remains, that of securing the general developmental effect of teaching and forming on that basis those mental properties and abilities that correspond to the specific features of preschool childhood.