

Natural Learning Atmospheres

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Abstract

During the “Age of Reason”, Jean- Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) shared his Naturalistic beliefs allowing children centered education and naturalistic or scientific learning opportunities during the different developmental stages of children. This “Natural Learning Atmospheres” report describes Rousseau’s background as he grew up without a formal education and cultural context of his lifespan which led to his writings and philosophies. He not only had his own unique understanding of education that was not consistent and ever changing, he also influenced others to develop their own unique theories. His idea of not allowing society tell him or others what they should know or be educated in was profound and left him a lonely man.

Keywords: Developmental Stages, Child-Centered, Naturalism, Self-Taught, Permissive Education

Natural Learning Atmospheres

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a prophet of Naturalism they say, has a few theories that should be brought back to life and out to the forefront in order to bring interesting curriculum back to students. Allowing children to choose their studies in their familiar territories and possible career choices seems more fitting according to Rousseau. The concept that students want to do what they want to do and Rousseau's ideas of letting learning happen naturally match. Every subject or career includes learning from each and every subject. For example, welding requires reading, mathematics, language, science and so on. Learning through the technical aspects of welding for a child who is interested in being a welder, could work perfectly if allowed to be in the atmosphere of a weld shop practicing the art rather than solely reading about welding or learning a diagram of welding technology. Going back to nature and learning about the materials used for welding and moving forward with the techniques for welding would provide positive experiences, self-encouragement and eliminate the social barriers. Children are more involved and attentive while achieving outcomes to studies they feel are relevant to them.

Background and Cultural Context

Rousseau was influenced by his own interest of only paying attention to what he wanted to pay attention to. He believed that a child's education was truly in the hands of that child and should be directed by that child. He was not highly educated, yet his father and him read books and learned from the experiences available to learn from in trades. He was given the opportunity to intern twice and didn't successfully complete them due to lack of interest or blaming others for his failure. When he was given the opportunity to

learn or tutor, he found nature was more interesting. The key aspect of the influences on the educational thinker's ideas was how he was able to self-educate and still succeed only learning what he needed or wanted to learn. He took actions to make this processes work for others in the Enlightenment era by using conventional ideas, "a systematic and careful way of observing natural phenomena". Gutek (2011) These ideas were not common in the times.

Rousseau's thinking has had a profound influence on later philosophers and political theorists, although the tensions and ambiguities in his work have meant that his ideas have been developed in radically incompatible and divergent ways. In modern political philosophy, for example, it is possible to detect Rousseau as a source of inspiration for liberal theories, communitarian ideas, civic republicanism, and in theories of deliberative and participatory democracy. Hostile writers have portrayed Rousseau as a source of inspiration for the more authoritarian aspects of the French revolution and thence for aspects of fascism and communism, Bertram (2018).

Philosophy of Education

Although Rousseau contradicted himself on many of his thoughts and writings, he was consistent on the fact that he believed children could learn best with self-direction and experiences especially in nature. Most of the recorded writings and documentations on him are random and unexpected. The most extreme reports of his actions were that he loved children and their ability to learn and documented the stages of learning, yet he put his 5 children in orphanages at birth.

More specifically, Rousseau and those of the Enlightenment period wanted to remove perceived obstacles to education, such as influences of the church. He believed children were born good and it was society that corrupted them. Thus, he proposed that children should learn based on stages of development. For each stage, there are appropriate activities and learnings that come naturally. (Guttek, 2011) Relating appropriate learning activities to a child's development stages was important.

A summary from Bertram, (2018) reports the following four developmental stages. The first stage of the program starts in infancy, where Rousseau's crucial concern is to avoid conveying the idea that human relations are essentially ones of domination and subordination, an idea that can too easily be fostered in the infant by the conjunction of its own dependence on parental care and its power to get attention by crying. Though the young child must be protected from physical harm, Rousseau is keen that it gets used to the exercise of its bodily powers and he therefore advises that the child be left as free as possible rather than being confined or constrained. From the age of about twelve or so, the program moves on to the acquisition of abstract skills and concepts. This is not done with the use of books or formal lessons, but rather through practical experience. The third phase of education coincides with puberty and early adulthood. The period of isolation comes to an end and the child starts to take an interest in others (particularly the opposite sex), and in how he or she is regarded. At this stage the great danger is that excessive amour propre will extend to exacting recognition from others, disregarding their worth, and demanding subordination. The task of the tutor is to ensure that the pupil's relations with others are first mediated through the passion of *pitié* (compassion) so that through

the idea of the suffering others, of care, and of gratitude, the pupil finds a secure place for the recognition of his own moral worth where his amour propre is established on a non-competitive basis. The final period of education involves the tutor changing from a manipulator of the child's environment into the adult's trusted advisor. The young and autonomous adult finds a spouse who can be another source of secure and non-competitive recognition. This final phase also involves instruction into the nature of the social world, including the doctrines of Rousseau's political philosophy.

Rousseau was a fan of self-love. Griswold, (2017). The only problem is that he believed we have to lead others to believe a false sense of who we want them to believe we are and then we can learn to love that person, even if that person is only the best part of us compared to what society thinks we should be. He was a lonely man with possible narcissistic nature in his search of tranquility is noted. During this search, he was quoted to say, "human beings are not by nature bad." Griswald (2017)

Immediate intuition is also mentioned by Rousseau. It is when people have immediate understanding or knowing something without reasoning. He was a huge advocate of the technical learning. Rousseau believed, "idleness brings loss of innocence". Wain, (2011)

The idea of "utility" is introduced where every object has a purposeful use. Every subject is observed in the moment, at face value instead of studying documented writings and maps. Science taught truth and reality was found in nature. (Guttek, 2011)

Rousseau's writings influenced the actions of following philosophers such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Piaget. For example, Rousseau formed writings of child development

stages long before Piaget. Stage theory is based on the idea that children's intellectual development progresses through various levels of thinking. At each stage the child thinks in a different way from that of the previous stage. Sutherland (1992).

Mathematics and the sciences were the academics he focused on most with the art of literature and music added in later years. The addition of the arts contradicted some of his earlier writings.

The main purpose of education was to allow children the time to develop individualization rather than depend on learning other's findings. This allows the children to develop the best they can in the areas they need or feel they need in the individuals lives rather than what society chooses for them.

The nature of the learner was to observe their surroundings, especially of nature where he believed all of the answers of life could be found. Rousseau felt that nature superseded the supernatural. He believed in religion but wanted to keep it separate from each other and let instinct inform self of moral standings. During the Enlightenment period, some educators attempted to remove religion from learning. This diluted God's truth by not studying or sharing it. (Tacket, 2006).

Some blamed him of anti-intellectualism, when he was possibly more connected with the Naturalism or Romanticism philosophical labels.

Definitions

1. *Naturalism* - : realism in art or literature specifically : a theory or practice in literature emphasizing scientific observation of life without idealization and often including elements of determinism.

Merriam Webster Dictionary, (2020), Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/naturalism>

2. *Romanticism* - a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement originating in the 18th century, characterized chiefly by a reaction against neoclassicism and an emphasis on the imagination and emotions, and marked especially in English literature by sensibility and the use of autobiographical material, an exaltation of the primitive and the common man, an appreciation of external nature, an interest in the remote, a predilection for melancholy, and the use in poetry of older verse forms.

Merriam Webster Dictionary, (2020), Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/romanticism>

Theory to Practice

Rousseau brought his concepts to action by not practicing that the Bible was the only way to learn. He shared that “truth and meaning were found in things and of people, not by contemplating ideal forms.” Gutek (2011). Curriculum methods and content with human nature, human growth and development began to be taught.

Some of Rousseau’s accomplishments were the award-winning titles, “Has the progress of the Arts and Sciences Contributed More to the Corruption or Purification of Morals?” He believed they helped to corrupt. Another writing was the essay, “A letter on French Music”. He shared that music was for everyone. Next, he wrote a “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality”, expressing society placed people depending on their possessions or lack of.

He believed in allowing children to become independent rather than coddling them with a false sense of security, but rather let them learn and become resilient.

Emile was his most popular writing documenting how he believed nature and the child-centered learning was the key to education.

Dockery (2013) a Christian worldview encompasses all concepts and topics into a “universal principle” into one’s whole life. If religion were seen as a natural science and children were allowed to learn from in it a natural setting by observing others around them in acts of good nature and morals, then maybe religion would have placement in his educational theory.

Rousseau was a social reformer and educator. He advocated for the poor and emphasized life in society and strength of one’s natural ability to include a child’s emotional reasoning. He advocated religious instruction and love as a part of the educational processes as secondary to scientific foundations. He influenced others with his social views even if they were against his ideas, they would write to argue against his beliefs including when Diderot rejected general will of the human race in the article “Natural Right” in the Encyclopédie. Bertram, (2018)

Perspectives on Diversity

See assignment directions regarding what to enter in this section. You may leave the above heading as is or customize it as long as the heading conveys a key aspect of the educational thinker’s views on societal and/or individual diversity.

Rousseau mentions that “humans create most of their problems by themselves” and that we are so busy educating ourselves by lessons made up by society that we miss

out on learning things we need and “opportunities that present themselves”. Müller, (2010) One of the examples was learning lessons presented while playing in nature and the confidence it brought. He was a master at what he knew until Rousseau had to go to school and was soon put in the position of not knowing anything and degraded by the amount of knowledge he didn't know.

Rousseau consistently reported how we share a false image of ourselves and no one really knows who we really are, just a façade.

Critical Analysis

Some of Rousseau's beliefs would mean students would have to learn of only those things around them and in order for them to learn more, they would need to travel to the subject if they chose to learn it. Rousseau believed that the state and religion could hinder what children learn and not allow them to focus on what they want, sort of a distraction to what they could learn if they weren't taking so much time learning what others want them to learn. People argued that religion was needed in the structure of education as it had been done in the past to teach morals and state curriculum was needed to allow opportunities to all children that provide knowledge to the whole brain.

John Rawls, shared the influence made on him in his writing that included “original position” or self-interested choices making determinations on his principles of justice.

Bertram, (2018)

Implications and Conclusions

The most relevant materials to move forward in today's educational ways of thinking are that natural education was and still could be the main methods of learning with rich

environments providing field trips, not only books in the classroom. Taking children out to engage in scientific methods could take children back to their instincts. Using natural materials as a “Special” activity instead of an every day opportunity could be further looked into. It seems the natural possibilities are being ignored.

Progressive education leads teachers to ask what children are ready to learn depending on their abilities and age with development stages in mind. Child developmental stages are observed, while it could be more child centered. It is understood that differentiated materials are recognized. These materials could be better selected by the child for every child for every lesson instead of having one curriculum the same for every student and taught for the children in different ways. Possibly instruction is becoming a sterile one size fits all in an environment created to cover all ways possible to cover everyone.

As Gutek (2011) reported, since the day of Rousseau, this tension between child-centered permissive education and subject-matter education remains a point of conflict.

Religious educators believed departing from scriptures of the Bible; Rousseau departed from truth.

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