ROUSSEAU’S CURRICULUM PERSPECTIVE AND THE PRE-PRIMARY/PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

J. B. Okimedim

Abstract
These are the words of a man who has had a profound influence on the field of education. This man is none other than Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau is one of those philosophers who have been greatly misunderstood. Many have criticized his philosophy as being totally outdated and not much applicable in today’s situation. But this seems paradoxical as Rousseau has also been that person who has had a great influence in the field of education. If not his method, then other methods fashioned on his philosophy have been introduced in different fields of education. This paper highlights his educational ideas through his educational and childhood career, his philosophy, aims, views, curriculum, methods and implications for functional pre-primary and primary education in Nigeria.

It is important to understand that Rousseau has been criticized more because people have not really understood why he expressed himself the way he did. Two main aspects come out very strongly in his philosophy. They are, nature and the child of these were of great importance in his philosophy of education. In order to grasp the reason for his philosophy one ought to understand his background and the context in which he wrote. Education has been defined in many ways, with each author stressing some or the other important dimension of education. For instance Aristotle sees education as the creation of a healthy mind in a healthy body. While Socrates says education dispel error and discover truth. Dewey in the other hand adverse that education is the process of remaking experience, giving it a more socialized value through increased individual experience, by giving the individual better control over his own powers. Pestalozzi opined that education is a natural, progressive, and systematic means an individual of development of all the powers and amplified that the preparations for complete living, is the function which education has to discharge. (Cunningham, 2013)

In formal education, a curriculum is the set of courses, and their content, offered at a school or university. As an idea, curriculum came from the Latin word for race course, referring to the course of deeds and experiences through which children grow to become mature adults. A curriculum is prescriptive, and is based on a more general syllabus which merely specifies what topics must be understood and to what level to achieve a particular grade or standard. Curriculum has numerous definitions, which can be slightly confusing. In its broadest sense a curriculum may refer to all courses offered at a school. This is particularly true of schools at the university level, where the diversity of a curriculum might be an attractive point to a potential student.

Rousseau’s Childhood and Educational Career
Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), was born of upper class parentage in the simple Protestant city of Geneva. His father, a watchmaker, was descendant from a Parisian family, and inherited much of the Romanticism, mercurial temperament, and love of pleasures of his forbears. The mother of Rousseau, too, although the daughter of a clergy man, was of a morbid and sentimental disposition. She died at the birth of Jean Rousseau. (Graves 1938:77)
Rousseau was brought up by an indulgent aunt, who never bothered to correct him when he faltered. She completely failed to instill in him any moral principles. This tendency for a want of self-control was further increased by his father, who had an equally careless attitude. When Rousseau was only six, his father would sit with him night after night and read to him the most silly and sensational romances, which were left behind by his wife. It is for this reason that extreme emotionality, imaginativeness and precocity were nurtured within the child at a really early age. “After a year or so, the novels were exhausted and Rousseau had to turn for material, to the more sensible library of his grandfather, the preacher.” Some of these works included the parallel lives of Plutarch and the standard histories of the day.

These works had a lasting impression on his character. They contributed to his sense of heroism and what he afterwards termed ‘that republican spirit and love of liberty, that haughty and invincible turn of the mind, which rendered me impatient of restraint.’ His want of control may in this way, have first come to turn itself toward the revolution and the destruction of existing society. (Graves, 1938: 78)

When he was ten, his father ran away, and Jean Rousseau, together with his cousin were sent to school in a village of Bossey. This constituted the only training he was destined to receive.” (Eby, 1964: 320) Here his love of nature, which had already been cultivated by the beauties of the Genevian environment, was greatly heightened. He found a wonderful enjoyment of this rural life. He was happy, played with zest, learned to garden and acquired a strong love for nature. However, a severe punishment for a boyish offence led to this period of schooling ending in disappointment.

Thereupon he declares, he began to evolve the theory that it is through restraint and discipline of the impulses and departure from nature that humanity has ever been corrupted and ruined…” (Graves, 1938: 79)

After this he retired to Geneva and spent a couple of years in idleness and sentimentality. This was because he always found it difficult to adjust himself to social and vocational life. However, during his trade apprenticeships, he was further corrupted by low companions, and gave free reign to his impulses to loaf, lie and steal. He ran away from the city and spent many years in vagrancy and menial service. During this time, the beauties of nature continued to have their effect on him, especially the wonderful scenery of Savoy. He priest felt pity on him and fed him. He was placed for his spiritual edification under the guidance of a Madame de Warrens. She was charming and was of shallow character, and it was because of this that Rousseau made little progress in piety. “With her assistance, he put forth many efforts to find a congenial vocation. He served as a lackey, studied for the priesthood, practiced music and became in turn, a government clerk, a teacher of music, and a secretary.” (Eby, 1964: 321) He was employed to teach the two sons of Monsieur de Plalby, but this too ended in failure, due to his hot temper. He thus, returned to Madame de Warrens, and ended being her paid secretary and lover.

Two features of these years are of special significance: the experiences gathered in his wanderings, and his somewhat desultory studies. His excursions, offered a vivid insight into the revolting miseries of the French peasantry. His studies served to acquaint him with the current social and philosophical problems agitating the minds of men. Montaigne, Leibniz, Locke, Pope and Voltaire made the deepest impression. (Eby, 1964: 321) In course of time, he and Madame de Warrens grew tired of each other, and in a fit of jealousy, he broke up with her, and moved to Paris. However, in spite of his poverty, he was able to make friends with Voltaire, Diderot and other leaders. Thus, by being associated with the most brilliant literary and philosophical group in France, he began to accept their pessimism and engaged in their libertarian life. He earned a meager livelihood by coping music.
He met Therese Levasseur, a vulgar and very stupid girl, who lived as his mistress for 23 years, before they got married. Five children were born, and without delay they were sent to the fondling hospital. None of them were ever traced. This was one of the most unaccountable of the performances of this paradoxical genius. (Eby, 1964: 322).

He spent the remaining years of his life writing. But in spite of the fame he received later on, his last years were no happier than the first. He died in exile, in poverty and in solitude, in the year 1778, at the age of 66.

**Rousseau’s Philosophy of Education**

Correct education disposes the child to take the path that will lead him to truth when he has reached the age to understand it, and to goodness when he has acquired the faculty of recognizing and loving it – Rousseau” (Cunningham, 1961: 21).

Through all the centuries, the theory and practice of education had been determined from the standpoint of adult interest and adult social life. No one had dreamed there could be any other point of view from which to approach the training of the young. Rousseau boldly assailed this basic assumption as not only utterly false but absolutely harmful. In place of the ideas and views of adults, he substituted the needs and activities of the child and the natural course of development. “No change could have been more revolutionary. Just as Copernicus destroyed medieval cosmology, Rousseau put an end to the traditional conceptions of the child, by showing that he is a creature of nature and that he acts and grows in harmony with her laws.” (Eby, 1938: 335)

The adult point of view carried numerous erroneous and misleading assumptions that were now seen to be quite absurd. Much of the treatment of children as well as most of the methods of instruction had to undergo radical revision. One of these misconceptions was that the child was a miniature adult, and that enlargement in size and the increase in knowledge are the processes of education. The result being that the children were treated as little men and women. They were expected to understand the same subjects and to be interested in the same ideas as adults. They were obliged to practice the same conventionalities of polite life and, at the same time, to observe a far more rigorous standard of ethical behaviour.

It was from such artificiality that Rousseau wished to liberate the child. Education had been conceived as a process by which the child must acquire certain habits, skills, attitudes, and a body of knowledge which civilization had handed down. It was the task of the school to transfer these unchanged to each new generation. On the one hand, the stability of society depended on the success of the transfer; on the other, the success of the individual depended on acquiring them. The fact that children are imitative, that the retentive power of memory is strongest in childhood, that they have an extraordinary ability to acquire language apart from the ideas symbolized – all these have conspired to mislead pedagogy. (Eby 336).

It was the great service of Rousseau to abolish this false system of education. His supreme contribution lay in making the child the centre from which education must be viewed. Teaching and training consist, not in inculcating ideas, but in furnishing the child with opportunities for the functioning of those activities that are natural for each stage.

Another problem was that the interests of society were placed above those of the individual. The child was trained to conform to the existing of the society. The individual was sacrificed to the whims of society. This is what angered Rousseau, who believed that the goodness and happiness of the individual are more essential than the development of his talent for social service. Thus in setting the needs of the
individual, the child’s interest and capabilities must be considered. The child must be at the centre of
attraction for the benefit of the society and not society fore the child as synergy of functional education
for values, knowledge skills in the pre-primary and primary education for national development.
Rousseau reversed the universal order. The heart of his educational theory is the study of nature of the
child. His principle involved understanding what nature itself is developing in the child.

**Rousseau’s Educational Aims**

It can to some extent be emphasized, that the ultimate aim of Rousseau was the preservation of
the natural goodness, and virtues of the heart, and of society which was in harmony with them. In the
physical world he observed order, harmony, and beauty; but in the world of man he observed infinite
conflict, ugliness, selfishness, which finally resulted in plenty of misery. It was exactly this contrast
between the world of nature and the world of man that led to evils in society and to the education given to
the young. “The supreme end to be attained is a society in which the noble, primitive virtues – courage,
endurance, temperance, equality, fraternity, simplicity and liberty – are realized.” (Eby, 1938: 340)

Rousseau was not really opposed to social life. On the contrary, he aimed to enable the individual
to enter whole-heartedly into all the basic relationships of humanity. But a person was to enter a society
which was adjusted to his or her natural virtues and capacities, and not one in which he or she would be
but a packhorse to serve others. It was in this regard, that Rousseau found it necessary to construct two
systems of educations for radically different social conditions. The first system was conceived as a form
of education for a state and society organized according to man’s natural being. Such a state was compact
and small. In this state, education is a public function and extends to every child. Its purpose is to foster
the natural, simple virtues, and the sense of solidarity. (Eby, 1938:341)

For Rousseau, education was the important business of the state, and natural education was the
privilege of free men. Children should be educated together and it is by means of common plays, patriotic
training and songs, that a society builds a sense of solidarity.

The second form of education was for existing civilization. So before a child enters social life, his
sense of independence, inner goodness, judgment, and resistance, must be built up to withstand the
degradng influences of social life. “He must live as a savage, in order that he may keep unscathed the
primitive virtues which distinguish man’s estate.” (Eby, 1938:342).

Rousseau had in view the education of the upper classes. The lower classes do not need
education, as the circumstances of life produce in them the sense of equality, simplicity, spontaneity, and
all the other virtues of which they stand in need. But it is the children of the rich, who are brought up in
luxury and artificiality, who require natural education.

**His Influence and Views in the Field of Education**

Influence of Rousseau on education is evident even today. If it is accepted that the child should be
imparted education, while treating him as a child, and conservatism has no place in education, it is all due
to Rousseau. If we talk of vocational or craft being taught to children, the credit goes to Rousseau. He
also laid emphasis on educating the heart along with the mind and hands. In fact, he brought about a new
era in education. (Rai 2012).

Thus the most revolutionary and the most potent effects of Rousselianism appear in educational
theory and practice. Few men have had as great an influence upon the organization, method, and content
of education. Although his mission was largely to destroy traditionalism, and most of the specific features
of his naturalism have in time been modified or rejected, many of the principles in modern pedagogy go back to him.

Rousseau firmly believed that education is a natural, and not an artificial process. It is a development from within, and not something from without. It comes through the workings of natural instincts and interests, and not through response to external force. It is an expansion of natural powers, not an acquisition of information. For Rousseau, education was life itself, and not a preparation for a future state which was remote in interests and characteristics from the life of childhood.

Previous to Rousseau, the child was merely the adult viewed through the wrong end of the telescope. He spoke as an adult, thought as an adult and acted as an adult. Even in the field of education, not only did he study the same subjects as the adult, but approached them form the same logical point of view. This was done through formal grammar which was mastered through the sheer effort of memory. He thus, made use of these subjects in the same artificially organized life. Rousseau believed that education was a process, and this process was something that lasted throughout life, or from birth to adult life. Thus, education finds it meaning for any particular stage, not in a future state, but in the various process itself.

Thus for Rousseau, education is no longer a harsh, artificial, unsympathetic procedure by which a child as a little man is made into a big man through the hands of his teacher. It is through allowing natural forces to have their way, that this process becomes an enjoyable, rational, and harmoniously balanced one. For Rousseau, the end is reached, not with adult life, but with each succeeding day, whenever life has its natural activities, its appropriate duties and its corresponding satisfactions.

**Rousseau on Curriculum and Method of Teaching**

Rousseau was against any kind of curricular teaching or learning up to wealth year of life. He was against any kind of verbal lesson on history, geography, or even language. He was also against teaching of morality.

This was his concept of negative education which suggested that child’s mind should not be stuffed with information of different kinds. So he objected to the use of any text-books for education of the young child. Giving to the child a chance to learn everything through direct experience and observation is what was stressed by him by way of child’s curriculum. Even morality was to be learnt by the child through natural consequences of his own action.

Thus, up to childhood stages, no curriculum of any kind was needed. Formal curriculum consisting of education in natural science, language, mathematics, woodwork, music, painting, social life and some kind of professional training was suggested to be introduced at the adolescence stage. Rousseau however, said that books do not give knowledge; they only train one to talk.

So he emphasized that curriculum for adolescence should be based on active work than on books. The youth should, however, be taught history mythological stories, religious stories with stress on moral and religious education. Spencer also, like Rousseau prescribed the formula of returning to nature as the basis of all learning. Providing an environment, to him, was enough of the curriculum. Learning by consequences was considered enough, although he said that in case of dangerous consequences the child should be fore-warmed.

In order to realize the aim of complete living, Spencer prescribed physical; education which was considered necessary for good health. In the worlds of Monroe Rousseau was the first person who
proclaimed that “education finds its process, its means wholly within the child life and the child experiences”.

Rousseau was against the oral and theoretical methods of teaching which was pursued in his time. Instead, he recommended play way method of teaching and learning. Real education to him was self-education acquired through experience and observation. Two great principles of teaching which he stressed were (i) learning through self-experience and (ii) learning by doing, Naturalism thus stands for a kind of teaching which is not dependent much on schools and books, as on the manipulation of the actual life of the education”. Its watchword is “Back to Nature”.

Views of Rousseau on the Place of the Children Education

In naturalist, child is the measure of all things, the centre around which revolves every aspect of education. Naturalist view of the child is very close to that of Wordsworth who said that child comes from heaven trailing clouds of glory. They are interested in the child as he is rather than as he will be. To them adult standards of behaviour are not all important to be followed by the child. They conceive of childhood as something desirable for its own sake and expect children to be children before they become men and women hence, they abhor all kinds of restrictions to be imposed on children in schools. They recommend that the nature powers and inclinations of the child should be allowed to develop freely with a minimum of guidance. The naturalistic educators allow the child to follow the lines of his natural interests and have to have free choice of activities with no interference or thwarting. No knowledge, no development of any kind (social, or religious) should be forced on the child. These the child will forgo for himself. He knows better what he should learn, when and how he should learn it. (James, S. Ross, 2011). Rousseau’s negative education advised to leave the child largely to himself.

Discipline, according to Rousseau, is learnt by the child as a consequence of his actions. It cannot be imposed on him by the teacher. Naturalist did not support idea of punishing the child for ensuring discipline. Rousseau said that consequence of child’s action was enough as punishment. Oral teaching of morality through lectures and preaching’s was against the naturalistic philosophy. Left to him the child will learn better discipline. This was their belief. Rousseau and Spencer both had the same views. In fact, Rousseau’s conception of education was that it is ‘the process of development into an enjoyable, rational, harmoniously balanced, useful and hence natural life’ (Wintgenes, 2001).

Implications of Rousseau's Ideas for Pre-Primary and Primary Education

He proposed a fourfold system /stage of education, they are; Infanthood stage One (0-2 years) It begins from birth to the age of two. Characterized by hardening the child's body by introducing him to walk with no shoes, fetching water or taking salt, moving around naked or semi-naked. He was strongly against the idea of bookish knowledge, no reading or writing at this stage. Childhood Stage Two (2-5 years). The child is not expected to get knowledge from books again, although elementary reading and writing could be introduced. The Child learns best from experience.

The boyhood or Rational Stage Three (5-12 years) It suit the boyhood of primary school children. The children are not supposed to rely on books. The teachers are not supposed to impose their ideas on the children. Children learn best from the natural environment. Environment is the best source of knowledge. No religion or morals to be preached to children, other than morals provetuls, the child is able to pick by himself. The adolescent /social stage four: The child is able to analyze, criticize, evaluate and critique issues. The child is now able to solve problems. Here again the child is not supposed to learn from books. The teacher needs not to improve his ideas on the learner. The teacher needs not to impose his religious beliefs and perceptions on the learner. The children should be left to their own decisions as
far as religious affiliations are concerned. The main emphasis is on religion and morality, that’s natural religion rather than theology and religious denominations, is encouraged.

Many modern education implementers take into consideration Rousseau's educational ideas. Teachers’ world over subscribe to the idea of learner's interests in the learning situation. Pupils are now introduced to the new content when they are ready. Children learn better by doing by being involved in methods and activities like, discovery learning, projects, field trips, project work, experimentation etc. This aspect has been captured by the Nigerian Educational System (FME, 2005). Content selection is linked to real life experiences that allows for the principles of education of known to unknown and simple to complex to be put to use in the primary education for functional education for values, knowledge of skills and national development. Teaching of social sciences where children learn about human behaviours, living together, moral values, multi-faith approaches and so on are achieved through free play, role plays, dramas, simulations, imitations and demonstrations. These are signs in the pre-primary and primary education for functional education for values, knowledge, skills for national development.

Education system should cater for individual differences because Rousseau says every individual is unique hence the need to use individualized instruction or believed that graded work or child centred education system that makes it necessary for functional education which engenders values, knowledge and skills for national development. Child centred learning, make children responsible for their learning this motivates them to investigate or explore with undisturbed interests through the use of appropriate teaching /learning media. Rousseau in Gordone and Brown (1988) using concrete rather than abstract materials for young children is still one of the corner stones of developmental appropriate curriculum in the early age. A new curriculum based on the needs of the learner at each progressive stage was presented. Rousseau emphasized the internal growth of the child not growth through punishment. (Malownsky, 1968).

Conclusion
Rousseau seemed to live in a system that cried out for a more natural system of education that would let the child grow more freely. His comments and suggestions appeared radical; they had to be such that, if a change was to be brought about. He wrote at a time when everything was so compartmentalized and controlled, including education. Thus one had to be freed from the shackles of such a system, and it was Rousseau who ventured into this bold task His stages of development, which is the key to his philosophy, only meant that a child should be allowed to develop slowly. Nature would teach the child. This did not mean that the child had to be left alone; but rather that nature had to be used by the teacher as the main instrument in teaching the child. Added to this his concepts of negative education is that the curriculum at different stages, etc. were all meant to bring about something in the rather stagnant system of education.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are suggested to stakeholders in education of children for functional education for values, knowledge, skills in the preprimary and primary education as a panacea for national development through the use of Rousseau’s perspective.

i. Although there is a course called philosophy of education in our schools, more attention be given to the study of Rousseau ideologies and principles for the betterment of preprimary and primary educational development.

ii. Courses designated as philosophy should focus on the aspect of the child rather than general.

iii. Rousseau’s ideas be fully explored and implemented by teacher trainers during the course of training or preparing teachers to teach.
iv. Methodologies courses should include ideologies and principles of Rousseau in their planning and implementation.

v. Programs for training and learning should be child-centred.

vi. Teaching and training to teach should be more practically oriented rather than oral/verbal.

vii. Stakeholders should make it a duty to maintain teacher/pupils ratio of 1 – 25 in the class.

viii. Child psychology in teacher training institution should be split into 0 -3, 3-6, 6-9 and 9 – 12 each semester so as to have a full knowledge of the child in terms of growth and development of the child.

References


