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### The Evolution of the Child

I used to think that genetics was heavily influential in the construction of the child and how he/she perceived life. That the innate DNA within them allowed for them to have positive experiences and negative experiences, but now I know differently. While genes heavily contribute to the makeup of the child, it is nature, society, and environment which influence how the child grows, what that child knows, and how he/she makes sense of this world.

How we are nurtured deeply affects the individuals we become. In Nature, Wholeness & Education Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that people are inherently good and that it is society which corrupts the individual (Rousseau). The trees, the birds, school, our personal relationships are all objects that effect who we are. Ludwig Wittgenstein had three siblings commit suicide, and ironically had a father who dictated that he cared for his children, but was incapable of showing them that he loved them (Noddings). This lack of love is what many would attribute to the demise of his children. “But kids who spend a lot of time with grownups who are accustomed and trusted to demonstrate what human judgment looks like have a great shot at growing up to be thoughtful, in all the sense of the word” (Meier, 19). Human judgment means not only possessing the capability, but acting on the capability to show love. The smallest object can affect our outcome, and likewise has lead to the progression of many and the decay of others.

In American society though Rousseau and Dewey believe that society influences the individuals we become, the history of schooling does not support events which aid in producing a proactive society. Horace Mann believed that “education was the birthright of every child born in the nation; it was a panacea to many society problems, such as crime, illiteracy, and poverty, and if

given the proper resources and support, education could serve as the great equalizer of society” (Good, 266). However, education did not include children of color or individuals with disabilities. In the south education wasn’t even available until after the civil war in 1885, and even then schools were separate and inherently unequal (Good, 268). If individuals weren’t even afforded the same equal education than how could students be afforded a safe passageway into the future? Though Rousseau argued that society corrupted the individual he was also a corrupter of individuals, in particular women; as he said, “The entire education of women must be relative to men. To please them to be useful to them, to be loved and honored by them, to rear them when they are young, to care for them when they are grown up, to counsel and console, to make their lives pleasant and charming, these are the duties of women at all times, and they should be taught them in their childhood” (Rousseau). Yet, he believed that education was the birthright of every child and the great resolution, however, failed to understand the desires of women by placing on them a load which not all women wanted to take.

There needs to be competent, loving individuals in the lives of all children in order for them to not only be successful in life, but to also be successful in school. Diane Ravitch said “In 1998, only 38 percent of public schools teachers had majored in any academic field of study when they were undergraduate or graduate students; those with an academic majors included only 22 percent of elementary school teachers, 44 percent of middle school teachers, and 66 percent of high school teachers. Teachers who do not have a strong education themselves are not well prepared to inspire the love of learning in their students” (Ravitch, 465). Though these individuals can be loving in every sense of the word they too must also be competent and creative in order to gauge students’ interest and nurture them effectively. Like Dewey, schools “must represent life as real and vital to the child,” and if subject matter is unconnected then it is meaningless. Students must see subject matter as interconnected entities which go beyond the classroom and reach our globally. But that

also conflicts with society and perceptions of society. If you turn on any TV you will see images of super thin models, the desire to have light skin, and images of people selling their bodies on ad campaigns. That is what is hot. “In short, we—the school teachers and school boards of America—are also trying to sell the kids something, but we don’t take it nearly as seriously as do our competitors in the commercial media” (17). If we want our students to grow up wanting education and wanting better than what is displayed in the media needs to be a reflection of those ideals.

Society influences our perceptions of ourselves and who we grow to be as people. The evolution of our lives depends on caring individuals who go the extra mile. Rousseau argued “we are born weak, we need strength; we are born lacking everything, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. All that we lack at birth and that we need when we are grown is given by education” (Rousseau, book 1). Education and the nature of the child has made considerable gains and has also encountered major setbacks. We will never live in a perfect world that agrees on education in the same way that I do; that the way we are nurtured affects the life we live. However, we are a reflection of the society in which we were raised in, whether we like it or not.