

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY – WHAT’S RELEVANT TO CONTEMPORARY  
PEDAGOGY??

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE CAPSTONE  
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During traditional pedagogy training, new teachers must learn a myriad of educational philosophies from different philosophers and psychologists. How do children learn and how must educators teach them is the question that is answered by each philosophy. Is a child’s aptitude determined by genetics (nature) or by environmental influences (nurture)? This paper will examine different educational philosophies of great thinkers; some who believe that children are genetically predisposed to intelligence and others who posit that all intelligence is experiential. It will also discuss which philosophies are relevant to teachers in contemporary times.

## **Introduction**

The philosophy of education can be defined as the philosophy of the process of education or learning or the philosophy of teaching. It attempts to answer how children learn, how they should be educated and how this education will benefit society. These beliefs are rooted in tradition, religion and reason. Educational philosophy as a process, was developed by Aristotle, Saint Augustine and John Locke and was directly correlated with their ethical theories. Educational philosophy's goal is to make sense of human nature and the psychology of learning. Since education is a continuous experiment and no one size fits all, why are there so many "different" educational philosophies? Philosophy is theory based and lacks any practical application to teaching and learning. Teachers need to know how to teach. Teaching requires skill.

Educational philosophy is rooted in two premises – what is considered truth in terms of in terms of education and what is man's original nature. When a prospective educator enrolls in the course of the philosophy of education or the foundations of education, they learn a myriad of theories postulated by child psychologists, educators, ethicists and philosophers. However, is this vast orientation of educational principles relevant when you are placed in front of twenty enthusiastic learners? This paper will explore the purposes of educational philosophy, various theories on education, who the great educational philosophers are and how each theory correlates with human nature, beginning with original sin. Great thinkers from Plato to John Dewey have "blueprints" as to what is the ideal in regards to educational philosophy. "Educational philosophy is a plan for allowing each succeeding generation to fulfill itself and take its place in an

increasingly complex and often confusing world” (Power 4). Educational philosophy is characterized by four distinct purposes: to inspire, to analyze, to prescribe and to inquire. Each purpose’s goal is, “committed to laying down a plan for what is considered to be the best education absolutely” (Powers 15). As I define all four goals in detail, I will also discuss which how these goals relate to the man’s original nature and the important text that concerns each belief.

## Inspirational Educational Philosophy

Inspirational educational philosophy is a model of teaching and learning that is considered the ideal. Inspirational educational philosophy can be defined as examining ideals for the education of children. The major players include Plato and French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Plato's *Republic* and Rousseau's *Émile* are both works that are placed in high regard as an illustration of inspirational educational philosophy. Plato's *Republic* outlines an educational plan "that would always be superior for preparing versatile and responsible citizens...He went on to justify the ideal credentials of his plan and came close to requiring its acceptance by any state wanting to enjoy success in the ancient world" (Power 5). Plato (427-347 B.C.), was a Greek philosopher and a follower of Socrates throughout his life (Ozmon 15). After the death of Socrates, Plato opened the Academy, a school where students and teachers engaged in dialect to discuss problems. Plato traveled throughout Greece and visited many states and reviewed their educational regimen. After doing so, he warned that any state not following the outline found in the *Republic* would suffer civic decline. According to Plato, man's life focus should be the search for truth. Plato viewed man's original nature as rational after being properly educated. Rousseau (1712-1778), like his predecessor, believed that without education, man would become a savage beast ( Ozmon 131). He was born in Geneva, Switzerland and lived most of his life in France. Rousseau believed that the environment was instrumental in shaping human thought. An ardent admirer of Plato, Rousseau believed that *The Republic* was "the finest treatise on education ever written" (Power 5). Rousseau's education plan, as outlined in *Émile*, describes the education process in a controlled environment. In his essay, *Émile* (1762), Rousseau tells the story of a fictional boy named Émile, who is removed from his family and sent to live

in isolation. It gives a narrative of a student's life in which environment and education are isolated and controlled. Rousseau breaks the education of *Émile* into five sections, based on the stages of his life. The first three stages of a child's development, infancy, boyhood and preadolescence require "negative education." The student would be shielded from any detriments of society and would not develop negative emotions such as envy and self-righteousness. The teacher or parent protects the child from external influences thus leading the child to develop his own reasoning in regards to actions and consequences. At age fifteen, *Émile* would develop reasoning and would begin to develop his morality by understanding society and God. Religion and God is not taught prior to this, since Rousseau's goal was for *Émile* to discern right from wrong and develop his own understanding of human nature. Rousseau also believed that education should follow nature. *Émile* was taken to a rural countryside as an infant because according to Rousseau, in regards to older children, "...the monster that is the enemy of the human race, has already crammed the little fellow's head with prejudice" (Boyd 89). Adults are able to carefully control how a child learns if the child is taught in complete isolation from man's influences. However, this task must begin when the child is very young. What is natural in human instinct is beyond repression. So, how can human kind follow anything other than what is natural? Rousseau also believe that, 'Every means has been tried except one, the very one which might succeed – well-regulated liberty' (Cleverly 35). By age twelve, the child has acquired a little experience and is able to discern what is right from what is wrong and become a member of society.

Both Plato and Rousseau's theories present a set of rules that would create the perfect student or citizen. However, ideals rarely become the reality. It is insufficient to

set forth an ideal and hope that people pick up on it. Philosophical logic doesn't teach children – people do. There is a line of demarcation between theory and practice and in the field of pedagogy, practice is what's relevant.

Inspirational educational philosophy is unrealistic to modern teachers since it is impossible to completely control our student's environments. Ideals are only useful when you can control the variables in which they occur. In public schools, there are children who come from extremely rich environments, extremely poor environments and anywhere in between. Allow me to clarify what I mean by rich and poor environments. An environment that is rich instills the importance of education in a child early in its life. The home is filled with books and dialogue that allows the child's vocabulary and articulation to flourish. An environment that is poor, is a home where educational tools are inaccessible, parents perhaps are too busy or tired to engage children with dialogue and television or video games are often the child's "baby-sitter" or form of entertainment. Educators who work in urban districts are often faced with children who are raised in poor environments. Too often education is not high on the community's priority list and parents are usually dealing with other personal issues. This presents a problem where as although you can create a controlled environment within the school's confines, you cannot create a controlled environment within the home and community. Educators can model appropriate behaviors, however, students are in your care for only 6.5 hours per day.

## **Analytical Educational Philosophy**

Analytical educational philosophy concentrated on linguistics and expression as a vehicle to discern and convey truth. The sole purpose of analytical philosophy is analyzing educational issues. Analytical educational philosophers do not establish ideals for education (Inspirational), nor provide a prescription on how education should take place (Prescriptive). Its sole purpose is to, “clarify the language used to express thought in order to be as accurate as possible about the meaning (or its lack) in connection with anything said about education. Analytical educational philosophers sought to find meaning in the varying educational propositions. “When they [analytical philosophers] allege that most statements about educational ends and means are clumsy and inexact, both in form and formulation, they feel that analytic technique can help supply definition and precision” (Power 8). Francis Bacon’s (1561-1626), *The Advancement of Learning*, attempts to find educational meaning in the educational policies of early colonists (Ozmon 56). “Bacon’s thesis was that most knowledge in man’s possession had elements of validity that could be made useful in the practical conduct of affairs if it were purged of those misconceptions that have been grafted to it over the years” (Power 9). From this quote, Bacon wants humans to be insightful and analyze information that we are given. Many things that we learn are faith-based and rooted in religious or philosophical ideology. These theories lack any real substance and cannot be proven. Linguistic analysis, according to analytical educational philosophy, is crucial to students of education. It allows the student to judge critically to draw meaning from theories that are



confusing. Pedagogical students learn a bevy of theories. Analytical educational philosophy is essential because it allows the student to extrapolate meaning from dogma. In the teaching process, it is insufficient to regurgitate information and facts to students. Students must be able to take information and analyze the information to make it useful and relevant in their lives. From my teaching experience, I have learned that spewing facts at students does not help them become thinkers. Thinkers are the innovators of the world. Analytical educational philosophy is a progressive idea that I believe is essential to modern pedagogy.

## **Prescriptive Educational Philosophy**

The prescriptive approach provides set criteria of how things should be done. The world is essentially an orderly place is the assumption of prescriptive educational philosophers. Human beings fit into this grand scheme of the universe and should live their lives in a way that is consistent with it. The interpretations are usually succinct and “prescribe a means to an end” (Power 10).

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), was a pioneer of prescriptive educational philosophy, although he never actually “wrote” a philosophy exemplifying this approach (Ozmon 48). As a pupil of Plato, he believed that human beings were rational animals. However, since Aristotle’s theories contained “the persuasive deductive logic, he started education in this direction’ (Power 10). Aristotle believed that the good in life comes from happiness. Happiness is the result of, “a virtuous and well-ordered soul” (Ozmon 52). A well-ordered soul developed from proper education. Education is necessary to reasoning so that mankind can make good choices. Education was the prescription necessary in producing good citizens. Another nineteenth century pioneer of prescriptive educational philosophy was German philosopher, Johann Herbart (1776-1841). Herbart believed that teachers should have accurate information and clear goals before they set foot into a classroom (Power 11). “His study of extant educational theory brought him to the abrupt conclusion that, for the most part, theory was deficient. It’s principle deficiency, he alleged, lay in the weakness of a foundation constructed on doubtful assumptions and misty tradition. This foundation needed prompt reconstruction and reinforcement from science” (Power 11). Herbart postulated that experience and an education in ethics was

what children needed to be successful. In regards to man's original nature, he believed that everyone is born with potential but it must be cultivated by education. "Education must begin with knowledge of persons-what they are and what they are capable of becoming" (11). Herbart sought to create a teaching standard. He gave a set of guidelines as to what schools and educators should do, which seemed like a feasible plan. Since Herbart showed disinterest in his philosophies being implemented, he "neglected to solicit support for a vast array of educational conclusions and allowed them to stand on their own merit" (11). Prescriptive educational philosophy is relevant to contemporary pedagogy because it provides a distinct set of guidelines for what needs to be taught. Teachers are not placed in a classroom and given instructions to just teach. Curriculums are designed based on prescriptive educational philosophy. Teachers must know what to teach. Many school districts, including the district I teach in, have adopted a backward teaching approach. This means teaching with the goal in mind throughout instruction. All instructional activities are geared toward the end result. For instance, a teacher wants to teach a unit on the Civil War. The teacher will refer to the district's curriculum too determine what needs to be taught. Then, assessment needs to begin to determine what the students know and what needs to be taught or reinforced. Then a final culminating assessment takes place. Prescriptive educational philosophy provides a purpose that is both practical and efficient. Students are taught what they need to know and instructional time is not wasted on concepts that are not needed.

## **Investigative and Inquiry Educational Philosophy**

Investigation and inquiry educational philosophy seeks to aid teachers in meeting the challenges in education. Its goal is to investigate policies and practices to determine whether they can remain as is, or require reconstruction. "Inquiring educational philosophy is committed to being a moderator of educational and scholastic experience rather than a judge of what is right or wrong in educational goals and practices" (Power 14). John Dewey (1859-1952), was a scholar, psychologist, philosopher and social critic, who took a pragmatic approach to the philosophy of education. "The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure" (Dewey 17). Dewey explains that education is not either this, "or" that. It is rather this "and" that. A teacher's job is to teach students to become good citizens. Education is reversing man's natural inclination and replacing it with habits that would make students productive and progressive. Believing in the unity of theory and practice, Dewey's theories on education were based on the writings of Charles Darwin and this made Dewey the father of modern progressive education and educational reconstructivism. He postulated that man's knowledge was obtained from experiences. Children were not blank slates; they came into the classroom with their own experiences that shaped who they were. Experiences and nature are mutually inclusive. "Experience and nature are not two different things separated from each other; rather, experience itself is of nature" (Ozmon 136). However,

not all experiences are beneficial to the enrichment of a child. Dewey formulated a criterion of experiences to discern worthwhile experiences from unworthwhile experiences. Experiences that allowed the participant to grow or develop, arouse curiosity and strengthen initiative, were worthwhile experiences. Dewey also agreed with Rousseau in regards to the importance of nature in education. "Rousseau established three sources of education: 1) nature, the spontaneous development of organs and capacities; 2) human beings, the social uses to which people put this development; and 3) things, the acquisition of personal experience from surrounding objects" (Ozmon 137). Instead of perceiving these factors as independent of each other as Rousseau did, Dewey believed that the relationships were interdependent.

Allowing teachers to discern which ideas would be "best practices" to suit their classroom is the main purpose of investigative and inquiry educational philosophy. All children do not learn in the same manner. Children's learning styles differ as much as educator's teaching styles. According to Dewey, the most effective learning is experiential learning. Experiential learning allows the students to become "active learners." The classroom environment is child centered and students combine experiences with knowledge to become problem solvers. This is an ideology that is considered progressive and has been adopted by contemporary teachers, including myself. When children take an active part in their education, they retain more information and schooling isn't perceived as a chore. In my experience, students are more engaged in lessons and are able to realize how learning is essential to their everyday existence.

## Man's Original Nature

Human nature is a subject of great complexity debated by philosophers. Education is also a topic that is constantly debated. This concept is entwined with Judeo-Christian beliefs of human nature and provides an explanation as to why people are the way they are.

Theories of human nature are constantly examined by philosophers to provide a set of guidelines on how we live our lives and specifically, how we should educate children.

What is the relation between human nature and education? Theories on human nature are the driving force of educational philosophy. Educational philosophy attempts to define human nature and how to teach it. Are children born as pieces of unmolded wax awaiting an artist's hand to transform them into masterpieces? Perhaps they are born corrupt, as all humankind is born into "original sin." (O'Neill 192). Philosophers' different theories and interpretations influence contemporary educational policies and what is considered "best practices." Studies on human nature dictate how children are taught, how they learn and how schools are organized. The purpose of education and learning philosophy is to have a model of teaching and learning that is cohesive. However, we know that in matters of children and education, no one size fits all. There are a few children who have a high aptitude for intelligence and many who have an average aptitude for intelligence. The concept of nature means that people are who they are, regardless of their environment. We are who we are and no one can influence or change that. The finality of this idea is quite dismal. Are children born with predisposed intelligences or is intelligence based strictly on external influences? The dichotomy of "original sin" and "blank white sheets," are not mutually exclusive, nor are they without controversy.

Learning may be a little of both. These two contradictory theories have influenced ancient and contemporary pedagogy.

Learning theories that aim to explain the original nature of man are essential to pedagogical training because teachers need to know how children learn and what their capabilities are. According to John Dewey, “the mind is as continuous with the materials within which it ingests and operates as is the stomach with the materials that it ingests” (Childs 57). We must know how children learn, their learning styles and what their capabilities are, in order to set them on a path for success. A teacher may have a class of academically gifted students. The way in which the teacher instructs them, the types of higher order thinking questions that the teacher asks them and the types of activities that are developed will be completely different from a class of students of average intelligence. As evidenced by kindergarten gifted and talented classes, some geniuses may be born and others are made.

## Original Sin

Religious ideology had a significant influence on early educational philosophy. Religious thinkers often had a pessimistic view of human nature. Theologians and educators of the eighteenth century believed that human nature has the propensity towards sin through the concept of “original sin.” The belief that children inherit sinfulness through God’s “first children,” Adam and Eve is supported by these thinkers in a quest to explain human nature. According to Genesis 3:1-23, Adam and Eve were innocent until they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. From this, they became aware of their nakedness and thus developed a consciousness. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430), popularized original sin by positing that man is innately evil and is bound by original sin (Ozmon 15). In 386, he converted to Christianity and entered the priesthood in 391 and was appointed the Bishop of Hippo in 395. He agreed with Plato that the “divided line” between ideas and matter existed, however Augustine referred to it as the World of God and the World of Man. The World of God is full of purity and virtue and conversely, the World of Man was full of sin and depravity. Augustine, like Plato, also believed that God created knowledge, not man. “In Plato’s philosophy, the soul has knowledge that is obscured by being imprisoned in the body. In Augustine’s interpretation, the soul was blackened by Adam’s fall from grace, which resulted in human doubt and uncertainty” (Ozmon 18). Man becomes gains morality with education and in pursuit of morality, is trying to restore the purity that Adam had before the fall of man. During the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin (1509-1564), a Protestant Reformation Theologian, adopted St. Augustine’s theory of original sin. (Battles 1327). According to Calvin, human nature possesses



immorality before we are born. “For since we are born sinners, we need forgiveness and pardon even from the time in our mother’s womb” (Battles 1327). God’s grace and proper education can reverse this predestination.

John Wesley (1703-1791), an educator and founder of the Methodist movement also theorized that free will had led Adam astray and was the cause of the sin and misery of the world (Cleverly 28). Wesley argued that education, “must attempt to restore the rational nature of man so far as this was possible and he listed all the interfering spiritual ‘diseases’ which everyone that is born of woman, brings with him into the world. (Cleverly 29). Children should be prevented from acting impulsively (as this was their nature). However, according to Genesis, the results of Adam’s sins were: enmity between man and women and between offspring (3:15), hard work and toil (3:17), and expulsion from the Garden of Eden (3:24). Absent is any reference of man’s original nature.

When one thinks of savagery, it is difficult to equate a child with that image. While most may think of a child as innocent and pure, devoid of any malice or ill intent, some, although not many educators believe that human nature is innately evil and it is the duty of parents, teachers or the individual, to invoke morality to tame the savage beast. What exactly is “evil?” Is evil subjective? Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines evil as “wicked; sinful; causing or likely to cause distress or trouble unless someone or something intervenes.” Eastern philosophy also postulates that man’s original nature is evil and selfish. According to Confucian philosopher Xunzi (312-230 B.C.), human nature is evil and must consciously work at being good (Watson 159). He states, “Hence if men follow their emotional nature, there will be no courtesy or humility; courtesy and humility in fact run counter to man’s emotional nature. From this it is obvious, then, that

man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity" (Watson 159). Since human beings are innately wicked, they must be educated in the ways to behave morally. According to Xunzi, no person is born with morals; they must be taught and education does not come naturally to humans. He describes moral education using the metaphor of a piece of metal being grinded in grindstone and sharpened.. A good example of the savage that lives within man is the novel, *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding (1954). Golding tells the tale of a group of boys marooned on a desert island after a plane crash who descend into savagery and barbarism. The novel is a metaphor for the evil and depravity that lives within human kind. There is hope for human nature for it can be tamed with education and discipline; we are not entirely incorrigible.

In theory, original sin is considered an archaic philosophy in regards to contemporary teaching. Schools and teachers strive to provide an environment that is conducive to developing students' potential, not provide education for students to redeem themselves. I disagree with this theory because it posits that the primary goal of education is to restore the piety that was lost in the Garden of Eden. My educational philosophy posits that children are educated to become thinkers and to shape the society in which they live. Education allows children to become enlightened and progressive. Becoming educated just for redemption seems incomprehensible.

## Blank White Sheets

As the pendulum swings to the other side of the spectrum of human nature, the belief is that children are pure and innocent and society or adults corrupt them. In Matthew 18:1-4, an Apostle asks Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus then calls a child in front of him and responds that unless the Apostle changes and become as that child, he will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus believed that children were innocent and thus rightful dwellers of the kingdom of heaven, which clearly refutes the belief that children are inherently evil through the dogma of original sin. Children are the models of what man should aspire to be. John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau accede to the belief of human nature is inherently good. John Locke (1632-1704), was an Enlightenment philosopher, doctor, and political theorist. (Aldrich 61). In his 1690 work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke objects the opinion that, “amongst some men, there are in the understanding certain innate principles; some primary notions, characters, as it were stamped on the mind of man; which the soul receives in its very first being and brings into the world with it” (Cleverly 16). In contrast, Locke posited that if innate ideas existed, they should be present in all human beings. He stated in this essay that there was no “universal assent.” If some theories were universal, this disproves that knowledge of them are inborn, since postnatal education must be taken into account. Locke also argued that the human mind at birth was a blank white sheet or *tabula rasa*, devoid of any ideas or corruption. “Experience is what our knowledge is founded and from that it ultimately derives itself” (Cleverly 16). The blank sheet theory disclaims any notion of original sin because a child’s mind is completely blank of rational thoughts or

ideas. Children are born empty vessels awaiting their fill of education and reason. Predisposed traits such as eye and hair color are the results of genetic markings. However, ideas and rational thoughts are not innate, if so, then everyone would have the same thoughts and ideas. Locke states in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, “I see no reason, therefore, to believe that the soul thinks before the senses have furnished it with ideas to think on” (Locke 5). Ideas are formed through experience and environment. Since children are born morally blind, they must be educated in the ways of civilized people to live in a civilized society. This is where the role of parents and teachers plays a part. Children are first taught morality by their parents. There is a multitude of explanations as to why a child can be perceived as evil. A morally corrupt child may be the result of a systemic or mental abnormality, which creates an altered perception of reality. Perhaps childhood trauma or poor breeding environment is the cause of depravity.

In essence, a parent and teacher’s goal is to educate children to gain their own logic and reasoning. Locke compares a parental influence and how children receive and learn from it, to swaddling clothes. “The bonds of this subjection are like swaddling clothes they are wrapt up in and supported by in the weakness of their infancy. Age and reason as they grow up loosen them, till at length they drop quite off, and leave man at his own free disposal” (Locke 8). Since children are born without any knowledge of morality, early education shapes their development and any impression, however miniscule can have lasting effects. The blank sheet theory allows a society to establish norms and mores for civilization. Since human beings are born without a predisposed nature, the mind can be engraved with the positive inscriptions for civilized citizens.

As a staunch supporter of Locke’s philosophy, French philosopher Jean-Jacques

Rousseau postulated that children's intrinsic nature is neutral (Boyd 8). Man and society corrupts them. "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man" (Bloom 37). Children can be shaped by their environment to be either good or evil. Rousseau's perception of children is that they are born pure and society in which they live taints their morality. Parents and educators are obligated to sow the seeds in the mind of a child to shape their consciousness as they mature and bring them closer to nature, which is good. Rousseau admits however, that although children have the ability to engage in misbehaviors, their intentions are without malice. Underneath their wrong doings is a pure heart, devoid of any corruption. "There is no original perversity in the human heart. There is not a single vice to be found in it which it cannot be said how and whence it entered" (Bloom 37). Freedom equated happiness and to attain happiness, early education must be negative. Do not teach virtue, do not teach corruption; a child should be taught to discern the worth of experience as his/her own reasoning developed. "We are born capable of learning but knowing nothing, perceiving nothing. The mind, bound up within imperfect and half-grown organs, is not even aware of its own existence. The movement and cries of a newborn are purely reflex, without knowledge or will" (Cleverly 36). Education comes from nature, from man, or from things, according to Rousseau.

In some aspects, the blank white sheets could be relevant to modern education, but not in its entirety. The theory does suggest that a person who has had a difficult upbringing could have a successful adulthood and I know this to be true. I know of quite a few well-adjusted, successful adults who have had extremely difficult childhood in which their parents were drug addicts or they were homeless. These adults were driven

enough to know what they wanted and someone provided guidance for their ambitions to come to fruition. However, this theory also suggests that all children are pretty much created equally and that they become corrupt when in the hands of adults or society. I believe that not all children have the same intellectual capacities. If they did, there would be campaigns to close the achievement gaps between white and minority students.

## **Innocent and Depraved?**

Can human nature be a combination of nature and nurture? Johannes Amos Comenius (1592-1670), a Moravian theologian and educator acceded that a child's original nature is innocent, even though they are marked by original sin (Power 49). "They are not yet the defaced image of God and are unable to discern between good and evil, between the right hand and the left. Secondly, they are the purest and dearly purchased possession of Christ who saves all except those who shut themselves out by unbelief and impenitence" (Eller 60). Albeit children are pure and innocent, parents and educators must also mold them so that they exhibit morality throughout their lives. Comenius believes that all human beings are born wanting to become educated and that all human beings are capable of becoming educated. Education consists of experiences and these experiences should be sensory.

John Dewey believed that there were not universals or absolutes in regards to education and learning. Learning was a combination of both nature and nurture. "For Dewey. Experience is not just an isolated happenstance; it has depth and reaches into nature. Experience and nature are not two different things separated from each other; rather experience itself is of nature" (Ozmon 136). Experience and nature are not monolithic. Nature is experiences and social interactions. Unlike Rousseau, Dewey maintained that a child need not be in a controlled, isolated environment to be educated properly. Social interactions are imperative to effective learning.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), albeit a modern educational philosopher, also believed that children constructed their own knowledge in response to their experiences (Munari 314).

He regarded himself in some ways, the “intellectual successor to Jean Jacques Rousseau” (Cleverly 85). According to Piaget, children are born with certain cognitive abilities and innate reflexes. These include grasping and sucking. “The child receives data through the sense organs; the child also has some inborn processing capacities – otherwise it would not be able to learn - but in addition, some ‘information’ or ‘programs’ are built-in at birth; there is a working memory, in which the child keeps those items of knowledge and skill that are being used at a particular moment; and there is permanent memory, which is, in Locke’s terms, largely a ‘blank tablet’ at birth, but which has a storage capacity that makes a hard disk pale into insignificance” ( Cleverly 137). Intelligence is a culmination of innate aptitude and experience. Learning and intelligence is constantly evolving. To say that it is one or the other makes it static. If a child’s aptitude is only predisposed, then it would not matter what type of environment the child grew up in; they would possess intelligence if they were raised by a pack of wolves.

When speaking to current educators, many believe that a child’s nature is a combination of nature and nurture. According to Viktor Lawson, third grade teacher at Lindenwold School 4, “Experience is the best teacher. To me, the most relevant educational thinker is John Dewey. Although children come to school with varying aptitudes, a nurturing environment allows children to learn best. I always try to think of ways in which the children can apply what is learned in the classroom into real-life. This allows them to become life-long learners.” I also agree that human nature is an combination of both nature and nurture. Most children are born with the potential to function successfully. With proper stimulation at an early age, children can develop higher order thinking skills. Effective teaching and proper external stimulation is



essential a good education. Kevin Riculfy, another third grade teacher at Lindenwold school 4 believes that, “individuals are born with specific intelligences that can be exposed by the environment. With an enriched learning environment, dedicated to creating meaningful experiences, students can develop and build intelligences.”

In summation, the nature versus nurture debate is not a rivaling one, but rather a cohesive idea in which no one has more bearing on intelligence than the other. To refute this, I again use the example of gifted children. Many parents play classical music to their baby in utero and allow their child to watch a myriad of ‘educational’ DVD’s to cultivate genius. If it were that simple, parents could create a country of geniuses. Each of us are born with a certain amount of intelligence. The more we nurture that intelligence, the more intelligent we become. If children are challenged and taught to become active learners, they will be better equipped to think innovatively and analytically and thus achieve their potential.

## **Conclusion**

Since all educational theories are rooted in man's original nature, I have explicated how some great thinkers believe that children are born evil, that children are born innocent and an amalgamation of both theories. One must agree that children are considered society's most vulnerable members and must be educated to insure that they become productive citizens of society. But how do we educate them? Which theory is the most effective? In response to the idea of original sin, if children possess naivete, how can they be evil? Also, if most would concur that children are born without reason, meaning that they are unable to discern right from wrong and adults must teach it to them, are they truly innocent? If something is inherently good, there is no need for education in reason or morality, because its nature is virtuous. Perhaps the focus for education should be on educating children's pure nature in order for them to improve a corrupt world. Learning and educating is active. It is neither yielding nor subjective. When a child is learning, they are bringing to that experience their entire schema (prior knowledge). In regards to classroom instruction, novice teachers should know that they have little or no control over their student's environment or aptitude to learning, but can provide effective instruction. Having a prescriptive purpose for education is the most meaningful to teach children critical thinking skills. Modern age children are more technologically advanced and must compete in a global environment. The best preparation includes the educator having a goal in mind. If educators know what the desired results will be, then you will know how to teach it. This is effective in teaching both general education students and special needs students. The philosophy of John Dewey provides the most pragmatic

approach in relation to experience and learning. Genetics and proper experiences are interdependent. If we know the aptitude of students, educators can provide experiences that will develop the child's intelligences.

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