

The Rise of the House of Rousseau

Historical Consciousness in the Contemporary ECE Teacher Education Classroom

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Here is it...arriving and returning to us, speaking to us after death of its signatory, and something in it henceforth resonates like the voice of a ghost... and it resurges at a moment in ... history. (Derrida, 2002, p. 191)

IN A RECENT ON-LINE GRADUATE CLASS that addressed contemporary issues in early childhood education, we raised the specter of Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) as a way to re-image critical historical and socio-cultural notions of children, childhood, and childcare in western curricular traditions and inheritances. Inviting a haunting and summoning Rousseau to speak with students interrupted and expanded interdisciplinary ideas about childcare and early years learning with relative historical beliefs and pedagogical practices. Rousseau's discussion of his controversial book *Emile or On Education* (Bloom, 1979), and his Enlightenment ideas complicated the origins of modern child developmental discourses and confirmed how such concepts were not fixed and eternal but rather located, interpreted, contingent, and always in the flux of difficulty and vulnerability (Caputo, 1987).

Our ideas and interests in restless spirits and messages from beyond the grave stem from our childhood fascination with ghosts and haunting tales. Like many young children, fairytales, myths and lore about ghosts, monsters and the Olympian gods sparked our curiosity and imagination while spine-tingling nineteenth century Gothic stories such as Edgar Allen Poe's (2002), *The Fall of the House of Usher* also animated our sense of the historical past and its role in our contemporary personal and professional lives:

Sleep came not near my couch- while the hours waned and waned away.....Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened – I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me – to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. (Poe, 2002, p. 179)

Today we are haunted by the seeming absence of historical voices in contemporary western pedagogical and child rearing practices as they are represented in the field of early childhood education. During the six-week length of this graduate course we came to see that students were duly concerned with the de-limiting of their field of study. Some scholars and researchers focusing on history of childhood, childcare and early learning (Ariès, 1962; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2005; Prochner, 2009; Frost, 2010; Hinitz & Lascarides, 2011; Prochner & Robertson, 2013; Hinitz, 2013) have raised similar concerns about the importance of historical thinking in early childhood education. MacDonald et al. (2013) noted “if we can critically analyze the [historical] archetypes that have become our 21st century discourse, we may be in a better position to forge new relationships with children and families in our learning communities” (p. 28). This research enables us to imagine and re-envision multiple pasts, providing diverse understandings of historical contexts and contingencies relative to present day beliefs and pedagogical practices.

But what does it mean to haunt? A 13th century definition of *haunt* is, “to practice habitually; busy oneself with, and take part in” (OED). To be haunted is to be disturbed, agitated and sometimes afraid. When we think critically about our own pedagogical beliefs and practices we “trouble our understanding...deconstructive processes become part of our professionalism, as we think deeply and critically about how we state, arrange, do and analyze our pedagogical performance” (Lenz Taguchi, 2008, p. 63). In troubling our understandings about children, childhood and pedagogy we become *troubled*. We know that our restlessness will not end if we listen exclusively to the ‘living’ and fail to heed historic perspectives.

However, rather than simply teaching a foundational history of early childhood course, we sought to follow scholars who wrote about “living” ghosts, phantoms and spirits (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Doll, 2002; Kenway, 2008; Ruitenbergh, 2009; Taylor, 2010; Bakker, 2013; Morton, 2013; Munro-Hendry & Winfield, 2013) as a way to offer different insights through metaphysics, the paranormal and the spirit world in the context of education. “A place of haunting”, as [Jacques Derrida] suggests, “is a place with no phantoms. Ghosts haunt places that exist without them; they return to where they have been excluded” (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, pp. 151-152). Perhaps that is why Rousseau so readily accepted our invitation to engage with us—for too long he has been silenced and excluded from early childhood education classrooms. Considering his own Enlightenment experiences and perspectives, we imagine and wonder what it must have been like for Rousseau to visit a 21st century virtual classroom.

Early in the semester, Carolyn—the instructor of the graduate course—playfully informed the fourteen class participants that “a rather unusual guest” would visit the on-line *Blackboard* site (the technological learning system through which the course was being facilitated). To prepare students for a ghostly encounter, Carolyn assigned an academic article (MacDonald et al., 2013) with relevant historical information about the life and work of Jean Jacques Rousseau and explained in an email that:

I have invited ...the ghost of Enlightenment Philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau to join our on-line conversation next week. He seemed hesitant and surprised when I disturbed his...slumber and made my request—perhaps this is an indication that he isn't summoned often enough...Inviting Rousseau to discuss *Emile* and his Enlightenment ideas about childrearing and early education...might shed some light on the origins of modern child developmental discourses. I warn you—Rousseau can be quite animated (and scary) at times but don't be afraid. I invite you to interact openly and ask him questions, always keeping in mind that this is a friendly haunting.

In what we consider to be an ahistorical teacher education program of studies, these ghostly visits provided critically important and different learning opportunities to those offered to students in the other three graduate level ECE certificate courses. To locate the haunting experience within the broader course agenda, Rousseau appeared numerous times over several weeks while students discussed contemporary ECE issues relative to historical contexts and perspectives. Carolyn set up an on-line *Blackboard* account enabling Rousseau (who was listed as a class participant) to appear and disappear—an unintended but ghostly feature of the technology—from the virtual classroom. Engaging in collaborative and collegial conversation together, the students, Carolyn and her alter ego Rousseau engaged in a conversation through which they were conducted by the subject matter itself (Gadamer, 2004). Some of the topics and issues that students discussed with Rousseau included child development, natural education, child-centeredness, protection of children, the role and rights of women and parenting. After the students posted questions or comments directly to the ghost, Carolyn—responding as Rousseau—replied with direct quotes from *Emile*. Playfully and creatively enacting the past in the present forged a deep and resonate conversation and exploration among all players, in which new insights and understandings were experienced and everyone abandoned themselves to the *erfahrung* of the ghostly encounter. For Gadamer (2004), this hermeneutic experience was "historically effected [by] consciousness" (p. 299). That is, we are aware of ourselves as having been shaped through our historical and cultural making. Gadamer (1987) explained that

modern consciousness—precisely as historical consciousness—takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition. Historical consciousness no longer listens sanctimoniously to the voice ...from the past but, replaces it within the context where it took root in order to see the significance and ...value proper to it. (p. 90)

Overtuning this strict historicism, we noted how the students listened to Rousseau—a voice from the past—and interpreted his ideas in the context of present day ECE issues and their personal life experiences. Accordingly, building students attunement to historical thinking and consciousness (Gadamer, 1985; Lowenthal, 1985; Seixas, 2004) was not only a key goal in this work but a crucial approach to early childhood education curriculum and pedagogic practice. Our understanding of *historical consciousness* aligns with the ideas of Peter Seixas (2004):

The area in which collective memory, the writing of history, and other modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind merge...individual and collective understandings, as well as the relations of historical understanding to those of the present and future. (p. 10)

Engaging with the specter now raises specific questions: How did encountering Rousseau raise historical consciousness and interrupt modern western discourses about childhood and early learning? How did students' dialogic encounter with Rousseau provoke historical imagination, and fuel their engagement and learning about course topics and current ECE issues? More broadly, we wonder how utilizing an on-line technological platform contributed to class participants' interactions and dialogic encounters with each other and the specter and how this pedagogical technique might foster and enhance students' historical consciousness. We believe that raising the house of Rousseau enabled students to reflect on the significance of historical consciousness and inquiry as an approach to the interpretive study of curriculum while duly critiquing and questioning the given western traditional ideas on early childhood education. Etymologically defined, *house* means, "family, including ancestors and descendants" (OED). Educators in early learning and childcare—those in Rousseau's direct line or 'house'—might come to understand the importance of paying heed to historical voice and ancestors. Furthermore,

we recognize the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 297)

Against the background of contemporary concerns around ECE curriculum and practice we envision a re-awakening and stronger focus on the history of childhood and early childhood education both theoretically and pedagogically.

Encountering the Historical Rousseau

Written in 1762, *Emile, or On Education* was a treatise divided into five separate books which dealt philosophically with the nature of education (and human goodness) and more politically with the relationship between the individual (citizen) and the state.¹ Through the fictional Emile and his upbringing from a child to man, Rousseau interlaces education, morality, and society, suggesting that nature made man and society corrupted him. Book 5, is dedicated to female education and focuses on Sophie, Emile's future wife. Rousseau's denigration of women's education brought a virulent response from moral and political theorist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1798), who in her seminal text the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) refuted Rousseau's arguments.

While reading quotes from *Emile*, the students noted how his ideas echoed modern and postmodern pedagogical theories and practices. A radical thinker Rousseau balked at the elite rote teaching and child-rearing practices of his time (Wain, 2011). Today his ideas continue to influence, albeit unevenly, early childhood re-conceptualists, pedagogues and scholars (Rinaldi, 2006; Louv, 2008; Frost, 2010) who advocate for child-centered practice, emergent curriculum, linking children to the natural world, and those who stress the importance of providing time for teaching and learning. In *Emile*, Rousseau personified nature referring to it as "the master [teacher]" and focused primarily on the natural development of children. Although his ideas were written as a method, Rousseau stressed the importance of allowing nature to take its course in accordance with the *individual* child. Demonstrating their emerging sense of historical time,

context and awareness students answered Rousseau in diverse ways. Ann,² responding to his notion of “nature” posted:

We *do* need to let the natural world teach our children in ways that are unique to it. However...the “natural world” today refers more to nature than it does to mother-child bonding... we no longer cling to the notion that mothers, fathers, and children are bound by roles that once were considered normative. In that sense, we *do* oppose nature’s rule. Is it not important, however, that we challenge ideas that have come before us? I know you [Rousseau] were a highly-regarded social critic so surely you can understand today’s educators’ wishes to critically examine your ideas regarding child development. We must examine the ideas that have influenced present-day thinking. (Post June 5, 2013)

The students discovered that Rousseau’s ideas echo both modern “linear, sequential” and postmodern “complex and holistic” views of child development (Elliot, 2010, p. 3). In fact, Rousseau’s natural stage-learning is not confined by time or age as Diane expressed:

This must be a huge paradigm shift for you. In our post-modern world, there are now many more people who are very self-reflective about ...education just as you were. While we are still very solidly following your “idea of the developmental stages of infancy, childhood, preadolescence, adolescence, and young manhood (MacDonald et al., 2013, p. 26), our perception of mothers, fathers, and children has shifted. (Post, June 5, 2013)

Dialogue with a ghost

Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long- long- long- many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it- yet I dared not- pity me...I dared not-I dared not speak! (Poe, 2002, p. 182)

Our discussions with Rousseau would not compare to the frightening encounter between Roderick, the ill-fated master of the “melancholy House of Usher” and the ghostly figure of Lady Madeline. No! Ours was a sophisticated conversation between an 18th century male philosopher and a group of 21st century women educators in the modern intellectual salon known as *Blackboard*. The teachers were both serious and humorous in their playful interactions with the ghost. They demonstrated increasing engagement and a growing interest in the course topics and issues as the conversation deepened. They agreed and disagreed, and were often emotional showing frustration and anger toward him. Ann jokingly invited Rousseau to attend parent meetings and share his “common sense approach... [to children’s challenging behaviors and] natural consequences” (Post, June 5, 2013). Significantly, while students’ lively emotional retorts to Rousseau may suggest their critical engagement with the course it may also signal the very necessity for historical thinking in disciplinary contexts. While we noticed enhanced forms of historical awareness what we also read in those exchanges was a particular lack of critical attention to historical context and contingency. In their quest to enlighten the Enlightenment philosopher, students often privileged the present over the past, charting a progressive future and a morally just world. Panayotidis has argued that contemporary educational researchers, in their quest to demonstrate the limitations of formulations such as the factory system, are complicit in forging for students the “... ‘past’ as dreadful and our present age as enlightened...they persist in

presenting our actions as laudable and those of our ancestors as merely compliant.” (Lund, Panayotidis, Smits & Towers, 2012, p. 97)

Rousseau’s image of an innocent, inherently good child—a vessel to be filled with knowledge—contrasts to the postmodern image of a strong, capable, and knowledgeable child. It is paradoxical that some educators today describe children as accomplished, skilled, competent and able to direct their own learning and yet over-protect, and restrict their opportunities to show what they *are* able to accomplish. Adults might say they believe in children’s capabilities but if actions speak louder than words, the postmodern image of a child might match Rousseau’s (1974), who noted: “[I]s there in the world a weaker being, a more miserable one, one more at the mercy of everything surrounding him, who has a greater need of pity, care, and protection, than a child?” (p. 88). Responding to Rousseau’s image of the child, Diane wrote:

Since your time, when you believed “children [had] no innate abilities to gather their own information or perceptions or direct their own learning” (MacDonald et al., 2013, p. 23)... much has changed... While there is still a great deal of your belief in the helplessness of children, we are beginning to challenge this view and ... see that children are capable of learning within themselves. They do not necessarily rely on adults to fill them with knowledge. Adults are beginning to collaborate with and listen to children and their already present knowledge. I hope that you will take this opportunity to reflect and disrupt your own previous beliefs in order to build a greater awareness of our society and what its diversity holds. (Post June 5, 2013)

According to Rousseau children should be raised and educated in the country, away from the city where they would *certainly* be corrupted by close encounters with people and civilization. Rousseau (1979) stressed “[t]his solitary education would, therefore, be preferable even if its only effect were to give childhood the time for ripening” (p. 105). Nature rather than books was Emile’s teacher and Rousseau (1979) offered this firm advice to educators of his day: “Observe nature and follow the path it maps out for you. It exercises children constantly; it hardens their temperament by tests of all sorts; it teaches them early what effort and pain are” (p. 47). Considering his pastoral disposition, Stella asked Rousseau:

What do you think of this new development of having naturalization areas in school grounds for the children to study in and explore? Is this beneficial for older, school age children as well? There is even a Nature Kindergarten on Vancouver Island where children spend their time outdoors as their classroom. Could you have envisioned this as part of formal education? Do you think there is a point where education should be in classrooms with books, paper and pencil and not with nature as teacher? (Post, June 5, 2013)

Rousseau’s ideas about women’s responsibilities are firmly situated in 18th century European contexts, where mothers reared their children according to their own instinct and ideas. Some students reacted strongly and at times angrily to Rousseau’s (1979) statement that “[t]he good constitution of children initially depends on that of their mothers. The first education of men depends on the care of women” (p. 365). To this Leslie sharply responded:

I would ... like to point out that the role of mothers as the source of sustenance for their wee charges ... is currently hotly debated. Yes, you heard me correctly Jean! This is a feminist issue with proponents heatedly arguing their respective points... [Contrastingly] Real Women Canada (RRC) argue vehemently that women are uniquely designed to nurture and care for children. “First and foremost, a mother is someone who has nourished and nurtured the child since he first existed. By design, a woman’s body is meant to facilitate this close relationship that no father can experience, no matter how close he may be to his child” (RWC). As you can see, in many respects we have not advanced far from your draconian notions of mother- and childhood... The dominant (read: white male) discourse is still as prevalent today as it was in your time. Thankfully, however, we (read: women/ feminists) are beginning to unpack some of these issues. (Post, June 6, 2013)

Our orientation to historical thinking—and hence Carolyn’s informed responses to the students as Rousseau—was predicated on an interpretive notion of historical study and a recognition that historians are always engaged in conversational dialogue with ghosts. More than a series of dates and facts, history or more properly the study of the past is a multifarious, contextual and representational practice. Importantly, interpretation of the past is grounded in narrative and story-telling as a mode of knowing. Lewis (2012) has suggested:

[I]f we accept that *Emile* has a fabulous dimension, then we can no longer read it for educational, [historical] or moral imperatives but rather as an open space where the ambiguity of the fable’s ungrounding is experienced directly by the reader (p. 324).

In recent years scholars have turned their attention to the way in which “stories” of the past—our traditional sense of inherited experience, knowledge and the transmission of memory from generation to the next—are integrated, imagined (through the act of mimesis, in which actual worlds are creatively re-cast as possible worlds in one’s remembrances), and represented through the always contextual and contingent process. After the “narrative turn,” contemporary theoretical writing has problematized previously unmediated notions of life writing (a term which encompasses the genres of autobiography, biography, diaries, letters, and other forms of self-representation), opting for the more critical practice of narrative inquiry. Concerned with issues of reflexivity and referentiality, scholars insisted that life-writing was always necessarily framed within more broad constructions of subjectivity and ways of understanding the world. Auto/biography is conceived as a discourse about identity and representation in the context of numerous disciplinary shifts. Connecting identity and memory, and community and self, scholars have shown the way in which historical stories are critical to one’s sense of self and one’s relation to a broader real or imagined community. Recounting our individual or collective identities is “fundamentally narrative in character” and shapes the people we become in these renditions (Rak, 2005; Kohler Riessman, 2008).

Change, continuity, and permanence are critically interrelated terms in historical methodology, which have to do with the very structure of historical narrative and ultimately interpretation. As Petersen, Østrem, and Bückner (2011) note, such conceptualizations proffer: “how to balance an emphasis on continuity, which is necessary to perceive the historical account as a narrative, with a focus on the changes which provide that account with impetus to drive” (p. 1). In essence this is vastly important in history practice/writing as it transforms how we come to

understand things and ultimately how we choose to argue for and represent them. The language and themes embedded in these formulations cannot be understated. As such, historical accounts are always contextual and contingent, across space and time—a vestige of the “perceived transformations in the meanings of these topics across different discourses” (Petersen et al., 2011, p. 2). A dualistic stress on change over continuity, or change over permanence suggest alternative and often troubling ways of casting the same historical narrative, its significance, and its agents. For a long-time, a particular form of continuity (progress) was promoted by Whig historians as developmental, eternal, and inevitable. Change occurred only in so far as an elite group chose to reshape the world. To hope for change was for many non-elites, a misguided longing. Today the “mediation between notions of change, innovation, rupture, or discontinuity in historical events on the one hand and ideas of continuity, tradition, constancy, consistency, and identity on the other, such notions as “transformation” and “re-contextualization” are important to scholarship” (Petersen et al., 2011, p. 2).

We remain cognizant of our own complicity in framing and negotiating the interpretive past. Philosopher Richard Kearney (2002) notes “stories are never innocent. Each re-telling of history is part of a continuing conflict of interpretation. A battlefield of competing meanings... [stories]... are always told from a particular perspective and in light of specific prejudices” (p. 83). Contemporary literature on historical consciousness (what Sexias (2009) defines as “broad popular understandings of the past” (p. 9) and the way they have been shaped by social and cultural contexts) suggests the complexity of these understandings in our national and regional narratives, our “progress-modernity” scripts, and our sense of self. Our consciousness is not independent of history: we have (productively and positively) prejudices and allegiances which shape how we take up the world. Through our pre-understandings, our horizons conflate and expand. Accordingly, historians are subject to the contingently reflexive conditions of historical consciousness and the historicity of the past.

Hearing Voices in the Dark

Leave the door open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That’s where the most important things come from... (Solnit, 2005, p. 4).

As the pendulum of time swings, scholars and pedagogues revisit, reinterpret and reinvent ideas in the context of our current, contexts, contingencies and cultures (among other considerations). There is a tendency to focus heavily on the ‘here and now’ and adopt an overly confident linear progression which is a symptom of neo-liberal educational agendas and market economies. Critical theorists suggest that our current pedagogical practices come from “dead white men” (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004). Reconceptualists in the field of early childhood education are listening to ‘dead men talking’ and pointing to their work and words again but in wholly diverse and complex ways. Accordingly, Rousseau's lineage and influence is somewhat polarizing in the literature. There is a “tendency of progressive educators to construct Rousseau as a patron saint while others label him as a villain” (Kessen as cited in Cannella, 2002, p. 95). Many scholars seem to find his notion of developmental stages in *Emile* as fundamental to the growth of modern developmental psychology. It is not our intent to foster a hagiographic account of Rousseau's ideas on children but as Koops (2012) notes, the child and childhood was an Enlightenment construct and hence you cannot avoid Rousseau's theories of education. After Israel (2012) we understand Rousseau’s “educational theories... [as] serviceable to the Counter-

Enlightenment...which believed it more important for children to remain...‘natural’ than to learn things [through a strict regime]” (p. 6). We attempt to understand Rousseau’s concepts in the context to history recognizing his call to “natural virtue” (Israel, 2012, p. 14), aesthetics, happiness and freedom—Romantic ideologies later taken up by philosophical thinkers and educators such as Hannah Arendt (1958) and Maxine Greene (1988).

Historical interpretation is always malleable and incomplete, subject to the framework of contemporary historical understandings of change, continuity, and permanency, and the hermeneutic flux to which it necessarily gives rise or arises from. Author Rebecca Solnit (2005) imagines history as a series of “paths and waterways that meander through many fields ...history is made more of crossroads, branchings, and tangles than straight lines” (p. 59). In viewing the text through fractured temporal and cultural lenses, we can only partially understand it. As such, after reading Rousseau’s seminal manual on childcare, we understand only some/*thing* about the philosopher’s image of the child and his pedagogical practices relevant to the times and the culture in which he lived. Although we cannot know everything that *Emile* represents and our knowledge of it remains fragmented, we attempt to fuse its past horizon with our present and partial horizon of understanding. Gadamer (2004) explained that

[i]n the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs—which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded. To bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the task of what we call historically effected consciousness (p. 306).

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur asks about the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting and whether it is possible that history “overly remembers” some events at the expense of others. He (2004) notes: “I continue to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here and an excess of forgetting elsewhere” (p. xv). Ricoeur highlights how memory and forgetting, mediated by language, are deeply implicated in our perception of historical experience and the production of forms of heritage and history that we promote or eschew. Perhaps then, we should not be surprised (as we were) when we read Cannella’s (2002) critical examination of Rousseau and his Enlightenment ideas. Viewing him from her contemporary vantage point, we wondered how Cannella constructed this image of the philosopher:

Whatever Rousseau’s beliefs, his discourses and ways of functioning clearly marginalize children as the “other,” creating them as beings who are inferior, as those who must be controlled through laws that are covertly imposed through nature and reason Rousseau’s work actually reinforces an acceptance of younger human beings as primitive, potentially subhuman because of their lack of western reason, and definitely beneath the adult male. (p. 97-98)

Such diverse interpretations lay bare Ricoeur’s notion about not only the partiality of our knowing but the way educational researchers choose what to remember and forget.

Contrastingly, Rousseau’s words from *Emile* (1979), evokes a plea for children’s freedom:

Let us suffer that a moment of life be exempt from this yoke [civil servitude] which nature did not impose on us, and leave to childhood the exercise of natural freedom and keeps [sic] at a distance, for a time at least, vices contracted in slavery. (p. 89)

In reading and interpreting the English translation of *Emile*, we came to understand Rousseau's image of the child very differently than Cannella described. We wonder however, what meaning might be lost in translation from the original French text.

Inviting a Haunting

We know that our own restlessness will not end should we continue to listen to voices from the past and fail to make sense of them in our world. It is difficult to be haunted. It demands more than listening to ghostly voices and necessitates action, wisdom, risk taking, perseverance and courage. Poe (1840) wrote "all experience, in matters of philosophical discovery, teaches us that, in such discovery, it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely" (para. 3). Solnit (2005) further explained:

Poe is consciously juxtaposing the word 'calculate', which implies a cold counting up of the facts or measurements, with 'the unforeseen,' that which cannot be measured or counted, only anticipated. How do you calculate upon the unforeseen? It seems to be an art of recognizing the role of the unforeseen, of keeping your balance amid surprises, of collaborating with chance, of recognizing that there are some essential mysteries in the world and thereby a limit to calculation, to plan, to control. To calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the paradoxical operation that life most requires of us. (pp. 5-6)

This disturbance requires something of us that we cannot ignore—a hermeneutic interlacing of past to present in the context to our personal ideas about postmodern pedagogical theories and practices. Our understandings are shaped by living and working in a space-in-between or what Hannah Arendt (2006) described as, "the gap between past and future" (p.3). Accordingly, in dialogue with Rousseau the students also connected past to present early learning and childcare practices and beliefs, enabling them to re/position themselves and their pedagogy based on newly constructed understandings. Levinson (2001) has noted the gap between past and future,

Represents not an escape from history but a 'fissure' within time where children and educators do not feel determined and fated by history, a time when they feel an opportunity to reconfigure themselves in response to history and are able to see...new relations and new realities. (Levinson cited in Berger, 2010, p. 70)

Student Alexa expressed that she "continued to find the examination of children throughout the course of history unique!" She further explained:

Throughout the [past] course work that I have taken, we are always interested in what is happening now and how these methodologies can be incorporated into our practices.

However, this view of examining children throughout history helps ground our understanding of where we have come. (Post, June 3, 2013)

Today, many ECE post-secondary programs emphasize modern science-based theories and practices that are ahistorical and less focused on inquiry and interpretation. Kummen (2010) suggested “early childhood educators...need to understand why we practice as we do and to be aware of the discursive genealogy that underlies our beliefs” (p. 110). Reading the posts, we recognized how little the students understood about the history of early childhood education—again underlining the importance of raising historical awareness in teacher education programs. Our conversation with Rousseau was a starting point for many class participants—an introduction to history, so-to-speak. The ghost sparked the curiosity and imaginations of many students, provoking them to dig deep and conduct further research. For example, Leslie referred to Rousseau's mistress, Thérèse Levasseur, indicating to us that she had done additional reading about the philosopher. What the students learned was the importance of looking back—paying attention to historical ideas. Our hope is that this ‘awakening’ will interest them in future studies and investigations of historical figures, events and ideas. Recently Ann explained to Carolyn how she would apply her ghostly encounter in her own post-secondary ECE classroom and teacher practice:

I truly loved that Jean-Jacques Rousseau class as it was very engaging... it has been a conduit to re-thinking presenting historical perspectives for me as I am sure it will be for others. In fact, I am trying to come up with a similar idea for my Play class as we go into theories around play. I shall let you know what I end up doing and what the responses are like. (Personal correspondence, September 22, 2013)

We believe that our interaction with Rousseau would not have been lived out in the same way in a regular face-to-face classroom. Rousseau’s name appearing and disappearing—floating in and out of virtual spaces— added to the haunting experience and appeared ‘real’. Summoning Rousseau offered innovative ideas as to how technology might be used to meaningfully and creatively engage students in on-line learning environments.³ Reflecting on our experiences as instructors in a graduate program of studies we wonder how this research might help other post-secondary ECE teacher educators to introduce and include history in their curriculum. Panayotidis (2010) reminds us that

Rather than an unmediated, content-driven curriculum, we might want to provide more entry points for students to understand how it is that we know the past and, specifically, what this knowing might mean for us today. What does it mean to know the past, and whose past (ideologies, values and beliefs) are we tacitly endorsing in the classroom? (p. 49)

Consequently we are coming to understand more about how history has shaped us, our image of the child and how we interact with and instruct our students. We have no doubt that we live with ghosts. The past is with us and a part of us. Munro-Hendry and Winfield (2013) remind us that “[l]iving in relation with the dead (as well as spirits and ghosts), who are always already present, is not a method, but a responsibility to confront the cutting of history” (p. 11).

The vast house and its shadows were alone behind me....while I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened- there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind- the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight-my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder- there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters- and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the House of Usher. (Poe, 2002, p. 182)

Unlike the catastrophic ending of Poe’s story, when the fissure widened and the mansion crumbled, we hope for a more constructive outcome to our haunting—to raise the House of Rousseau. This does not mean that we will not experience restlessness or fear as we ‘trouble our understandings’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2008) and practices. William Doll (2002) points out that ghosts “haunt us ... until the reality that lies beyond mere perception is seen by both ourselves and our audience (those we teach)” (p. 28). Rousseau is one of many who walks and talks to us. Their voices are audible *only* if we are willing to listen and acknowledge their wisdom, contradictions, and complexities in our world. What are the spirits asking of us? Will we invite thishaunting?

Endnotes

¹ *Emile, or On Education* and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, also published in 1762 were both banned in France and Switzerland because they were critical of religion.

² Students’ names are all pseudonymous.

³ We elaborate on the link between technology and imagination in a forthcoming paper.

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