

The 300th Anniversary of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–2012)

(Editorial)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the eighteenth century thinker born 300 years ago in Geneva, has certainly influenced the development of pedagogical thought in a controversial way. The present thematic issue of the “Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies” is the third event this year to celebrate the anniversary of Rousseau’s birth and the 250th anniversary of the publication of his influential pedagogical work, “*Émile, or On Education*”. This testifies to the fact that we, as educators, have “adopted” him to a greater degree than the representatives from the other fields in which he worked (such as philosophy, literature, music). In May 2012, the Slovenian School Museum launched the exhibition “J-J R / The Exciting Citizen of Geneva / 300 Jean Jacques Rousseau 1712 – 1778,” accompanied by the Association of the Slovenian Pedagogues’ short conference on Rousseau’s pedagogical ideas.

Since we are still waiting for a comprehensive overview of Rousseau’s work and pedagogical ideas in the Slovenian pedagogical tradition, we will focus on only the controversies surrounding his pedagogical thought and activities.

Rousseau’s biographies and especially “*Confessions*”, his lengthy autobiography, suggest that his pedagogical experiences were not exactly extensive. He became internationally reputed as a distinct autodidact without any real family education or systematic academic studies. His limited pedagogical experiences were related to a short teaching period in Lyon, where he taught Mr. de Mably’s two children for a year. In the “*Confessions*,” he critically describes himself during this period as unsuccessful. This turned him against the profession of a teacher as he did not feel up to it and gave it up after a one-year trial period (Rousseau 1956). It is even more striking to read in his biographical information that he consigned his five children to an orphanage immediately after their births, in spite of his wife’s disapproval, in the belief that they would be better educated there (ibid.). Was the great pedagogical novel “*Émile, or On Education*” written in response to the feelings of guilt that the older Rousseau admits to having in his “*Confessions*”?

The controversies surrounding his ideas are demonstrated by well-known facts from his lifetime and from the period after his death. “*Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*” published in 1750 was awarded the prize by the Academy of Dijon, and on its publication in 1762, “*Émile*” sparked a real wave of euphoria among the Parisian bourgeoisie. However, “*On the Social Contract*” and “*Émile*” were publicly banned eighteen days after publication, and Rousseau was forced to flee into exile. After his death, Rousseau’s legacy first sank into oblivion, but after the French Revolution, he was awarded the highest state honors, and, in 1794, his remains were moved to the Pantheon (Kroflič 1997).

With regard to education, the traces of his pedagogical ideas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the extremely diverse interpretations of his theoretical concepts in particular, are more interesting than the political responses following the publication of his fundamental works and the attitudes expressed after his death. It is by no means possible to ignore the similarities between Rousseau's natural education and prevailing ideas about the preventive nature of education in the nineteenth century. Neither is it possible to ignore the fact that the critics of modern theory of education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries proclaimed him the father of reform and progressive pedagogies. Yet, a closer reading of "Émile" reveals places where Rousseau is indignant about raising willful children and calls for children's aggressive behavior to be paid back with interest. He also claims that education should not avoid the pedagogical situations, which the child does not experience, since human life necessarily contains anguish and renunciation. Preparation for these painful experiences must be part of child and adolescent education.

The contradictory interpretations of Rousseau's thought are undoubtedly caused by his extensive and essayist manner of writing and, probably, also by the fact that he did not approach anthropological, educational, and political ideas in a theoretically consistent way like the thinkers with whom he polemicized (Hobbes and Locke), the thinkers with whom he had personal quarrels (Hume) and others who developed theoretical ideas at least partly inspired by his views (Kant). Some of the contradictory and controversial topics of Rousseau's pedagogical thought worth emphasizing are:

- the question about the importance of the rational, emotional, and volitional dimensions of humanity;
- the question about the integration of Rousseau's pedagogical, anthropological, and political ideas in modern and postmodern thinking;
- the question about the consistency of his theory of education and society and their corresponding notions of the education of the individual and the citizen.

The first dilemma is addressed by **Robi Kroflič** in his article "Rousseau's Concept of Humanity and the Main Controversies in the Pedagogical Interpretations of *Émile*". The author emphasizes that Rousseau's concept of humanity is an intertwining of emotional and rational factors, which are open to both the development of human morality and the development of vices. In addition, the dividing line between positive and negative existentials is not based on the relationship between the rational and the emotional (as in Kant's philosophy); rather, the rational awareness of morality and social justice is conditioned by compassion, moral imagination, and the readiness of the individual to harmonize her or his private morality with that of the public and restore the general will. Rousseau's emphasis on the importance of the various modes of love (*amour de soi*, *amour-propre*, compassion) for the development of morality in different developmental periods – when the child's reason is not yet able to make complex moral judgments and moral education is meant to assure the child's unconditional subjection to the

norms of the environment – puts him in proximity to Hume's ideas regarding the importance of the formation of value judgments and sympathetic emotions for the development of morality. Simultaneously, it opens up a space for some contemporary theories of morality development, in particular, the theory of social domains (Nucci, Turiel, Smetana) and the inductive educational approach (Kroflič).

The question of integration of Rousseau's pedagogical, anthropological, and political ideas in modern and postmodern thinking is raised by **Eva D. Bahovec** in her text "*Rousseau and Nietzsche: 'The Politics of the Proper Name'*." E. D. Bahovec addresses the important issue of unity in Rousseau's work by highlighting the confessional and autobiographical nature of his writing in his opus, which is similar to Friedrich Nietzsche's. In addition to the nature of their work, the two authors share a key philosophical problems – how to face the corrupt nature of human civilization, and how to remedy this through education. Both problems are related to the manner according to which each of the authors inscribes himself and his proper name in philosophy. E. D. Bahovec employs Derrida's concept of the politics of the proper name and the consequential question about how "the personal" can become "the political" precisely through education. Since Nietzsche is seen as one of the most radical critics of modernity, the comparison shows Rousseau to be one of the predecessors to postmodernity.

Considering Rousseau as the author who addresses some of the key questions related to the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment is also discussed by **Tyson E. Lewis** in his "*From Being Willful to Being More Willing: A Phenomenological Critique of Rousseau's 'On Education'*." The article is based on a critical analysis of Rousseau's idea that we are all born "devoid of knowledge and of will," and it is the task of natural education to prepare individuals to use their liberty and their powers independently. Rousseau opposes the formula of discipline, which strengthens the will and, thereby, liberates it. This advocates a covert leadership over the child, which strengthens the sense of the child's will to function in the world and simultaneously limits his or her abundant desires. Lewis, however, believes that Rousseau remained a captive of the metaphysics of the educational, social, political, and theological relationships of the increasing nihilism of a technological age. With the help of Heidegger's concept of "enframing," Lewis highlights the drawbacks of Rousseau's pedagogical ideas, and he turns to Agamben's theory of study to go beyond the metaphysical limits of the majority of pedagogical theories. In addition to Rousseau, he also discusses Spencer, Dewey and the contemporary author, Rancière.

The last theoretical controversy mentioned above – the relationship between the education of the individual and the citizen, relating to the realization of the existential of the general will, while also setting education new objectives, such as the development of a positive attitude toward the republic – is discussed by **Igor Pribac's** "*Rousseau's Theory of the Social Contract and Its Amendments*" and **Zdenko Kodolja's** "*Rousseau and Patriotism*." In his article, Pribac argues that Rousseau's social contract theory belongs among those that originated the concept of "positive liberty"; as a consequence, he gives priority to duty over rights with regard to the organization of a just state. Citizens' duties are formulated in the

form of virtues with the help of civic religion and civic education. Civic education should instill a passionate affection for the homeland in future citizens, which is nothing but harmony with the general will. According to Pribac, however, this definition of civic education reveals a serious weakness: solidarity with others and giving priority to the common good over the private is not supported by education. Discerning the common good impairs citizens' legislative competence. Similarly, if the condition for the duration of a social contract is the continual educational and moral intervention of the state, the question of how to make entering the social contract possible at all is raised. Trachtenberg believes this condition can only begin after the contract has been concluded.

This interpretation of civic education is complemented by Zdenko Kodelja's contribution to patriotism as love of the homeland. While Rousseau sees the foundation of the homeland in the relationships between the state and its citizens as well as in the way of life, which is in accordance with the laws, he also sees patriotism as love of freedom and laws, with the origin of this love being the citizens' gratitude toward a good government. Education for the inspiration of patriotism is a key element in civic education. Rousseau writes in "The Government of Poland", that this should begin in the family. This supports Kroflič's thesis that Rousseau's pedagogical ideas cannot be divided into two separate parts, one belonging to the familial education of the individual and the other to civic education, which begins with the entry of the individual into society. This point is maintained by Schmidt in the preface to the Slovenian translation of "Émile" (1959). The same interpretation is advanced by Trachtenberg.

The selection of papers on Rousseau's pedagogical concepts is accompanied by the Slovenian translation of two intriguing extracts from "Émile", Book Five (also called "Sophie"), which has not yet been translated into Slovenian. The first extract is about the special characteristics of the female nature, which Rousseau believes requires a special educational approach. The second extract demonstrates Rousseau's perception of human virtue, thus completing the descriptions of the other existentials described in more detail in the first four books of "Émile". The principal existentials are different modes of love, compassion, will, reason and, in the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," conscience.

Although the contributions published here do not come anywhere near exhausting all the pedagogical ideas touched upon by Rousseau in his work, nor do they provide unambiguous answers to the controversial questions he raised, I do believe that the in-depth theoretical analyses can serve as an appropriate way to mark the anniversaries of Rousseau's birth and the publication of one of the pedagogical classics of the eighteenth century.

This issue of the "Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies" concludes with a non-thematic contribution from practice, in which **Maša Gril** demonstrates "*How School Can Encourage and Ensure Better Reading Literacy*." The author shows chronologically and content-wise how a project aimed at achieving better reading literacy among students in the school where she works was carried out. The approach taken aimed at improving pupil motivation for reading, learning different reading strategies, and working with parents. Her article offers a plan

of concrete activities related to the improvement of reading literacy, divided into three three-year school periods, encompassing the whole school, pedagogical staff, and individuals.

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