



TOWARD THE  
GROWTH OF  
PERSONAL PAIDEIA:  
NEW POTENTIAL IN THE POST-COVID ERA

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# INTRODUCTION

Paths of Paideia

# Paideia

- It seems self-evident that the desire for excellence in one's life and work is a natural concern. No one desires or seeks the problematic or the dysfunctional.
- The Ancient Greeks, however, saw this desire as the core of human nobility. They called it Paideia, the pursuit and development of areté. Areté means the embodiment of physical and moral excellence, and therefore constitutes the development of a Self of the highest order (Jaeger, 1945).
- This is not the all-too-human self driven by desire and want; rather, it is a fundamental "ideal which inspires us ... to reach out towards ... the beautiful. ... To lay claim to the beautiful, to take possession of it, means to overlook no opportunity of winning the prize of the highest areté" (Ibid, p.12).
- However, the Greeks thought the specification of what counted as Paideia should be a cultural, even governmental affair. The ruling body of wise old men would specify a plan for the study of specific intellectual subjects like Philosophy and Geometry along with important martial subjects like Wrestling and Swordsmanship. Mastery of these and other subjects then constituted the achievement of true areté.

# Pluralism, Diversity, and Relativism

- In the modern world, however, the rise of pluralism, cultural diversity, and various forms of relativism have exposed the biases and prejudices inherent in the Greek conception of Paideia (e.g. Bey, 2021).
- *And yet, how can we see the ultimate goal of education as anything other than the development of intellectual, physical, and moral excellence?*
- Doner (2018) argued that the problem was not the abstract concept of Paideia, per se, but the institutionalizing of its interpretation. The only way for Paideia to be free of cultural and ethnic biases is through the development of paths of individual or personalized Paideia.
- Individualized education, however, though reasonably straightforward in early education, can be notoriously difficult at higher levels.
- Confronting this difficulty, the main thrust of the present work is the presentation of a theory of individual Paideia and its implementation.



# THEORY

And Philosophy

# Individual Paideia

- Biology presents the foundation for individualized Paideia. Every organism strives to live to the full capabilities of their nature (Uexküll, 2010/1934). The rabbit must be capable of running fast enough to elude the fox. And the fox must be clever enough to elude the hounds. Never do organisms seek to be less than what they are. To be less than excellent examples of their species is to be either out of a meal, or the meal itself.
- Hence, it is no stretch to assume that, deep within all human beings there likewise exists the desire to be their best, most capable and functional selves. Certainly, life can complicate and even undermine this desire, and where this is the case, special attention is needed. Nonetheless, people will always respond positively to being treated and regarded as capable of being excellent.
- Such optimism, however, must be tempered by common sense. If an individual feels forced to be in an educational setting, they may not want to participate in whatever process of individual Paideia is made available to them. Nonetheless, even someone feeling highly resistant to participating would still benefit from an individualized concern for their potential growth and development.
- This paper is thus profoundly committed to the idea that regardless of one's past educational and/or life experiences, a path to individual Paideia is possible.

# Pluralism and Relativism Revisited

- The major strength of an individual path of Paideia is that it avoids the dangers of both pluralism and relativism.
- It avoids these dangers by fully embracing each one. Neither is considered something to be *dealt with*. Rather, each is a valuable source of variation and creative expression.
- Individual Paideia embraces pluralism in that it allows the learner to both focus on what matters most to them individually and, at the same time, to be cognizant of alternative perspectives.
- Individual Paideia embraces relativism in a similar manner. It encourages the learner to be aware of the different forms of cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender relativity that define the study material. In addition, it encourages the learner to embrace a range of potential educational experiences rather than being constrained by an antique didactic pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2017b).
- Most importantly, the individual path of Paideia provides the means for overcoming the potential bias and elitism of the standard didactic methods of the past.
- However, the implementation of methods for individual paths of Paideia faces several issues which will only be overcome through technological innovation in the construction of artificially intelligent, individually committed, educational assistants.

# Primary Concerns

- In the recent past, the construction of an individual educational path through college required a flexible institution, sympathetic teachers, and a seriously committed student. Even so, because institutions have limited flexibility and because teachers have their own constraints, these individual degree programs will generally consist of some hands-on experiences nestled amongst an otherwise fairly standard schedule of didactic pedagogy.
- As Cope & Kalantzis (2017b) argue, however, modern technologies allow far more innovative and game-changing alternatives, especially regarding pedagogy.
- The pandemic has sparked a critical concern for the problems and possibilities of these new educational technologies. During the pandemic, despite lockdowns and quarantines, educational systems worldwide were able to continue functioning at a level unimaginable just a few years before. This was possible because of web-based individual and group computer instruction. The experience revealed the vast promise of these technologies, but it has also made apparent the many complexities, problems, and shortcomings that must be overcome if this promise is to be fulfilled.



# Primary Concerns

- Two recent articles by Cope & Kalantzis (2017b; Cope, Kalantzis, and Searsmith 2021) succinctly examine the key aspects of computer and artificial intelligence technologies with educational relevance. These technologies create a foundation for the development of a personal, intelligent educational advisor (PIEA). C & K make the point that technology, especially artificial intelligence, is capable of both more and less than human intelligence.
- In Cope, Kalantzis, and Searsmith (2021), AI technology is shown to be best at *naming, measuring, calculating,* and the *multimodal display of information*. These are critical functions for systems that must construct and evaluate not only individual educational experiences, but entire programs of study.
- Cope & Kalantzis are quick to point out, however, that just because a machine can parse, interpret, and produce English sentences, does not mean the machine *knows* English like a human knows English. The point here is not so much about the comprehension of English per se as it is about the comprehension of *human beings*. In other words, the artificial intelligence aspects of the individual path of Paideia will need to be balanced with more tangible engagements. The texts provided in Orchard et al (2021) concerning teacher's experiences during the pandemic give testament to the enduring educational importance of *people* (other students and teachers) and of *place* (the many roles of the *physical school*).

# Primary Concerns

- Cope & Kalantzis (2017b) develop the concept of what they call *e-learning ecologies*. These are examples of pedagogy utilizing digital and AI technologies. Yet as C & K point out, these technologies are pedagogically neutral. Hence, unfortunately, most current applications merely graft the new technology onto an otherwise standard didactic pedagogy.
- For C & K, this is a tragic waste. One of the main promises of the modern technologies is their ability to promote and support what they call *reflexive pedagogy*. This style of education is marked by seven *affordances*.
- These are: ubiquitous learning, active knowledge making, multimodal meaning, recursive feedback, collaborative intelligence, metacognition, and differentiated learning. Any individual learning path is necessarily a form of reflexive pedagogy. It is thus no surprise that these affordances are all required for the successful accomplishment of individual Paideia.
- The remainder of this paper examines the functions and structure of a hypothetical PIEA (personal intelligent educational assistant). It is shown how the PIEA enacts Cope & Kalantzis's seven affordances of e-learning and necessarily, a good deal more.



# IMPLEMENTATION

At Least in Theory

# Functions

- **Institutional Affiliation**

- In most implementations, the PIEA will be associated with some institution of higher learning (IHL). It will thus act as the student's agent with respect to all administrative and financial business between the student and the institution. These functions are well within current capabilities.
- If the implementation was not associated with a specific institution, the individual's Paideia path could be conceived as its own virtual institution. In this case, the PIEA's role would be to utilize its administrative and financial abilities in the construction of this virtual institution; which would basically serve as the legal and procedural shell within which the Paideia path is constructed.

# Functions

- **The Educational Experience**

- The core function of every PIEA, its very reason for existing, is in the construction of the individual's path toward their personal Paideia. It does this through the organization, construction, and evaluation of educational experiences. It is here that the affordances of reflexive pedagogy come to the fore.
- *Organization*. In this case, an important function of the PIEA will be the utilization of the appropriate available resources of the associated IHLs (courses, seminars, talks, libraries) in the organization of the individual's path. Performing this function will utilize AI's naming and calculating capabilities. Without an IHL association, the PIEA would make more use of world-wide web and internet resources.
- *Construction*. Whether associated with an IHL or not, an important aspect of the function of the PIEA will be the construction of educational experiences, both long- and short-term. All seven affordances will have application in the construction of and participation in these experiences.
- *Evaluation*. Cope et al (2021) point out that one of the areas in which artificial intelligence can have its greatest impact is in evaluation and assessment.

# Functions

- **The Social Experience**

- One important lesson of the COVID pandemic has been a renewed appreciation for the importance of having people in our lives. Social interactions with fellow students, as well as teachers and professors, are critical components of the educational experience. Such interactions can be informative, confirmative, affectionate, competitive, or simply an example of comradery. In all cases they enrich and help propel the educational experience forward.
- In this regard, important functions of the PIEA will be in identifying and evaluating the student's potential participation in interest groups, clubs, and other organizations relevant to the student's pursuit.
- Where the PIEA has an IHL affiliation, it can also serve as a liaison between the student and a human academic counselor or advisor. This can be part of a general regard and awareness of the student's overall state of well-being. This would let the PIEA be instrumental in identifying potential issues and providing relevant information to the student, as well as IHL persons of relevance (like medical or psychological clinicians). Without an IHL affiliation, this role is more complicated but not impossible.

# Structure

- The PIEA has no necessary form. It can be anything or nothing at all. It could be highly interactive with the student, or merely play a subordinate role, providing information and nothing else. Nonetheless, certain concerns are relevant in this regard.
- The PIEA will be able to communicate either by voice or by text. If by voice, the gender and overall nature of the voice will have an impact. These issues will be under the control of the student, with the PIEA providing the default condition.
- Though the PIEA need not have a graphic avatar, this may be desirable. In the future, such representation might even be holographic.
- Finally, it will be critical that the PIEA operate across platforms and devices. What this means is that the PIEA's digital program will be cloud-based. In this way it can interact with the student regardless of what device they are on, e.g., tablet or smart phone.
- There will be many relevant structure-based issues in the implementation of the PIEA. The above provides a glimpse of the possibilities.



# CONCLUSIONS

And Takeaways



# Summary

- Despite all the negatives, the time of COVID has unquestionably ushered in a new era in education. This period will see the development and proliferation of artificial intelligence-based systems for online as well as classroom education.
- Prominent among these innovations will be systems promoting the student's individual pursuit of Paideia. Individual Paideia allows the development of excellence without the problematic consequences of bias and elitism.
- This will be made possible through the application of PIEAs—personal intelligent educational assistants. These systems will be devoted to the task of developing and implementing the student's individual path of Paideia.
- The accomplishment of this goal will involve the full application of AI's strengths in naming, calculating, measuring, and the presentation of multimedia information (Cope, Kalantzis, and Searsmith, 2021).
- In addition, the PIEA will be the key player in realizing reflexive pedagogy's seven affordances (Cope and Kalantzis, 2017a).



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*And thank you for your interest.*

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