

What is imagination?¹²

O que é a imaginação?³⁴

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ABSTRACT

This is a fragment of notes from a lecture given by V.V. Repkin in 1975 to students at the Institute of Psychology of the Kharkiv State University, dedicated to the problem of the psychology of imagination. The author's judgments, expressed almost fifty years ago, reveal his concern with the education of the child's personality as the fundamental objective of developmental learning theory, rather than the mere assimilation of theoretical concepts.

Keywords: V.V. Repkin. Personality. Imagination. Developmental Learning.

RESUMO

Trata-se de um fragmento de notas de uma aula ministrada por V. V. Repkin, em 1975, para estudantes do Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade Estatal de Kharkiv, dedicada ao problema da psicologia da imaginação. Os julgamentos do autor, expressos quase cinquenta anos atrás, colocam de manifesto a sua preocupação com a educação da personalidade da criança como objetivo fundamental da teoria da aprendizagem desenvolvimental, em lugar da mera assimilação de conceitos teóricos.

Palavras-chave: V. V. Repkin. Personalidade. Imagem. Aprendizagem Desenvolvimental.6

¹ Fragment of V. V. Repkin's lecture notes on the problem of the psychology of imagination. It remained unpublished until its publication as part of the "Biographical Study Experience" published by A. K. Dusavitski in the journal *Вестник* (Pedagogical Center "Experimentar", Riga, n. 10, 2002). [Translator's note].

² Translated by Roberto Valdés Puentes.

³ Fragmento de notas de aula de V. V. Repkin sobre do problema da psicologia da imaginação. Ficou inédito até sua publicação, como parte da "Experiência de estudo biográfica" publicada por A. K. Dusavitski, na revista *Вестник* (Centro Pedagógico "Experimentar", Riga, n. 10, 2002). [Nota do tradutor].

⁴ Tradução realizada por Roberto Valdés Puentes.

⁵ Graduated in philosophy from Moscow State University (1952). Founded the Kharkiv Group in 1963 as part of the Elkonin-Davido-Repkin system. He taught at the Kharkiv Institute of Psychology (1968-1972, Ukraine). He received his doctorate in Psychological Sciences in 1966 from Moscow State University under the guidance of P.I. Zinchenko. In the late 1960s, with the support of V. V. Davidov, he founded the Kharkiv Research Laboratory. He also taught at the Maximum Gorki State University in Kharkiv (now Karazin University), where he founded the Department of Psychology (1972-1979), at the Kharkiv Institute of Engineering, and at the Tomsk Institute of Developmental Learning. He has been vice-president of the International Association for Developmental Learning since its creation in 1994. Furthermore, he is the author of numerous articles and books. His name is inserted in a text box, indicating, according to tradition, a sign of mourning due to his death on April 11, 2022. [Translator's note]

⁶ Resumo em português e espanhol redigido pelo tradutor com base no conteúdo do artigo.

Imagination is the poorest area of psychology, the least studied. The question itself is controversial: imagination exists as a specific psychological process. There are many reasons for conceptualizing it: traditionally, imagination is defined as a psychological process associated with the restructuring of sensory-visual images. This restructuring has a certain intuitive character. The process defies logical description: how and by what laws are these images constructed? It is clear that the process of renewal creates something that doesn't exist in reality. It's no coincidence that fantasy is synonymous with imagination.

On the one hand, all sensory images stored in memory are subject to restructuring (the image is not an exact copy). This blurs the line between imagination and memory. On the other hand, the emergence of the new (discovery) is a domain of thought. Of course, this process is not limited to logical thinking; it also involves intuition. If you separate imagination from thinking, it loses its most interesting part. It turns out that imagination fits perfectly into the processes of thinking and remembering.

Is there a special function that cannot be performed by processes that are not part of thought or memory?

Then the question of the function of imagination as a psychic process arises.

In the life of a person, the psyche plays first a guiding role in the conditions of his activity and a regulatory role: it is a mechanism of internal control of activity.

Human activity has one fundamental difference from animal behavior: it is intentional (desirability and purpose are two different things). This means that the immediate driving motives and the objects toward which human activity is directed may not coincide. (A hungry person needs food, but he builds a road and then buys food with the money he gets).

The discrepancy between goal and motive is an essential moment in human activity. The goal is the anticipation of this future result. How can activity be anticipated, represented in consciousness? Probably in the form of a concept or an image. In the process of carrying out a specific activity (practical actions - the original form of work activity), the anticipation in the form of a concept cannot act as a regulation of the activity. You can't make a

table; you have to see in front of you the real object we want to get. It's a model; we check it.

Precisely because the goal plays a regulatory role in human activity, a process is needed to ensure that the result of the activity is anticipated in a specific figurative form. Is this a function of memory? Obviously not. Memory is a reflection of experience, and we need a reflection of future experience. That is a different function. We need to see what isn't and never was.

However, thought can't do that either because thought, no matter how concrete, never gives a complete picture of the object. Every definition of an object is a kind of abstraction (K. Marx). Even with an infinite set of definitions (a system of abstractions), there is no image, but only the image plays the role of regulating activity: without anticipating its results, human activity is impossible.

This leads to the following conclusion: imagination apparently has a special function in the psyche; it is an atypical psychic process, the significance of which is to anticipate the future result of activity.

It is necessary to recognize the existence of imagination as a special form of psychic process that provides guidance in the future result of activity.

This means that imagination is a specific process characteristic of human beings. M. Gorky wrote that the ability to plan and invent is what makes a person human and distinguishes him from animals.

All other mental processes are common to man and animals, except imagination. In addition, it's understandable why animals don't have it. Since human activity is intentional, it necessarily depends on imagination.

Imagination can only be the construction of visual images. But images can only be constructed from other images: from what is stored in memory and from what we ourselves perceive. In other words, they are reflected in perception. In the process of perception, a person doesn't see everything but processes what is visible. These are not images of perception but of imagination. In love, a person doesn't see what they really are, what their relatives see, for example. After 2–3 months, a person sees the same object with different eyes (S. L. Rubinstein).

In one way or another, only sensory images can be material for the imagination. This means that the solution of a fundamentally new problem is never realized without an external sensory-visual clue (Newton's apple, the discovery of the structural formula of the benzene ring, the invention of the walking excavator).

What is the role of a clue? One person has to solve everything. A solution scheme has been created beforehand. The person realizes that it's no good. This is the work of thinking. However, it never leads to a solution by itself. You need imagination to see the result visually.

It turns out that not a single type of human activity can be carried out without the participation of imagination, which is why it plays no small part in productive activity. A child at birth has no imagination at all. This is obvious because the result of the process must be separated from the action. At first, the child is not separated from the action. They begin to distinguish between what others do to them and what they do themselves ("I myself") only at the age of 2-3.

This distinction is first made in play. The child picks up a chair and rides in it like a car - it's not the car itself that is important here, but what the driver does when he's in the car. A chair can be a machine because you can sit in it. A magic wand can't be a machine, but it can be a horse because you have to hold the wand. Instead, initially, the child usually plays with the car and the horse without the wand and the chair, just running around.

These are the first forms of imagination that are incorporated into the child's real activities. Therefore, play is very significant for the development of the psyche. If we deprive a child of play, we deprive him of the opportunity to develop the most significant human skill. Without the development of imagination, there can be no good activities later on (probably the main reason why geeks typically don't become geniuses is that they were deprived of play in childhood).

As with all mental processes, we can speak of involuntary and voluntary imagination, which differ in content. By its very nature, imagination appears to be

voluntary: the goal must be foreseen. But this assumption does not justify the existence of fantasy, whose facts are not accidental.

Along with a voluntary form of imagination (in developed practical activity, in art, in science), we see other earlier forms of imagination. A child's imagination in play is probably an involuntary imagination. A dream is an involuntary imagination. Perhaps animals have dreams. And the child has them.

The paradox is that there is no way to understand this process as anything other than voluntary because of its origin. Moreover, at the same time we observe involuntary imagination.

In fact, historically, imagination arises in the process of productive activity. But when imagination arises, like other psychic processes, it materializes in a certain way: some images of the imagination are fixed in art, drawings, and so on. An arsenal of means is created to fix this human faculty.

The child finds these fixed products of imagination as products of work (fairy tales). Therefore, in the individual experience, the capacity of imagination apparently appears earlier than the purposeful activity of the child. (In a fairy tale, the child must present the goal in an elementary form.) The child does not draw a line between a real object and an imaginary one. Therefore, involuntary imagination, which prepares for purposeful activity, is possible.

Dreams don't occur spontaneously either: they are manifestations of purely physiological processes. In a dream, neither needs nor circumstances disappear. All of a person's sensory and logical experience is essentially related to needs, goals of activity, etc. In a dream, only one thing is lost: control over the course of psychic activity, but the combination of images in a dream is not accidental. In a dream, an anticipated result of future activity is possible. We are used to overestimating the role of human consciousness and thinking. Our thinking is always limited by experience, means, etc. The reflection of the world is richer than the reflection of consciousness and thought. Many things are important to us that we are not aware of. We are only aware of what enters our consciousness. But in a dream, a richer realm of imagination begins to function.

Imagination, like other mental processes, is intertwined with man's practical activity. But just as thought has given rise to theoretical knowledge, so imagination also acquires a certain independence - in the form of art.

Art is an objective form of the existence of imagination, it is imagination realized in its purest form.

Now there is a discussion about the fate of art in the age of science (E.V. Iliénkov)⁷ despite all the omnipotence of science, it must reckon with the fact that the true human capacity is the creative imagination. This is what contributes to the flourishing of science itself.

However, imagination is created only through art. There is no other cultural way to transmit imagination to succeeding generations. It is naive to assume that science will replace art that art can die. It will exist as long as human beings exist.

Another question: art, like science, is a reflection of objective reality. What does art give to man? Science is based on thinking. Thinking is always a certain distance from reality, a certain abstraction, one-sidedness, a draft, the death of living life. But no one feels uncomfortable with this because it gives us the opportunity to penetrate the essence of things and to remake the world. If there were an object of knowledge that could not be known by science, reproduced in a scientific concept, then we would find justification for the presence of art.

There is such an object; it is the personality of a person. No abstract theory can describe a concrete person. It is fundamentally impossible to represent individuality through science.

⁷ Evald Vasilyevich Ilyenkov (February 18, 1924, Smolensk - March 21, 1979, Moscow). Important Soviet philosopher, researcher of Marxist-Leninist dialectics. His works are dedicated to various issues of the Marxist theory of knowledge, the nature of the ideal, personality, creative activity, as well as psychology and pedagogy, ethics and aesthetics. In the field of the history of philosophy, he was a researcher of the legacy of B. Spinoza and G. W. F. Hegel, and paid much attention to the critique of positivism. [Translator's note.]

Science generalizes; it goes against individuality. We need a form of generalization that preserves individuality. It's a picture created in the imagination.

Why do we require an image that preserves individuality?

I think that art probably began as a kind of magic, but with a utilitarian orientation, as a component of practical activity (ritual dances, killing an actor, representing animals, etc.). But as man develops, it begins to perform another function - the preservation of individuality.

Art seems to bend the world. There is a double, a copy of the real world that exists in art. Not just a copy, but also a double because it preserves man's individuality. However, such doubling is one of the most essential conditions for the development of a person's personality (K. Marx: a person realizes himself as a person by looking at another person).

The greater the number of people with whom the individual is connected, the more he is aware of himself as a personality. The greater the sphere of comparison with others, the richer the personality. However, the real possibilities of such a comparison are scarce for everyone. The presence of the second human world makes this possibility practically unlimited not only in space, but also in time (Romeo, Don Quixote - in comparison with living beings of the past and future).

Art gives man the opportunity to develop his personality intensely. Outside of art, there is a narrow basis for development. From this perspective, it must be admitted that art plays a decisive role as a materialized imagination aimed at understanding human life. But the images of the imagination must somehow be fixed in language. There are special means - systems of signs for fixing images (objects of imagination can be feelings, experiences, etc.). These means are embodied in the language of art: poetry, music, works of art, rhythm.

To correct the image, certain canons, rules of writing, are necessary. To master any language is to understand the rules of that language. The rules of art are aesthetics. Aesthetics is not the science of beauty, as the dictionary says. A brilliant picture is created according to the rules of the language of aesthetics.

We allow the greatest foolishness - wrote S. Obraztsov⁸ - which is to say that art is a means of aesthetic education. On the contrary, aesthetic education, knowledge of its language, is necessary for understanding art. And art is not a means of aesthetic education, but of ethical education, personality education. Unfortunately, gangster movies can be works of art, that's their great social evil.

The question of the formation of imagination in childhood is the problem of problems. We have not even come close. A complete education without the development of imagination is impossible.

Imagination does not begin with the creation of an image, but with the ability to see the created image.

Science and art. Imagination and thought. It is absurd to argue which is more important. But is thought's claim to a leading role in human life justified? When truth is known through thought, we always know that it is one-sided, relative, and incomplete. When the essence of a phenomenon is represented in the imagination, individually, the truth is known in a much deeper and more complete way than thought can. Imagination allows you to see the truth directly, not only in art, but also in science. The scientist usually sees the solution first and then proves its validity. It's no coincidence that Albert Einstein believed that Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky⁹ gave him much more to understand about physics than all the physical theories.

⁸ Sergey Vladimirovich Obraztsov (June 22, 1901 - May 8, 1992). He was an important Soviet actor, puppet theater director, publicist, theater figure. Hero of Socialist Labor (1971), People's Artist of the USSR (1954), recipient of the Lenin Prize (1984), Stalin Prize of the Second Degree (1946) and the State Prize of the RSFSR K. S. Stanislávski (1967). Knight of the Three Orders of Lenin (1967, 1971, 1981). [Translator's note].

⁹ Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was a writer, philosopher and journalist from the Russian Empire. He is considered one of the greatest novelists and thinkers in history, as well as one of the greatest "psychologists" who ever lived. [Translator's note].

Qué es la imaginación

RESUMEN:

Este es un fragmento de notas de una conferencia dada por V. V. Repkin, en 1975, a estudiantes del Instituto de Psicología de la Universidad Estatal de Kharkiv, dedicada al problema de la psicología de la imaginación. Los juicios del autor, expresados hace casi cincuenta años, manifiestan su preocupación por la educación de la personalidad del niño como objetivo fundamental de la teoría del aprendizaje desarrollador, en lugar de la mera asimilación de conceptos teóricos.

Palabras clave: V. V. Repkin. Personalidad. Imaginación. Aprendizaje Desarrollador.

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