

Tracing the Path of a Modern American Paradigm: Chapter 10

For chart portions above this point, see the chart for Chapter 7.

Plato

Pythagoras

Aristotle

Renaissance & Enlightenment, 16th-18th centuries (Chap 4)

- The Platonic paradigm was strong: the “real” is unavailable to the five senses; what’s worth learning is *inside* oneself.
- Humans gradually began to be seen as autonomous, able to make judgments based on experience and five senses. The old assumption of dependent fatalism began to wane.
- A new paradigm emerged, linked with Comenius’s “sense realism” and Locke’s *tabula rasa*; it aligned with observation-based inductivism. What’s worth learning is *external*.
- Another paradigm was that of the rationalists, linked with Descartes. Not interested in children, they favored mental discipline via study of Latin, Greek, math, and philosophy. Oriented to contemplation, they trusted “given” intuition.

Empiricism & Rationalism, 16th-18th centuries (Chap 3)

- The observation-based, inductive process of science, initiated by Bacon and Newton, laid the foundation for much irreverent questioning and innovative thinking.
- Descartes argued that the mind, not the senses, is in the central position regarding knowledge acquisition.

Renaissance & Rousseau, 16th-18th centuries (Chapter 5)

- Emerging values about children focused on preserving their innocence and purity while reversing their ignorance.
- A prior belief about adults was that they could never attain perfection. Renaissance humanists countered that belief.
- The humanist view slowly transformed into the belief that *the younger the human, the better the human*. This view was very widely popularized by Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762).
- Very young children came to be associated with exotic savages; both existed in an uncorrupted state of nature.
- *Émile* also advocated “negative education,” which relied on the spontaneous emerging from within of a child’s interest in a non-classroom, non-book-populated, natural setting.
- “Nature” was deified; “organic” growth came to be valued.

Evolution of Authority, 16th-18th centuries (Chapter 6)

- Weakening was the idea that everything worth knowing is already known and must be passed on intact.
- Thinkers argued that authority must not receive deference by ascription, but needs rational justification.
- Applied to clans, communities, churches, kingdoms, and commerce, that idea was extended to classrooms.
- Deference to authority declined; individualism gained.

Pestalozzi & Calvinism, 18th-19th cent. (Chapter 8)

- Pestalozzi said that to improve instruction, first understand the child, then develop methods that reflect and cater to children’s inner life.
- He tried to *psychologize instruction* by devising methods “in the strictest psychological order.”
- By using “instruction with heart,” an instructor can cooperate with nature, enabling children to rise to their level of ability – a “given” potential that also implied limits beyond anyone’s control.
- Calvinism also posited a “given” beyond control, predestination of the person to heaven or hell.

Literary Romanticism, 18th-19th centuries (Chapter 7)

- The image of botanical, “organic” growth emerging *passively* from within an organism was further idealized.
- Science cannot know all; nature is not for harnessing. Nature’s mysteries should be appreciated by intuition & emotion. What is natural is Good, in life and in learning.
- Children are revered for their open-minded simplicity, absence of pre-conceived ideas, and naturalness. They are precious. They should be imitated. Amplified was *the younger the human, the better the human*.
- Each person’s “given” inner light illuminates Truth; insight and imagination are superior to the five senses.
- Books are regarded with suspicion, and whether children should be in classrooms *at all* is questioned.
- Authority (externally imposed rules) of all kinds was rejected. Self-directing individualism was affirmed.

Recapitulation Hypothesis

Spencer on Education, Late 19th century (Chapter 10)

- Spencer extended the prenatal “recapitulation” hypothesis into the postnatal realm of mental development, saying that patterns of historical development of the “race” *must* be followed.
- He popularized an image of the child as incapable of flexibility, adaptability, or resilience, *and* as injured by mental overstrain.
- He applied a biological model of development to the mind, saying – in Aristotelian fashion – that its disposition to reach a “given,” pre-determined form *must not* be interfered with.
- His demand on parents and teachers was for constant, active compliance with, and promotion of, all of each child’s “givens.”
- His test for good teaching was pupils’ pleasurable excitement.

Background to Spencer, Late 19th century (Chapter 9)

- On the individual level, Spencer posited “survival of the fittest,” which saw each one’s “givens” as rigidly limiting his ability to adapt/develop.
- On the collective human level, Spencer posited “homogeneous-to-heterogeneous” as the template for all things developmental, which promised purpose-driven progress to ever-higher planes of fulfillment.
- He and contemporary philosophers proclaimed that each individual’s intuition is a valid and self-sufficient means of scientific investigation.

← [Chart for Chapter 9](#) [Overview of the Eight Key Beliefs](#) [Chart for Chapter 11](#) →