

Research Article

Rousseau's Natural Education Thought and Its Practical Significance Are Revealed -- Take Emile as an Example

Wen Shi^{1, 2, *}

¹Department of Education, Graduate University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

²Administration, Chengde College of Applied Technology, Chengde, China

Abstract

Rousseau's birth of natural education was a landmark event in the birth of modern education. Rousseau's natural education believed that attention should be paid to the natural changes in students' physiology and psychology, in accordance with their nature. This educational ideology has had a huge impact on the history of world education, influencing the emergence and development of a series of educational ideas by educators. It still has certain significance and value in the current era of education system reform. Rousseau's natural education philosophy advocates blaming nature, cultivating natural individuals, and respecting individual natural instincts, which has had a profound impact on the development history of Western society. This article combines Rousseau's work "Emile" to deeply analyze the connotation and characteristics of his natural education thought, interpret Rousseau's natural education thought, and elaborate on the practical significance of Rousseau's natural education thought to contemporary education from the aspects of respecting and adapting to students' natural nature, respecting and highlighting students' subjectivity, respecting and paying attention to students' individual differences, and paying attention to and promoting students' comprehensive development. The aim is to provide important reference and inspiration for the development of education and the development of education at all stages.

Keywords

Rousseau, Natural Education Thought, Emile, Realistic Significance

1. Introduction

Jean Jacques Rousseau (hereinafter referred to as Rousseau) was one of the 18th century French Enlightenment thinkers, philosophers, educators, writers, and representatives of the Enlightenment movement, with numerous representative works [1]. Rousseau's concept of natural education holds an important position in the history of human education. The formation of Rousseau's natural education thought is closely related to his growth experience and living environment.

Rousseau's Emile is the essence of his natural educational philosophy, and is considered one of the world's three great educational classics along with The Republic and The Essay on Education. Rousseau first systematically expounded a new perspective on children's education in his book Emile, proposing an educational philosophy based on natural education and human free development, which marked the watershed between old and new education [2]. In 18th century France, he

*Corresponding author: 350968068@qq.com (Wen Shi)

Received: 29 February 2024; **Accepted:** 20 March 2024; **Published:** 25 March 2024



initiated a Copernican style revolution [3]. Since Emile's birth over two hundred years ago, discussions about Rousseau's educational philosophy have never ceased [4]. In today's era, it is of great significance to repeatedly read the educational classic Emile and understand the essence of Rousseau's natural thought, which is of great practical significance for promoting the development of China's education.

2. The Connotation, Goal and Method of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought

To fully grasp Rousseau's natural education thought, we must make clear the goal and method of Rousseau's natural education thought and understand it accurately on the premise of correct understanding of its connotation. To be specific:

2.1. The Connotation of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought

The natural education thought is the core of Rousseau's educational thought. Emile tells the whole story about natural education. Rousseau understood education as the education of nature, the education of people and the education of things [5]. Among them, the education of nature is the premise of the education of people and things [6]. Through the coordination and unity of the three to promote the achievement of educational goals. Through the development of natural education, human organs can become mature, talent more and more outstanding; Through the implementation of human education, individuals can make progress under the guidance of others; the implementation of personal education can make individuals gain rich experience and improve a number of abilities. Therefore, the education of things and the education of people must be consistent with the natural education in the implementation process, and the goals of the three education must be unified [7]. In his opinion, the laws of nature should play a leading role in the development of education and provide favorable conditions for the development of human nature. Rousseau pursued ideal personality and natural humanity in education, requiring that the law of nature should not be violated in the implementation of education, and educational activities should be carried out in a way that conforms to nature, and children should not be forced to accept adult thoughts, concepts and propositions.

The "natural person" in Rousseau's vision has four main characteristics: first, natural development, that is, according to the nature of development, not from the stage, grade and class of bondage; Second, he is independent, capable of self-reliance and not dependent on others; Third, have social adaptability, can consciously assume and fulfill social responsibilities; Fourth, with good physical and mental conditions, can do independent thinking. In order to achieve the purpose of cultivating natural persons, Rousseau put forward

that individuals should be treated correctly as the premise and given full freedom.

2.2. Rousseau's Goal of Natural Education

The educational thought proposed by Rousseau emphasizes that the ultimate goal of natural education is to cultivate "natural persons" whose natural nature is fully developed. [8] In Rousseau's opinion, to achieve this goal, we must always respect the nature of children and develop in accordance with the natural nature. Rousseau pointed out that everything is governed by the laws of nature, including human development and growth, and the laws of nature determine what kind of person a person can become. This requires the setting of reasonable educational goals to cultivate all individuals into "natural persons" who can meet the requirements of nature. The natural person mentioned here is not a person who lives like an animal, far away from society, without knowledge and reason, but a person who will not be fettered by feudal society and will not be exterminated by feudal culture, achieve spontaneous and natural development, has a strong and healthy body, lives completely for himself, and can get rid of the shackles of tradition. The implementation of natural education can cultivate students into people with loving thoughts, developed mind and strong body, requiring people to be in the tide of society without prejudice or desire and fall into the whirlpool; As long as they can use their mind and eyes, they will only be affected by their own reason, and will not be controlled by any authority. Rousseau, by no means neglecting the social goal of education, demands that the teacher promote the natural development of the student, make him a pure natural person, and in this process gradually acquire the qualities of a citizen, and cannot skip the steps of a natural person and become a citizen directly.

2.3. Rousseau's Method of Natural Education

Rousseau's natural thought education puts forward the methods of education, that is, respecting children's nature, cultivating children's interests and implementing education in stages. First, respect children's nature. Keep children as they should be until they become adults. [9] Second, cultivate children's interest. To stimulate the students' learning power with interest, to maintain the desire for knowledge, on the basis of adhering to the principle of people-oriented, through the organic combination of free growth and correct guidance of children, to jointly promote the happy and healthy growth of children. Thirdly, education should be implemented in stages. Rousseau gave a comprehensive discussion of this method in Emile and proposed a complete education system. Rousseau's thought of natural education emphasizes that education should conform to nature and adopt different educational strategies according to different age groups. This idea is fully embodied in the book Emile. [10] In this book, Rousseau invented an educational object named Emile. Through narra-

tion and discussion, the idea of natural education runs through Emile's infancy, childhood, adolescence and youth, and endow the protagonist Emile with a happy childhood, healthy body, sound personality and other enviable life wealth. [11] In the book, Rousseau is an ideal teacher who educates Emile at all ages with the concept of nature and kindness. In infancy, the education based on physical exercise is implemented, so that children can develop naturally; The implementation of sensory education in childhood; Intelligence education and moral education should be implemented in the juvenile period; Children's education and moral education should be implemented in the adult period. According to the system of education proposed by Rousseau, children really go to society from the initial infant whispers and become "natural persons".

3. The Evaluation of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought

The value of Rousseau's thought of natural education is outstanding, but its limitations are also outstanding. Rousseau's thought of natural education should be treated from a dialectical perspective. This article evaluates Rousseau's natural education thought from two angles of value and limitation:

3.1. The Value of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought

Rousseau emphasized that education should be natural, vigorously attacked the traditional educational views, set off a far-reaching reform in the field of education, and became the watershed between new education and traditional education. Rousseau strongly attacked the feudal autocratic education. Although some of his views were too one-sided and extreme, they did not have too obvious impact on its value and influence. In France in the 18th century, the feudal ethics firmly confined people's thoughts, and human nature and freedom were suppressed. Rousseau put forward the theory of natural education under the support of natural philosophy, which truly regarded children as independent people and believed that children were the center of education. He hoped that children would have the appearance of children before they became adults, [12] and all educators should not disturb the order of children's development. Thousands of years of educational conventions and habits were broken, requiring education to be consistent with children's physical and mental development laws and age characteristics, to follow the nature of children, which is the source of child-centered thought.

3.2. The Limitation of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought

He emphasized that education should lead children to achieve spontaneous development, free from social con-

straints, with a strong utopian color; He affirmed the effectiveness of education and believed that education has the ability to transform the whole society. He believed that the relationship between the individual and the state, the natural person and the citizen is diametrically opposed, which shows that his ideas are contradictory. [13] He divided the development of children into five stages, that in a stage can only focus on one kind of education, not allowed to advance the implementation of education, such a claim is a bit metaphysical, too mechanical, rigid.

4. The Practical Significance of Rousseau's Thought of Natural Education

Rousseau's naturalistic education thought caused a sensation in some bourgeois families, and soon had a large number of loyal followers, challenging the feudal autocratic education thought. Viewed from the social development situation at that time, this thought had an enlightening effect that cannot be underestimated. Up to now, Rousseau's thought of natural education is still of great practical significance. For the current era of education and teaching, the practical significance of Rousseau's natural education thought is mainly reflected in:

4.1. Education Should Respect and Conform to Students' Natural Nature

The feudal education has a negative impact on the comprehensive and free development of children, Rousseau analyzed this, and required educators to grasp the natural development law of children, not only to provide children with good opportunities for education, but also to give them enough free time. Judging from the current development of education, the adverse effects of "exam-oriented" still exist. The choice of educational methods and management modes is only for the pursuit of higher scores, which stifles children's natural nature. Therefore, cultivating creativity and promoting children's free development have become slogans that cannot be implemented. Education reform should conform to the law of children's physical and mental development, and the realization of the goal of free development should be based on respect for nature, and should lead all children to move forward toward their ideals and learn under the drive of interest. This can not only help children to unload the heavy burden of learning, but also reflect the respect for children's natural nature, and lead students to develop freely with free education.

4.2. Education Should Respect and Highlight Students' Subjectivity

Conforming to nature is the core content of Rousseau's naturalistic educational thought, which holds that only edu-

cation that conforms to the law of children's natural development can be successful, and children should be cared for and respected, which lays a foundation for the formation and development of the student-oriented educational view. The essence of education is to lead all students to achieve all-round development, so that they have a healthy body and mind, and can achieve educational goals through a variety of ways, but no matter what kind of education method is adopted, teachers should respect the nature and interests of students, and put students' subjectivity into practice. Teachers can not grind and grind knowledge and then infuse it to students, but to enlighten and lead students to explore the unknown, so that students can master new knowledge with interest. In this process, teachers should guide students to master the correct learning methods, guide students to form a good quality of thinking. [14] Encourage students to participate in every learning activity to build up their learning confidence; Guide students to study independently and enhance their learning ability; Inspire students to think deeply, broaden their horizons, and have innovative thinking and ability.

4.3. Education Should Respect and Pay Attention to Students' Individual Differences

Rousseau was fully aware that students are different and children have different developmental characteristics at different ages. He suggested that teachers grasp the law of children's development and determine the content and methods of education according to their ability to accept and understand. He believed that education should not impose adult will, thoughts and views on students, should not carry out teaching activities according to adult viewpoints, and should not implement advanced education against the laws of nature. At present, the phenomenon of advanced education is widespread. In family education, parents do not want their children to lose at the starting line. In addition to expecting their children to achieve results in school, they also use their spare time to send their children to a number of interest classes, tutorial classes, and promotion classes, resulting in physical and mental exhaustion of children; In school education, some teachers always require students to adult standards, let students complete some of their own level and ability to reach the "uplift", in this way to improve scores, but did not use more energy for students to consolidate the foundation, students also have a fear of difficult emotions, lost interest in learning. Long-term learning pressure, students will appear a variety of complex psychological problems, is not conducive to growth. Therefore, education should teach students according to their aptitude and respect their individuality.

4.4. Education Should Pay Attention to and Promote Students' All-Round Development

Rousseau's educational thought has rich connotation, which takes promoting the all-round development of natural person as

the final point. Rousseau believes that intellectual education and physical education are a pair of whole, and labor can play an important role in the process of sharpening children's will, exercising their bodies and forming good character. In his works, Rousseau pointed out that if a person has good health, he will become a rational person. He believed that all social people should take labor as an unexempt responsibility, no matter whether the citizen is rich or poor, strong or weak, as long as he does not work, he is a rogue. At present, China's educational policy requires to promote the all-round development of students. Although it requires all kinds of schools at all levels to carry out quality education, it has not been fully implemented. Educational activities still have the essence of exam-oriented education. In the family education, parents too spoil the child, for the child all labor, school arrangements for students to participate in labor, but caused parents opposition and exclusion, labor education implementation encountered resistance. In the process of education, the school only takes the examination outline as a reference, and the education time that should be used in other aspects is all used in learning, and the score becomes the only standard for evaluating students. [15] The purpose of the implementation of educational policies and guidelines is to solve the problems of traditional education, and to complete the task of fostering morality and educating people in the process of in-depth promotion of quality education. Rousseau's educational thought can play a guiding role in educational practice.

5. Epilogue

In short, Rousseau's thought of natural education contains both positive content and irrationality. We should analyze it dialectically and extract the reasonable part from its educational concept and method so as to play a guiding role in improving the educational system and innovating educational methods of our country. Based on the national conditions, we should critically absorb it and formulate educational plans in line with the development situation of our country. To promote the development of education.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Huang Rong. Rousseau's theory of natural education and its implications for the five educations - based on reflections on Emile. Educational observation. 2020.9 (39): 37-39. <https://doi.org/10.16070/j.cnki.cn45-1388/g4s.2020.39.012>
- [2] Yang Rongjun. Returning to Human Nature: A Reconsideration of the Essence of Education: A Discussion on the Contemporary Value of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought in Emile. Journal of South China Normal University (Social Sciences Edition). 2020(04): 58-70+190.

- [3] Xu Xiaolin, Sun Shan. Inspiration of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought on Kindergarten Game Activities. *Science and Education Journal*. 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.16871/j.cnki.kjwha.2021.10.054>
- [4] Wang Fang. Conscience: The Main Line of Moral Education Thought in Emile. *Chinese Moral Education*. 2019 (19): 15-19.
- [5] Zhao Dan, Li Junkao. The naturalistic educational ideas and their practical significance in Rousseau's Emile. *Modernization of Education*. 2018. 5(27): 124-127.
<https://doi.org/10.16541/j.cnki.2095-8420.2018.27.045>
- [6] Qiu Shanshan. Exploring the Educational Value of Research Travel from Rousseau's Concept of Natural Education. *Journal of Heilongjiang University of Education*. 2018.
<https://doi.org/j.cnki:sun:hljb.0.2018-02-027>
- [7] Bian Shuzheng. Innovative Exploration of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era: Inspiration from Educational Ideas in Emile and Democracy and Education. *Research and Practice of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Theory*. 2019. 2(11): 71-73.
- [8] Wang Yanjun. Rousseau's Enlightenment of Natural Education Thought on Preschool Education in Emile. *Journal of Qiqihar Normal College*. 2017(02): 10-11.
<https://doi.org/10.16322/j.cnki.23-1534/z.2017.02-005>
- [9] Zheng Qi. Rousseau's Natural Education Thought and Its Inspiration. *Journal of Henan University of Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*. 2020. 21(01): 20-25.
[https://doi.org/10.16698/j.hpu\(social.sciences\).1673-9779.2020.01.004](https://doi.org/10.16698/j.hpu(social.sciences).1673-9779.2020.01.004)
- [10] Song Hui. Inspiration of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought on Contemporary Preschool Education. *Guangdong Women's Vocational and Technical College*. 2023. 7-9.
<https://doi.org/10.19392/j.cnki.1671-7341.202332003>
- [11] Aizi Li Jiahui. Further Exploration of Rousseau's Naturalist Educational Thought. *School of Educational Sciences, Yangzhou University*. 2022. 9.
<https://doi.org/10.26914/c.cnkihy.2022.063077>
- [12] Zhou Xingyu. Research on Rousseau's Thought on Labor Education and Contemporary Reference. *Jilin University*. 2022. 5. <https://doi.org/10.27162/d.cnki.gjlin.2022.002975>
- [13] Liu Liming. On Rousseau's Humanistic Thought on Natural Education: Purpose and Path. *School of Educational Sciences, Hunan Normal University*. 2021. 10.
- [14] Lu Yanyang. The Enlightenment of Rousseau's Natural Education Thought on Modern Ideological and Political Education. *School of Marxism, Hunan University of Science and Technology*. 2021. 2.
- [15] Ge Yuning. Analysis of Rousseau's Moral Education Thought. *School of Marxism, Henan University of Technology*. 2021. 1.
<https://doi.org/10.13747/j.cnki.bdxxyb.2021.01.014>