soviet psychology

SPRING 1967/VOL. V, NO. 3

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(1896—1934)

THIS ISSUE OF SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY
IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
LEV SEMYONOVICH VYGOTSKY
WHO WOULD HAVE REACHED HIS
SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY IN 1966.

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Voprosy psikhologii, 1966, 12(6), 62-76

PLAY AND ITS ROLE IN THE MENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD*

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In speaking of play and its role in the preschooler's development, we are concerned with two fundamental questions: first, how play itself arises in development — its origin and genesis; second, the role of this developmental activity, which we call play, as a form of development in the child of preschool age. Is play the leading form of activity for a child of this age, or is it simply the predominant form?

It seems to me that from the point of view of development, play is not the predominant form of activity, but is, in a certain sense, the leading source of development in preschool years.

Let us now consider the problem of play itself. We know that the definition of play on the basis of the pleasure it gives the child is not correct for two reasons — first, because we deal with a number of activities which give the child much keener experiences of pleasure than play.

For example, the pleasure principle applies equally well to the sucking process, in that the child derives functional pleasure from sucking a pacifier even when he is not being satiated.

On the other hand, we know of games in which the activity process itself does not afford pleasure — games which predominate at the end of preschool and the beginning of school age and which only give pleasure if the child finds the result interesting; these are, for example, sporting games (not only athletic sports, but also games with an outcome, games with results). They are very often accompanied by a keen sense of displeasure when the outcome is unfavorable to the child.

Thus, defining play on the basis of pleasure can certainly not be regarded as correct.

Nonetheless it seems to me that to refuse to approach the problem of play from the standpoint of fulfillment of the child's needs, his incentives to act, and his affective aspirations would result in a terrible intellectualization of play. The trouble with a number of theories

*From a stenographic record of a lecture given in 1933 at the Hertzen Pedagogical Institute, Leningrad. [Editor's note: Russian uses a single word, igra, where English uses either play or game (cf. German Spiel, French jeu, Spanish juego, et al.). The resulting potential ambiguity of the original Russian should be borne in mind when encountering the words play and game in this translation.]

of play lies in their tendency to intellectualize the problem.

I am inclined to give an even more general meaning to the problem; and I think that the mistake of a large number of accepted theories is their disregard for the child's needs — taken in the broadest sense, from inclinations to interests, as needs of an intellectual nature — or, more briefly, the disregard of everything that can come under the category of incentives and motives for action. We often describe a child's development as the development of his intellectual functions, i.e., every child stands before us as a theoretical being who, according to the higher or lower level of his intellectual development, moves from one age stage to another.

Without a consideration of the child's needs, inclinations, incentives, and motives to act — as research has demonstrated — there will never be any advance from one stage to the next. It seems to me that an analysis of play should start with an examination of these particular aspects.

It seems that every advance from one age stage to another is connected with an abrupt change in motives and incentives to act.

What is of the greatest interest to the infant has almost ceased to interest the toddler. This maturing of new needs and new motives for action is, of course, the dominant factor, especially as it is impossible to ignore the fact that a child satisfies certain needs and incentives in play, and without understanding the special character of these incentives we cannot imagine the uniqueness of that type of activity which we call play.

At preschool age special needs and incentives arise which are highly important to the whole of the child's development and which are spontaneously expressed in play. In essence, there arise in a child of this age large numbers of unrealizable tendencies and immediately unrealizable desires. A very young child tends to gratify his desires immediately. Any delay in fulfilling them is hard for him and is acceptable only within certain narrow limits; no one has met a child under three who wanted to do something a few days hence. Ordinarily, the interval between the motive and its realization is extremely short. I think that if there were no development in preschool years of needs that cannot be realized immediately, there would be no play. Experiments show that the development of play is arrested both in intellectually underdeveloped children and in those with an immature affective sphere.

From the viewpoint of the affective sphere, it seems to me that play is invented at the point when unrealizable tendencies appear in development. This is the way a very young child behaves: he wants a thing and must have it at once. If he cannot have it, either he throws a temper tantrum, lies on the floor and kicks his legs, or he is refused, pacified, and does not get it. His unsatisfied desires have their own particular modes of substitution, rejection, etc. Toward the beginning of preschool age, unsatisfied desires and tendencies that cannot be realized immediately make their appearance, while the tendency to immediate fulfillment of desires, characteristic of the preceding stage, is retained. For example, the child wants to be in his mother's place, or wants to be a rider on a horse. This desire cannot be fulfilled right now. What does the very young child do if he sees a passing cab and wants to ride in it whatever may happen? If he is a spoiled and capricious child, he will demand that his mother put him in the cab at any cost or he may throw himself on the ground right there in the street, etc. If he is an obedient child, used to renouncing his desires, he will go away, or his mother will offer him some candy, or simply distract him with some stronger affect and he will renounce his immediate desire.

In contrast to this, a child over three will show his own particular conflicting tendencies; on the one hand, a large number of long-term needs and desires will appear, which cannot be fulfilled at once but which, nevertheless, are not passed over like whims; on the other hand, the tendency toward immediate realization of desires is almost completely retained.

Henceforth play occurs such that the explanation of why a child plays must always be interpreted as the imaginary, illusory realization of

unrealizable desires. Imagination is a new formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child, is totally absent in animals, and represents a specifically human form of conscious activity. Like all functions of consciousness, it originally arises from action. The old adage that child's play is imagination in action can be reversed: we can say that imagination in adolescents and schoolchildren is play without action.

It is difficult to imagine that an incentive compelling a child to play is really just the same kind of affective incentive as sucking a pacifier is for an infant.

It is hard to accept that pleasure derived from preschool play is conditioned by the same affective mechanism as simple sucking of a pacifier. This simply does not fit our notions of preschool development.

All of this is not to say that play occurs as the result of each and every unsatisfied desire: the child wanted to ride in a cab, the wish was not immediately gratified, so the child went into his room and began to play cabs. It never happens in just this way. Here we are concerned with the fact that the child not only has individual affective reactions to separate phenomena, but generalized, unpredesignated, affective tendencies. Let us take the example of a microcephalic child suffering from an acute inferiority complex; he is unable to participate in children's groups, he has been so teased that he smashes every mirror and pane of glass showing his reflection. But when he was very young it had been very different; then, every time he was teased there was a separate affective reaction for each separate occasion which had not yet become generalized. At preschool age the child generalizes his affective relation to the phenomenon regardless of the actual concrete situation because the affective relation is connected with the meaning of the phenomenon in that it continually reveals his inferiority complex.

Play is essentially wish fulfillment, not, however, isolated wishes but generalized affects. A child at this age is conscious of his relationships with adults, he reacts to them affectively, but in contrast to early childhood he now generalizes these affective reactions (he respects adult authority in general, etc.).

The presence of such generalized affects in play does not mean that the child himself understands the motives which give rise to the game or that he does it consciously. He plays without realizing the motives of the play activity. In this, play differs substantially from work and other forms of activity. On the whole, it can be said that motives, actions, and incentives belong to a more abstract sphere and only become accessible to consciousness at the transitional age. Only an adolescent can clearly account to himself the reason for which he does this or that.

We will leave the problem of the affective aspect for the moment — considering it as given — and will now examine the development of play activity itself.

I think that in finding criteria for distinguishing a child's play activity from his other general forms of activity it must be accepted that in play a child creates an imaginary situation. This is possible on the basis of the separation of the fields of vision and meaning which appears in the preschool period.

This is not a new idea, in the sense that imaginary situations in play have always been recognized, but they were always regarded as one of the groups of play activities. Thus the imaginary situation was always classified as a secondary symptom. In the view of older writers, the imaginary situation was not the criterial attribute of play in general, but only an attribute of a given group of play activities.

I find three main flaws in this argument. First, there is the danger of an intellectualistic approach to play. If play is to be understood as symbolic, there is the danger that it might turn into a kind of activity akin to algebra in action; it would be transformed into a system of signs generalizing actual reality. Here we find nothing specific to play, and look upon the child as an unsuccessful algebraist who cannot yet write the symbols on paper, but depicts them in action. It is essential to show the connection with incentives in play, since play itself, in my view, is never symbolic action in the proper sense of the term.

Second, I feel that this idea presents play as a cognitive process. It stresses the importance of the cognitive process while neglecting not only the affective situation but also the circumstances of the child's activity.

Third, it is vital to discover exactly what this activity does for development, i.e., how the imaginary situation can assist in the child's development.

Let us begin with the second question, as I have already briefly touched on the problem of the connection with affective incentives. We observed that in the affective incentives leading to play there are the beginnings not of symbols but of the necessity for an imaginary situation; for if play is really developed from unsatisfied desires, if ultimately it is the realization in play form of tendencies that cannot be realized at the moment, then elements of imaginary situations will involuntarily be included in the affective nature of play itself.

Let us take the second instance first — the child's activity in play. What does a child's behavior in an imaginary situation mean? We know that there is a form of play, distinguished long ago and relating to the late preschool period, and considered to develop mainly at school age: namely, the development of games with rules. A number of investigators, although not at all belonging to the camp of dialectical materialists, have approached this area along the lines recommended by Marx when he said that "the anatomy of man is the key to the anatomy of the ape." They have begun their examination of early play in the light of later rule-based play and have concluded from this that play involving an imaginary situation is, in fact, rule-based play. It seems to me that one can go even further and propose that there is no such thing as play without rules and the child's particular attitude toward them.

Let us expand on this idea. Take any form of play with an imaginary situation. The imaginary situation already contains rules of behavior, although this is not a game with formulated rules laid down in advance. The child imagines herself to be the mother and the doll the child, so she must obey the rules of maternal behavior. This was very well demonstrated by a researcher in an ingenious experiment based on Sully's famous observations. The latter described play as remarkable in that children could make the play situation and reality coincide. One day two sisters, aged five and seven, said to each other: "Let's play sisters." Here Sully was describing a case where two sisters were playing at being sisters, i.e., playing at reality. The above-mentioned experiment based its method on children's play, suggested by the experimenter, which dealt with real relationships. In certain cases I have found it very easy to call forth such play in children. It is very easy, for example, to make a child play with its mother at being a child while the mother is the mother, i.e., at what is, in fact, true. The vital difference in play, as Sully describes it, is that the child in playing tries to be a sister. In life the child behaves without thinking that she is her sister's sister. She never behaves with respect to the other just because she is her sister — except perhaps in those cases when her mother says, "Give in to her." In the game of sisters playing at "sisters," however, they are both concerned with displaying their sisterhood; the fact that two sisters decided to play sisters makes them both acquire rules of behavior. (I must always be a sister in relation to the other sister in the whole play situation.) Only actions which fit these rules are acceptable to the play situation.

In the game a situation is chosen which stresses the fact that these girls are sisters: they are dressed alike, they walk about holding hands — in short, they enact whatever emphasizes their relationship as sisters vis-à-vis adults and strangers. The elder, holding the younger by the hand, keeps telling her about other people: "That is theirs, not ours." This means: "My sister and I act the same, we are treated the same, but others are treated differently." Here the emphasis is on the sameness of everything which is concentrated in the child's concept of a sister, and this means that my sister stands in a different relationship to me than other people. What passes unnoticed by the child in real life becomes a rule of behavior in play.

If play, then, were structured in such a way that there were no imaginary situation, what would remain? The rules would remain. The child would begin to behave in this situation as the situation dictates.

Let us leave this remarkable experiment for a moment and turn to play in general. I think that wherever there is an imaginary situation in play there are rules. Not rules which are formulated in advance and which change during the course of the game, but rules stemming from the imaginary situation. Therefore to imagine that a child can behave in an imaginary situation without rules, i.e., as he behaves in a real situation, is simply impossible. If the child is playing the role of a mother, then she has rules of maternal behavior. The role the child fulfills, and her relationship to the object if the object has changed its meaning, will always stem from the rules, i.e., the imaginary situation will always contain rules. In play the child is free. But this is an illusory freedom.

While at first the investigator's task was to disclose the hidden rules in all play with an imaginary situation, we have received proof comparatively recently that the so-called pure games with rules (played by schoolchildren and late preschoolers) are essentially games with imaginary situations; for just as the imaginary situation has to contain rules of behavior, so every game with rules contains an imaginary situation. For example, what does it mean to play chess? To create an imaginary situation. Why? Because the knight, the king, the queen, and so forth, can only move in specified ways; because covering and taking pieces are purely chess concepts; and so on. Although it does not directly substitute for real-life relationships, nevertheless we do have a kind of imaginary situation here. Take the simplest children's game with rules. It immediately turns into an imaginary situation in the sense that as soon as the game is regulated by certain rules, a number of actual possibilities for action are ruled out.

Just as we were able to show at the beginning that every imaginary situation contains rules in a concealed form, we have also succeeded in demonstrating the reverse — that every game with rules contains an imaginary situation in a concealed form. The development from an overt imaginary situation and covert rules to games with overt rules and a covert imaginary situation outlines the evolution of children's play from one pole to the other.

All games with imaginary situations are simultaneously games with rules and vice versa. I think this thesis is clear.

However there is one misunderstanding which may arise and which must be cleared up from the start. A child learns to behave according to certain rules from the first few months of life. For a very young child such rules, for example, that he has to sit quietly at the table, not touch other people's things, obey his mother, are rules which make up his life. What is specific to rules followed in games or play? It seems to me that several new publications can be of great aid in solving this problem. In particular, a new work of Piaget has been extremely helpful to me. This work is concerned with the development in the child of moral rules. One part is specially devoted to the study of rules of a game, where, I think, Piaget resolves these difficulties very convincingly.

Piaget distinguishes what he calls two moralities in the child — two distinct sources for the development of rules of behavior.

This emerges particularly sharply in games. As Piaget shows, some rules come to the child from the one-sided influence upon him of an adult. Not to touch other people's things is a rule taught by the mother, or to sit quietly at the table is an external law for the child advanced by adults. This is one of the child's moralities. Other rules arise, according to Piaget, from mutual collaboration between adult and child, or between children themselves. These are rules which the child himself participates in establishing.

The rules of games, of course, differ radically from rules of not touching and of sitting quietly. In the first place they are made by the child himself; they are his own rules, as Piaget says, rules of self-restraint and self-determination. The child tells himself: I must behave in such and such a way in this game. This is quite dif-

ferent from the child saying that one thing is allowed and another thing is not. Piaget has pointed out a very interesting phenomenon in moral development — something which he calls moral realism. He indicates that the first line of development of external rules (what is and is not allowed) produces moral realism, i.e., a confusion in the child between moral rules and physical rules. The child confuses the fact that it is impossible to light a match a second time and the rule that it is forbidden to light matches at all, or to touch a glass because it might break: all "don'ts" are the same to a very young child, but he has an entirely different attitude to rules which he makes up himself. (1)

Let us turn now to the role of play and its influence on a child's development. I think it is enormous.

I will try to outline two basic ideas. I think that play with an imaginary situation is something essentially new, impossible for a child under three; it is a novel form of behavior in which the child is liberated from situational constraints through his activity in an imaginary situation.

To a considerable extent the behavior of a very young child — and, to an absolute extent, that of an infant — is determined by the conditions in which the activity takes place, as the experiments of Lewin and others have shown. Lewin's experiment with the stone is a famous example. (2) This is a real illustration of the extent to which a very young child is bound in every action by situational constraints. Here we find a highly characteristic feature of a very young child's behavior in the sense of his attitude toward the circumstance at hand and the real conditions of his activity. It is hard to imagine a greater contrast to Lewin's experiments showing the situational constraints on activity than what we observe in play. In the latter, the child acts in a mental and not a visible situation. I think this conveys accurately what occurs in play. It is here that the child learns to act in a cognitive, rather than an externally visible realm, relying on internal tendencies and motives, and not on incentives supplied by external things. I recall a study by Lewin on the motivating nature of things for a very young child; in it Lewin concludes that things dictate to the child what he must do: a door demands to be opened and closed, a staircase to be run up, a bell to be rung. In short, things have an inherent motivating force in respect to a very young child's actions and determine the child's behavior to such an extent that Lewin arrived at the notion of creating a psychological topology, i.e., to express mathematically the trajectory of the child's movement in a field according to the distribution of things with varying attracting or repelling forces.

What is the root of situational constraints upon a child? The answer lies in a central fact of consciousness which is characteristic of early childhood: the union of affect and perception. At this age perception is generally not an independent feature but an initial feature of a motor-affective reaction; i.e., every perception is in this way a stimulus to activity. Since a situation is always communicated psychologically through perception, and perception is not separated from affective and motor activity, it is understandable that with his consciousness so structured the child cannot act otherwise than as constrained by the situation — or the field — in which he finds himself.

In play, things lose their motivating force. The child sees one thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees. Thus, a situation is reached in which the child begins to act independently of what he sees. Certain brain-damaged patients lose the ability to act independently of what they see; in considering such patients you can begin to appreciate that the freedom of action we adults and more mature children enjoy is not acquired in a flash but has to go through a long process of development.

Action in a situation which is not seen but only conceived on an imagined level and in an imaginary situation teaches the child to guide his behavior not only by immediate perception of objects or by the situation immediately affecting him, but also by the meaning (3) of this situation.

Experiments and day-to-day observation clearly show that it is impossible for very young children to separate the field of meaning from the visible

field. This is a very important fact. Even a child of two years, when asked to repeat the sentence "Tanya is standing up" when Tanya is sitting in front of him, will change it to "Tanya is sitting down." In certain diseases we are faced with exactly the same situation. Goldstein and Gelb described a number of patients who were unable to state something that was not true. Gelb has data on one patient who was left-handed and incapable of writing the sentence "I can write well with my right hand." When looking out of the window on a fine day he was unable to repeat: "The weather is nasty today," but would say: "The weather is fine today." Often we find in a patient with a speech disturbance that he is incapable of repeating senseless phrases, for example: "Snow is black"; while other phrases equally difficult in their grammatical and semantic construction can be repeated.

In a very young child there is such an intimate fusion between word and object, and between meaning and what is seen, that a divergence between the meaning field and the visible field is impossible.

This can be seen in the process of children's speech development. You say to the child: "clock." He starts looking and finds the clock; i.e., the first function of the word is to orient spatially, to isolate particular areas in space; the word originally signifies a particular location in a situation.

It is at preschool age that we first find a divergence between the fields of meaning and vision. It seems to me that we would do well to restate the notion of the investigator who said that in play activity thought is separated from objects, and action arises from ideas rather than from things.

Thought is separated from objects because a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse. Action according to rules begins to be determined by ideas and not by objects themselves. This is such a reversal of the child's relationship to the real, immediate, concrete situation that it is hard to evaluate its full significance. The child does not do this all at once. It is terribly difficult for a child to sever thought (the meaning of a word) from object. Play is a transitional stage in this direction. At that critical moment when a stick — i.e., an object — becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse, one of the basic psychological structures determining the child's relationship to reality is radically altered.

The child cannot as yet sever thought from object; he must have something to act as a pivot. This expresses the child's weakness; in order to imagine a horse, he needs to define his actions by means of using the horse in the stick as the pivot. But all the same the basic structure determining the child's relationship to reality is radically changed at this crucial point, for his perceptual structure changes. The special feature of human perception — which arises at a very early age — is so-called reality perception. This is something for which there is no analogy in animal perception. Essentially it lies in the fact that I do not see the world simply in color and shape, but also as a world with sense and meaning. I do not merely see something round and black with two hands; I see a clock and I can distinguish one thing from another. There are patients who say, when they see a clock, that they are seeing something round and white with two thin steel strips, but they do not know that this is a clock; they have lost real relationship to objects. Thus, the structure of human perception could be figuratively expressed as a fraction in which the object is the numerator and the meaning is the denominator; this expresses the particular relationship of object and meaning which arises on the basis of speech. This means that all human perception is not made up of isolated perceptions, but of generalized perceptions. Goldstein says that this objectively formed perception and generalization are the same thing. Thus, for the child, in the fraction object-meaning, the object dominates, and meaning is directly connected to it. At the crucial moment for the child, when the stick becomes a horse, i.e., when the thing, the stick, becomes the pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse, this fraction is inverted and meaning predominates, giving: $\frac{\text{meaning}}{\text{object}}$.

Nevertheless, properties of things as such do

have some meaning: any stick can be a horse but, for example, a postcard can never be a horse for a child. Goethe's contention that in play any thing can be anything for a child is incorrect. Of course, for adults who can make conscious use of symbols, a postcard can be a horse. If I want to show the location of something, I can put down a match and say, "This is a horse." And that would be enough. For a child it cannot be a horse: one must use a stick; therefore this is play, and not symbolism. A symbol is a sign, but the stick is not the sign of a horse. Properties of things are retained but their meaning is inverted, i.e., the idea becomes the central point. It can be said that in this structure things are moved from a dominating to a subordinate position.

Thus, in play the child creates the structure $\frac{\text{meaning}}{\text{object}}$, where the semantic aspect — the meaning of the word, the meaning of the thing — dominates and determines his behavior. To a certain extent meaning is emancipated from the object with which it had been directly fused before. I would say that in play a child concentrates on meaning severed from objects, but that it is not severed in real action with real objects.

Thus, a highly interesting contradiction arises, wherein the child operates with meanings severed from objects and actions, but in real action with real objects he operates with them in fusion. This is the transitional nature of play, which makes it an intermediary between the purely situational constraints of early childhood and thought which is totally free of real situations.

In play a child deals with things as having meaning. Word meanings replace objects, and thus an emancipation of word from object occurs. (A behaviorist would describe play and its characteristic properties in the following terms: the child gives ordinary objects unusual names and ordinary actions unusual designations, despite the fact that he knows the real ones.)

Separating words from things requires a pivot in the form of other things. But the moment the stick — i.e., the thing — becomes the pivot for severing the meaning of "horse" from a real horse, the child makes one thing influence another in the semantic sphere. (He cannot sever meaning from an object, or a word from an object except by finding a pivot in something else, i.e., by the power of one object to steal another's name.) Transfer of meanings is facilitated by the fact that the child accepts a word as the property of a thing; he does not see the word but the thing it designates. For a child the word "horse" applied to the stick means, "There is a horse"; i.e., mentally he sees the object standing behind the word.

Play is converted to internal processes at school age, going over to internal speech, logical memory, and abstract thought. In play a child operates with meanings severed from objects, but not in real action with real things. To sever the meaning of horse from a real horse and transfer it to a stick (the necessary material pivot to keep the meaning from evaporating) and really acting with the stick as if it were a horse, is a vital transitional stage to operating with meanings. A child first acts with meanings as with objects and later realizes them consciously and begins to think, just as a child, before he has acquired grammatical and written speech, knows how to do things but does not know that he knows, i.e., he does not realize or master them voluntarily. In play a child unconsciously and spontaneously makes use of the fact that he can separate meaning from an object without knowing he is doing it; he does not know that he is speaking in prose just as he talks without paying attention to the words.

Hence we come to a functional definition of concepts, i.e., objects, and hence a word as part of a thing.

And so I would like to say that the creation of an imaginary situation is not a fortuitous fact in a child's life; it is the first effect of the child's emancipation from situational constraints. The first paradox of play is that the child operates with an alienated meaning in a real situation. The second is that in play he adopts the line of least resistance, i.e., he does what he feels like most because play is connected with pleasure. At the same time he learns to follow the line of greatest resistance, for by subordinating them-

selves to rules children renounce what they want since subjection to rule and renunciation of spontaneous impulsive action constitute the path to maximum pleasure in play.

The same thing can be observed in children in athletic games. Racing is difficult because the runners are ready to start off when you say "ready, get start. . ." without waiting for the "go." It is evident that the point of internal rules is that the child does not act on immediate impulse.

Play continually creates demands on the child to act against immediate impulse, i.e., to act on the line of greatest resistance. I want to run off at once — this is perfectly clear — but the rules of the game order me to wait. Why does the child not do what he wants spontaneously at once? Because to observe the rules of the play structure promises much greater pleasure from the game than the gratification of an immediate impulse. In other words, as one investigator puts it in recalling the words of Spinoza: "An affect can only be overcome by a stronger affect." Thus, in play a situation is created in which, as Nohl puts it, a dual affective plan occurs. For example, the child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player. In play the child renounces his immediate impulse, coordinating every act of his behavior to the rules of the game. Groos describes this brilliantly. He thinks that a child's will originates in, and develops from, play with rules. Indeed, in the simple game of sorcerer as described by Groos, the child must run away from the sorcerer in order not to be caught, but at the same time he must help his companion and get him disenchanted. When the sorcerer has touched him he must stop. At every step the child is faced with a conflict between the rule of the game and what he would do if he could suddenly act spontaneously. In the game he acts counter to what he wants. Nohl showed that a child's greatest self-control occurs in play. He achieves the maximum display of willpower in the sense of renunciation of an immediate attraction in the game in the form of candy, which by the rules of the game the children were not allowed to eat because it represented something inedible. Ordinarily a child experiences subordination to a rule in the renunciation of something he wants, but here subordination to a rule and renunciation of acting on immediate impulse are the means to maximum pleasure.

Thus, the essential attribute of play is a rule which has become an affect. "An idea which has become an affect, a concept which has turned into a passion" — this ideal of Spinoza finds its prototype in play, which is the realm of spontaneity and freedom. To carry out the rule is a source of pleasure. The rule wins because it is the strongest impulse. (Cf. Spinoza's adage that an affect can be overcome by a stronger affect.) Hence it follows that such a rule is an internal rule, i.e., a rule of inner self-restraint and self-determination, as Piaget says, and not a rule which the child obeys like a physical law. In short, play gives a child a new form of desires, i.e., teaches him to desire by relating his desires to a fictitious "I" — to his role in the game and its rules. Therefore, a child's greatest achievements are possible in play — achievements which tomorrow will become his average level of real action and his morality.

Now we can say the same thing about the child's activity that we said about things. Just as we have the fraction $\frac{\text{object}}{\text{meaning}}$, we also have the fraction $\frac{\text{action}}{\text{meaning}}$.

Whereas action dominated before, this structure is inverted, meaning becoming the numerator, while action takes the place of the denominator.

It is important to realize how the child is liberated from actions in play. An action, for example, is realized as finger movements instead of real eating — that is, the action is completed not for the action itself but for the meaning it carries.

At first, in a child of preschool age, action dominates over meaning and is incompletely understood; a child is able to do more than he can understand. It is at preschool age that there first arises an action structure in which meaning is the determinant; but the action itself is not a sideline or subordinated feature; it is a struc-

tural feature. Nohl showed that children, in playing at eating from a plate, performed actions with their hands reminiscent of real eating, but all actions that did not designate eating were impossible. Throwing one's hands back instead of stretching them toward the plate turned out to be impossible; that is, such action would have a destructive effect on the game. A child does not symbolize in play, but he wishes and realizes his wishes by letting the basic categories of reality pass through his experience, which is precisely why in play a day can take half an hour, and a hundred miles are covered in five steps. The child, in wishing, carries out his wishes; and in thinking, he acts. Internal and external action are inseparable: imagination, interpretation, and will are internal processes in external action.

The meaning of action is basic, but even by itself action is not indifferent. At an earlier age the position was the reverse: action was the structural determinant while meaning was a secondary, collateral, subordinated feature. What we said about severing meaning from object applies equally well to the child's own actions. A child who stamps on the ground and imagines himself riding a horse has thereby accomplished the inversion of the fraction $\frac{\text{action}}{\text{meaning}}$ to $\frac{\text{meaning}}{\text{action}}$.

Once again, in order to sever the meaning of the action from the real action (riding a horse, without having the opportunity to do so), the child requires a pivot in the form of an action to replace the real one. But once again, while before action was the determinant in the structure "action-meaning," now the structure is inverted and meaning becomes the determinant. Action retreats to second place and becomes the pivot; meaning is again severed from action by means of another action. This is a repetition of the point leading to operations based solely on the meanings of actions; i.e., to volitional choice, a decision, a conflict of motives, and to other processes sharply separated from fulfillment: in short, to the development of the will. Just as operating with the meanings of things leads to abstract thought, in volitional decision the determining factor is not the fulfillment of the action but its meaning. In play an action replaces another action just as an object replaces another object. How does the child "float" from one object to another, from one action to another? This is accomplished by movement in the field of meaning — not connected with the visible field or with real objects — which subordinates all real objects and actions to itself.

This movement in the field of meaning predominates in play: on the one hand, it is movement in an abstract field (a field which thus appears before voluntary operation with meanings), but the method of movement is situational and concrete (i.e., it is not logical but affective movement). In other words, the field of meaning appears, but action within it occurs just as in reality; herein lies the main genetic contradiction of play. I have three questions left to answer. First, to show that play is not the predominant feature of childhood but is a leading factor in development. Second, to show the development of play itself; i.e., the significance of the movement from the predominance of the imaginary situation to the predominance of rules. And third, to show the internal transformations brought about by play in the child's development.

I do not think that play is the predominant type of child activity. In fundamental everyday situations a child behaves in a manner diametrically opposed to his behavior in play. In play, action is subordinated to meaning, but in real life, of course, action dominates over meaning.

Thus we find in play — if you will — the negative of a child's general everyday behavior. Therefore, to consider play as the prototype of his everyday activity and its predominant form is completely without foundation. This is the main flaw in Koffka's theory. He considers play as the child's other world. According to Koffka, everything that concerns a child is play reality, while everything that concerns an adult is serious reality. A given object has one meaning in play, and another outside of it. In a child's world the logic of wishes and of satisfying urges dominates, and not real logic. The illusory nature of play is transferred to life. This would be true if play were indeed the predominant form of a child's

activity. But it is hard to envisage the insane picture that a child would bring to mind if the form of activity we have been speaking of were to become the predominant form of his everyday activity — even if only partially transferred to real life.

Koffka gives a number of examples to show how a child transfers a situation from play into life. But the real transference of play behavior to real life can only be regarded as an unhealthy symptom. To behave in a real situation as in an illusory one is the first sign of delirium.

As research has shown, play behavior in real life is normally seen only in the type of game when sisters play at "sisters"; i.e., when children sitting at dinner can play at having dinner or (as in Katz's example) when children who do not want to go to bed say, "Let's play that it's nighttime and we have to go to sleep"; they begin to play at what they are in fact doing, evidently creating associations which facilitate the execution of an unpleasant action.

Thus, it seems to me that play is not the predominant type of activity at preschool age. Only theories which maintain that a child does not have to satisfy the basic requirements of life, but can live in search of pleasure, could possibly suggest that a child's world is a play world.

Is it possible to suppose that a child's behavior is always guided by meaning, that a preschooler's behavior is so arid that he never behaves with candy as he wants to simply because he thinks he should behave otherwise? This kind of subordination to rules is quite impossible in life, but in play it does become possible; thus, play also creates the zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior.

The play-development relationship can be compared to the instruction-development relationship, but play provides a background for changes in needs and in consciousness of a much wider nature. Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives — all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development.

The child moves forward essentially through play activity. Only in this sense can play be termed a leading activity which determines the child's development.

The second question is: how does play move? It is a remarkable fact that the child starts with an imaginary situation when initially this imaginary situation is so very close to the real one. A reproduction of the real situation takes place. For example, a child playing with a doll repeats almost exactly what her mother does with her; the doctor looks at the child's throat, hurts him, and he cries, but as soon as the doctor has gone he immediately thrusts a spoon into the doll's mouth.

This means that in the original situation rules operate in a condensed and compressed form. There is very little of the imaginary in the situation. It is an imaginary situation, but it is only comprehensible in the light of a real situation that has just occurred; i.e., it is a recollection of something that has actually happened. Play is more nearly recollection than imagination — that is, it is more memory in action than a novel imaginary situation. As play develops, we see a movement toward the conscious realization of its purpose.

It is incorrect to conceive of play as activity without purpose; play is purposeful activity for a child. In athletic games you can win or lose, in a race you can come first, second, or last. In short, the purpose decides the game. It justifies all the rest. Purpose as the ultimate goal determines the child's affective attitude to play. When running a race, a child can be highly agitated or distressed and little may remain of pleasure because he finds it physically painful to run, while if he is overtaken he will experience little functional pleasure. In sports the purpose of the game is one of its dominant features without which there would be no point — like examin-

ing a piece of candy, putting it in one's mouth, chewing it, and then spitting it out.

In play the object, to win, is recognized in advance.

At the end of development rules emerge, and the more rigid they are, the greater the demands on the child's application, the greater the regulation of the child's activity, the more tense and acute play becomes. Simply running around without purpose or rules of play is a dull game that does not appeal to children.

Nohl simplified the rules of croquet for children, and showed how this demagnetized the game, for the child lost the sense of the game in proportion to the simplification of the rules. Consequently, toward the end of development in play, what had originally been embryonic now has a distinct form, finally emerging as purpose and rules. This was true before, but in an undeveloped form. One further feature has yet to come, essential to sporting games; this is some sort of record, which is also closely connected with purpose.

Take chess, for example. For a real chess player it is pleasant to win and unpleasant to lose a game. Nohl says that it is as pleasing to a child to come first in a race as it is for a handsome person to look at himself in a mirror; there is a certain feeling of satisfaction.

Consequently, a complex of originally undeveloped features comes to the fore at the end of play development — features that had been secondary or incidental in the beginning occupy a central position at the end, and vice versa.

Finally, the third question: what sort of changes in a child's behavior can be attributed to play? In play a child is free, i.e., he determines his own actions, starting from his own "I." But this is an illusory freedom. His actions are in fact subordinated to a definite meaning, and he acts according to the meanings of things.

A child learns to consciously recognize his own actions, and becomes aware that every object has a meaning.

From the point of view of development, the fact of creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought. I think that the corresponding development of rules leads to actions on the basis of which the division between work and play becomes possible, a division encountered at school age as a fundamental fact.

I would like to mention just one other aspect: play is really a particular feature of preschool age.

As figuratively expressed by one investigator, play for a child under three is a serious game, just as it is for an adolescent, although, of course, in a different sense of the word; serious play for a very young child means that he plays without separating the imaginary situation from the real one.

For the schoolchild, play begins to be a limited form of activity, predominantly of the athletic type, which fills a specific role in the schoolchild's development, but lacks the significance of play for the preschooler.

Superficially, play bears little resemblance to what it leads to, and only a profound internal analysis makes it possible to determine its course of movement and its role in the preschooler's development.

At school age play does not die away but permeates the attitude to reality. It has its own inner continuation in school instruction and work (compulsory activity based on rules). All examinations of the essence of play have shown that in play a new relationship is created between the semantic and visible fields — that is, between situations in thought and real situations.

Footnotes

1) I have already demonstrated in an earlier lecture the nature of a very young child's perception of external behavioral rules; all "don'ts" — social (interdiction), physical (the impossibility, for example, of striking a match a second time), and biological (for example, don't touch the samovar because you might burn yourself) — combine to form a single "situational" don't, which can be understood as a "barrier" (in Lewin's sense of the term).

2) [Editor's note: Vygotsky is probably referring to Lewin's demonstration of the great

difficulty a small child has in realizing that he must first turn his back to a stone in order to arrange to sit on it.]

3) [Editor's note: In the following discussion of the role of meaning in relation to objects and actions Vygotsky uses the word smysl', which roughly corresponds to the range of notions covered by the English "meaning," "sense," and "purport." Smysl' is uniformly rendered as "meaning" in this translation.]