

The Present, Past, and Future of the Gardening Metaphor in Education

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ABSTRACT: Educators and educational theorists frequently employ a gardening metaphor to capture several child-centered principles about teaching and children: i.e., teachers must respect a child's unique interests and abilities, recognize what is developmentally appropriate for students, and resist pursuing a narrow set of outcomes. Historically, however, educational theorists were as likely to use the gardening metaphor to support teacher-centered, 'moulding' ideals as they were to support child-centered ideals. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the contemporary optimism about a child's innate, unique potential, the use of the gardening metaphor in the past sometimes supported prejudicial, deterministic views of children. In many ways, therefore, the contemporary use of the metaphor reflects genuine progress in educators' ideas about children and their potential. Nevertheless, those who employ the gardening metaphor today might learn from some of its past users. Eager to avoid imposing their own goals on children, today child-centered gardeners have resisted articulating normative ideals by which teaching and parenting might be guided. Yet a normative ideal of the educated adult is not inconsistent with child-centered gardening.

Educational theorists have long seen the care and nurture of the child as akin to horticulture and agriculture. The Greek sophist Antiphon wrote that one's education is 'first among human activities' because, 'according to the seed which a man sows in the soil so must one expect the crop to be. In the same way, whenever one plants a good education in a young body it lives and increases for the whole of life, and neither rain nor drought destroys it' (Sprague 2001, DK87, B117). About a generation later, Plato included an agricultural analogy in his midwife metaphor; his Socrates says that he is an expert in both 'the cultivation and harvesting of the crops' – drawing out knowledge from young men – and prescribing 'the best soil for planting or sowing a given crop' – serving as a match-maker between teachers and students (Plato 1990, 149d-e). These examples from Antiphon and Plato reveal that it is no overstatement to say that people

have employed agricultural and horticultural metaphors and analogies since the dawn of western educational philosophy.

These images may not merely have helped people illuminate their educational theories for readers. Agricultural and horticultural experiences may have shaped cultural beliefs about learning as well. So Malcolm Gladwell has argued, at least. In Asian countries, rice farmers work their fields nearly year round whereas a significant break for the fields each year is routine in America. Perhaps, therefore, Asians were inclined to believe that children's minds should be cultivated year round while Americans believed that students needed a substantial break at some point of the year. Thus, Gladwell suggests, agricultural practices may partly explain why the school year is so much shorter in the United States compared with Asian countries (Gladwell 2008, pp. 224-249, 259-60).¹

While Gladwell may be right about how agricultural practices subtly affected beliefs about educating children, educators and educational theorists continue to employ gardening metaphors explicitly, just as Plato and Antiphon did. One might be inclined to wonder if the contemporary use of the gardening metaphor resembles its use in the past. More importantly, perhaps by comparing the present employment to the past we might illuminate how western educational ideals have evolved. In this paper, I first discuss how educational theorists and teachers' employ the gardening metaphor today by surveying some of the recent literature on the subject. I then turn to the historical utilization of the gardening metaphor to demonstrate that it is far more flexible than most who invoke it recognize; indeed, the metaphor has served vastly different, even in some cases opposing, visions of children and education. Finally, drawing on those historical reflections, I offer some reflections on the value of using the metaphor in the future.

The Gardener-Educator of the Present

Alison Gopnik prominently endorses the gardening metaphor in her recent book, *The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the new science of Child Development tells us about the relationship of parents and children*.² Gopnik describes gardener-educators as follows:

The good gardener works to create fertile soil that can sustain a whole ecosystem of different plants with different strengths and beauties—and with different weaknesses and difficulties, too. Unlike a good chair, a good garden is constantly changing, as it adapts to the changing circumstances of the weather and the

¹ One might reasonably point out that, in the American example, the length of the school year was a more literal response to cultural agricultural practices; the school year featured a long break because of farmers' needs to have their children help in the fields during the most labour-intensive season.

² Gopnik (2016) focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on parenting rather than schooling (on schooling see pp. 179-210). Historically, however, the distinction between the two was not always sharp. For example, Rousseau and Locke (discussed below) intertwine comments on parenting and teaching.

seasons. And in the long run, that kind of varied, flexible, complex, dynamic system will be more robust and adaptable than the most carefully tended hothouse bloom. (Gopnik 2016, p. 19)

Gopnik is not alone in recognizing in the metaphor a certain set of ideals for teaching and parenting. Teachers and teacher candidates often identify gardening as a desirable approach of teaching. In one study, 91.7% of interviewees identified the gardening metaphor as an apt description of his or her 'self as future teacher' (Saban 2004, p. 628). These interviewees characterized gardening as a form of teaching in which the students' innate potentialities are actualized at appropriate developmental stages. In another investigation into educational metaphors, the authors describe the analogy as follows: 'Like a gardener, the teacher's job [is] to construct the optimal environment in which the inner nature of the mind could grow and flourish' (Oxford, Tomlinson et al. 1998, p. 9). Another study emphasizes that gardener-educators recognize students' need for self-expression. The authors quote a teacher candidate who described teaching along those lines:

I envision myself as a gardener. As a gardener, I would not always be right on top of the flowers; instead I would check on them daily and monitor their growth; however at night I'd go back inside giving them room to develop for themselves. [...] Furthermore, I would remember that each flower grows at its own pace, some need more nurturing than others - picking one flower over another because of its beauty will only cause its premature wilting anyway. (White and Smith 1994, p.167)

Like this teacher, another emphasizes that gardening entails accepting students as they are; 'Some classrooms are like my "weed beds." They don't force children into a classification but let them grow and be what they are . . . beautiful' (Levine 2005, p. 174).

We can attain an even clearer picture of what the gardening metaphor represents for contemporary teachers, teacher candidates, parents, and scholars by considering to what it is contrasted. For Gopnik, the gardener is opposed to the carpenter, whose 'job is to shape that material into a final product that will fit the scheme you had in mind to begin with. And you can assess how good a job you've done by looking at the finished product' (2016, p. 18). The carpenter attempts to control the child, and has a fixed goal in mind for what the child will become. The gardener, on the other hand, relinquishes much control; the gardener creates optimal conditions for development, but allows nature to run its course.

In the teaching literature, gardening is characterized as a student-centered approach to education rather than teacher-centered. In one article, gardening is opposed to 'moulding' and 'gate-keeping' (Oxford, Tomlinson et al. 1998, p.7).³ In another,

³ In Oxford, et. al., the authors do not describe gardening as strictly student-centered but rather as a metaphor that suggests shared teacher and student control. They also identify 'democratizing' as another shared control metaphor.

gardening is opposed (among other things) to optometry, which views 'the teacher as powerful expert, the text as independent object, teaching as presenting the results of an objectively verifiable diagnostic process, and the student as deficient and in need of correction' (White and Smith 1994, p.164). Overall, a picture emerges of the gardening metaphor in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as aligned with a generally 'progressive' view of teaching and parenting – the strain of progressive education that is also commonly identified as child-centered, romantic, or pedagogical progressivism. Child-centered progressives seek to engage the child's unique interests and abilities; they are eager to create space for children to explore, discover and express themselves; and they are reluctant to impose their own desires and ideals upon children.

The Gardener-Educator of the Past, Part 1: Child-centered gardening and moulding

If this idea of child-centered gardening sounds familiar to scholars of education, that's because it is a metaphor that arises regularly in the history of educational philosophy. In the opening of *Emile's* first book, Jean-Jacques Rousseau advised mothers to keep 'the nascent shrub away from the highway and protect it from the impact of human opinions.' Rousseau elaborated: 'Cultivate and water the young plant before it dies. Its fruits will one day be your delights. Form an enclosure around your child's soul at an early date' (Rousseau 1762/1979, pp. 37-38). In *Emile*, Rousseau articulated perhaps most influential of the educational ideas that appeal to child-centered gardener-educators today. Rousseau proposed to 'waste time' until the child's interest is aroused, to teach through activity rather than through lectures or books, and to recognize the need for the tutor's or parent's educational goals to be developmentally appropriate.

In this initial use of the metaphor that I have quoted, however, Rousseau did not merely emphasize the contemporary aspects of child-centered gardening. Rousseau additionally stressed that gardening involved protecting the young. One must shield the child from the opinions and customs that would inflame his *amour propre*, his vanity. Rousseau's gardener is a builder; not a builder who constructs the child like Gopnik's carpenter, but rather a fence builder who encloses the child. The enclosed shrub is spared from opinions and customs that cause most people to seek to have themselves recognized as better than others; Rousseau's shrub will recognize the fundamental equality of all humans (Rousseau 1762/1979, pp. 67-68, 213-14, 225).

Importing Rousseauian educational philosophy to the new American republic, Noah Webster wrote in 1790 that 'it is better for youth to have *no* education than to have a bad one, for it is more difficult to eradicate habits than to impress new ideas. The tender shrub is easily bent to any figure, but the tree which has acquired its full growth resists all impression' (Webster 1790, p.15; emphasis in original). In Webster, like in Rousseau, child-centered gardening involves protection, taking care not to corrupt the

child. Webster, like Rousseau, worried that children are too easily moulded. He related a story of a Greek *polis* which, when conquered, was instructed to hand over male children as hostages. Knowing how impressionable are the young, they offered instead adults, whose patriotism could not be tarnished and who would resist the ideals of the foreigners (Webster 1790, p. 32). Webster spelled this out explicitly: An American 'boy who lives in England from twelve to twenty will be an *Englishman* in his manners and feelings; but let him remain home till he is twenty, and form his attachments, he may then be several years abroad, and still be an *American*' (ibid., emphasis in original).⁴ Webster and Rousseau simultaneously maintain a child-centered ideal – that one should follow children's interests, that learning best occurs when children actively explore and discover on their own – and the principle that children are inevitably moulded by the particular garden, the distinct culture, in which they are raised. For Webster, to create American republicans, children must grow up in an environment of American ideas, commitments, and passions. Because of this recognition that the young are moulded by their environment, Webster, a child-centered gardener, simultaneously acknowledged the power of moulding. His analysis of education ends up not that far from the Jesuit maxim, 'give me the child until seven and I'll give you the man' – an idea that is at odds with the modern day child-centered gardeners who value students' self-expression and recognize in their students a vast array of potential futures.

If one regards the child as pliable, then it may logically follow that adults must embrace their ability – perhaps even their duty – to mould the young. Rousseau and Webster believed that most parents and educators ended up corrupting the young, and therefore sought to keep would-be 'moulders,' or carpenters at bay. John Locke, on the other hand, had earlier invoked the gardening metaphor to stress that one could 'weed out' bad habits or undesirable behaviors: 'one by one you may weed them out all and plant what habits you please' (Locke 1693/1996, §64). Locke blamed tutors – not the child's innate character or talent – for permitting weeds to arise. For example, he wrote, '*Affectation* is not, I confess, an early fault of childhood or the product of untaught nature; it is of that sort of weeds which grow not in the wild uncultivated waste, but in garden plots under the negligent hand or unskillful care of a gardener' (ibid., §66).

Likewise, Horace Mann invoked the gardening metaphor to emphasize just how impactful the gardener-educator *ought* to be. (Perhaps an unsurprising position for the great advocate of common schooling in America to adopt.) In 1848, Mann wrote in his *Twelfth Report* that the 'inflexibility and ruggedness of the oak, when compared with the lithe sapling or the tender germ, are but feeble emblems to typify the docility of childhood, when contrasted with the obduracy and intractableness of man' (Mann 1957, p. 80). Rousseau and Webster sought to allow the young room to develop on their own,

⁴ Likewise, Rousseau (1762/1979) wrote about the cultural basis of many beliefs. For example, 'The faith of children and of many men is a question of geography' (p.258) and 'Let a Turk who finds Christianity so ridiculous at Constantinople go and see how they think of Mohammedanism at Paris!' (p.260).

insisting that educators ‘waste time’ to let children take some control over their own development, and to let that development proceed at an appropriate pace. In contrast, Mann argued that, since one can alter the sapling but not the tree, one must take advantage of the opportunity while one can. Mann adds the saying from *Proverbs* (22:6) that is similar to the Jesuit maxim: ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it’ (ibid., p. 100).

For Mann, just as for Locke, the gardening metaphor is not child-centered; it is an explicitly teacher-centered, moulding metaphor. Indeed, there are many uses of gardening as moulding that predated Mann, and there are those who use the metaphor in this way today. The British now talk about ‘hothouse’ parenting (the equivalent of Americans’ ‘helicopter’ parenting). Hothousing entails the idea that with intense adult involvement and the right kind of, and sufficient amount of, stimuli – early music lessons, extra math tutoring, etc. – children will flourish. It is a moulding metaphor. (Nevertheless, there exists a general consensus on what child-centered gardening is in education today, even if hothousing reveals some variation in the employment of the metaphor.⁵)

Likewise, in other eras the gardening metaphor has been used in opposing ways. In her study of teaching in early modern humanism, Rebecca Bushnell argues that When a teacher was compared with a gardener it could mean many things ranging from violent mastery to tender regard; similarly, a student was imagined in different ways when compared with a seed, a plant, or soil. On the one hand, such comparisons suggested that the teacher/gardener could plan and cultivate the pupil’s mental garden for greater profit. On the other hand, such analogies also conveyed resistance on the child’s part, for they granted the child a specific property or nature that the teacher/gardener could not alter. (Bushnell 1996, p. 75-76)

Indeed, Erasmus, like Horace Mann, argued that you can control saplings, but not trees. One must fix the plants while they remain pliable, Erasmus contended; an untamed child quickly becomes a wild animal (ibid., pp. 93-96). In contrast to Rousseau (and contemporary child-centered gardeners) who believed the corruption is a product of too much adult influence, or at least the wrong sort of adult influence, Erasmus argued that corruption results from too little influence: ‘unless the tender child’s mind is engaged in fruitful education, it too will be overgrown by vice.’⁶ The gardening metaphor, in this iteration, is a moulding metaphor, more resembling Locke’s view that a young child’s mind is akin to ‘white paper or wax to be moulded or fashioned as one pleases’ (Locke

⁵ Gopnik is well aware that a contemporary strain of the gardening metaphor runs in the direction of hothousing. In the line I cited at the beginning of this essay, she extols the ruggedness of garden over the fragility of the ‘most carefully tended hothouse bloom’ (2016, p. 19).

⁶ Erasmus, *De pueris*, p. 75, cited in Bushnell (1996, p. 98). Bushnell provides an engaging account of the gardening metaphor not only in Erasmus but in humanist thought generally. See pp. 73-116.

1693/1996, §216) than the Rousseauian, child-centered call to grant the child time and space to explore the world.

The Gardener-Educator of the Past, Part 2: Gardening with Prejudice

Gardening as moulding falls on the nurture end of the nature-nurture spectrum. Moulding entails that children's future selves are largely, though not exclusively, a product of their environment and their experiences.⁷ The child-centered gardener respects the individuality of each child, and wants to help each actualize her potential. To do this, to a certain extent, requires patiently biding one's time; one must wait to see what blooms in the garden. The child under the care of the gardener as moulder, in contrast, requires intense intervention. Gardening involves training the sapling to grow along the right path. So gardening as moulding is, in principle, quite optimistic and egalitarian: with the right education, any child can thrive. Some child-centered gardeners, like Rousseau, are similarly optimistic about children's innate nature and potential; they fear that adults' intervention will compromise the child's potential. But falling on the nature side of the nature-nurture debate (as the child-centered gardeners do) has its drawbacks, and certain historical periods reveal those drawbacks quite clearly.

The seed contains within it a particular future, a future from which one cannot depart. In a society in which people hold broad assumptions about hierarchies of races, ethnicities, religions, genders, and social classes, claims about people's innate nature were more likely cynically deterministic rather than optimistic. For example, in 1844, Henry Ward Beecher, in *Seven Lectures to Young Men*, wrote, 'You can make a great deal more of a potato if you cultivate it than if you do not cultivate it; but no cultivation in this world will ever make an apple out of a potato' (cited in Kaestle 1983, p. 88). Carl Kaestle characterizes the educational theory of nineteenth century America as follows: 'The environmental thrust of childrearing literature of the antebellum period must [...] be understood within a context of group prejudices' (ibid.). The gardening metaphor may thus be invoked in defense of freeing children from adult prejudices and stereotypes, but it can also be tool to reinforce prejudice and marginalize children based on their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or social class.

The Gardener-Educator of the Future

We have seen that the gardening metaphor can be used to justify either nurture over nature, or nature over nurture; it may reflect an optimistic, egalitarian belief in every child's innate potential, or a deterministic prejudice against some children. In essence, the gardening metaphor is a Rorschach test nimble enough to accommodate a

⁷ Locke wrote that 'nine parts of ten' of what men are - 'good or evil, useful or not' - is a product of their education (Locke 1693/1996, §1).

diverse array of educational theorists' ideas. There are many different kinds of gardeners – occasionally checking in on wildflower plot is quite different from trying to grow an ancient seed discovered during an archaeological excavation. Is the child a wildflower, likely to flourish with little intervention? Or a rare, delicate specimen, unable to grow without the Herculean efforts of others? Today, the metaphor is most commonly invoked by (a) people like Gopnik to challenge the kind of parenting that over-schedules children in the hope of achieving specific outcomes, and (b) teachers and educational theorists who seek to challenge inflexible, outcomes-oriented teacher-control of the learning process and classroom.⁸

Erasmus and others sought to highlight the power of education and hoped to change the course of seventeenth century pedagogy. For some early humanists, the gardening metaphor, like it would later for Rousseau, encompassed a deep respect for the child and a recognition of the child's interests and needs. Yet, for them, the gardener is someone who meets a child at a unique moment, a fork in the path towards being a productive member of society or living a life of vice. The gardener ought to take responsibility the child's future by taking control over the child's education. Given the different ways that the gardening metaphor has been invoked, to find out that that a parent or teacher, today or in the past, claims to be a gardener, is to know little about the person's conception of the child, approach to pedagogy or child-rearing, or goals for the child's future. But might these reflections from the past inform a how we use the gardening metaphor in the future? I believe that they can.

At the outset of this essay, I noted that Gopnik differentiated the gardener from the carpenter by, among other things, having a particular output in mind. The carpenter is working towards a particular kind of adult while the gardener is open to discovering what kind of adult emerges from the well-tended garden. But Gopnik is not completely agnostic on a vision of adulthood. She writes, 'Being a good parent won't transform children into smart or happy or successful adults. But it can help create a new generation that is robust and adaptable and resilient, better able to deal with the inevitable, unpredictable changes that face them in the future' (Gopnik 2016, p.19). I recognize the value of this distinction – there surely is a difference between a child who is forced to practice violin (or baseball, or mathematics) for hours a day at the age of three and a child who is allowed to develop general character skills like resiliency by encountering a variety of challenges in the playground or among siblings. Yet by identifying 'adaptability' and 'resiliency' as a goal, Gopnik is not simply rejecting the outcome-oriented carpentry model of parenting, as she suggests. Her vision of the resilient adult who emerges from what I have called child-centered gardening reveals

⁸ In a chapter focused on schooling rather than parenting, Gopnik specifically criticizes schools and teachers for focusing narrowly on standardized test scores (Gopnik 2016, pp. 179-210).

that normative commitments are unavoidable. Indeed, they are both necessary and desirable.

Gopnik would not deny that she has an ‘outcome’ in mind, I assume, because she is contrasting her flexible, dynamic outcome to the carpenter’s rigid, oppressive outcome. Nevertheless, her outcome is widely endorsed; it taps into the parenting anxiety and educational obsession of the moment. The parenting advice most commonly promoted by the expert class of psychologists and writers publishing and TED-talking on the subject today is currently focused on character and, more specifically, like Gopnik, on resilience and what teachers, educational reformers and scholars call “grit” (see, e.g., Stokas 2015). The most influential among them, Angela Duckworth, creator of the Grit Scale assessment instrument, defines grit as a combination of passion and perseverance.

In a personal anecdote in her book, Duckworth describes how she watched as her four year old struggled to open a box of raisins and then gave up. Duckworth was aghast about the lack of perseverance her daughter demonstrated, and came over to offer some encouragement. Her daughter refused to attempt to open the box again. Duckworth writes, ‘Not long after, I found a ballet studio around the corner and signed her up’ (Duckworth 2016, p. 223). Duckworth’s parenting goal is for her children (and all children!) to develop grit – the kind of character that enables children to bounce back from failure, to take risks, and to succeed in a variety of walks of life. Despite the fact that, broadly speaking, Gopnik and Duckworth seem to share a central parenting goal, Gopnik would likely consider Duckworth a carpenter, a parent who is too quick to interfere in the child’s negotiation with her environment. Gopnik might call the short road from an unopened box of raisins to ballet class hothousing, carpentry, or helicopter parenting. Nevertheless, Gopnik and Duckworth are both ultimately guided by a similar ideal of a flourishing adult, an ideal to which resilience is central.

The emphasis on resilience and grit is not limited to parenting experts. Schools have increasingly focused on grit as the key to success both inside and outside of schools. Grit was eagerly embraced by the American charter school movement, particularly KIPP (The Knowledge is Power Program network of schools), but has now been spreading more broadly. California has moved to begin assessing its students’ grit in its CORE districts.⁹ Grit now stands firmly among the educational goals of a not insignificant part of the expert class of American educational reformers, as well as writers on parenting.

So grit and resilience is now a goal explicitly shared by some moulders/hothousers/carpenters and child-centered gardeners. That they might share a goal is not necessarily a problem. What is problematic is that child-centered gardeners

⁹ On KIPP’s emphasis on character, see Paul Tough (2013). On assessing grit in California’s schools, see, for example, Martin West (2016).

often fail to recognize that they are guided by normative ideals. That is, regardless of whether they articulate them or not, they maintain a particular vision of the educated adult; they are working towards an outcome. Furthermore, child-centered gardeners ought to recognize that the line between child-centered gardening and hothousing is thin. The moment we set out to identify experiences for our children or students to explore without undue influence, we have already had a hand in shaping that experience. We may create opportunities for the young to explore and experiment unencumbered by adults, but that requires work on our part, it is a garden that we have tended. The days when children roam the neighborhoods throughout the day until they are called in for dinner are, for many, long past. Ironically, parents must now create opportunities for their children to explore without parental interference.

Gopnik and other child-centered gardeners would not have a problem with someone doing so. The gardener, after all, does not walk to the park, throw some seeds into the wind, and then check back in a few years to see if anything has bloomed. Child-centered gardening requires conscientiousness, meticulousness, and much effort. Even in the case of Rousseau, the line between hothousing and gardening was thin. For all of Rousseau's insistence that Emile should have to time and space to explore, he created for Emile a nearly omniscient and omnipotent tutor. Rousseau wrote, 'Let [the pupil] always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are [...] Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants; but he ought to want only what you want him to do' (Rousseau 1762/1979, p.120).¹⁰

Child-centered gardeners like Gopnik, Rousseau, and Webster are not to be faulted for having outcomes in mind. Parents and teachers who embrace gardening should not be *laissez faire* about their children's futures. Instead, they should embrace gardening because they propose a particular vision of a flourishing adult that they hope to cultivate. Gopnik has an ideal, even if she does not call it an outcome. And she is right to be guided by an ideal. Parents and teachers *ought* to hold normative commitments about the types of adults who will be the products of their teaching and parenting. To abandon such normative commitments is, in essence, to abandon the very purpose of education.

In addition to the importance of recognizing that even child-centered gardeners must have a normative ideal for the children they educate, one must consider what that ideal entails. Rousseau, Webster and many child-centered gardeners of the past were concerned to keep bad habits and vice at bay. Rousseau, for example, wanted to ensure that Emile would be the kind of citizen who viewed no one else as his inferior (Rousseau 1762/1979, p.245). In contrast, today's child-centered gardeners, like Gopnik, are concerned to keep stress and anxiety at bay, avoiding an 'oppressive cloud of

¹⁰ Indeed, child-centered progressives who have noticed the near omnipotence of the tutor have been uncomfortable with it. A.S. Neill, for example, was critical of the authoritarianism of Emile's tutor; see Walter (1996). On Rousseau and authority more generally, see Michaud (2012).

hovering expectations' (Gopnik 2016, p.24). This contrast exemplifies how child-centered educational priorities have shifted from prioritizing citizenship and morality to psychological well-being. Child-centered gardening today is individualistic – it has little to say about how the student will interact with others. For Rousseau and Webster, a child's relation to others was central. Rousseau and Webster never lost sight of the fact that the child grows up to become not merely an adult, but a citizen.

My criticism of today's child-centered gardeners has a historical precedent. In 1932, at perhaps the apex of the growth of the progressive education movement in the United States, George Counts credited child-centered progressives because 'they have focused attention squarely upon the child; they have recognized the fundamental importance of the interests of the learner; they have defended the thesis that activity lies at the root of all true education; they have conceived learning in terms of life situations and growth of character; they have championed the rights of the child as a free personality' (Counts 1932/1978, p.3). But Counts chastised them for calling themselves 'progressive' while failing to see that *progressive* education ought to have *direction*. Counts wrote, 'Like a baby shaking a rattle, we seem to be utterly content with action, provided it is sufficiently vigorous and noisy' (ibid., p. 4). Counts argued that progressive educators ought to use their classrooms to promote social welfare, justice. With such an aim in mind, Counts advocated that teachers needed to overcome their adoration of *laissez faire* child-centered pedagogy, embrace indoctrination, and begin to cultivate citizens who would improve society for all.

Rousseau and Webster, on the other hand, suggest that child-centered gardeners can have their cake and eat it too. Child-centered gardening is not inconsistent with holding a normative ideal of the educated citizen who helps create a just society. Indeed, from their perspectives, their normative ideals *require* child-centered gardening. One can only become the right kind of citizen if one's views of others have not been corrupted in one's early education. This is not to endorse the educational theories of Rousseau and Webster. I am arguing simply that the child-centered gardeners of the future ought to learn from their example that pedagogical theory is always wedded to a particular ideal. Rousseau and Webster make the case that among the ideals available to child-centered gardeners is that of a citizen – a human being who interacts with others rather than selfishly pursuing, with great resilience and adaptability, his own successes. Were Rousseau and Webster to comment on the use of the gardening metaphor today, they might say that the emphasizing the child's resilience, her self-discovery, and her self-expression without attending to her moral character or her duties as citizen, may lead to resilient adults, but not a resilient political community.

As the gardening metaphor is an open canvas, we are free to use it as we please. But we ought to recognize that our metaphors reflect our educational ideals. When we recognize and articulate the normative commitments that guide our approaches to

parenting and education, we become better positioned to pursue them and, equally importantly, to criticize them.

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