

IMITATION: A STUDY BASED ON E. H. RUSSELL'S CHILD OBSERVATIONS.

By CAROLINE FREAR, Stanford University.

The observations of children, recorded in E. H. Russell's book on Imitation, are of unquestionable value in bringing student observers into a sympathetic appreciation of childhood.

The charts given below are a result of the working over of Mr. Russell's book which affords the most available material yet published on the subject of imitation, and are an attempt to discover trends and age-tendencies in the imitative activities of children. They certainly reveal some decided and law-abiding tendencies.

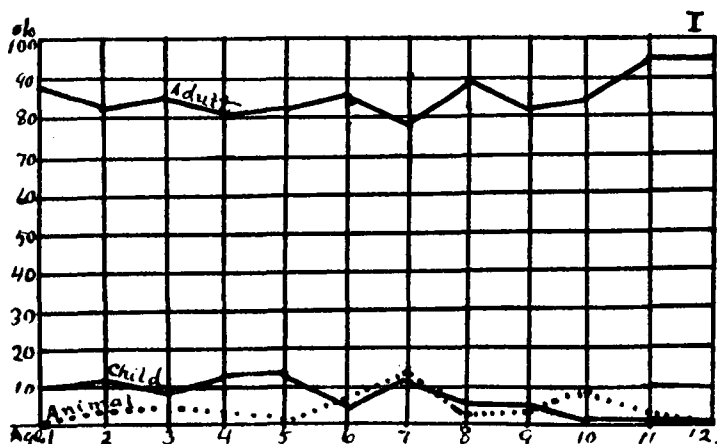


Chart I shows whom the child imitates. There is a small percentage of imitation of things, as an engine, but this is too slight to merit representation. According to the chart the proportion of imitation of adults is far in excess of imitation of other children or of animals. It is doubtful whether this chart shows the actual condition of things. Does a child imitate those who are far in advance of him, or does he imitate those who are more nearly on his own plane? We notice in the chart that the imitation of adults increases with years. It is probable that this trend is a true one.

If the tendency to imitate adults, whatever the proportion may be, means something, then it is pedagogically important.

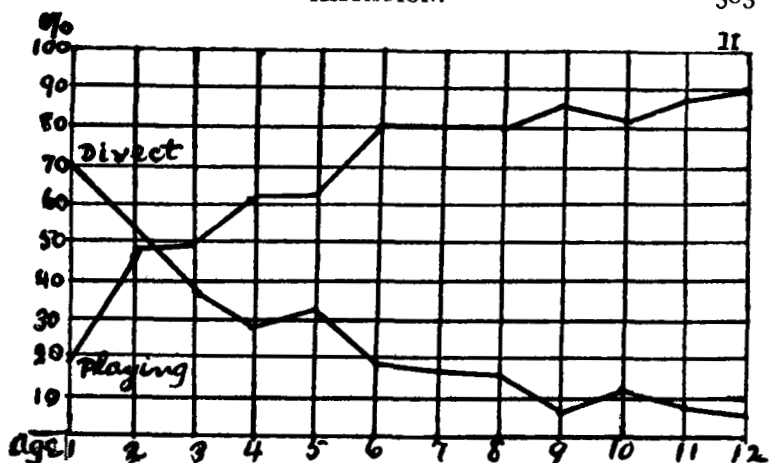


Chart II. Broadly speaking there seems to be three kinds of imitative activity represented in this book: Direct imitation, playing, and imitation with a conscious purpose. By direct imitation is meant the more immediate, more instinctive, less voluntary, sometimes unconscious and reflex, at all events impulsive imitation. This is illustrated by example 776, in which a class of little children bobbed their heads in imitation of the teacher who was keeping time with her head in teaching them a song. By playing, I mean the more dramatic form of imitation, — playing horse, etc. The direct imitation and playing are represented in the chart. As we should expect, the former decreases and the latter increases.

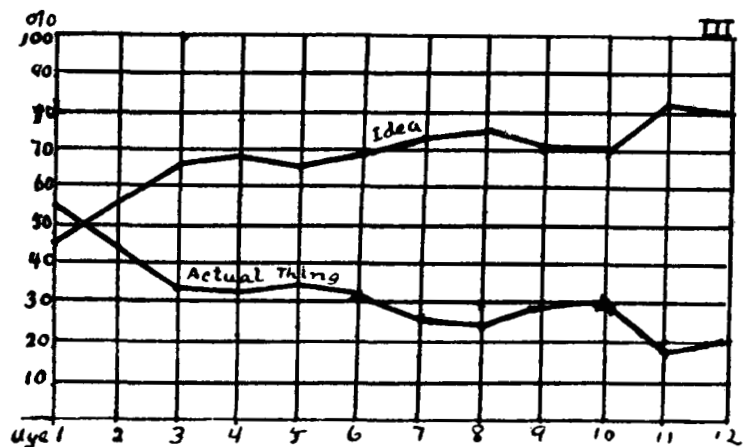


Chart III seems to show about the same thing as Chart II

but is collated on a different basis. Chart II shows an external objective classification, while Chart III, revealing the same laws, gives rather the internal meaning of these laws. It represents the exact imitation of the actual thing and the imitation of the *idea* with some variation of external features in the working out of that idea. As an illustration of imitation of the idea I quote example 50.

"Frank, age 1 yr. 9 mos. Frank had seen the boys play shinny in our yard and was delighted when my brother let him take the stick with which they played. Two days later I saw Frank playing shinny in the kitchen with a toasting fork and a pair of stockings rolled up in a ball."

This chart shows the growth of the understanding and imagination, and indicates growth of creative power and individuality.

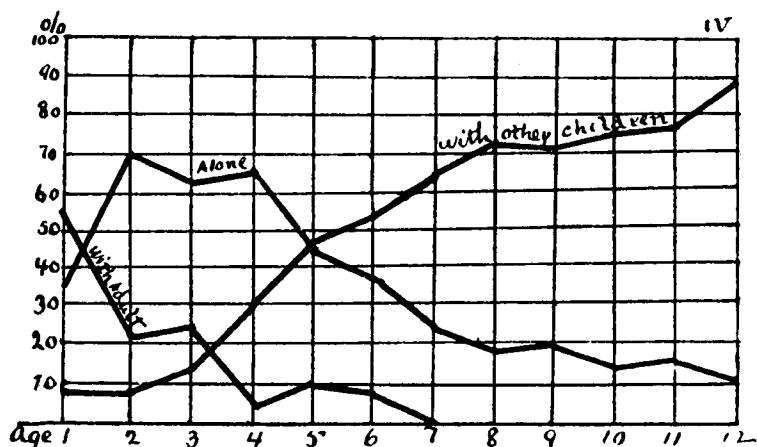
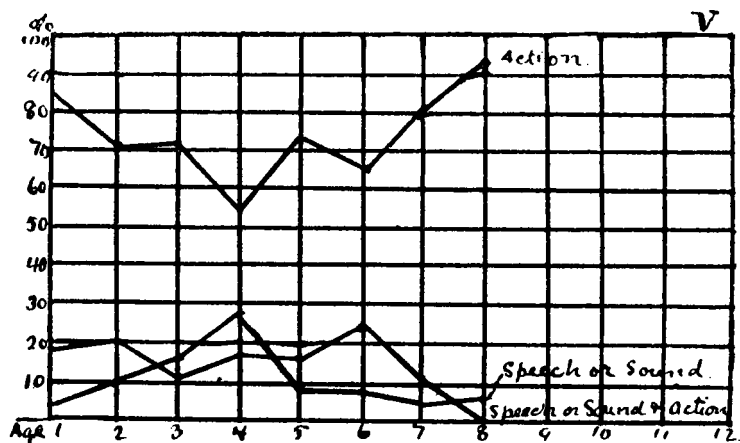


Chart IV shows with whom the child plays. The per cents are made, not on the whole number of cases of each age, as in the preceding charts, but on the cases of "playing" only. The tendency for a child to play with an adult is marked during the first year, after which for two or three years he is satisfied to play by himself. Then this tendency decreases, and with the development of the social instinct the tendency to play with other children increases rapidly and steadily. As this line advances there are more instances of groups of children playing together, which may indicate that while at first the child needs strong, authoritative control, yet beginning perhaps at four, he needs more and more democratic association with his fellows, with its increased possibilities of self direction.



Charts V and VI show what children imitate: as action, speech, or sound. The per cents of Chart V are made out on the cases of playing and those of Chart VI on the cases of direct imitation. Chart V shows the increasing combination of dramatic speech with dramatic action and the decreasing occurrence of playing by simple action alone.

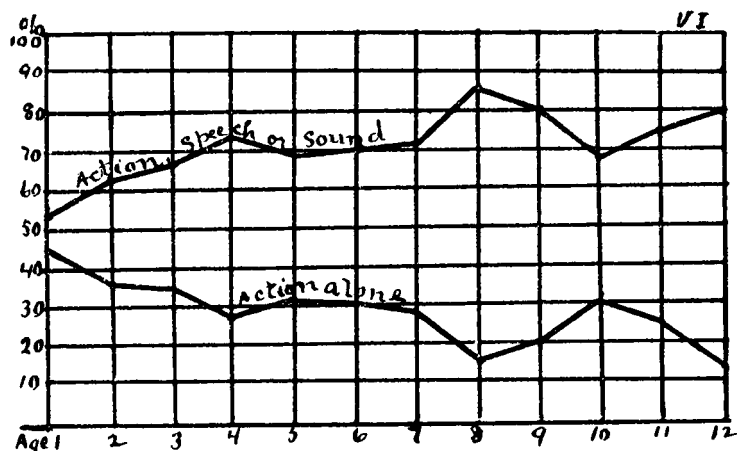


Chart VI shows the preponderance in early years of imitation of action over that of speech. This suggests that possibly in the early years too much is made of teaching language and that more attention should be given to hand and body activity. Bodily activity is such a large part of a child's spontaneous life, why should we not utilize it in the school room? It establishes one

more association with a given subject and so intensifies and broadens the mental concept. Chart V shows, moreover, that speech develops in connection with action.

The pedagogical suggestions drawn from the charts may be summed up as follows :

a. The natural tendencies of children indicate that adaptations of adult occupations furnish healthy material for part of the activity of the kindergarten.

b. From the age of four or five years considerable play should be given to the free development of children in connection with their social instincts.

c. In early years of school life *action* should be given a prominent place. The formal teaching of language should be subordinate. Verbal expression should be developed spontaneously in connection with action.