COMPARING A.S. NEILL TO ROUSSEAU, APPROPRIATE?

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Abstract

The following article explores a comparison drawn by several authors between A.S. Neill and J.-J. Rousseau. To conduct this exploration, the article first delineates a methodology that rests on the analysis of key educational themes. Then, the article contextualizes the works of both Neill and Rousseau. This contextualization clarifies the subsequent comparative analysis. This analysis examines Neill and Rousseau' stances on knowledge, learning, teaching and the nature of learners. This examination identifies evident discrepancies between the discourses of both authors. As a result, it concludes that the likening of Neill to Rousseau is largely inappropriate.

COMPARING A.S. NEILL TO ROUSSEAU, APPROPRIATE?

The literature on A.S. Neill and on the school that he founded, Summerhill School, abounds with comparisons linking his pedagogical principles to those of J.-J. Rousseau in *Émile*. Indeed, Darling (1984, 1992), on more than one occasion, likened Neill's child-centered principles to some of Rousseau's ideas. In a similar way, Goodman declared that Neill and Rousseau shared a common view against authoritarianism in education (Lawson,

1972). Suissa (2006) asserted that Neill and Rousseau both conceived the nature of children as benevolent. Many others formulated similar comparisons (e.g. Miller, 2007; Stronach & Piper, 2007). In the same perspective, to introduce Neill's philosophical contributions to literacy, Krogh (2001) stated that one notable attempt at a Rousseau-like atmosphere was Summerhill School. Do such comparative statements do justice to Neill's educational contributions? This article will argue that they do not to a large extent. As such, its goals are not only to shed light on Neill's educational heritage and to further the discussion on free schooling, but to offer guidance to free school practitioners on some of the theories that underpin the free school movement. To achieve them, we will first define a method that will allow us to analyze the likening of Neill's tenets to those of Rousseau. Then, we will contextualize the works of Neill and Rousseau to proceed to an analysis of their commonalities and differences.

METHODOLOGY

The works of both of these thinkers represent very complex entities and cannot be analyzed without making certain reductions (Van Manen, 1990). However, in order to make this analysis viable, a theoretical lens will guide our argumentation. This theoretical lens will draw upon structural elements of Davis' *Inventions of teaching*. In this book, Davis tried to articulate an overview of every Western educational theory from a little more than the past two millenniums (Davis, 2004). One premise guided his endeavour. This premise supposes that an educational theory is defined by the combination of assumptions about four topics knowledge, learning, teaching and learners. These four topics are common to Rousseau's central piece on education (*Émile or Treatise on Education*) and to Neill's essays on his school (*Summerhill [1968]*, *Summerhill: A radical approach to education [1972]*, and *Summerhill School: A new view of childhood [1992]*). The recurrence of these topics in the works of these two authors makes comparison between the two possible, even though the two

theorists' thinking emerged in different times and traditions. Thus, our intention is to use the combination of these four topics to structure our comparative analysis to discuss the fairness of the likening of both thinkers' educational theories. Hence, in the following lines, we will juxtapose Neill's pedagogical beliefs to those of Rousseau with regard to knowledge, learning, teaching and learners respectively. In doing so, we will make sure that the writings of either Neill or Rousseau predominantly ground our analysis.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

To enhance the understanding of the associations of Neill's educational tenets to those of Rousseau, we will first contextualize the works of both individuals.

Neill was a twentieth-century Scottish educator for almost 60 years, although he liked to consider himself a psychologist (Darling, 1984). Both of his parents were schoolteachers (Neill, 1960/1992). Early in life, Neill worked as a pupil-teacher for his father. He then went to university where he obtained a Master's degree. He became a headmaster in 1914, but became uncomfortable with many educational practices based on what he called "moral standards from without" (Neill, 1960/1992, p.195). At that school, he tried to implement a system of self-governance, though he resigned from his position after the staff told him that such a system did not work. In 1921, he founded Summerhill School. He detailed his pedagogical practices at this school in numerous books (1968, 1972). This school is a free school in England. A certain number of principles characterizing the functioning of Summerhill School distinguish this school from conventional ones. Indeed, Summerhill School is largely run democratically through school meetings by the collective formed by students and teachers together (Darling, 1992). During these meetings, every member of the school can bring up a topic to be discussed by the assembly and everyone has an equal vote on each issue that the assembly addresses. As a boarding school, Summerhill School differs from most free schools, which only operate during the day, and, as such, provides more

opportunities for the emergence of a social life and, as a result, of many possibilities for

democratic self-governance. However, there are limits to the democratic mechanisms of the

school, for instance, the administrative apparatus is run by adults (Darling, 1992). The system

of self-governance of the school entails a certain freedom for students (Neill, 1960/1992).

Questioned on freedom in his school, Neill replied:

> There isn't such thing as absolute freedom. Anyone who allows a child to get all his own way is following a dangerous path. No one can have social freedom, for the rights of others must be respected. But everyone should have individual freedom. To put it concretely: no one has the right to make a boy learn Latin, because learning is a matter for individual choice; but if in a Latin class, a boy fools all the time, the class should throw him out, because he interferes with the freedom of others. (Neill, 1961, p.309)

Indeed, students enjoy a freedom that stops where that of others starts (Neill, 1972). As a

result, for them, attending class is optional (Neill, 1972). Neill is the one who theorized and

put into practice these educational principles. He acknowledged on several occasions the

influence on his praxis of the works of psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm

Reich as well as of Henry Lane's *Little Commonwealth*, an experimental self-governing

community for young delinquents at the beginning of the twentieth century. We have to admit

that Neill read Rousseau's *Émile*, but only late in life (Darling, 1984). He had designed

Summerhill School long before that point.

As far as Rousseau is concerned, he was an eighteenth-century French philosopher[1].

The bulk of his educational thinking lies in his book *Émile ou de l'éducation* (*Émile or

Treatise on Education*). Elements of Rousseau's biography and of French history can help

better understanding the significance and the message of this book.

Rousseau reached notoriety by winning a writing contest organized by *L'Académie de

Dijon* (Rousseau, 1762/1969). He earned this title by arguing, as suggested by Diderot, that

the development of the arts and sciences was morally detrimental (Rousseau, 1762/1969).

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[1] He was born in Geneva. Here, the adjective French implies the language in which he has written.

This marked the beginning of his controversial philosophical career and of a life of criticisms of the French society of the time. Rousseau's perspective of this society is largely manifest in his books *Discourse on Inequality* and *The Social Contract* (Rousseau, 1762/1969). He wrote *Émile* to reinforce his criticisms of the eighteenth-century French society (Rousseau, 1762/2003). Dewey outlined the content of this treaty on education (Dewey, 1968). He depicted this treaty as an antisocial work on education that posits that the goal and the means of education ought to reside in nature. In this sense, nature should provide the wherewithal for men's[2] emancipation from society (Dewey, 1968). Nature is a key theme. In *Émile*, it represents the antithesis of society, the prejudicial feudal French society of the time. *Émile* is a chronological fictional account of how Rousseau would raise a pupil named Émile[3] and, then, of how he would raise Sophie, a girl who is meant to marry Émile.

Rousseau's own education is highly indicative of most of the stances present in the book. Indeed, as Rousseau admitted himself in *The Confessions*, he never attended school (Rousseau, 1789/1995). In this book, he recalled how he did not know how he had learned how to read (a common phenomenon in free schools [Greenberg, 1995]). Rousseau obtained his education from his family and by working.

Several commentators underscored the contradictive nature of some of Rousseau's statements (Rousseau, 1762/1969; Rousseau, 1762/2003). Indeed, on many instances, his arguments are contradictory. However, the overall message of the book is consistent. This will be important to keep in mind to examine the comparison between him and Neill.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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[2] Here, our intention is to suggest the misogynistic character of Rousseau's discourse.
[3] Even though Rousseau has not actually raised Émile, in the book, the philosopher acts as though he were raising him. Thus, in the article, we will refer interchangeably to Rousseau, the philosopher, and to Rousseau, the governor, the fictional character.

Even though our analysis will identify different points of agreement between Rousseau and Neill's thinking, it will demonstrate that their thinking clearly diverged on several issues.

KNOWLEDGE

About knowledge, these educators' perspectives on its essence and on its value contain sharp contrasts.

The essence of knowledge

By resorting to Davis (2004)'s classification of conceptions of knowledge, we claim that Rousseau's viewpoint on the essence of knowledge belongs to the subjectivist end of the spectrum, whereas Neill's position is in line with objectivity. Indeed, Rousseau alluded to a well-defined distinction between things in themselves and abstractions when criticizing pedagogical practices of his time. When it came to educational matters, he contended that educators should strictly rely on things in themselves and that signs, abstractions, were useless. For example, to teach about a geographical region, he advised to visit and explore the region of interest instead of having recourse to maps. Rousseau saw those maps as highly reductive abstractions of regions, that is of things in themselves. This position truly denotes a subjective stance as it suggests that abstractions are reductions of realities. Concerning Neill, Darling (1984) contended that Neill's view of knowledge was impoverished. Neill granted a bigger importance to learning and to what Darling (1984) called the acquisition of knowledge. Darling (1984) argued that Neill considered school subjects as self-contained exercises. To support this statement, he provided an example of how Neill had introduced algebra to children:

> All right, this is our first algebra class, so I'll begin by saying that in algebra we deal with letters instead of numbers. Is that clear? For example (writing on blackboard):
> a+a= 2a
> b+b= 2b. (Darling, 1984, p.167)

Such examples led Darling (1984) to categorize Neill's stance on knowledge as traditional. According to Davis (2004), this traditional view is congruent with objectivism. Indeed, Neill's position on knowledge is in line with Davis correspondence theory of truth. This theory is a feature of objectivism and assumes word-objects, meaning that words are uncritically understood as tags that one attaches to objects (Davis, 2004). This lack of criticisms on the nature of words is representative of Neill's perspective (Darling, 1984). Indeed, according to Darling (1984), "Neil was enslaved by a traditional model of knowledge because he had no conception of any alternative view" (p. 170). Thus, regarding the essence of knowledge, we should see Rousseau as an adherent to subjectivism and Neill as one to objectivism.

The value of knowledge

A similar distinction sets apart Neill and Rousseau's valorization of knowledge. Neill thought that there were things more important than knowledge (Darling, 1992). These things comprised happiness and emotional well-being (Neill, 1960/1992). Nevertheless, he still considered that knowing was important. However, he was at odds with the hierarchy of subjects and the valorization of certain subjects over others as set by universities, for instance, when he raised the question as to why arts were not more valued in schools (Neill, 1972). According to Neill, the value of a particular subject had to hinge on the utility of this subject for a particular individual. On the other hand Rousseau articulated the hierarchy of subjects to teach his pupils. He maintained that geometry was a valuable topic, that religion should not be introduced at a certain point. The organisation of this subject hierarchy rested on usefulness as a criterion, but the standard specifying this usefulness had been decided by Rousseau. Hence, Rousseau and Neill both conceived knowledge as useful, though they disagreed on how to go about the valorization of different bodies of knowledge. Because this also applies to their

position on the essence of knowledge, Neill and Rousseau did not articulate similar conceptions of knowledge.

Learning

The same is true of their stance on learning, more specifically on the nature of learning processes and on the object of learning. Neill advocated that intrinsic motivation should be the starting point of learning. In some ways, this view is consistent with Rousseau. However, the intrinsic motivation of Rousseau's pupil bears on a specific topic. It is grounded on the respect and trust that this pupil has for his or her governor. It is important to note that Rousseau intended to develop this respect and trust by instilling in his pupils an unconditional obedience – we will further discuss this point in the teaching section. According to Neill, the intrinsic motivation had to be directed at a particular subject. He felt that, once students possessed this motivation, they could learn in two years what others would learn in eight years in conventional schools. Neill believed that relying on students' intrinsic motivation would allow these learners to satisfy their wishes. As a principle, this entailed that most students' educational journey would begin with play. The purpose of this activity was twofold. First, it allowed to satisfy unfulfilled wishes and to nurture creativity, imagination and abstract thinking. These aspects of learning were absent from Rousseau's view of learning. Indeed, for him, imagination distracted individuals from earthly concerns. The philosopher advocated for a very inductive learning approach, whereas Neill thought anything could be learned in anyways once a person was intrinsically motivated. In fact, Rousseau postulated that learning should begin by observations of nature supplemented by hands-on activities. This observation ought to start by an acute development of the senses and of specific physical abilities. Therefore, despite a few similarities, Neill and Rousseau had contradictory groundings for their stances on learning as a process – Neill, intrinsic motivation; and Rousseau, inductiveness.

Regarding the object of learning, drawing a parallel between the two authors becomes completely inappropriate, namely in matters of goals and curriculum. Before tackling with their positions on the goals of learning, we would like to remind the reader that those goals can hardly be dissociated from the goals of teaching. For efficiency reasons, we will address some of the goals that, we feel, pertain more to learning here and go over the other ones in the next section.

Rousseau predetermined the purposes of learning. This is not Neill's case. He believed that every child should have the right to decide freely what to do with his or her life (Darling, 1992). In fact, Neill did not care if his students wanted to become scholars or street cleaner (Neill, 1972). Furthermore, as odd as it may sound, Neill did not want to choose the religion or the spouse of each of his students. However, this does not apply to Rousseau. He granted himself the power and the right to choose his pupils' religion and spouse. In addition, Rousseau aimed at creating versatile individuals, whether his pupils wished to achieve this goal or not. He would also forbid Émile and, later on Sophie, to perform tasks that he considered to belong to the opposite sex. The writer wanted Émile to have a useful job. Other goals missing from *Émile*, but coveted by Neill, comprise self-determination, self-government and abiding by a freedom that stops where that of others stops. As such, Neill wanted to empower his students with decision relative to learning while Rousseau wanted to take these decisions for his pupils. In spite of those discrepancies with respect to the goals of learning, Neill and Rousseau both desired that their students would not be alienated by society. On the one hand, for Neill, this meant that children could elect to eat or to sleep when they wanted, though Neill was glad if his students became active member of society. On the other hand, Rousseau wanted that the master protect his[4] pupils from social institutions.

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[4] Here, again, we employ the masculine because the master could only be a man.

Neill and Rousseau derived from their respective goals divergent conceptions regarding curricula. Rousseau insisted that his curriculum followed what he called the natural laws, as opposed to social ones. Those laws would help the emancipation of his pupils from society. They should show the positive and negative consequences of every action. Rousseau, due to his emphasis on inductiveness, articulated a curriculum that began with sense-related abilities. This led to the development of physical skills such as running, throwing, etc. Then, Rousseau would teach to read and to write. Later on, subjects like geometry, natural history, astronomy, moral and religion would appear. In Neill's case, the word curriculum fails to convey what he conceived as the object of learning. Children themselves had to determine what this object ought to be. In this sense, this object hinged on students' interests only. This also entailed that Neill would never refuse a child the right to be taught the ministerial curriculum. Another distinction between Neill and Rousseau in terms of object of learning is salient. This distinction deals with the mind-body dialogic. Neill imparted to his students that there was nothing shameful about the body. He would allow masturbation. However, he would forbid his students from sexual intercourse, though, on the grounds, that any resultant scandal would be harmful to the school (Darling, 1992, p. 8). He felt that the repression of such sexual impulses would have negative effects on learning, among other things. As for Rousseau, he warned his pupils on many occasions versus the vices of bodily experiences. In his book, he did not even dare to use the word sex. He talked of passions instead. Hence, with regard to learning, students' initiatives and emotions underpinned Neill's perspective whereas Rousseau's position revolves around decisions taken by the master.

Teaching

This section will highlight similar discrepancies with regard to teaching. This should be salient in terms of teaching goals and means.

At first view, the teaching goals of Neill and Rousseau seem similar. Indeed, Rousseau contended from the onset that educators should teach their students to be themselves, though as opposed to being citizens. For Rousseau, citizenship implied to be someone for others, not to be oneself. According to him, training students to become citizens equated indoctrination. He justified this by pointing out that such training involved the molding of personalities with respect to values selected by a society. For Neill, the aim of education was to lay the foundation of a happy life for his students. This has been substantiated by his claim that a happy childhood assures future development. Neill's objective entailed that students become themselves. On this matter, Neill was consistent with Rousseau. However, two important points differentiate their viewpoints on teaching goals. First, Rousseau associated citizenship to the values of a society, though being oneself, for his pupils, meant abiding by the words and values of the governor, in this case, Rousseau himself. This implied, as mentioned earlier, powers with respect to profession, religion and spouse. Secondly, Rousseau's allusion to citizenry only hinted at a patriotic sense of the word while Neill wished that his students improved the state of their society. In this sense, Neill employed a conception of citizenry that transcended national barriers.

These two obvious distinctions between Neill and Rousseau's teaching intentions have underlain important differences with regard to teaching strategies. This is obvious with respect to the nature of the student-teacher relation, and to positions on socialization, coercion and motivation.

Regarding this relation, the position of Rousseau was in line with authoritarianism whereas that of Neill was congruent with equality. Even though Rousseau put forth the idea that happiness lies in freedom, unconditional obedience on the part of his pupils predicated his teaching. This relation of dependence was the essence of Rousseau's conception of education. This education ended when the pupil did not need guidance anymore. On the other

hand, Neill attempted to establish an equalitarian relationship with his students from the outset. This involved that both adults and children possessed equal rights and obligations. It is worth noticing that matters of fire and safety limited this equality. Nevertheless, this meant that, at times, a child could be the teacher and the adult, the student, and vice-versa. It also entailed that teachers and students could be honest about one another. In addition, democratic mechanisms underpinned this equalitarian system. At Summerhill School, democratic assemblies called school meetings served and still serve the purpose of regulating the social life of the school and of deciding on educational matters. Each amendment decided in these meetings implied that every person participating in the assembly had an equal say, one vote on each issue. These assemblies created a setting that provided opportunities for students to take decision with respect to real concerns. This idea of real concerns is incongruent with parts of Rousseau's thinking. Indeed, in his book, he described episodes where he would entice his pupil into artificial situations that would force the student to want to learn something. For instance, he evoked an example where he would go for a walk in the forest with his pupil and, at some point, would act as though they were lost. This subterfuge would fulfill the need of stimulating his student's desire to develop new skills to come back home. This illustrates the state of dependence characterizing Rousseau's ideal of the teacher-student relation as contrasting with Neill's equalitarian status at the heart of this kind of relation at Summerhill School.

Concerning socialization, Rousseau and Neill are at odds. Rousseau would wait as long as possible before introducing society to his pupils. He would go to great length to delay this introduction. First, he would only teach to one student at the time, hence, preventing a form of socialization between pupils. Moreover, he suggested that his students should learn to speak as late as possible. According to him, learning a language would give his students the concept of self. This would ultimately lead to selfishness. On the other hand, for Neill,

selfishness represented a phase that needed to be satisfied in order for one to become altruistic. Therefore, Neill would be comfortable with having his students in social situations very early. As soon as a student set foot on the ground of the school, Neill would grant to this individual rights to participate in the decisions relevant to the everyday social life of the school. Furthermore, as opposed to Rousseau, Neill would teach to more than one student at the time. He believed that interests –key aspect of learning- grew contagiously in social settings. Thus, Neill was in favor of children socialization, whereas Rousseau stood against this idea.

In relation to coercion, they appear to agree on some issues, but they still diverged noticeably. Indeed, both of them warned against the usage of coercion for pedagogical purposes. To this, Rousseau also added that every wrongdoing meant to prevent a misdeed turns out to be the cause of similar misdeeds. This way, Rousseau claimed that one cannot do any harm to teach something good. On the other hand, on different instances, he advised to remind the child how weak he or she is with respect to the governor's strength. The intention of this strategy was to solidify the status of dependence of the child with regard to his or her master. This way, the child would be scared to lose the teacher. As for Neill, he wanted to abolish such fear of adults and teachers. Instead of reminding his students of their weaknesses, he attempted to nurture their self-esteem and self-confidence. Approving of the students' actions was a key step in this attempt in line with being on the side of children. Another one was the use of smiles and laughter. Therefore, even though Neill and Rousseau largely advocated against coercion, their views were conflicting concerning self-esteem and self-confidence.

These positions entailed different stances on motivation. As mentioned earlier, Neill relied on intrinsic motivation, though Rousseau espoused a more behaviorist approach. Neill thought that if educators taught children's emotion, the intellect of those children would look

for itself. Thus, in order to increase the intrinsic motivation of his students, Summerhill School did not divide – and still does not- its students in grades. Furthermore, it does not mark its students' work, unless those children request the opposite. Neill also encouraged his students to be themselves. This strategy has to be combined to those employed to foster children's self-esteem and self-confidence. Neill saw intrinsic motivation as so important that he believed that, as soon as a student had it, any teaching method could suffice. In fact, when teaching children who had opted to attend a class, Neill used to resort to very conventional teaching methods, such as lectures (Darling, 1984). As for Rousseau, even though he advanced the idea that every adult should allow children to follow their desire, Rousseau's reliance on fear and on rewards made his approach behaviorist. We have demonstrated how he would instill fear in his pupil. As for an example of rewards, Rousseau devoted a huge part of one of his chapter to an episode during which he had convinced an overweight aristocratic child to run for cakes. We also need to include the instances where Rousseau would put his pupils in artificial situations that would force them to learn something. One of such instances was the aforementioned event of the walk in the forest. Nonetheless, especially regarding infants and very young children, the French author recommended that every adult interfere as less as possible with children's attempts to get the object of their desire. This meant that adults should not provide children with help that the latter did not need. This would push children to do as much as possible on their own to get what they wanted. Neill advanced forward a similar idea. It supposes that unnecessary teaching creates the need for more teaching as such teaching sends the message to children that they are incapable of learning things for themselves. Even though this idea is in line with Rousseau's foregoing positions, Rousseau's advice did not apply to adolescents. Therefore, despite some theoretical agreement on the importance of intrinsic motivation, Rousseau's pedagogical practices mostly relied on extrinsic motivation, which is incongruent with Neill's tenets.

In spite of the generations of distinct inferences on various educational aspects, Neill's focus on intrinsic motivation and Rousseau's naturalistic approach produced similar stances on learning settings. Both writers discussed the idea that learning should not occur behind closed doors. For Neill, allowing children to spend time outside offered them a space to fulfill many of their wishes. This would foster children's emotions in a way that would be suitable to learning. For Rousseau, experiencing the outdoors was congruent with an inductive approach to learning.

Consequently, even though Neill and Rousseau agreed on the necessity of open space for children's development, Rousseau's teaching approach was largely teacher-centered while that of Neill, child-centered.

Learners from an ontological perspective

Our analysis should reveal that the two educators differed on ontological issues pertaining to learners' gender, age and abilities/disabilities. Nevertheless, it should also underscore their common views on the overall nature of learners.

Indeed, both authors asserted that there was no evil in children. Neill contended that children were innately wise and realistic. He also declared that there was no original will for criminality in children. According to him, the suppression of unfulfilled wishes inclined children to criminality. Congruent with this, Rousseau depicted children as naturally good. They would remain that way as long as they found resistance in things not in will. Resistance in will referred to the resistance exerted on children's desires by society. This statement is consistent with Neill's association of suppressions of unfulfilled wishes to children criminality. However, this statement and Neill's association differ with respect to the role of society. In his statement, Rousseau blamed society in general for children's moral decay, whereas Neill only held responsible bad parents and bad teachers. Moreover, Rousseau affirmed that children became tyrants when people would answer their orders positively.

Babies' cries could exemplify such orders. Nonetheless, Rousseau and Neill's assertion of children's innate goodness is the most relevant commonalities between the two authors.

About gender issues in relation to the ontological essence of learners, the two writers stand for extremely conflicting view. We can infer that Neill saw women and men as equals since he attended to the educational needs of boys and girls in a very similar fashion. However, on several instances, Rousseau argued that men and women were unequal. He asserted that educators should teach boys to be themselves and should train girls in a way that will, later on, ensure that they can please men. For him, these educators should ensure that girls would be able to meet men's expectations. On many occasions, Rousseau highlighted how women should be subdued. This stance contradicts enormously Neill's perspective on gender. It is especially for this reason that we think that the comparison between Neill and Rousseau's pedagogical tenets is inappropriate.

As for disabilities, Rousseau made clear in the beginning of his book that he would only teach to whom he considered a normal child. He listed several cases of disabilities that would dissuade him from teaching to certain children. In contrast, Neill educated several children, considered delinquents at the time, who presented symptoms associated to oppositional deficit disorders and/or to attention deficit disorders. This was particularly true during the first decades of Summerhill School.

Lastly, the two authors' perspectives on the age of learners are also conflicting, notably in the way that ageism entered their respective pedagogical approaches. Indeed, Neill thought that children should learn what they wanted when they wanted. For Rousseau, this was not the case. For example, he affirmed that children should not learn about religion before the age of fifteen years old. In this sense, Rousseau, as opposed to Neill, demonstrated an espousal of ageism.

Evidently, despite agreeing on the innate good nature of children, Rousseau and Neill are at odds as far as gender, disabilities and age are concerned.

CONCLUSION

In the light of our analysis, we conclude that our introductive contention on the inadequacy of the likening of Neill's educational heritage to Rousseau's pedagogical tenets is viable. Indeed, our analysis showed, based on a contextualization of the two authors' works, several discrepancies between Neil and Rousseau's positions on knowledge, learning, teaching and the ontological nature of learners. Due to the contradictive nature of some of Rousseau's ideas, we understand how it is possible to draw a parallel between this author and Neill. However, we consider that, once one put these isolated contradictive ideas in context with the general sense of *Émile*, this parallel is unsubstantiated as, overall, *Émile* conflicts with Neill's thought. Notwithstanding, some comparisons on specific aspects of education remain appropriate, though we would like these comparisons to remain specific. In asserting this, we want to remind the reader that both Neill and Rousseau underscored the innate goodness of children. Their assertion is very significant as it seems to challenge the assumption that underlies compulsory education. This assumption posits that societies should compel children of a certain age to learn various things, presuming that, otherwise, children would not do what compulsory schooling deems good, learning those various things. According to Neill, for several decades now, Summerhill School disproved this assumption, thereby confirming Neill and Rousseau's assertion on the goodness of children. Lastly, we want to welcome the reader to further this discussion on Neill, Rousseau, free schooling and compulsory education.

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