

Imagination in Child-
Development.

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Imagination in Child Development

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Imagination in Child Development.

To him whose part in life it is, to train the intellect of the child, must come the feeling of vast responsibility at holding in his hand that most delicate of all mechanisms, and knowing that largely on him, depends its destiny. If he takes up his work carelessly, without realizing the importance of his mission, it may result in the downfall of nations; but if he regards it as a sacred charge, to which he must devote his best thought and action, he may succeed in moulding the little mind into the form it was intended to be.

Until of late years, child study has been either ignored altogether or at best, studied in an aimless, wholly impracticable way. Some one has said "It is strange that the child should be the last of all

God's creatures, to be studied scientifically." Now however, parents and teachers are beginning to understand the necessity of a clear conception of the child mind, - which knowledge is largely obtained by a thorough acquaintance with him as an individual, during the time when his mind is so rapidly unfolding.

The early intellectual stages in child development are dominated by the senses, but gradually are added the more complicated mental processes with which the investigator has to deal. Important among these is imagination, - "the ideal faculty which perceives ideals and helps us to realize them."

During the period in the child's life, when his imaginative power is at its height, his steps should be carefully guided that this faculty may indeed prove a God-given one.

Imagination may be classified as reproductive and constructive. The former is defined as a mental

picture of something seen and heard. For instance, the young child listens to daily conversations, always trying, either consciously or unconsciously to understand, and he forms pictures which connect with certain words he hears.

Constructive imagination is known as a mental picture of things not experienced.

Closely allied with these two terms are passive imagination, that which appreciates what another constructs and active imagination which is in itself constructive. After all, it is not correct to say that we have two kinds of imagination, for they are but different aspects of the same thing. When the mind looks on the work, it must form its own picture, in order to understand. Constructive imagination must depend for its working material, upon ^{the products of} reproductive imagination, and thus the necessity for the careful study of the child. We would not hire a workman

without giving him necessary materials for his work, neither should we expect the child to form out of nothing, his images.

The simplest forms of imagination are found in construction as exemplified in children's plays. Here we find a constant exercise of the faculty. The child will work for hours, building playhouses or mud dams, and his "make-believe" plays portray art as truly as do the models of clay which he makes under instruction. Surely the ideas or images which the child develops in his play, are a prediction for his future, and thus the expression which may at first have no particular purpose, may later be the result of the soul's highest ideal. The block house which he builds today, may be the forerunner of some beautiful piece of architecture which he will produce tomorrow.

As the child grows toward man-

hood, he will constantly find deeper meanings in nature, and as his imagination reaches toward perfection, he will strive for the expression of universal ideas. There can be no more richly rewarded theme for study than the progress of the mind from the purely mechanical, on up through the realms of fancy into the highest type of creative imagination.

Imagination has sometimes been regarded as dealing with dreams instead of realities, and unfitting the child for practical life. In the days of our grandfathers the imaginative child was looked upon as an oddity, and when a child showed a tendency toward that quality, means were promptly taken to weed it out of his nature. All the harm that has been done by such attempts can never be estimated, but we can now look with pride upon a better day

when imagination is looked upon as a gift from heaven - one that is intended for practical use instead of an unprofitable dream in the mind of the sluggard or freak.

Clark in his "Self Culture", speaks of imagination as "the vision of the perfect in the midst of imperfection." Imagination then, gives a knowledge of the beautiful, and no work can be complete ~~without it~~. unless there is held before the mind, all through the process, an image of its perfected state. But the working toward the beautiful, does not include merely the painting of pictures or the writing of poetry. Anything which is useful is beautiful, and so the child should be taught that a simple little task well done represents beauty and art in its best sense.

It must not be thought that imagination is a thing distinct and separate from the other mental

processes. On the contrary, it is closely allied to them, and they are dependant upon it to supply the details in the mental pictures they form. What would perception and apperception be without it, and how much would be left of memory, were imagination eliminated?

The one great force in invention and discovery, is imagination, and while these two factors of civilization lie somewhat beyond the pale of child development, yet the man is only the child grown older, and the seed must be planted in infancy if it is to grow to full maturity. Clarke says again: "The imagination is the prophetic soul which dreams of things to come, and is always making a new heaven and a new earth".

In morals, imagination again shows itself to be a prominent force. If you would teach a child to be sympathetic, you must

appeal to his imagination, else how can he learn to put himself in the place of another? Selfishness too is often the direct result of lack of, or rather an unawakened imagination. The selfish one cannot practise the Golden Rule until he can form an image of himself as "done by."

The imagination takes different forms with different children, and this fact, the teacher or parent should be acquainted with, before he begins his work of instruction. Have the children tell you of a fictitious excursion, which they took together, or read ^{to} them a story and have them repeat it, and notice the difference in the accounts.

One will give you a mere catalogue of events, another will follow details of a certain order, while another will perhaps go so far as to give a touch of ornamentation to his story.

The imaginative faculty also varies with different ages. At each successive stage, the child takes up new themes and often his manner of dealing with them, changes also. Perhaps he begins to appreciate the aesthetic, or it may be that utility appeals to him. Yet any rate, as he advances, added delicacy manifests itself, along with an increase of individuality.

There are certain dangers however, to which the imagination of the child is liable. We have all heard the exaggerated stories which children are prone to tell, and we have doubtless seen those same children furnished by the horrified parent who fears lest his child will grow up to be an habitual prevaricator. But these highly colored tales do not result from wrong inclination on the part of the child. He is, to begin with, entirely innocent of any wrong doing. On the contrary, the

act is perhaps due to his over-exuberant spirits which overflow in the wrong direction. He is eager to express what he feels, but his lack of experience, combined with the desire, results in the so-called "false hood." The reason for this riot in his mind is, that his power to distinguish truth and false hood, does not come into being until after he begins to form images. He is not then capable of knowing the difference between actual images and those which arise in his own mind.

Usually the child naturally outgrows this period naturally, but if guidance is needed, it should be given gently, and with the spirit of love so that the imagination will not be retarded but only led in safe paths.

Closely allied to this distorted form, perhaps growing out of it, is the excessive imagination which occurs in childhood, early youth

or even later in life. The victim is inclined to live too much in a world of dreams and romance, and is thus unfitted for practical life. His surrounding influences, particularly his reading matter, should be such as will broaden and strengthen his imagination, and turn his will into the right channel.

Another disease of the imagination is lethargy, and this is perhaps the worst affectation of all, since it is most difficult with which to deal. Work, without that essential element to enliven it, becomes drudgery, and life, prosaic. The unimaginative child is the dull, plodding pupil in whom it is difficult to arouse interest, and who learns chiefly by rote.

The best cure for both extremes, is to look for beauty, and the beauty to be seen, is the beauty of usefulness. Then, after a true appreciation of beauty, will come

a desire to produce the beautiful, the motive to see and to do the best in everything.

But as the richest of soil requires cultivation, and care, so the intellect of the child demands the best of culture to broaden and strengthen it. "Into its upbuilding flow every current of his mental life, and upon its genius, every ideal and every destiny depends."

If then we would have the child do beautiful things, his imagination must be educated by the sight of beauty, both in the world of nature, and in the work of men's hands. Beautiful grounds, clean and artistic rooms, walls hung with the best pictures, all aid in the formation of right images. These elements are not accessible to the child of wealth alone, for the idea can be carried out, with the simplest of materials.

Included with these things, and

most important, is the beauty of character which his model must possess, for, to repeat once more the old thought, - "Every human action well done, is beautiful"

An excellent field for the use of imagination, is found in natural objects and ~~scenery~~ ^{scenery} and among other ways for their presentation to the child's mind, is through lessons in geography.

For instance, instead of telling him in a didactic way dry facts, paint a word picture for him, in bright colors, being careful however, not to include too many details. If his imagination is to grow, it must have soil for development, and he must be given a chance to help in the construction of the picture.

Scenes and incidents from life, form also some of the best of material in the formation of images in the child's mind. The deeds

of great men serve to inspire him and wake an answering echo in his own nature, bringing to his mind, pictures where he too has a part on the stage. One

the writer says that it is not so much existing things as the things which are imagined to exist, which affect the child's mind. If this is true the literature is presented to the child if of a wholesome character, is an important aid in his image formation.

The study of the imagination as a factor in the development of the child, has been sadly neglected in schools in the past, but teachers are now beginning to realize the prime necessity of storing the young mind with beautiful ideals so that it may later be able to guide itself in the same way.

Since the unexperienced little mind, not knowing the ideal

from the real, acts according to its conception, how important it is to give the right training to that faculty which can form reality out of mind pictures. And there can be no more divine mission on earth than the leading of the child mind to the God who is "revealed by the universe which shows him in his beauty, manifested in the sun and storms and flowers."

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