



Education and Nature

Since the early modern era, the modern project of education has been closely associated with another modernist project, namely the clear distinction between a purportedly unchangeable 'nature', on the one hand, and a historically conceived, changing society, on the other. An exploration of the history of education may reveal that this clear-cut separation has been constantly challenged and undermined by hybrid phenomena and networks between these two realms. Nature has classically been a contentious subject within educational thinking, yet nature has not only been a point of reference for ideas and theories, but for educational practices as well. The European Enlightenment repositioned nature as a determining arena and the backdrop for educational practices. Since then, nature has become a central reference point for educational thinking and practices in a variety of forms and dimensions:

Nature has proved a somewhat contradictory *argument* in pedagogic reflection. It has been viewed both as a method guiding educational practices and a standard by which to measure those practices. It is assumed that nature's 'mode' of teaching and its 'method' – using Rousseau's fixed points in the educational discussion – are to be followed. At the same time, nature has been defined as one of the aims of education insofar as education was defined as the creation of a second nature in humankind, a transformed nature, which produces 'real' humans from untamed animal-like creatures. Many nuances and variations shaped the modern educational scene, from an anti-feudal point of view focusing on the 'unnatural' stratification of society, to nature as an irrefutable determiner of a person's 'natural' gifts and dispositions. Finally, nature has been a notorious argument within projects seeking a consistent reform of education and instruction. Nature has been not only a legitimising concept for different projects; it has also been a discursive weapon against the perceived 'decay of values' and 'evils' of society.

Nature is a key *point of reference while constructing educational relationships and settings* and therefore plays a central role in educational practices. On the one hand, nature may be understood as a call to action for educators, highlighting those practices credited with advancing the nature of students, pupils and children or at least pushing them to the limits of their learning capacities, yet on the other hand, nature also delineates the finite possibilities of education. Discourses concerning nature and education vary widely and include theories such as human nature being intrinsically

ductile; the construction of the concept of intelligence primarily understood as a limit to the potential of individual development; all types of theories concerning giftedness; and contemporary discussions about the moral and legal right of educators to intervene with mechanical, chemical, and digital enhancement possibilities, including neuro-enhancement. In this context the central question arises of whether nature as a concept works as a differentiating instrument for the increasingly challenged dichotomy between nature and culture.

'Nature' continues to be perceived as *an educative* tool in itself. For instance, natural environments for learning have been reclaimed as being a counterbalance of the artificial environment of education. Here, green playgrounds, school gardens, the contemplation of forests and landscapes, the use of purportedly 'responsive' animals in education and therapy are some of the remedies that have been discussed. Not only imagined nature, or nature as discourse, but elements and constellations of 'real' nature have been integrated into educational arrangements. As recent approaches in environmental or animal history show, analysing education in purely social and cultural terms may be a shortcoming stemming from a persistent and dominant worldview that only addresses humankind.

Finally, since the ascendance of a modern understanding of 'science', the natural world has increasingly become part of the *content of teaching* and learning itself. This has occurred in all types and at all levels of schools, from kindergartens to universities and includes not only formal educational institutions, but non-formal and informal educational practices as well. In particular, school subjects focusing on nature have markedly shaped and accelerated the consolidation of modern schooling as an agent of production, distribution and consumption of knowledge working on the assumption that schools teach not only substantive but also disciplinary knowledge.

This interplay of nature, society, and education in the histories of education is the main topic of the conference. ISCHE 40 will be a powerful platform for historicizing the present and for exploring the theoretical and empirical richness of history of education as a field.

The following themes would be of interest for the conference:

- Nature as argument in educational discussions and theories
- Anti-nature and antinaturalism as drivers of modern educational practices and discourses
- The nature(s) of the human being in educational contexts and practices
- Nature and civilization; nature and technology; nature and ecologies
- Nature and the natural world as educational settings
- Nature as a medium and subject of education
- Animals and the human
- The urban and the natural child

Important Dates:

Deadline for submission: January 31, 2018

Notification of acceptance: March 15, 2018

ISCHE welcomes the following types of submissions.

[1] Individual papers. Accepted papers will be placed on panels with each panelist having 15-18 minutes to present. Proposals should be a maximum of 500 words excluding bibliography.

[2] Preformed panels. Accepted panels will be allotted 90 minutes and typically should feature 3-5 panelists with time left for discussion. These proposals should include a 500 word abstract of the proposed panel, followed by titles, author information, and 200-300 word abstracts, excluding bibliography, of each of the papers.

[3] Multilingual panels, with at least two languages represented. Accepted multilingual panels will be highlighted by the local organizers and will be allotted 120 minutes and typically feature 3-5 panelists with ample time left for discussion and cross-language exchange. These proposals should include a 500 word abstract of the proposed multilingual panel, followed by titles, author information, and 200-300 word abstracts, excluding bibliography, of each of the papers.

[4] Symposia, consisting of two to four preformed 90 minute panels with a minimum of three countries represented among the participants. In addition the symposium must include a discussant. Accepted symposia will have their panels scheduled across the conference dates in the order presented, though it may not be possible to have a symposium's panels scheduled in back-to-back sessions. These proposals should include a 500 word abstract of the proposed symposium, followed by information on each panel included within the symposium, along with titles, author information, and 200-300 word abstracts, excluding bibliography, of each of the papers.