

*The Philosophy of Education: Ongoing Dialogue among Scholars*

Education philosophers have for centuries debated the fundamental ideas about the nature of a child and the necessary tools required to be a successful learner. This paper will display the scholarly conversation revolved around the evolution of education.

To begin, there are basically two different schools of thought in the discussion of the nature of a child. Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed in *Émile* that the nature of a child is pure freedom, which means a child has natural instincts to learn, and education should follow a child's inclinations (Rousseau, *Émile*). Similarly, John Dewey believes in the idea of the child's natural curiosity, but he adds that it is only a starting point, and that education can be used as a tool to guide and support the child's curiosity (Dewey, *The School and Society*). Michael Oakshott takes an even more conservative approach to Dewey's idea about education, and argues that children should be nurtured, by providing them with a "common inheritance" of knowledge that will eventually lead the child to "self-realization (Oakshott, *Learning and Teaching*)." Nel Noddings not only shares the idea of nurturing children through education, but her "caring" theory goes even deeper, identifying the role of the teacher as the most significant, stating, "As teachers, we must help students to bring these interests and topics together in ways that have meaning for them (Nel Noddings, *Caring in Education*)." The trajectory of thoughts about the nature of the child versus nurturing the child, leads to another essential question regarding the debate of the philosophy of education; we now turn our focus to the practical implications of how education can guide a child to be a successful learner.

The debate continues with two types of inquiry, "student-centered" inquiry versus "teacher-centered" inquiry. Sir Ken Robinson asks an important question in "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" He argues that schools should be based on what students want to learn rather than on the curriculum and structure developed by teachers, administrators or society, thus a more student-centered form of inquiry (Robinson, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*). Contrarily to Robinson, E.D. Hirsch Jr. argues that schools need to be responsible for providing students with specific knowledge, in a teacher and school-centered inquiry approach, which will then, in turn, help students "gain what schooling has to offer *beyond* essential facts (Hirsch, *Why Traditional Education is More Progressive*)." Nonetheless, John Dewey bridges the gap between student-centered and teacher-centered inquiry by incorporating both methods. He incorporates both sides of the debate, arguing that students should learn, based on their curiosity, through experience, but work closely with the teacher, who will guide and focus the content, based on their curiosity. When asked about Dewey's Lab school's philosophy he responded, "The intellectual and moral discipline, the total atmosphere, is to be permeated with the idea that school is to the child and to the teacher the social institution in which they *live*, and that is not a means to some outside end (Harms and DePencier, *Experiencing Education*)."

In conclusion, the debate about the nature of the child and what a child needs to be a successful learner is evidentially complex and large in scope. After looking at the

dialogue, each scholar presents certain ideas that keep the conversation going, but, John Dewey's ideology sets a new tone for the philosophy of education, and helped bridge the gap between many scholars. Although Dewey was very influential in this conversation, it is imperative for current and future educators and philosophers of education to maintain the rigor of this "great debate."