

Toward a Pedagogy of *Paidia*:
A Re-imagining of Education through the Lens of the
Philosophy of Plato, Schiller, and Gadamer

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Abstract

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In the wake of the French Revolution and the failure of subsequent governments to enact humanistic reforms, Schiller observed in frustration that “*a great moment has found a little people...*” As we emerge from a once-in-a-century pandemic, navigating crisis after crisis amidst uncertainty and instability, it is easy to sympathize with Schiller’s frustrations. For parents and teachers, the pandemic and its effect on public education have been eye-opening, and present a clear call to action. We are currently in an important historical moment with both challenges and opportunity. For education theorists and policy makers, this moment calls for a rethinking and reimagining of our schools (and schooling), if not our entire educational paradigm. This is a moment that calls for a re-evaluation of contemporary education reform - a deeply flawed movement guided largely by assessment and accountability culture.

Unfortunately, this moment has been met by characteristic smallness and a lack of imagination and dedication to our public commons and social infrastructure of which our schools are an integral component. It is not a reimagining to defund public education; and it is not a reimagining to transfer our current, inadequate curriculum (guided by a flawed neoliberal paradigm) onto a synchronous or asynchronous digital platform. This moment called for imagination, creativity, kindness and audacity, but instead we got a doubling down on efficiency,

assessment, and a model of schooling closer to “educational accounting” than anything even remotely resembling a rich and broad humanistic education.

The goal of this dissertation is in part to highlight an important concept that could broaden our thinking about contemporary education. That thing is play, not in a narrow, gamified sense but rather the robust rich conception *paidia*. In this dissertation, I argue we must re-engage with *paidia* in order to reclaim the ancient notion of *paideia*, or an ideal education in the broadest sense. This exploration of the serious play as the basis of education in the philosophical tradition begins with Plato, Aristotle, and others in Greek antiquity, and evolves through the thought of Kant, Schiller, Heidegger, Gadamer, Dewey, and others. Once we have traced this concept from its foundational discussion in Plato’s philosophical dialogues through German romanticism and into the 20th century and beyond, we can put this concept into conversation with contemporary schooling and the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary education reform.

We also will look at how this idea of a broad, engaging education has been lost, what is at stake if we lose it permanently, and what *paidia* can offer our present age with respect to reimagining education for a post-pandemic 21st century. This discussion attempts to retrieve something important from the tradition of thinking about education more broadly - *paideia* - education not merely as a matter of utility, efficiency, or credentialing, but also as a matter of justice. This discussion will inform our understanding of education as a matter of justice and lifelong learning that encourages real fulfillment and has the potential to open structures and potentialities. We will demonstrate that the concept and history of *paidia* are relevant for reflecting on the impoverished education paradigm we have today, but it is also helpful in pointing the way towards a new paradigm.

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As an unfunded student, I used to lament the reality of having to burn the candle on both ends, of working full-time and taking classes at night. It is very difficult to go through any graduate program this way. However, in hindsight, many of my professional experiences directly contributed positively to my thinking and teaching and impacted this very project. Additionally, I am immensely grateful for my colleagues at TC, CUNY & Columbia, who I learned so much from and became friends with as well. In particular I would like to mention the support of Sherene Alexander, my first supervisor at Teachers College, whose brand of accountable support, unwavering friendship, patience and mentorship I will forever appreciate. I would also like to thank and acknowledge Ravi Ahmad, Alisha Arthur, James DiGiovanni, Celia Genishi, Uli Hoinkes, Anna-Kira, Kira Seeler, Susan Recchia, Jessica Stein and Ruth Vinz.

Finally, in one of those serendipitous coincidences that becomes meaningful only for the people who go through them, it just so happens my defense was nearly 20 years to the day of a very serious (and not particularly playful) surgery that saved my life, performed in haste at Vassar Brothers Hospital in Poughkeepsie by Neurosurgeon Dr. Jack Goodman, MD. Following surgery, Dr. Goodman visited me in the ICU and implored me to exercise my mind and put it good use. He knew he could make no promises on my long-term recovery, and didn't make any, but he was encouraging and optimistic and in the days and months ahead would often remind me of what he told me in the ICU, often accompanied with a book recommendation. Twenty years later, I've spent 17 of them as an educator and as a father. I am forever grateful to doctors, nurses, technicians, and other healthcare professionals for doing work that is difficult, thankless, often overlooked, and almost never fully appreciated (as we have been reminded of during this pandemic). Experiences like this come with scars, visible and invisible, and these scars become part of who we are and what we do. These scars come with a gift as well, a reminder to attune our sensibilities to excavate the silly that hides often in plain sight behind the sometimes serious but always ephemeral, fleeting and precious project of human life.

Dedication

For Tadhg Eugene Pasquale Ignaffo, and his grandmother Deborah Ignaffo

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Setting the Stage

Like a lot of new teachers in a classroom of their own for the first time, I had a lot of ideas and fantasies about how my lectures, discussions, and the overall management of the classroom environment would go. I was excited to become a teacher and felt I had an incredible opportunity to do and be a part of something great. I had memorized the strategies and prepared lesson plans and handouts to go with scripted lectures I had written. I wanted my class to be special, something the students would look forward to and remember. Every teacher has an idea of how they will fare as a new teacher, with assumptions and preconceptions subconsciously borrowed from depictions of teachers in movies, shows, and books. And like a lot of new teachers faced with the realities of being in charge of a classroom, many of my preconceptions were promptly trounced. Managing a classroom and creating a curriculum within a new school is full of challenges and varying dynamics, many of them unpredictable. I poured my heart and soul into my classes and lectures, did my best to manage classroom outbursts and distractions—maybe it wasn't going exactly as I had envisioned, but it was going. I shadowed senior teachers at other schools, participated in workshops, worked closely with mentor teachers and educational consultants. With time, I learned more classroom management strategies, devoured books on best practices, cut my lengthy lectures down to more manageable, bite-sized plans. With this, I noticed immediate improvement, as did our school leaders, and I learned the truth and wisdom in some old adages—structure was my friend, and the best classroom management is a well-structured lesson plan.

And so, my classes became tighter and more structured, and my observations were very positive. But the more managed the lessons were, the less it felt like teaching as I had envisioned

it. While it felt good to be running a more managed class, it also felt more scripted. I also noticed that the more scripted and managed the class, the less open the class discussions became; more scripted lesson plans were often dominated by many of the same students—students who were attentive, organized, and engaged. These were great students and a pleasure to teach and work with, but I felt like I was losing others. When class discussions were less ‘managed’ and allowed more room to roam, the less engaged students spoke up more and added insights and perspectives. These discussions made the classes feel more alive, more like teaching—not the teaching I had fantasized about exactly, with students hanging on to every word of a scripted lecture, but a different kind of teaching.

The students reacted positively as well, as they were more engaged and invested in the course and the material, but there was a conflict—the discussions, while good, often strayed too far from the core lesson aims. I lacked the precise language to articulate what I valued about these more open-ended discussions, and it took time to understand the value. I was delighted to see how usually quiet students would come alive, building on each other’s ideas and observations, challenging interpretations; as discussions continued, students became less inhibited, ‘freer,’ and more confident. I could identify with the students who were disengaged in school, bored, acting out, unable to sit still during lectures because I had been one of those students. As a neurodivergent person with a learning disability diagnosed late in high school, I had experienced first-hand the same frustrations and issues I saw in many of my students. Coupled with the experiences of suffering from and then surviving a brain tumor, with the resulting sequelae and anxieties associated with such an illness, I often felt almost antagonized by school—not just the day-to-day tasks but also the institution. However, certain educational experiences reached me—being involved in music (symphonic band or wind ensemble), being

involved in theater, and most acutely—philosophy. Not necessarily the stultified scholarly readings often associated with analytic philosophy (at least not at first), but the feeling of coming alive when engaging with texts and philosophical themes in discussions and, with time, the ability to engage with the timeless and enduring questions and the history of ideas. As with learning to read music, or practicing scales, or rehearsing lines in a play, with time, I was able to cultivate a literacy to engage more deeply with the readings, and with that cultivation came a heightened appreciation. At times, I had to sit in an empty car in a school parking lot in order to focus—I remember this fondly, as with everything else blocked out, I was finally able to begin to immerse myself in and understand certain texts that had previously intimidated me. This engagement became as much self-medicating as it was self-cultivating. Rather than a feeling of loneliness, I felt a feeling of communion. When immersed in Plato’s *Dialogues*, my sense of time slipped away, something I now understand as “flow” (Schmidt, 2010).

I had these moments of immersive flow while teaching as well. Knowing their value as a student, I wanted to hone in on these moments, understand them, and share them as a teacher. I could identify with the students who often didn’t speak during the pre-scripted lectures because I had been that student. So, I spoke with close friends who had gone into theater performance and shared notes. I also turned to philosophy. The openness involved risked undermining the very structures that had allowed the class to begin to take form and succeed, and too much ‘freedom’ risked avoiding curricular goals. The balance was difficult to navigate, and the tension between structure and freedom, between prescription-lessons and open-ended discourse was always present. I began seeking out other texts to try to gain an understanding of the issue and a literacy in order to articulate the value of the approach I saw so keenly within the classroom. I kept coming back to the experiences I could identify with, that had reached me—activities like

theater, music, and, importantly, philosophy. I spoke with friends and colleagues about my experiences in the classroom—what was working and what wasn't. One close friend, then a professional actor, gifted me with books on improvisation, such as Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theater* (among others), and encouraged me to take improvisation classes. And I did.

I found this vision of learning and the synchronous creative learning dynamic of improvisational art within the context of education fascinating and helpful, but often these ideas felt out-of-place and without a home within the context of faculty development workshops and lesson planning at our school. Something felt incomplete. Years later, I pursued graduate study to explore the philosophical underpinnings of pedagogy. I wanted to know the underlying and competing philosophies undergirding not only the contemporary curriculum but the discourse concerning contemporary education reform. Were my own experiences novel? Were they par for the course? I was open to different ideas.

I was fortunate to get a full-time position in the Curriculum & Teaching Department's Early Childhood Education program and had the good fortune of visiting early childhood programs throughout the city. This was not only professionally rewarding but an education in its own right. It was here I was also exposed to the Early Childhood philosophies such as emergent curriculum, Reggio, Montessori, and thinkers like Piaget and Vivian Paley (whom I had the pleasure of meeting). Not wanting to be away from the secondary classroom, I continued to teach philosophy as part of a Philosophy Outreach. I became involved with Columbia Secondary, a public secondary school in Harlem with an integrated philosophy curriculum that paired philosophy graduate students with math, biology, and history teachers. One of the many benefits of this collaboration was the opportunity to receive feedback on how integrating philosophical discourse into a rigorous public magnet school curriculum might affect learning. Once again, we

saw how certain students came alive during these discussions. I was fortunate to be involved with and utilize such curricula. The problem is that this level of student engagement, interaction, and rigorous discourse is not quantifiable and, therefore, its value within the context of contemporary public schooling is increasingly at risk. With the trajectory of standardization and assessment, we continue to see nuanced, context-dependent qualitative experience pushed aside in favor of quantitative measures.¹

What can be done to find balance? How did we get here? I asked myself these questions and delved into understanding the predicament. I have come to realize that that we are in a historical moment with challenges and opportunities: a moment that calls for an awareness of how contemporary education reform—a deeply flawed movement guided largely by assessment and accountability culture—has failed.² We are in a moment that calls for true rethinking and reimagining of our schooling, if not our entire educational paradigm. Schiller once observed, in frustration with the French Revolution, that “a great moment has found a little people....” (Wilkinson & Willoughby, 1968). It seems Schiller’s words, as with many of his ideas, find resonance today.

Likewise, the calls from many politicians, policy leaders, think tanks, NGOs, and education reform advocates to ‘reimagine education’ have thus far borne very little fruit. While it should not have taken a once-in-a-century pandemic to highlight the inequities, disparities, and the multitude of ways in which contemporary schooling has failed to meet challenges of our present day or inspire the educators of tomorrow, it is equally surprising how uniform and *small*

¹ “When I was confronted with the demand to ‘measure culture,’ I reflected that culture might be precisely that condition that excludes a mentality capable of measuring it” (Theodore Adorno; in *Trust and Numbers*, Porter (1995) traces the role of quantification as a response to political, social, and moral problems (p. 224).

² See Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), p. 64; Hawley and Ready (2003), p. 438.

this so-called ‘reimagining’ is—having been met with a remarkable dearth of imagination. Everyone from mayoral candidates (like Maya Wiley and Dianne Morales) to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to former and current Secretaries of Education (Arne Duncan and Miguel Cardona) have embraced the call to *reimagine education*.³

But when diving into the actual policy proposals, this reimagining appears to need more imagination. Calls for longer school days, more targeted test prep, more online schooling assisted by “learning pods,” with the goal of “identifying” high-value teachers, increasing the student-to-teacher ratio, thus enabling cost-cutting, are emblematic of how this great historical moment has been met by characteristic smallness and a *lack* of imagination when it comes to our public commons and social infrastructure. Even while data pour in about the deleterious effects of online education on early childhood education, mental health, and educational equity,⁴ the reversion to neoliberal ed reform seems to have withstood even a once-in-a-century pandemic. We are not reimagining anything, and certainly not education. Rather, we are transferring the current inadequate curriculum, guided by the current flawed paradigm, onto an asynchronous digital platform—doubling down on efficiency, assessment, and a model of schooling closer to “educational accounting” rather than anything even remotely resembling a rich and broad humanistic education. It is clear that the current educational paradigm is very narrow in its thinking.

What do we do about the erosion of teacher autonomy and loss of creative control over

³ A cursory search revealed an abundance of sources, but I have selected a few to illustrate this point: “Coronavirus has changed school forever, let’s make it an improvement”; “Summers off makes no sense: Former US Education Secretary Arne Duncan calls for year-round schooling”; “A conversation with US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona: Schools have an opportunity to reimagine education (ASCD)”; “Cuomo taps Gates Foundation to ‘reimagine’ what schooling looks like in NY” (Chalkbeat New York); “No current NYC educators named to Cuomo’s ‘Reimagine Education’ Council (Chalkbeat New York); Reimagine education (UNICEF).

⁴ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/pandemic-takes-toll-on-mental-health-of-children-and-their-caregivers-magazine2021.aspx>

curriculum? What about accountability systems that currently hold teachers and schools “accountable” for student performance, defined by complex and often proprietary statistical formulas? What becomes of virtues within the context of education (defined broadly) that cannot be accurately or consistently measured? How can interactions (civil, humanistic engagement, community building) be measured? The accountability and assessment movement influenced the very framing of contemporary schooling, not just in specific actions and policies (teaching to the test) but in how these specific practices and policies are an outgrowth of our entire paradigm. A critique of the reduction of education to schooling as well as of accountability is in order to elaborate this point.

Following this, I argue that we have to re-engage with a different vision of education. In this project, I focus on the Ancient Greek notions of *paideia* (an ideal education in the broadest sense) and *paidia* (a conception of play integral to a broad, well-rounded education). We will look at how this idea of a broad, engaging education has been lost, what is at stake if we lose it permanently, and what *paidia* can offer our present age with respect to reimagining education for a post-pandemic 21st century. We will look at the concept of education as a matter of justice and lifelong learning that encourages real fulfillment through character development, which has the potential to open structures and potentialities and the long historical legacy it has bequeathed to humanity. We will follow the course of *paidia* from Plato through modern education theories.

As noted above, *paidia* encourages real fulfillment through character development and has the potential to open structures and potentialities. A pedagogy informed by *paidia* fosters collaboration: it is constructive, informs sound learning practices, and allows for intellectual and emotional free space, so the learners can engage their interests, creativity, and innovation, as well as those of their learning community, while contributing to the larger society in which

this community exists.

A careful philosophical analysis of the commonalities between playful activities as they appear at a variety of ages stands to inform (and improve) educational theory and practice across the board: if we can understand what is essential about the concept, then we are in a much better position to deploy play effectively as a pedagogical tool at all levels. This reimagining of pedagogical practices through the lens of play will shed light on features of what is and is not working in contemporary education policy and practice and, therefore, lend support to educational leaders and practitioners.

1.2 What Is at Stake and What Is Wrong with the Current State of American Education?

The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.... If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. —James Harvey (1983), *A Nation at Risk*

To understand the assessment culture in contemporary schooling, I will look at the origins of the reform movement, which began at the turn of the 20th century, when politicians and educators alike struggled to respond to the needs of a newly industrialized nation with stratified wealth and receiving an influx of immigrants from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and languages. In response, public education was transformed accordingly. Standardization, preparation for vocational labor, and literacy were at the forefront of the school-as-factory model for reform (seen, for example, in the Smith-Hughes Act).

First, we must examine the flawed philosophical underpinnings behind the education reform movement. Although the underpinnings of this movement can be found earlier, the beginnings of this movement are often traced to *A Nation at Risk*, a landmark 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. While only a report, with no authority beyond

recommendations, *A Nation at Risk*'s influence is almost impossible to overstate, as its impact was felt across the country. On its impact, Celia Genishi (1992) wrote that the report's "explicit pressure for 'accountability' via standardized tests led to most states' widening the scope of their testing programs as well as continuing or strengthening traditional (textbook-driven) aspects of curriculum." (Genishi, 1992, p.8). *A Nation at Risk* also changed the discourse surrounding education and education reform almost overnight, as it quickly influenced school boards to usher in reforms on the local and state level, and would soon have an impact on the national level as well. The report strongly recommended that schools adopt rigorous new standards with an emphasis on 'efficiency' and 'performance' (narrowly and as we will see, problematically defined.)⁵

"Standardized tests of achievement (not to be confused with aptitude tests) *should be administered at major transition points* from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work. The purposes of these tests would be to: (a) certify the student's credentials; (b) identify the need for remedial intervention; and (c) identify the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work. The tests should be administered as part of a nationwide (but not Federal) system of State and local standardized tests. This system should include other diagnostic procedures that assist teachers and students to evaluate student progress." (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.24)

Decades after *A Nation at Risk*, its influence was not only still felt, but in fact the education reform movement picked up momentum, leading to federal legislation. In particular, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), and *Race to the Top* (RTTT) became transformational moments in this education reform movement, undergirded by neoliberal assumptions and centered around 'assessment,' with 'accountability' and 'efficiency' as guiding principles. This movement has led to increased standardization (such as the Common Core

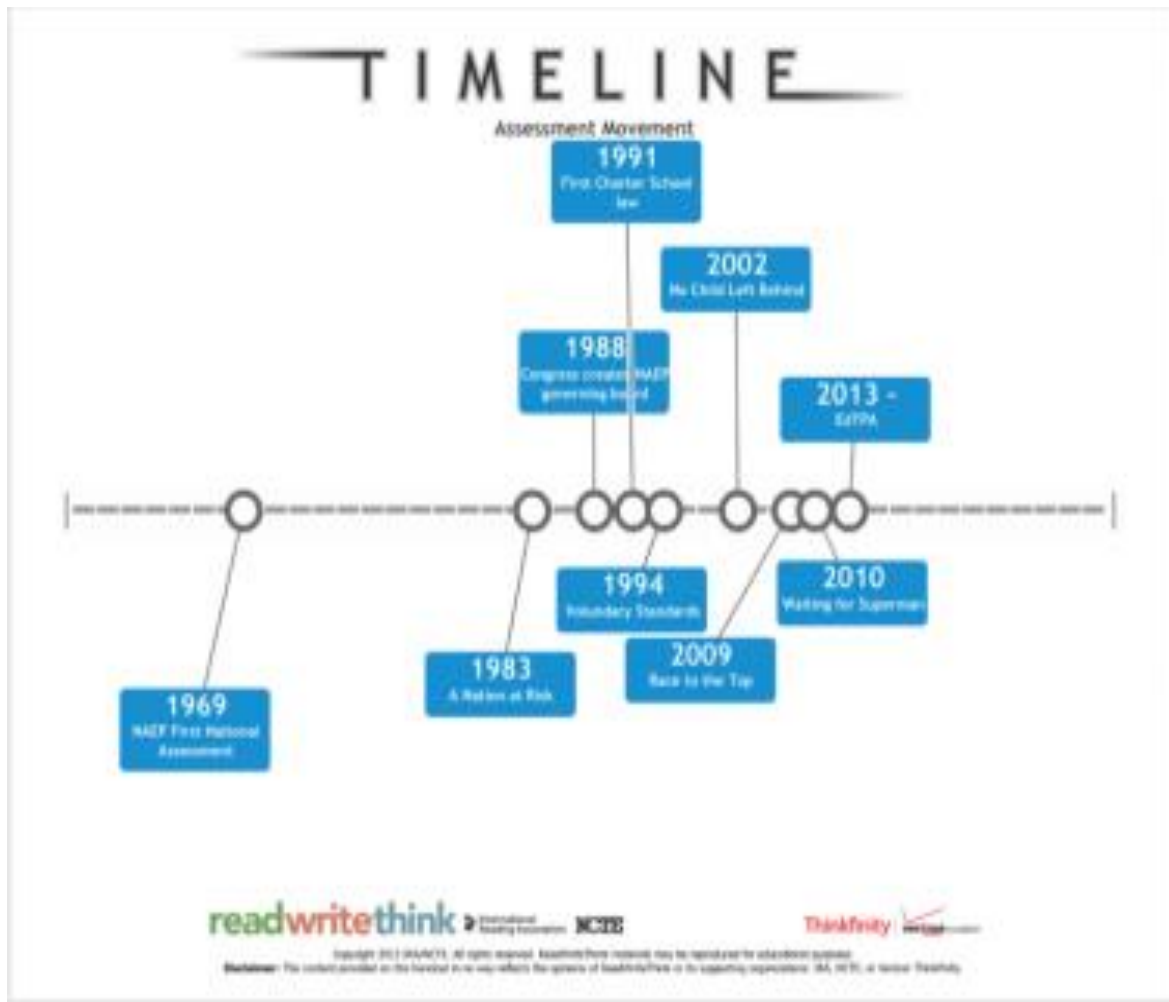
⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/29/604986823/what-a-nation-at-risk-got-wrong-and-right-about-u-s-schools> ; The entire report is widely available, and can be found here: https://www.csus.edu/indiv/l/langd/nation_at_risk.pdf

Standards), and privatization in many forms (from the embrace of charter schools to partnerships with private and even for-profit organizations).⁶ After NCLB and RTTT, the de facto national curriculum became test preparation. The historical backdrop of EdTPA (Educative Teacher Performance Assessment)—a narrowing conception of the purpose and goals of schooling, widespread disagreement about what counts as good teaching and how to measure it—heightened concern about disparities of “teaching performance” and increased the cult of quantification. The dominant discourses that have come to define teacher quality are rooted in assessment and accountability culture. As a prime example, we have seen something that only decades ago would have been unthinkable: the wholesale outsourcing of curriculum design, materials, grading, and even teacher certification to for-profit corporations (such as Pearson), and consultants. Some examples are EdTPA (Pearson), Edison Schools, Kaplan (owned by *Washington Post* Company), Relay Graduate School of Education (founded in 2012), and so on. Assessment, accountability, and choice have been the leading contemporary reform ideas in American education for the past few decades. The standards movement gave way to the accountability movement. These ideas were at the heart of NCLB, a bipartisan effort in 2001-2002 that codified the testing movement, making standardized assessments the critical variable in measuring school quality and teacher effectiveness (NCLB, however, did not prescribe curriculum; it was primarily a measurement and accounting strategy). Since 2009, almost all states have adopted the Common Core Standards (see Figure 1.1 for timeline).

Figure 1.1

⁶ Neoliberalism is an ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition. Although there is considerable debate on the defining features of neoliberal thought and practice, it is most commonly associated with laissez-faire economics. In particular, neoliberalism is often characterized in terms of its belief in sustained economic growth as the means to achieve human progress and its confidence in free markets as the most efficient allocation.

Timeline of Key Educational Reforms



As Ravitch (2010) indicated, “The most brilliant and intelligent minds do not shine in standardized tests because they do not have standardized minds” (2010). So, what are the historical and philosophical underpinnings of assessment and accountability culture? According to the advocates of this reform movement, assessments of teacher quality draw on evidence collected from observations of teachers’ work that lead to the empowering of effective teachers as well as to better access to quality education for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, the “market” introduces choice, freedom, and competition. The reality?

American Education has a long history of infatuation with fads and ill-considered ideas. The current obsession with making our schools work like a business may be the worst of them, for it threatens to destroy public education. Who will Stand up to the tycoons and politicians and tell them so? (Ravitch, 2016, 236)

There are a number of issues. For starters, there is no consensus on the purpose of a good elementary and secondary education. Are we seeking to cultivate citizens, workers, individuals who can transcend social standing? radicals? artists? When we cannot agree on the goals and principles of education, or if the goals emphasized by policymakers differ from the ones championed by practitioners or desired by parents and families, then a standardized curriculum is problematic.⁷

Ravitch (2010) also noted, “Testing is not a substitute for curriculum and instruction. Good education cannot be achieved by a strategy of testing children, shaming educators, and closing schools” (p. 111). Teachers have lost significant autonomy in the profession and creative control over their curriculum. As a result, there is far less differentiation or creative freedom. Many teachers have experienced an erosion in their control over the classroom and the curriculum. This is part of a broader narrative of the increasing encroachment of outside corporate influence into the classroom. Teachers coming through the system now might be shocked to learn that teachers decades ago were buffered from the external accountability systems that currently hold teachers and schools “accountable” for student performance—as defined by complex and often proprietary statistical formulas that purport to measure the “value add,” where contributions of teachers to student test performance are discerned as a direct measure of an individual teacher’s productivity.

Just as SATs fail to actually measure reasoning or correlate with achievement in college, the merit of these productivity algorithms is unproven and highly suspect. A number of studies

⁷ 3/8/214 National edTPA Conference: Aaron Pallas

(Hiss 2014, Popham 2001) have cast doubt on the efficacy of these standardized tests and the conclusions derived from them.⁸ And yet, despite the dearth of evidence supporting the efficacy of these assessments to measure what they claim to be measuring, and despite a growing amount of scholarship on their potential harm, these tests remain nonetheless extremely influential.⁹ This emphasis and reliance on standardized tests, even in the absence of any kind of demonstrated efficacy, can be traced to the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the assessment and accountability movement. One cannot manage what one cannot measure, and so measurement (testing) becomes the prism through which curriculum, student success, achievement, and teaching “quality” are viewed.

One issue with this is that there are a whole host of virtues within the context of education (defined broadly) that cannot be accurately or consistently measured. For instance, how do you quantify or measure the very interactions (civil, earnest humane engagement) that make schools communities, for instance? Or the kind of interactions that invite students, who might otherwise be uninterested, to “buy in” to the subject or class in question or the school as a whole? This point is largely not objected to by proponents of contemporary neoliberal education reform. Rather, the framing of the “school” is brought ever narrower under the umbrella of what can be measured, but even in that narrow conception of schooling, there is a fundamental problem that Plato foresaw eons ago—the tests do not work as advertised; they do not actually measure the

⁸ “The evidence of the study clearly shows that high school GPA matters. Four-year, long-term evidence of self-discipline, intellectual curiosity and hard work; that’s what matters the most. After that, I would say evidence that someone has interests that they have brought to a higher level, from a soccer goalie to a debater to a servant in a community to a linguist. We need to see evidence that the student can bring something to a high level of skill,” Hiss (2014) said (“Do SAT Tests Matter? Studies Say They Shouldn’t” <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/nail-biting-standardized-testing-may-miss-mark-college-students>)

⁹ The books) *Collateral damage: How high-stakes testing corrupts America’s schools*. Nichols and Berliner, (2007) and *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Tests* by McNeil (2000) are both excellent resources as to the potential harm of these assessments

things they claim to measure.¹⁰ In this way, we can see how the accountability and assessment movement influenced the very framing of contemporary schooling, not just in specific actions and policies (teaching to the test) but in how these specific practices and policies are an outgrowth of our entire paradigm. We have lost focus on engagement, creativity, the overall learning community, and the concept of contributing to society as a well-rounded individual.

One problem, I came to realize, is that within the modern schooling system, rooted in the industrial age, a learner's motivations are almost entirely extrinsic, and so-called rewards come to those who can play the 'game' of school well. "All parties become domesticated, our minds bureaucratized—teachers and learners alike—when public consensus holds that schooling is the unidirectional transfer of information, when teachers are pulled to mistake education for instruction or training" (Allsup, 2016, p. 42). Yet, these rewards are as empty and unfulfilling as the game itself. Is this learning? Is this education? Or is it learning to work a system?

Contemporary discourse on education and education reform so often conflates "schooling" and "education," as if they are one and the same, making the distinction almost meaningless. As the American philosopher John Stuhr (2003) wrote in *Pragmatism, Postmodernism and the Future of Philosophy*:

the distinction between education and schooling is often erased, and it is overlooked even more often by 'educators' who are employed by, and primarily concerned with, schools. As such educational problems and issues are often misinterpreted and viewed over narrowly as schooling problems and school issues. Education, however, is a broader notion. School is one important means of forming the habits and dispositions of the immature members of a society, but it is only one means, and compared to other, more powerful ones, a relatively superficial and ineffectual one.

¹⁰ To this point, Ravitch (2010) said, "Our schools will not improve if we value only what tests measure. The tests we have now provide useful information about students' progress in reading and mathematics, but they cannot measure what matters most in education.... What is tested may ultimately be less important than what is untested...." (226)

If we choose to define schooling in this way, how might one define “education”? A survey into educational scholarship and educational theory from Plato onward reveals otherwise.

In the Ancient Greek model of education, *paidia*, we find a contrast. Unlike the tedium of schooling, *paidia* (a concept of play integral to a broadly well-grounded education) engages learners in an intimate conversation with their environment. This notion of education defines education as a matter of justice and learning that encourages full self-development through character building. This kind of playful engagement opens the potential for personal growth, fulfillment, and fundamental character building—vital elements that have been lost in our current schooling model. As theorist Donald W. Winnicott (2005) elucidated, “It is only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self. Bound up with this is the fact that only in playing is communication possible” (p. 54). Should learning to communicate not be in the realm of education? I believe it should be.

Here, *playfulness* provides a foundational perspective on learning, and functions as an important, if not defining, concept of an approach to learning. While cognitive psychology places emphasis on playfulness because of its many physical, intellectual, social, and emotional benefits to the individual, one of the reasons play is considered important is because it provides intrinsic motivation. According to Vallerand (1997), motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic, but the intrinsic motivation—which stems from perceived enjoyment as opposed to the perceived usefulness of extrinsic motivation—is more valuable to the learner/player. Intrinsic motivation provides a more formative, fundamental educational drive. Clearly, motivation for play—which is predicated on joy and pleasure—comes largely from intrinsic incentives. Every act provides an inherent enjoyment, but this can be increased through free play, in which the

player is free to bend the rules and employ their own imagination and creativity into the play context. Any autonomous activity tends to come with a sense of volition and is therefore also accompanied by a willingness which endorses the behavior in which one is engaged. There is, however, a general attunement with the community around the child—either the child is emulating someone or is cognizant of an observer whom the child trusts to provide safety in the event that something goes wrong; it is only in the presence of these factors that the intrinsic motivation for pleasure is acted out through play.

1.3 *Paidia* (or Lack Thereof) in 21st Century American Education

Surprisingly, there is little room for play in the modern American classroom. While a great deal of educational scholarship and research engages ‘play’ and ‘playfulness’ as concepts of discernment and intrigue, the majority of this research focuses on play in relation to early childhood education. There has been precious little consideration of how we might integrate playfulness into more advanced educational settings, or how play might be part of an ongoing educational process that does not parcel out strategies like play exclusively to the early, non-serious, years of schooling. The assessment culture and the “factory model” school persist as the guiding forces in contemporary schooling, despite the lack of any proof justifying claims¹¹ to its efficacy or value. The concept of play with respect to education offers a unique perspective on and critique of assessment culture.

Play is perhaps the quintessential activity of childhood. Play’s central role in shaping the

¹¹ This is a point observed by Plato in the *Republic*, a central assertion that rather than predicted, human capacity must be supported, observed, and revealed over the course of someone’s life. For Plato, there is no “test” that can put a child on the path to being gifted and talented (a guardian). One gives all “students” the resources to flourish and allows them to achieve their capacity. In this regard, *paidia* (play) becomes the only assessment needed for *paideia* (education defined broadly). This has also been backed up by contemporary research, as summarized by Jaschik’s 2014 article that found nearly identical academic performance by students who submitted and didn’t submit SAT or ACT scores at test-optional colleges and universities. (link: [Large study finds nearly identical academic performance by students who submitted and didn't submit SAT or ACT scores at test-optional colleges](#)).

development of children across a variety of dimensions is well-documented scientifically (Johnson, 2013); both structured and unstructured play are essential for teaching children about the world in which they live, helping them develop the social skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives, and preparing them to take on adult responsibilities in the future. Given this central importance in learning and development, it comes as no surprise that play has received a tremendous amount of attention from both educational theorists and philosophers of education more broadly.

Contemporary American education is a bit schizophrenic when it comes to the concept of play. A cursory exploration of the concept in educational journals yielded a surfeit of research on play in education. The sheer volume of work on play and playfulness belies the reality of contemporary education—a reality that contemporary schooling values assessment and accountability significantly more than unmanaged free space and creative exploration. The degree to which education journal articles explore the concept of play might lead a naive reader to expect to find play at the center of contemporary educational practice. Considering the scientific, psychological, and philosophical importance of play, our naive reader would likely be puzzled that play (as well as unmanaged free time and space) has been nearly completely eradicated from the modern classroom and modern school. Although plenty of scholarly ink has been spilled over ‘play,’ its impact on pedagogical practice and policy has been arguably modest, as accountability-driven policies have squeezed intellectual ‘free space’ within the school. One cannot help but be disturbed that even though students may be more able to meet the predetermined outcomes as measured by state and national assessment tools, other critical aspects of a complete education are being lost in the flurry of assessments.

The fundamental problem is that the world the school is preparing the students to enter no

longer exists. Most of the jobs for which the industrial school was supposed to prepare the masses are gone. This condition will be further exacerbated in the coming years, as increasing automation of the school meets the technological job displacement of the digital age. With this in mind, we can see that the presupposition that undergirds current trends in education reform is misguided. We need a different concept/metaphor for pedagogy, and a different model for the school. As we will see, the Ancient Greek notion of *paidia* offers just such a model.

There are also implications for the teacher, as the public definition of ‘good teaching’ is increasingly construed to mean effectiveness in delivering measurable outcomes, while the ‘work’ of teaching is guided by models of efficient data transmission. This critique of assessment and accountability culture is not meant to dismiss the idea of assessments in its entirety, but to point out that the obsession with measurement in schools distracts educators away from a focused engagement with the environment of learning: the atmosphere, interactions, and relationships that make education possible. We can surmise from this general survey of educational and philosophic literature that the concept of *improvisation*, inexorably tied as it is to the concept of *paidia*, features frequently and commonly in the background of any inquiry into the nature of learning, the nature of teaching, and all philosophical activity. However, it has rarely been given an explicit examination, particularly as it bears on curriculum design and general educational policy. This is the course I intend to pursue in the chapters that follow.

Pedagogy frames the culture of the school community; it defines and creates the lens through which each component interprets the other constituent parts. It is through an engagement with pedagogy that the DNA of the school, so to speak, becomes observable in stark relief, and it is through an engagement of contemporary education policy (such as NCLB) that we see the residual architecture of the factory model school is most clearly revealed. The goal of a

standardized assessment-based pedagogy and accountability culture is efficiency and automation (Ravitch 2010). Through this lens, teachers are recast as educational accountants while students are still seen through the prism of the industrial school—as grist for the mill (Dewey, 1991, MW, 8.289). However, just as was the case for John Dewey in his time, we can anticipate and discern the social problems of tomorrow through a mix of forward-looking critiques of our current educational crisis as well as creative reconstructions of our philosophical and educational legacy.¹²

Looking at the conception of *paidia* as introduced by Plato and Aristotle and developed by thinkers such as Caillois yields a valuable access point to a discussion of play and its role in education. Improvisation as a concept-metaphor with which to critique schooling and education reform returns us to an interesting constellation of education-play-philosophy that was present in Ancient Greece (and, as we will see, found adherents in 19th and 20th century Germany as well). In general, Ancient Greek philosophers saw *paidia* (serious improvisational play) as inextricably bound up with education. Improvisation also provides a lens through which we can examine collaborative education as well as educational cooperatives that are qualified by contextualized transactional learning. This will help build a philosophical and theoretical foundation for a pedagogy of *paidia*. It will give us recommendations for and insights into improvisation-based pedagogies, alternative models of education that inhabit *paidia* as a lived educational concept, and, of course, implications for teacher education.

In the next chapter, I will examine the link between modern conceptions of improvisation and Plato's *paidia*. Using the concept of *paidia* to understand and examine the role of play in American education, I will critique the contemporary trajectory of education reform and

¹² For a discussion of this method, please see Dewey's (1966) discussion of "Education as Recapitulation and Retrospection" in *Democracy and Education*, pages 77-82.

reimagine the possibilities of a pedagogy of *paidia* within contemporary schooling. For this latter aspect of the project, I will examine visions and approaches to education in education cooperatives and other alternative collaborative learning environments, and focus on improvisation-based pedagogies as a methodological tool to inform better school practices and environments. We will be concerned with the place of play (especially in the form of improvisation) in contemporary educational practice. As a concrete point-of-entry into this discussion, we will consider the relationship between classical and contemporary improvisational theory and the development of jazz as a musical style. I argue that the methods, norms, and practices of jazz provide a potentially enlightening model for a novel approach to education at all levels—from early childhood to teacher training. I sketch out some of the foundations of this idea in Ancient Greece and indicate how they might be helpful in developing a critique of 21st century American educational policies. We will see that an educational model that is more firmly rooted in the virtues that undergird cooperative games, autonomous collaboration, and improvisational art is one that is significantly better suited to meeting the challenges facing education in the 21st century. Furthermore, an expanded engagement with play has the potential to cultivate receptivity to human interaction, collaborative problem solving, and participatory democracy based on new bonds of social trust.

Then, I continue this account of serious play in education by turning to 19th and 20th century German philosophy. In the figure of Friedrich Schiller, we see a shift back toward *paidia*, away from hyper-rationalism. Slightly later, we see Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer turning to play in developing a response to certain Enlightenment trends that they saw undermining the kinds of educational goals that this project is aiming to advance.

I do not intend for this project to focus exclusively on Plato: however, I feel it is

important to ground this discussion in Plato and in his robust conception of *paidia* as it related to his treatment of philosophy, education, and justice in the *Republic*. This reading of *paidia* offers a contemporary audience an opportunity to engage pedagogy, theory, and policy through this lens. It is an opportunity to explore, and hopefully inspire, different educational approaches, or even architectures, while simultaneously consulting and considering the rich, influential body of work already done on the topic.

I am not suggesting that this is “inventing” a new way to look at education; on the contrary, this is why the historical and philosophical grounding is crucial to the project. This approach is not novel but rather situated on the very bedrock of western thought—the model of classical philosophy itself. The pedagogy of play has persisted precisely because it is how people learn to learn, how people engage and navigate the world as autonomous, thinking individuals. This is a kind of education that is necessary for innovation, creativity, and collaboration—values that are ostensibly prized in our educational system yet are too often ignored in our culture of standardized assessment. The approach to pedagogy that I discuss here is not meant to displace other valid ways of being and learning, but it must not be forgotten. This most fundamental basis of learning is increasingly neglected in our discourses, our research, and our schools, at the peril of the teacher and the student.

In this dissertation, I argue that (1) We should be educating our children and not just “school” them, but we are not. (2) Real education involves “play.” (3) The concept “play” requires careful characterization to avoid confusion. And within the context of this work, I am specifically re-engaging the concept of *paidia*, a specific kind of play that is serious, discussed throughout the history of ideas and the very activity of philosophy. This concept is close to what we now consider improvisation. In this way, philosophical discourse is a kind of improvisational

art. I trace this argument through the works of Plato, Schiller, Gadamer, and others. (4) Such characterizing features would include spontaneity and the like, (5) as well as ludic features that provide structure for that spontaneity. (6) Rightly pursued, *paidia* enhances the full development of a person (foreshadowing Schiller). (7) Plato's theory in the next chapter provides an interesting context for this discussion.

Chapter 2: *Paidia* in Ancient Greece

Perhaps, and perhaps even more than that, for I myself really don't know yet, but whatever direction the argument blows us, that's where we must go. (394d)

In Chapters 2 and 3, I will develop a reading of the Greek conception of *paidia* and trace its trajectory in the philosophy of education. Such a reading, coupled with the chapters that follow, will reconstruct an important strand in the history of philosophy of education and draw a firm connection between play, education, and justice—an interwoven history that begins in Ancient Greece. Then, as we will see, finds a second powerful articulation in 19th century German aesthetics, which is carried through the 20th century through figures like Gadamer and Heidegger. First, I turn to *paidia*'s importance in Plato's philosophical and educational projects, as outlined in the *Republic* and *Laws*. Supplemented by a reading of Aristotle's aesthetic theory, I show how *paidia* was part of a broader trend in Ancient philosophical thought that bound together education, the arts (and with it, play), and social goods, like justice. In Chapter 3, I provide a survey of contemporary relevant literature to locate *paidia* and provide a summary of parts of Roger Caillois's helpful exegesis on play. When read together, we can see a trend in educational philosophy that speaks powerfully to the challenges of the present. It is precisely this bond which has been severed by our modern assessment culture, much to the detriment of all three. Thus, my goal is to rehabilitate this history not only as a reminder of what has been lost, but also of what may be gained if this trajectory can find a re-articulation in our present circumstance.¹

¹ It is through the concept of "formative justice," developed by the educational philosopher and historian Robbie McClintock (2012) that I will attempt this re-articulation.

2.1 History of *Paidia*

Well before Caillois and other contemporary educational theorists and philosophers engaged the subject, *paidia* emerged as an important concept in Ancient Greece. Education was known as *paideia*—a well-rounded and lifelong endeavor, and defined as the cultivation of an ideal member of the polis, a flourishing (*eudaimonia*) person. This conception of *paideia* (education broadly defined) is far from our contemporary conceptions of education and schooling today. While we have built on important elements inherited from Plato and Aristotle, many concepts central to their thought have disappeared. The Greek notion of *paideia* signifies a broad, well-rounded education—not an education of utility or efficiency, but a matter of justice and lifelong learning. *Paideia* fosters fulfillment through character development and offers an opportunity to open structures and potentialities in ways our modern schooling does not. Within the *paideia* paradigm, an important concept emerged in particular for thinkers such as Plato: *paidia*, or play. While *Paidia* is often translated as play, the meaning is considerably distinct and removed from the frivolous activity commonly associated with the word “play” as it is used today, particularly in respect to early childhood education. Instead, *paidia* referred to a serious, often spontaneous, creative process of improvised activity or collaborations. Built into the foundations of western philosophy was a conception of playful discourse. Western philosophy at its roots was not thought of as a game, or sport, or profession, or contest, but as *paidia*. As I will demonstrate, we must revive something from the tradition of thinking about education more broadly.

In respect to *paidia*, as we will see, the disposition or orientation of playfulness is of central importance.² An argument, for instance, may appear identical to the outside observer, and

² (*I forgot that we were merely playing*) (536d).

yet the mindset or disposition of playfulness transforms the argument into the very activity of philosophy. I will explain this in detail in the next section, which focuses on Plato's *Republic*. The *Republic* recognized *paidia* as integral to education. Plato's description of his ideal educational system laid out in the *Republic* includes significant discussions of this concept. Philosophical discourse was a serious yet playful discourse within a protected space of intellectual and creative freedom. In contrast to a game or tangential pleasantries, it was seen as a central educational activity, and playfulness as the fundamental mindset or disposition for a well-lived life (Rocha, 2010).³ *Paidia* is also integral to Plato's understanding of philosophical activity as a practice. Indeed, it is *paidia* that becomes Plato's preferred method of instruction—for the education of the *free* citizens, the philosophers (536a). Socrates, the protagonist in *Republic*, even argues that the best education should be more like play than work (536a-3), and makes an important pedagogical observation between what is taught by force and what is learned through play – as “nothing that is learned out of compulsion stays with the mind.” (536e). Furthermore, Plato and Socrates repeatedly frame the practice of philosophy itself—a most serious undertaking—as a playful one (536b).

In Ancient Greece, when the concept of *paidia* was coupled with *ludus*, or structure (but also a function of play), *paidia* opened spaces for students to experiment with their skills and themselves. Engaging in this creative process facilitated a birthing of new works of art and ideas, which would become objects of reflection and direction for the individual and group. It was often through the spontaneous insights gleaned from *paidia* that learners would come to know

³ Play as a serious, however free-spirited exercise must be disambiguated from play-as-sport or (mere) game; the latter ‘play,’ pursued for the sole aim of pleasure, or relief from labor, can and should be distinguished apart from play as a kind of unregulated activity engaged earnestly, but with playfulness as a necessary temperament. This second kind of play, *paidia*, and its corresponding disposition of playfulness, was also the disposition from which to think of and engage philosophical activity.

themselves. In this paradigm, learners, motivated by intrinsic as well as extrinsic incentives, collaborated and reflected as they cultivated a sense of self-efficacy and embarked on lifelong learning, undergirded by the wisdom that there is immeasurable value in personal evolution. *Paidia* (play) was an integral aspect of this educational paradigm—the activity of philosophy itself.

2.2 *Paidia* in Plato's *Republic*: *Paidia* as Serious Play

Don't use force to train the children in these subjects, use play instead. (536b)

Proper understanding of the concept of *paidia* requires a discussion of the educational project in the *Republic* and its resulting implications for Plato's philosophy of education. *The Republic* provided one of the most intriguing elements within Plato's carefully structured, intricate educational protocol—making it *the* concept that is essential to understanding Plato's educational project—that is, having a protected space for discourse that nourishes intellectual and creative growth and freedom. Plato saw improvisation and play as inextricably bound up with education, and Plato's description of his ideal educational system laid out in the *Republic* includes significant discussions of play.⁴

The *Republic* introduces distinct forms of play, including play as a serious (albeit free-spirited) exercise and play as mere sport or game with the sole aim of pleasure. Plato also delineated between play as an unregulated activity that one engages in earnestly with playfulness as a necessary temperament. That is, the spirit with which *paidia* is undertaken requires a disposition of playfulness, the necessary disposition from which to participate in philosophical activity. The extemporaneous activity that Plato would have defined as the right kind of play is dialectic. *Elenchus*, or the Socratic method, is actually intended to be a playful, improvisational

⁴ *Elenchus*, or Socrates's method of questioning, is also clearly an example of a playful, improvisatory, open-ended form of pedagogy.

activity. Here, the participants “play” in service of something that exists independently and outside of the game, which does not draw its validity from the game itself. In dialectic, mutual cultivation and ascension to greater understanding are the goal. Success with dialectic, work of the utmost seriousness and importance, depends on a playful activity that requires open, creative, and intellectual space to explore arguments in the hope of discerning and discovering truth. Therefore, it is also the final—and principal—stage of education for the philosopher, the stage that has no end. Just as one would not allow a child without musical training access to an audience, children must not be allowed to play with disputation (debate, and dialogue) before they are able to do so earnestly and dutifully for fear that they will misuse it, and as a result become corrupted and lawless (Plato, 539b). For Plato, a cultivated disposition makes authentic dialectic possible and, when done correctly, there is no greater educational activity. Plato explicitly defined play as an essential ingredient and, indeed, a method of instruction for the education of the *free* citizens, the philosophers (536a).

The relationship between *ludus* and *paidia* is essential to delineate correctly between philosophical activity undertaken with the correct orientation and motivation, and the kind of inauthentic philosophical activity that Plato ascribed to the sophists. Education, Plato writes, “isn’t the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there, but that it isn’t turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and tries to redirect it appropriately” (518d). The concepts of *paidia* and *ludus* are immediately detectable in this description: *paidia* as the inherent “sight” that enables a student to learn, and *ludus* as the governing quality that directs inborn potential toward constructive purpose, connecting the inborn capacity to see and capabilities that can be cultivated:

It looks as though all the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren’t there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However,

the virtue of reason seems to belong above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned. (Plato, 518d-e)

In Book VII, Socrates determines that the best education should resemble play more closely than work (536d). Moreover, the initiation and discussion of the ideal city at the beginning of the dialogue in Book VII are described as ‘playful’ activities. In line with this, the Socratic thought experiment that results in the creation and discussion of the city is *itself* a playful activity (536b); after all, it is essentially a game to flesh out the discussion of justice in a provocative way. It is fitting, then, that *paidia* would be an integral part of Plato’s educational protocol, as its underlying disposition would also be necessary for the realization of a formative conception of justice.

Perhaps most telling, throughout the discussion, Socrates utilizes playful and poetic images, story, and poetry to convey his ideas, reinforce his arguments, and persuade. Illustrating the pedagogical practice that he discusses, Socrates is educating his interlocutors by navigating them through a free-flowing dialogue. The education of free thinkers, then, must not eradicate the inborn virtue of reason but orient it toward constructive purpose. This orientation process must start, Plato writes, at the very beginning of a child’s education. “It is at that time that [the child] is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress upon it” (Plato, 377b).

2.2.1 Early Education: Music, Poetry, and Storytelling

Young children, who have not yet developed the discipline and focus born of cultivating skill, respond best to pleasurable activities. These, Plato notes, include music, poetry, and storytelling (376e)—though not just any, as Plato is aware of the power of these forms to impact the soul. Through these early experiences, children are first exposed to the concepts that will shape their education. Given the impressionable mindset of the youngest learners, Plato

emphasizes that music, poetry, and stories must be chosen with the utmost care. “The young can’t distinguish what is allegorical from what isn’t,” Plato writes, “and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable. For those reasons, then, we should probably take the utmost care to ensure that the first stories they hear about virtue are the best ones for them to hear” (378b). Stories create a prism through which a small child understands the world, and imitating the figures in stories may provide an early form of experiential learning—“Nor should a young person hear it said that in committing the worst crimes he’s doing nothing out of the ordinary, or that if he inflicts every kind of punishment on an unjust father, he’s only doing the same as the first and greatest of the gods” (378b).

Instead, tales for children must be built around the principles of justice storytellers wish to inculcate in their charges.

If they do imitate, they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate for them, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. They mustn’t be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. (Plato 395c)

Similarly, poetry and music should be chosen with an eye toward meritorious concepts. “We should try to discover what are the rhythms of someone who leads an ordered and courageous life, and then adapt the meter and the tune to his words, not his words to them” (Plato 399e).

When children are educated according to these principles, they will develop the ability to discern what is worthwhile before they develop the ability to articulate why they make this discernment. “He’ll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he’s still young and unable to grasp the reason, but, having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself” (Plato, 402a). We will see a variation on this theme when we examine Aristotle’s views on aesthetics and education later in the chapter.

In emphasizing storytelling, music, and poetry as the beginning of the educational process, and noting that children are often drawn to imitate the characters and themes to which they are exposed, Plato argues for the consideration of *paidia* as a serious, fundamental part of the learning experience. Children's first educational activities should appeal to their playful dispositions, but the tendency toward play should not be taken lightly. Instead, young students should be presented with a conceptual framework that reinforces discernment, self-control, and justice as the highest aims. These early experiences will form a basis for later knowledge and understanding.

2.2.2 *Paidia* in Handling a Rigorous Education

The importance of *paidia* is also detectable in Plato's description of the students best suited for the rigorous educational protocol necessary to create free thinkers. "They must be keen on the subjects and learn them easily, for people's souls give up much more easily in hard study than in physical training, since the pain—being peculiar to them and shared with their body—is more their own" (Plato, 535b). While *paidia* does not remove pain, it offers a focus for it. "We must also look for someone who has got a good memory, is consistent, and is in every way a lover of hard work. How else do you think he'd be willing to carry out both the requisite bodily labors and also complete so much study and practice?" (535c).

Here, we see a connection between engagement in education and Caillois's definition of play as a voluntary, enjoyable activity. A student who does not love the hard work involved in every aspect of Plato's educational protocol cannot fully engage with the process. It is impossible to commit to an activity one finds contemptible, and students cannot properly engage in pursuits that only bring them pain. "No student should be lame in his love of hard work, really loving half of it, and hating the other half. This happens when someone isn't a lover of physical training,

hunting, or any kind of bodily labor, and isn't a lover of learning, listening, or inquiry, but hates the work involved in them" (535d). It is worth noting that avoiding hard work is not a virtue. Dr. Avi Mintz (2008) wrote about how suffering is a key and often overlooked component of the Socratic elenchus.

A balanced focus is necessary, both during the educational process and as part of later decision making. "If we bring people who are sound of limb and mind to such a great subject and training, and educate them in it, even justice itself won't blame us, and we'll save the city and its constitution. But if we bring people of a different sort, we'll do the opposite" (536b). In later chapters, I discuss the importance of intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation for Plato's formative conception of education.

Students who lack this balanced focus will be unable to participate in the rigorous dialectical inquiry that Plato holds in highest esteem, as the dialectic depends on the ability to engage in novel ways with revealed information to uncover what can be known. This engagement requires a playful disposition, as students must look beyond the single-minded collection of information to make connections between other subjects. In this way, dialectic inquiry supports the greater good. The purpose is problem solving rather than collecting. "If inquiry into all the subjects we've mentioned brings out their association and relationship with one another and draws conclusions about their kinship, it does contribute something to our goal and isn't labor in vain, but that otherwise it is in vain" (531c-d). Plato provides examples of musicians who "put ears before understanding" (531b) by placing all of their attention on the measurement of tones. Collecting information is not, in and of itself, a fruitful process. It is only when the information is used for a greater purpose that the pursuit becomes meaningful.

Just as *paidia* elevates *ludus* into an activity that is both enjoyable and constructive, the

playful spirit of *paidia* is a necessary part of creating a dialectic. It is not single-minded and tightly focused but supports a spirit of broad, multisensory inquiry. The ultimate purpose of the dialectic, Plato writes, is perfection. “All this business of the crafts we’ve mentioned has the power to awaken the best parts of the soul and lead it upward to the study of the best among the things that are, just as before, the clearest thing in the body was led to the brightest thing in the body and visible realm” (532d).

Dialectic inquiry is serious work and the proper domain of those who are prepared to engage in high-level discourse. It is not an argument for the sake of argument. Children exposed to the concept too early will fail to see the difference and miss the point of the activity. This, Plato suggests, is the reason why current leaders, very much under the sway of the Sophists, tended to be incompetent:

We hold from childhood certain convictions about just and fine things; we’re brought up with them.... And then a questioner comes along and asks someone of this sort, ‘What is fine?’ And, when he answers what he has heard from the traditional lawgiver, the arguments refute him, and by refuting him often and in many places shakes him from his convictions, and makes him believe that the fine is no more fine than shameful, and the same with the just, the good, and the things he honored most. (Plato, 538c-e)⁵

Plato’s educational protocol does not prescribe that children should be forced into a particular mold; instead, he suggests they be allowed to gravitate toward the subjects they find most enjoyable. Those who are well-balanced, equally committed to all subjects while hating none, will be suited to engage in the dialectic inquiry necessary for leadership positions.

The subjects they learn in no particular order as children they must now bring together to form a unified version of their kinship both with one another...it is also the greatest test of who is naturally dialectical and who isn’t, for anyone who can achieve a unified vision is dialectical, and anyone who can’t isn’t.... And after they have reached their thirtieth year, you’ll select them in turn from among those chosen earlier and assign them yet greater honors. Then you’ll have to test them by means of the power of dialectic, to discover

⁵ Yet *paidia* will not be present for all students in all situations. Plato took note of this when describing the educational experiences that should be offered to future leaders. Instead of providing students with a narrow range of subjects, a wide variety of options should be offered but not forced (539b).

which of them can relinquish his eyes and other senses, going on with the help of truth to that which by itself is. And this is a task that requires great care. (Plato, 537b-d)

In Book VII, Socrates revises his previous accounts of education, introducing the study of mathematics (521e-522b). In part, the study of numbers and geometry is important not only for training logic, but also for imparting a sense that the universe has fundamental laws. The benefit of geometry is to introduce abstract concepts within a context of the universal applicability of math and, therefore, appropriately establish the environment for intellectual curiosity: “It leads the soul powerfully upward and compels it to discuss numbers themselves” (525d). The study of abstract concepts inspires one to study and distinguish the impermanent from the permanent and discover the ‘forms.’ To this end, dialogue is also introduced. Logical reasoning and argument cultivate our ability to discern reality better. As the account continues, we begin to see that the significance of ‘playful’ activity is in respect to education. Plato invokes caution and even censorship when discussing the role of poetry, not out of a dislike of poetry or the poets, but rather out of respect for the unique power that the poets yield (the ability to reach the soul in a way reason cannot).

2.2.3 Banishing the Poets while Embracing Poiesis

Indeed, I said, our city has many features that assure me that we were entirely right in founding it as we did, and, when I say this, I’m especially thinking of poetry. Now that we have distinguished the separate parts of the soul, it is even clearer, I think, that such poetry should be altogether excluded. (595a)

Plato has a reputation for his harsh treatment of the poets and for an overly critical assessment of the potential of *poesis*. On the contrary, a close reading of the passages throughout the *Republic* demonstrates that Plato is keenly aware of poetry’s constructive power and even its educative potential—and for precisely this reason, he encourages caution with poetry and music. He discusses poetry as if it is a powerful ‘drug’ that one is ill-equipped to handle, as it bypasses

the reasonable parts of the soul leading to a disproportionate influence over the passions directly. For Plato, this is a power to be treated with the utmost discretion, but it reserves a very special place for *poesis* in the educational protocol of the republic.

It seems, then, that a god has given music and physical training to human beings not, except incidentally, for the body and the soul but for the spirited and wisdom-loving parts of the soul itself, in order that these might be in harmony with one another, each being stretched and relaxed to the appropriate degree. (412a)

Similarly, we have many passages in which ‘play’ and ‘playful games’ are dismissed for their destructive, corrupting potential. Then in Book VII, Socrates advocates for play, but it is a particular playful activity within a complex educational system—an activity that reinforces rather than escapes truth and responsible citizenship, just as poetry must be carefully selected to represent reality and passages carefully selected to promote and inspire the imitation of the good and cultivation of our best character. The educational potential of play necessitates that it must be treated seriously, never to be introduced without its meaningful educational aims in mind. “...No free person should learn anything like a slave.... Don’t use force to train the children in these subjects, use play instead. That way, you’ll also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for” (Plato, 536d-e).⁶

True dialectic inquiry is not accessible to an unprepared student. In fact, we can see something like a staged theory of development, where *paidia* is preparing the way for judgment and discernment that we see in *ludus*, and eventually in Plato’s moral account of turning one’s soul towards the good.

⁶ The full quote is as follows:

All great and numerous labors belong to the young.... Therefore, calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education required for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood, and not in the shape of compulsory learning either.... No free person should learn anything like a slave. Forced bodily labor does no harm to the body, but nothing taught by force stays in the soul.... Don’t use force to train the children in these subjects, use play instead. That way, you’ll also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for. (Plato, 536d-e)

Unless someone can distinguish in an account the form of the good from everything else, can survive all refutation, as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion, but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still intact, you'll say that he doesn't know the good itself or any other good. And if he gets hold of some image of it, you'll say that it's through opinion, not knowledge, for he is asleep and dreaming throughout his present life. (Plato, 534c)

Consider, for example, a group of jazz musicians improvising together onstage. The musicians come together in a spirit of playful spontaneity, but the harmonious result is far from effortless. Instead, it is the result of committed practice, knowledge of music theory, and experience working with other musicians. No single factor makes harmonious improvisation possible, and exceptional performances are beyond the scope of the inexperienced or under-practiced. This vividly illustrates the dialectic Plato discussed in the *Republic*. High-level inquiry—in this case, exemplified by improvised jazz music—is only accessible to those who are properly prepared. Again, we will see an echo of this in Aristotle, who privileged habituation over a more detached form of learning. *Paidia* is expressed through the playful spontaneity that allows the musicians to respond to one another as they create a song together. Yet, *paidia* is not only apparent in the end result. It is the spark that propels a music student through the practice and study required to perform at a professional level. *Paidia* is the element of play that separates effort from drudgery.

2.3 The Right Kind of Play

Our children's games must from the very beginning be more law-abiding, for if their games become lawless, and the children follow suit, isn't it impossible for them to grow up into good and law-abiding men? But when the children play the right games from the beginning and absorb lawfulness from music and poetry, it follows them in everything and fosters their growth, correcting anything in the city that may have gone wrong before.... (424d)⁷

⁷ This passage is immediately preceded by a warning about lawlessness and a comparison to music and poetry: "Then it seems, I said, that it is in music and poetry that our guardians must build their bulwark. At any rate,

In looking to locate and explain the kind of *paidia* that Plato felt was educationally valuable, I'd like to return to an oft-quoted passage from the Republic that I mentioned earlier in the chapter. In the following passage, Socrates apologizes because he reacted angrily to his interlocutor, and explains that in his anger he lost sight of the fact that they were only "playing:"

I forgot that we were merely playing, and so I spoke too vehemently. But I looked upon philosophy as I spoke, and seeing her undeservedly besmirched, I seem to have lost my temper and said what I had to say too earnestly, as if I were angry with those responsible for it.... Therefore, calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education desired for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood, and not in the shape of compulsory learning either.... (Plato 536d)

This passage is critically important for understanding both the kind of play that Plato calls for and the nature of philosophical activity. This "apology" occurs within the context of a discussion on dialectic and philosophy—and specifically of there being two kinds of dialectic, one qualitatively superior to the other. On one hand, one has play-for-play's sake; like a game of checkers, with a winner and a loser, this kind of play when applied to dialogue would be sophistic argument, undertaken for the wrong reasons (in some cases money, in some cases amusement, and in some cases for the sake of argument), with the wrong orientation and wrong goal (winning). The best example of this is the classic game of sophistic one-upmanship. This is a cynical, corrupting practice, and one which Plato despises and warns us against.

The other kind of play—the *right kind of play*—is being modeled by Socrates in the way he approaches dialectic for the benefit of all participants. It is only during the latter that one could be 'carried' by the winds of discourse (394d). As I will discuss later, it is this kind of dialectic that is the true practice of philosophy. This does not mean that this kind of dialectic is unenjoyable, and in fact it produces a distinct pleasure—it is, in fact, *serious* play.

lawlessness easily creeps in there unnoticed. Yes, as if music and poetry were only play and did no harm at all...." (424d)

This type of play, *paidia*, not only produces something, but the players are also formed in its production, in their navigating of it. That is, in playing, one does not disengage from the world but rather engages in an intimate “conversation” with their environment. That is, “it is only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self. Bound up with this is the fact that only in playing is communication possible” (Winnicott, 1991, p. 54).

When this kind of *paidia* is introduced under the right circumstances and at the correct time,⁸ it is *lawful*, which means it is coherent with how human beings naturally engage each other and society. The idea of lawful play (with dialectic as its best example in mind) is that in order to have a structured, harmonious society, one needs a structured, harmonious educational system; paradoxically, this requires opportunities for unstructured (but informed) creative and intellectual space. However, when dialectic is pursued for mere amusement and practiced purely for pleasure and sport, the results are devastating both to the individual and to society. Under these circumstances, Plato wrote that the individual becomes “lawless” (537d-539d), and once the infectious corrupting practice becomes widespread, it is “as pernicious to a city as disease is to a citizen” (537d-539a).

2.3.1 Character

In Book II, a critically important book for understanding Plato’s philosophy of education, Socrates begins his initial account of education by explaining the appropriate character of an ideal guardian by looking at the requisite physical and spiritual qualities. Socrates also compares the guardian to a pedigree dog: loyal, friendly, and protective of the known, yet nevertheless critical,

⁸ There must be a prevailing cognizance of and engagement with what Plato called “preliminary education.” On preliminary education, Plato wrote, “calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education desired for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood” (536e).

even suspicious of the unknown. The guardians must be lovers of learning, relying on “knowledge and ignorance” (376b). And with the goal of a truly just city in mind, Socrates summarizes that those best suited serve as guardians would be, “by nature a lover of wisdom and learning...” and also possess “high spirit and quickness and strength will be combined for us in the nature of him who is to be a good and true guardian of the state.” (376c).

Once the guardian’s character has been assessed, Socrates then introduces the most appropriate pedagogical protocol for the cultivation of the guardian’s character. Socrates explains that carefully selected music for the soul and rigorous gymnastics for the body will best shape the guardian as a whole. It is important to note here that for Plato, music (*musikē*) encompasses more than simply notes and melody. Music, for all intents and purposes, also involves what we might now consider literary education – such as narrative and epic poetry, for instance.⁹ Here, Plato (through the figure of Socrates) goes to great lengths to illustrate precisely the intended meaning of a musical education, and the educative value of story, myth, and poetry to shape the prospective guardian minds: “Imitations, if they are practiced continually from youth onwards, become established as habits and nature, in body and sounds and in thought” (395d). Therefore, the power of story and potentially ‘transformative’ power of imitation must be used sparingly and with caution and restraint as part of the educational protocol of the guardian (396c-d).

As we interpret Plato’s philosophy of education we must keep in mind that in Plato’s metaphysics, the idea of “becoming” good is not the molding or shaping of a mind simply into the best fit for society. To understand how Plato’s metaphysics ties into his educational philosophy, it’s helpful to reflect on his “Allegory of the Cave” in book VII of *Republic* (514a–520d). For Plato, a philosopher’s educational journey is one away from the world of illusion and

⁹ In “Music for the Guardians,” Rheins (2021) offers a detailed and informative breakdown of Platonic musical education in *Republic*.

toward the world of eternal forms, and truth. For Plato, our physical, as interpreted by our senses, was not entirely trustworthy – but if interrogated and reflected upon, could help point us toward truth. (518c) Plato saw good and truth as connected, eternal forms and saw the purpose of philosophy to help its suitors discern, recognize and pursue these eternal truths (521c). And so when it comes to either the education of the philosopher or the cultivation of the citizen within the state, Plato is not interested in pouring into the soul knowledge that didn't exist there previously, (518c) and the 'good' within this context is not a relative, ever-changing societal good but rather one connected to truth and the eternal forms.¹⁰ And this partly explains Plato's emphasis on mimetic education, as imitating a 'good' act or quality can help guide one to truth and bring harmony to the soul. A good education also then cultivates a disposition toward loving truth, and pursuing and habituating good virtues reflective of eternal truths and forms. In other words, a good person is one who acts or behaves in accordance with how a truly "good" being would behave. With this understanding in mind, we can interpret the term *transformative* above (396c) within the context of Plato's educational project. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Plato does not believe we are a blank slate, or plastic, in the sense of being able to transform into a completely different nature. For this reason, education is never a transfer of data for Plato from teacher to student, or a filling of an empty cup. Far from it, Plato insists that education must be interpreted within the context of responding to the character of the person and that person's involvement with society. Education is about cultivating our best *possible* selves, so that we might form and be formed by the best *possible* community.

As the account of education evolves throughout this dialogue, this narrative—that

¹⁰ . "In Plato's world, the philosopher-leader acts on behalf of the good, as a sort of mediator between the 'real' world of the forms and the world of becoming, illusion—the world we live in, allegorically called 'the cave.'" (Hudak, 2005, p.321)

education is less about shaping (so to speak) fully-formed human beings, but rather, it is largely contingent on recognizing an individual's character in youth, and then responding accordingly and *continuing* to respond as the individual's interests and character unfold. Since education's role within the *Republic* is all-pervasive, and the harmony of the ideal city depends on the appropriate cultivation of all of its inhabitants, the educational protocol is targeted to each and every individual's character. Plato sees the flourishing city as contingent on the harmonious interplay of its components – its citizens. Likewise, the cultivation of individuals within a city depends on the harmony of the city, and the harmony of the city depends on its flourishing citizenry.

And so, an important part of education's role in Plato's *Republic* is to effectively assess and evaluate which of the citizens of a harmonious city are best served for what purposes – not only in service to the city itself, but also to ensure the flourishing of each individual within the city. Important in this task, of course, is to assess those who possess a true, unbridled love of wisdom; to “identify those who are capable of philosophizing” and create systems and structures of support to enrich and “strengthen the characters of those who are capable” (Dillon, A. 2004). Moreover, the free citizens are encouraged and taught to love learning and philosophy (376b-c).¹¹

2.3.2 Education as a Lawful Activity

For Plato, the concept of law has great meaning for his philosophy of education, particularly in the *Republic*.¹² The discussion in the *Republic* begins with the provocation of

¹¹ In “Education as Free Use: Giorgio Agamben on Studious Play, Toys, and the Inoperative Schoolhouse,” Lewis (2014) invokes the idea of ‘studious play’ in observing the relationship between play and assessment in Plato's *Republic*: “*Thus play is integral to the evaluative process itself. Indeed, it would make little sense to submit the child to harsh testing if, as Plato suggests, play more easily and directly manifests the soul of the child. Either way, my main point is that a problem emerges here which educational philosophy has inherited and passed down throughout the centuries: the ambiguous relation between rituals of testing and the freedom of play.*” (202)

¹² While I focus on the *Republic*, it is worth noting that Plato further develops the idea of the “seriousness of play” and the appropriateness of philosophy as playful in *Laws*: “Now they imagine that serious work should be done for the sake of play; for they think that it is for the sake of peace that the serious work of war needs to be well

defining justice, only to move to the creation of an ideal city when the winds of dialectic blow our protagonists in that direction. For Plato, the ideal city is *Just* precisely because it is *harmonious*—its parts work perfectly in accord with each other, as organs do in a healthy body. In such a city, the laws are not reactive or even necessarily prohibitive or prescriptive. Rather, (L)aw exists to undergird the (J)ust city by providing the appropriate environment for all individuals to rise to their roles and realize their best possible selves, while engaging each other, and their city, in an appropriate and, therefore, harmonious manner.

With this understanding of Law in mind, we see the importance of education in Plato's *Republic*. Education is, for Plato, the very process through which character is both recognized and cultivated within the context of a Just city, and so, in essence, education is a *lawful* activity, in a broad sense, rather than simply law-abiding or legal. It is worth noting as well that in *Laws*, Plato's final dialogue, the "dual aspect" of the 'Muse' as patron of both *paidia* and *paideia* ('play' and 'education,' respectively), music and poetry should be regulated but not necessarily banned (D'Angour, 1994).

2.4 Mimesis

...the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents. (Poetics 1453)

Heavily influenced by and following in the footsteps of his teacher Plato, Aristotle also seriously engaged the concept of *paidia*.¹³ Whereas Plato was very suspicious of the arts in his

conducted. But as a matter of fact we, it would seem, do not find in war, either as existing or likely to exist, either real play or education worthy of the name, which is what we assert to be in our eyes the most serious thing. It is the life of peace that everyone should live as much and as well as he can. What then is the right way? We should live out our lives playing [803e] at certain pastimes—sacrificing, singing and dancing—so as to be able to win Heaven's favor and to repel our foes and vanquish them in fight. By means of what kinds of song and dance both these aims may be affected,—this has been, in part, stated in outline, and the paths of procedure have been marked out, in the belief that the poet is right when he says—"

¹³ As Armand D'Angour and others have pointed out, Plato and Aristotle "were the first theorists" of education whose ideas on the subject still influence us today, and both took seriously the concept of *play*; though

Republic and in *Laws*, Aristotle viewed the arts as being integral to moral and social education; we see this most evident in Aristotle's treatment of catharsis in the poetics. This, too, has important implications for our understanding of *paidia*. As K. E. Davis (2017) explained, Plato recognized the importance of mimesis for our social, moral, and emotional cultivation. As aforementioned, Plato conceives an ideal education—*paideia*—as one that incorporates intellectual, moral, and physical education. However, Plato famously excises the poets out of concern that mimetic arts are so powerful that they have the potential to “disrupt the unity and order of the soul,” which would in turn lead to a “disordered, dysfunctional society” (Davis, 2017, 9). And so, Davis (2017) surmises that “*Plato's ultimate answer to the problem of untangling the relationship between art and morality is to exclude art from his city* (9). Many agree with this interpretation, and moreover, many have additionally (and understandably) interpreted Plato's banishment of poets to mean Plato disregarded or even resented the arts. In a *Preface to Plato*, Eric Havelock (1992) takes up Plato's quarrel with the poets and, in particular, with Homer in Book X of the *Republic* (598e-606e).¹⁴ Havelock takes seriously, and somewhat literally, the character of Socrates dismissing poetry and mimesis in the *Republic* when Socrates argues that the mimetic imitation of life in art is bad for the soul:

Our present business is to connect this discovery with that crisis in Greek culture which saw the replacement of an orally memorized tradition by a quite different system of instruction and education, and which therefore saw the Homeric state of mind give way to the Platonic. (Havelock, 1992, p. 198)

I side with those who argue that this is not the case and Plato's treatment of the poets

their opinions diverged, they both understood the importance of play's role in education and as a way to “imbue the norms of serious cultural activity” (D'Angour, 1994, p. 299).

¹⁴ “since some people tell us that these poets know all the arts [598e] and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine?”

“praisers of Homer who say that this poet educated Greece, and that in the management and education of human affairs it is worthwhile to take him up for study and for living, by arranging one's whole life according to this poet” (606e1–5)

should be more nuanced within the context of the *Republic*. Rather, as I argued earlier in the chapter, Plato understood the power of the arts and the intimacy between aesthetic practice and social harmony; he felt that the power was such that it must be tended to carefully and regulated.¹⁵

Aristotle, like Plato, keenly understood art's power in evoking strong emotions. But in contrast to Plato's cautious treatment of the poets, Aristotle argued on behalf of the benefits of mimetic poesis. While for Plato, art's power to effect excessive influence upon and over us was a concern, for Aristotle, the transformative potential for art to elevate us morally and intellectually, and to help us to tame and even *educate* our emotions (as we see with his exploration of *catharsis* in the *Poetics*) was a unique educative strength of art, especially poetry and mimesis.¹⁶ Rather than something to be potentially feared or even banished, Aristotle embraces the potential of aesthetic power to transform and elevate, specifically linking the art form of tragedy to an edifying emotional and even moral experience. Aristotle achieves this through the concept of *catharsis*, which had been previously viewed only through medical terms as a *purgation*. Aristotle recognizes the defining capacity of catharsis to purge excess emotion that might otherwise be suffocating, and so can bring about, rather than threaten, harmony of the individual and society. In *Poetics*, Aristotle wrote of the pleasurable reward of learning through mimesis, "The instinct of imitation is implanted in men from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated."

¹⁵ John Halverson (1992) has an excellent analysis and response to Havelock's *Preface to Plato*.

¹⁶ This difference in interpretation had an effect on *paidia* as well as the arts; as D'Angour (1994) explained: Despite the connections implied here between learning and musical play, Aristotle thought of education as completely separate from play, arguing that education is a way to spend leisure-time edifyingly, whereas play is nothing more than a break from work.... "Aristotle's reduction of work and play to a dichotomy may account for why the new understanding of play as educational for children, broached by Plato's novel theorizing, disappeared from ancient thinking. It was not to be revived for over two millennia." (1994)

(*Poetics* 1448)

This interpretation is partly argued by Aristotle scholar Leon Golden, who conceived of catharsis as a means to intellectual and emotional clarification. In *The Clarification of Katharsis*, Golden (1976) wrote that the “essential pleasure and goal of *mimesis* is a learning experience...” (p. 45). Others, such as Stephen Halliwell (2002), have argued for a link between tragic catharsis and ethical teaching in Aristotle’s moral and aesthetic philosophy, and Martha Nussbaum (2010) directly asserted that catharsis should be interpreted as a means to moral and emotional growth. In her essay “Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency,” Nussbaum began with the historical context of the *Poetics* as Aristotle’s response to Plato: With the *Poetics*, Aristotle calls back the poets who were banished in the *Republic* to cultivate the character of citizens so that they might flourish:

Plato’s *Republic* endorses as the permissible literature for citizens of the ideal city.... tragic action is ruled out. Aristotle, then, is ruling it back in and insisting on its importance with respect to just that goal—illumination about *eudemonia*—with reference to which Plato thought it pernicious. (p. 265)

Based on the importance of the role of the emotions in Aristotle’s moral theory (as demonstrated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*), Nussbaum argued for a link between tragic catharsis and the cultivation of a stronger, more fulfilled, moral self.

Tragic action gives rise to pity and fear. Through their pity and fear, indeed *in* those responses, spectators attain a deeper understanding of the world in which they must live, the obstacles their goodness faces, the needs each has for the help of others. (p. 287)

For Aristotle, *mimesis* is a natural, uniquely human quality that results in an essential pleasure. More importantly, it is connected to learning. As Nussbaum and others asserted, learning, or at least a type of learning, is pleasurable as it relates to *mimesis*. In Book 11 of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle wrote, “since learning and wondering are pleasant, it follows that such things as acts of imitation must be pleasant...” (1371b 4-7). The type of learning is a kind of

metaphorical thinking, recognition of the universal in the mimetic representation.¹⁷

In *Mimesis: Where Play and Narrative Meet*, cognitive scientist Carol Feldman (2005) explains “There is nothing sufficiently neat, or conceptually sharp, about mimesis to make it an easy sell to a school board as a ‘free-standing’ trait or skill worthy of support” (p. 512). Like many concepts related to aesthetics, it is an irreducibly protean and nuanced concept. Furthermore, it “violates demands for solitary achievement, for mastery of free-standing facts, and with its dependence on local cultural patterns, for universal truths.... Without an expanded view of what mind and self include and require, we can easily miss its importance for development and experience” (p. 512). In her essay, Feldman attempted to (partially) correct this deficit. She did so by looking at the educational relationship between mimesis and narrative in the play of children, and then categorizing and explicating four basic identifiable educative functions of mimesis: Construction (megacognition), Convention, Artfulness (Judgement), and Interpretation:

Construction:

Whatever the nature of such constructed representations, mimetic representations always have a dual-layered quality that can be considered meta-cognitive, where the symbolic object is a meta-cognitive take on the reality it represents. For example, Leslie and Roth (1993) defined a meta-representation as “the attitude an agent takes to a particular aspect of reality”—the agent need not consciously have “a general theory of representation” (p. 88). We know now that in autism, one sees a lack of both narrative and pretend play that is sometimes attributed to lack of metacognition. I am suggesting that the lack of a general mimetic sense could help in understanding this deficiency in both narrative and play in a fuller way, as a deficiency of mimetic capacity. (Feldman, 2005, p. 510)

¹⁷ As Stephen Halliwell wrote in *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*:

In Poetics, [Aristotle] draws the larger distinction between regarding a mimetic or figural form as a representation (which requires recognition and understanding of what it depicts) and regarding it nonrepresentationally, that is, only as a technical artifact. (p. 183)

Convention:

Vivian Paley's work makes evident that the same conventional permissions and restrictions apply to the narratives and even to the play of young children. Her books are full of examples of children stepping outside their roles in an ongoing episode of narrated play to make mid-course corrections. They pronounce prohibitions, make suggestions for what should happen next, and even give stage directions. Plainly here, too, conventions are at work—and under construction at the same time. (Feldman, 2005, p. 511)

Artfulness:

This could be thought of as judgement. Even young children must surely see some play and stories as good, even as wonderful, other play and stories as dull, unlovely, even badly wrought. (Feldman, 2005, p. 512)

Interpretation:

Both play and narrative, as mimetic forms, are meant to be interpreted or understood by another person from the beginning. Such mimetic activities invite, stimulate, and even teach members of a culture how to interpret not only their conventional forms of art but also events in life itself. (Feldman, 2005, p. 512)

During the game, the child will likely utilize meta-cognitive skills, apply and explore social conventions, make artful judgments, interpret emotions, use new vocabulary, and interpret everything in between. As the game approaches the inevitable, dreaded pretend “shot,” the child's fear may grow, and afterwards he or she or they will likely experience a relief, perhaps even a release, of this fear. Perhaps as a result of this aesthetic/cathartic encounter, the child will have a better sense of what they are capable of enduring, or might even discover their own ‘courage.’

It seems clear that our understanding of art is still quite limited, and further research efficacy is necessary. However, the issue is less about our understanding of mimesis, and more about our conception of schooling and curriculum, which is narrow, anemic, and faulty. While we cannot pinpoint exactly what and how art is educational, the fact that it is educative is not contested. In explaining the therapeutic and educative properties of catharsis in relation to mimesis, play, and narrative, the benefits of the aesthetic experience in education become

increasingly evident. Still, the lack of evidence might as well be a refutation in the current educational policy paradigm. If it cannot be demonstrated through anonymous, easily replicable standardized testing, it will not be taken seriously. Thus, if we do not engage Aristotle's project, then we are failing in our mission as educators.

An exploration of the nature of catharsis, mimesis in narrative and play shows that the issue cannot be simplified to a problem of a lack of "arts-education" in schools. In fact, even a cursory exploration of mimesis not only unveils its multitude of virtues but also a multitude of uses, such that only an unnecessarily narrow paradigm of schooling would not look to incorporate the functions of mimesis into all subjects for all age groups. This understanding of the aesthetic is profoundly important, as it embraces the active, meaning-making properties of the aesthetic encounter. As educators, we have an imperative to rescue the aesthetic from its art-class-only paradigm in schools. Aristotle's project and the educator's mission are one and the same. This task is not the responsibility simply of philosophers, scientists, psychologists, or educators, but as Richard Kearney, Carol Feldman, Vivian Paley, and, of course, Aristotle have demonstrated: all of the above. In the next chapter, I will look to situate the concept of *paidia* in juxtaposition from contemporary modern and contemporary discussion of play in philosophy of education.

Chapter 3: Orienting *Paidia*

The concept of play has captured the imaginations of scholars throughout history and across various fields. While most of the contemporary discourse on play and playfulness has occurred within the context of early childhood education and development, the study of play and playfulness has also enjoyed a rich history within the philosophical tradition. Despite being considered primarily an activity of early childhood, play remains of critical importance through secondary school levels, and even beyond. As Haidt (2008) observed, “The effects of play deprivation and over-supervision may extend far beyond college” (p. 181). He commented on research illuminating the skills individuals develop in a democracy; it takes “many years to cultivate [these skills], which overlap with the ones that Peter Gray maintains are learned during free play” (pp. 181-182). But in order to understand the meaningful distinctions of *paidia* from our presentist lens, it is important to set the groundwork for how we define and discuss play in contemporary educational discourse. Here, I will sketch out some contemporary definitions of the concept in literature pertinent to this project.

First, it bears repeating that the precise definition of play can be lost in discussion, as Eberle (2014) notes, the concept of play is “complex and ambiguous.” (p. 214) One is struck by the vast and varied literature on different types of play, but a dearth of literature on the philosophical conception of *paidia*. Below, I provide a brief survey of play to understand the kind of play we are talking about. According to Eberle (2014), play is free when it is ungoverned by complications and codified necessities such as rules and laws. These are instances when a player is free to improvise without being constrained and is, therefore, participating in a free and unimpeded playful activity—as children often are. Peter Gray (2011), a leading researcher in the metaphysics and psychology of play, defined free play as “an activity which is freely chosen and

directed by the participants and undertaken for its own sake, not consciously pursued to achieve ends that are distinct from the activity itself” (p. 444).

Nachmanovich (1990) examined free play in the context of art—specifically making music—and suggested that the notion of perfection, and what it might entail, is one of the primary causes for limitation on free play. It is these limitations that tend to interfere with the inherent creative impulse that humans have as children. In “Evolutionary Functions of Social Play,” developmental psychologist Peter LaFreniere (2011), notes that children’s play “combines the expenditure of great energy with apparently pointless risk” and, therefore, comes closest to being unrestrained by constraints. Peter Gray (2011) builds on this by describing this kind of free play as being “undertaken for its own sake,” self-directed by participants who choose it freely, where the ends pursued in such kind of play are completely “distinct from the activity” (465). With regard to such play, Gray (2011) found that children self-regulate their play by “dosing themselves with moderate degrees of fear, as if deliberately learning how to deal with both the physical and emotional challenges of the moderately dangerous conditions they generate.” (p. 455). According to Gray (2011), all free play is self-directed and self-controlled, and it often highlights children’s tendency to induce levels of risk and rule breaking sufficient to generate physical risk and social conflict, as well as cooperation.¹

As Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (1961) pointed out, there is a tension and dialectic between *ludus* and *paidia*, with structure always encroaching on free exploration. At the core of Huizinga’s exploration of play, was the idea that culture in all its expressions is an outgrowth of play (or the play-element), and for this reason, blurs the line between the playful and the serious.

¹ In *Coddling of the American Mind*, (2018) Lukianoff and Haidt have a timely and informative discussion of free play and its importance for the social, emotional and intellectual growth of children.

(Rodriguez 2006).² Huizinga (1955) explained that, “as a rule the play-element gradually recedes into the background, being absorbed for the most part in the sacred sphere. The remainder crystallizes as knowledge: folklore, poetry, philosophy, or in the various forms of judicial and social life.” (46) And also that philosophical games such as riddles “cut clean across any possible distinction between play and seriousness,” (110) which I interpret as an endorsement of Plato’s conception of philosophy as serious play.

Robert Roemer noted, “For Whitehead, an ideal situation would be one in which work is play and play is life.” (2006) Philosopher and Ethicist Maurice Hamington (2010) notes that Dewey distinguished open-ended playfulness as an essential characteristic for the imaginative development of children as well as adults— ““*when children ... they are subordinating the physically present to the ideally signified.* (Dewey, 1991, 161) ”³ Margaret Macintyre (2002) wrote that “without a playful approach to thinking,” imagination “might not be possible” (p. 228).

Peter Giampietro (2007) and Lugones (1987) framed playfulness in respect to a disposition or “attitude that carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play” (p. 95). Argentinian philosopher Maria Lugones’s work on playfulness has been very influential. In her 1987 essay (reprinted in 2003) “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception,” Lugones took on Caillois’s distinction between *ludus* and *paidia*, or in her framing, between an “agonistic play grounded in competition” and open-ended play, *paidia*, characterized

² As Rodriguez (2006) argues, to my mind persuasively, “culture is essentially constituted by elements of theatricality, exhibitionism, virtuosity, joyful improvisation, competition and challenge... Homo Ludens was not written merely to mark a superficial analogy or similarity between play and culture. Religion, philosophy, politics and art all present an ineradicably playful aspect.”

³ Hamington (2010) has a good exploration of Dewey’s philosophy on play, connecting it to the concept of dramatic rehearsal: “The same can be said of dramatic rehearsal. In the process of imagining the various paths of moral choices, we require the skill and time to reflect beyond the present circumstances to potential outcomes — not to just the physical outcomes but to their rich ethical significance as well.” (p126)

by a “loving playfulness grounded in the sort of harmonizing spirit necessary for critical autonomy” (Giampietro, 2007, p. 194). In other words, Lugones fleshed out playfulness conceptually *as the defining* characteristic of *ludus* and *paidia*, with *playfulness* opening up any activity. Lugones stressed that the converse is also true—that playfulness can work upon structured activity to open it up - “*the attitude that carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play... The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an openness to surprise.*” (Lugones, 2003, pp 96)

As Lugones (2003) explained, this is a necessary function of education formation: “we may not have rules, and when we do have them, there are not rules that are to us sacred.... while playful, we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular ‘world.’ We are actively there creatively” (p. 96). As Hudak (2010) notes, Rorty’s conception of philosophical activity likewise promotes an open-minded, “free inquiry, and indeed the making of a *‘free spirit’*: ‘one who is developing the capacity to embrace solitude, and the idiosyncratic, while playing in the presence of others’—and perhaps in public solidarity towards a more just and democratic society” (Hudak, 2010, p299).

3.1 *Paidia* as Defined by Caillois

The concept “play” requires a careful characterization to avoid confusion. The concepts of *paidia* and *ludus* as described in Roger Caillois’s path-breaking work *Men, Play and Games* provide a good starting point. Caillois and Huizinga offered a comprehensive review of play forms. Caillois, inspired by the critical thinking on play in *Homo Ludens* by Huizinga as well as by Plato but frustrated by the difficulty in defining play and intent on bridging contemporary play studies with Classic Greek Philosophy, concluded that the concept was best described by four basic forms: *agon* (competitive), *alea* (chance), *mimesis* (involving mimetic activity or

roleplay), andilinx (in which reality is altered) (Salen & Zimmerman, 2005). Caillois (1961) also placed two connected but distinct forms of play which exist as poles on a continuum: *ludus*, or structured activities with explicit rules (games), to *paidia*, unstructured activities often involving improvised and spontaneous behaviors marked by a disposition of playfulness. *Ludus* and *Paidia* engage in a kind of dialectic; it is the *ludic* structure that enables *paidia*. Callois wrote that Play is distinguished from other activities by six separate criteria. In enumerating these criteria, we can begin to see how play and education are naturally spoken of in complementary ways, despite the current discourse.

Play is (1) non-compulsory, (2) inherently non-productive, (3) takes place in a designated space and time, separate from other activities, (4) involves doubt, and (5) is governed by rules, even in situations where “no fixed or rigid rules exist.” The sixth characteristic is that those engaged in play must understand that something out of the ordinary is taking place. “Play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement.... As an obligation or simply an order, it would lose one of its basic characteristics: the fact that the player devotes himself spontaneously to the game, of his free will and for his pleasure” (p. 6).

Furthermore, play is inherently non-productive. “A characteristic of play, in fact, is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art. At the end of the game, all can and must start over again at the same point” (Caillois, 1961, p. 5). As a non-productive activity, “play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill and often money” (p. 6).

Play takes place in a designated space and time, separate from other activities. “Play,” Caillois (1961) wrote, “is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and place.... nothing that takes place

outside this ideal frontier is relevant” (p. 6). Within the space designated for play, “the confused and intricate laws of ordinary life are replaced...by precise, arbitrary, unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game” (p. 7).

Doubt is another necessary element of play. “Constant and unpredictable definitions of the situation are necessary.... The game consists of the need to find or continue at once a response *which is free within the limits set by the rules*” (Caillois, 1961, p. 8). In situations where doubt is removed, games cease to be enjoyable. “The game is no longer pleasing to one who, because he is too well trained or skillful, wins effortlessly and infallibly” (p. 7).

Play is governed by rules, even in situations where “no fixed or rigid rules exist” (Caillois, 1961, p. 7) When a game consists of play acting or pretend, “the chief attraction...lies in the pleasure of playing a role, of acting *as if* one were someone or something else” (p. 8). Under these conditions, “the sentiment of *as if* replaces and performs the same functions as do rules” (p. 9).

Finally, those engaged in play must understand that something out of the ordinary is taking place. “The game is accompanied by the knowledge that the required behavior is pretense, or simply mimicry. This awareness of the basic unreality of the assumed behavior is separate from real life and from the arbitrary legislation that defines other games” (Caillois, 1961, p. 9).

The universe of play, Caillois (1961) wrote, can be described as a continuum with two extremes. At one end is *paidia*, “a word covering the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct... it intervenes in every happy exuberance which affects an immediate and disordered agitation, and impulsive and easy recreation, but readily carried to excess, whose impromptu and unruly character remains its essential if not unique reason for being” (p. 28). At the other end is *ludus*, which is exemplified by “the pleasure experienced in solving a problem arbitrarily

designed for this purpose...so that reaching a solution has no other goal than personal satisfaction for its own sake” (p. 29).

Paidia is present from early infancy, “first appear[ing] as an impulse to touch, grasp, taste, smell and then drop any accessible object” (Caillois, 1961, p. 9). As a child grows, *paidia* expands from sensory stimulation to experimentation with physical and interpersonal boundaries. “It explains the pleasure in endlessly cutting up paper with a pair of scissors, pulling cloth into thread, breaking up a gathering, holding up a queue, disturbing the play or work of others, etc.... For the child, it is a question of expressing himself, of feeling he is the *cause*, of forcing others to pay attention to him” (p. 28). At a later stage, “there is born the desire to invent rules, and to abide by them whatever the cost.... he hops, walks backwards with his eyes closed, plays at who can look longest at the sun, and will suffer pain or stand in a painful position” (p. 29).

When a child begins to take part in games defined by “conventions, techniques and utensils” (Caillois, 1961, p. 29), *ludus* and *paidia* begin to overlap. *Ludus*

is complementary to and a refinement of *paidia*, which it disciplines and enriches. It provides an occasion for training, and normally leads to the acquisition of a special skill, a particular mastery of the operation of one or another contraption or the discovery of a satisfactory solution to problems of a more conventional type. (p. 29)

Ludus complements the tumultuous spontaneity exemplified by *paidia*, channeling playful impulses into constructive experiences. Caillois wrote that it is “the specific element in play, the impact and cultural creativity of which seems most impressive” (p. 33). Yet, Caillois noted that *ludus* can be quite limited: “*ludus*, in itself, seems incomplete, a kind of makeshift device intended to allay boredom. One becomes resigned to it while awaiting something preferable” (p. 31).

The playful spirit of *paidia* transforms *ludus* from an incomplete activity to an enjoyable

experience. When an activity encompasses both aspects of play,

it is pleasure founded upon excitement, illusion and disorder that has been agreed to, falling and being caught, blunted shocks and harmless collisions. A perfect example of such recreation is colliding autos, which, to the pleasure of being at the wheel (the serious, almost solemn faces of some drivers should be observed) is added the elemental joy reminiscent of *paidia*, quarreling, pursuing other vehicles, outflanking them, barring their passage, endlessly causing pseudo-accidents with no damage or victims, doing exactly and until sated what in real life is most strictly forbidden. (Caillois, 1961, pp. 135-136)

The term Caillois used for structured play, *ludus*, is Latin for game or sport play (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*). It was also the word used in Ancient Rome to denote elementary school, which relied heavily on structured games and game-playing. The relationship between *ludic* or structured gameplay and free play is a generative one, and the distinction of what qualifies as a game, as well as the relationship between the activity of play and the player within the world of the game, is a topic taken up in depth later by Gadamer as well (as discussed in chapter 5).

Games, for the most part, are ludic or structured play. Whether they are competitive or non-competitive, social or solitary. Games can be individual like solitaire, competitive like tennis or basketball or futbol, collaborative like certain board games, or even role-playing like Dungeons & Dragons. There are an almost infinite number of games, but they all have certain structures and realities that distinguish them *as* games, as they are - “characterized and individuated with reference to the various rules and resources available to the person. Different types of play can be distinguished from one another via the structures that underpin them.” (Rodriguez 2006) Games, therefore, empower participant-players the freedom to act within a fixed set of boundaries and possible permutations. In the world of gameplay, rules serve as structures scaffolding for imaginative play. In a classroom setting, guided play “lies midway between direct instruction and free play, presenting a learning goal, and scaffolding the environment while allowing children to maintain a large degree of control over their learning”

(Weisberg, 2013, p. 104).

3.2 Dewey and Gadamer

“To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition.” (Dewey, 1991, p218)

For philosophers of education, the discourse on play provided rich fodder for exploration. In particular, Dewey and Gadamer were both very concerned with philosophical underpinnings as well as educational implications of free play as well as structured, rule-based, and organized forms play.

Dewey acknowledged the importance as well as the utility of play as a means for the achievement of other goals – which is not to imply that Dewey saw play solely through an instrumental lens, as even a cursory reading of Dewey’s scholarship demonstrates a robust and nuanced consideration of play and its role in philosophy and education.⁴ For instance, Dewey (1991) explored the social (MW, 8.289), moral (MW, 11.112), and psycho-educational benefits of play (MW, 14. 111).⁵ In *How We Think*, Dewey explores the distinction (and lack of distinction) between play and work, and the importance of play in the curriculum. Dewey well understood that play could be serious work, and that the serious could also be playful. Engaging and invoking his philosophical influences, Dewey eloquently summarizes how educative play promotes moral development, when he writes in almost platonic terms (1991): “when children play horse, play store, play house or making calls, they are subordinating the physically present to the ideally signified” (p.161). As Hamington (2010) explains, the cultivation of our playful

⁴ Stilbeck (2017) provides an excellent and thorough discussion of Dewey’s conception of play, and its relationship to philosophy and education.

⁵ Hansen (2012) explores the richness and breadth of Dewey’s Philosophy of Education: “*Dewey shows that any well taught subject yields aesthetic intellectual moral and practical values and meanings...He examines connections between play and work occupations in human growth labor and leisure appreciation and production and more.*” P. 12

and imaginative capacities fosters intellectual and moral growth: “In the process of imagining the various paths of moral choices, we require the skill and time to reflect beyond the present circumstances to potential outcomes—outcomes that are not limited physically, but also imbued with rich ethical significance” (p.126).

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey (1966) expands on this idea, referring to types of playful endeavors as “active occupations,” (108), and explaining how play and work are not necessarily antithetical – “What has been termed active occupation includes both play and work. In their intrinsic meaning, play and industry are by no means so antithetical to one another as is often assume.” (112). As Hansen (2012) observes, Dewey’s aim in introducing this concept of ‘active occupation’ was part of his lifelong endeavor to “dispel both within and outside of the education sphere” the needless, “mischievous divisions and dualism” between play and work. (125) For Dewey, aspects of play are also problematic. Like Plato, Dewey (1991) keenly understood the power and importance of leisure, its positive as well as negative potential (LW, 8.346). Thus, like Plato, Dewey cautioned his readers about “aimless play” which, when divorced from purpose, risks “foolishness” and stifles educational growth (Dewey, 1991, MW, 8.81).

Dewey well understood the generative tension between *ludus* and *paidia*, between structured and free play, and the importance of structure-informing space. Dewey also was very attentive to the orientation or attitude. For instance, Dewey (1966) explains “work which remains permeated with the play attitude is art.” (114) As demonstrated by Dewey’s conception of the pedagogy of dramatic rehearsal, his exploration of the aforementioned ‘active occupations’ and his philosophy of aesthetics, we can see that “the distinction between creative process and resulting product was one of the central themes” for Dewey’s

pragmatism. (Sawyer 103)

It follows that Dewey would not have wanted to reduce teaching to aimless extemporization, but would have also wanted to provide teachers and students with the necessary spaces for meaningful collaborative, contextualized, transactional learning. As Skilbeck (2017) explains, for Dewey, “teaching is an art, therefore the teacher is an artist and the ideal mental attitude of the teacher to his or work combines the playful and the serious.” We can see this evident in Dewey’s engagement of ‘dramatic rehearsal,’ where he pushed back against the emphasis of ‘productivity’ at the expense of play. Dewey found playfulness essential to the imaginative as well as moral development of children - “To play out imaginative moral scenarios, adults have to use these powers of dramatic simulation in complex ways” (Hamington, 2010, 126). Given its open-ended character, dramatic rehearsal entailed an element of playfulness as well as a means for individuals to “playfully inhabit the lives and situations of others in a manner that can facilitate the development of imaginative resources” (p. 126). Compare this approach to methods of improvisational theater promoted by Spolin, or the “method” and “system” promoted by the theories of Stanislavsky and Strasberg, respectively, all of which have been enormously influential in the practice and teaching of drama and are still very much in use today (Sawyer, 2000). In these systems of cooperative, collaborative learning, actors take up the psychological disposition of their characters, developing a depth of understanding that allows them to confront varied circumstances and “stay in character” (Hamington, 2010, p. 127).

Philosopher Paul Woodruff (2008) described the moral dimensions and educational potential of method acting, framing it as a “laboratory for empathy.” (p 228) Hamington (2010) explains that, with these types of theater education:

In this manner, method acting becomes the means of developing the skills and habits of care. Valuing dramatic rehearsal suggests that drama is more than entertainment or a

luxury, but participates in developing important moral skills. Furthermore, the arts, which are usually considered educationally expendable...become a central component of moral education made particularly significant in a diverse democratic society. (p. 126)

Improvisation in education, conceived in this way, is not limited to drama or ECE.

One can find numerous examples of this kind of learning in the training of other advanced professions and practices (as we will see later), but the connection between this kind of praxis and the conception of improvisation is lacking. While Caillois (1961) talked about *paidia* and improvisation under the term *paidia*, Caillois's enterprise was slightly different, but I think it is important to develop a similar kind of genealogy and its importance for education.

3.3 Improvisation as *Paidia*

It seems, then, that a god has given music and physical training to human beings not, except incidentally, for the body and the soul but for the spirited and wisdom-loving parts of the soul itself, in order that these might be in harmony with one another, each being stretched and relaxed to the appropriate degree. (412a)

It is important here to define improvisation, as Lydia Goehr (2012) explained it, as a loaded term.⁶ In identifying and defining improvisation as a concept, we must be attuned to the involvement of several factors.

The first is action—production, invention, composition, utterance, and performance. The second is the manner in which these actions are performed—whether they are for the occasion, impromptu, spur of the moment, or unpremeditated. Improvisation, therefore, involves actions that are temporary or ephemeral and spontaneous. In an illuminating work on musical

⁶ According to Goehr (2012):

The word 'improvisation' is a loaded term, and means different things within different contexts. In colloquial terms, the word denotes acts that are happenstance. We may use the word to define the completion of a task 'on the fly,' perhaps a task that would have been better performed had there been time, or more careful preparation or even luck. For instance in the sentence, 'plan A failed, so we had to improvise,' the word is used in lieu of 'adaptation' to mean adjusting to one's circumstances. Improvise is also sometimes used, and therefore understood, to be synonymous 'extemporize.'

improvisation, Alperson (2010) claimed that the chief characteristic of an improvised activity is that, “while we might or might not have a general idea of the sort of outcome of the activity in question, in improvised activity, certain of the fundamental features of both the activity and of the product of that activity are determined in the very doing of the activity” (p. 273). For Ross (2012), the concept of improvisation offers “liberating forms of engagement and dynamic opportunities for creative expression.” Improvisation, or improv, therefore, has some basic elements that must all be present for the activity to be considered improv, and these elements help shed light on the direct and distinct relationship between free play and improv.

The first condition required for improv is that any involvement in the activity is voluntary and autonomous (Zaunbrecher, 2011, pp. 49-59)—just like in free play—and is supported by autonomous choices that are meaningful. For instance, a child swinging upside down on the jungle gym does so out of his or her own volition, and the autonomous participation in the activity is what makes it so desirable. Any adult-directed sport, for instance, would not be categorized either as free play or improv because it does not beget autonomous participation, and participation itself is constrained significantly by rules, norms, and expectations.

The second element needed for improvisation is a safe setting. Though improvisation is about taking risks, it can only occur in a safe space, where one feels comfortable taking risks. According to Gee (2003), “learners can take risks in a space where real-world consequences are lowered” (p. 20). Introducing risk into free play, particularly outdoor free play, is vital for appropriate social and moral development (Haidt, 2008) and also leads to greater opportunities for improvisation.

A third important element, which overlaps both in free play and improvisation, is the opportunity for collaboration. When there is collaboration within any play, it leads to a shared

focus and creates space for an exploratory and playful orientation, which in turn forms the basis for assuming risks and leads to improvisation. This orientation allows for activities (such as discourse, jazz, and other improvisational arts) that are participatory and experiential.

Both free play and improvisation also benefit from the fourth element, a communal attunement, in which the player makes important connections with others. According to Zaunbrecher (2011), when a player develops a connection with the audience, it becomes easier to move outside a pre-given structure and let go of a fallback position to induce the risk that makes the play more exciting.⁷ However, in the absence of this communal attunement, the experience of free play is not complete because there is a fear that prevents risk-taking associated with free play. This communal attunement is vital for creating the space for the germination of trust, which is the final and fifth element of improvisation. When there is communal attunement, the player not only feels familiar and safe within the given setting but is also more readily able to establish trust, which, in turn, gives the player an ability to take risks with much fewer implications.

According to Jensen (2013), play is often characterized as “an exclusively human pursuit of highly structured activities designed to ward off boredom,” while it is also considered an outlet of spontaneous expression. (p. 69) Building on the phenomenon of spontaneous expression, Improvisation, similarly, is considered a “mainly social activity that takes place among a group of individuals who collaborate to play spontaneously,” in which a playful, spontaneous and free expression of creativity opens up structures, creating unpredictability in an otherwise structured activity (Biasutti, 2015). This practice can lead to innovation in form or practice. In music, theater and in art, it can lead to new works of art or music. While improvisation in music (namely jazz) is

⁷ “Rather than try to free ourselves from limitation, we should recognize it and work with it. The question should be—What do you want the show to accomplish, and how can that be facilitated by purposeful employment of limitation?” (Zaunbrecher, 2011, p. 54).

often collaborative and social, it can happen outside of immediate groups. Further, Biasutti (2015) claimed that improvisation involves a variety of generative processes along with various other cognitive techniques. For instance, in musical improvisation, instrumental techniques and generative processes combine to create music that contains the “creation and interpretation of various musical ideas.” (Biasutti 2015) Owing to these reasons, free play is encouraged in classroom settings to allow children to improve their cognitive processes during the act of play.

Sawyer (2000) observed pretend play among children and found it to be a largely improvisational performance, and this improvisational behavior is prevalent during the same years that many of the other cognitive and social skills among children are developing. This is why Sawyer claimed that improvisation has a significant role to play in the development of social skills among children because there is a palpable developmental continuity between children’s fantasy play and adult conversational skills:

Unlike product creativity—which involves a long period of creative work leading up to the creative product—in improvisational creativity, the process is the product. For example a small group jazz ensemble collaborates onstage spontaneously to create the performance. The performance that results emerges from the musical interactions among multiple members, there is no official guiding the performance, and no script to follow. (Sawyer, 2000, p. 150)

Autonomy and motivation are two of the most important elements of improvisation, and when both are present, the learner becomes an active participant in the process of education. Just as in a jazz performance, where the player must spontaneously and simultaneously make decisions to exercise several processes, a skilled pedagogue may use the right strategy of improvisation to motivate students into becoming active learning participants. According to Greene, in classrooms with improvisation-based pedagogy, children are encouraged to explore various domains of learning, allowing them to de-familiarize themselves with those things that

are taken for granted as the norm.

Biasutti (2015) found that the applications of free play or improvisation are many. Beaty (2015) argued that improvisation should be “one of the most exalted expressions of creative behavior” and creative behavior because an improvisational performer or player must manage several complex processes simultaneously and in real time (p109). For instance, Biasutti (2017) argued that musicians must focus on “generating and evaluating melodic and rhythmic sequences, coordinating performance with other musicians in an ensemble, and executing elaborate fine-motor movements—all with the overall goal of creating aesthetically appealing music” (p.1). Jazz is an example of what happens when a musician with a playful disposition explores creative and intellectual space within the self-governing restraint provided by the intimate knowledge of the particular musical instrument, as well as a general knowledge of musical harmony. Biasutti (2017) further claimed that though improvisation is a “complex and multidimensional act,” it involves a number of creative performance behaviors that must be performed in real time, in addition to several other physical and cognitive processes, “including motor control, performance monitoring, memory storage and recall, perceptual encoding, and much more.” (p.1) As Beaty (2015), Biasutti (2017), Ross (2012), and others detail, the educative potential of improvisation-based pedagogy potentially has a lot to offer.

Certain activities are specifically singled out as improvisational or following along the lines of improvisation. This is because we consciously designate those activities as improvisational which have at least some element of spontaneity or free play. Just as when a jazz musician breaks out into a tune encouraging the rest of his group to play with him or her, or just as a small child begins to hang upside-down on the monkey bars in the park encouraging others to emulate him, free play and improvisation also act as a deviation from the standards and an

expression of creativity. The chief characteristic of any improvised activity, however, is that it is tethered—at least in some way—to the routine and ritualistic aspects of learned activities. For instance, a jazz player is able to act spontaneously on a musical whim while performing a show because he understands the routine activity well and has developed a particular skill in it. A child is able to hang upside-down on the monkey bars because she has learned how to play on one and use her body strength to keep from falling. Therefore, improvisation-based pedagogy must also be rooted in structured activity, allowing learners to experience improvisational subjectivity as they tread on familiar as well as unfamiliar territory. The element of risk is also safely introduced in an environment that is at least vaguely familiar, and the chances of success from improvisational activity are also more likely when the player is familiar with the play to some extent. As we will see, improvisational arts are a serious work undertaken with a spirit of playfulness, and this is the domain of philosophical activity. All improvisation is context-dependent, emergent, dialogic, and collaborative.

Goehr (2012) disambiguated between two forms of improvisation: *improvisation impromptu* and *improvisation extempore*. She defined improvisation extempore as extemporaneous artistic expression, such as free jazz. Improvisation impromptu, by contrast, is a broader concept.⁸ One might rightly interpret improvisation impromptu as a form of *phronesis*. Halverson (2004) offered “a description of the Greek concept of *phronesis*, sometimes defined as practical wisdom, that resonates with the dynamics central to group improvisation: ‘experiential knowledge developed through habitual practice over time, lodged in individual

⁸ According to Goehr (2012), “a concept of fit and wit, of doing exactly the right thing or the wrong thing *in the moment*... It refers to what we do at singular moments—in the moment—when we are put on the spot, particularly though not only when we are unexpectedly confronted with an obstacle. It marks a quick witted and fitting solution to a problem...concept refers, when the application is successful, to the inspired or exemplary moment of or turn in an act when one does the right, fitting, or winning thing. (p. 459-460)

character and used to determine intentional action” (Ross, 2012, p. 92). The concept of *phronesis* as a practical wisdom or knowledge has a long and rich history, and is taken up by Aristotle, Kant, Gadamer and others and as Halverson and Ross demonstrate, is still very much relevant in Philosophy of Education. There are meaningful distinctions to be made in tracing the history of this concept, and volumes can (and have) been written on this topic, but for the purpose of this a general working definition that approaches what is sometimes referred to as applied improvisation, or an improvisational practice as education: “Phronesis is a praxis that students may become more skillful in deploying, one gained through the conscious attempt to engage with the complex particulars, conceptual and moral, that characterize the negotiation and learning of practical knowledge” (Ross, 2012, p. 51). It’s worth noting as well that Gadamer (1989) weaves a lengthy discussion of *phronesis* (exploring the concept in depth for Aristotle as well as Hegel, Kant, Heidegger and others) in *Truth and Method*. Gadamer’s analysis of *phronesis* is important for understanding his hermeneutic project: “One of the most important lessons the history of philosophy offers for this current problem consists in the role played in Aristotelian ethics and politics by practice and the knowledge that enlightens and leads it, the practical acuteness or wisdom that Aristotle called phronesis...” (536).

One might argue that with the improvisational arts, we see fleeting, momentary resolution of the tension between *ludus* and *paidia*—a tension that undergirds all of improvisation. The dialectic among structure, the protagonist or ensemble (I use the word *ensemble* not just to refer to drama and music, but also philosophical activity undertaken in a group), and free space gives birth to the improvisational arts. To art, and to the art of living life, it can be equally detrimental to be burdened with an overarching system or to be entirely liberated from structure, “where there is freedom without control, or control without freedom, the act will not succeed” (Schlegel, 1991,

p. 11). Improvising is an “explosion of confined spirit” (p. 11). What are the characteristics, then, of this broader conception of improvisation? We can say that they are context-dependent, emergent, dialogic, and collaborative, as even when improvisation is undertaken by a sole practitioner, it is done so within the structure and discourse of its embedded art form, be it music, drama, or philosophy. To put it more eloquently, as Marshall Soules (2000) wrote, improvisation as an art form provides an “aesthetic which seeks to reconcile an apparent contradiction: how to bring spontaneity and restraint into balance” (Soules, 2000).

Clearly, the intent of improvisation is to break the structure of planned activities through a playful exploration of that which is out of bounds from the given structure. Many educationists have worked on such learning methods, including John Dewey, whose pragmatism and constructivism were both based on experiential learning, which provides room for children to improvise and learn through individuated experiences, as opposed to a compulsive training in universalized responses to given situations. One purpose and goal of adding improvisation to the curriculum and the classroom is to develop “alternative forms of understanding” and expand opportunities for students to “respond critically to a diverse range of perspectives.” (Ross, 2012, 48)

3.4 Dialectic as an Improvisational Art

“Playfulness is serious and the seriousness is only play.” (Oakeschott, 1991, p. 493)

The theoretical approach to an improvisation-based educational paradigm is exemplified well in the actual praxis of improvisational arts—most notably, jazz. As Ross (2012) explains, “Improvisation in jazz is characterized by distinct dialogical qualities that highlight the following perspectives: a view of learning as ongoing process, a heightened awareness of the immediacy of knowledge construction, engagement in feedback and critique in real time, the creative

exploration of constraints with rules seen as generative possibilities, and the foregrounding of interpersonal relationships in collaborative sense-making” (55).

A number of philosophers of education have engaged jazz with respect to education. Sam Rocha (2010) made the connection between Plato and jazz. Eduardo Duarte (2001) also invoked jazz as a working metaphor for cooperative, exploratory learning models. Ross (2012) explored the emergent nature of jazz to emphasize and elucidate a paradigm of democratic education:

The emergent nature of jazz, in which the dynamic interaction of musicians is centered upon the creation of a mutually determined and critically negotiated piece of music, represents individual and group expressive ends, a process that has been seen as a paradigm of democratic action. (p. 61)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Socratic *elenchus* as represented and dramatized by Plato in the Platonic dialogues, closely links play and philosophical inquiry.⁹ More specifically, the definition of dialectic inquiry found in the *Republic* supports the definition of philosophical activity as an improvisational art. For these purposes, improvisational arts are best seen as a serious work undertaken with a spirit of playfulness, which is the domain of philosophical activity. The necessity of a playful spirit does not erase the seriousness of such work, as meaningful improvisation is made possible by cultivated skill. For this reason, Plato cautioned against introducing students to dialectical inquiry before they are properly prepared.

3.5 Returning to Plato

Of course, a number of important questions and objections have been left unanswered. *How do you as an educator facilitate play that is end-directed but does not specify the end? How can play be play if it is ultimately subordinate to the blueprint of the state?* For Plato, the answer is complicated but clear. By creating the right kind of environment—by identifying and

⁹ This has been elegantly observed by Ortega y Gasset (1964) in the book *What Is Philosophy*, in which Plato’s definition of philosophy is referred to as a “jovial intellectual rigor” (p. 120).

acknowledging the laws—one can scaffold the child’s development with an education that responds to their interests and needs while also observing and discerning their nature. In this way, the guardians and educators of the state can effectively give future generations the intellectual and emotional space they need to become who they are, when they are at their best.

Perhaps the most difficult objection is the fact that Plato appears to exclude large portions of the population when discussing play, and so it follows that the reader may doubt play’s standing as a principal educational activity for Plato. Of course, Plato did not exclude play from the education of everyone; he simply mentioned it explicitly when it comes to the education of the best. Likewise, Plato did not exclude music or art from the general education but is merely explicit and emphatic about its critical importance to the education of the guardians.

Furthermore, we need to remember that the *Republic* is a ‘playful’ book. Plato clearly understood that the legacy he left behind with this work was not a blueprint for an ideal state, and it was not an impeccable definition of justice. Rather, Plato gave us the legacy of dialectic, the opportunity to continue the discussion, and—possibly most importantly—the opportunity to get lost along the way. In this sense, play, especially in light of dialectic, is a lynchpin concept for understanding Plato’s educational project—it is controversial precisely because it is imperative to do correctly and impossible to define completely. It is also a lifelong activity that continues to cultivate to the very end, only to be embraced again by the next generation.

As stated earlier, I do not intend for this project to focus exclusively on Plato; however, I feel it is important to ground this discussion in Plato and in his robust conception of *paidia* as it relates to his treatment of philosophy, education, and justice in the *Republic*. This reading of *paidia* offers a contemporary audience an opportunity to engage pedagogy, theory, and policy through this lens. It is an opportunity to explore and perhaps even inspire different educational

approaches, or even architectures, while simultaneously engaging with the rich, influential body of work already done on the topic.

This should not be taken to suggest that this is “inventing” a new way to look at education; on the contrary, this is why the historical and philosophical grounding is crucial to the project. This approach is not novel but rather situated on the very bedrock of western thought—the model of classical philosophy itself. The pedagogy of play has persisted precisely because it is in line with how people learn, how people engage and navigate the world as autonomous, thinking individuals. This is a kind of education that is necessary for innovation, creativity, and collaboration—values that are ostensibly prized in our educational system yet are too often ignored in our culture of standardized assessment. The approach to pedagogy that I discuss here is not meant to displace other valid ways of being and learning, but this concept has its place, and it is an important one—one that is increasingly neglected in our discourses, our research, and our schools, at the peril of both the teacher and the student.

Plato’s conception of what he called *paidia* in education endows the wider contextual paradigm concerning the formulation and sustenance of a “Just” society, in contrast to the reductive approaches more common today (McClintock, 2012). When Plato talked about justice, he was primarily concerned with a formative conception of justice, which means he was talking about education. We do not have to agree with Plato’s specific recommendations (whether or not they were intended to be taken literally) to understand the paradigm in which he approached the project of formative justice, and Plato’s influence on western philosophy is undeniable. influence is undeniable.¹⁰ It is impossible to talk about Greek philosophy or western philosophy

¹⁰ To echo the oft-quoted (and misquoted) comment from philosopher Alfred-North Whitehead, “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” (Whitehead, 1978, p39)

without talking about Plato. Also, that he defined philosophy as *paidia* is important. “When the future is pre-given, there is no room for education, only training” (Freire, 1994, p. 91). But actually, his project is the same—the idea that justice is, fundamentally, an educational issue.

Pedagogy establishes a school’s community and culture. It is through engagement with pedagogy that the structure is formed and observable. In contemporary education policy, the residual architecture of the factory model school is apparent. The result of a standardized, assessment-based pedagogy and accountability culture is efficiency and automation. Through this paradigm, teachers are recast as educational accountants while students are still seen through the prism of the industrial school—as grist for the mill (Dewey, 1966, MW, 8.289).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, we can learn from John Dewey’s (1966) work and philosophy, and discern future social challenges through a combination of forward-looking critique of our present condition as well as reflective renewal of the philosophical and educational legacy bequeathed to us and embedded in our institutions. The fundamental problem is that the world the school is preparing the students to enter no longer exists. All the jobs for which the industrial school was supposed to prepare the masses are gone. This condition will be further exacerbated in the coming years, as increasing automation of the school meets the technological job displacement of the digital age. With this in mind, we can see that the presupposition that undergirds current trends in education reform is misguided. We need a different concept/metaphor for pedagogy, one that broadly accounts for the flourishing of all students and the cultivation of all citizens; and in turn helps us reimagine a humanistic model for the school in the twenty-first century. It is my contention that *Paidia* is precisely the concept-metaphor to inform just such a model.

In the last two chapters, I have sketched some of the foundations of this idea in Ancient

Greece and indicated how they might be helpful in developing a critique of 21st century American educational policies. I want to continue this account of serious play in education by turning to 19th and 20th century German philosophy. In the figure of Friedrich Schiller, we see a re-engagement with *paidia* as well as an understanding of play that allows for human flourishing in an Aristotelian sense. Later, we see Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer turning to play in developing a response to certain Enlightenment trends that they saw undermining the kinds of educational goals this project is aiming to advance.

3.6 Significance

Why does this project matter? What are the stakes?

Throughout the history of ideas, notable thinkers and philosophers of education have engaged the role of play with urgency and eloquence, notably Rousseau, Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, among numerous others. Contemporary educational theorists, such as Vivian Paley, whose scholarship has largely centered around advocating for the importance of creative, free play, and the role such activity plays in the psychological, intellectual, and social development of young children. Despite the extensive empirical and theoretical literature focusing on play, educational practice largely abandons it as a central feature of learning once students advance beyond the early primary level.

This dissonance between theory and practice is shocking once we take note of it: if we, as educators, are so adamant about the importance of play, why is curriculum design so devoid of playful approaches to teaching? Such a disconnect between what we know to be part of good pedagogy and what we practice as day-to-day teachers suggests that perhaps we do not understand play as well as we may have thought. A careful examination and synthesis of our myriad concepts of play is in order.

Where philosophy's contribution remains unique is the fact that this discussion of play centers around the cultivation of our best and most rational selves—it is hardly a stepping-stone to later development or an opportunity for collateral learning. Rather, play is a central educational activity, and being playful is a fundamental disposition for a well-lived life. Further, Plato's conception of *paidia* in education is embedded in a wider context of how we form and sustain a Just society, as opposed to the reductive approaches of studying the effects of play on, say, personality in early childhood.

Now more than ever, this is a topic of substance and urgency. Largely because we are culturally primed to think about “play” only in respect to certain discourses, it is important to articulate and advocate for a different kind of play to point out that while it is of critical importance to the development of the child and should be protected, play does not only happen in Early Childhood Education. Improvisation is a worthwhile educational activity and art in its own right, and should be celebrated for its unique access to and insights into being and learning; it is not only something that happens in the music room or the theater.

Finally, it is important to note that the broader topic of the educational value of play is both timely and significant. Thanks in part to a reaction to the national movement toward standardizing the public-school curriculum and its associated assessments, play has again become a ‘hot topic.’ The response to the Common Core Standards has included appeals to play in a number of different ways, and some of them are no better than the broken models they were intended to replace. The recent rise of ‘gamification’ is one such approach; while gamification superficially resembles play, this resemblance is purely cosmetic. Gamifying learning is simply another way of ignoring the autonomous learner. Respect for—and nurturing of—individual students’ autonomy is the heart of a play-centered approach to education. How to retain that

respect, while still maintaining a high standard for student performance and good educational outcomes, is a major concern.

Chapter 4: Schiller's Concept of the Play Drive

Known as much for his influence on German literature because of his creative and dramatic writing as his philosophy, Frederick Schiller, in his life and works, demonstrated how education broadly conceived the arts and philosophy as a unified pursuit.¹ Schiller's aesthetic philosophy inspired the *Frühromantik*, or early German romanticism, and has proven paramount in his influence on aesthetic education, though his work and ideas—particularly in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (AEM, 2002)—are dense, complicated and, at times, confusing text that also represents the most rigorous and influential of Schiller's philosophy (Beiser, 2005, p. 2). Schiller's aesthetic philosophy is significant to my overall project for several reasons. First, his turn towards aesthetic experience, following Plato and Kant, is a powerful argument toward a more comprehensive and humanistic conception of education. In the cultural and linguistic sphere that would shape Schiller's work and that existed in the modern state of Germany in 1871, there were strong educational reform movements in education, many of which centered on the notion of *Bildung*—both a term and a Romantic movement intended to capture the cultural, emotional and intellectual development of a person. For instance, a *Bildungsroman* is a kind of coming-of-age novel that details a protagonist's formative education.² Heavily influenced by Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers, Schiller pointed to the educational impact of experiences prompted by aesthetic encounters and the mix of cognitive and emotional processes that attended such experiences. The retrieval of such a focus will provide a crucial historical grounding for the

¹ As strongly influenced by Enlightenment thinkers of the day including (and responding to) Plato and Kant and as well as other enlightenment thinkers.

² Schiller's friend Goethe popularized the *Bildungsroman* with his famous philosophical novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* in 1796.

critique of contemporary education (in its reductive focus on schooling and assessment) that I will develop in the following chapters.

Second, with respect to the concept of *paidia*, Schiller serves as a bridge between the Greeks and more modern critics of education to follow in my critique within subsequent chapters.³ Schiller saw in Plato a disconcerting prioritization of examining intellect at the expense of sense and emotion. This was coupled with his concern about the principle of specialization seen in the *Republic*. Schiller recognized the utility of such specialization but observed how in modern times such classifications and mechanistic thinking fragmented people and led them “away from humanity and the fullness of human life” (Davis, 2017, p. 75). This critique was later taken up by Heidegger in the form of his warning against ‘*enframing*.’⁴

While Schiller embraced many Enlightenment assumptions and projects, he resisted the instrumentalist overspecialization and the cult of rationality that he believed was endemic to his modern age and that had doomed the French Revolution. As Hendrickson (2022) observes that despite Schiller’s embrace of much of Kantian philosophy, he was nonetheless “concerned about the dominance around him of instrumental rationality, a prevailing at a stomach orientation that is characteristic of modern individuals.” (p.29) Schiller recognized that while the cultivation of specific talents might produce excellence in specific areas, it failed to produce well-rounded, free citizens. Connecting his conception of beauty to the concept of freedom, Schiller invoked the image of the athlete to point out that while specific exercises may lead to increased strength in particular areas and even exceptionally trained muscles, such a body is not truly beautiful, for

³ Schiller clearly embraced many of the Platonic ideals and was particularly inspired by Plato’s embrace of *paideia* (as discussed in Chapter 1)—as discussed *supra*, a term that denotes the ideal of a holistic education, broadly conceived, that results in well-rounded citizens who are active participants in a harmonious and just republic.

⁴ I will discuss Heidegger’s critique in Chapter 5

“...only through the free and equable play of the limbs is beauty formed...only their even tempering makes full and happy men” (Schiller, 2002, p. 45).

Moreover, Schiller’s life and works are an important resource for this project due in part to the notable context in which he wrote this treatise on aesthetic education. A criticism frequently lobbed at Schiller is that he had evaded the great political questions of his time and instead chose to retreat to the realm of aesthetics. I will delve more into criticisms and objections to Schiller later, but it is important to note that Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* is hardly a retreat from politics; rather, the letters are more correctly interpreted as a thoughtful and timely response to the great political issues of his time (Beiser, 2005, p. 5). In fact, Schiller was keenly aware of and deeply troubled by the political crises of his time, famously writing that “a great moment has found a little people” (p. 5).

Schiller conceived of his aesthetic philosophy partly as a political project, writing in the second letter that he needed to “discuss aesthetics for the sake of politics” (Beiser, 2005, p. 5). The reason for this is that in the *Letters*, which were partly an analytical meditation on beauty, Schiller ties civic freedom to the concept of beauty, which I will address later.

Inspired by the political backdrop of the events in France, an intellectual debate also served as an important impetus for the *Letters*. As Beiser (2005) explained, “the merits and fate of the Enlightenment were intensely discussed and debated in the early 1790’s in Germany, most notably in the famous theory-practice dispute” (p. 11). This dispute was primarily about the role of reason in politics. On one side of the dispute, philosophers Kant and Fichte argued that “reason should play a fundamental role in politics because reason determines the basic principles of morality” (p. 11). On the other side of the dispute, right-wing thinkers such as Rehberg, Gents, and Möser argued against reason playing “any significant role in politics because even if reason

can determine the most basic principles of morality, these principles are so general they have no specific consequences for political practice....” (p. 11). Moreover, they argued that reason could not provide a “sufficient motive or incentive for human conduct” (p. 12).

Beiser (2005) argued that if we view the *Letters* within this historical and intellectual context, we can view Schiller’s aesthetic philosophy as “a solution to the crisis of the *Aufklärung*” (p. 12). Schiller, in fact, never wavers from the cause of the Enlightenment, but only from the execution of its ideals. According to Beiser, the *Letters* demonstrate that Schiller believed the gap between theory and practice could be bridged and the ideals of Enlightenment republicanism could be achieved, but only through the lens of aesthetic education—specifically aesthetic education. “Like Mirabeau, Schiller saw education as the key to ensuring the stability and duration of the new French Republic” (p. 13).

Schiller and later figures who were more directly involved in educational reform in the 19th century emphasized culture and aesthetic experience as opposed to exclusively instrumental concerns. This is why German Enlightenment figures often contrasted *Aufklärung* with the French Enlightenment, which, on one hand, was too positivist and science-oriented, and the British Enlightenment, which on the other hand, was considered too materialist and utilitarian. The Germans put more emphasis on culture and the holistic development of the person.⁵ One way they did this was to return to the Greeks and other classical sources, as can be seen in the development of philology (Nietzsche’s discipline when he was a university teacher) and history. The outcomes of such reforms are not only a matter of historical curiosity, but can also serve as a powerful reminder of how educational concerns can be organized differently. By the end of this reform process, German universities were the envy of the world, as were pre-college institutions

⁵ Referenced with fondness as *Bildung* by Schiller.

such as the *Gymnasium*. With Schiller, whom Nietzsche called the Pied Piper of Jena, and those he influenced (including Gadamer and Heidegger), we can begin to retrieve a worthy trajectory from which we have strayed, with the concept of *play* central to the recalibration.

To support and substantiate my argument, I consider the concept of ‘play drive’ as captured in Schiller’s Letter 14 of the *AEM*. In this letter, Schiller suggested that when an individual experiences all the drives (form drive and sense drive) in balance, a new drive is awakened known as the ‘play drive’ (Bentley, 2009). In other words, this drive can only be realized when one is at once aware of one’s freedom, but at the same time is in touch with one’s existence. The play drive empowers one to feel oneself as significant and comes to know oneself as both mind and spirit. Just as Schiller’s work and concepts are often geared towards the wholeness of experience, the object of the play drive is the living form as well as the contemplation of beauty that enables man to achieve that which is most human. With the play drive, the other two drives work together in harmony as they are directed toward suspending time within time, “reconciling becoming with absolute being,” as well as change with identity (Tauber, 2006). Hence, in harmoniously balancing the form drive and the sense drive, the play drive liberates humans from each drive’s domination. As such, the concept of the play drive as captured by Schiller is important in broadly understanding education as a unified pursuit of art, aesthetic freedom and philosophy.⁶

⁶ Moland (2021): “In Letter 14, Schiller suggests that when a human experiences both these drives in balance—when he is “at once conscious of his freedom and sensible of his existence” and can “feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind”—a new drive is awakened, namely the play drive [*Spieltrieb*] (NA XX, 353/E 126). In the play drive, both other drives “work in concert”: they are “directed toward annulling time *within time*, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity” (NA XX, 353/E 126). In holding the first two drives in harmony, the play drive frees humans of the domination of each:

To the extent that it deprives feelings and passions of their dynamic power, it will bring them into harmony with the ideas of reason; and to the extent that it deprives the laws of reason of their moral compulsion, it will reconcile them with the interests of the senses. (NA XX, 352/E 127)”

Schiller's life and works have offered robust contributions to aesthetics as well as aesthetic education and had profound influence on Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers alike. Schiller, influenced and responding to Kant, believed that experiencing states of harmony facilitates the personal growth and moral development of an individual. As briefly mentioned earlier, Schiller's typology of the nature of human classified three drives of human: *Sachtrieb*, *Formtrieb*, and *Spieltrieb*. The third drive requires a conscious interplay between the form (*Formtrieb*) and sense (*Sachtrieb*). In his seminal work *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller described the *Formtrieb* as corresponding to our intellectual engagement with the world. It is the rational part of the human being, neither temporal nor spatial, where the personality asserts itself independent of the individual's sensory experiences (Schiller, 2002). In other words, Schiller viewed form drive or *Formtrieb* as the function of an individual which is grounded on itself. This drive aims to give humans beings their freedom so that he can bring coherence and harmony to their own lives and communities. Schiller (1993) explained, "It wants the real to be necessary and eternal, and the eternal and necessary to be real." (p120)

By contrast, the *Sachtrieb* is sensuous and entirely based on sensory experience. It proceeds "from the physical existence of man" and orients him in time and space (Schiller, 2002). Schiller believed that the sense drive is a function of man's condition due to his sensuous existence, man is limited by time within his condition and becomes matter. As such, the drive requires the existence of change in order for time to have content, thereby making a sensation of the sense drive to be the time occupied by content (Schiller, 2002). Notably, the form drive and the sense drive are competing so as to overwhelm the other within a person. It's also important to note that Schiller is mainly concerned with the imbalance and overpowering of one or the other; his philosophy breaks with many of his intellectual predecessors in not prioritizing the rational

over the sensuous.⁷ As aforementioned, Schiller maintained that when the sense drive overcomes the form drive, it reduces the man into matter, and precludes his capacity to bring harmony to his existence. Whether the form drive takes the upper hand over sense, or sense over form, man is out of balance. However, when *both* drives are at their respective peak, a third drive emerges to mediate between them: the play drive (*Spieltrieb*), so named for the particular feelings of joy and mastery we feel when using hard-earned skills in a creative way. (Think, for instance, of a seasoned jazz trio, a master painter at an easel, a top chef in the kitchen, a prima ballerina in concert, and so on.)

As the mediator, the *Spieltrieb* is made manifest in aesthetic beauty, where the *Sachtrieb* gives life, character, and motion to the *Formtrieb*'s rationalism. Whether we are engaging with aesthetic beauty as a creator or as a witness, the activation of the *Spieltrieb* opens our minds to see beyond our present circumstances and look to horizons we never even knew existed. According to Schiller (2002), this process of activating the *Spieltrieb* and engaging with its beautiful, awe-inspiring forms enriches our inner lives and sets us on a course to moral self-realization. Thus, Schiller believed that meaningful learning is at the formal and sensorial nexus, where we create art and are ourselves recreated in that process. It was Schiller's contention that this process, which he termed *aesthetic education*, could facilitate the freedom that the political revolutions of his time had conspicuously "failed to achieve" (Kimball, 2001) Given the similarities between Schiller's time and ours—with a global pandemic, unrest, and social and political revolutions—it is an opportune time to consider Schiller's solution to the political,

⁷ Schiller (2002) wrote "The bad influence of an overpowering sensuousness upon our thoughts and actions will be easily apparent to everyone; the pernicious influence of an overpowering rationality upon our knowledge and our conduct is not so evident, although it occurs just as frequently and is just as important." (70)

cultural, and intellectual crisis of his time: aesthetic education. In particular, to understand Schiller's commitment to aesthetic education, we must understand the *Spieltrieb*.

4.1 *Spieltrieb*

In ancient Greece, the word for “education” (*paideia*) referred to a broad system of educating an individual, one that involved both play (*paidia*) and discourse. As discussed in both Chapters 1 and 2, “play” here is not to be conflated with our contemporary use of the word, which is often connoted as an entirely frivolous and unproductive activity that, even when promoted as educationally valuable, is primarily relegated to the educational journey of children (Paley, 2007). By contrast, *paidia* was an important and serious but unbounded activity that Plato and others felt was an integral and necessary component of an adult's educational journey and human flourishing. It meant bringing the intellect and intuition together to create new works of art and discuss their meaning with peers. This process began in youth but continued throughout life, allowing for the personal development and maturation of the individual. Therefore, education in its broadest sense was a lifelong endeavor to be undertaken as a means of personal fulfillment and self-actualization.

The ideals of *paideia* and the concept of *paidia* are rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, and specifically Plato, but we also see in Platonic philosophy the elevation of the rational over all other sense (and sensory) experience. While Plato appreciated the educational value of mimetic activity as placed against the powers of artistic expression, he inevitably cast out artists from his ideal Republic. Plato understood the influence and power that the aesthetic realm had over cultivation of the person, and it was precisely because of this power that “Plato's ultimate answer to the problem of untangling the relationship between art and morality is to exclude art from his

city, his word is hardly the last in thinking about this relation” (Davis, 2017, p. 19).⁸ As with most things, it was Plato’s influence that prevailed. There was a move away from pacifying existential questions through philosophical and religious doctrine in deference to a search for the truth of nature through the scientific method. Over time, this fostered a new, analytical way of thinking that culminated in the Age of Enlightenment with its pronounced sovereignty of reason.⁹ As Davis observed, “thinkers like Schiller brought Kant’s cautious insights into the analogy between beauty and morality to full maturity by thematizing the connection between ethics and aesthetics in terms of the unity of the human being and the role of aesthetic play in human freedom” (p. 20).

Schiller’s work on aesthetic education he reawakens the concept of play that was so pivotal to education in ancient Greece through the lens of an 18th century German poet and playwright. In Schiller’s conception, play is about the way in which one brings the rational and sensual powers within them together and generates a new way of being for themselves. Unlike when their *Formtrieb* leads one without passion or their *Sachtrieb* without structure, he argued that the joining of both in the *Spieltrieb* facilitates moral self-realization. Schiller stated that his use of the term *play* “conforms entirely to ordinary usage because play means ‘everything that is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and that still neither externally nor internally constrains’” (Beiser, 2005, p. 21). Since the form and sense drive each represents a kind of constraint, we can see how the play drive, for Schiller, is liberating—“play characterizes those activities not subject to constraint, their synthesis consists in play” (p. 21).

⁸ It is worth noting that Plato’s student, Aristotle, takes a different path, instead “arguing in favor of the morally transformative power of poetry and tragedy, mimetic arts that he claims use imitation and an exploration of the possibilities of human life as a form of moral edification. Like Plato, Aristotle recognizes art’s ability to evoke in us emotions such as pity and fear. But Aristotle characterizes the aesthetic experience as one of catharsis, a purging and purification of emotion more so than a simple indulgence of emotion” (Davis, 2017, p. 20).

⁹ Kant’s philosophy attempted to reconcile the rationalism of the Enlightenment age with morality, freedom, and political authority (What Is Enlightenment?).

It was Schiller's contention that through following the *Spieltrieb*, one opens up innovative possibilities for themselves and is able to achieve their humanity. Given that *Spieltrieb* is a middle disposition that enables one to pass from the sensation to thought, Schiller believed that the play drive emerges from an art (Von Wiese, 2017). In other words, only in the play of art are the formal drive and sensuous drive brought together, and only when contemplating the beauty is an individual harmonized with nature, thereby finding a happy medium between physical exigency (necessity) and moral law (freedom) (Von Wiese, 2017). In fact, play was a distinctly humanizing dignity activity for Schiller.

In later work ("Letter 15"), he wrote the words, "For, to speak out once for all, man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays" (Schiller, 2002, p. 20). This strong belief in the humanizing potential of play has to do with the way aesthetic education unites the sensual with the moral and ethical, taking morality out of the purely rational domain. The value in this communion was implicitly understood in Ancient Greece, which is why education was such a deeply personal process that was pursued through each stage of life. Schiller intuited this value as timeless, and in *Letters*, he provided a framework to understand moral development and ethical life through the heuristic of play.¹⁰

4.2 Beauty, Play, and Freedom

Where both these aptitudes are conjoined, man will combine the greatest fullness of existence with the highest autonomy and freedom and instead of losing himself to the world, will rather draw the latter into himself in all its infinitude of phenomena, and subject it to the unity of his reason. (Schiller, 2002)

¹⁰ "Play transforms our divided physical and intellectual being into a unified entity that can make principled moral judgments with care and wisdom.... Moral beauty and aesthetic freedom—our expressions of the unity of ethics and aesthetics, or the overcoming of our solely physical and solely intellectual being in the aesthetic—are the apotheosis of human life" (Davis, 2017, p. 98).

As aforementioned, Schiller's conception of play was heavily influenced by Kant's idea of "free play" in his *Critique of Judgment* (Kimball, 2001). For Kant, "to play" meant observing sensory experience with the mind and then putting these sense impressions together, giving them a rational dignity. In this state, one's cognition is not constrained in any direction. They can take true pleasure in aesthetic beauty without the burden of indulgence associated with more carnal pleasures (such as eating food or engaging in sexual intimacy). Schiller, however, went considerably beyond Kant's notion of free play, where the *Formtrieb*, *Sachtrieb*, and *Spieltrieb* are intrinsic but dynamically balanced to make harmony possible. As Beiser (2005) pointed out, "Schiller's distinction between these two drives sounds like, but is in fact broader than, Kant's distinction between understanding and sensibility" (p. 139). In fact, Schiller's formulation of the drives follows Reinhold: "Schiller is indebted to Reinhold's distinction between a *Trieb nach Form* and a *Trieb nach Stoff*" (p. 51.)

Kant's work in the *Critique of Judgment*, with its focus on moral beauty, aesthetics, and teleology, had a strong appeal to Schiller (Baxley, 2008). This work, which Schiller excogitated in 1781 while on bedrest and received patronage from Prince Friedrich Christian and Count Ernst von Schimmelmann, later became the major inspiration for his publication *Letters* (Kimball, 2001). In fact, one may find in *critique* many of the proto-Schillerian ideas of *Letters*, particularly Kant's theory that there is a moral dimension to experiencing aesthetic beauty.

Kant theorized that our judgments on aesthetic beauty open the doorway to morality because such judgments are subjective and, at the same time, are a demonstration of our "common humanity" (Kimball, 2001). Moreover, and to exemplify, it is a subjective statement to call a seashell "beautiful," yet the impression of beauty that the shell leaves on one's being is a distinctly human experience that is linked to our interpretation of beauty. As Kimball (2001)

observed, Kant famously referred to beauty as a symbol or representation of morality because in aesthetic pleasure, the human mind becomes aware of a certain sublimity and ennoblement.

Schiller appreciated this observation and associated the experience of ennoblement through beauty with freedom from the ugliness around him. For Schiller, the violence, destruction, and uncertainty of life in his time found a remedy through the experience of aesthetic beauty. Thus, to an extent, Schiller's work in *Letters* is a "response to Kant's theories about the nature of aesthetic experience and its relation to moral freedom" (Kimball, 2001). Taken on its own, however, it would be a mistake to think that Schiller is only building on Kant's ideas. For example, as Beiser (2005) pointed out, Kant only used the term *play* to explain aesthetic experience with respect to the "activity of the imagination," whereas Schiller embraced a rich and broader understanding of the concept, applying it to the "person as a whole" (Beiser, 2005, p. 22). Additionally for Kant, beauty is instead the awareness or consciousness of the pleasure that coincides with the play of the imagination. For Schiller, it plays a much more profound role.¹¹

4.3 Freedom, Beauty, and the Living Form

Schiller argued that the play drive, which arises from the synthesis of the sense drive (the object of which is life) and the form drive (the object of which is form), has its own object, beauty—the living form. Through play's mediation, one's senses are formalized and intellect is sensualized. Thus, for Schiller, the "full development of humanity consists in beauty" (Beiser, 2005, p. 21). Moreover, for Schiller, beauty is somewhat synonymous with freedom: "since the play drive frees a human being from the constraints of both sensibility and reason, its achievement will consist in the appearance of freedom and therefore beauty" (p. 23).¹²

¹¹ This discussion can be found in the chapter "Analytic of the Beautiful" in the *Critique of Judgment*

¹² See also Schiller's definition of freedom in Letter 19.

Schiller's idea that moral freedom is possible through aesthetic experience is arguably one of the greatest statements of humanity's potential to wrest itself from its self-imposed pain through the power of play. Schiller developed and extended Kant's notion of aesthetic and is probably the first to take an interest in Kant's proposal of the higher role played by art. However, unlike Kant, whose objects of beauty existed in the natural world,¹³ the beauty Schiller referred to was born from play and manifested distinctly in human creations, especially artwork.¹⁴ In "Letter 22," Schiller regarded the work of art as "the highest reality...[wherein] we feel snatched outside time and our humanity expresses itself with a purity and integrity as though it had not yet experienced any detriment from the influence of external forces" (Beiser, 2005, p. 28). This "high reality" to which Schiller referred was the experience of freedom itself, and art was the path towards it.¹⁵ Schiller's conception of freedom is also important as a distinguishing feature of his aesthetic project, as it pushes back against Kant's conception of freedom as an element of reason alone.¹⁶

Schiller's main aim of aesthetic education was to make Kantian Enlightenment ideals possible in reality by establishing an aesthetic state wherein which individuals are harmoniously integrated into an organic social totality (Von Wiese, 2017). In other words, in Schiller's aesthetic education, art was a manifestation of dignity and an indicator that there was a future

¹³ Examples include pine cones, flowers, crystals, sunsets, and seashells.

¹⁴ For example, in reference to the subjective beauty found within referenced pine cones, flowers, crystals, sunsets, and seashells.

¹⁵ "Reason demands that we should perfect our humanity. (2) The perfection of humanity consists in the unity of the form and sense drives. (3) The unity of the form and sense drives is beauty.... Reason demands that we should create beauty" (Beiser, 2005, p. 24).

¹⁶ "Schiller implies that it is necessary to go further and to recognize another sense in which it is an attribute of our whole nature. There are two implied criticisms of the Kantian conception here. First, in making freedom into moral autonomy, willing and acting according to rational principles, Kant does not assign any role at all to sensibility, so that his freedom is possible without sensibility. Second, Kant's concept of freedom is compatible even with the repression of sensibility, so that his freedom is possible even when acting contrary to sensibility" (Beiser, 2005, p. 32).

worth looking forward to. Thus, art stood apart from beauty, which had to exist outside of the world as Schiller envisioned it. Then art would be the communion of the mortal and the immortal, the spirit and the material, the finite and the infinite. It would be the perfectly balanced state between time and timelessness, mortality and immortality, freedom and necessity. To this end, Schiller (2002) saw that art had “no individual purpose, either intellectual or moral” in the context of the world in which he lived (p. 101). Simply put, art was too good for that world; in Letter 21, he wrote that art could “discover no individual truth, [help] us perform no individual duty, and is, in a word, equally incapable of establishing the character and enlightening the mind” (p. 101).¹⁷

For Schiller, art and beauty alone are not our moral compass (Davis, 2017). Schiller firmly believed that morality and art come together at two points: Grace and Dignity (Davis, 2017). Hence, although aesthetic freedom may not contribute human dignity or moral worth, it does result in easy grace that makes moral actions appear unconditioned, emerging easily from an individual’s character. That is, aesthetic freedom enables humans to demonstrate their moral character through mediating the formal and sensuous. In particular, Schiller believed that the ideal human state is reached when one reconciles the rational and the sensuous. Therefore, Schiller adamantly believed that a happy and full humanity would be achieved not only through reason, but also through the third impulse known as play.

Artists and art lovers, regardless of the context of their lives, might vehemently disagree with Schiller’s statements regarding art as “incapable of establishing the character” or “enlightening the mind,” as did the 19th century art critic John Ruskin. Ruskin, who spent his life painting, teaching art at Oxford University, and writing about art, called these words a “gross and

¹⁷ For Schiller, art and beauty should not be misunderstood as aids in the moral behavior they might have understood earlier (Davis, 2017).

inconceivable falsehood” (Kimball, 2001). Indeed, these lines about art in Letter 21 can easily be taken out of context and seem like vituperation on art, yet as a lifelong poet and playwright, Schiller considered art a deeply personal endeavor. Truly, then, Schiller’s *Letters*’ main contention is that art has the greatest power to create realities he would have liked to have known, realities that are dignified by the kind of moral beauty Kant spoke of. For this reason, in Schiller’s esteem, aesthetic experience functions to civilize man, healing the “rifts” between our inner conflicts—“reason and desire, duty and inclination, our purposes as individuals and as members of a community” (Kimball, 2001) According to critic Lesley Sharpe, who published *Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thoughts, and Politics*, Schiller’s work can thus “be regarded as the supreme statement of faith in the power of human creativity to heal and to restore to wholeness” (Kimball, 2001).

4.4 The Philosophical Context of the Play Drive

What is man before beauty liberates him from free pleasure, and the serenity of form tames down the savageness of life? Eternally uniform in his aims, eternally changing in his judgments, self-seeking without being himself, unfettered without being free, a slave without serving any rule. (Schiller, 2002, Letter XXIV)

It is a common belief that the concept of the play drive in Schiller’s *Letters* is thought to compensate for some of what Kant failed to consider about human nature. In part a response to Kant’s work, *Letters* takes it upon itself to address these issues, principally Kant’s emphasis on rationality. This emphasis undermines the force found a priori in the sensual side of man. However, while Kant is a definite influence, Schiller is also influenced by and responding to other thinkers. One such thinker who influenced both Kant and Schiller was Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau’s work on education, the social contract, and his ideas on nature, beauty, and freedom served as both an inspiration as well as an intellectual antagonist for many of Schiller’s ideas. Rousseau’s conception of man’s state of nature was idyllic and

peaceful. He argued that it was difficult to comprehend why man would abandon this paradise for the ills of society (Rousseau used natural disasters to explain the shift in human development) (Beiser, 2005, p. 42). Schiller, on the other hand, paints a much bleaker picture of the natural state of man. For Schiller, the natural state of man is not blessed with self-dependency and freedom, but rather the natural state of man involves fear, suspicion, and “savage greed”¹⁸ (Letter XXIV) and rejects Rousseau’s conception of natural freedom, arguing instead for freedom as an acquisition of culture and morality. He declared, “man, in his physical condition, suffers only the power of nature; he gets rid of this power in the aesthetical condition, and he rules them in the moral state” (Letter XXIV).

Rousseau also discussed freedom and education in his work *Emile* (1762), saying that man's path to freedom was through his heartfelt passions (“On Education”). “In the first edition of the Briefe Schiller had even cited Rousseau’s famous statement ‘Si c’est la raison qui fait l’homme, c’est le sentiment, qui le conduit’” (p. 65). Nevertheless, despite Schiller’s qualified agreement with Rousseau regarding the significant role of these passions, Schiller took issue with Rousseau’s conclusion regarding them – “The mere fact that these feelings are natural, he argued, means that they have no moral merit” (p. 66). Here, to prove his point, Schiller invoked (p. 159) a fundamental Kantian principle: “For an action to have moral value, it must proceed from an act of the will or choice and not from an implanted natural disposition” (Beiser, 2005, p. 38).

While Schiller was fundamentally in agreement regarding the importance of the passions, Schiller sided with Kant that for an act to have moral value, it must “proceed from an act of will

¹⁸ Full quote from Letter XXIV:

Ignorant of his own human dignity, he is far removed from honouring it in others, and conscious of his own savage greed, he fears it in every creature that he sees like himself. He never sees others in himself, only himself in others, and human society, instead of enlarging him to the race, only shuts him up continually closer in his individuality. Thus limited, he wanders through his sunless life, till favouring nature rolls away the load of matter from his darkened senses, reflection separates him from things, and objects show themselves at length in the after-glow of the consciousness.

or choice.” According to Rousseau, man would exist in a state of harmony with himself and his environment if he were living outside of all socially constructed systems (Durkheim, 2004). On principle, Rousseau believed that no one person would violate another in their natural state because this is the perfect state (Durkheim, 2004). Therefore, one must only be in their natural state to know themselves,¹⁹ create art, and ascend to higher states of being.

Schiller did not entirely disagree with Rousseau. But where they agreed, they often took divergent paths. For instance, Schiller’s description of how man experiences pleasure in appearances and adornment is very similar to Rousseau’s *amour-propre*, but while Rousseau saw *amour-propre* as the beginning of the fall of natural man, Schiller saw this as a fundamental step in man’s moral and creative development—“the pleasure he takes in decorating himself marks the first exercise of his creative powers...” (Beiser, 2005, p. 40). Likewise, Schiller accepted much of Rousseau’s critique of art and culture, but did not share Rousseau’s view that art and culture are fundamentally corruptive (Letter VI).²⁰

These ideas about the perfect state of being were incredibly novel at the time and inspired American pedagogical theory in the late 19th century. Rousseau inspired pedagogical theorists Johann Herbart (1776-1841) and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), and also influenced philosophers of education such as John Dewey. For Herbart and Pestalozzi, children benefited more from self-directed activities than pre-scripted ones, improving learning outcomes and self-efficacy.

¹⁹ The wisdom of “knowing thyself” comes from Socrates.

²⁰ Rather than art and culture as fundamentally corruptive, Schiller pointed the blame at overspecialization and the alienating division of labor which itself both funds art and science as a luxury good and corrupts these pursuits (Letter VI).

Rousseau's conception of man being perfect in a state of nature was itself largely a response to Plato²¹ who conceived of man in an entirely different light. In his 4th century work, "Allegory of the Chariot" in *Phaedrus*, Plato considered the concept of two drives within the human soul—one of which is noble, immortal, moral, and rational, and the other which is appetitive, irrational, and emotional (Hebbar, 2020). Plato illustrated this concept with an analogy whereby each driver is leading a horse that is pulling the same chariot in two directions. The individual steering the horse is the self whose work somehow leads their lives forward in one direction (Hebbar, 2020). For Plato, the best course of action would be subduing the appetitive, irrational, and emotional side, and allowing it to follow behind the noble, immortal, and moral. Rousseau's response to this was that doing so goes against human nature and would ultimately cause more harm than good.

Kant was in concurrence with Rousseau on this reaction to Plato, and both Kant and Rousseau reflected the typical Enlightenment-era views of human nature of man, each strongly believing that reason should dominate over emotion. Schiller, however, did not share this view. Instead, he knocked the cult of enlightenment off its proverbial throne, and advocated for a departure away from the subordination of emotion to reason. For Schiller, for man to be actualized and achieve their full potential, one must equally promote the flourishing of both of their drives, and it is only through the reconciliation of the two senses via aesthetic education and, in particular, through the play drive, that man can flourish. Unlike Plato, Schiller did not see the sense drive (*Sachtrieb*) as something to simply control or put in its place. From Schiller's perspective, the *Sachtrieb* was a grounding force that indicated to a man that he existed in the material world. Thus, without the *Sachtrieb*, man ceases to be. At the same time, Schiller did not

²¹ Reacting to the era of 428-348 BC, Plato, in his dialogue *Phaedrus* (sections 246a–254e), used the Chariot Allegory to explain his view of the human soul.

believe that personal development and maturation would be possible by following one's rational side alone, as Kant and Rousseau had contended. Instead, Schiller theorized that when one integrates their internal drives towards sensuality (*Sachtrieb*) and form (*Formtrieb*), they find themselves at the very dignifying state of play.

To every extent, achieving the state of being at play was truly the culmination of Schiller's educational project. Indeed, play was the aesthetic education of man, for it would acknowledge a fuller epistemology that would include man's senses. Such an epistemology embraces the broadest meaning of wisdom rather than today's narrowed meaning of being knowledgeable, which is more akin to being erudite. Kimball (2011) addressed this in his work on Schiller, asking, "Can it be purely fortuitous that *sapientia*—wisdom—has its root in *sapor*, taste: a faculty of feeling, intuition, and sensibility? What deep truth does that etymology suggest?" (p. ____). To Schiller, that etymology would suggest a most obvious truth about what it means to be knowledgeable, which is that one has to balance internal drives of sense and form. As mentioned earlier, this balance defines humanity as a species and sets humans apart from the animal world, where self-knowledge and an appreciation of beauty do not even exist as functions. On the contrary, Schiller said that human beings actually have an innate drive to experience aesthetic beauty and the ability to harmonize their drives using both the impetus of their senses along with their reason. Through this harmonization, people can experience different and unique aesthetic responses. Schiller's theory suggests that each person experiences aesthetics somewhat uniquely, coupled with and mediated by sensory perception and imagination, guided and supported by rationality. In this way, Schiller established a link between the creative enterprise and a voluntary engagement with aesthetics to ethics and beauty.

4.5 Conjoining of the Two Faculties

One of the greatest values of Schiller's work is revealed in his acknowledgment of the two opposing drives of the human soul without advocating for the supremacy of either of them. This acknowledgment brought with it the holistic idea of integration rather than the sublimation of either side. He stated that when the sense drive—with its guiding object of life—overcomes the form drive, it reduces man to merely animal nature, since sensory experience can only make a “material man” (Schiller, 2002). Meanwhile, by being concerned only with the form—with its guiding object of form—man deals only with the eternal and can never orient himself in the time or place in which he lives. Thus, Schiller wrote in Letter 13 that “these two impulses require limits, and looked upon as forces, they need tempering; the former that it may not encroach on the field of legislation, the latter that it may not invade the ground of feeling” (p. 17). Here, Schiller is essentially saying that as long as man feels, desires, he is effectively a servant of his appetites and he is nothing more than the world, if by this term we understand nothing but the formless content of time. At the same time, the goal is not that the form drive overcome the sense drive or that both are suppressed. Instead, Schiller wrote that the potential of each is achieved only through the tension with the other, and the highest possible potential is achieved when both sides come together in maximum fullness. In Letter 14, Schiller wrote, “the two sides of a balance are in equilibrium when empty; they are also in equilibrium when their contents are of equal weight” (p. 27). This “conjoining” of the two faculties is mediated by the play drive, with its guiding object of living form (or beauty), allowing the two drives to exist fully and in harmony with each other.

In Schiller's aesthetic education, the middle disposition of play is precisely that which stimulates the imagination to synthesize the rational and the sensual. When one plays with

something, one takes its rational dimension (as it is known intellectually) and its sensual dimension and bring them into conversation with each other in an imaginative, even fanciful way. The actor at play (and immersed in play) makes the different dimensions twist upon themselves; she observes reciprocal combinations of sensuous and rational drives. When one said actor plays with things in her imagination, she takes these objects and twists them around to see new possibilities. In this way, the actor finds a way with which to engage, aesthetically appreciate, and be in the world with them. For this reason, Schiller said it was essential that “the material impulsion should be contained in the limits of propriety by personality and the formal impulsion by receptivity or nature” (p. 17). Through this middle course, man can at once simultaneously work with and contemplate the beautiful and ultimately harmonize himself with nature.

4.6 Schiller’s Influence

Schiller’s contributions to philosophical thought and aesthetic education in *Letters* are woven deeply into the philosophies that changed the course of subsequent history. In particular, Schiller’s conception of aesthetic freedom and the play drive had a profound influence on Hegel, Gadamer, Marx, Marcuse, Adorno and others.²² Marx’s notions regarding “unalienated labor” were a kind of response to Schiller’s warning that man could tend to become “merely the imprint of his occupation” (Kimball, 2001).²³ Meanwhile, in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse cited Schiller’s work when illustrating a scenario wherein visual art “invokes a tabooed logic—the logic of gratification as against that of repression” (Kimball, 2001).

²² As Nietzsche wrote of both Schiller’s influence as well as the complicated task of reading Schiller, “Schiller has thrown some light on the poetic process by a psychological observation, inexplicable but unproblematic to his own mind. He confessed that before the act of creation he did not have before him or within him any series of images in a causal arrangement, but rather a musical mood.” (49)

²³ Although Marx recognized and praised Schiller on his revolutionary diagnosis and spirits regarding the modern age, he also criticized him for his perceived and slightly misguided idealism (Kain, 1982).

Evidently, what gives *Letters* its wide appeal is its examination of aspects of human nature that had not, by Schiller's time, been looked at with his unique lens of a poet, playwright, and philosopher living in late-18th century Germany.²⁴ Indeed, Kant might have taken heart to see how Schiller arrived at certain categorical imperatives (a Kantian term used to describe certain laws of human nature as fixed and ubiquitous), such as "the irreducible nature of aesthetic experience" and his "connection between moral freedom and aesthetics" (Kimball, 2010). Furthermore, Schiller's work advances a context in which humanity can connect its present with its past and future, bridging the finite experience of a biological human life to the infinite nature of the human soul. The writer T. S. Eliot beautifully and eloquently illustrated this very concept in his essay "The Tradition and the Individual Talent." In this work, Eliot (1922) played with the idea of art as a kind of chemical reaction between the timely and the timeless, through which the artist is merely a vessel. Eliot wrote that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (53). And further, Eliot argued that not only is the artist-as-vessel relatively dispassionate, but also the reader-as-critic ought to interpret a poem not in relation to other poems by the same author, but rather from the "conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" (p. 151). Eliot went on to say that when we approach a poet, we often find that "not only the best but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (p.152). In essence, this perspective envisages man as a medium through which the essence of art is channeled into its earthly and material form. In respect to temporarily, Eliot wrote of an "historical sense" that compels the poet

²⁴ Meanwhile, in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse cites Schiller's work when illustrating a scenario wherein visual art "invokes a tabooed logic—the logic of gratification as against that of repression" (Kimball, 2001).

“to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature...has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (44) ²⁵

In reading Eliot, Schiller’s *Letters* are a clear influence. While there are important differences, Schiller’s influence looms large over Eliot’s aesthetic philosophy. As Howarth (2006) explains “Despite Eliot’s much-vaunted hostility to Romanticism... the overall thrust of those cultural poetics is taken straight from Schiller’s criticism of the divided modern person in the Aesthetic Letters.” (442)

Eliot is not alone. While Schiller’s name does not have the worldwide recognizability of Plato or Rousseau, he is well-read in his native Germany throughout the 21st century. According to Kimball (2001), Schiller’s ideas in *Letters* charted a new course for German critical theory today, contributing to Hegel’s (1770-1831) entire notion of “dialectical progress.” Kimball noted that “it was Schiller...who first used the fateful term *aufgehoben* in the paradoxical Hegelian sense of ‘simultaneously cancelled yet preserved.’” (Kimball 2001) Moreover, Schiller’s thoughts have also influenced Hegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt, and through Humboldt in particular had a profound effect on his aesthetic education. (Hegel, 1998, *Aesthetics*; Humboldt, 1830, “On Schiller”). More importantly, Schiller’s substantial influence on continental as well as British Romanticism (Mehigan, 2020). More recently, Schiller’s vision regarding “aesthetically permeated culture” has been adopted or considered as the predecessor to contemporary mass media studies (Mehigan, 2020). Schiller thus became a link in the philosophical chain of influence, connecting Plato, Rousseau, and Kant through himself to a line of theorists yet to follow.

²⁵ Eliot’s use of the word ‘sense’ here is not a separate Schillerian drive, but rather the various subconscious influences of a poet’s artistic, historical and cultural inheritance.

4.7 Criticisms and Responses

Schiller's aesthetic philosophy has endured due in large part to its insightful, life-affirming, and beautifully written poetic prose, as well as its influential role in the history of ideas, including Schiller's undeniable influence on subsequent Romanticism that followed. However, there are some criticisms worth noting before we follow some of Schiller's ideas into subsequent generations of philosophers (such as Gadamer). As mentioned previously, Schiller's writing—poetic and lyrical—could also be, at times, inexplicable (see footnote 22) and enigmatic, which led to some confusion and consternation over the meaning of certain passages. In *Letters*, at times, the beauty of the prose came at the sacrifice of clarity. Additionally, there are some gaps, as not all aspects are fleshed out in detail—for instance his discussion on play as the practical workings of aesthetic education in Letter XIV. Schiller's dense, romantic language in *Letters* left some of his contemporary confused as well, as mostly evidenced by its “unfavorable reception among contemporaries such as Wilkinson and Willoughby (1967).” (Moland, L. 2021) Many authors have argued that Schiller does not seem to be clear about “whether the aesthetic state is the means to the achievement of full humanity” or whether it is the end. (Moland, L. 2021) Thus, it could be argued that Schiller has not adequately addressed one of his original questions—the question of what must come first: the good citizens or the good state (Sharpe, 2005). My own interpretation of Schiller's philosophy of play, as I have laid out in this chapter, aligns with those that interpret Schiller to mean that the play drive indeed does make possible human flourishing bringing together in harmony the full actualization of our senses and reason. Another criticism I already addressed earlier is that Schiller's work has been seen as encouraging elitism and a retreat into apoliticism (Sharpe, 1995). A particular target of this and other criticism was aimed at Schiller's notion of the aesthetic state, which was accused of having “irrationalist

and totalitarian implications” in addition to elitism (Beiser, 2005, p. 43). However, as Beiser and others argued, this criticism is unfounded because it fails to recognize that the “sentiments of Schiller’s beautiful soul arise from internalization and habituation to moral laws whose ultimate basis lies in reason” (p. 43).²⁶

Schiller’s *Letters*, which are dense and at times vague and confusing (particularly without understanding their political and intellectual context), were written with educated and informed readers in mind, who we can assume were versed in the aforementioned intellectual context and willing to accept the basic assumptions regarding drives, beauty, and freedom. Future readers would need to be primed with the knowledge that there are semantic gaps between their cultural understanding of words like “education” and “play” and Schiller’s understanding of these terms. For Schiller, nothing could be further from the truth since nothing *was* further from the truth with respect to play in aesthetic education. There are also problems with Schiller’s program of aesthetic education because it presupposes that “people will be receptive to an aesthetic education, which is not likely if they are already corrupt or if the government is repressive” (Beiser, 2005, p. 9). Schiller also takes for granted that the artists who would provide this aesthetic education would maintain integrity and would work, at times, unsupported for the good of the public (p. 10).

Regrettably, Schiller’s reputation also suffered from the misappropriation of his thought in the 1914 “War of the Intellectuals” involving Germany and England, as well as from the fact

²⁶ Additionally, Beiser (2005) pointed out that It is important to see that Schiller thinks that affection should not replace but support reason as the foundation of the state. Second, it confuses the reason or justification of the laws with the impulse or incentive for executing them. Schiller already made this distinction in Letter VIII when he declared that reason is necessary to discover and establish the law while feeling is necessary to execute it (330). We confuse this distinction, however, if we think that Schiller holds feeling to be a sufficient justification for the law, i.e. if we think that whatever someone feels, or is made to feel, somehow justifies the law. (p. 331) For a more detailed criticism of the elitism charge, see Steven Martinson (1996), *Harmonious Tension, The Writings of Friedrich Schiller* (pp. 191-192).

that the National Socialists misused his thoughts in the decades to follow (Sharpe, 1995). That is, in the divided Germany of the postwar period, Schiller's fame was used to support competing political philosophers in the Federal Republic of Germany as well as the German Democratic Republic (Sharpe, 2005). Nonetheless, even if the intellectual and political context of the work absolves Schiller of the criticism, we can perhaps understand why contemporaries of his own time might have found his work impractical and detached from the questions of life and death that confronted them, and why his work was cited (however unfairly) by critics of Weimar Classicism.

4.8 Conclusion

Despite these criticisms, when read in context, Schiller's critique of the issues facing modernity (namely, the overspecialization and supremacy of reason over sensual nature) offer tremendous endurance—particularly on aesthetic education. Gadamer considered Schiller's embrace of play a “wake-up-call,” and that the play drive brought forth what was previously “hidden and withdrawn.” (Hendrickson, 2022, 33) In this vein, Schiller can be understood to be beneficial towards healing the “rifts” in contemporary man as well, given that we are plagued by many of the same difficulties as those of 18th century Germany.²⁷ Between a global pandemic and mass unrest and political division, many are left feeling that desire for freedom that Schiller discussed in *Letters*.²⁸

²⁷ As Beiser (2005) explained, it is important to understand the context of Schiller's AEM not only as a work of aesthetic philosophy and a treatise on aesthetic education, but also as a political response to the issues of his time.

²⁸ The fact that the problems faced during Schiller's era are almost the same those faced by humanity today is an indication that humans in the contemporary world are faced with same ontological issue that were addressed by Schiller. Accordingly, LaRouche contended that “We are faced, thus, once again, with the fact, that the most powerful technological cultures can be doomed by the kind of moral and cultural ‘paradigm shift’ which has dominated the world, increasingly, since the 1964-72 youth counterculture revolt against both technological progress and rationality generally” (Wertz, 2005, p. 83).

Schiller's grounding of freedom in beauty, which he tied to the play drive, offers his readers an insight into what it means to be a flourishing human being and goes a long way to repair some of the damage of overspecialization. For Schiller, play offers us a liberating path, free from the constraints of a purely sensory or purely intellectual experience; play allows us to unite our different faculties and grow into a fully enlightened human being. Through art, we can still find this freedom, and in its liberation, it also offers moral dignity as well. Aesthetic experience, in Schiller's estimation, can provide an entry point towards this elevated level of being. It is worth considering, as I do in later chapters, what it would look like to embrace these pedagogical ideas.

Most importantly, applying the principles of aesthetic education to the 21st century American school system would instill in children the value of play as Schiller conceived of it, and carry this value into adulthood towards a lifetime of education. This would foster the "enlarged mode of thought" that Kant spoke of and produce a new generation of adults with a far broader intellectual horizon (Kimball, 2001). Among today's adults, play would reawaken the talents that have fallen dormant through years of atrophy, and it would also relieve the tensions that are building up for Americans, both personally and socially. Through play, people will gain new impressions of each other and begin to associate each other with positive experiences of growth and freedom—rather than as existential threats.

In sum, contemporary America is a pressure cooker of emotions, and the game can safely and joyfully release those emotions so that they do not lead to total self-destruction. Moreover, the emotions would be redirected into an aesthetic experience, creating works of beauty that can be pondered and encouraged through reflection. Had Schiller's Germany applied this approach, perhaps they would have avoided the devastation of World War I, which aroused the destructive

nationalism that paved the path for the rise of Fascism and Nazism. The world may have learned much during that time, but it seems that we are beginning to forget it again, making now the crucial time to act on behalf of ourselves. In Schiller's view, there is no better way to act than through play, where we show ourselves and one another that we can become masters of our talents and our emotions. As Schiller reasoned, beauty puts us in a position to realize our "highest potential,"²⁹ when we feel our *Formtrieb* and *Sachtrieb* perfectly equalized—"from this standpoint, even a block of marble—although lifeless, i.e. non-living, can become a living form through the architect or sculptor" (Wertz, 2005, p. 95). As humanity glimpses its potential in this way, we almost cannot help but take care of ourselves and each other.

Aesthetic education grounded on play drive supports something more far-reaching than the superficial education offered in the United States and most schools around the world. Aesthetic education supports unconditional openness and viewing education as an ongoing process that takes place at different stages of life. In following the aesthetic education proposed by Schiller, we will be able to be open to the other as well as concretely "engage in the interplay of human life," thus attuning ourselves to that which is found beyond the scope of scientific education and objectivity. (Davis, 2017, p.231) That is, students will be able to discover a more humane and deeper truth about play. Accordingly, Schiller's aesthetics, as presented in this chapter, have demonstrated an important unity between the sensuous and rational aspects of the human being through asserting that there is a "greater possibility of freedom in this unity as well as in the ascendancy of play impulse, compared to human rational and impulse alone," as was suggested by Kant. (Davis, 2017, p.243) More importantly, since man strives for beauty (freedom), Schiller believed that the play drive allows us to bring our varied human capacities

²⁹ Moland, L. (2021) "Friedrich Schiller" has a good explanation of how the play drive allows the other drives to work in concert, bringing about human flourishing.

and potential into harmony.³⁰ Schiller's play impulse also helped lay the intellectual groundwork for Gadamer's hermeneutic project, and signaled a shift away from neo-kantian enlightenment rationality. In sum, Schiller's impact is perhaps best understood through the works of those he influenced, as his life and legacy offered a *"vision of the centrality of aesthetic experience to daily and political life that has resonated through the centuries since his death and continues to shape philosophical thought today."* (Moland, 2021)

In the next chapter, I will look at how Heidegger and Gadamer, influenced by Schiller's work and philosophy and in particular Schiller's diagnosis of the modern condition and his articulation of the *play drive*, advanced the importance of play and playfulness in philosophy.

³⁰ KE Davis (2017) offers a very interesting interpretation of this process. (233)

Chapter 5: Gadamer, Heidegger, and the Importance of Play

Only he who already understands can listen.

So far in this project, I have tried to demonstrate that while often not given the serious attention it deserves, we can trace the concept of *paidia* in the history of philosophy as well as in philosophy of education. In Chapter 2, I discussed *paidia* in Ancient Greek philosophy, while in the previous chapter, I explored the concept in the works of Kant and Schiller. In this chapter, I focus on Gadamer and Heidegger, who take up this concept as part of their respective projects and reintroduce it for the 20th century. Following the line of thought which formed the underpinnings of the German Enlightenment undertaken during the late-18th century and early-19th century, Heidegger and Gadamer resisted the more positivist and materialist movements and reforms. Distinguishing between scientific knowledge and humanistic truth, Heidegger and Gadamer acknowledge that in order to ascertain a truth about the human condition, or understand history or the arts, one has to recognize the lens or paradigm within which the authors are working, allowing the text to speak to one's current concerns. With their respective exploration of philosophical hermeneutics, Heidegger and Gadamer challenged the flawed and narrow mechanistic thinking that they viewed as a dominating influence of scholarship, crowding out authentic ways of knowing and *being* in-the-world. For instance, for Gadamer and Heidegger, the Enlightenment failed to account for the ontological nature of bias and prejudice, a denial of something innately human that caused a distance between the individual, one's respective community, and truth (more on this later). In addition to their respective treatment of philosophical hermeneutics, I will discuss their respective treatment of a playful openness toward philosophy, art, and history, and how Gadamer's exploration of gameplay remains relevant to our discussion of contemporary educational theory.

Some philosophers developed critiques of this concept and tried to work out the concept of *paidia* in their era. Gadamer and Heidegger are notable not only for their critiques, but for preserving this emphasis on the theme of play or improvisation as an important philosophical concern. In this chapter, I will explore and highlight a few important aspects of the respective philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer, and present the case that the contemporary conception of improvisation is the closest model and a better framework for how we might embrace *paidia* in our era.

5.1 *Dasein*, Hermeneutics, and Improvisation

There is a real risk in bringing in Heidegger, whose life and legacy remain highly controversial and whose dense philosophical prose invites a wide range of interpretation and is difficult to explicate clearly. The purpose of these sections is not to invoke or engage Heidegger's entire philosophical project but to highlight certain important concepts that are pertinent to my overall project, as well as Heidegger's undeniable influence on Gadamer. Heidegger provides an important bridge to Gadamer's philosophy of play, and in this sense, it is important to engage him. Similar to Schiller, Heidegger's work also provides an alternative to those resisting the notion that only hard science can approach "real knowledge" regarding the world and true insights of history. In *Being and Time*, which he referred to as an analytic of being, Heidegger (1996) introduced and explored the relationship between his conception of *Dasein* and hermeneutics. Heidegger offered the concept of *Dasein* as a distinct being that relates to its own being—"an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it" (p. 32). *Dasein* is also an entity in and of time, influenced by history and directed toward a present and future (p. 41).

We are temporal, we have the experiences that we do, and these influence the way in which we relate to things the way we do.... We want to understand things. This is the way we are, this is how we apply ourselves to the things and people in the world. And so, tracing the meaning of existence back from its underlying basis in being, and in light of the inescapable notion of death that each of us carries with us. (p. 277)

Heidegger (1996) argued that a human being lives best when living authentically, setting aside their relationships with the world and its constituents, in favor of a creative view of life (p. 277). In interpreting Heidegger's view, it would appear that he believed *Dasein* should be understood as the prior condition on the basis of which past things and events may have significance for human beings. As such, his analysis starts with the observation that being-towards-death is merely one aspect of *Dasein*'s finitude.¹

Heidegger's (1996) basic contention with the established philosophy of his time was that too much had been ceded to science and rationality. Heidegger's philosophy makes room for ways of knowing and understanding outside of the purely rational. Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* takes these realities into account: *Dasein* is to be present and in the self-directed moment, implying that *Dasein* bestows the ability of human beings to create their own experiences and live their lives uniquely. As Heidegger wrote:

If *Dasein* discovers the world in its own way [eigens] and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the 'world' and this disclosure of *Dasein* are always accomplished as a clearing away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which *Dasein* bars its own way. (p. 167)

This temporal aspect of *Dasein* is important to the philosophy of play and gameplay. Dreyfus (1991) framed *Dasein* as a being-in-the-world that is present, but with an openness toward a 'there.' This directional, ontological structure has influenced contemporary game theory—as a

¹"Death is a possibility-of-Being which *Dasein* itself has to take over in every case. With death, *Dasein* stands before itself in its own most potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 294).

tension between the flow and presence (the being in the moment) of play, with the directional structure of a ‘there.’²

According to Heidegger (1996), play and leisure allow us to “clear the forest of our angst,” which keep us perpetually distracted from looking at the truth of our existence as mortal beings, or our *Dasein*. It is in this clearing, called a *lichtung*, we can be our authentic selves. With respect to modern culture, a *lichtung* (or *lichtungen* if plural) opens the possibility of having genuine and shared experiences without the self-consciousness of surveilling ourselves through our constant use of contemporary media technology. Together, these shared experiences can be documented and told with historical authenticity (or historicity). As such, it is imperative that we find spaces for play and leisure if we are to continue the documenting and telling of history at all. These spaces might be found in cultural events, such as on holidays, in theatres, and at festivals.

According to Kevin Aho (2007), who wrote on Heidegger’s ideas about the relationship between authenticity and leisure, these cultural events “stand outside of the workaday horizon of willful mastery” (p. 229). As such, Aho said, they “... acquaint us with an affirmation of the unsettledness and fragility of the world as *a whole*” (p. 229). Reacquainting ourselves with this “unsettledness” and “fragility” through shared experiences of play and leisure can facilitate a mass exodus from our echo chambers and epistemic bubbles, offering us an opportunity to tell our human story together once more.³

² “We shall use Dasein’s ontological structure of being here and there to unlock play as being-here (Larsen, 2015) and game as being-there (Kampmann, 2003, 2011; Grimes & Feenberg, 2009). We argue that play’s being-here is tied to the situational player involvement of a more or less pure here-and-now experience: A realization of play as an act of being present in which the player experiences being” (Walther & Larson, 2020, p. 611). gameplay arises from the tension between being-here and “being there,” according to Walther and Larson.

³ According to Peters (2009), it would appear that Heidegger’s narrative of improvisations borders anachronism and that his philosophy was a reaction to the Husserlian ontology of phenomenological inquiry, which is used to acquire knowledge regarding how individuals feel and think. At the same time, it is also important to point out that Peters indirectly seemed to acknowledge that there is value in the “bracketing-out” project as attempted by Heidegger because it is warranted by the *Epoché*. Furthermore, it is also critical to acknowledge that though such a

5.1.1 Doing History: A Shared Experience

Every performance is the authorizing of a future, in the midst of the present, trying to recover the best of the past. (Cornel West, 2022)

When used colloquially, the word *history* tends to evoke the idea of the past, but insofar as history is always being written, it is very much an atemporal concept. History is, in fact, more something that we “do” than something that remains static and unmoving along the corridors of time. Therefore, in this analysis, the term *doing history* is operationally defined as documenting, telling, and interpreting the narrative of our collective human experience. This experience’s collectivity is of paramount significance as we seek to give context and meaning to our lives. After all, “doing history” is not an individual activity, but rather a shared activity that we participate in together. Simultaneously, the very act of doing history is heavily influenced by the kinds of technology we have at our disposal, and nothing has been more individualizing than the ubiquitous and incessant use of today’s contemporary media technology.

Technology enthusiasts might take exception to this assertion that technology is individualizing, pointing to how the internet has created instant communication bridges over continents and across oceans, connecting people from vastly different cultures who would never have made acquaintance otherwise. However, despite the rhetoric about contemporary media technology bringing us “closer together,” there seems to be significantly more evidence that it is driving us further apart. Heidegger took exception to the narrow view through which technology has been defined, interpreted, or perceived, that it is basically an instrument or set of devices that we as humans invent, build, and later exploit. Heidegger admitted that this narrow view may be correct to a certain degree, but it offers only a limited anthropological and instrumental definition

project may not be entirely successful, the mere attempt and the subsequent unconcealing of alternate epistemologies can only work towards enriching the phenomenal experience.

of technology (Heidegger, 1996, p. 312). However, Heidegger contended that what needs to be interrogated and exposed is something that is ignored by every account, and that is the essence of technology.⁴ In doing so, it will be understood that there is another side to technology which is not controlled by human beings but the other way around. This corresponds to what the so-called technology is doing to us currently, ranging from groups of people sitting together and ignoring each other in favor of using their phones to the increasingly polarized national discourse. It is clear that this technology is not only individualizing but isolating while we are under the impression that we control it because we use it when we want, and yet that is not the case.

Nevertheless, what if we look at the Greeks? In doing so, we find collectivity and a playful orientation to be the prerequisites of engaging with language and art, the main technologies of doing history in this early era of humankind. For instance, communities gathered to hear lore from their elders or participate in storytelling dances. Thus, doing history was predicated on community and a communal decision to set aside the pressing needs of survival to address the much less tangible (but no less important) need to do history. More recently, history was made largely through the vehicles of theater, festival, and ritual on holy days in pre-modern empires (such as Egypt, Rome, Greece, and Babylon). Although such activities may appear to modern people in a “busy” world to be frivolous, they were critical in establishing a common background for people living in those empires’ widely separated regions. To have a common creation story, for instance, also meant establishing a unifying identity and, therefore, a strong sense of peoplehood, purpose, and meaning.

⁴ Heidegger appeared to take issues with the fact that technology is depicted as a means to an end (instrumental) as well as a product of human activity (anthropological). In this sense, Heidegger re-explicated his earlier concept of intelligibility with regard to the notion of “clearing,” where true being is disclosed. This led Heidegger to argue that identifying the essence of technology involves laying technology bare as clearing, which implies describing the technological mode of Being (Heidegger, Question Concerning Technology, p. 324)

5.1.2 The Confrontation with Angst and the Plight of Busyness

A confrontation with the root of our existential angst is, for the most part, a source of profound discord and is simply far too terrifying for most of us to bear. As such, so long as we can distract ourselves from engaging with it through meaningless activity, most will opt for this path of least resistance. Based on even the most casual observations of how people use contemporary media technology today, it seems clear that social media and the internet have given us ample opportunities to do just so. Essentially, Heidegger might say we are using this technology to remain in a state of perpetual “busyness,” where it is socially acceptable and even encouraged to stay consumed with trends and fads.⁵ This busyness is a kind of “mental safe space,” far from the discomforts of confronting our angst, where we can defend our flight from our angst with assertions that our “busyness” on the internet is purposeful insofar as it is related to school or work (2002 p74). Yet, as Heidegger asserted, this state of busyness is an entirely inauthentic mode of being, identifiable by its tranquilizing effect.⁶

Pulling ourselves out of this haze at once forces a confrontation with our deepest existential angst. Yet, in Heidegger’s estimation, this is a kind of responsibility we have to ourselves if we are to know our *dasein*. In Heidegger’s terms, the need for an individual to face their *dasein* is a kind of microcosm for the work humanity faces as a whole in the interest of doing our history once more. Superficially, this work involves de-emphasizing the role of contemporary media technology in our lives so that it is no longer servicing our angst and instead serves as a tool just like any other. Concurrently, this de-emphasis will, more importantly, necessitate a shift in values away from those of modernity (speed, efficiency, automation) and

⁵ Heidegger is challenging us to take a step back and consider our relationship with technology and the physical world (Heidegger, Question Concerning Technology, p. 324).

⁶ Heidegger is adamant and critical of the fallacy and misuse of the term “busyness” as most use it in the contemporary world to avoid commitment or confrontation of our angst.

towards greater wholeness, balance, and togetherness. With this value shift, we will find ourselves more receptive to the forms of play and leisure we used to experience in communal storytelling, dance, theater, festivals, and rituals in the prehistoric and pre-modern era. Through this playful orientation, Heidegger asserted, we will find pivotal moments of clarity, where we can see through the tempting distractions that seek to lead us away from facing our *dasein*. Such moments, which he called *lichtung*, in fact, precede the revelation of our *dasein* to us. In this sense, our *dasein*'s "truth" is an unequivocally objective phenomenon, unconcerned with personal bias. Thus, if we commit to engaging in play and leisure together, we will also find a common truth of our collective being together. Over time, these experiences serve as the fodder for historicity. Such a commitment could, at last, retrieve a common heritage through the meaninglessness of our current tradition, where we consume copious amounts of contemporary media as a means of turning from our angst. In the process, a playful orientation could potentially free us from traditional and personal prejudices, finally ejecting us out of our echo chambers to a more meaningful space.⁷

To find a *lichtung* in the playful and leisurely spaces, these spaces might principally be characterized by a sense of wonder. In every respect, this wonder underscores a feeling of being truly present, where we are not marveling at technological distractions but rather seeing anything and everything as unusual and staying attentive to the appearance of heritage (Aho, 2007). Thus, whether we are engaged in festivals, plays, or improvisational art, it is this prevailing sense of wonder that we would aim to engender, celebrate, and encourage at those events. Of course, these

⁷ "Turning his phenomenological hermeneutic to literature, Heidegger must deal specifically with the possibility of creative expression in and through the determining historical Dasein of language. The historical apriority of language and the personal experience of language are brought together, Heidegger states, in the act of play.... Play imitates the serious issues of life. In make-believe games, the child mimics, and is initiated into, the social conditions of maturity. Play, then, is also a language of signs that conjure, yet are not, the things signified" (Burwick, 1990, p. 61).

are ideal examples of play, fusing both “leisure and heritage in the retelling and recovery of a shared history,” but most important, especially at this critical juncture, is that those instances of shared play are memorialized (Aho, 2007). Memorialization is, after all, fundamental in the process of doing history with true authenticity, and our memorialization skills have been atrophying for years in deference to our propensity to staying “busy” on the internet.

For Heidegger, if we are to find meaning in our lives as individuals and recover the possibility of doing history together once more, then it is a process that is altogether worthy of our dauntless efforts. In today’s fast-paced, hyper-modern age, there is arguably an urgency to doing so before we drift irrecoverably apart from one another down the halls of our echo chambers. In this sort of worst-case-scenario, our collective history, built upon our active and playful fascination with one another and the world around us, eventually is replaced by disparate narratives that have disparate mythologies, offering nothing to future generations. Our enrapt engagement dissolves and, with it, our meaning—indeed, our very being. This would be more disastrous than we can imagine, as it would mean that all of our mistakes and errors have been in vain, fated to reoccur. From Heidegger’s perspective, the best place to steer us off this collision course with a dark destiny is through a playful orientation, where we can tune back to the moment with one another. It is here where an authentic experience can be found.⁸ Before moving onto Gadamer, it is important to note a couple of aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy that become integral to Gadamer’s philosophy of play—namely the experience of art and the process of disclosure of truth and reality, which for Gadamer becomes a process of concealment and unconcealment.⁹

⁸ An artwork has a “festive, as well as symbolic and playful character. It is therefore only through a work of art that a shared history, a shared future (and therefore community) are possible” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 99).

⁹ “By turning back to the direct experience of art, and to the concept of truth as prior and partial disclosure, Gadamer was able to develop an alternative to subjectivism that also connected with the ideas of dialogue and

5.2 Locating Gadamer's Perspective of Play

all encounters with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event.... (Gadamer, 1989, p. 99)

Inspired by his mentor Heidegger, with a dialogical approach influenced by Plato and Aristotle, Gadamer advanced and broadened the philosophical discussion of 'play' inherited from Kant and Schiller. While Gadamer rejected Kant's and Schiller's subjectivism in favor of a richer and more flourishing articulation of play, he built on their conception of play as integral to the experience of art and artistic expression. This is important, as Gadamer's aesthetic philosophy provides an alternative to scientism and positivism, and connects self-understanding and ways of knowing to the concept of *bildung*.¹⁰ For Gadamer, the subjective experience of the one who plays does not and cannot lead us to an understanding of play, as such. Just as conceiving aesthetic consciousness as something that "confronts an object does not do justice to the real situation," defining play as such does not confront the "essence of play" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 103). Just as Schiller responded to and built his conception of 'play' out of the Enlightenment thinkers, Gadamer responded to Heidegger and Schiller in his framing of 'play.' Gadamer's approach to the experience of play can, therefore, be contextualized within the experience of the world, in keeping with the Platonic tradition.¹¹ Gadamer agreed with Schiller (and Plato) that subjective pleasures can be derived from art, but also added the important caveat that these subjective

practical wisdom taken from Plato and Aristotle, and of hermeneutical situatedness taken from the early Heidegger..." (Malpas, 2018).

¹⁰ Gadamer's aesthetic philosophy provides an alternative to scientism and positivism, ejecting the notion that truth is reducible to scientific method and creating space for historically and linguistically situated ways-of-knowing (Barthold). Additionally, from Davey (2016): "For Gadamer aesthetics stands on experientially accumulative modes of learning (*Bildung*) which orientate and ground sound judgement in the arts." ("Gadamer's Aesthetics")

¹¹ However, as Davey (2016) pointed out, Gadamer's approach to aesthetics offers a phenomenological reconstruction of many of the Platonic tradition's central insights to demonstrate its continuing relevance to contemporary experiences of play. Most central to Gadamer's philosophy is a claim that the philosophy of play must not be limited to the study of acceptance of the subjective awareness of art, but the objective understanding of what informs it.

pleasures are informed objectively.¹² For Gadamer, art *is* experience, as he explained in *Truth and Method*: “...our concern is to view the experience of art in such a way that it is understood as experience (Erfahrung).”¹³

5.2.1 Gadamer’s Conception of Play

Gadamer’s philosophy of play sought to free the concept from a certain conception of the subjective meaning that it had in Kant and Schiller. Much of Gadamer’s framing and discussion of play in the *Relevance of the Beautiful* and *Truth and Method* might be described as gameplay. With this, we see a familiar generative tension. For Gadamer, play can be said to be serious and unserious, structured and unstructured. That is to say, play is unserious in the sense that it exists outside of the urgent requirements of normal life. We do not play to accomplish any outside purpose (any purpose outside of the play space). Also, for Gadamer, play is not serious in the sense that we are not externally forced—we must opt-in to the play world and be motivated intrinsically to submit to the rules of game, and play invites precisely this. This is what Gadamer meant when he referred to as “ease of play” (Gadamer, 1989, 105) —we play because we are motivated to play, because play is fun. Play is also an escape, and provides a departure from the concerns and urgencies of normal life. The play world offers a reprieve away from our world of “seriousness of purposes,” and allows entry to a space wherein the purpose of play is play itself, and play is only fulfilled if the player “loses himself in play.” (103) Within the world of game the concerns of ordinary life are absent and only the rules of the game matter, and in this way “play

¹² “Gadamer retrieves play from the implication of dreamlike irreality. Elaborating ‘Heidegger’s Criticism of Modern Subjectivism’ (T&M 89), he argues that aesthetic consciousness is not abstract vision.” (Burwick, 1990, p. 62).

¹³ In “Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Contribution to a Theory of Time Consciousness, author David Vessey (2007) presents a concise and helpful definition of the term *erfahrung* and its importance to Gadamer: “*Erfahrung* refers to that subset of experience that connects directly to judgment; it is often inferred, need not be first-person, and emphasizes cognitive insights. *Erfahrung* is constructed from *fahren*, to travel, as the realizations in the experiences move and transform one. It is the correlate for the English word “empirical,” as in the empirical sciences (*Erfahrungswissenschaft*) and being experienced (*erfahrend*).” (4)

has a special relationship to what is serious...play contains its own, even sacred seriousness” (Gadamer, 1989, 102). And if you fail to lose yourself to play, then it means you have not taken the play-world seriously; you are a “spoilsport” (103).

Regarding subjectivity and structure, play has its essence independent of those who play—“the players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the play” (TM 103). Play has a meaning that does not depend on human behavior. The players are not the subject of play...play reaches presentation through the players. It is natural, organic to the nature of all living things. Play is dynamic and fluid and involves a “to-and-fro movement”—a give and take that is central to the essence of play and its importance for Gadamer’s entire project in *Truth and Method*, and to his framing of art, dialog, hermeneutics, and philosophy itself.

Play has its own rules, its own “playing field”—which is a closed world unto itself. Entering the gameworld means entering a unique aesthetic reality, in which the urgent needs of the real world are replaced with the “make believe goals of the game” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 108). The metaphor of gameplay allows us to understand the dynamic interplay of artistic or philosophical hermeneutics.

5.2.2 Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics

The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding which is not a mysterious communion of souls but sharing in a common meaning. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 292)

Gadamer’s mentor Heidegger, whose work on hermeneutics was very influential for Gadamer, wrote about the process of understanding as not only a purely rational process, but

rather one influenced by subconscious prejudgments and prejudices.¹⁴ We are meaning-creating beings, and part of that means that we bring our history and our body of knowledge to our experience of things in the world. For Gadamer and Heidegger, the Enlightenment failed to acknowledge the ontological nature of prejudice—and so the denial of prejudice creates a distance; it renders the text dead. Gadamer took this up and expanded on Heidegger’s understanding of philosophical hermeneutics. As I will explain later, Gadamer invoked the image of gameplay to explain the process of interpretation and dialectic, which helps us to understand hermeneutics. When one interprets a text, it is not purely a rational process but one in which biases and prejudgments (both from the author of the text and the reader) inform the process. In this case, the reader must enter fully into the hermeneutics, losing oneself in the hermeneutic game, and submit to the world of the text, putting preconceptions at risk in order to embrace and understand the text-world. This alters a person. Hermeneutics (as defined by Heidegger and Gadamer) is predicated on openness toward one’s own prejudices and irrationality. One has to put one’s prejudgments at risk on the way to true understanding. There is an openness, even a vulnerability, required for the hermeneutic process to be successful. The point is not to have prejudgments; rather the point is to be open to having these judgements changed.

When engaged in a dialogue or discourse, each participant is constrained within a limited range of things. However, in a true discourse, participants are free within this range to play with ideas within the context of the conversation and to allow the discourse to play with them. This opens up the possibility of participants expressing themselves while exploring the topic and, in turn, finding new insights. Hermeneutics is an active process of interpretation. But even if we learned all of the history and cultural and social influences of the authorial mindset of a given

¹⁴ George Steiner (1991) wrote that Gadamer’s conception of hermeneutics “developed explicitly out of Heidegger’s concept and practice of language”

text, there is still likely no single correct interpretation because it is impossible to fully put aside our own blind spots and prejudices to get to a single, objective truth (Gadamer, 1989, p. 271).

As one goes back and forth between a part of the text and the whole of the text, one's understanding of the whole informs the interpretation of any given sentence; likewise, one's understanding of any given sentence causes one's understanding of the work as a whole to evolve. Parallel to this process, the dialectic between a person and the text—including one's own prejudices and blind spots—causes a person to evolve along with awareness and understanding of oneself. Engaging with a text means engaging with oneself, fulfilling a fundamental Socratic challenge to know thyself.¹⁵

What guides the players' actions is not their desire to win the game; rather, a structure or movement of a game emerges as the result of players making choices from a restricted range of possible actions. The rules of the game are important only because they allow participation in the sense of subordinating one's own ends to the ends provided with a larger structure. It is because play requires participation that it was important for Gadamer that the players take the game seriously and really try to achieve the goals which the game provides them.

5.2.3 Hermeneutics and Play

There can be no speaking that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to. This is true of the hermeneutic process as well. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 399)

In addition to taking up and advancing Heidegger's project, Gadamer's framing of hermeneutics also arises from an interest in Plato, which is evident in Gadamer's endorsement of the centrality of dialogue to produce knowledge and understanding. Gadamer's vision of hermeneutics is clearly dialectic because he emphasized the importance of dialogue to praxis and

¹⁵ "This is the famous Socratic *docta ignorantia* which, amid the most extreme negativity of doubt, opens up the way to the true superiority of questioning. We will have to consider the essence of the question in greater depth if we are to clarify the particular nature of hermeneutical experience" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 356).

affirmed the inability to separate understanding from the dialogue.¹⁶ Gadamer (1986) wrote about a “logical structure of openness” characteristic of hermeneutic understanding, and it is from this orientation that we can distinguish between authentic and inauthentic dialogue (p. 356). Gadamer saw the human capacity for open discourse as a fundamental ingredient for solidarity, and in the vein of Aristotle and Plato, this vision of philosophical hermeneutics affirms Gadamer’s commitment that philosophy engages in and emerges from the human condition, or praxis.¹⁷ Like his teacher and mentor Heidegger, Gadamer looked at this practical philosophy as rooted in human experience, of which the quest for meaning and significance is the most relevant. This is an ideal that Gadamer endorsed throughout his works, especially *Truth and Method*, and this forms the basis of his theory of play.

At the very outset, Gadamer built his argument with the Platonic presumption that play is an important part of education and knowledge. Gadamer’s philosophy of play also concerns itself with moral development. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1960) explained that “hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical nor moral knowledge” (p. 115). Gadamer’s appreciation of dialogue as a method of truth is best reflected in his endorsement of Plato’s hermeneutics, but his commitment to praxis as the origin of truth is further asserted by his appreciation of Heidegger’s ontological method. Building on Heidegger’s work, Gadamer also emphasized experience and communal existence, which fosters both intellectual and moral development.

¹⁶ Gadamer relied on the early Platonic dialogic traditions which have been derived from the Socratic tradition itself.

¹⁷ Barthold (n.d.) claimed that “dialogue is rooted in and committed to furthering our common bond with one another to the extent that it affirms the finite nature of our human knowing and invites us to remain open to one another”

The root of intellectual and moral development in hermeneutic philosophy stems from Gadamer's (1989) claim that "hermeneutic philosophy understands itself not as an absolute position but as a way of experience. It insists that there is no higher principle than holding oneself open in a conversation" (p. 189). Hermeneutics is a tradition that dates to the Ancient Greeks. In the Platonic tradition, interpretation involves three primary concepts—expression, explanation, and translation—on the basis of which the act of interpretation itself becomes a performance. However, Gadamer's understanding of the Hermeneutics of music diverges from this understanding (Ramshaw, 2005). The Hermeneutic cycle proposed by Ramshaw places music within normative values and prejudices, unconsciousness, social context; from here, it moves to the appropriation of the discursive object (in this case, music), which involves interpretation and understanding, finally moving to the awareness of the prejudice and the process—which, according to Gadamer, is the objective knowledge that the subjective experience of art reveals.¹⁸

5.3 The Play of Art

The task, then, is to allow the work of art, which is the work of play, to do its work on the participant observer. When one is swept up in play, whether it's the hermeneutic cycle of aesthetic experience, or the world of gameplay (such as a sports game), one loses themselves. (Gadamer, 1989, 103) When one submits to the play space, they are yielding, even surrendering, an aspect of themselves to that that world. Many contemporary theorists and cognitive scientists refer to this subjective, psychological phenomenon as a 'flow state.'¹⁹ Once in this state, the play-

¹⁸ "In the experience of art, we are not merely given a 'moment' of vision, but are able to 'dwell' along with the work in a way that takes us out of ordinary time into what Gadamer calls 'fulfilled' or 'autonomous' time. Thus the artwork has a festive, as well as symbolic and playful character, since the festival similarly takes us out of ordinary time, while also opening us up to the true possibility of community" (Malpas, 2018).

¹⁹ In *Museums as Sites of "Being in Conversation": A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study*, Roberts (2013) connects what is now referred to as "flow state" to Gadamerian hermeneutics. (154). Flow state is also referred to by cognitive scientists as 'Effortless Attention' (Bruya 2010)

er allows work of play to do its work on them. Gadamer spent much ink on discussing sports as well as art, and many argue that Gadamer's treatment of art is meaningfully distinct from sport. For instance, in a game of soccer, there is no real need for spectators in order for the game to be realized—in other words, for the play to do its work on the players. However, in a work of art, in order for the art to do its work on us, it must have a spectator—the audience completes the play. A piece of music's way of being is being performed; in its being performed, it works on the performer as well as the listener.

However, this distinction is better understood not as different types of play, but rather as different boundaries of the play space. The bounded reality of the soccer game is the physical field of play; the audience, with respect to the actual game itself, is irrelevant. This is not to say the audience does not experience something of value in spectating, and it is not to say that the audience does not have an effect, but all of this is external to the game itself—the experience of the spectator is a distinct and different experience than the players. The game can still work on and over the players, with or without the spectators, and when spectators do engage in the field of play, it is seen and experienced as a transgression, an interference. The play world has been momentarily interrupted.

With a work of art—depending on the work's mode and intention—the field of play is expanded to include the spectator. It requires an audience to be realized as a work of art. Notes on a page are merely that, a potential, until they are played. A work of theatrical drama is merely rehearsal until it is performed in front of an audience.²⁰ With a philosophical text, the hermeneutics involves layers of questioning and interrogation—of oneself, the mindset of the

²⁰ Gadamer (1986) made a point to expound on the virtue of drama and theater: "It is raised above all such comparisons—and hence also above the question of whether it is all real—because a superior truth speaks from it. Even Plato, the most radical critic of the high estimation of art in the history of philosophy, speaks of the comedy and tragedy of life on the one hand and of the stage on the other without differentiating between them" (p. 112).

author—and so a hermeneutic cycle forms within this dialectic between the reader and the philosophical text. “The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things...”

(Gadamer, 1986, p. 271).

5.3.1 Play as Discourse, Discourse as Play

As with his predecessors, Gadamer placed philosophical activity under the domain of play. For Gadamer, the experience of philosophical hermeneutics—the back-and-forth, to-and-fro process—leads to understanding. This process is a kind of dialectic that can happen between the individual and a text or work of art, and, according to Gadamer, this is similar to the process of a player within a game. It’s important to note, not only for Gadamer’s philosophy on play but also his understanding of philosophical activity, that for Gadamer, play is not purely subjective, it does not exist solely in the player’s mind, but on the contrary “draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit” (Gadamer, 1989, 109). This “in between” space of play where the play-er (or philosopher) is surpassed by the reality of game also helps us to understand Gadamer’s framing of philosophy and of dialectic – it is “the submission to the play of the work... is analogous to submitting oneself to the flow of dialectic from which truth emerges” (Karnezis, 1987, p. 1). Gadamer was interested in the interplay between the player and game. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1989) wrote that “the purpose of the game is not really the solution of the task, but the ordering and shaping of the movement of the game itself” (p. 97).

In both *Truth and Method* and *Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer aligned play with nature, writing that “whatever is alive has its source of movement within itself and has the form of self-movement” (p. 23). In other words, all that lives, plays. Indeed, the deliberate and purposive character of human play is at once fundamentally human, yet also part of our animal

nature, as play is “the elementary phenomenon that pervades the whole of the animal world and, as is obvious, it determines man as a natural being as well” (p. 123).

Gadamer’s adaptation of the concept of play results from an aesthetic contemplation that aims to demonstrate the inappropriateness of more modern constructions of the philosophy of play—and that is evident from his alignment with Plato. Schiller’s fundamental aesthetic category is play—just like Gadamer’s—and, therefore, it is not surprising that much of his work stands in contemplation of the Kantian tradition, of which Schiller is a proponent. Gadamer used the category of play exclusively to demonstrate the limitations of the alternative point of view developed by Kant and later by Schiller, by arguing that the subject cannot be restricted to themselves alone. Instead, play compels the observer to be interwoven into the game in a way that prevents him from freely disposing of his normal horizons of experience and expectations. Gadamer did not stand for an irresponsible and subjective understanding of the play. Rather, Gadamer proposed that since play is an important method of experiencing the world and adding personal knowledge and experience, a serious sacredness is involved when an individual is at play.²¹

5.3.2 A Playful Hermeneutics

Overall, Gadamer’s construction of hermeneutics involves a unique approach towards achieving a clear understanding, which involves an emphasis on the concept of play. Within this approach, Gadamer is able to negate the philosophical camp which supposes or aims at a dispassionate attachment to beauty and its processes, as held by supporters of the Hegelian thought. Instead, he rooted himself in the Platonic approach to hermeneutics and used his

²¹ “My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is a part of the event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play as play” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 116).

mentor's (Heidegger) arguments to flesh out his aesthetics and notion of play. This contribution is critical in keeping hermeneutics contemporary and lends much authority to the notion that play is a fundamental component of education, broadly defined. Gadamer asserted the primacy of play over the player's consciousness by making a connection between the subjectivities of the experience of play and the objective criteria that create such subjectivity. If the objective criteria are missing or made unavailable by disallowing a space for play, the subjective experience cannot occur. Without this experience, one cannot be transformed.

Furthermore, Gadamer's claim that play is medial and therefore expresses the infinite play of the world opens up the interpretation of play significantly and removes any delimitations from the playing field or the creative expression chosen by the player. This method has been extremely useful in understanding how people experience various forms of art and how they find their meaning. In addition, this method has also been critical in developing an understanding of how play contributes to the experience of the world and increases knowledge. Gadamer looked at art as an eternally self-creating work and therefore considered it infinite and limitless. Gadamer's Hermeneutical aesthetics presuppose a phenomenological involvement with art subjects instead of Schiller's disinterested and logic-based detachment.²² But in addition to play's hermeneutic, mediating essence it is the element of self-presentation that explains, for Gadamer, how human play becomes transformed into the structure of art, and how the playful is necessary for aesthetic experience:

The self-presentation of human play depends on the player's conduct being tied to the make-believe goals of the game, but the "meaning" of these does not in fact depend on their being achieved. Rather, in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact

²² "Even though he claimed to free aesthetic experience, Schiller's theory of art offered only a 'freedom in appearance'" ("Freiheit in der Erscheinung"). The freedom of play which Schiller identified in the creative process (the *Spieltrieb* which mediates the *Formtrieb* and *Sachtrieb*) is available to the spectator only through the illusory "play" with the beautiful. As Gadamer pointed out, Schiller may have intended to free aesthetic experience "from a mechanistic society...but he succeeded only in shifting the ground of subjectivism" (Burwick, 1990, p. 64).

playing oneself out. The self-presentation of the game involves the player's achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing—that is, presenting—something. Only because play is always presentation is human play able to make representation itself the task of the game. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 108)

Gadamer's philosophy of play emerges from his observation that human play requires a setting, or, in other words, a playing field within which a player is presented to be achieved or a task to be completed. For instance, for a child playing football, the objective is to kick the ball towards scoring a point. Gadamer viewed this process of the player's engagement with the play as the essence of being. In terms of aesthetics, this would imply that playfulness is a requirement to experience a work of art, to enter into an artwork's universe, and to be made anew—art is a playing field.

Through this concept of 'play,' Gadamer continued the attempts to highlight experiences of truth which contrast with the scientific model. 'Play' is key to the idea of truth as an experience in which the knower is a constitutive element of the knowledge gained. This contrasts with the scientific model of objective knowledge in which the knower is a passive recipient of knowledge from a removed object. Additionally, in the aesthetic experience, truth has an *ontological* dimension. The scientific model describes the act of knowing as strictly epistemological, that is, concerned solely with the constitution of the object of knowledge. For Gadamer, knowledge involves the grasping of an object that is simultaneously revealing itself to the knower. In his words, ontology precedes epistemology; the act of knowing entails that being is revealed.

Gadamer's Hermeneutics are "deeply involved in philosophical disputes over the legitimacy of claims to understanding in the visual and literary arts"; while Gadamer did not oppose any scientific modes of knowledge, his argument attends to the cultural privilege of science over philosophical arguments (Davey, 2016). Gadamer's insistence that art is

presentational and not representational frames the central focus of his philosophy of play.²³ For Gadamer, Meaning arises out of a mixing together of things, people, and experiences that were formerly independent from each other. Gadamer rejected the notion that an aesthetic experience can provide an ‘integration of meaning’ because any experience of an aesthetic object/artwork is interminably open and capable of meaningful re-interpretation – indeed this is part of the hermeneutic process.²⁴ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, for Gadamer the experience of the aesthetic is both a cumulative process and one based on ‘becoming’ (rather than one attempting to achieve any stasis or fully grasped/determined meaning). (Davey, 2016, Gadamer’s Aesthetics). Accordingly, Gadamer did not believe that the meaning of an aesthetic object could be fully understood, captured, expressed, or reduced by way of language into concepts. And so, ‘underlying idea’ an aesthetic object purports to express is never going to be fully, completely, or adequately represented by the artwork. In other words, art can never be “satisfactorily translated in terms of conceptual knowledge” (Gadamer, 1986, 69). The artwork is always ‘essentially enigmatic’ (as part of it always resists our attempts to determine or grasp its meaning). This is a counterpart to Gadamer’s fundamental assertion that Being always exceeds knowing. Therefore, the artwork always represents only itself, and the meaning of that representation only comes to consciousness by our involvement or interaction with the work itself. Such meaning does not discover or refer to a separate, determined concept or idea, of which the work of art is a representation.

²³ Davey (2016) tried to demonstrate that arts should not be classified according to visual aspects alone.

²⁴ Davey (2016) writes “When Gadamer speaks of being attentive to what an artwork says, of discerning its enigmatic quality and of becoming aware of its speculative resonances, he is indeed speaking in a hermeneutical idiom, but this is most clearly not a case of Gadamer submitting aesthetic experience to an externally derived theory.” (<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/gadamer-aesthetics>)

An interesting entry point into Gadamer's conception of play can be seen through the idea of festival. Like Heidegger, Gadamer was drawn to the phenomenon of the festival. Similarly, Gadamer's exploration of this phenomenon helps us understand the role of mimesis, of improvisation, as well as the truth value of our historical existence. Through Gadamer's analysis of the festival, we can also see what is meant by the complicated interplay between objective knowledge and subjective experience within art.

A festival exists only in being celebrated. This is not to say that it is of a subjective character and has its being only in the subjectivity of those celebrating it. Rather, the festival is celebrated because it is there. The same is true of drama: it must be presented for the spectator, and yet its being is by no means just the point of intersection of the spectators' experience. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 121)

The truth of artistic experience is found only in the playful engagement of the artistic work. A festival is unique in that it is grounded in a historical remembrance, but its historical connection is secondary to its essence as a celebration as well as an artistic experience (p. 121). A festival changes each time it is performed, but it is designed to do so, as the nature of the festival is to be celebrated (p. 121). This provides a helpful lens through which to return to the metaphor of jazz music, discussed earlier. As a way to better understand Gadamer's theory of play, Gadamer's hermeneutical approach is useful for understanding the musical process as he allowed for the dialogic consideration of music, such as the cultural and historical moment in which the music was composed, performed, and/or improvised. An 'original' work of jazz was created, or co-authored, in a particular temporal moment—where it was performed, who it was performed by, and which cultural and social influences are therein. This same work can be re-interpreted, performed, and experienced—and when doing so, this work lives again (as with jazz festivals). However, we might observe that when performed again, it is no longer entirely improvisational, but rather is mimetic. Even so, it is re-interpreted by the new performers and the audience.

When experiencing a work of music, even one that is experimental or improvisational, our preconceptions have much influence on how we interpret and understand knowledge received from a musical experience. The appropriation, interpretation, and understanding of meaning associated with jazz are, therefore, susceptible to various forms of social and historical constructions. Consequently, the subjective experience it generates is also different. According to Ramshaw (2005), interpretation and understanding are not static destinations. Instead, they are highly specific to the context—so much so that when the context changes, the meaning changes.²⁵

We might rightly observe that this movement, from an improvisational act to a song (or work of art or festival)—where the act can now be repeated, renewed, and re-interpreted—gives it a different meaning. In a way, this is an illustration of the movement or transformation of *paidia* into art, as “Gadamer claims that play comes into its truth only as art. Art is the consummation of play, in which play is transformed into what Gadamer calls ‘structure’” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 110). Gadamer further explained that “this gives what we called transformation into structure its full meaning. The transformation is a transformation into the truth” (p. 112).

5.3.3 Dewey, Gadamer, and Aesthetics as Game Play

Gadamer also understood the generative tension arising out of *ludus* and *paidia*. He claimed that while human play intends to be deliberative and purposive, non-purposive reason is operational in play. Humans need a certain amount of freedom to submit to the sphere of the game, along with its rules and prescriptions. There is freedom, both in the decision to enter the sphere of play and in the choice of games. The deliberateness of human play, therefore, means

²⁵ “The work of Art has its true being as an object that can be experienced and changes the subject that experiences it. Play (spiel) reveals the ontological structure of art. For Gadamer, the structure of play is integral to his understanding of philosophical dialogue, phronesis, aesthetics and truth in artistic expression, and the hermeneutic circle” (Malpas, 2018).

that play is never entirely frivolous. If there are goals in particular that humans can identify as their goals in play, they originate not in them but in the game itself. “In case of the game...fulfilling the task does not point to any purposive context” (Gadamer, 1994, p. 112).

So, what might Dewey and Gadamer think about assessment culture driving play out of schools? In her essay “The Juggernaut of Tradition,” O’Neill (2005) wrote: “Counterbalancing claims by scholars like E. D. Hirsch who argued for objectivity in interpretation since the 1960s, Gadamer argues for the legitimacy of a more flexible, expansive interpretive space as a logical and ethical necessity...” (p. 147). Interestingly, E. D. Hirsch, the influential educational theorist whose work undergirded assessment and accountability culture in 20th century education reform, was highly critical of Gadamer’s philosophy of play and hermeneutics, arguing instead for a traditionalist approach to interpretation.

In “A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening,” Jim Garrison (1996) placed Gadamer’s “hermeneutic listening” at the pragmatic heart of educational philosophy by connecting it to Dewey’s definitions of freedom and democracy. Deborah Kerdeman (2009) more explicitly connected Gadamer’s hermeneutics to education, identifying four ways in which his conception of understanding can be useful for educators. Gadamer’s “call” seems in many ways to be ideally suited as a framework for teaching philosophy of education based on “conversations” with exemplary philosophers. Encouraging “conversations” with influential thinkers in the philosophical tradition is one way of making philosophy of education accessible, perhaps even welcoming, to a wide range of students. Both Gadamer and Dewey aimed to contextualize aesthetic experience. However, Dewey’s and Gadamer’s views differed in that Dewey considered any experience as always being already transactional, while Gadamer considered aesthetic experience as being hermeneutic at the core; for Gadamer, the experience of a work of art is

literally the working of art over the participant. Gadamer's hermeneutical approach incorporates consideration of all kinds of influence, including historical, cultural, linguistic, among others.²⁶ For Dewey, artistic experience is not simply about the communication of content from a creator or author to a recipient or reader; rather, it "is the process of creating participation" in which author and reader alike forge new meanings and possibilities (Dewey, 1934, p. 253).

Gadamer (1989) also emphasized this idea of the art object bringing some new truth to the experiencing spectator-participant. He referred to this as "being there present" (*Dabeisein*) (p. 121). In this process, the truth woven into a work of art from the past persists into the present moment in which the work of art is experienced. For Gadamer, this is best understood in terms of play. Dewey (1934) also framed this phenomenon of artistic experience in playful terms that resonate with Gadamer's philosophy on play—"a pond moving in ripples, forked lightning and the waving of branches in the wind" (p. 159). When the artistic experience is understood as play, it is no longer bound to any physical, historically produced object. Play and art, and the play of art, is something alive and enacted across and through generations. A work of art, which as Dewey might note means the production of art (but not necessarily the labor of it), is therefore "played" in a sense. Moreover, when it is played, it is no longer remote or past, but rather alive, immediate, and contemporaneous. The work of art's influences lives through it, which the spectator engages as much as he does the artist, and the work also retains "what threatens to pass away" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 47). The artwork has an autonomy that transcends time and invites us all to participate (Doebler, 2012), and so a work of art is "an extension of the power of rites and ceremonies to unite men, through a shared celebration, to all incidents and scenes of life" (Dewey, 1934, p. 275).

²⁶ The role of play '*spiel*' featured importantly in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, providing a "basis for Gadamer's account of the experience both of art and understanding" (Malpas, 2018).

Gadamer did not treat the question of play in the traditional analytic way of modern philosophy. His discourse on play did not concern itself with aesthetic pleasures, which have remained the mainstay of many of his contemporaries. Instead, his theory of game or play was rooted deeply in the phenomenological tradition in which he attempted to locate the place of play in the human perception of the world. Gadamer's central doctrine was termed "aesthetic non-differentiation" by Pizer (1989), who located Gadamer's theory of play as the middle ground between the two versions of aesthetic consciousness in the works of Schiller and Lukacs. Gadamer claimed that in trying to understand the game, or a work of art, it cannot be simply reduced to rules or concepts. Therefore, a different aesthetic structure must be applied to play so that an interactive view of both game and play can be ascertained.

Just as the objective understanding of art is located in the experience of the work and not in the work itself, "play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 103). Gadamer (2004) distinguished between play and the behavior of the player, with the latter belonging to the "other kinds of subjective behavior" (p. 103). Since the player does not "intend this relation to seriousness" and "The mode of being of play does not allow the player to behave toward play as if toward an object," we cannot define "the nature of play itself," when we look for it in the player's "subjective reflection" (p. 103). This essence of play is what objectively informs our subjective pleasure. In the same way *being* reaches representation through *Dasein* for Heidegger, Gadamer (1989) maintained that

Play proper also exists when the thematic horizon is not limited by any being-for-itself of subjectivity, and where there are no subjects who are behaving "play-fully". The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players. (p. 103)

Gadamer's exploration of the concept of the play finds a precedent in Schiller's own attempts at defining aesthetics and aesthetic education. Like Schiller, Gadamer argued that aesthetic perception is not only in the internal. Rather, for Gadamer, this is found in (and affected by) the relationship between the individual and the time and society in which they live (Breken, 2010). However, unlike Schiller, Gadamer rejected a purely subjectivist notion of play.²⁷ In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1994) approaches play in the philosophical context, with the overarching goal of excavating objective meaning in it. This was a radical departure from Schiller's emphasis on the subjectivity of experiences associated with play. According to Gadamer (1960), play is not the orientation or the state of mind, but instead it is the "mode of being of the work of art itself"²⁸ (p. 102). This aspect of Gadamer's aesthetic philosophy could be seen as the real aspect of 'play,' and I would argue this conception embodies an improvisational accent closer to Plato's *paidia*. In keeping with his existential ethos, Gadamer further claimed that play is independent of the consciousness of those at play, stating that "the savage himself knows no conceptual distinctions between being and playing" (p. 104).²⁹

Openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is. This point shows the importance of defining play as a process that takes place "in between." We have seen that play does not have its being in the player's consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him. This is all the more the case where the game is itself "intended" as such a reality—for instance, the play which appears as presentation for an audience. Even a play remains a game—i.e., it has the structure of a game, which is that of a closed world. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 109)

²⁷ "This is why Gadamer says, in opposition to the subjectivist notion of play on the part of someone like Schiller (who posits the foundation of play as being in the human subject), that it is more a case of the players being played by the game than the reverse (1982: 95)" (Olivier, 2005).

²⁸ "When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 102).

²⁹ This is Gadamer referencing Huizinga.

Gadamer's insistence on the relationship between the community and the individual is also crucial to his philosophical hermeneutics and his theory of play. He asserted that any shift in the way individuals relate to their society affects the overall aesthetic perception.³⁰ Play becomes a common bond for artists/players and spectators/observers alike. This is an important tenet of Gadamer's philosophy on play. In his essay "The Relevance of the Beautiful," Gadamer claimed that

So long as art occupied a legitimate place in the world, it was clearly able to affect an integration between community, society, and the Church on the one hand and the self-understanding of the creative artist on the other. Our problem, however, is precisely the fact that this self-evident integration, and the universally shared understanding of the artist's role that accompanies it, no longer exists. (p. 7)

Gadamer's definition of play pertains in part to mental state and a playful orientation, as well as an immersion in the present moment. Gadamer regarded play as a communicative act in which there are no passive participants. Therefore, even someone experiencing art from a distance is also likely to be a participant in the art they are viewing. For instance, when people watch a sporting event, they are not removed from the sporting experience. Consequently, they are not passive viewers but instead are active participants in the sporting event.³¹ This is because Gadamer's understanding of play is that the appreciation of play is an active event, "an act or a being in-play with the work, an act that one's consciousness can surrender to and participate in" (Breken, 2010). The play takes primacy over individual consciousness because players are instrumental to the way play comes into being. Participation in the play itself is not considered an

³⁰ In Gadamer's view, it would appear that a subject's play is ideally an interplay with its context. That is, his famous excursus on "play" is strategically located in *Truth and Method* so as to develop phenomenological verification of the same conception of primary conception as Dewey (Jeannot, 2001).

³¹ Gadamer (1986), calling upon play's original connotation as 'dance,' defined the activity or movement of play as a to-and-fro movement that "is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end" (p. 104).

individual endeavor because, according to Gadamer, play takes both the player and the spectator out of themselves and connects them to a larger community, a larger whole:

The play itself is the whole, comprising players and spectators. In fact, it is experienced properly by, and presents itself (as it is “meant”) to, one who is not acting in the play but watching it. In him the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality. For the players this means that they do not simply fulfill their roles as in any game—rather, they play their roles, they represent them for the audience. The way they participate in the game is no longer determined by the fact that they are completely absorbed in it, but by the fact that they play their role in relation and regard to the whole of the play, in which not they but the audience is to become absorbed. A complete change takes place when play as such becomes a play. It puts the spectator in the place of the player. He—and not the player—is the person for and in whom the play is played. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 110)

What is most important in Gadamer’s discourse on play is his ontological grounding of subjectivity in the experience of play. Here is where Gadamer differed from Schiller the most. While Gadamer appreciated Schiller’s notion of play as the contemplation of beauty, he claimed that to approach play solely within the context of the subjective responses to play or the player’s intentionality may provide only an incomplete experience. Instead, he focused his discourse on the philosophical emphasis on those experiences that shape subjectivity. He termed this as “substance,” which he understood as something that supports all, despite remaining far away from reflective consciousness (Gadamer, 1986). Therefore, while Gadamer gave primacy to art’s immediate effects, he also examined the ontological foundations of play experience. These claims are in line with the immediacy of art’s impacts while also allowing his theory of play to be contemporary.

Gadamer’s aesthetics stand in contrast to many other aesthetic philosophers. Kant, for instance, had been an extremely influential thinker of his time and had influenced a long line of German thinkers after him. Unlike Kant, Gadamer drew a distinction between the aesthetics of taste and genius. Kant saw aesthetic taste as a way to facilitate the play of one’s mental prowess by intensifying the relationship between imagination and understanding. One might ask, as

Gadamer (1986) does, the nature of “this truth that is encountered in the beautiful and can come to be shared?” Gadamer’s answer (1986) is telling and important, as he explains that this truth is “the sort of truth or universality to which we apply the conceptual universality of the understanding. Despite this, the truth that we encounter in the experience of the beautiful does unambiguously make a claim to more than merely subjective validity. Otherwise, it would have no binding truth for us” (p. 18). Gadamer agreed that the Kantian concept of taste generates a universal agreement, but also stated that this agreement is not through a conceptual argument but through the development of a discerning faculty – “It is a free play of imagination and understanding.” (Gadamer, 1989, p.36) For Gadamer, this meant that Kant gave primacy to taste, resulting in an unwitting state of disinterested delight. This is the same notion expounded by Schiller, to which Gadamer has raised serious objections, as discussed above. Gadamer felt that Kantian aesthetic philosophy opposed the natural beauty of taste in favor of the beauty of art creation. In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer expounded further on the relation of taste to genius, and much of it has been read as a reflection of the inherent ambiguity in Kant’s own discussion on the issue. Clearly, Gadamer felt that Kant’s explanation of the philosophy of play was flawed because its basis itself was inadequate as Kant did not consider the subjectivity of aesthetics, though he did consider this in his attempt to explain how subjective taste could be the basis of objective judgment.³²

Gadamer provided an interactive understanding of art, aesthetics, and play, compelling the application of a different aesthetic structure to play and aesthetic experience. Ultimately, Gadamer’s notion of play is that it cannot be reduced to its intentions, conventions, or materiality. For Gadamer, the relationship among play, players, and spectators is so strong that the player and

³² “Despite this, the kind of truth that we encounter in the experience of the beautiful does unambiguously make a claim to more than subjective validity” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 18).

the spectators not only participate actively in the play but are also simultaneously transformed by it. For him, the act of play is central to the relationship between an individual and society because it is a play that draws players, spectators, equipment, rules, intentions, and outcomes into a singular event. Just as the work of art has “its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it,” the true essence of play is found in this exchange.

Gadamer (1989) in *Truth and Method* explained the transformation:

I call this change, in which human play comes to its true consummation in being art, transformation into structure. Only through this change does play achieve ideality, so that it can be intended and understood as play. Only now does it emerge as detached from the representing activity of the players and consist in the pure appearance (Erscheinung) of what they are playing. As such, the play—even the unforeseen elements of improvisation—is in principle repeatable and hence permanent. It has the character of a work, of an *ergon* and not only of *energeia*. In this sense I call it a structure (Gebilde). (p. 110)

5.3.4 Gadamer and Aristotle

Not only were Plato and Schiller influential, but Gadamer’s encounters with Aristotle’s theories and views on aesthetics are also notable and significant. Gadamer’s hermeneutics are widely influential, especially since they are recognized to be in the Aristotelian and Platonic tradition. Aristotle’s concept of *praxis* is central to Gadamer’s hermeneutics; as both the centrality of dialogue and its commitment to furthering inclusiveness and unity, he also affirmed that *praxis* is the initiation point of all philosophy. Therefore, *praxis* is also a starting point to dialogue.³³

One of the most well-acknowledged characteristics of Gadamer’s philosophy on aesthetics is its practicality through time. Aristotle’s practical philosophy forms the basis of this advantage. Gadamer, like Aristotle, valued *phronesis*: a type of wisdom relevant to practical

³³ Barthold (n.d.) claimed with regards to Gadamer’s interest in Aristotle’s notion of *praxis*, that “We must not allow knowing to remain only on the conceptual (that is, distanced and theoretical) level; we must remember that knowing emerges from our practical quest for meaning and significance” (<https://iep.utm.edu/gadamer/>).

action, which implies both good judgment and excellence of character. Gadamer emphasized not only practical philosophy but the way in which knowledge derived from it can be applied towards performing the right actions, based on a universal knowledge.³⁴ Gadamer also proposed his own rules for practical philosophy; that phronesis is not scientific knowledge; it is impossible to learn and therefore forget; it has a capacity of combining the knowledge of ends with that of means; and that practical philosophy presupposes a specific kind of experience.

In his *Nichomachian Ethics*, Aristotle claimed that certain habits or states are necessary for the soul to possess truth by virtue of denial or affirmation. He identified five states: art, knowledge, practical wisdom, intellect, and philosophical wisdom. Gadamer not only correctly interpreted them as the habits that underscore the forms of true knowledge, but also recognized that the interpretation of these habits must be separated into practical and theoretical knowledge so that they can lend to the interpretation of the episteme (Berti, 2000). There is a significant convergence between the ideas propounded by Aristotle and Gadamer regarding the nature and value of episteme. Aristotle first observed in his *Nichomachian Ethics* that episteme concerns itself with things that cannot be otherwise, and therefore episteme must lend itself to the theoretical part of the reason. This understanding of episteme is perhaps most notable in Aristotle's admission that while politics is not demonstrative like mathematics or other scientific disciplines, it can still be demonstrative for the most part and, therefore, it can be an episteme. Gadamer endorsed this view by identifying all practical knowledge with the concept of phronesis, which forms the basis of his Platonic tendency to keep dialogue at the center. Therefore, both Aristotle and Gadamer look at wisdom with the affirmation that it is a combination of intellect

³⁴ This is the closest that Gadamer came to developing his system of ethics. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1960) specifically pointed out that "hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical nor moral knowledge" (p. 315).

and episteme that can render the knowledge of principles and their outcomes. Aristotle also clearly affirmed the primacy of wisdom in his works, and this is endorsed repeatedly by Gadamer, first in his hermeneutics and then in his theory of aesthetics.

5.3.5 Gadamer and Platonic Tradition

In the *Republic*, Plato discussed serious play in terms of being the best instructional method, which must be practiced both freely and deliberately. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Greek etymology of play revolves around a root word that is also used to construct other words like “education, culture, and children.”³⁵ This would logically explain the importance of play within Platonic tradition, in which play is considered an essential part of the education or cultivation of a citizen. Plato advocated a form of motivated play which could educate the free citizens so they can contribute to a just society (Barrow, 2011). Plato’s commitment to his view on the importance of play can best be seen in his own chosen method of discourse, where he used many playful techniques including banter, allegories, irony, and even puns. Plato even viewed the construction of the polis as a form of play, claiming that the Socratic ideal of the polis must not be taken too seriously.

Plato saw the freedom of the citizens within the structure and context of their relationship to the polis, a claim which is very similar to Gadamer’s claim regarding the subjectivity of the play over the player on the playing field. For Gadamer (1989), it is the nature of the game, as well as the rules and regulations, which provide the structures for which the to-and-fro movement of the players can improvise and fill.

The reason for this is that the to-and-fro movement that constitutes the game is patterned in various ways. The particular nature of a game lies in the rules and regulations that prescribe the way the field of the game is filled.... The playing field on which the game is played is, as it were, set by the nature of the game itself and is defined far more by the structure that determines the movement of the game from within than by what it comes

³⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paideia>

up against—i.e., the boundaries of the open space—limiting movement from without.
(p. 107)

Similarly, the hermeneutic process of engaging a hermeneutical text works the same way and has the same relationship as a player to a game. It should be no surprise that Gadamer even used Platonic dialogues to argue this point.

The Platonic tradition views dialectic as inseparable from dialogue, which is evident in Gadamer's works.³⁶ These components interact with each other to create a good dialogue. Gadamer believed that good dialogue is akin to engaging in play, and participants can get so caught up in connection with each other that they lose themselves. Gadamer (1989) explained that this loss of self emphasizes the active role of the spectator in the 'game' of discourse, and likens it to a kind of ecstatic (being outside oneself) experience:

In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter at hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment. (p. 122)

It is the play of the dialogue that guides the actions of the participants. It ought not to be their desire to "win" the argument, but rather the flow and structure of the dialogue emerge as a result of the interplay of the choices made by the participants within the parameters of a restricted range of possibilities. This is as true with jazz and drama as it is with dialogue. The rules of the 'game' matter to the extent that the players themselves buy in, therefore allowing participation in the sense of subordinating oneself to the larger reality of the game: "Here the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player is fundamentally acknowledged" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 105). It is because play demands this subordination to the larger order of the game (or dialogue, or art)

³⁶ "Barthold (n.d.) identifies four main components of dialogue in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics—subject matter, goodwill, willingness to offer reasons and justifications for one's views and an acknowledgement of the limitations of one's knowledge. These components interact with each other to create a good dialogue" (<https://iep.utm.edu/gadamer/>)

that Gadamer felt it is important for the players to take the game seriously and really try to achieve the goals which the game provides them.³⁷

When engaged in a dialogue or discourse, each participant engages within the confines of certain parameters (ideas, civility, etc.). However, within those parameters, they are free to play with ideas within the context of the conversation and to allow the discourse to play with them. This process opens up the possibility for participants to achieve insights as they engage, in common, with the topic. In this way, Gadamer (1989) explained, a dialogue has the potential to become transformed into a communion: “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (p. 371).

It is unsuccessful, then, if we are not transformed. Maintaining a playful disposition allows us to engage fully and be transformed during this interaction. The intentionality of being absorbed and absorbing others into something has to exist for this transformation to occur. Participating means to become absorbed on both sides. In a pedagogical setting, this engagement is vital as the teacher acts as the participant (actor) seeking to engage students (audience), so that both are absorbed in the exchange, where the class or lesson is the play. Within these parameters, there must also be a non-compulsory, non-productive, unpredictable element for this transformation to occur; there must be some room for doubt (Caillois, 1961), as we saw in Chapter 1. Gadamer also discussed the importance of language for human existence and engaged

³⁷ “The self-presentation of human play depends on the player’s conduct being tied to the make-believe goals of the game, but the ‘meaning’ of these does not in fact depend on their being achieved. Rather, in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact playing oneself out. The self-presentation of the game involves the player’s achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing—that is, presenting—something. Only because play is always presentation is human play able to make representation itself the task of the game” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 105).

in a discussion of linguistic expression as a mode of meaning-creation. Language may not be a direct mirror to truth, but it makes it visible (Gadamer, 1989, p. 474)

Gadamer's philosophy on play was certainly heavily influenced by Plato, and he overtly recognized Plato's endorsement of play in *Truth and Method*, but at the same time, he also argued that human thinking cannot always be captured in language and rejected the simplification of dualisms in Platonic philosophy. Instead, Gadamer opted for the aforementioned emphasis on practical existence embraced by Heidegger. According to Gadamer (1960), language is that part of the being that can be understood (p. 105). Gadamer also framed his discussion of language and linguistic interpretation with respect to play: "we are so accustomed to relating phenomena such as playing to the sphere of subjectivity and the ways it acts that we remain closed to these indications from the spirit of language" (p. 77).³⁸ Additionally, in Gadamer's exploration of language, he made clear that he conceived of play as presentational because he felt that language is inadequate in making presentations of the self, as "linguistic Being transcends linguistic consciousness"³⁹ (Davey, 2016).

5.3.6 Gadamer's Philosophy of Play (*Paidia*) in Education

Within Gadamer's framework, a game that does not transform the player falls short of being a real game. A performance or work of art that does not captivate and meet the active

³⁸ In the full passage, Gadamer (1989) also highlighted his position on the subjectivity of the play working over the player:

This linguistic observation seems to me an indirect indication that play is not to be understood as something a person does. As far as language is concerned, the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of an individual who, among other activities, also plays but is instead the play itself. But we are so accustomed to relating phenomena such as playing to the sphere of subjectivity and the ways it acts that we remain closed to these indications from the spirit of language.... (p. 77)

³⁹ According to Davey (2016),

Accordingly, language is not the representation (mimesis) of a set of pre-given meanings but a 'coming to language' of a constant reserve of meanings (Palmer 2001, 67). The finitude of linguistic expression is such that no utterance can be complete.... 'The only thing that constitutes language...is that one word leads to another, each word is, so to speak, summoned, and on its side holds open the further progress of speaking' (Palmer 2001, 67). No meaning can be completely revealed. (p. 67)

attention (for Gadamer, a kind of participation) of the audience falls short of being a *true* dramatic performance and play. What can this tell us about education—not just arts education, but education broadly speaking? If a class does not incorporate transformative interactions, it cannot claim to be a real education; it falls short. Simply put, without *paidia*, we cannot have *paideia*.

The intentionality of being absorbed and absorbing others into something greater has to exist for education, whether it is within the context of schooling or one's own self-formation, to be effective. It is important to return to Gadamer's exploration of his philosophical hermeneutics and the example of the Platonic dialogue. It is possible for someone far removed from Plato's time and culture to allow the Platonic dialogues to absorb and transform them, as long as they are willing to do the work (or play) of engaging with the text hermeneutically. Within the context of contemporary schooling, this idea of being absorbed in what cognitive psychologists might now refer to as 'flow' is similarly relevant. If, as a teacher, one is just speaking to a disengaged audience, the experience falls short (at least in that moment) because it fails to be transformative. Even delivering a lecture could function in a way similar to a play, if certain conditions are met: where the teacher is the 'player' and the student is the 'spectator-participant.' Just as a player's participation in a play is to be part of the whole play and absorb the audience, a teacher must engage and absorb students into something greater than the material or performance. Only then can a transformative change take place. As Gadamer explained, this complete change is what makes play a play. The spectator and player roles are reversed, resulting in an immersive experience for both with the intention of effecting a change in the spectator. In the same way, a class is taught for the students with the intention of engagement on the part of the teacher. A clear

picture of the necessity of *paidia* in *paideia* emerges when we read Gadamer (2013) with this correlation in mind:

This does not mean that the player is not able to experience the significance of the whole in which he plays his representing role. The spectator has only methodological precedence: it becomes apparent that the play bears within itself a meaning to be understood and that can therefore be detached from the behavior of the player. Basically, the difference between the player and the spectator is here superseded. The requirement that the play itself be intended in its meaningfulness is the same for both. (p. 110)

If we substitute the teacher for the player and the student for the spectator, we can easily see the classroom lesson as a performative, engaging piece, similar to a dramatic play. It is a work intended to transform. It is in the transformation that a class, as such, emerges.

5.4 Significance

Heidegger believed that human beings could only find meaning in their lives at the individual level so as to regain the possibility of undertaking history as a subject and lived experience once again. In the chance that this is possible, then it makes it worthy of our time and effort. This line of thought is crucial in today's fast-paced and hyper-modern age, where an ethic of busyness and a culture of distraction and immediate gratification—exacerbated by modern technology—push us further away from the possibility of a shared experience, of a shared history and potential also a shared future, as our collective humanity would be obscured by the disparate narratives and information bubbles (such as today's information echo chambers). In order to offer a meaningful history to future generations, Heidegger believed that the best way to get back on track is through a playful orientation where meaningful engagement can be generated. Playfulness opens up possibilities that allow for otherwise hidden (and sometimes difficult) truths to disclose themselves.

Gadamer, influenced and informed by Heidegger, Schiller and Plato, advanced the importance of a serious play in understanding and grappling with our lived experience. Overall,

Gadamer's construction of hermeneutics involved a unique approach towards achieving a clear understanding which involves an emphasis on the concept of play. Within this approach, Gadamer was able to negate the dispassionate attachment to beauty and its processes, as held by supporters of the Hegelian thought. Instead, he rooted himself in the Platonic approach to hermeneutics and used his mentor Heidegger's arguments to flesh out his own claim of aesthetics and play. This contribution is critical in keeping hermeneutics contemporary and lends authority to the notion that play is an integral component of education.

Furthermore, playfulness allows for opening up a fluidity of possibilities. Specifically, Gadamer stressed the primacy of play in terms of the *play-er's* consciousness by exploring the connections and distinction between the subjectivities of the experience of play and the objective criteria that result in such subjectivity. Additionally, Gadamer asserted that play is medial and, as such, expresses the limitless possibilities of experience revealed through play and removes any delimitations from the playing field, or rather the creative expression chosen by the player. Gadamer's contributions were influential in understanding how play contributes to our experience and understanding of the world.

Gadamer's work has also found a new relevance in respect to the contemporary trend of gamification in technology and education. Gadamer framed much of his philosophy of play around gameplay, which is meaningfully distinct from gamification. For Gadamer, playing a game requires a voluntary submission to the Gameworld by the players, and a freedom to improvise and interact within the structures and parameters of the game, and this implies an element of autonomy that gamification fundamentally undermines. In the next chapter, I will discuss why the adulteration of play and gameplay through gamification is harmful.

Gadamer and Heidegger are not only notable for their critiques, but also for preserving this emphasis on the concept of play. But while influential, it was the more positivist critiques and materialist versions of the Enlightenment that influenced the trajectory of 20th century schooling. In the following chapter, I return to some of the insights I have spoken of in this and previous chapters and look at how *paidia*, with the contemporary improvisation as a contemporary framework, might provide a guide for our current era.

Chapter 6: Emergent Education and the Information Age

In the previous chapters, we looked at the discussions of *paidia* and serious play in Plato, Kant, Schiller, Heidegger, and Gadamer. In this chapter, I would like to argue that this history is not only relevant for reflecting on the impoverished educational paradigm we have today, but it also points the way towards a new paradigm, one that is informed by Plato's formative conceptions of education and justice. This chapter focuses on addressing the ways these insights inform and influence our thinking on issues of equity, social justice, and educational reform.

6.1 Can We Reimagine a Better Reimagining?

I have argued that the notion of *paidia* can be understood in terms of improvisation and demonstrated that for Plato, Schiller, Gadamer, and others, this concept framed the practice of philosophy. For our current moment, I believe it is fruitful to reflect on this and place it in conversation with the dominant educational paradigm of today. Perhaps this interrogation will also help us understand how *paidia* and improvisation might guide a reimagining of schooling in the 21st century—one that reconciles with a broader conception of education. In this spirit, I would like to return to Platonic educational philosophy and explore how a reimagined paradigm for schooling may not be so new after all.

One topic that has fascinated me throughout my research and teaching has been the phenomenon of emergent educational communities of the digital commons. These communities seem to spring up all the time, often seemingly out of nowhere in a multitude of forms and serving a multitude of interests, offering lessons and insights, and presenting examples of successes and failures. In looking to learn from emergent communities, we must also understand and account for the tensions and pitfalls that such educational communities face as they grow, evolve, and expand while also (attempting) to adhere to their educational and cultural missions. I

argue that certain successful emergent communities are formative, and therefore insights into formative justice with respect to emergent education can bear fruit for schools and schooling.

What are the elements of a formative and *just* conception of schooling? What does it look like for an education in the 21st century to attend to the ‘whole person’? What would the role of the teacher be in this context? In this chapter, I will explore how the practice of improvisation, informed by the concept of *paidia*, can provide a guide for a formative conception of emergent education and potentially influence the trajectory of 21st century, post-pandemic education reform.

6.1.1 Revisiting the Failures of Our Current Assessment-Based Education System

In Chapter 2, I examined some of the ways that our current assessment-based model of schooling falls short. In many cases, assessment-based education fails to prioritize the learning of students. The assessment-based model also defines and evaluates teacher performance based on students’ standardized test scores, creating an unfortunate feedback loop and echo chamber that limit the pedagogical possibilities within and outside the classroom. A growing number of voices in educational philosophy and policy have argued that the current assessment-based education system places more emphasis on accountability (as defined by standardized test scores) at the expense of well-being, learning, and intellectual and emotional growth. Perhaps no one has been more outspoken on this issue than Diane Ravitch, an educational theorist and historian who was Assistant Secretary of Education under President George H. W. Bush. She was also a member of the National Assessment Governing Board and a vocal advocate of the assessment and accountability movement, which was punctuated by her vocal support for the influential *No Child Left Behind* Act that many saw as codifying the aims of the assessment and accountability movement into federal law. Despite spending years in an influential position advancing

assessment culture, however, Ravitch kept an open mind. Rather than allowing ideology to blind her to reality, Ravitch looked carefully at the harmful downstream consequences of the movement she helped advance and abruptly changed course, inevitably becoming one of its fiercest detractors. In a 2010 Op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal*, Ravitch argued against high-stakes testing and tying teacher performance to standardized test results.¹ In her book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, released in the same year, Ravitch (2010) called on the United States to reverse course on compulsory standards-based education reform that she argued narrowed curriculum, undermined teachers, and degraded the intellectual and creative capacity of students. Despite the work of Ravitch and others, the educational establishment doubled down on the assessment and accountability movement with Race to The Top at the federal level, the Common Core Standards Movement at the state level, and EdTPA for teachers. As of this writing, the standards-based assessment and accountability movement remains the dominant paradigm in contemporary education reform. As Ravitch pointed out, there were (and are) legitimate and good faith arguments in favor of this paradigm—arguments I became acquainted with while working as the Teacher Education Coordinator for the Department of Arts & Humanities, where my primary responsibility was to study and helped pilot the Department’s adoption of EdTPA. However, these arguments had fundamental flaws and blind spots, and the results have been overwhelmingly negative (Ravitch, 2010).

The primary conceit which undergirds the aforementioned policies was essentially that in order to improve school and teacher quality, as well as improve student performance, and eliminate disparities in educational outcomes, there needed to be a mechanism to measure student

¹ “I no longer believe that either approach will produce the quantum improvement in American education that we all hope for” (Ravitch, *Why I Changed My Mind About School Reform*, see <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704869304575109443305343962>).

learning adequately (which would then give insights into which teachers were effective). As the old adage (often inaccurately attributed to either Peter Drucker or W. Edwards Deming [Measurement myopia, 2013]) goes, one cannot manage what one cannot measure. However, the standardized tests designed to measure student learning (or student capacity, for that matter) have never been able to do so. Instead, these assessments simply focus on the progress of tracked assessment data which provide little to no actual real insight into actual learning, capacity, or development. This creates the now well-established and documented cycle where teachers are pressured to teach to the test to demonstrate student ‘aptitude,’ which in turn reflects teacher and school quality (with the very real consequences of employment, salary, and school funding at stake). Thus, students are only taught to prioritize the material that will be assessed, and it is only that material that is assessed.

Rather than an assessment measuring learning, the learning is undermined in favor of assessment, with the threat of less funding and even school closures as a potential result. When putting so much emphasis on flawed and unreliable assessments and tying this to funding, we risk losing sight of what education ought to do in the first place. In contrast to our contemporary system, Plato anticipated the pitfalls of the assessment-driven model of education. No one—neither the individual nor their parents, nor anyone else—understands the future capacities of children (McClintock, 2016, p. 11).

6.1.2 Justice, Equality, and Schooling

In light of this, we can see how a Platonic critique of the contemporary education system would locate as a central concern the goal of treating schooling and education (broadly conflated) as a distributable good, and not a formative one. In the “Regulative Principle,” educational philosopher and historian Robert McClintock (2016) explained that if an individual perceives

something as a distributive good, that person is likely to be primarily concerned with how and whether to acquire it. However, in a situation where the individual or group thinks about the item as a formative resource, they will reflect on its future applications as well as the importance they can or cannot encounter in their viewpoint (p. 16). Thus, when more emphasis is placed on who gets what, in what shape, and at what cost, it is largely viewed as a distributive benefit (p. 16). The education system should adapt individuals to their aptitude, which the current assessment-based education system cannot do.

Furthermore, individuals tend to participate in collective cultural and educational projects for the sake of the projects, as opposed to being motivated to do them for self-cultivation and self-development as a person (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016). In *Emergent Pedagogy*, the authors noted, “The satisfying paradox of the emergent approach is that it facilitates both independent and collaborative thinking, teaching students to initiate and sustain their own learning through interactions with others who enrich and stimulate their learning environment.” I provide one example in the footnote below and will discuss more examples of this phenomenon later.²

Principles of distributive justice have gradually rationalized access to healthcare, education, and various other public programs, as advantages and expenses are shared in line with the principle of equality. Debates about unequal school funding have raged for decades, and the

² In *Emergent Pedagogy* (2007), Blank, Cassidy, Dalke & Grobstein explore a number of case studies involving implementing emergent pedagogies in the classroom:

“We provided the opportunity for participants to play with computer models of emergent systems so that they could see how they worked and explore themselves how they could be used as part of a curriculum to facilitate discovery of the properties of emergent systems...The system we used is the most recent descendant of a long line of educational computer tools. Logo, the original of these, is a simplified programming environment for children and was designed in the 1960s by a team lead by Wally Feurzeig at MIT.... StarLogo, was specifically designed to allow children to explore ideas in emergence. In our workshop we used a more recent implementation of StarLogo, Uri Wilensky’s NetLogo. NetLogo is free for educational use (Wilensky, 1999). Since NetLogo is written in the Java programming language, it will run on most computers over the World Wide Web. NetLogo comes with many “case studies” that allow students and teachers to load a predefined model, pose questions about it, create new experiments, and make predictions about what may happen.”

disparity in school quality is one of the rationales mentioned above for the assessment and accountability movement. However, this paradigm has proven inadequate at delivering the public's access to educational resources. Unfortunately, the disparities have only grown as the cost of private and higher education has risen precipitously. We have, in part, the myth of meritocracy to blame for this, which corresponds very poorly with the current allocation means of contemporary plutocracies. That is, allocating educational resources solely based on a distributive model places an emphasis on getting access to 'quality,' narrowly defined and inaccurately assessed.

Such an account rests fundamentally on a particular understanding of human psychology, one in which people act and choose, as it were, "for the money" rather than "for the love." If this psychological model turns out to be flawed—if people are capable of or even disposed toward acting for love rather than money—a novel approach to the issue of distributed justice in education becomes necessary.³ (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 4)

But if we were to approach this problem from a formative perspective, the educational activity would respect and recognize the autonomy of the learner. In other words, if there were a possibility that would empower us to prioritize education as a way of seeking to bring fulfillment to our inner imbalance as opposed to an endeavor based on risk and investment, then formative conception of education would become not only necessary but also beneficial to learners.

People tend to strengthen their sense of motivations, capacities, and purpose when there is a reinvigoration of formative arguments for guaranteeing that everyone receives optimal education, investing in the "health, vigor and creativity of persons and the public" (McClintock, 2016, p. 21). Consideration of formative justice and, in turn, a formative conception of education imply an emphasis not on the distribution of educational goods but rather on the active formative of goods of all types (educational and public). McClintock (2016) wrote, "...to work out and

³ "McClintock's work thus demonstrates how a rehabilitation of Plato's formative conception of justice might yield pedagogical insights for our historical moment" (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 4).

strive to implement their purposeful future. That is the mission of formative justice in public life” (p. 21).

6.2 Emergent Education

Developing programs that lead to the changing needs of students in relation to the knowledge base and interests of the teacher is better served by formative justice as an instructional model.

—De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016

Because the discourse surrounding education (school) justice in the United States is framed through a solely distributive lens, all emphasis is placed on mere access to schooling as opposed to a focus on what a *just* education might (and ought to) be—humanistic education aimed at developing the whole person. In this regard, one may ask, “If the current curriculum was to be reimaged in accordance with the guiding principles of the formative conception of education, what would it look like?”

This educational paradigm’s formative outlook is best served by an adaptive, evolving, and reactive curriculum centered and attuned to the developing needs of learners in accordance with the interests and knowledge base of the teacher. Such a curriculum requires creativity, openness, communication, flexibility, and, perhaps most importantly, a playful disposition. Unlike the current education system that combines daily lessons into a “unit,” emergent education makes it possible for the students’ evolving interests to be in sync with the teacher’s knowledge base and interests. Emergent education speaks to the guiding principles of the formative conception of education as it considers the interests of the students as opposed to molding them into something they may not desire. Hence, the model denotes the teacher as a conductor (more on this later in the chapter) whose main objective is to attend to the students’ interests while guiding their formative journeys. A balance of formative and sustainable fulfillment is realized when individuals identify their formation and development as fundamental to their participation

in organizations and society (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 7). In other words, instead of being motivated by external stimuli of merits as done in the set curriculum (such as the Common Core), an emergent, adaptive curriculum—one centered on the learner—prioritizes a student’s fulfillment.

Arising from interests and centered around questions, such a model is attuned to the specific and particular needs and dynamics of each and every educational relationship. The orientation and openness of the educational movement are the critical difference that would distinguish a pedagogy served by formative justice as an instructional model. Such a program would not only empower and encourage learners to take ownership of their schooling and educational interests but would also more broadly enable them to question themselves about what their aspirations are and how to achieve them. As McClintock (2016) wrote,

Figure out what abilities they seek at this age and that; what abilities they believe they require; what they complain about yet desire, seeing a challenging and substantial challenge. Creating oneself as an involved agent, alive with life’s complexities. Model the important developmental life of others of every generation. (pp. 23-24)

As exemplified in the above quote, McClintock wrote eloquently about the aim and purpose of an instructional model based on formative justice, reviving these Platonic insights for a 21st century audience. However, the above invites further reflection: Would an emergent approach to education require a different learning modality or a different curriculum altogether? Is there anything specific in the curriculum of a contemporary K-12 English classroom that undermines the possibility of students “living with the questions”? I would argue not necessarily. It is the direction of the learning, the centering of questions guided by the interests of the learner in discourse with the teacher, that distinguishes the formative curriculum. But as Plato understood, it is not *only* that. It is a disposition of *paidia*—specifically, an orientation of serious playfulness that Plato, Schiller, Gadamer, and others associated with the very practice of

philosophy—which allows for the openness and creativity that a formative conception of education calls for.⁴

6.2.1 Educational Emergence in the Digital Commons

We might observe, by way of summing up, that the most interesting form of distance learning is occurring, not as people use the Internet to take familiar courses of instruction, but as they enter into participating in cultural work, to which they once stood as a great distance.

—McClintock, 2000

The issues of human motivation in formative justice come to the forefront with an exploration of educational emergence. In this model, “each person exerts educational effort to bringing his or her mix of aptitudes to their full employment in pursuit of sustainable fulfillment” (McClintock, 2005, p. 78). This philosophy of education seeks to empower the learner and allow for the forces of intrinsic motivation to shape and propel the course of their educational journey.⁵ This is especially evident in emergent educational communities of the digital commons. Such communities are purposefully learner-driven, where participants shape and mold their online communities while contributing to the community’s growth and the advancement of digital commons-based educational resources. When we look into open-source, decentralized, and collaborative educational communities (such as Wikipedia) we see how intrinsically motivated learning leads to formative communities of educational emergence.⁶

⁴ Bringing principles of emergence to bear on educational reform would also challenge us “to think about education not in terms of carefully pre-planned, hierarchical structures, but rather with an understanding that complex organization has a high probability of arising out of the bi-directional interactions of autonomous, somewhat randomly behaving elements. To put it differently, hierarchy is not the only conceivable form of organization in educational environments” (Blank, Cassidy, Dalke & Grobstein, 2007, “Emergent Pedagogy”).

⁵ Chris Higgins (2011) has an excellent discussion of McClintock’s formative conception of justice, or justice as an “educational concept” in the *Good Life of Teaching*. (p.38)

⁶ “In cases where intrinsic motivation leads to skills that are intrinsically valued, McClintock’s formative justice seems to capture the educational reality in respect of coming to terms with the ways in which technology is changing both the nature of education and the nature of how communities are formed” (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 6).

Another fascinating illustration of this phenomenon is the now-infamous “Reddit Place experiment.” As a phenomenon, the r/Place experiment offers fascinating insights into how humans interact, communicate, organize, and collaborate in the digital commons. r/Place was a collaborative social experiment hosted on Reddit that began on April Fool’s Day in 2017 but quickly went viral and took off as a phenomenon; it now exists in perpetuity as a kind of mural to the emergence in the digital commons. The experiment consisted simply of an online canvas hosted on the r/Place subreddit, in which registered users could edit the blank canvas by changing the color of a single pixel. There were certain limitations imposed on the users; for instance, only 16 colors could be used, and timers prevented users from placing pixels for a specific amount of time. That said, there was no limit on where a pixel could be placed, so there was no stopping any pixel from being changed back by another user. Given the unpredictability of what would be done, the creators did not know what to expect.⁷

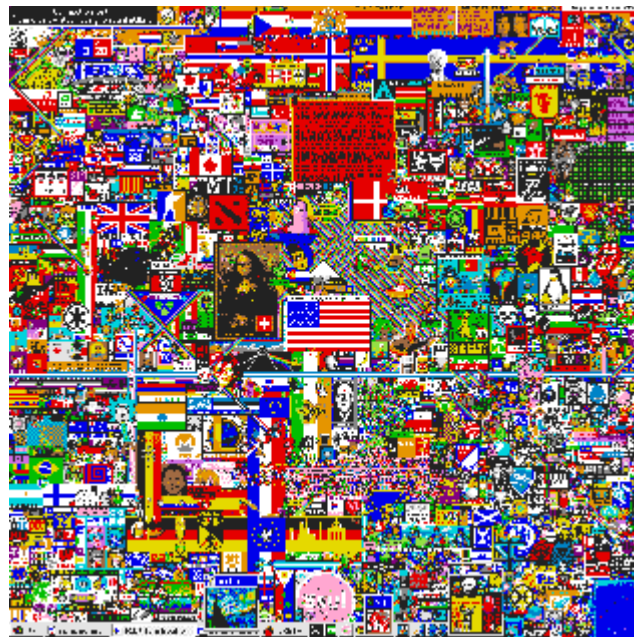
What began to form, in real time, was a spontaneous illustration of how digital communities form, collaborate, and create; the project was ended by Reddit administrators on April 3rd, about 3 days after its inception. Early on, users quickly realized that attempts for image creation were frustrating and futile, as disruptors and destroyers (other anonymous users) could quickly undo or undermine progress, and competing visions canceled each other out in a chaotic collage of indiscernible though colorful shapes. Then, iterative progress began as corners of the canvas began to represent coalitions; a blue wave emanated out of one corner of the canvas. We saw factions develop: the creators—those who attempted to execute their vision for the canvas; the protectors or fixers (those who would fix defacement of corners or images); and the disruptors. A delicate balance between *ludus* and *paidia*, between structure and freedom, played

⁷ For further discussion, see <https://redditblog.com/2017/04/13/how-we-built-rplace/>

out. Images began to appear in relief of the colorful blobs, first memes and flags, and replications of iconic artwork such as the “Mona Lisa” and “Starry Night.” In the end, over 1 million users edited the canvas, placing over 16 million tiles. The Foundation for Economic Education (2017) noted that the experiment was a “microcosm of the emergent, spontaneous order that characterizes society” and emblematic of internet culture as a whole.

Figure 6.1

The R/Place Experiment



Note: The time lapse of Reddit Place can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnRCZK3KjUY>

v=XnRCZK3KjUY

6.3 Human Motivation

...Aware of what is lacking, we can try to correct mistaken purposes, disproportional motives, and inadequate or undeveloped capacities. These efforts to fill in, to mind the gaps, to compensate for the palpable lack of fulfillment, shape a person’s self-formation. (McClintock, 2016, p. 15)

Like Kant's moral jewel that shines from its own light or Plato's "good horse" in his chariot analogy, philosophers have long understood an inner guiding sense, a compass that drives and directs human beings to be and do 'good.' In the *Republic*, Plato wanted an education that nurtured this inner sense. While *paidia* does not remove the pain or suffering of education (nor is it desirable to remove all pain or suffering), it offers a focus for it and an internal incentive (*Republic*, 535b-535d).⁸ What are the insights that human motivation can tell us about education? For instance, if we (as McClintock suggested) consider purpose, motivation, and an individual's educational journey as they discover and reveal their own capacities, what might that look like? If we consider purpose, motivation, and capacities through a formative conception of education, will we get better results and more equitable outcomes? McClintock (2016) argued this to be the case. As he explained:

An inner sense of fulfillment, akin to a sense of balance, allows a person to manage the three existential questions of formative life by sensing how apparent fulfillments are less than full. Doing so gives a three-dimensional sense—rational, emotional, developmental—of how we are lacking fulfillment, allowing us to sense when efforts are misdirected, excessive or inadequate, and beyond our means. (p. 14)

In other words, the inner sense not only enables an individual to sense inner balance but also imbalance, thereby putting them in a continuous state of improvement while never allowing the individual to assume they are in a state of static balance or perfection. Furthermore, sensing imbalance or lack of inner fulfillment enables the individual to detect what is lacking in their education so they may take corrective actions. This ensures that one realizes one's desired capacities or motives. Hence, the ability to sense what is lacking and use education or educational

⁸ From Chapter I: The importance of *paidia* is also detectable in Plato's description of the students best suited for the rigorous educational protocol necessary to create free thinkers. "They must be keen on the subjects and learn them easily, for people's souls give up much more easily in hard study than in physical training, since the pain—being peculiar to them and shared with their body—is more their own" (Plato, 535b). While *paidia* does not remove pain, it offers a focus for it. "We must also look for someone who has got a good memory, is consistent, and is in every way a lover of hard work. How else do you think he'd be willing to carry out both the requisite bodily labors and also complete so much study and practice?" (535c).

resources to fill in missing areas contributes to an individual's self-formation. To this end, emergent educational movements in the digital commons are instructive.

The motivational principles that support shared inputs and outputs, of which there are numerous and growing examples in the digital commons, “[become] intrinsic to the culture—where persons and groups understand that the value of the resources is derived from the very processes associated with its accrual” (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 2).⁹ Technology has made it possible for people to form online communities where the platforms act as learning avenues but also constitute a digital commons, where individuals can contribute information or knowledge for the accumulation of the resource. As Clay Shirky (2008) noted, a Wikipedia article is as much an article as it is a product, an example we might place in conversation with the process of jazz musical composition (as noted in Chapter 2).

6.3.1 The Possibility of Formative Online Communities

One might argue that an education through autonomous, self-directed, and motivation-oriented education might prove uneven and unbalanced. However, this is not necessarily the case as internal motivation directs the learner toward the direction of fulfillment “with respect to purpose,” which, over time, compensates and fills in for undeveloped capacities. That is, given that we often do not know what can, could, or *should* become, to determine what we can and should be, we have to work to develop our capacities as fully as possible. We can form these capacities through having a sense of inner balance that guides our efforts through continual

⁹ “The resources of the digital commons are defined by a central characteristic: their cultivation is motivated by intrinsic rather than extrinsic incentives. Such an approach to motivation offers persons the opportunity to participate in a shared project of self and cultural formation that ultimately extends beyond the individual but is also transparent in its reliance upon the contribution of the individual” (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 2).

inward consideration of formative justice, aiming to help us become and fulfill ourselves the best we can.¹⁰

Besides providing a valuable compass for a learner, intrinsic motivation can also benefit the educational sphere beyond the domain of schools and schooling alone. For example, intrinsic education is evident in how an aspiring filmmaker, initially motivated by a love of narrative art and visual storytelling but untaught in composition and photography, will be motivated to learn the tools of their craft to advance in the medium. This is also demonstrated in how a coder or computer programmer, who, as they advance in their field, must learn math to excel and advance. That means that although math might not be an individual's core study, they may come to understand that having the drive to learn math is necessary to excel in coding or programming. "By reinvigorating the formative arguments for ensuring that all receive an optimal education, for investing in the health, vigor, and creativity of persons and the public, and for promoting the advancement of knowledge and the arts, people will strengthen their sense of purpose, their motivations, and their capacities" (McClintock, 2016, p. 21).¹¹

Of course, intrinsic motivation does not account for all aspects of educational emergence, but it does play a significant role. Contemporary psychology tells us that the things that move an individual are never an instance of *either* extrinsic *or* intrinsic goods but rather a case of "*both/and*" (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 12). However, an advantage of collaborative, member- and community-driven educational resources is that they tap into an individual's intrinsic motivational structure while fulfilling emotional and social needs. Such needs are

¹⁰ Our inner motivations and interests will not lead to complacency. Rather, they will inevitably "alert us to what we overlook and steer our further endeavor to improve personal abilities" (McClintock, 2016, p. 16).

¹¹ "Active consideration of formative justice in our public life can revitalize our shared, common life. If a polity is an association for the pursuit of the good life, it has to go beyond the distribution of given goods to the active formation of goods of all types, to work out and strive to implement their purposeful future. That is the mission of formative justice in public life" (McClintock, 2016, p. 21).

interpersonal connection, personal growth, and the pleasurable satisfaction that results from a sense of self-efficacy and contributing to an overall project.¹² As a result, an individual's contributions to commons-based, open-source resources become more creative, more efficient, and better compared to those guided solely or primarily by an extrinsic motivational structure. Humans fully fulfill their potential when motivated intrinsically to contribute to projects and provided with access to formative resources (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, pp. 12-13).¹³

An optimal education does not happen on its own but rather requires consideration of other aspects of our life. Reforming our current system of schooling to be more in line with an emergent, formative conception of justice would be less about proscriptive or prescriptive policies and more about “engendering a different understanding of the situation in which educative efforts are taking place” (McClintock, 2016, p. 23). This process begins with student-centered learning, recognizing the autonomy of the learner and empowering students to question themselves and interrogate their own educational journey, along with the formative institutions in their lives. A comprehensive learning environment is less about instructing students on what to do or not to do and more about allowing them to discern their own aspirations, providing the space, resources, and environment that allow them to identify and articulate their own motivations.¹⁴

¹² “One answer that comes from research in experimental psychology is that persons engaged in problem-solving tasks that require creative solutions are more likely to meet the challenge in a more efficient and effective manner precisely when the good derived from solving the problem is cultural and intrinsic, and that the process gets thwarted when motivated by and [sic] economic and extrinsic good” (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 13).

¹³ “In other words, the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, though descriptively helpful in explaining why certain human potentials are utilized in order to achieve specific goals, could not have helped us predict why Wikipedia would usurp Encarta, or why an open-source browser like Mozilla and an open-source operating system like Linux would take a sizable market share away from Internet Explorer and Windows respectively, the cornerstones of the once monolithic Microsoft Corporation” (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 12).

¹⁴ “Let them say what moves them; what they hope for and want to try; what angers and gives them joy. Find out, at this age and that, what abilities they seek; what skills they think they need; what they worry over yet want, seeing a challenge difficult yet important. Let them see you do all this as well, forming yourself as an active agent, alive to the uncertainties of life” (McClintock, 2016).

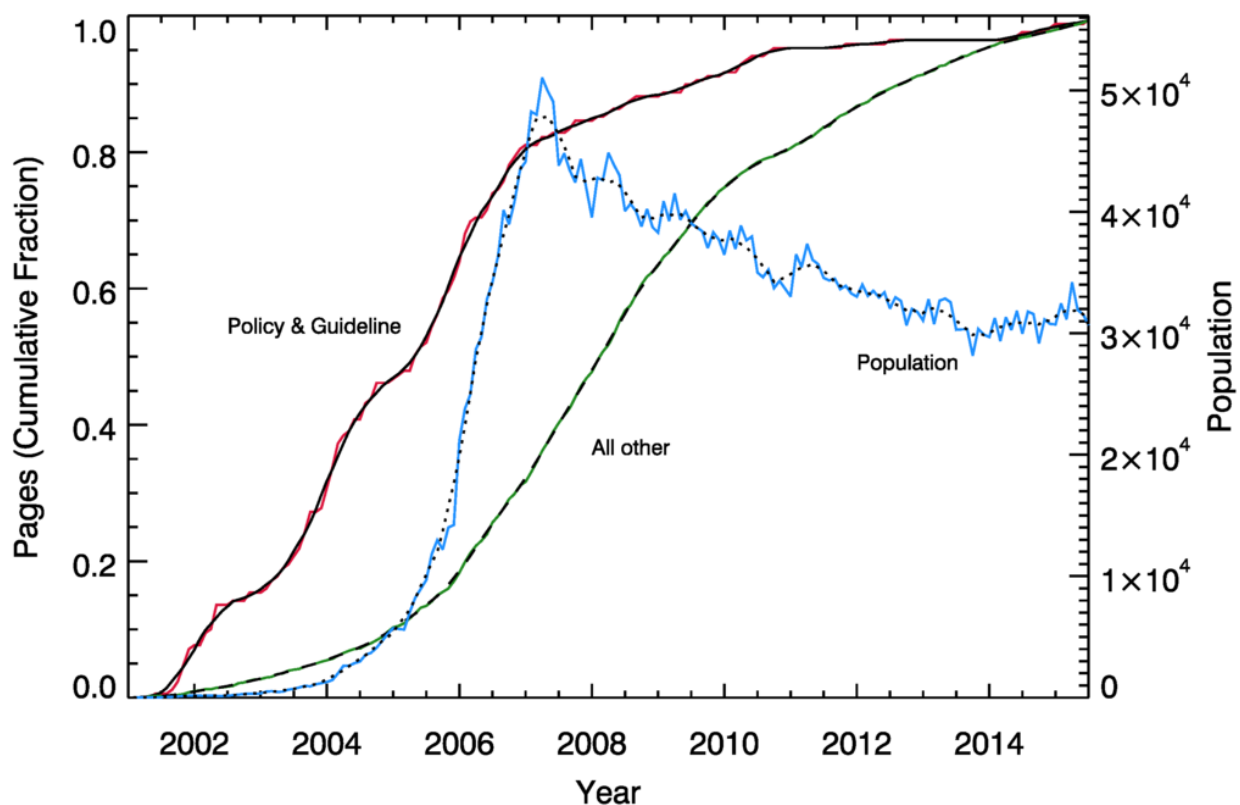
6.3.2 How Schools Can Benefit from the Digital Commons

We have innumerable and growing examples of such educational resources (learner- and community-centric communities guided by intrinsic and cultural goods) in almost every domain, from human endeavor and subject matter to online encyclopedias (such as Wikipedia), open-source operating systems and browsers (such as Mozilla and Linux), online open-source recipe cookbooks, fanfiction databases, language-learning communities, 3D printing collaboratives, and more. Visions of McClintock's dream of a "learned people" as a realized potentiality can be found in every corner of the digital landscape. Still, many visions peter out or disintegrate before they are fully realized. Some of the advantages of collaborative and open-source communities that allow such communities to grow and develop quickly also lead to weaknesses and tensions. For instance, the democratic potential of open-source resources can also invite dissent and detraction from within and without. As we can see with the astounding growth of Wikipedia, the strength of a community in which anyone could edit and contribute led to the incredible growth of an invaluable educational resource (quickly overcoming Microsoft's Encarta as the premier digital encyclopedia) but the accessibility also invited problems. Over time, to ward off trolling and defacement, Wikipedia's open-source editorial community has become increasingly inaccessible, developing its own language and customs that can seem incomprehensible to an outsider. The tension of relying on a global community of contributors and adhering to quality and style standards is not an easy one to navigate. Thus, questions abound concerning how to grow such communities in a way that they can remain democratic, open, and accessible while also staying honest to their educational and cultural mission. Indeed, even in the case of Wikipedia, researchers have documented how the pressures and tensions of growth; the pressures of funding (and funders); the bureaucracy of a central administrative organization; and the rise of

authorities in core competencies such as administration, policy, and article quality have led to a deviation of the encyclopedia's open, democratic aims (Heaberlin & DeDeo, 2016). In Figure 6.2, Heaberlin and DeDeo (2016) demonstrate this phenomenon by graphing out the growth of policy, non-policy, and population. You can see below that that policy and guidelines “preceded the arrival of the majority of the active users,” and population growth on the site has lagged behind the creation of essay and commentary (non-policy entries) . (Heaberlin and DeDeo, 2016, p6)

Figure 6.2

Policy & Guidelines vs Wikipedia Population



Source: Heaberlin & Simon (2016), p. 6

Additionally, we must ask how such communities, when successful, can be synthesized and incorporated into our social and public infrastructure. In the central case of education, how can schools adapt to incorporate and benefit from the digital commons? Can schools themselves become formative communities of educational emergence? What would it look like if we were to reimagine a curriculum in line with the guiding principles of a formative conception of education?¹⁵

6.4 The Metaversity: Implications for Schooling Post-Pandemic

Those in the past stood at an unbridgeable cultural distance to the university, are spontaneously discovering that they have much to gain from the full assemblage of resources supporting the advancement of learning.

McClintock (2000)

With respect to the educational and democratic potential of digital technologies, we have seen optimism from educational theorists, historians, and philosophers of technology alike. In his works, Clay Shirky has evangelized the potential of technologies such as smartphones, the internet, and social media to transform governments, democratize repressive and autocratic governments, open closed groups, and flatten siloed organizations. In lectures and books such as “Here Comes Everybody,” Shirky (2008) praised the possibility of internet-based platforms such as Wikipedia and WordPress: “We have lived in this world where little things are done for love and big things for money. Now we have Wikipedia. Suddenly big things can be done for love” (p. 140). Shirky’s talks echoed an optimism found in the work of philosopher and historian Robert McClintock concerning the speed and possibility of cultural change as digital technologies took down barriers and emanated from universities. Among the many prescient insights in his

¹⁵ McClintock (2016) noted that such an exercise is a Deweyan project of reconstruction of experience: “John Dewey often wrote about the reconstruction of experience; an endeavor I embrace in this essay. To reconstruct experience, we must revise important concepts and use them to recast familiar issues and concerns” (p. 25).

work, McClintock's diagnosis of the divide as being less spatial and more cultural has proved particularly enduring.

In *The University and the School*, McClintock (2000) predicted that with digital technologies bridging divides, the university and the school would increasingly become interwoven, and with this, "the ideal, not of a learned clergy and a lettered people, but one directly of a learned people, [would become] an historic potentiality, which [would] profoundly transform the structural relation between the university and the school" (p. 3). There was and is much reason to highlight the democratic and liberating potentialities of these divides, but as Ravitch (2010) demonstrated, we also must remain open-minded and vigilant to the realities of implementation. For instance, we may discover in the years ahead that this potentiality is not tied directly to the fate of traditional educational institutions, but rather that education will become increasingly detached from schooling and the work of universities.

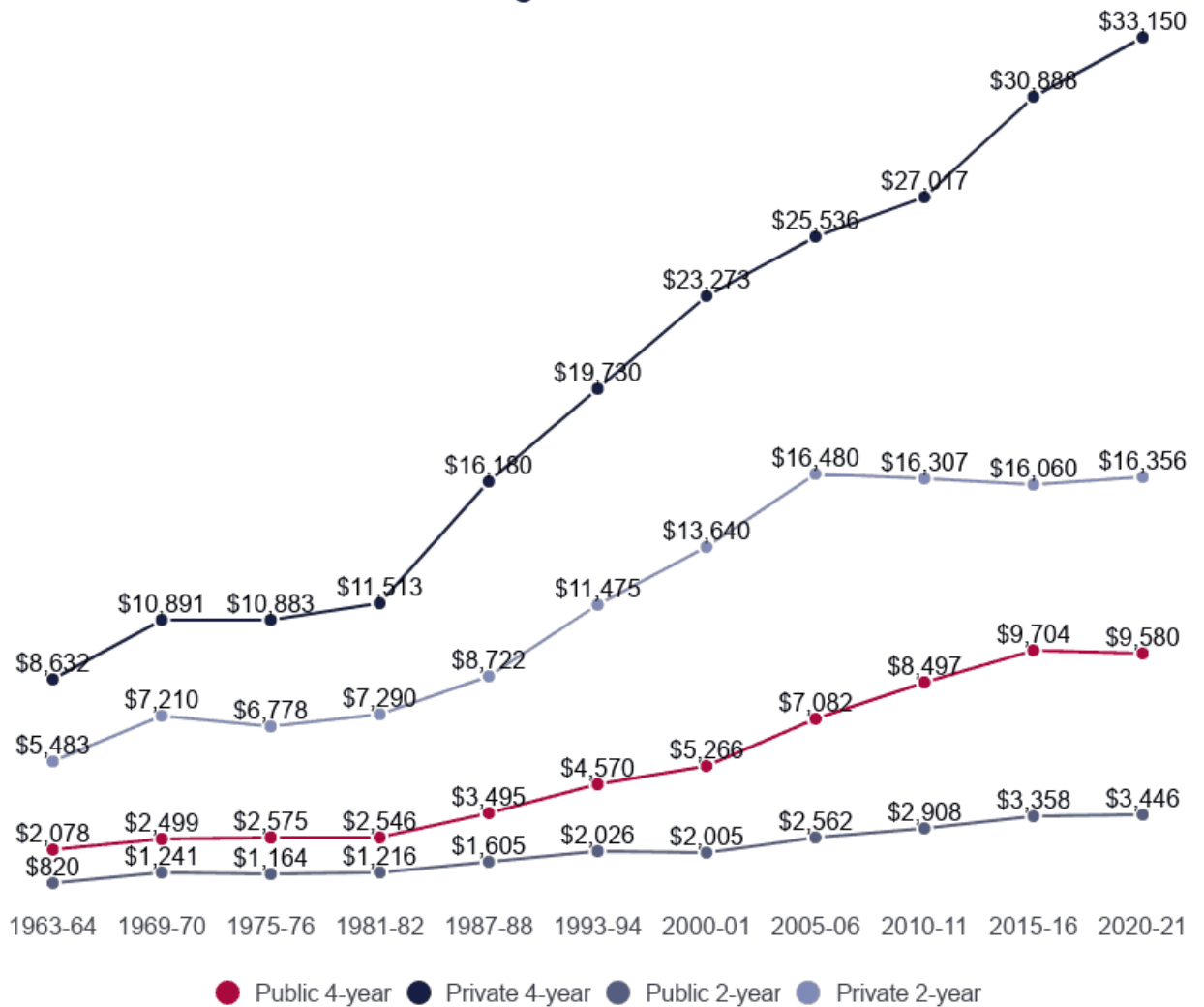
The COVID-19 pandemic, and its effect on schools and schooling, has provided significant data that revealed issues of concern for the digital transformation of education. As a parent and an educator, I have seen how the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything—it was arguably the single most impactful socially and culturally moment of our time. At the height of the pandemic, schools and businesses shut down, entire industries went remote, and education went online. In other words, as some have noted, this greatly accelerated the inevitable. Pre-pandemic, massive open online courses (MOOCs) were still somewhat on the bleeding edge of digital education, and both K-12 and higher education showed surprisingly little interest in the potential of digital education. While online schools and colleges existed, they were mostly relegated to the for-profit sphere and not seriously embraced or acknowledged by major school districts or universities. But when the pandemic hit, just about every educational institution in the

United States, from local school districts to major universities, had to embrace online and distance learning. This is a change many have predicted as an eventuality, but few could have envisioned how abruptly and dramatically the transformation took place when the pandemic hit, as universities and districts had to shutter almost overnight (Galloway, 2020).

In his book, *Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunities*, scholar and professor Scott Galloway (2020) invokes the infamous MP George Galloway quote to capture the world-historic moment: “Nothing can happen in decades, and then decades can happen in weeks.” With a focus on education in particular, Galloway takes aim at the economic model undergirding private secondary and higher education. In a post-corona world, how does higher education maintain its educational mission, and provide a valuable preparation and degree, in a decentralized, digital economy? How does higher education justify tuition prices? These are significant questions. And the answer, for Galloway, is that higher education cannot and will not. Over the past half-century, college tuition costs have risen exponentially outpacing even the rising cost of healthcare. With it, student loan debt has also increased exponentially, now totaling more than \$1.6 trillion. However, the increase in cost has not provided better value or produced substantial innovations in many, if not most, subject areas or training. An English or history class at New York University or University of California at Berkeley functions much in the same way it did decades ago but costs exponentially more money. The rising costs of tuition and the explosion in the student debt crisis have become impediments to economic growth and mobility. In the figure below, Melane Hanson (2022) charts the precipitous rise in the cost of tuition and fees.

Figure 6.3

Historical Cost of College Tuition & Fees in 2021 Dollars



16

Previous generations viewed higher education as an engine to and for the middle class, but as rising costs of professional and advanced degrees have outpaced wages, it no longer serves this function adequately. As Galloway explained, “Higher education in the US has unfortunately devolved from being the great upward lubricant of unremarkable kids to an enforcer of a caste

¹⁶ Source for this graph is Hanson, M., “Average Cost of College by Year.” EducationData.org.

system...let's not expand freshman seats and brag about sending away 90% of applicants”¹⁷ (2021). A 2021 study from Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce backs up this claim, finding that while the cost of a college education has risen nearly 170 since only 1980, earnings for workers the ages of 22 and 27 have increased less than 20%: “Postsecondary education policy has failed to keep higher education affordable even as formal education beyond high school has become more essential.” (12) ¹⁸ In an article titled the “Great Dispersion,” Galloway writes “The pandemic's most enduring feature will be an accelerant of existing trends.... Similar to prior macro trends like globalization and digitization, it offers enormous opportunity, but also real threats” (“The Great Dispersion,” 2020).

Part of the issue is artificial scarcity. In the past few decades, many elite universities have decreased enrollment and dramatically lowered acceptance rates. Elite private and public universities now have acceptance rates of between 4% and 10%, significantly lower than a few decades ago. This is true even for public universities. The admission rates in 1982 at UCLA were 63% and are now under 12%. Rather than adding seats as endowments and costs have grown, universities have adopted a brand management strategy, lowering their acceptance rate. As a result, even as higher education costs have soared, a lower percentage of students is receiving a high-quality education or valuable degree. At 40 of the top 100 colleges and universities in America, according to *US News*, there are more students from the top 1% than from the bottom 60%.¹⁹

Just as we saw an acceleration of e-commerce and a rapid decline in brick-and-mortar retail closures, we will see consolidation (mergers) and closures of colleges and universities in

¹⁷ ZDNet has an excellent writeup as part of their Coronavirus coverage (<https://www.zdnet.com/article/professor-scott-galloway-higher-education-is-ripe-for-disruption/>)

¹⁸ The study is “If Not Now, When.” Carnevale, Gulish and Campbell (2021) page 12

¹⁹ See more details at <https://apb.ucla.edu/campus-statistics/admissions>

the years ahead. Galloway now looks to technology companies to deliver the transformative spark and predicts that big tech companies will partner with elite educational institutions:

Ultimately, universities are going to partner with companies to help them expand. I think that partnership will look something like MIT and Google partnering. Microsoft and Berkeley. Big-tech companies are about to enter education and health care in a big way, not because they want to but because they have to. (“The Coming Disruption” 2020)

This is not surprising as we have already begun to see such models with respect to professional certifications. Google has partnered with Coursera to roll out professional certifications in data analytics, project management, UX design, and more at a fraction of the cost of mainstream certifications. The University of Pittsburgh has partnered with Outlier to offer calculus and other core subject literacies at a fraction of the cost of their tuition (while ensuring that those credits can transfer and count toward a 2- or 4-year degree). Purdue Global, University of Maryland Global, and many other public universities have expanded their online presence and degree offerings, and private universities are following suit at breakneck speed. Universities such as Western Governors, Grand Canyon University, Southern New Hampshire University, and others have gained traction and “market share” as they had a head start in online education. The Minerva Project has partnered with Keck Graduate Institute (which is part of the Claremont University Consortium) to offer a rigorous, elite undergraduate and graduate education to a greater number of students at half the price of Ivy League competitors. Western Governors University now certifies more science and social studies teachers (fully online) than any other higher education program in the United States.

The pandemic years has demonstrated the previous shift to digital to be merely a drop in the bucket. After a year of online and hybrid classes, major universities have inadvertently shown a path forward that Galloway and others believe will permanently disrupt the higher education model. Providing more students access at a lower tuition cost is the way forward. Universities are

embracing online and hybrid models. Many have shown (in particular with hybrid learning models) that they could easily increase, if not double, enrollment this way without sacrificing quality.

The same argument could be made for elite and magnet secondary schools. In the past year, there has been increased scrutiny on elite and magnet secondary schools around the country. In particular, in New York City, the debate around admissions to selective, specialized schools, such as Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Tech, and more has been particularly heated, with many calling for the eradication of gifted learning programs altogether (a view that was tacitly endorsed by disgraced former Department of Education Chancellor Richard Carranza, who now works for a Silicon Valley Ed-Tech firm). There is good reason for concern all around. Schools like Stuyvesant, Bronx High School of Science, and Brooklyn Tech have long been paths to the middle class, revered in particular for low-income and immigrant populations. However, while the number of seats at these schools has barely budged since they were founded many decades ago, the city's population has grown exponentially, and the demand has risen due to the schools' well-earned reputations as incubators for later success among the best and brightest students. These selective schools use the SHSAT exam with an extremely high cutoff and, over the past decades, have become highly exclusionary, with acceptance rates that are lower than Ivy League universities (Stuyvesant recently admitted under 3% of applicants). In 2020, Stuyvesant admitted only 10 Black students, according to the *New York Times* (Shapiro, 2020).

In a city as large and diverse as New York, it is easy to see why these admissions numbers at one of its flagship specialized public schools would prove scandalous. The test itself has long been accused of cultural bias, and there have been many proposals for various remedies to fix the

issue. In 1971, Mayor John Lindsay accused the test of cultural bias and pushed to institute an affirmative action program. The issue has popped up numerous times in almost every administration, with various groups protesting the SHSAT-only admissions policy to these selective schools; however, calls to eliminate the test have also been criticized as discriminatory to Asian-Americans.²⁰

This issue is not unique to these schools, and similar debates and controversies are playing out across the country, with many of the same arguments also being echoed on behalf of the “School Choice” movement. The issue is exasperated by the overall state of public education in America. While the country’s population has grown, disparities in the way schools are funded and inadequate investments in our social infrastructure have led to high demand for fewer and fewer seats at desirable public, magnet, and specialized schools.

Over the past year, the proposed solutions have ranged from various modifications of the admissions process (including scrapping the SHSAT), implementing an affirmative action program, or even eliminating the specialized schools altogether. Notably, just about all of these policies come from a vantage point of scarcity. Without question, the admissions policy is deeply flawed and leads to unjust outcomes. Studies conducted in the last decade have compared SHSAT test-takers whose scores only differed by a few points (a few missed questions). The group with the scores just under the astronomically high SHSAT cutoff for Stuyvesant achieved equally well on SAT and AP scores as the group of Stuyvesant students who scored slightly above them on the entrance exam. Standardized tests and exams are notoriously bad at assessing intellectual capacity, but even if we were to assume that some meaningful insight was gleaned

²⁰ The debate around elimination of the SHSAT tests has been a polarized one in New York City (and echoes similar debates about high stakes testing in other districts around the country. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/nyregion/nyc-specialized-high-school-test.html>; <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/14/17458710/new-york-shsat-test-asian-protest>)

from SHSAT scores, is there any doubt as to whether those students who scored just under the cutoff would be able to handle the work at Stuyvesant? What is the rationale for keeping the number of seats at Stuyvesant so low and the acceptance at an absurd 2.7%?

In the past year, Stuyvesant went all-virtual and has slowly integrated a hybrid approach. Without any adverse change to quality or even the building's infrastructure, Stuyvesant (as well as the other selective schools) could increase attendance significantly simply by maintaining some version of the hybrid approach (3-4 days on campus, 1 day virtual) that was already piloted during parts of the pandemic. As we have seen throughout pandemic, the Zoom-only model of public education has earned many detractors across the board, from students to parents and teachers. Zoom fatigue is real, and Zoom-only learning has proven less effective than in-person learning. Additionally, as a result of Zoom, we have lost the school as a physical location, a social and cultural space, and an environment designed for and devoted to learning (outside of the home). There is much value in being immersed in an academic and/or scholarly environment, and some students do better than others. In particular, with early childhood settings, Zoom learning and hybrid approaches have proven to be inadequate, and in-person learning is preferable and best even for secondary programs. We have seen how many students fall between the cracks, largely due to a lack of resources. However, the difference in return-on-investment is different for secondary and college students, especially in certain modified hybrid approaches that have proven successful. In particular, for STEM-focused secondary and postsecondary schools and programs, a 3- or 4-day school week is a sensible, workable solution that would add valuable and in-demand seats to capable students at each of the selective schools without sacrificing quality.

Implementing a modified hybrid approach would allow schools like Stuyvesant to increase enrollment without making significant curriculum changes dramatically. Coupled with

reforms to the admissions policy that would allow for a Berkeley-type model of acceptance, the results could be transformative and life-changing for many families and students. This is a model that could be extended to other schools as well. Education reformers, such as former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, have called on reimagining and rethinking education. If technology allows more students to have greater access to the best classes and teachers, we should embrace that. However, the reimagining sounds familiar as it echoes all of the rhetoric of the education reform movement, for instance, reinforcing the efficiency model to identify high value add teachers, and utilizing blended learning to increase class size online. Of course, a cursory review of Duncan’s work and policy initiatives prove that his push for blended learning as tools to increase efficiency predate the pandemic, and were a consistent theme of his tenure as Secretary of Education.²¹

I pose the changes above as an example of how, with little modification and virtually (no pun intended) no detriment to quality, particular programs and schools can be expanded to allow more students more access to high-quality public secondary and postsecondary education. I picked the above examples specifically because they are not particularly radical yet would prove transformative. However, this example is not a reimagining of schooling or education in the least. Serious reform efforts can and should be aimed at school funding, teacher preparation, school safety, and curriculum reform. This is, however, one example of the simple adoption of proven technology that has already had wide, real-world adoption and success over the past year to greatly improve outcomes and public education—one that is very much in line with the prescient

²¹ In his tenure as Secretary of Education, Duncan championed “Race to the Top,” and advocated for efficiency, assessment, accountability and blended learning model that increased class size. Duncan touted the Department of Education 2010 report on Best Practices in Online Learning, saying that the report demonstrated that “effective teachers need to incorporate digital content into everyday classes and consider open-source learning management systems, which have proven cost effective” (Ash 2009). Additional sources: “Secretary Duncan Emphasizes Teacher Quality Over Class Sizes” (Khan 2012); “Duncan: Time for Efficiency” (Talbot 2010).

thought of McClintock and satisfies many of the objections and critiques that Galloway and others have observed.

There is undoubtedly tremendous potential for transformative reform with implications for democratic access. The opening of possibilities of delivery can be huge for the non-traditional student, the working student, and the part-time or vocational student. However, none of these are givens. Big Tech is not the answer. It is important to note that while I largely agree with Galloway's critiques of education, I would like to caution against Galloway's contention that Big Tech/Silicon Valley disruption is the answer. The same people, corporations, and venture capitalists who "disrupted" public transportation, food delivery, media, and journalism to the detriment of becoming handmaidens to insurrection should not be allowed to 'disrupt' public education. Unfortunately, this narrative lends itself to a neoliberal approach to education reform, and I would like to return to the central project and retrieve an ancient and valuable way of thinking about education, of *paidia*—education not merely as a matter of utility or efficiency but as a matter of justice.

It is important to recognize, however, that Big Tech companies are angling to further their educational reach. If we are to avoid their profit-driven, inevitably destructive "solutions," education theorists must be serious about the issue. It is also important to understand that what has happened since COVID is not really "online education"; rather, it was traditional education put on Zoom. The possibilities of online education are potentially revolutionary, and we have only begun to scratch the surface. But, as with all technological innovation, these possibilities are not a given. Once again, we can look to Plato for guidance. This, of course, is an idea we have been looking at since time immemorial, and Socrates illustrated it well through the story of King Thamus and the Egyptian god Theuth. In this story, Theuth brought the gift of writing to King

Thamus and explained that with the technology of writing, the King could would have the gift of permanent memory—the ability to remember everything. However, the King objected to this statement, saying that writing would, in fact, do the opposite. While it would allow him to record or export memories, the reliance on this technology would inevitably make his own memory obsolete and the muscle would weaken, thereby weakening his own ability to recall events (*Phaedrus* 274b-278d).

This Platonic myth reflects an age-old tension between humanity and our technological creations. First, we work on technology to make our lives easier, and after we are successful, we find that life has gotten so easy that we now fear how our new comforts will weaken and destroy us. At the same time, our consistent confrontation with this fear tells us that the human psyche functions in a highly predictable manner. It also tells us that we will invariably adapt to the new technology and that, at some point in the future, life will become uncomfortable enough again to start thinking about the next technological improvement we need to make.

Many of the platforms, once celebrated for their open, democratic, and educative potential, have become walled gardens at best and at worst (as with the case of many social media platforms), highly sophisticated and antisocial radicalization machines, manipulating an attention economy toward profitable but socially destructive ends. As Dianne Ravitch (2016) wrote:

There is something fundamentally antidemocratic about relinquishing control of the public education policy agenda to private foundations run by society's wealthiest people; when the wealthiest of these foundations are joined in common purpose, they represent an unusually powerful force that is beyond the reach of democratic institutions. (p. 211)

In the closing chapter I will demonstrate that paidia is not only extremely relevant for reflecting on the impoverished education paradigm we have today, but also points the way towards a new paradigm, a pedagogy of educational emergence.

Chapter 7: Conclusion:

***Paidia*, Gamification, and the Education of Philosophy**

To know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge.

Paolo Freire, 1998, p. 29

7.1 Improvisation as *Paidia*

In examining discussions surrounding the concept of *paidia* as serious play or improvisation in Plato, Kant, Schiller, Heidegger, and Gadamer, I have traced the concept from its foundational discussion in Plato's formative dialogues through German romanticism and into the 20th century. I began with the roots of play as an integral part of Plato's educational project, fundamentally employing an engagement with the *Republic*. Then, with an eye towards considering the history of *paidia* in the philosophy of education, I explored how philosophical activity is best undergirded by the very qualities of *paidia*, or improvisation. We have seen in the philosophy of Schiller how the qualities of *paidia* are integral to a flourishing life; within Gadamer, we see that play once again frames the practice of philosophy and, importantly, for Gadamer and those he influenced, the hermeneutical experience is inherently playful in its orientation.

I argue that the notion of *paidia* can be understood as improvisation, and demonstrate that this concept framed the practice of philosophy for Plato, Schiller, Gadamer, and others.

7.1.1 Improvisation-Based Pedagogy

Improvisation-based pedagogical approaches are used to help develop effective cognitive skills among children and encourage them to engage in social learning to make meaning of the world collectively. Ross (2012) claimed that "improvisation fosters an awareness of these transactional understandings as well as develops an array of cognitive and social skills" (p. 47).

Improvisation-based pedagogy emphasizes classroom behavior, individual or subjective experience and personality, individual interpretation of objective reality, cultural literacy, and many other subjective notions that the current standardization in education ignores. An improvisational approach to pedagogy requires a cultivated disposition of “serious playfulness.”

An improvisation-based approach is in harmony with Dewey’s pragmatic, aesthetic and democratic understandings. Improvisation not only parallels Dewey’s integrated approach to education—what is widely known as “learning by doing”—but it also fits equally well with his democratic and experiential understanding of social engagement. (p. 53)

Improvisation-based pedagogy holds the key to achieving the most relevant educational outcomes. For instance, autonomy and motivation are two of the most important elements of improvisation, and when both of them are present, the learner becomes an active participant in the process of education. Just as in a jazz performance where the player must spontaneously and simultaneously make decisions to exercise several processes, a skilled pedagogue may use the right strategy of improvisation to motivate students into becoming active learning participants.

In *Improvisation-Based Pedagogies*, David Scott Ross (2012) of McGill University engaged the philosophical underpinnings of improvisation as well as its educative implications, and questioned the value of flawed, narrow curricular designs that fail to address the transactional complexities of learning or recognize the role of imagination and creativity in growth and development: “improvisation-based approaches embrace the indeterminate, unscriptable interactions of collaborative knowledge construction as dynamic opportunities to create” (p. 5). Drawing on the work of Maxine Greene and John Dewey, Ross explored improvisation as a kind of concept-metaphor to argue that “curricula must be partially indeterminate if they are to take into account learners’ subjectivities and interpretations” (p. 1).

Among the 20th century philosophers whose work most fully addresses these concerns in an educational context were John Dewey and Maxine Greene. Dewey viewed learning as

transactional in each of these contexts: In *School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum* (1900/1990) and in his formulation of the Laboratory School, Dewey promoted forms of learning that could not be reduced to the simple transmission of pre-scripted knowledge or skills. Rather, Dewey approached learning in a more holistic light, as a transactional method that was shaped by the complexity of student experiences within and outside of the school.

In *Democracy and Education* (1916/1966), Dewey argued that democratic models for school interaction are based on the free expression of ideas. Further, in *Art as Experience* (1934/2005), he argued that the work of art, both as an object and as a stimulus, was a profound method of experiential learning (Anselmi, 2006).

Greene (1988) was also tuned in to the world of aesthetic experience and the profoundly transformative learning experiences therein. She saw the writing on the wall with respect to the shortcomings and blind-spots of the accountability movement and assessment culture, stating:

teachers and administrators are helped to see themselves as functionaries in an instrumental system geared to turning out products, some (but not all) of which will meet standards of quality control. They still find schools infused with a management orientation, acceding to market measures; and they (seeing no alternatives) are wont to narrow and technicize the area of their concerns. (p. 13)

In reviewing her writing, I found that a word that frequently appears is *space*. Greene advocated not only for the arts to have a place, but a home in public education. Greene (2009) advocated for artistic and public *space*—in physicality and in time—to create the possibility of transactional learning in all its innate possibilities.

What is necessary is to remind ourselves that education has much to do with power and with the opening of public spaces—spaces where people come together in their freedom to bring a democratic community into being. There can be, and must be, spaces of dialogue, spaces of diversity and mutuality and concern. There must be spaces of convergence. (p. 318)

Other contemporary philosophers of education have also addressed this issue. For example, D. W. Winnicott explored the importance of play as a space of transition between the child (or learner) and their social and physical environment. It is in this play space that the public and private intermingle, and it is this activity that gives rise to culture: “transitional space” where the private and public meet and intermingle in “playing.”¹ In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott (2005) has his aim, to “to draw attention to the importance both in theory and in practice of a third area, that of play, which expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of man.” (138) In “Practice: A Central Educational Concept,” Paul Smeyers and Nicholas Burbules (2005) looked at education, conceived broadly both formally and informally, through the lens of ‘practice.’ They concluded that there is an overemphasis on the “reproductive functions of teaching and learning” (p. 339).

Amidst the overall trend of pre-scripted curricula whereby teachers are educational accountants held accountable by market-driven expectations within the context of the modern cult of performance standards, the concept of improvisation opens up a wedge. Ross (2012) argued that

the imposition of pre-determined standards not only minimizes opportunities for dialogic interaction but also insufficiently capitalizes upon the strengths of constructivist teaching. Improvisation-based approaches differ significantly from top down curricular implementation by purposefully using gaps and constraints to provoke student interaction. (p.56)

A more open and integrative curriculum, inspired by the work of educational theorists such as Dewey, Greene, Burbules et al., allows the student to explore intellectual, emotional, and creative space subjectively within the context of the public space (commons) of the school and in dialogue with generative structure and constraints to better promote creativity, critical

¹ Jones (1991) has a great analysis in his essay “The Relational Self: Contemporary Psychoanalysis Reconsiders Religion”

thinking, and student-directed learning. But what do such curricula look like? This is a subject in which contemporary education theorists and philosophers of education interested. There are a number of good examples of Improvisational-Based Pedagogy. In relation to the concept of improvisation, curricular aims may be divided into three categories: improvisation arts for their own sake (the argument for which has already been laid), applied improvisation, and performativity/process drama. To highlight an example, in “Asymmetry and the Pedagogical I-Thou,” Ann Chinnery (2003) wrote that the pedagogy of the other is a pedagogy of responsibility that, like great improvisational jazz, demands a response that cannot be prepared beforehand, but which can only be spoken with one’s whole being. It demands, in Buber’s (1955) words, “nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you” (p. 114).

Kathy Hytten (2006) advocated for combining a philosophical approach, which is philosophy in the schools in this case, with performativity and process drama as a way to help develop students’ capacities to think critically and educate for democracy and social justice. “Given our current social, political, and educational climate, the need to teach in ways that help students develop the habits of democratic citizenship and inspire them to work for social justice is increasingly important. Perhaps one of the hallmark tools of philosophy is to uncover that which we take for granted: the assumptions that go behind our actions...” (p. 441). In *Remixing the Classroom Toward an Open Philosophy of Music Education*, philosopher of music and author Randall Allsup (2016) advocates for the virtues of improvisation as a transcendent concept that, while valuable for musicians, is also necessary for growth and innovation in any field or discipline that has a capacity for skill mastery. In “Discourse, Theatrical Performance, Agency: The Analytic Force of ‘Performativity’ in Education,” Claudia Ruitenberg (2007)

advocates for a curriculum designed around performative inquiry, which makes the use of dramatic enactments and improvisations in which “the educator engages in performative explorations with participants as a means of investigation and learning” as all teaching unfolds as embodied and enacted responses (p. 261).

Similar to Ruitenberg’s ‘performative inquiry,’ ‘process drama’ (PD) is a pedagogical methodology whereby both the students and teacher work in and out of roles. This is a popular way to teach drama (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995). However, as with applied improvisation and performative inquiry, process drama is not limited to the dramatic arts; PD methodology can just as easily be applied to urgent themes, philosophical problems, or ethical dilemmas. One possible manifestation of this occurs when students and teachers “work together to create an imaginary dramatic world within which issues are considered and problems can be solved. In this world they work together to explore problems and issues” (Schneider & Jackson, 2000). Students must approach this work with a disposition of open playfulness, even (or more precisely, especially) when the topics are serious. Through doing so, students learn to think beyond their own points of view and consider multiple perspectives on a topic through playing different roles (Schneider & Jackson, 2000).

Dynamic and flexible, process drama allows the teacher-as-facilitator to provide differentiated instruction as well as construct meaningful learning environments for the class to navigate. PD was, in part, promoted by Dewey and Greene, as it considers the learners’ subjective engagement and appreciation of the process as “the ‘end-product’ and improvisation to be ‘the experience of it’” (O’Neill, 2005). PD is also fundamentally *learner-directed*. “As in other artistic endeavors, the act of creating transforms the creators, whose own possibilities are actualized as they respond to the unpredictable turns their works take as they unfold” (Ross,

2012, p. 56). We might argue that philosophical activity satisfies all three criteria (Anselmi, 2006). In summary, process drama offers an open-ended framework for learning through enactment, a pedagogical approach that embodies many of the social and cognitive benefits experienced by jazz improvisers.

7.1.2 Spontaneity and Restraint

Instead of presupposing convergent responses as the sole indicator of mastery, improvisation offers a context for students to express their own perspectives upon the content under discussion, much as jazz improvisers provide their individual interpretations of the tunes they are exploring. The role of the teacher shifts toward one of facilitation, empowering learners to increase their involvement and heighten interplay in the unfolding of class content. In contrast to direct instruction, improvisation-based structures heighten engagement and invite authentic learner-empowered interactions. (Ross, 2012, p. 56)

The current state of education in the United States entails test-driven, pre-scripted curricula. Within this model, teachers are educational accountants who are held accountable by market-driven expectations within the context of the modern cult of performance standards. The concept of improvisation provides an opening or, as Marshall Soules (2000) wrote, improvisation as an art form provides an “aesthetic which seeks to reconcile an apparent contradiction: how to bring spontaneity and restraint into balance.” The main advantage of applying an improvisation-based pedagogy to learning environments is that play imbues education in mere schooling and provides students with a true sense of purpose. Rather than only becoming proficient at mimetic activity (memorization, recitation, and copying), the incorporation of *paidia* empowers students to pursue the kind of creative self-mastery aligned with a formative conception of education, opening up a space for them to make lifetime contributions to their field. In turn, these contributions possess the potential to become significant cultural artifacts. It is precisely these innovations that set a new precedent for human life, and

such innovations are not possible without *paidia*. Indeed, improvisation is the fertile soil out of which many of our most culturally prized artistic masterpieces have grown.²

Within the classroom, cultivating the kind of fertile soil from which to develop creative works are developed is highly influenced by the joining of structure with play. For example, this is achieved by bridging subjects like biology with bioethics and math with the philosophy of calculus, all while doing so with a disposition of serious playfulness. This brings the practice of philosophy into the classroom, which can manifest as an improvisational approach to discourse. In this process, educators encourage students to draw on their internal resources and build their knowledge of themselves, fulfilling the Socratic wisdom of “knowing thyself.” In *Improvisation-Based Pedagogies*, Ross (2012) placed the concept in conversation of the philosophies of Greene and Dewey to question the value of curricular designs that do not sufficiently address the transactional complexities of learning and fail to recognize the role of the imagination in fostering subjective interpretations. Ross argued that viewing improvisation as a concept metaphor demonstrates that “curricula must be partially indeterminate” and “open-ended curricula, which integrates both information gaps and minimally specified, generative constraints, better promotes creative thought, critical thinking, and student engagement.”³ As a philosopher of music, Randall

² There are numerous examples, from the spontaneous composition of one of the most famous songs in Latin America, *No Soy de Aquí Ni Soy de Allá*, to one of the most popular jazz compositions of the 20th century, *Rhapsody in Blue*.

³ In “Improvisation-Based Pedagogies,” Ross (2012) eloquently connects philosopher John Dewey’s transactional and democratic models of learning and schooling to the experiential and collaborative orientation of jazz improvisation:

“The philosopher whose work most fully takes up these concerns in an educational context is John Dewey. Dewey saw learning as transactional in each of these contexts: In School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum (1900/1990), and in his formulation of the Laboratory School, he promoted forms of learning that could not be reduced to the simple transmission of skills, but rather that shaped and were shaped by the complexity of student experience outside of class; in Democracy and Education (1916/1966), he argued that democratic models for school interaction are based upon the free expression of ideas offered up for critical analysis, and in Art as Experience (1934/2005), he argued that the work of art, as both object and stimulus, invites a uniquely coherent form of experiential understanding. These transactional views closely parallel the orientation of improvisers towards their co-collaborators and the work as it unfolds. Jazz improvisers

Allsup (2016) explained in *Remixing the Classroom*, teaching in an open-ended way requires the most structure, an antimony which is the coexistence of two contradictions. Education is a classic antimony as it is the coexistence of the change that is coming in the future and preparing students for an unpredictable future as well as an inherited continuity rooted in traditions and communities and cultures.

7.2 Gamification

While the Platonic conception of *paidia* is largely absent from the classroom, “play” conceived more narrowly is oft-cited and very much in vogue. While the accountable school may not allow for much unstructured free play, there is a movement, driven largely by private capital in education, that seeks to implement a kind of play into the standardized curriculum—a phase known as “gamification.” It is also important to note that this *is* a “hot topic,” which has been taken up in a number of different ways. For example, I specifically cite ‘gamification’ which is but one method of addressing this topic, as ‘gamifying’ learning is simply another way of hijacking the autonomy of the learner. It is important to emphasize that my analysis of *paidia* and its significance in the lifetime education of the individual is distinct from mere gamification. While there might be a tendency to conflate this notion of improvised, creative activity with a trivial, shallow, gamified curriculum, I want to explore and draw attention to the differences between the two.

This distinction between *paidia* and gamification is fundamental to understanding how an improvised-based pedagogy can improve overall education quality and even outcomes in ways a gamified curriculum system does not and cannot. Gamification is *paidia* if one removed all of

are committed not only to achieving instrumental virtuosity but also, more importantly, to having their music speak for their lived experiences....” (52)

the elements that make it organically educative, learner-centered, and improvisational—it is a version of play (defined narrowly) without the actual elements of improvisation or creativity. Gamification only feigns a superficial resemblance to *paidia* through, perhaps, the name of the activity at hand (learning to play an instrument, for instance). Otherwise, gamification is purely a system in which to be processed and assessed. Achievement in this system is demonstrated through how well the playful activity is mimicked. Thus, in the example of learning an instrument, a student demonstrates achievement through how well they are able to mimic a song. Conversely, in improvised-based pedagogy, students would understand themselves through the vehicle of music well enough to innovate their own musical scores. The difference between mimicry and creative self-mastery and its impact on the individual cannot be overstated. Just as with a formative conception of education, the “direction,” so-to-speak, of the educational movement (learner-directed) and the autonomy of the learner within the context of an educational community becomes a defining characteristic. The very orientation and elements of *paidia* as opposed to gamification are critical.

Overall, the purpose of applying gamification to learning environments is to process students through the school system, obfuscating education in favor of conformity. Within the game of schooling, the players’ conduct is performative and tied to the make-believe goals of the game. Yet, ironically, the “meaning” of these goals does not, in fact, depend on their ability to be achieved. In fact, it is conformity that is truly meaningful in the game, even if the task at hand is labeled as “creative.” Thus, by spending oneself in the task of playing the game, one is playing oneself *out*. In other words, rather than actually being creative, they exhaust themselves in a fruitless pursuit of creativity. Within the game, it is nearly impossible to be objective enough to realize the pointlessness of this pursuit. After all, a true consummation of creativity cannot be

sought after—it must be actualized through experience. Yet, since it is easy enough for players to confuse the self-presentation of the game with the true presentation of self in *paidia*, gamification is able to be disguised as *paidia*.

Gadamer (1989) wrote of the aforementioned phenomenon in his work, *Truth and Method*, explaining that play is a kind of presentation of oneself, but that self-presentation is not the objective of *paidia*. In truth, self-presentation is a kind of superfluous detail of play, whereby the real objective is self-development, yet the gamified school system makes self-representation its focus and objective. Gadamer explained this by saying, “Only because play is always presentation is human play able to make representation itself the task of the game” (p. 108); essentially, this is how gamification-based pedagogies can instrumentalize *paidia* to facilitate gameplay while surreptitiously keeping education out of the classroom.

Gamification-based pedagogies are very much *en vogue* currently. However, valuable progress in education pushes back against instrumentalizing *paidia* in this way. Gamification-based pedagogies not only undermine the essential element of improvisation, but also recast play in schools as something else, draining improvisation-based pedagogies of their most compelling aspect: an emergent curriculum premised on the intrinsic motivation of their participants. In the process, the possibility of true autonomy is removed and, therefore, the self-cultivation of the participants is curtailed. Rather than being approachable and inviting, the gamified school becomes condescending. Further, instead of being an open-source commons, the gamified school becomes a walled garden; rather than being dignified and empowering, *paidia*, when misinterpreted within the gamified school, becomes a disempowering technology of domination. As such, gamification can turn the educational, liberating potential of *paidia* on its head by recasting and instrumentalizing serious play toward the ends of production and disempowerment

and overlaying game structure onto an existing curricular architecture. Gamified schools can impose goals, rules, quantitative indicators, and feedback without the factors of autonomous motivation of participants or the playful disposition that allows the activity to be enjoyed for its own sake.

In effect, activity in gamified schools has been framed by strategic instrumental action. As a result, the players themselves become “strategic actors, forgetting that they are first and foremost social and ethical actors” (Deterding 2012) In this way, “gaming the system” is actually what the system wants its participants to do. This manifests in education reform by the increasing use of quantitative social indicators for social decision making. Theorist Donald T. Campbell (1976/1979) warned against this. In an excellent summary, Hai Zhuge (2020) channels Goodhard and Campbell respectively in explaining that any assessment ceases to be a good measure once it becomes a target - “The more a quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor” (2020 100).

7.3 An Emergent Pedagogy of *Paidia*

When we ask about the relationship of a liberal education to citizenship, we are asking a question with a long history in the Western philosophical tradition. We are drawing on Socrates’ concept of “the examined life,” on Aristotle’s notions of reflective citizenship, and above all on Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is “liberal” in that it liberates the mind from bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world.

—Martha Nussbaum (1997), p. 8

The *paidia* paradigm unveils its value as a *modus vivendi* beyond the childhood learning environment, as *paidia*, or the Platonic conception of serious play, can be conceived of as a concept metaphor that encourages the cultivation of the self. From this angle, the creative outlets chosen by individuals for their own development are avenues for their own self-cultivation.

Integrating *paidia* into lives inside and outside of the early and secondary classroom (as well as higher education) involves playfully engaging with these outlets as opposed to, say, engaging with gamified approximations of them. As a concept metaphor for emergent, formative education, *paidia* channels our focus away from the assessment-based curricular model toward a pedagogical orientation of lifelong learning, which asserts the value of learner-driven development within the context of broad, lifelong education. The result is a continuous discovery of the self in relation to one's larger educational and social communities.⁴

What I hope this work illustrates is that these goals are not new but rather a revival of ideas originating in Platonic educational philosophy, and these are ideas that have been taken up by educational theorists and philosophers ever since. This vision of education would not be foreign to readers of Rousseau, Schiller, Gadamer, or American philosophers of education such as Dewey, Greene, or Du Bois, who called for an education to be made up of both the “permanent” and “contingent,” and include the “broad, pure, and inspiring ends of living,” as well as the growing and ever-evolving knowledge of trade, training, and life (Du Bois, 2008, p. 65). Each and every subsequent generation has grappled with the great timeless questions posed at the core of the Platonic dialogues. Times and circumstances change, and each generation must struggle for reforms to achieve a society worthy of the next generation and closer to a vision of justice. This struggle is not adjacent to education. It is, as some of our progenitors understood, an educational project that must be engaged, and we must engage it from the standpoint of our

⁴ “Another important contribution of emergent thinking to pedagogy is the way it broadens the lens to include the group level. When we think only in terms of enhancing students’ ability to think independently, the focus of teachers and students tends to become narrowed to individual achievement. Recognizing that growth and change occur because of interactions among elements highlights the importance of contact among individuals, and of overall group dynamics. Students need these interactions to provide experiences, viewpoints and stories alternative to their own, which will enable them to alter their individual stories in new ways. Conceptualizing the classroom environment in terms of emergent thinking highlights its inherent social nature, and invites us to attend to the role of the group in individual performance, as well as to the contribution’s individuals can and should make to the learning of other participants” (Blank, Cassidy, Dalke & Grobstein, 2007)

current situation and context. In “A Philosophical School for Our Time,” Hansen and Davis (2016) asserted that educators are under immense pressure to justify their work on instrumental grounds—a pressure that has only intensified in light of economic considerations and an over-reliance on standardized testing:

Plato would aver that we are in danger of becoming enslaved to this narrow, top-down auditing system. Like other contemporary critics, he would warn of its troubling resemblance to a larger, globalizing ethos of harsh, unyielding competition that has generated frightful socioeconomic and political inequalities, and with all these developments coming on top of a steady dissolution of a craft-consciousness in many fields of work. For Plato, mindless subservience and excess are symptoms of imbalance, i.e., of a sick society. Plato envisioned education as a cure for this illness. Education can actively shape cultural narratives and associated sets of norms. It can do so, in part, through foregrounding philosophical discourse in which people learn to reason and to think publicly—the very circumstances of the school, at least potentially, as a social space. (Hansen & Davis, 2016, pp. 29-30)

Hansen and Davis (2016) suggested that if Plato were to engage and reimagine the contemporary school, he would argue for a philosophically-minded model that cultivates a sense of craft and vocation and imparts a sense of what it means to “inhabit life fully rather than as a superficial consumer of experiences” (p. 29). In their view, such a school would have an ethos that supports teachers and students in being mindful of truly ethical purposes, in the sense that they can come to treat the school as a shared world in which to cultivate themselves as thinkers, guided by a sense of deep wonder and love for justice and how to render it manifest in the world of human words and deeds. In this way, instrumental learning will occur against a backdrop of visible, dialogically emergent human values which are at once ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and social (p. 29).

I contend this is a clear and compelling justification and one that resonates with a need for pedagogical perspective and the call to commune with the uniquely *human* experience, which is perhaps best granted by engaging the great questions. In this model of a school, the subjects

would still be in place, but reflective philosophical activity would be an integral part of each classroom and each subject.⁵ Hansen and Davis’s description of the pedagogical orientation of the school also aligns with the values of emergent education:

The philosophical school assumes that the persons who come through its doors are capable of reasoning and being reasonable.... What Plato conceives as the humanity of reason means that we value our human capacity to set ends based on reasons, and that we acknowledge this ability in other people. We respect each person as an agent who can set his or her ends.... (pp. 29-30)

These are good and admirable goals, and they are potentially achievable. From 2009-2012, I had the pleasure of working with one such model designed by Dr. Paul Thompson at Columbia Secondary—a magnet public school with a unique philosophy curriculum. Rather than add philosophy to the curriculum as an elective, the school integrated philosophy into each of its subjects (Bioethics with Biology, Philosophy of Science with Physics, etc.) using a Cooperative Team Teaching (CTT) model that joined certified teachers and Philosophy instructors.

7.4 The Role of the Teacher

Just as the emergent perspective alters but does not eliminate the role of the teacher, so too does it alter but not eliminate the significance of course content, by placing it in context. Rich content is essential for the dynamics of the emergent classroom, and should be selected in order to facilitate the exploratory process of education... (Blank, Cassidy, Dalke & Grobstein, 2007)

In a formative, emergent curriculum, the role of a teacher could be one of a guide: helping the students navigate their way through their educational journey and finding the abilities and skills along the way that may assist them in achieving those purposes that motivate them to

⁵ “As we gather from Plato, Dewey, and numerous other scholars, ‘philosophizing’ is a term of art for reflective method, or for method when fused with thinking. As we have suggested, philosophizing will be an ongoing element in each and every subject in the school, in each and every classroom. It will be an ongoing element in all the communications that take place in school, and between the school and related communities whether near (e.g., parents) or far (e.g., virtual dialogues with teachers and students in schools on the other side of the globe). Philosophizing will itself be a topic of discussion and inquiry. And, as mentioned previously, because the school will be consciously formed mindful of Plato’s pioneering educational proposals, the very elements in the latter will be taken up in timely, judicious ways...” (Hansen & Davis, 2016, 30).

realize self-mastery and flourish. A formative conception of education that promises a wholesome development and formation of students could be realized through an emergent curriculum which encompasses “a model of implanting a responsive, fluid curriculum” predicated on openness, creativity, and, most importantly, a playful disposition that responds “to the student’s growing needs in engaging with the knowledge base and interests of the instructor. In such a model, the teacher is a conductor attending to the interests of students while guiding their formative journey” (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016, p. 15). Such a curriculum encourages all learners and all members of an educational community (whether it is a school or otherwise) to see themselves as creative shapers of their own lives (De Marzio & Ignaffo, 2016). Additionally, in *The Good Life of Teaching*, Chris Higgins (2011) advances the idea of teaching as an “ongoing conversation with the world” (12) that involves asking formative questions, and implies the centrality of hermeneutics in teaching. (241)

Just as such visions of the role of teachers are not out of place in the online digital commons, such a vision of the teacher, or of education, would not be unfamiliar to almost any preschool classroom where emergent curricula and problem-based learning are commonplace—if not the standard—and can be found across multiple early childhood educational philosophies. Likewise, we can see such philosophies at work in some iterations of high school and even professional graduate education, such as in law and medicine, where apprenticeships and learning communities are common and the Socratic method remains the standard-bearer. Quite simply, an emergent curriculum is a philosophy of teaching that centers the students’ interests and prioritizes relationship building while emphasizing active participation through the employment of flexible and adaptable (and often evolving) methods, inquiry, and play-based inquiry (Crowther, 2005).

But what does this mean in a practical context? How can teachers be trained with these

inherent contradictions? In *Remixing the Classroom*, Allsup (2016) explained that the tension between structure and freedom is generative and rooted in philosophy, stating:

the qualities that give meaning to the term “education”—replication and transformation, tradition and change—are in an equal state of contradiction. An antinomy exists, thus, when a concept cannot be understood apart from the paradoxes that give it meaning. Importantly, inferences drawn from these contradicting truths are equally valid: There is no education without innovation. There is no education without tradition. (p. 39)

The classroom then becomes a place of discovery and authentic inquiry, one that organically challenges the pre-scripted hierarchical structure of the school. This is not to suggest that teachers would be less important or indistinguishable from students, as some models of democratic or horizontal pedagogy advocate. Rather, this view of teaching and learning liberates teaching from mere educational accounting and empowers a more natural and philosophical role for the teacher: a teacher as guide, as mentor, and as philosopher. In *Emergent Pedagogy: Learning to Enjoy the Uncontrollable, and make it productive*, authors Blank, Cassidy, Dalke & Grobstein write:

The teacher’s distinctive role is to create the kind of rich environment within which productive organizations can emerge from the interactions of all participants. The teacher has the additional task of encouraging, facilitating and nudging a process of emergence, of helping to assure that it evolves in directions that are engaging and productive for all. Finally, the teacher is the major synthesizer and reflector, the one who has primary responsibility for making classroom activities visible and meaningful to all participants. (*Emergent Pedagogy*, 2007, p. 114)

7.5 The Philosophical School

The philosophical school assumes that the persons who come through its doors are capable of reasoning and being reasonable.... What Plato conceives as the humanity of reason means that we value our human capacity to set ends based on reasons, and that we acknowledge this ability in other people. We respect each person as an agent who can set his or her ends.... (Hansen & Davis, 2016, pp. 29-30)

The project of liberating the humanistic possibility of well-rounded emergent education (as described above) from the very real structural constraints of contemporary schooling is not a

small problem, particularly in public schools which are often underfunded and burdened by inequity, social ills, and pressing, urgent needs. When we see them—as in increasingly frequent stories pertaining to dire school conditions such as lead in water found in schools around the country, toxic air and work conditions, staffing shortages, and student populations plagued with hunger and poverty, we take stock of the hierarchy of urgent needs that take precedence. However, existing models of precisely this kind of project being successful. For instance, at Columbia Secondary School, such a program was implemented, whereby a unique philosophy curriculum was incorporated not only into the school’s ethos but also into each subject, and this occurred within each classroom (e.g., bioethics along with biology). At the heart of this collaboration and curriculum, dialectic—the language of philosophy—becomes the pedagogical approach. Dialectic empowers students to guide their own educational journey, engaging their own ideas and use of language while also engaging those of their peers and what we often refer to as the “great questions.” In such a setting, students and teachers can interact with both humanity and rigor, engaging each other in the immediate while simultaneously engaging the timeless issues of existence, thus taking their place within timeless human discourse. As Dr. Jon Lawhead (2009) recalled regarding this endeavor:

The goal was just to get them talking, philosophy came natural to them. My favorite definition of philosophy is by Jeffrey Kasser, “Philosophy is the art of asking questions that come naturally to children using methods that come naturally to lawyers.” The questions come naturally—what they lack is the method, or more precisely the language. The biggest danger is that, in giving them the methods, we quash the creativity—in teaching them how to think, we make them not want to do it anymore. That’s the line that needs to be walked. The best way to do it, I think, is just to encourage the natural creativity. Get them talking, and get them to express their thinking out-loud. They’ll realize that some of what they’re saying is imprecise, and you can help them think it through. At best, we’re just guiding, but more accurately just modeling for them how to formulate their thoughts, not much else. Give them the tools to ask the kinds of questions they want to ask naturally. (Philosophy in Schools Conference 2009)

A philosophically-minded school constitutes on its own an exercise in social and political philosophy. Students get to (a) speak their minds and be listened to, (b) address “off-test” questions that are of real concern to them, and (c) learn the tools of clear thought and discussion that make the class meaningful. Students have completely legitimate questions and concerns, which are philosophical in nature: Who am I as an individual? What do I owe my community, my family, and my friends? How do I reconcile my desires with social demands and the demands of school? In a post-Wiki-Leaks era, it would be negligent to ignore some larger themes such as the role of the media in public and private life; the transparency of governments, IGOs, and NGOs; and the impact of multinational corporations.

Plato and Dewey elucidate the hopeful possibilities that can issue from what they picture as the humanity of reason and the reasonableness of humanity. The ability to reason positions human beings to weigh what they ought to do, even as it constitutes a living mechanism for criticizing poor reasoning, or its very absence, in the vicissitudes of societal life. The capacity to be reasonable points to arts of listening, patience, self-criticism, and more.... (Hansen & Davis, 2016, p. 20)

It is also not difficult to imagine how the everyday events in students’ lives might feed their interpretation of larger events. Big questions and little questions, abstract or mundane, these discussions are tremendously important to these students. Students want to engage these questions—*their* questions; they want to engage each other, and the introduction of an intellectual, creative, and reflective space for them to do so within a classroom is an event whose value cannot be undersold. With this in mind, the question of whether or not they are doing “proper” philosophy becomes as unimportant as it is uninteresting.

As aforementioned, this may be pedagogically significant considering our contemporary circumstance, but it is not anything new; this is not reinventing the wheel or even particularly innovative. However, in the context of the contemporary American school, even subtle changes and nudges in this direction are potentially transformative. Students already have these questions

bubbling up all of the time, the same questions that have echoed throughout every human generation. They not only *want* to engage them, they *need* to—and sadly, in the public institution devoted to their emotional, civic, and intellectual cultivation (the school), they are often but not always deprived of doing exactly that.

It is fairly common to find that many talented, dedicated educators are provided with a rather malnourished conception of education to work within, one in which the parameters are neatly set in a primary or secondary classroom. In this conception, a teacher is a person whose job is to deliver the curriculum to the student, and the student is expected to receive and apply these data on standardized tests. The student is a receptacle for information, and the school is a “mill to grind out the due daily grist of prepared textbooks.” As Maxine Greene (1988) wrote:

Teachers and administrators are helped to see themselves as functionaries in an instrumental system geared to turning out products, some (but not all) of which will meet standards of quality control. They still find schools infused with a management orientation, acceding to market measures; and they (seeing no alternatives) are wont to narrow and technicize the area of their concerns. (p. 13)

Especially when placed in contrast to the uninspired and problematic underpinnings of contemporary educational policy, philosophy affords students with the opportunity to challenge themselves and affords educators with the opportunity to strive for a rich, humanistic conception of what an education can and must be. There is a further justification, however: the creative residue that results from navigating the obstacles of difficult, unfamiliar landscapes, whether physical, cultural, intellectual, or emotional. This residue is a sense of self-efficacy, one’s visceral understanding of what is possible within the context of one’s life. It is important to remind the reader here that the practice of philosophy is an improvisation-based approach and that *elenchus*, or the Socratic method, was actually originally intended to be a playful, extemporaneous, open-ended pedagogical practice. As Ross (2012) noted:

An improvisation-based approach is in harmony with Dewey's pragmatic, aesthetic and democratic understandings. Improvisation not only parallels Dewey's integrated approach to education—what is widely known as “learning by doing”—but it also fits equally well with his democratic and experiential understanding of social engagement. (p. 53)

Thus, an emergent education, with *paidia* as its core guiding principle, could be accomplished in a philosophical school, wherein the practice of philosophy is an improvisation-based approach built on a free expression of ideas, inviting a humanistic model of experiential and transactional education. However, this is only one model. That said, the practice of philosophy rejects schooling as merely educational accounting, organically centering the learner and opening intellectual, creative, and emotional spaces that free inquiry from the constraints of the institution within which they occur. For students and teachers alike, there is extremely limited opportunity to think beyond the school walls (even when they are digital) in any serious and sustained way, but philosophical inquiry affords students a tremendously valuable and rare opportunity to disambiguate the blurred concepts of teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum that undergird the structure of the institution. Incorporating even a modicum of humanistic and philosophical inquiry into schools is a small victory when considering the problems and issues—including the many structural and systemic inequalities that have been exposed in the last year—that lie before us in our post-pandemic era. An improvisation-based pedagogical model, with philosophy broadly conceived at its core, can “play” a role in another project, namely, the renewal of a Platonic vision of education and of philosophy. I am reminded again of Ross's (2012) discussion of jazz, and how features of improvisational collaboration can inform classroom practice: “the adoption of open-ended curricular elements with an emphasis on divergent production, a shift to question-making as a means of provoking inquiry and response, a view of mistakes as prompts for dialogue, and the rotation of leadership roles in the classroom to facilitate the expression of individual interpretation” (55).

7.6 Significance: What Do We Lose If We Ignore *Paidia*?

The assessment culture and the factory model of schooling persist as the guiding forces in contemporary schooling, despite the lack of any proof justifying claims to their efficacy or value. The concept of play with respect to education offers a unique perspective and critique on assessment culture. Briefly, I want to return to the question *What do we lose when we push out paidia?* when we speak of schooling conflated as education? and when we allow assessment culture to define the aims and objectives of schooling?

I think that all educators, when stepping into a classroom, recognize the importance of that space, the *genius loci*, because each classroom space exists within an intentional community—a school. The space was designed for learning, which is evident throughout its design and evokes positive visions related to the physical area and its inhabitants. One looks at the walls, the posters, perhaps the blocks or trains in the corner, or the books, the architecture, and they all say: “*Learning happens here.*” One can immediately conjure up positive visions of that space—images that reveal something about the learning community, its inhabitants, how they navigate it. Likewise, when an educator walks into a basketball court, a cafeteria, an orchestra room, an art room, a stage or black box theater, or even a garden or park, it is perceived that we know that learning happens here too. We as educators, as students, as parents, and as citizens all lose something when we reduce and narrow our conception of schooling, when we cap and denigrate our aims of education. The presupposition that undergirds much of contemporary education reform is misguided. Therefore, a different concept/metaphor for pedagogy is required, and a different model for the school. *Paidia* offers precisely such a model.

Looking at the conception of *paidia* as introduced by Plato yields a valuable access point for discussion of play and its role in education. In particular, placing improvisation as a concept-

metaphor in conversation with the conception of *paidia* produces fruitful insights with which to critique contemporary schooling and education reform. Improvisation also provides a lens to view emergent, collaborative educational projects and educational cooperatives that are often not only learner-centered but learner-directed, and qualified by formative, contextualized transactional learning. This exploration can help build a philosophical and theoretical foundation for a pedagogy of *paidia* and provide recommendations and insights into improvisation-based pedagogies, alternative models of education that inhabit *paidia* as a lived educational concept, with potentially radical implications for teacher education.

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