

"The Imitative Phase of Intellectual  
Development."

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## Outline.

I Subject: "The Imitative Phase of Intellectual Development."

II Intro: Imitation a force in developing the human mind.

III Object: To show the importance of imitation from a psychological point of view.

IV Discussion:

1. Two kinds of imitation.
2. The degree of mental development at the time imitation begins.
3. Examples of child imitation.
4. Imitation serves as a guide.
5. Imitation in learning a language.
6. Imitation in play.
7. Imitation a mere schoolmaster.
8. Imitation not important only during childhood but all through life.

Reference

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Psychologic Foundations of Education. Harris
2. "Child Development".  
The Groundwork of Psychology. Stout.
3. "Imitation"  
The Psychology of Child Development. King.
4. "The Psychological Aspect of Education."  
The Philosophy of Education. Horne.
5. "The Child's Capital: Imitation"  
A Broad Elementary Education. Gordy
6. "Imitation and Invention".  
Introduction to Psychology. Calkins.

Of the many forces which tend to bring about the development of the human mind, imitation is perhaps one of the strongest. The word "imitation" carries with it a variety of meanings. And yet, strange as it may seem, there is always a common impression or idea conveyed when it is used. Recent psychological investigation has brought out many important facts concerning this commonly used expression "imitation." A deeper, broader meaning has been applied, a knowledge of which would prove valuable to any one who has to do with the training of an undeveloped mind.

In order to enter into a discussion of imitation from a psychological point of view it is necessary to make a clear distinction between two kinds of imitation.

First we have a form of imitation the intended meaning of which would probably be more clearly expressed if called mimicry parrot-like copying or mechanical repetition, done merely for the sake of doing. It is this kind of imitation with which so many feel a sense of disgust when it is observed. It is this imitation which gives a teacher a disappointed feeling when indulged in by one or more of her pupils. It has no part what ever worthy of mention in developing the intellectuality of a child.

But now we come to the other kind of imitation, that which must be admired by all who truly understand its worth. It is to it that we referred in the statement contained in the first few lines of this thesis and it is to it that from now on we turn our entire attention.

Nearly all authors agree that the child begins to imitate between the ages of eight and twelve months. When the child has reached this age its mind has collected quite a store of impressions.

It has in a more or less accidental way learned to grasp various objects and perhaps to know something of their physical properties. It has reached that stage when various things will

interest him and hold his attention. The child's self-activity has in a practically unguided way brought about a certain degree of development. But now imitation enters and seems to act as a guide to this self-activity and in so doing makes it possible for intellectual development to be brought about much more rapidly.

A child sees some one use a hammer to drive a nail; if he is allowed to get a hold of the hammer or something similar he will perhaps go through the same motions. There is no thought in the child's mind of imitation, but he has witnessed something new and to imitate is his method of explaining to himself his new experience.

A child of thirteen months upon seeing several older children pulling grass and putting it into a pail, is attracted; he has never before witnessed such a proceeding, a new impression is gained and there comes a desire to react. He wants to explain this new experience, so he stoops to pull a handful of grass as he sees the others doing.

This is practically an old accomplishment, for many times before he has stooped and picked up one object or another. But now to carry it to the bucket and drop it in is all new. He holds the few blades of grass tightly clutched in his hand and hesitates to see again what to do next. Just then one of the children drops a handful of grass

in the bucket. Now he thinks he knows how and toddles over to the spot, stands erect, stretches out his arm and drops the grass. The bucket is missed and the grass falls to the ground. The child tries again with but little better success. But by the changed expression on his face it is seen that his interest has been aroused and new ideas of his own are being formed. The third time and he is successful, the handful of grass is pulled, he goes directly to the bucket, stoops over so his hand is close too and directly over the bucket, and then lets the grass drop.

In either illustration just given we can clearly see how imitation has served as a

guide and in so doing has made possible for the child to learn that which would otherwise have taken him much longer.

A child not only imitates the actions of others but to a large extent imitates his own actions. Although there are many benefits to be derived from this still it should not pass unobserved that self imitation often gives rise to undesirable conditions which do not bring about true advancement intellectually.

The greatest gain in mental development which a child gets from imitating is in learning to talk.

This, as every one knows, comes purely from imitating. If the child is normal he will speak with the same accent to

the words and with the same grammatical or ungrammatical construction of sentences as he is accustomed to hearing. But these are of the smallest value in comparison with the other knowledge which a child's imitating the language of others gives rise to. It is at this stage in life that the child's mind is most active. As before stated, the child does not at all imitate for the sake of imitating but because he wants to know. ~~and~~ This accounts for the numerous questions which are asked, and which too often are left unanswered by the parents who do not stop to think that it is the most natural and therefore the best way that a child has of storing his

his little brain with knowledge.

In a child's play we have revealed to us an infinite number of imitated actions and expressions of grown people. Sometimes these imitations are so vague that one scarcely thinks of them as such. But right here is where the child is acquiring true mental development. He has gotten the suggestion from others and in his effort to imitate, which he does simply to amuse himself, he works in his own childish ideas, and in so doing develops a great amount of originality. Then too, when a child imitates he does not imitate everything but rather selects that which interests or especially attracts his attention,

In this way he develops individual characteristics which tend to remain with him throughout life.

Professor Herman O. Horne says; "Imitation is a mere schoolmaster to bring us to originality. The child, through imitating others, becomes aware of his own capacity for a wide variety of acts that he otherwise would have believed beyond his powers; he finds that he is able to do what others do. In this way, his own strength and skill and versatility are not only cultivated, but are revealed to himself."

While the influence which imitation has as a phase in intellectual development

is undoubtedly strongest during childhood still it is very evident that all through life it plays an important part. The truest, noblest and strongest characters which can be found anywhere are those who have devoted their lives to imitating Christ. Thus is proven the power which imitation has in developing the moral and religious status of an individual's life.