

Pedagogical Individualism as an Impulse for Self-Education, or In Short: How to Use a Database

Perhaps the most exciting part about the research process is embarking upon the journey with a plan you believe to be foolproof, and finding yourself faced with new perspectives, context and opinions that shake the foundation you had stood upon and point you into new directions that were previously unexplored. The initial topic for my project on Rousseau's 1762 work, *Emile* was pedagogical individualism and self-reliance as an impulse for self-education, or in short: teaching a child how to learn on their own and then allowing them to do so under supervision. On my first reading of the primary source, I had felt that Rousseau convincingly communicated his ideals and their implementation. My project was intended to be an analysis of the way in which Rousseau was able to convey these ideas through a narrative structure. However, following my first few steps into secondary source research on this very narrative structure I started to question the very credibility of my author.

I began by simply searching *Rousseau* and *Emile* for my keywords in the Modern Languages Association Directory of Periodicals and the ProQuest database that I had discovered through the K-State Library's website. I felt it was important to interface with the preexisting conversation by exploring the greater context of the academic field I was to introduce myself to, and to avoid the needless repetition by discovering my place within it. As I explored project titles, I selected those that seemed directly related to my topic, read the abstracts, and if the information seemed immediately relevant, I saved them. My first secondary source was the antithesis of *Emile*, literally called "*The Anti-Emile*" by H.S. Gerdil. I was interested in studying the historical perception of the work, and felt that I should immediately challenge my supportive views of Rousseau by reading a critique. It was here that I began my annotated bibliography page that would become the central document around which I would be able to construct my

arguments and rhetoric for the eventual end of the year paper. After establishing this, I was interested in modern perspectives on the way Emile is educated. I began by using the simple keywords “Emile” and “Rousseau”, as this seemed the most straightforward way to orient myself with this new field. Once I reached the third page and quickly realized there were thousands of papers from thousands of authors on Emile, I reevaluated my research strategy and decided to try narrowing my searches by focusing on specific keywords alongside the title and author.

Having followed up on a number of papers in my first broad search, I reassessed my project proposal and decided upon “Pedagogy” and “Independence” as my first two real searches. These two keywords led me into very different directions from where I had begun, and was where my real research journey began. A key criteria for ensuring the writings were valid was well sourced information. Usually the longer the bibliography, the greater trust I had with what I was reading. As I read more specific papers published from well known universities, certain terms and subsections began to intrigue me and I took note of new keywords, topics and authors in those bibliographies worth exploring. I began to get better and better at deciding what exactly I was looking for, and how to decode abstracts and titles to better find what was relevant. My keywords changed for a third round of searching and became “Behaviorism” and “Alienation” far off from where I had started. It was really during this phase of research that my project began to align itself. As I read on and on, my opinion on Emile began to change, different perspectives allowed me to see different fractures in the writing. Quickly my entire topic began to shift focus from a positive affirmation of the text as a pedagogical utopia proved through textual analysis to a negative critique of the work as a totalitarian anti-utopia. I began using the very same textual analysis I had constructed in praise of Rousseau to present some of the critiques I had been reading within my secondary source research.

It was during this phase that I found the arguments of Enit K. Steiner, and through her, Eliyahu Rosenow. These two texts, the first ordered through the KSU Interlibrary Loan System and picked up at Hale and the second located online in pdf form at JSTOR whose access was provided to me by the K-State, became the foundation for my new topic direction. I've now reached a point in my research where I can return to the primary work with fresh eyes, and to reanalyse the work with a very distant perspective from where I began. I believe it was this long journey and detailed followup on each article that sets my research strategies apart from the general library research techniques. I truly sought to follow through on a line of ever changing questions instead of only works that supported my original thesis. In closely reading arguments that challenge my original thesis, I was able to critically assess my understanding of *Emile*, and push my arguments forward into a new space within the field.

This research process was very exciting, I had never realised the extent of academic work that was available to me through the KSU Libraries system, nor how to interact with dense academic periodicals in order to find the specific information I may have been looking for. Following this experience, I feel I have gained extensive knowledge about how to scan a database and find relevant information. Ironically, in just the way Rousseau intended to give Emile the tools with which he could guide his own education, I feel this experience has similarly given me the library research tools with which I will be able to guide my own education. I've never been more excited to begin future research projects through this incredible system, and have already checked out multiple books through it to follow up on ideas for potential projects.