NO!

AGAINST ADULT SUPREMACY

Issue 4

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Now for the good news. Once you understand the logic behind modern schooling, its tricks and traps are fairly easy to avoid. School trains children to be employees and consumers; teach your own to be leaders and adventurers. School trains children to obey reflexively; teach your own to think critically and independently. Well-schooled kids have a low threshold for boredom; help your own to develop an inner life so that they'll never be bored. Urge them to take on the serious material, the grown-up material, in history, literature, philosophy, music, art, economics, theology - all the stuff school teachers know well enough to avoid. Challenge your kids with plenty of solitude so that they can learn to enjoy their own company, to conduct inner dialogues. Well-schooled people are conditioned to dread being alone, and they seek constant companionship through the TV, the computer, the cell phone, and through shallow friendships quickly acquired and quickly abandoned. Your children should have a more meaningful life, and they can.

First, though, we must wake up to what our schools really are: laboratories of experimentation on young minds, drill centers for the habits and attitudes that corporate society demands. Mandatory education serves children only incidentally; its real purpose is to turn them into servants. Don't let your own have their childhoods extended, not even for a day. If David Farragut could take command of a captured British warship as a preteen, if Thomas Edison could publish a broadsheet at the age of twelve, if Ben Franklin could apprentice himself to a printer at the same age (then put himself through a course of study that would choke a Yale senior today), there's no telling what your own kids could do. After a long life, and thirty years in the public school trenches, I've concluded that genius is as common as dirt. We suppress our genius only because we haven't yet figured out how to manage a population of educated men and women. The solution, I think, is simple and glorious. Let them manage themselves.

Inglis knew that if children could be cloistered with other children, stripped of responsibility and independence, encouraged to develop only the trivializing emotions of greed, envy, jealousy, and fear, they would grow older but never truly grow up. In the 1934 edition of his once well-known book Public Education in the United States, Ellwood P. Cubberley detailed and praised the way the strategy of successive school enlargements had extended childhood by two to six years, and forced schooling was at that point still quite new. This same Cubberley - who was dean of Stanford's School of Education, a textbook editor at Houghton Mifflin, and Conant's friend and correspondent at Harvard - had written the following in the 1922 edition of his book Public School Administration: "Our schools are . . . factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned.. . . And it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down."

It's perfectly obvious from our society today what those specifications were. Maturity has by now been banished from nearly every aspect of our lives. Easy divorce laws have removed the need to work at relationships; easy credit has removed the need for fiscal self-control; easy entertainment has removed the need to learn to entertain oneself; easy answers have removed the need to ask questions. We have become a nation of children, happy to surrender our judgments and our wills to political exhortations and commercial blandishments that would insult actual adults. We buy televisions, and then we buy the things we see on the television. We buy computers, and then we buy the things we see on the computer. We buy $150 sneakers whether we need them or not, and when they fall apart too soon we buy another pair. We drive SUVs and believe the lie that they constitute a kind of life insurance, even when we're upside-down in them. And, worst of all, we don't bat an eye when Ari Fleischer tells us to "be careful what you say," even if we remember having been told somewhere back in school that America is the land of the free. We simply buy that one too. Our schooling, as intended, has seen to it.

There you have it. Now you know. We don't need Karl Marx's conception of a grand warfare between the classes to see that it is in the interest of complex management, economic or political, to dumb people down, to demoralize them, to divide them from one another, and to discard them if they don't conform. Class may frame the proposition, as when Woodrow Wilson, then president of Princeton University, said the following to the New York City School Teachers Association in 1909: "We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class, of necessity, in every society, to forgo the privileges of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks." But the motives behind the disgusting decisions that bring about these ends need not be class-based at all. They can stem purely from fear, or from the by now familiar belief that "efficiency" is the paramount virtue, rather than love, liberty, laughter, or hope. Above all, they can stem from simple greed.

There were vast fortunes to be made, after all, in an economy based on mass production and organized to favor the large corporation rather than the small business or the family farm. But mass production required mass consumption, and at the turn of the twentieth century most Americans considered it both unnatural and unwise to buy things they didn't actually need. Mandatory schooling was a godsend on that count. School didn't have to train kids in any direct sense to think they should consume nonstop, because it did something even better: it encouraged them not to think at all. And that left them sitting ducks for another great invention of the modem era - marketing.

Now, you needn't have studied marketing to know that there are two groups of people who can always be convinced to consume more than they need to: addicts and children. School has done a pretty good job of turning our children into addicts, but it has done a spectacular job of turning our children into children. Again, this is no accident. Theorists from Plato to Rousseau to our own Dr.

Why We Can't Wait

Adam Fletcher

"Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor;
it must be demanded by the oppressed."
I look at the people around me
and see the prisons and traps
we are all stuck.
From an early age we are taught and trained:
sit still, hold on, walk (don't run),
and be quiet.
Whatever you do, be quiet.

So we do. We go to polite schools or content jobs.
We type and read and feel nice.
Our hair is nice and our hearts are nice.
We live nice lives.

But what if…
what if we were shown the whole picture
from the first day?
What if they said
"Hey, when you're poor, you're screwed.
If you're black, you're facing an uphill road.
If you're female, you're up a creek.
Oh, yeah, and you'll be young too!
Let's not even go there!"

What if we could awaken all people to the chains that tie them down?
What if everyone saw that
we are responsible for holding ourselves down?
What if the message of systematic and deliberate oppression
was exposed and the entire society

– everyone everywhere-
saw that young people are
looked down upon,
frowned upon,
sat upon
and shat upon?

Then they become adults.
The world turns.
They start pooping on youth…
and the cycle continues.

We've gotta speak up, act up, and quit
putting up, giving up and settling down.

We cannot wait any longer.

Its time to get up, stand up, scream out loud and dream out loud.
We've gotta break outta the chains that hold us down.
We've gotta stand up for what is ours:
Freedom.
To earn, to learn, to speak, to serve.

We've gotta tie people together
instead of tearing them apart.
We're taught that we're not the same because we are
young and old
black and white
educated and ignorant
rich and poor.

But we're the same.
And that's why young people have got to be free.

No one is free until everyone is free.
Free Youth Now.

as their destination in the social machine merits - and not one step further. So much for making kids their personal best.

5) The selective function. This refers not to human choice at all but to Darwin's theory of natural selection as applied to what he called "the favored races." In short, the idea is to help things along by consciously attempting to improve the breeding stock. Schools are meant to tag the unfit - with poor grades, remedial placement, and other punishments - clearly enough that their peers will accept them as inferior and effectively bar them from the reproductive sweepstakes. That's what all those little humiliations from first grade onward were intended to do: wash the dirt down the drain.

6) The propaedeutic function. The societal system implied by these rules will require an elite group of caretakers. To that end, a small fraction of the kids will quietly be taught how to manage this continuing project, how to watch over and control a population deliberately dumbed down and declawed in order that government might proceed unchallenged and corporations might never want for obedient labor.

That, unfortunately, is the purpose of mandatory public education in this country. And lest you take Inglis for an isolated crank with a rather too cynical take on the educational enterprise, you should know that he was hardly alone in championing these ideas. Conant himself, building on the ideas of Horace Mann and others, campaigned tirelessly for an American school system designed along the same lines. Men like George Peabody, who funded the cause of mandatory schooling throughout the South, surely understood that the Prussian system was useful in creating not only a harmless electorate and a servile labor force but also a virtual herd of mindless consumers. In time a great number of industrial titans came to recognize the enormous profits to be had by cultivating and tending just such a herd via public education, among them Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller.

intended to be just what it had been for Prussia in the 1820s: a fifth column into the burgeoning democratic movement that threatened to give the peasants and the proletarians a voice at the bargaining table. Modern, industrialized, compulsory schooling was to make a sort of surgical incision into the prospective unity of these underclasses. Divide children by subject, by age-grading, by constant rankings on tests, and by many other more subtle means, and it was unlikely that the ignorant mass of mankind, separated in childhood, would ever reintegrate into a dangerous whole.

Inglis breaks down the purpose - the actual purpose - of modem schooling into six basic functions, any one of which is enough to curl the hair of those innocent enough to believe the three traditional goals listed earlier:

1) The adjustive or adaptive function. Schools are to establish fixed habits of reaction to authority. This, of course, precludes critical judgment completely. It also pretty much destroys the idea that useful or interesting material should be taught, because you can't test for reflexive obedience until you know whether you can make kids learn, and do, foolish and boring things.

2) The integrating function. This might well be called "the conformity function," because its intention is to make children as alike as possible. People who conform are predictable, and this is of great use to those who wish to harness and manipulate a large labor force.

3) The diagnostic and directive function. School is meant to determine each student's proper social role. This is done by logging evidence mathematically and anecdotally on cumulative records. As in "your permanent record." Yes, you do have one.

4) The differentiating function. Once their social role has been "diagnosed," children are to be sorted by role and trained only so far

On Play and Development

Benjamin Fife

In 1978 a collection of writings by the Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky's was published in English for the first time. Among these writings was a new translation of an important article he wrote on play and its relationship to development. The 1978 publication offered American psychologists and educators new ways of thinking about child development.

Partly due to the cold war, access to Vygotsky's ideas had been very limited in the United States. Only one important article of his had been published in English up to that point, and that was in 1962, twenty eight years after his death. In the seventies, Alexander Luria, an influential neuropsychologist and a student of Vygotsky's convinced a group of American academics to publish a collection of Vygotsky's essays called Mind In Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.

It is remarkable reading his essays now to think about how well they have held up over time (They were written in the late 1920s and early 1930s). I find chapter 7 of his book, The role of play in development, very useful for thinking about how play relates to cognitive and socio-emotional development.

If there is something in my summary of Vygotsky's work that you find useful or interesting, consider checking out his wonderful book.

Understanding play helps to understand children's changing relationships to their own needs.

Vygotsky begins his chapter The Role of Play in Development reminding readers that if we see play only as something children are doing for enjoyment, then we miss an important aspect of play - its

relationship to development. At the same time we should keep in mind the parts of play that are about children's needs and motivations - including the need for pleasure and fun. Vygotsky's goal is to form a complete picture of play, what it makes play possible, and what play allows to happen later in life.

Vygotsky wants to make sure that children's motivations are fully considered when thinking about play and development. He highlights a constant relationship between need, motivation and development in play. Specific needs that children are motivated to satisfy through play change as a child grows.

Play and Development: Developing the capacity to wait.

Part of what changes in children as they grow older is how long they can wait before a need is satisfied. Vygotsky writes "No one has met a child under three who wants to do something a few days in the future."(p. 93)

When a very young child can't have something she wants or can't do something she wants to do she gets upset immediately. Maybe she even tantrums. She might be able to be distracted by a skilled and lucky caregiver, but that is not the same as being able to wait.

As a child gets older she starts to recognize that there are some needs that can't be satisfied right away. Vygotsky sees play as the first activity that allows a child to hold off on having a need satisfied. For Vygotsky, play is the activity in young children that in older children and adults becomes the experience of having an imagination. To Vygotsky imagination as experienced by older children, adolescents and adults is "play without action."(p. 93)

What is play made of?

Vygotsky argues that two things - imagination and rules - are necessary components to play. Even play that seems to have no rules

back in the 1840s. Horace Mann's "Seventh Annual Report" to the Massachusetts State Board of Education in 1843 is essentially a paean to the land of Frederick the Great and a call for its schooling to be brought here. That Prussian culture loomed large in America is hardly surprising, given our early association with that utopian state. A Prussian served as Washington's aide during the Revolutionary War, and so many German- speaking people had settled here by 1795 that Congress considered publishing a German-language edition of the federal laws. But what shocks is that we should so eagerly have adopted one of the very worst aspects of Prussian culture: an educational system deliberately designed to produce mediocre intellects, to hamstring the inner life, to deny students appreciable leadership skills, and to ensure docile and incomplete citizens - all in order to render the populace "manageable."

It was from James Bryant Conant - president of Harvard for twenty years, WWI poison-gas specialist, WWII executive on the atomic-bomb project, high commissioner of the American zone in Germany after WWII, and truly one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century - that I first got wind of the real purposes of American schooling. Without Conant, we would probably not have the same style and degree of standardized testing that we enjoy today, nor would we be blessed with gargantuan high schools that warehouse 2,000 to 4,000 students at a time, like the famous Columbine High in Littleton, Colorado. Shortly after I retired from teaching I picked up Conant's 1959 book-length essay, The Child the Parent and the State, and was more than a little intrigued to see him mention in passing that the modern schools we attend were the result of a "revolution" engineered between 1905 and 1930. A revolution? He declines to elaborate, but he does direct the curious and the uninformed to Alexander Inglis's 1918 book, Principles of Secondary Education, in which "one saw this revolution through the eyes of a revolutionary."

Inglis, for whom a lecture in education at Harvard is named, makes it perfectly clear that compulsory schooling on this continent was

1 - To make good people.
2 - To make good citizens.
3 - To make each person his or her personal best.

These goals are still trotted out today on a regular basis, and most of us accept them in one form or another as a decent definition of public education's mission, however short schools actually fall in achieving them. But we are dead wrong. Compounding our error is the fact that the national literature holds numerous and surprisingly consistent statements of compulsory schooling's true purpose. We have, for example, the great H. L. Mencken, who wrote in The American Mercury for April 1924 that the aim of public education is not

"to fill the young of the species with knowledge and awaken their intelligence. . . . Nothing could be further from the truth. The aim.. . is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality. That is its aim in the United States . . . and that is its aim everywhere else."

Because of Mencken's reputation as a satirist, we might be tempted to dismiss this passage as a bit of hyperbolic sarcasm. His article, however, goes on to trace the template for our own educational system back to the now vanished, though never to be forgotten, military state of Prussia. And although he was certainly aware of the irony that we had recently been at war with Germany, the heir to Prussian thought and culture, Mencken was being perfectly serious here. Our educational system really is Prussian in origin, and that really is cause for concern.

The odd fact of a Prussian provenance for our schools pops up again and again once you know to look for it. William James alluded to it many times at the turn of the century. Orestes Brownson, the hero of Christopher Lasch's 1991 book, The True and Only Heaven, was publicly denouncing the Prussianization of American schools

and seems very connected to reality, has both imagination and rules if you know where to look.

Take for example a pair of siblings playing a game they call "being siblings". They hold hands, talk the same, dress the same, maybe the older one talks in authoritative ways to the younger one about things that belong to them, and things that belong to other people. It might not seem at first that there are a lot of rules or much imagination - but Vygotsky sees it differently. In this kind of play, the children are distilling rules about what it means to be siblings - they are taking the things that people don't notice in day to day life, and making them the rules of play. They are also imagining what is different to adults and to others about the relationships siblings have with each other from the relationships they have with the rest of the world. The game allows them to figure out, through the use of imagination, the meaning of being sisters instead of just living the day to day experience of being sisters.

Any play with imagination has rules. Playing house involves rules of how members of the family behave. Whatever the imaginary game, be it cops and robbers, or space explorers or mom and baby, or monsters attacking the town, rules are there. Often these are not rules that the child comes up with ahead of time but rather rules that emerge from the imaginary situation the child presents - rules about who wins and how, rules of how monsters, babies, mommies, and townspeople act.

For Vygotsky games are activities where rules and imagination are always present and where each helps to make the other. Even later games that seem to be all rules and no imagination - games like chess, actually contain both. Accepting the rules of the game, "here we are in a scenario where knights move like this and bishops move like this and the game ends when one of us captures the other's king," means entering into a shared imaginary situation.

For Vygotsky what defines something as an imaginary situation is the fact that a person accepts some rules and the rules limit the possibilities for action.

According to this theory developmental progress in play goes from a child having games that look mostly like imaginary situations but have hidden rules to having games with clear rules and a less obvious imaginary situation.

When does play in an imaginary situation start?

Play in an imaginary situation usually starts around 3 years old. This is about the time when a child goes from reacting mostly to the environment to being motivated by cognitive factors as well. Of course there is variation in the ages when children start to play - but a huge amount of brain development happens between 2 and 3 that allows for new kinds of thinking to emerge at about 3 years old.

A three year old can plan in a way that a 2 year old simply cannot yet. Vygotsky gives the example of a 2 year old who is facing at a stone. An adult asks him to sit on the stone and he has a very hard time following the directions. The task is difficult because planning the actions required to turn around first and then sit down is cognitively too complex. The stone is right there in front of him and he he's committed to doing something with it. If he turns around he won't be able to see it anymore and figuring out the interaction with the stone will be incredibly difficult. Where two year olds are generally motivated by what they see in front of them, three year olds can often begin to hold a plan in mind and figure out the steps needed to make that plan happen.

Objects and Motivation

For most children under about three years old objects in the environment contain their own inherent motivation. For an infant,

Do we really need school? I don't mean education, just forced schooling: six classes a day, five days a week, nine months a year, for twelve years. Is this deadly routine really necessary? And if so, for what? Don't hide behind reading, writing, and arithmetic as a rationale, because 2 million happy homeschoolers have surely put that banal justification to rest. Even if they hadn't, a considerable number of well-known Americans never went through the twelve-year wringer our kids currently go through, and they turned out all right. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln? Someone taught them, to be sure, but they were not products of a school system, and not one of them was ever "graduated" from a secondary school. Throughout most of American history, kids generally didn't go to high school, yet the unschooled rose to be admirals, like Farragut; inventors, like Edison; captains of industry, like Carnegie and Rockefeller; writers, like Melville and Twain and Conrad; and even scholars, like Margaret Mead. In fact, until pretty recently people who reached the age of thirteen weren't looked upon as children at all. Ariel Durant, who co-wrote an enormous, and very good, multivolume history of the world with her husband, Will, was happily married at fifteen, and who could reasonably claim that Ariel Durant was an uneducated person? Unschooled, perhaps, but not uneducated.

We have been taught (that is, schooled) in this country to think of "success" as synonymous with, or at least dependent upon, "schooling," but historically that isn't true in either an intellectual or a financial sense. And plenty of people throughout the world today find a way to educate themselves without resorting to a system of compulsory secondary schools that all too often resemble prisons. Why, then, do Americans confuse education with just such a system? What exactly is the purpose of our public schools?

Mass schooling of a compulsory nature really got its teeth into the United States between 1905 and 1915, though it was conceived of much earlier and pushed for throughout most of the nineteenth century. The reason given for this enormous upheaval of family life and cultural traditions was, roughly speaking, threefold:

boredom and childishness were the natural state of affairs in the classroom. Often I had to defy custom, and even bend the law, to help kids break out of this trap.

The empire struck back, of course; childish adults regularly conflate opposition with disloyalty. I once returned from a medical leave to discover that all evidence of my having been granted the leave had been purposely destroyed, that my job had been terminated, and that I no longer possessed even a teaching license. After nine months of tormented effort I was able to retrieve the license when a school secretary testified to witnessing the plot unfold. In the meantime my family suffered more than I care to remember. By the time I finally retired in 1991, I had more than enough reason to think of our schools - with their long-term, cell-block-style, forced confinement of both students and teachers - as virtual factories of childishness. Yet I honestly could not see why they had to be that way. My own experience had revealed to me what many other teachers must learn along the way, too, yet keep to themselves for fear of reprisal: if we wanted to we could easily and inexpensively jettison the old, stupid structures and help kids take an education rather than merely receive a schooling. We could encourage the best qualities of youthfulness - curiosity, adventure, resilience, the capacity for surprising insight - simply by being more flexible about time, texts, and tests, by introducing kids to truly competent adults, and by giving each student what autonomy he or she needs in order to take a risk every now and then.

But we don't do that. And the more I asked why not, and persisted in thinking about the "problem" of schooling as an engineer might, the more I missed the point: What if there is no "problem" with our schools? What if they are the way they are, so expensively flying in the face of common sense and long experience in how children learn things, not because they are doing something wrong but because they are doing something right? Is it possible that George W. Bush accidentally spoke the truth when he said we would "leave no child behind"? Could it be that our schools are designed to make sure not one of them ever really grows up?

everything is to be explored with every sense. For the toddler, objects in the environment are recognized and are associated with a concrete use. Doors are for opening, stairs are for climbing, bells are for ringing. Everything that the under three year old child perceives in her environment is in itself a motivation to do something; to approach or to avoid - to interact with in a concrete way.

It is usually only at about age three when something a child perceives can start to be used in an imaginary scenario - for example a stick can be ridden as if it were a pony. What is happening when a child starts to play this way is a giant cognitive step from early childhood. Unlike before, a child at play can now see an object in her environment and act based on what she is thinking about rather than based on what she is seeing. This allows children to start taking actions based on meaning rather than perception.

What is happening in preschool aged play?

Vygotsky sees something special happening at preschool age - specifically thought and objects become separate allowing children's actions to begin to come from their ideas instead of their reactions to things.

Little by little objects in the world that have some similarities to things a child is thinking about can be used in play as if they were the things the child is thinking about. So a stick, because a child can swing a leg over it and pretend to ride it can become a play horse, and a piece of wood, because it is about the right size and shape, can become a baby doll.

This is a transitional stage - and it is important to remember that what the child is doing here is at times for the child hard work. It is also important to remember that the object the child picks to stand for the thing she is thinking about has to have some of the same properties as that thing and it has to be able to be used as if it were the thing, not just any object in the environment will do.

The Object to Meaning Ratio

Vygotsky has a math-like formula for understanding what is happening here. One of the things that is special about being human, he says, is that we can make meaning out of objects. We can look at a clock and where an animal might see a round thingy with two straight thingies in it, we can distinguish a clock, and know what the parts of it are and its specific uses. He proposes that for people there is an object to meaning ratio. Early in life, when we are infants and toddlers the object value in the ratio is higher and the meaning value is lower. Later in life the meaning value can be higher and the object value is lower. Play is the activity in development that allows for that change to start to happen. Meaning enters into how a child understands her enviornment when the child starts to use objects as if they were something else - when the stick, because of how it is used starts to mean "horse."

The Limits of Play

Where an adult can take a match and put it on a table next to a postcard and say to another adult "OK, so imagine the horse is here and the barn is here" and be understood, that kind of symbolic communication isn't available to a preschool child. The stick isn't a sign for horse the way the adult uses the match as a sign for horse. The stick's meaning comes from the fact that it can be used as if it were a horse. This difference for Vygostsky highlights how play is a transitional activity between the way very young children experience the world in terms of the situations they are in, and the way adults can have abstract thoughts that don't have anything to do with real-life situations.

Play and Later Development

Play also paves the way for later, more complex, relationships children will have to meaning through activities like writing. In play

Against School

John Taylor Gatto

I taught for thirty years in some of the worst schools in Manhattan, and in some of the best, and during that time I became an expert in boredom. Boredom was everywhere in my world, and if you asked the kids, as I often did, why they felt so bored, they always gave the same answers: They said the work was stupid, that it made no sense, that they already knew it. They said they wanted to be doing something real, not just sitting around. They said teachers didn't seem to know much about their subjects and clearly weren't interested in learning more. And the kids were right: their teachers were every bit as bored as they were.

Boredom is the common condition of schoolteachers, and anyone who has spent time in a teachers' lounge can vouch for the low energy, the whining, the dispirited attitudes, to be found there. When asked why they feel bored, the teachers tend to blame the kids, as you might expect. Who wouldn't get bored teaching students who are rude and interested only in grades? If even that. Of course, teachers are themselves products of the same twelve-year compulsory school programs that so thoroughly bore their students, and as school personnel they are trapped inside structures even more rigid than those imposed upon the children. Who, then, is to blame?

We all are. My grandfather taught me that. One afternoon when I was seven I complained to him of boredom, and he batted me hard on the head. He told me that I was never to use that term in his presence again, that if I was bored it was my fault and no one else's. The obligation to amuse and instruct myself was entirely my own, and people who didn't know that were childish people, to be avoided if possible. Certainly not to be trusted. That episode cured me of boredom forever, and here and there over the years I was able to pass on the lesson to some remarkable student. For the most part, however, I found it futile to challenge the official notion that

a child makes a thing stand for something else without knowing that is what she is doing. Later activities like reading and writing will be based on doing that same thing with awareness; making one thing (for example the word "tree" written in pencil) call up an idea about another thing (the tree outside my window) with the full knowledge that is what you are doing.

Play allows creative things to happen. It gives young children their first opportunity to take the meaning of something they know about from one environment and put it in a new reality. For example it allows a child to ride her pony in her classroom, even if the pony is a stick, or to be a nurse in her bedroom taking her teddy-bear's temperature with a crayon. Play also allows a child to both have pleasurable experiences and to delay pleasurable experiences at the same time.

Take for example the child who really wants a pony but can't have one for the usual reasons of space, money, and everything else that stops us from buying every child a pony. Imaginary play allows her to have the experiences she imagines having if she did have a pony, and to tolerate the fact that she has to operate within a certain set of external rules that doesn't allow her to have a real pony. She also gets to come up with the rules of play herself that are involved in the experience of having a pony. Where in a lot of childhood experiences following a rule feels like giving up on pleasure, in play coming up with the rules of play and then following them becomes the source of pleasure in itself. Vygotsky sees here the seeds of both self restraint and self determination.

What Changes in Play Look Like

A preschool child's relationship to her own actions changes through play. In the play of a young preschool age child all of the actions the child takes will more or less mirror the activities she is imagining. When she is pretending to eat toy food from toy plates she will usually do all of the things that she would do when eating from real

food from real plates. As play progresses, her actions will take on more diversity and things she with her body will start to stand for actions instead of just mimicking them.

Let's return to the example of the older preschool child playing at riding a pony using a stick. Maybe stomping her feet quickly while standing in place becomes the way she rides the pony very very fast. She isn't imitating the action here so much as doing something that has elements of how she thinks about "riding a pony" (the loudness of the stomping, the speed of moving her feet). Action in play also has a ratio type relationship to meaning. For the younger child action determined meaning, for the older child meanings were assigned to actions.

Play as a Preview

Vygostky sees play as a place where children can experiment with what comes next developmentally. For him play represents a "zone of proximal development," a time when a child can experience being developmentally older than she is in other parts of her life. In that way play is probably the single most important activity that prepares children for future developmental progress. Actions children take in the imaginative realms of play give them opportunities to set goals, develop plans, and see activities through. Outside of play a child might not be ready to do some of the things she can do inside of play, but once she does them in play she is well on the road to doing them in other areas of her life.

For example, a child with anxiety about sleeping in her own bed may be able to participate in a game where a caregiver plays at putting her to sleep in her own bed and she plays at falling asleep. While intending this as a game, the child may really be able to fall asleep. In such a game she might be able to have her first sense of being able to do something she could not do before. Over time this play skill could transition into becoming a day to day skill she can use.

In another instance a child who cannot yet read may play at reading a book to a friend or stuffed animal. The play may include explaining the pictures, turning pages, checking to make sure the stuffed animal or friend is paying attention, and telling a story in a way that links specific moments with specific feelings. Each of these may be things that the child cannot yet do outside of the play scenario. Play, by the way it provides an imaginary scenario in which a child performs real actions frees a child from some of the constraints of everyday life and allows her to do things she can't do elsewhere.

Ultimately Vygotsky sees two very important developmental skills emerging from play

> abstract thought - which he sees as developing from play in imaginary situations
>
> and the ability to differentiate work from play and to work creatively within sets of rules - which he sees coming from the development of rules and experimentation with relationships to rules within imaginary scenarios.

In this way it is play that for preschool age children sets the fundamental groundwork for later complex thought and motivated action.