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Creating The Capable Public: A Call for Liberal Arts Education in Public Schools

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**Creating the Capable Public: A Call for Liberal Arts
Education in Public Schools**

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Submitted to the Faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in the Education Department.

Abstract

I argue that liberal arts education is critically important to the creation of a capable public in a democratic society. I draw on David Labaree and Henry Giroux to assert that education is a public good and must serve the purpose of promoting democratic equality. By promoting democratic equality, public education is capable of creating publicly minded citizens. Publicly minded citizens of a democracy must also be freethinking. Liberal arts education has at its core the aim of creating individuals who are able to think freely and autonomously. In a democratic society where freethinking citizens are necessary in order to bear the responsibilities a democracy, liberal arts education is imperative. There are noticeable barriers to shifting towards a public K-12 system of education that is rooted in the liberal arts. Changes would need to be made to teacher preparation programs as well as the relationships between schools, institutions of higher education, and humanities foundations. I explore the Paideia Program as a case study to highlight a model of liberal arts education designed for the K-12 classroom that could be more widely implemented if we take serious the charge of creating freethinking citizens for the well being of our democracy.

This thesis draws heavily on founding thinkers on public education in America including Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Horace Mann. Additionally the philosophical thinking of Aristotle lays a foundation for the contemporary scholars of liberal arts education sighted including Martha Nussbaum, David Labaree, Henry Giroux, Mortimer Adler, E. D. Hirsch, and W. B. Carnochan.

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Chapter One: Education as a Public Good

Various ideas, oftentimes at tension with one another, have resurfaced over time in the dialogue between policy makers, educational scholars, and school administrators as to what purposes our public schools should serve. However, we often become so consumed by meeting a certain purpose that we do not stop to examine whether or not it is the ideal purpose. I argue that we need to return to the debate and take seriously the conversation surrounding the philosophy and purpose of public education in America. In other words, instead of discussing ways to improve public education or the best means of assessment, American society and stakeholders within public education need to first ask what is the purpose of our public education system. Only after determining the true purpose of public education in American society, can we proceed with figuring out the ways to put that purpose into practice.

Rather than accepting what exists and operating within a certain assumed framework, we should strive for the ideal education and then determine how to make that ideal a reality. In other words, like Thurgood Marshall argued we should “emulate idealists and imagine a world better than we found it”.¹ In order to do this in the context of education, we must determine the primary purpose of public education. Currently, our education system does pursue certain purposes such as developing strong math and science skills or graduating students who are career ready, but those aims seem to be rather vocational and simplistic. The question needs to be asked, what purposes would the ideal educational system serve. In our pursuit of the ideal, wrestling with the difficult question of the true purpose of public education, we will find not only great personal

¹ James O. Freedman, *Liberal Education and the Public Interest*, (City: University of Iowa Press, 2003),

satisfaction and meaning, but also collective meaning as a society.² Both personal meaning and societal meaning are necessary in relation to our understanding of public education as it is something we engage with individually as well as collectively.

Determining the purpose of public education is not an easy undertaking as it is multi-faceted. Additionally, various stakeholders have different objectives and therefore conflicting views on the structure of public schools. Some argue that public education's primary purpose is to develop a healthy economy and strong working middle class. Others argue that education should challenge existing social structures and seek to challenge the dominant narrative in America and instead rewrite the narrative to be one that is more representative of minorities and other marginalized groups. I argue that the purpose of public education in America is to create the public and therefore we should view it as a public good. Historically, economists have defined public good as, "a good that is both non-excludable and non-rivalrous that individuals cannot be effectively excluded from use and where use by one individual does not reduce availability to others".³ This is true of public education as it is something that legally those under the age of eighteen are compelled to attend and can obtain without causing any decrease in value for others.

However this definition of public good is rooted in economics and the value goods hold in the marketplace. A public good has greater meaning than simply something that individuals can consume without decreasing its value. A public good is something that is accessible to citizens and improves not only their individual life but also the

² James O. Freedman, *Liberal Education and the Public Interest* (City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 101

³ Tyler Cowen, "The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics" *Library of Economics and Liberty*, Accessed April 1, 2016, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/PublicGoods.html>.

condition of collective society. When speaking to the importance of understanding public goods as creating a public sphere, June Sekera writes, “the absence of a widely-held, constructive idea of public goods in public discourse denies citizens the ability to have an informed conversation, or to make informed decisions, about things that matter mightily to the quality of their lives and their communities”.⁴ From this framework, we can see that citizens benefit from having an understanding of and being involved in dialogue about public goods. Citizens benefit from an understanding of the purpose of public goods because they are then able to discern which public goods will have the greatest positive impact on individuals as well as the collective community.

By viewing education as a public good, something that is accessible to all and holds the responsibility of improving the lives of individuals as well as the collective society, it becomes clear why citizens must seriously engage in determining the purpose of public education. The way in which public education is structured and the purposes that are valued will impact the way in which it shapes our individual lives as well as the trajectory of our society. In the coming chapter, I argue that education as a public good is inextricably linked to serving the purpose of creating and sustaining a capable public. In order to do create and sustain a capable public, it is imperative that we focus on the development of strong citizens. I suggest that a curriculum rooted in the humanities, one that explores philosophy, history, literature, and that asks difficult questions surrounding the meaning and purpose of life and the role of citizens in a society, is a pathway that creates strong citizens. In order to make this argument, let us first turn to the ways in which public education has strayed from this goal.

⁴ June Sekera, “Rethinking the Definition of “Public Goods”,” *Real World Economics Review Blog*. July 9, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2016. <https://rwer.wordpress.com/2014/07/09/re-thinking-the-definition-of-public-goods/>.

The American public K-12 education system has become increasingly focused on promoting college and career readiness as well as achieving satisfactory scores on state examinations.⁵ Emphasis on state assessments as well as college and career readiness within the public education system is not a decision that occurs in isolation from the rest of society. Such focuses imply a prioritization of the need for schools to prepare students for the economic sphere of society. With schools prioritizing education that will allow for students to be successful in the workforce and ultimately benefit the American economy, the conversation becomes about how to best serve that purpose. Rather than debating if the purpose of schools should be to build a strong workforce and economy, policymakers seek to put practices in place that will achieve the aim of producing graduates ready to enter college or the workforce. The practices put in place include achieving quality outcomes on tests which will allow one to access college and then the career world, vocational/job training programs in order to best prepare students who are not entering institutions of higher education to successfully gain employment and enhanced STEM education in order to increase STEM job opportunities in the United States.

The increased focus on STEM education can be seen as a promotion of “practical subjects” that have a high need of workers in career fields as well as serve the aim of allowing us to advance technologically and therefore economically. On the other hand, the support for a broad general education, rooted in the humanities, is dwindling.⁶ We see

⁵ Martin West, “Testing, Learning, and Teaching: The Effects of Test-based Accountability on Student Achievement and Instructional Time in Core Academic Subjects,” in *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. ed Chester E. Finn Jr and Diane Ravitch. (Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2007), 45.

⁶ David J. Farrero “W(h)ither Liberal Education?: A Modest Defense of Humanistic Schooling in the Twenty-first Century” in *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. ed Chester E. Finn Jr and Diane Ravitch. (Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2007), 25.

a loss of art and music programs in American high school beginning in the 1980s as well as the absence of philosophy in many public schools.⁷ The increasing focus on math and science and a decreasing focus on theater, music, and art, as well as the absence of philosophy in the curriculum in public schools points to a shift towards a more specialized or narrowly focused curriculum as opposed to a broad based or general curriculum. A narrower curriculum, with a focus on practical subjects is not inherently problematic. In fact if the purpose is to produce career ready graduates, perhaps it is favorable. However, in terms of creating a capable public and strong citizens, a narrow curriculum without the inclusion and equal positioning of the humanities is problematic. A general curriculum with a wider array of subjects and the inclusion of the humanities, allows for the development of both analytical and critical thinking skills, an exploration of what it means to be a part of society, and direct conversation about being part of a democratic country through social studies and history courses. A narrow curriculum privileges one type of study and one type of thinking and by doing so it restricts our potential to have conversations surrounding what matters in our society and what our responsibilities are as citizens.

The conversation surrounding the role K-12 public schools play in building citizens, imparting knowledge, and providing a curriculum rooted in the humanities is not missing entirely from the dialogue, but rather, is overpowered by voices advocating for public education that is outcomes driven, focused on workplace readiness, and concerned with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. Since education is ultimately an assertion of values with different interest groups oftentimes holding conflicting opinions, it follows that the minority view may be muted in the

⁷ Richard Hofstadter. "Anti-Intellectualism in American Society" (New York City: Vintage, 2012). 331.

conversation. Henry Giroux comments on the idea of competing values within education when discussing the differences between conservative and radical critics on the significance and roles of schools in reproducing the public sphere. Giroux highlights that conservatives often believe that schools have strayed from “the logic of capital” and need to focus more intently on training workers, educating students about the economy, and ultimately serving corporate interest. This aim is what endorses the dominant culture and seeks to see it preserved and created amongst future generations.⁸

Giroux argues that conservative educators believe a heavily vocational based education with an emphasis on college and career readiness and standardized test outcomes to be ideal because it sustains the current structure of society and a healthy economy. Conservatives believe that the recession of the 1970s was due to schools straying too far from their purpose which is to promote the creation of capital and therefore the skills needed in the workforce.⁹ However, Giroux challenges conservatives’ beliefs by asserting that if the primary purpose of schools is to create a strong labor force that fits into the structure of the capitalist American society then schools must provide “different classes and social groups with forms of knowledge that not only legitimate the dominant culture but also track students into a labor force differentiated by gender, racial, and class considerations”.¹⁰ By seeking to create a strong economy, public schools provide an education that separates students and therefore does not allow for students to see themselves as part of the same society but rather as members of different classes within society. In doing so education becomes a commodity that does not unite but rather divides common men and women.

⁸ Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and The Politics of Hope*,” (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 120.

⁹ Ibid. 119.

¹⁰ Ibid. 120.

According to Giroux radicals argue that schools need to play an active role in eliminating existing social structures by providing different groups of people with a different type and quality of education, frequently divided by lines of race, gender, and socio-economic status. Rather, public school administrators and educators need to question the structures that currently exist within a society and reshape them. Here, it is important to note that in Giroux's conception, radicals are not arguing for a reexamination of the purpose of public education or a curriculum rooted in the humanities nor are they suggesting education's purpose is to build citizens. Rather, radicals are calling for an examination of the way in which education is constructed and how it could be used to reshape society rather than perpetuate the existing inequalities within society. Radicals believe that education is a social structure that has been used to continue privileging those who are currently in power. Radicals raise the question of why those people are in power and see education as a tool that can recreate the power structure to create a more just and equitable society.

According to Giroux, both radicals and the conservatives have moved away from "the Deweyan vision of public school as democratic spheres, as places where the skills of democracy can be practiced, debated, and analyzed".¹¹ For radicals schools are not about shaping citizens who are capable of sustaining a public, rather the public itself needs to change and the schools have a responsibility to bring about that change. I disagree with this view here in that I think the only way to achieve a just and equitable society is through creating citizens who have the ability to freely determine the structure of their public. Radicals emphasize an education system that explicitly questions the current way in which society exists, whereas I argue for an education system that allows citizens to

¹¹ Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and The Politics of Hope*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 119.

see themselves as individuals with power in a democratic society. These two views are not entirely devoid of each other but are distinct. I think it is critically important to develop individuals who see themselves as capable of affecting their own lives and collective society rather than serving a purpose determined for them. Perhaps from this will follow citizens acting on changing the structure of society, but first we must give them the ability to think critically and see the various options they have for how to shape society. Radicals argue for schools that seek to restructure the power system whereas I argue for schools that teach students to be able to come to their own reasoning of why the power structure needs to be changed.

Clearly, curriculum, school structure, and purpose of education are widely debated with many not considering the primary purpose of education being to build strong citizens, including both conservatives and liberal educators. With an increasing focus on economic success comes a decreasing focus on the less tangible outcomes of public education such as the creation of citizens. I contend that the purpose of education is not economical, and relegating it to such a position does great injustice and harm to American society. In upcoming chapters, I argue that liberal arts education is necessary in K-12 schools if we take seriously the charge of creating capable citizens and a strong democratic public.

Giroux would likely argue against this as he would see the liberal arts curriculum as favoring a group of people who have been historically privileged. While I agree with Giroux that historically liberal arts education has been locked away in an ivory tower, I argue that it is only through liberal arts education that each individual can be given the tools to exercise power over their own mind. Liberal arts education has historically

served those who are free but in the American democracy all are free and therefore all should be granted access to liberal arts education. By making liberal arts education more widely accessible no longer will it be possible for a certain group in society to control another group. With collectively free minds, a collectively free society can be formed.

Contemporary American society is comprised of several different social institutions including religion, family, political organizations, and of course public schools. As one of the most impactful social institutions of the United States, education has the ability to shape society in a meaningful and lasting way. It is for this reason that we must take seriously the form and purpose of education within our society. If we fail to do so, we risk creating a society that strays from the ideals that are essential to America's founding, ideals such as democracy, freedom, and justice. In order to create a meaningful society, we must take seriously the charge of creating a quality educational system that upholds our founding principles.

Public education has served a variety of different purposes, some of which are in conflict with one another as we explored earlier in the tension Giroux highlights between conservative and radical educators and by my discussion of economic versus public goals. In David Labaree's analysis of the purpose of public education in America he points to three main purposes: to promote democratic equality, to create social efficiency, and to encourage social mobility. For Labaree these three different purposes serve different sectors of the public. Labaree argues that if the purpose of public education is to promote democratic equality, education is seen as a public good, which serves citizens and the entire society. If the purpose of public education is to create social efficiency, education benefits taxpayers and employers and becomes a public good that benefits the

private sector. If the purpose of public education is to create social mobility, education benefits individual consumers and promotes education as a private good for personal consumption.¹²

Much like Giroux's conservatives and radicals had opinions that served different constituencies, those who benefitted from current social structures and those who did not, the three purposes Labaree outlines serve different constituencies within American society and suggest different ways in which education should be conducted and structured. An education whose purpose is to create social efficiency emphasizes "hierarchical social structure and the occupational marketplace" which promotes amongst young students a sense of competition with one another and also an emphasis on vocational learning.¹³ Since vocational learning increases necessary workplace skills, it follows that if the purpose of public education is to create social efficiency and a stronger economy that schools should seek to do their best in preparing students for vocational life. Put into conversation with Giroux, this leads to a divided society with those who are in positions of power within the workforce or marketplace continuing to benefit while those who are in subservient positions continuing to struggle.¹⁴ Clearly, from both the perspectives of Giroux and Labaree, an education with the purpose of creating social efficiency does not emphasize the creation of equal citizens or a collective society.

The structure of an education with the purpose of social mobility is different from, but related to an education with the purpose of social efficiency. Labaree makes the distinction clear when he states, "social efficiency argues that schools should adapt

¹² David Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Races in American Education*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 18.

¹³ Ibid. 22.

¹⁴ Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and The Politics of Hope*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 119.

students to the existing socioeconomic structure, the social mobility goal asserts that schools should provide students with the educational credentials they need in order to get ahead in this structure”.¹⁵ The promotion of social mobility abstracts public education one step further than the purpose of social efficiency. Social efficiency still promotes some type of connection to broader society, through a connection to the development of a workforce and economy. In contrast, social mobility promotes the improvement of the individual in order to surpass others within society. If the purpose of education is to achieve social mobility, education becomes a good for personal consumption. The relationship between the purpose of social efficiency and social mobility is evident as promoting individual achievement and hard work reinforces our capitalist economic structure. However, it does little to create citizens that are familiar with society’s full range of culture and therefore does not allow for individuals to participate independently and thoughtfully in the political process or broader public sphere.¹⁶

Giroux might argue that historically the elite have seen education through a lens of social mobility. They have used education as a tool to maintain their own power as well as prevent others from gaining power. In radicals calling for the restructuring of public education, I actually see them calling for the end to education that has social mobility as its purpose. Since social mobility allows for the individual advancement, oftentimes at the expense of others, putting an end to social mobility as the goal of public education would allow us to focus on what our responsibility as citizens is to our collective society. This is where Labaree’s third purpose, promoting democratic equality, becomes fundamentally important.

¹⁵ David Labaree, “*How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Races in American Education*,” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 26.

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

Democratic equality, the third purpose of education that Labaree points to, emphasizes the pursuit of citizenship training, equal treatment, and equal access to participation in the public sphere.¹⁷ Labaree asserts that this aim has played a consistent role over the course of the development of public education. However, at different points in time, it has been more prominent than others. In the founding of the United States, the purpose of promoting democratic equality through public education was a central focus. Horace Mann, a founder and leading thinker in American public education, commented, “It may be an easy thing to make a republic, but it is a very laborious thing to make Republicans; and woe to the republic that rests upon no better foundations than ignorance, selfishness, and passion”.¹⁸ Mann clearly believed that public schools in America held a serious responsibility to create thoughtful and engaged citizens who could participate in and uphold the values of a Republic. From Mann’s perspective, schools essentially created the foundation of the American public sphere. If schools do not take seriously the role of creating engaged citizens, our form of government and the American principles of a government that was participatory and democratic in nature would not succeed.

Horace Mann’s assertion that public education must focus on creating Republicans aligns directly with Thomas Jefferson’s earlier argument that the democratic experience is directly linked to public education. For Jefferson, knowledge was connected to freedom. Therefore, in order for people to be free citizens they needed to be educated and it was the government's job to provide such an education. Jefferson differed

¹⁷ David Labaree, “*How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Races in American Education*,” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 21.

¹⁸ Michael Roth. “*Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters*.” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014),19.

from others who believed education to be solely a moral process where the government was not involved. For Jefferson, in the United States, a country founded on the establishment of a democratic government, education was not just a moral process but rather a citizen building process. Those who saw education as a moral process believed that its purpose was to help individuals discern right from wrong and to engage in larger debates surrounding philosophy and wisdom.

Jefferson did not disagree that education should teach students to discern right from wrong, however, he saw the role of the public sphere and government as inseparable from doing so. In other words, public education, provided by the government, served the purpose of equipping students with the skills and abilities to join a collective society where together they determined right from wrong. Education with the purpose of building citizens in addition to developing moral reasoning abilities places an emphasis on the collective society rather than just the individual. This is a significant distinction as the argument is often made that education serves the purpose of allowing individuals the luxury of debating what is moral and what is not. For Jefferson, and for American society, public education was not something that should be accessible only to those who wanted the ability to morally reason or had the time and desire to learn to do so. Rather, public education was a process that allowed for citizens to collectively discern right from wrong in order to create a just public with laws and policies that were reflective of the best interests of the collective society.

From Jefferson's perspective it was "only by educating its citizenry that the new Republic could steer a course between the hazardous rocks of governmental tyranny and popular anarchy. Thus the education of the people should be the responsibility of a

government elected by the people”.¹⁹ Jefferson and Mann both saw education as a public good that should be accessible to participating members of the public. Not only would this benefit individuals who would then be able to engage in decision making processes, but also create their ideal form of government and a strong public sphere. Education is a public good because it is necessary and inseparable from our public sphere; a democracy cannot function without an educated citizen base. It is for this reason that education must be accessible to all and conducted with the purpose of building citizens.

In order to create citizens and one collective democratic society, schools have to create a common culture and shared educational experience. Founders of the Common School feared the social divide that was created from our capitalist economy and unequal opportunities afforded to different immigrant groups and therefore advocated for uniform curriculum, school enrollment, and a shared educational experience.²⁰ From this lens, education’s primary purpose was to create strong citizens and a collective experience in order to allow students to engage in the public sphere. This is congruent with the way in which Labaree views promoting democratic equality as the aim of public education. This purpose cannot be served by increasingly individualized education that rewards personal achievement or performance of state assessments. If the purpose of public education is to promote democratic equality, it must be centered on the development of capacities that allow one to be a citizen- critical thinking, knowledge of different components of American society, and active engagement with the public sphere. However, in addition to fostering individual citizenship skills, promoting democratic equality necessitates a focus on the collective in order to create a public sphere.

¹⁹ Michael Roth. *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 20-25.

²⁰ Ibid, 22.

Public schools that have the primary purpose of promoting democratic equality realize that they are in fact a social institution that does not shape the public, but rather creates the public.²¹ It is for this reason that public schools must take seriously examining the question of what type of public they will create. Promoting democratic equality creates a public of engaged citizens who are able to come together and reason collectively. Neither the goal of social efficiency or social mobility achieves this. As both of those aims “privatize the mind” therefore making the creation of a public mind virtually impossible.²² In this context to privatize the mind means that the mind is made into a tool that is used to benefit the private sphere. One’s mind does not serve to benefit the public but rather other private aims that benefit a select portion of the public. In order to create and sustain a capable public, schools must serve the purpose of promoting democratic equality, which will allow for a collective society comprised of individuals who are publicly minded. The promotion of democratic equality allows for the creation of citizens who are able to engage, debate, and reason with one another and therefore take part in public life. The promotion of democratic equality allows for citizens to live in connection with one another rather than in isolation from one another.

²¹ Neil Postman, “End of Education,” (New York: Vintage, 1996), <http://brilliant-learning.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/04/Neil-Postman-The-End-of-Education.pdf>.

²² Ibid, <http://brilliant-learning.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/04/Neil-Postman-The-End-of-Education.pdf>.

Chapter Two: Qualities of a Democratic Citizen

Conceptualizing education as a public good with the primary purpose being to create citizens that are able to participate effectively in a democracy, raises the following question: “What characteristics or abilities must citizens possess to be quality participants in the American public sphere?” In a democratic society where citizens are charged with shaping the public sphere, it is necessary to create the public mind in each individual citizens. In the previous chapter, I asserted that the conversation surrounding education reform must first ask the question “What is the purpose of public education in our society?” in order to determine necessary practices and policies. My answer to this question is that the purpose of public education in America, as articulated centuries ago by Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, and more recently by scholars such as Neil Postman, is to build strong citizens in order to promote democratic equality and create an engaged and participatory public sphere.

I argued, in agreement with Neil Postman that “public education does not serve a public. It *creates* a public”.²³ Creating a capable and sustainable public requires the pursuit of democratic equality. Only by pursuing democratic equality can we foster an education system that believes in equal access and opportunities for all members of society. A strong, capable, and sustainable public requires all to be engaged citizens. Democratic equality, as opposed to social efficiency or social mobility, allow for this.²⁴ Additionally, promoting democratic equality in public schools allows for the creation of the public mind in the individual. It does so because we learn that all citizens of

²³ Neil Postman, “End of Education,” (New York: Vintage, 1996), <http://brilliant-learning.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/04/Neil-Postman-The-End-of-Education.pdf>.

²⁴ David Labaree, “*How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Races in American Education*,” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 21-22.

American society are entitled to the same rights and goods because they are all of equal value. Viewing humankind in this way allows us to see ourselves reflected in our fellow citizens and therefore extended the same rights and privileges. This is essential to creating the public mind in individuals because the public mind requires thinking in terms of the broader society. One who is publicly minded thinks about the way in which one's actions align with the broader moral codes of society and acts in a way that is benevolent to the public sphere. Democratic equality is fundamental to creating the public mind because it allows us to see the value in our fellow citizens and therefore need to act in a way that benefits the public. This cannot be achieved through promoting social mobility or social efficiency, as neither of those aims would instill a sense of equality amongst citizens but rather a sense of competition or inequality. This serves to privatize the mind, allowing it to become devoted to aims that benefit the individual or a small group of citizens. Through the pursuit of democratic equality and creation of the public mind, public education can sever to create and sustain a capable public.

With a clear understanding of the purpose of public education within our democratic society, we can now turn to examine the qualities that are necessary in building citizens that are able to engage thoughtfully and meaningfully in the public sphere. What are the necessary abilities and qualities of American citizens? In what ways are these qualities intrinsically connected to their responsibility as citizens of a democracy? How have scholars over time differed about their beliefs of what it means to be a citizen? In the coming chapter, I explore the meaning and necessary qualities for citizens of the American democracy. There are three elements to developing the public mind within citizens that I argue are fundamentally important: citizens must have the

ability to reason, a thorough exposure to and well-versed understanding of American culture and the breadth of things it is comprised of, as well as an understanding of their role in participating in and shaping the decisions made in the public sphere.

It is easy to gloss over the meaning of citizen in contemporary society with many only thinking of citizen as a passive title that one earns simply by being born in a certain county. In this way citizen has become confused with “resident.” One is a resident of a place they live in. One is oftentimes a citizen of a place they live but to define the term citizen purely off of geographic residence does not accurately capture the meaning of the word. Being a citizen is not a passive role in which one resides in a place and is therefore deemed to be a citizen. Instead, being a citizen is an active role in which one takes part and is involved with the public sphere through helping to define and administer justice. This is a role to be taken very seriously and with great responsibility because it leaves a great deal of power to citizens.

Citizen is a term with a great deal of history that has been defined differently by various philosophers. I turn to Aristotle’s defining of citizen because his definition is not in regards to what makes one a citizens but rather what responsibilities citizens have. In recent public dialogue, Americans politicians have become narrowly focused on whether or not one is a citizen by virtue of being born within the United States. This does not really do the term justice as it does not bring into the conversation what a citizen’s responsibilities or how citizens shape the public. For Aristotle a citizen was not solely determined by the physical space in which one lived. Rather, a citizen was one who had certain duties to the public. He writes, “The citizen in this strict sense is best defined by the one criterion that he shares in the administration of justice and in the holding of

office”.²⁵ For Aristotle, essential to being a citizen was participating in the public sphere through civic duty and upholding of justice. Aristotle’s definition of holding office is not constricted to roles such as mayor or president as he also includes things such as “the office of jurymen or the office of a member of the popular assembly”.²⁶ By including these roles as examples of “holding office,” we see that Aristotle’s defining of citizen is far reaching and not limited to political officials but inclusive of the common men who take part in the administration of justice through serving on jury or taking part in voting²⁷.

Aristotle is clear that this definition of citizen, one that is linked to the administration of justice or holding of office, is only applicable to forms of government that are democratic. He states, “Citizens under each different kind of kind of constitution must also necessarily be different... We may thus conclude that the citizen of our definition is particularly and especially the citizen of a democracy”.²⁸ The reason that defining citizen as someone who is directly involved with the public sphere through administering justice as well as holding office must be linked with a democratic form of government is because it implies what Aristotle refers to as “a public element”. A public element means that the public sphere, comprised of citizens, has power in decision-making.

In other forms of government, such as oligarchies or autocracies, power does not rest with the public but rather with a small group or individual. Oligarchies and autocracies have citizens, however it cannot be conceptualized as one who holds office or

²⁵ Aristotle. *Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), trans. Ernest Baker, 1274b32.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 1275a19.

²⁷ In Aristotle’s time not all were included in the administration of justice. Women, racial minorities, and the servile class were excluded. However, in the American democracy where all are part of the free class and equal civil rights have been extended to formerly marginalized groups, we can conceptualize administrators of justice as all citizens, including both men and women.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 1275a33.

participates in administering justice because in those forms of government there is no public element. Fundamental to a democratic government is citizens who are able to participate actively, through serving jury duty, voting on elected officials, and taking part in public meetings. Without citizens who are able to do these things, democratic government fails because it is so directly linked with a strong public sphere where a great deal of power rests.

This is not to say that in oligarchies or autocracies there is no meaning of citizen or no capabilities they must possess, rather that the defining of citizen as one who is capable of “administering justice” is unique to democratic societies. The administration of justice requires one to be able to think freely. Historically, liberal education has existed in societies that were not democratic, but it has consistently served the free class of society. For example, liberal arts education flourished in the Middle Ages in monarchical governments. However, it was not made widely accessible to all citizens and solely served the elite class who were free to pursue a leisurely education.²⁹ I argue that in a democracy liberal arts education cannot simply be available to those who can afford it but rather that liberal arts education is necessary in the creation of the type of citizens that a democratic society requires. Liberal arts education serves the free class by developing autonomous minds. In a democracy all citizens are members of the free class and therefore need to be able to think autonomously. Therefore, in democratic society liberal arts education must be afforded to all.

In the context of contemporary American society, one that is democratic in nature, people partake in the administration of justice through voting on both political

²⁹ John of Salisbury. “Humanist, Scholastic, and Sectarian Strains in the Colonial College,” *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 108-109.

candidates and laws, participating in jury duty, and attending town hall meetings or forums. Through doing so, they are acting as citizens and therefore their education should prepare them to thoroughly understand these roles and be able to fulfill them. Since public education should be viewed as a public good, with the aim of creating a common culture amongst citizens and therefore a strong democratic public, public schools bear the responsibility of developing skills such as critical thinking and the ability to reason with one another. These skills are necessary if citizens have such a powerful and important role in shaping the public sphere through determining laws, policies, officials, and outcomes of judicial cases.

Before turning to look at why citizens must be able to think critically, let us explore what is now thought to be a rather elementary skill, the ability to read. I first explore the concept of literacy as it relates to cultural literacy. They are not one in the same as literacy simply implies the ability to read whereas cultural literacy signifies the ability to understand a variety of phrases, concepts, and significant works in order to understand one's own culture and therefore have a sense of efficacy within society.³⁰ I then seek to relate culture literacy to critical thinking and assert that the former offers us a basis of which to understand and access information while the latter allows us to participate in the public by developing opinions, beliefs, and courses of action.

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams believed literacy to be a critical skill for all citizens. On the surface, this may appear to be a rather trivial argument, but I expand on their notion that literacy is essential by arguing in addition to literacy, exposure to a wide range of texts is necessary in the development of citizens. Let us first begin by examining

³⁰ E. D. Hirsch, "Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know," (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) 2-5.

why Jefferson and Adams found literacy to be a necessary skill to the building of capable citizens. For both Jefferson and Adams, “literacy was the basic foundation of knowledge”.³¹ Literacy allowed one to be exposed to new ideas, information, disciplines, and beliefs. It also enables one to gain knowledge independent from a teacher or school. Once one can read, access to literature is the only necessary tool to continue to learn. In terms of building citizens, literacy is necessary because it prevents against indoctrination. One who can read cannot be easily coerced into believing a certain doctrine because he or she is able to access a plurality of beliefs, customs, or opinions thus realizing that one doctrine is not the sole choice.

It is obviously widely accepted that literacy is an important and necessary skill for students, as every public elementary and secondary school focuses a great deal of time and energy on producing literate students. Discussions of how to create students who are reading on grade level are common and the reasons for promoting literacy are rather practical in nature. Students must be able to apply to jobs, read basic news articles, and absorb information. However, when discussing literacy as an essential skill of citizens, it is important to acknowledge that literacy allows for one to learn about their own culture and society. Whether it is through news articles or a history textbook, literacy allows access to understanding the American identity and the broader context of human identity. Both understanding the American identity as well as global identity is an essential part of being a citizen because it gives meaning to one’s citizenship.

David Labaree makes the argument that, “all members of a free society need familiarity with the full range of that society’s culture in order to participate intelligently

³¹ Michael Roth. *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014),23.

in the political process”.³² Although not directly making the argument that literacy is necessary, put into conversation with Jefferson and Adams we can see that literacy allows for one to have a more thorough understanding of one’s own identity and broader culture. It is for this reason that I argue it is not only literacy that is important, but also a wide breadth of exposure to literature. In this way, I am not making an argument for basic literacy as a decoding skill in which one is able to simply read words. Rather literacy is a form of efficacy that allows for one to be engaged within their own culture. E. D. Hirsch makes the argument that cultural literacy, the ability to not only read but also use reading to comprehend and discern meaning, is “inseparable from democracy”.³³ He views it as necessary within the context of a democracy because without being able to comprehend and discern meaning we cannot develop the ability to reason or determine our views on important issues. Since a democracy relies on citizens to uphold justice and therefore not only possess knowledge but also be able to dissect and analyze that knowledge, cultural literacy is imperative.

Wide exposure to literature will allow for the creation of citizens that are not just able to read but have a broad knowledge base and understanding of the different components that make up society. Exposure to literature in disciplines such as history, art, music, scientific discovery, statistical analysis, religion, philosophy, and sociology, provide different insights into the American identity and culture. These different forms of knowledge and perspectives in turn allow for citizens to be well rounded and better informed when engaging in the public sphere. Additionally, they contribute to a citizen

³² ³² David Labaree, “*How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Races in American Education*,” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997),20.

³³ E. D. Hirsch, “Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know,” (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) 12

becoming culturally literate and they are able to comprehend and discern meaning in a variety of fields that make up American society. Students become aware of the various perspectives and ways of thinking that exist across disciplines and people and are then able to develop their own lines of reasoning and beliefs.

In terms of contemporary educational philosophers, Hirsch makes the argument that core knowledge is necessary in order to develop literacy amongst students. When examining issues of literacy amongst elementary ages students, Hirsch states that lack of prior knowledge or relevant information is what hinders most students from comprehending passages. To combat illiteracy, schools have spent hours of educational time devoted to mastering the skill of reading through teaching students to monitor, question and summarize. However, Hirsch asserts that this is somewhat futile as the most helpful tool is increased knowledge so that students can better comprehend passages, which he believes can be achieved through a good general educational curriculum.³⁴ By doing so, teachers will be able to develop students content knowledge and close the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged students and therefore increase literacy.

This method of approaching increasing literacy stresses its importance, as Hirsch would not be making an argument for how to improve literacy education if he did not see literacy as valuable to begin with. Additionally, he sees closing the gap in literacy as linked with exposure to a wider array of content areas and knowledge. Doing so allows for all students to not only become better readers but also have a greater exposure to

³⁴ E. D. Hirsch, "What Do They Know of Reading Who Only Reading Know? Bringing Liberal Arts into the Wasteland of the "Literacy Block" *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2007), 17.

elements that comprise their culture. Therefore upon graduation more able to, as Labaree states, “participate intelligently in the political process”.³⁵

Hirsch’s argument is premised on the idea that literacy is important in public education as it creates a base of citizens who can be well informed and engaged. He states, “an education in literature, science, history, and the liberal arts... is the *only* kind of education that can build good readers”.³⁶ For reasons outlined previously, based on ideas of Jefferson and Adams, reading is necessary for citizens. By good readers, Hirsch does not mean children who can read words off a list at remarkable speed. Hirsch means students who can comprehend and analyze the texts and their relevance to our own society. Hirsch’s argument that exposure to an array of knowledge areas is necessary in order to develop good readers, or culturally literate citizens, is serendipitous in terms of my argument that engagement with an array of areas of culture is necessary to being an informed and strong citizen. Education that teaches the skill of literacy through broad exposure does two things in developing citizens. First, it ensures that students will graduate with the ability to obtain knowledge for themselves and not become victims of those in power. Second, it enables citizens to be in touch with and exposed to a variety of issues, ideas, and beliefs and therefore be informed when participating in the public sphere.

If literacy acts as a sort of gatekeeper to information, equally important is what is done with that information. If schools solely sought to produce literate students, there would be little meaning in an education. Literacy allows one access, but it is only part of the process of becoming educated. In addition to creating a literate public, schools have a

³⁵ ³⁵ David Labaree, “*How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Races in American Education*,” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 20.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

responsibility to teach students to think critically about the material they read. Both literacy and thinking critically are necessary skills for citizens of a democracy as the first allows access to information and therefore power, while the latter promotes the voicing of opinions and thoughtful participation in the public sphere.

Jefferson conceived “an educated citizenry as the guardian of freedom”.³⁷ For Jefferson, developing citizenship was linked directly to education and education was directly linked to protecting freedom. The concepts of citizenship, education, and freedom could not be separated from one another, as education produced strong citizens who then protected the ideal of freedom. This raises the question why is critical thinking necessary for citizens to truly be free? Jefferson argued that a major purpose of education needed to be “to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom”.³⁸ In order for an educated citizenry to be able to serve as the guardian of freedom, it had to first be able to discern the meaning of freedom.

Citizens must be able to debate with one another about what would protect or hinder their freedom. Only after engaging in these debates can citizens work to shape a society that maximizes the capacity to be free. In order to engage in the discussion about what increases the capacity for freedom, one must have the ability to think critically and reason through an argument. One must be able to analyze the way in which a certain policy or politician would impact their own life, the lives of others, and broader society. By teaching people to be able to judge for themselves, Jefferson ultimately asserts that citizens become free of authority. The ability to judge or think critically prevents citizens from falling victim to an oppressive regime or dictator who will endanger their freedom.

³⁷ Michael Roth. *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24

It was only “an informed citizenry who would be able to see through the ruses used by governmental authorities” and that would be capable of deciding who would best represent their ideas in public office.³⁹ In a democracy, citizens must learn to be able to reason and think critically because it is the very tool that ensures their freedom and autonomy as opposed to their oppression and domination.

In the coming chapter, I explore liberal arts education as a type of education that develops critical thinking and reasoning abilities in order to protect the freedom of individuals. The American democracy has at its core the value of individual freedom. Liberal arts education has at its core a belief in freethinking individuals. Public education is an institution of our democratic government with the purpose of creating free individuals with a public mind and therefore must be designed to promote freedom. Liberal arts education does just that through creating freethinking individuals.

³⁹ Michael Roth. *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 23.

Chapter Three: Defining of Liberal Arts Education

In order to define the “liberal arts” or a “liberal education” it is essential to examine the history of the discussion, and conflicting views over the meaning of this type of education. Ultimately, we must explore what scholars’ points of contention in the debate but also what they have found as inherent or essential to the meaning of liberal arts education. I argue that liberal education cannot be separated from creating freethinking individuals and therefore is the type of education necessary in a democracy. To understand how liberal arts education is connecting to the creation of freethinking individuals, it is necessary to explore both the content of a liberal arts education and the overall philosophy of liberal arts education. The former asks the questions what are the traditional “arts” or “arêtes” and the latter raises questions in regards to the form or technique of liberal arts education as well as its purpose and significance to humanity and democracy. Both the content and philosophy of liberal arts education are important in understanding how liberal arts education gives one freedom over their own thoughts. Additionally, having both the content and philosophical understanding of liberal arts education allows us to understand what it would look like in practice in K-12 classrooms as well as why it is necessary.

There are two broad categories that exist when mapping out the discussion of the meaning of liberal arts education. In order to understand the meaning of liberal arts education, it is necessary to examine the scholars who have taken part in the conversation and how they ultimately differed. On one side are those who are typically referred to as “traditional” thinkers, Aristotle, Robert Hutchins, Anthony Kronman, Mortimer Adler, Ted Sizer, and Michael Oakeshott. They are referred to as traditional for their belief in

the “great books⁴⁰”, view of education as a pursuit of leisure, and emphasis on the humanities. On the other side of the debate, are those who are viewed as more progressive, Martha Nussbaum, Bobby Fong, John Dewey, and Michael Roth. They are different from the traditional thinkers in that they focus on education that is also not exclusively leisurely but also practical⁴¹, aim to create global citizens, and incorporate disciplines outside of the traditional humanities.

What is in tension between these two different groups of liberal arts schools are their different ways of answering the following three questions. First, what is the significance of the humanities in the liberal arts curriculum and how do other disciplines (specifically social sciences) fit into the curriculum? Secondly, is liberal arts education devoid of practicality? In other words, is liberal arts education a complete freeing of the mind from daily necessary tasks? Thirdly, what transcends individual experiences to make up collective human wisdom? This third question is closely linked to the first, with scholars in the more traditional camp arguing that the humanities are the core of human wisdom and come more contemporary thinkers arguing that fields of social science and subjects such as African American Studies or Gender and Women’s studies also contributing the pool of collective wisdom. I explore the scholars’ difference in opinions over these three questions to ultimately argue that liberal arts education is both practical and leisurely, incorporates the social sciences in addition to the humanities, and there is

⁴⁰ Robert Hutchins, “The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education,” (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 1955). Hutchins is credited for the term “great books” which are a set of texts, typically of the traditional western canon that he and other scholars find to be necessary to liberal learning.

⁴¹ Practical used here is closely linked to Robert Dewey’s description of “useful labor.” Dewey discusses an education that is both leisurely and on preparation for useful labor. Dewey makes the argument that having a divide in education between the leisurely and the useful only perpetuates divides in social classes. If we pursue democratic equality we cannot have a divide between leisurely education and useful education, as it will not create citizens who seem themselves as part of one united public. Rather, citizens would be divided into classes with different aims and purposes.

not universal human wisdom but rather universal questions that groups of people have come to answer in different ways based on their shared experiences.

Let us first begin with looking at scholars' differing opinions on the role of humanities and the social sciences in a liberal arts curriculum. The traditional thinkers stress the importance of the humanities within a liberal arts curriculum and believe that the increasing attention given to social sciences as well as research has prompted educational institutions to shift away from examining collective wisdom or the collective meaning of humanity. No longer is education about questioning the meaning of life, a question central to the humanities, but rather education has become about pursuing highly specialized fields of knowledge or understanding social patterns of different groups of people.⁴²

The social sciences, sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics are all fields that have thrived for their ability to produce research. However, they do not focus on questions of collective humanity, experience, or wisdom. For Anthony Kronman, as well as other traditional liberal arts scholars, the increasing emphasis on diversity in the liberal arts curriculum prompted an increase in emphasis on the social sciences and a decrease in emphasis on the humanities. The shift towards diversity education within the curriculum, which Kronman refers to as “political correctness” guides the conversation away from the meaning of humanity and instead claims that characteristics such as race and gender define our experiences. For Kronman and other traditional liberal arts scholars, this is detrimental to a liberal arts education for it no

⁴² Anthony Kronman. *Education's End Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 7.

longer has at its core the pursuit of the meaning of a collective humanity or collective human wisdom.

Martha Nussbaum takes an opposing view as the incorporation of social sciences, African American Studies, and Gender and Women's Studies courses, ultimately arguing that these fields allow for a greater understanding of the plurality of human experiences and are central to a liberal arts education, which has the ultimate aim of cultivating our collective humanity. In contemporary US Society, Nussbaum argues, “we must commit ourselves to producing citizens, white and black, who know themselves and their historical plight and how to fight race prejudice. Then the world of our dream will come and not otherwise”.⁴³ It is for this reason that Nussbaum believes African American Studies, for example, to be an important discipline in institutions of liberal arts education.

This brings us to the debate scholars have over what transcends individual experience and becomes part of the collective narrative of wisdom. Through the work of Aristotle and discussed in the medieval period by John of Salisbury, we see that the pursuit of collective wisdom is fundamental to liberal education. John of Salisbury states, “They are called ‘liberal’, because their object it to effect man’s liberation, so that, freed from cares, he may devote himself to wisdom”.⁴⁴ Here we see that the devotion to wisdom is the highest calling for human beings and that liberal education allows human beings to devote themselves to this cause. The text goes on to stress the importance of the mind having “greater ability to apply itself to philosophy” with philosophy meaning the

⁴³ Martha Nussbaum. “*Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Densense of Reform in Liberal Education*,” (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1997), 185.

⁴⁴ John of Salisbury, “Humanist, Scholastic, and Sectarian Strains in the Colonial College,” *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 113.

love of wisdom⁴⁵. When the author calls for a freeing from “worry about material necessity” and instead a pursuit of wisdom, he is suggesting that liberal education should allow us to explore knowledge rather than being concerned with the more day-to-day matters of life. This is an argument for the leisurely over the practical; rather than worrying about necessary work one should be able to think about ideas and concepts regardless of their relevance to day to day survival.

The ideas John of Salisbury puts forth can be traced back to the thinking of Aristotle who also believed that devotion to wisdom was the highest calling. Aristotle refers to the pursuit of leisure, which really is about the devotion to wisdom. Aristotle concludes that only pursuing areas of study that are useful does not lead to a free soul and that is why subject matters such as music and philosophy are important in education. In *Debates in Antiquity* Aristotle states, “for the ancients bear witness to us, their opinion may be gathered from the fact that music is one of the received and traditional branches of education”.⁴⁶ From this, we can gather that the pursuit of leisure, which is about a devotion to wisdom or knowledge, connects humans from different generations. If humans in contemporary times as well as ancient times are pursuing an education in wisdom, then wisdom transcends individuals, and connects human beings throughout time.

Disciplines such as African American Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, and well as other social sciences are part of collective wisdom for they are not based on a day-to-day experience or an individual experience, but rather, collective identities that

⁴⁵ John of Salisbury, “Humanist, Scholastic, and Sectarian Strains in the Colonial College,” *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 113.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, “Debates in Antiquity,” 330 B.C. *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 1338a10.

connect individuals throughout vast periods of history. Collective wisdom consists of the various ways in which groups of people with shared experiences have come to answer universal questions. By universal questions I mean questions that have persisted throughout time and are asked by all people. These questions are broad and consist of things such as how should we live our lives, what morals should we hold, or what is the universe.

There is not one universal answer to each of these questions. Rather, answers are shaped by people's experiences, which have largely been shaped by our identities and factors such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity. The plurality of ways groups have come to answer universal questions contributes to the collection of human wisdom. These collective identities are all pieces of the greater human experience and therefore are fundamental in humans' pursuit of wisdom. For Nussbaum the addition of these academic disciplines allows for a broader understanding of our human history and therefore a more complete understanding of who we are. These disciplines do not detract from the study of the humanities, but rather seek to expand upon our ability to think justly and rationally as we consider the various experiences of human beings and how they have shaped both history and our present day society.⁴⁷ Additionally the studying of these disciplines provokes the raising of important questions in order to develop one's reasoning skills.

For Nussbaum, a primary aim of liberal education is to foster curiosity and questioning, with an ultimate aim of being able to reason. She introduces two important concepts, Socratic self-examination and narrative imagination, which I believe to be

⁴⁷ Martha Nussbaum. "*Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*," (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1997), 221.

essential to liberal arts education. Socratic self-examination has at its core the aim of “confronting the passivity of the pupil, challenging the mind to take charge of its own thought”.⁴⁸ It forces students to become reflective, raising questions, and learning to reason to come to an answer. Socratic self-examination is at its heart student-centered for the teacher cannot reason for the student. Rather, students must be engaged and reflective in order to develop the ability to reason as individuals and also in conjunction with one another. Additionally, Socratic self-examination promotes the type of free thinking that is necessary in a democracy because it requires the student to be able to reason independently, examining her own thoughts, the possible gaps in her thinking, and then determine where her thoughts originated from and how she might think about something differently.

Socratic self-examination is a concept that Nussbaum emphasized but it is rooted in Socratic questioning, a method employed to guide a person towards a higher level of critical thinking. It is perhaps too familiar to many from “*The Republic*” where Socrates and Polemarchus engage in the process of Socratic questioning. Ultimately, Socrates forces interlocutors to sort through what they know and do not know and pushes them to examine inconsistencies in his arguments. The liberally educated, the one with the ability of Socratic self-examination, will read the dialogue between Socrates and Polemarchus and question Socrates’ reasoning as well. Nussbaum refers to this as “logical analysis” and argues that it is at the heart of not only a liberal education but also the formation of a democratic society.⁴⁹ Being able to raise questions of an author’s message and thinking critically about whether an argument is well constructed on the grounds of logic gives

⁴⁸ Martha Nussbaum. “*Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*,” (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1997,) 28.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 36.

one ownership over his or her own thoughts. Being able to come together with one another to discuss lines of reasoning than allows for meaningful dialogue of autonomous individuals to take place, which allows humans to collectively reason as a society.

The core of liberal arts education is creating freethinking individuals; we see this in the work of Nussbaum but also in the work of Roth and Fong⁵⁰. It is evident in Roth's final line, "when liberal education works it works for a lifetime" that he believes that true liberal education transforms the way in which one thinks and that can never be taken away from an individual.⁵¹ If this is true, then an educational institution or teachers cannot contain liberal education. Rather, liberal education must leave students with the ability to think for themselves outside of the confines of a classroom. It is for this reason that liberal education is fundamental in K-12 classrooms. Liberal education gives to students a gift that is inseparable from them for the rest of their lives; it gives students the ability to think independently. Political decisions, questions of meaning, and ultimately the events of our society are dictated by our ability to reason collectively. However, in order for collective reasoning to occur individuals must be able to think autonomously. Liberal arts education cannot be separated from creating autonomous thinkers and democracy requires autonomous thinkers.

With the purpose of liberal arts education being to create freethinking individuals, it is necessary to examine how the content of the education does so. When defining the

⁵⁰ Bobby Fong. "Cultivating Sparks of Divinity: Soul Making as the Purpose of Higher Education," In Liberal Education: Association of American Colleges and Universities, Summer 2014, Vol. 100, No. 3. Accessed April 19, 2016. <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2014/summer/fong>
Fong's piece "Cultivating Sparks of Divinity" he references the concept of "doxa" which from the ancient Greeks means "inherited beliefs." Fong talks about how students come to institutions of higher education with certain inherited beliefs. He, like Nussbaum, believes that institutions of liberal learning have a responsibility to help students live the examined life which can only be done by teaching them to think critically and independently. <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2014/summer/fong>. April 19, 2016.

⁵¹ Michael Roth. "Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters." (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 156

content of liberal arts education, it is important to understand the meaning of the word “arête”, an ancient Greek concept. Translated into modern English, arête means virtue or excellence. Arête has no direct translation as it also conveys a sense of merit and excellence that transcends human kind and is possessed by gods or higher spirits.⁵² Arête is not something all human beings possess but rather something that noblemen acquire through a process of courage, valor, and education. The “liberal arts” is comprised of arêtes, or disciplines, thought to create and foster this sense of virtue and excellence among human beings.

In Ancient Greece, an education in the liberal arts was comprised of gymnastic, music, drawing, and letters. In the 1100’s during the founding of “the modernus university” the seven liberal arts were thought to consist of grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.⁵³ By the 1300’s, the liberal arts were thought to consist of history, moral philosophy, eloquence, poetry and the poetic art, music, arithmetic, and the science of the stars.⁵⁴ Although we see a slight shift, most notably perhaps being the incorporation of history and philosophy, it remains true that the liberal arts were all distinct subjects that were thought to be the necessary components of an education of a “nobleman”; an education that would lead to both virtue and excellence.

When understanding the significance of a liberal arts curriculum, it is essential to explore the relationship between the “arêtes” rather than the disciplines in isolation from one another. A liberal arts education was not merely a series of unconnected subjects that

⁵² Werner Jaeger, “Paideia: Ideals of Greek Culture” Vol.1. Trans. Gilbert Highet, (New York: *Oxford University Press*, 1939,) 5.

⁵³ John of Salisbury, “Humanist, Scholastic, and Sectarian Strains in the Colonial College,” *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 101-6.

⁵⁴ William Harrison Woodward, “Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators,” (New York: Burreach of Publications, Teachers College), Paolo Vegerius, 108-110.

scholars deemed important, but rather each “arête” was a piece of a larger whole which together would allow humans to access excellence, valor, and ultimately wisdom. When speaking about the seven liberal arts, John of Salisbury states that they “so hang together and so depend on one another in their ideas that if only one of the arts be lacking, all of the others cannot make a man into a philosopher”.⁵⁵ While each discipline is certainly important and to be pursued thoroughly and thoughtfully, it is when the arêtes are put into connection with one another that a greater whole becomes possible. Therefore, a liberal arts education cannot occur without a curriculum that contained all seven disciplines because the disciplines were all part of a larger whole that allowed human beings to think fully and holistically.

This idea is revisited by John Newman at the end of the 19th century who states, “all branches of knowledge are connected together... they complete, correct, and balance each other”.⁵⁶ For Newman, the different disciplines of a liberal arts education were inherently connected and therefore understanding one would better inform a scholar of another. Additionally, the disciplines were thought to balance each other out which perhaps can be equated to developing different forms of reasoning. Collectively the liberal arts are able to provide an education in quantitative, verbal, logical, and moral reasoning, which allow scholars to holistically reason. Both Kimball and Newman point towards the same argument which is that a liberal arts education cannot exist without a holistic and thorough curriculum which is far from the norm in the context of K-12 and higher education in modern day America.

⁵⁵ John of Salisbury, “Humanist, Scholastic, and Sectarian Strains in the Colonial College,” *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 107.

⁵⁶ John Newman, “The Idea of a University,” (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 76.

Perhaps the need for the *arêtes* to exist in connection to one another is best understood when put into conversation with another term closely associated with liberal arts education, *paideia*. The word “*paideia*” has a long-standing history dating back to ancient Greece. Werner Jaeger was a classicist who studied Greek Philosophy and wrote about the significance of the term “*paideia*” in ancient Greece. He explains that there is no true equivalent in the English language to the Greek term *paideia*. However, it consists of, civilization, tradition, literature, and education and is both moral and practical.⁵⁷ Jaeger discusses how the word has no direct translation in part because it was born out of a tradition that was based around the public consciousness. By this, Jaeger means that ancient Greek society valued honor above all else and that public praise and blame were powerful forces. In a society where public consciousness is important and honor is highly valued, it follows that the mixing of civilization, culture, tradition, literature, and education would call for its own term, *paideia*. The *arêtes* are closely connected to *paideia* because they were studied in connection with one another in order to develop the honorable and publicly conscious citizen. The *arêtes*, studied together, comprised the type of education that is most closely associated with *paideia*. It allowed for man to be immersed in an education surrounding civic life, tradition, literature, and that was both moral and practical.

Davey Naugle extends the conversation of the connection between *paideia* and public consciousness or collective Greek society by discussing how the purpose of *paideia* was to “make each person in the image of the community”.⁵⁸ It was not about the individual, but rather, about creating a collective society that embodied the ideal of

⁵⁷ Werner Jaeger, “*Paideia: Ideals of Greek Culture*” Vol.1. Trans. Gilbert Highet, (New York: *Oxford University Press*, 1939,) 1-3.

⁵⁸ Davey Naugle, “The Greek Concept of *Paideia*,” *Summer Institute in Christian Scholarship*, 2012, 1.

community and intellectual activity. Here we see that *paideia* not only is about human wisdom and meaning of collective humanity, but also about creating a and public sphere. For the Greeks, *paideia* was about “producing the well rounded and fully engaged citizen”.⁵⁹ This is the exact purpose that I argue public education has within the broader context of the American democracy. Through the pursuit of the arêtes collectively, we can develop an education system that is more closely associated with *paideia* and therefore produce citizens who are publicly minded and able to contribute thoughtfully to the public sphere and our democratic society.

The idea that education is to “make a person in the image of the community” is very similar to Neil Postman’s argument that we must unite students in public schools under one god. By uniting students under one god, Postman means that since all students are members of the same collective society they must be united by a common narrative that makes up the American identity. These two concepts are similar because for Postman it was essential that there be a common “god” that students were united under in order to form a cohesive and collective society⁶⁰. For Postman, uniting students under one god meant uniting them under a common culture, history, and value system. The Greek desire to make individuals in the image of their community shows for a valuing of the collective society and a need for a strong culture and public community. *Paideia* was not only about educating individuals; it was about educating individuals in order to form a strong public. Therefore the purpose of the education of individuals was “producing the well rounded

⁵⁹ Davey Naugle, “The Greek Concept of Paideia,” *Summer Institute in Christian Scholarship*, 2012, 1.

⁶⁰ Neil Postman, “End of Education,” (New York: Vintage, 1996), <http://brilliant-learning.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/04/Neil-Postman-The-End-of-Education.pdf>.

and fully engaged citizen”⁶¹ which is precisely the type of public education that is necessary in a contemporary American context.

Above I mentioned the importance of the public consciousness within Ancient Greece, with public honor and shame being powerful social forces. The level of importance of the public consciousness is something unfamiliar to many Americans. Contemporary US society is largely individualistic which could be attributed to several factors including the capitalist economic structure, a history of oppression and discrimination, and the widely held belief that meritocracy is alive and well. I highlight the difference between ancient Greece being focused largely on the collective and the United States being more individualistic in nature because the term *paideia* would be a unfamiliar for many Americans. But a shift away from the individual and towards the collective is precisely what I think is necessary in order to develop engaged citizens for a democracy.

The individualistic nature of contemporary American society has affected the content of the curriculum of institutions of liberal arts education. In order to understand the structure of the liberal arts curriculum, I turn to the debate between Charles Eliot’s free elective system and James McGosh’s promotion of general education⁶². Charles Eliot served as president of Harvard University in the early 20th century and is credited with the creation of the “free elective system.” For Eliot, liberal educational institutions had a responsibility to give students an opportunity to win academic distinctions, responsibility

⁶¹ Davey Naugle, “The Greek Concept of *Paideia*,” *Summer Institute in Christian Scholarship*, 2012, 1-2.

⁶² Carnochan frames the debate between Eliot and McGosh ultimately arguing that the free elective system is now the dominant structure curriculum in institutions of higher education. Eliot, president of Harvard University, and McGosh, president of Princeton are two prominent educational leaders that took differing sides of this debate. I frame the debate here in order to use it to show the way in which educational curricula have evolved and ultimately argue that both in higher education and K-12 schools general curricula are disappearing.

for forming their own habits, and freedom of choice of studies.⁶³ Giving students freedom over their own choice of studies was the beginning to the end of a clearly defined liberal arts curriculum as it allowed for students to be in control of their educational curriculum as opposed to faculty members or liberal arts institutions. It became possible for students to select classes that they were gifted or interested in while avoiding entire other subject matters.

James McGosh served as president of Princeton University in the early 20th century and unlike Eliot was an advocate for a traditional curriculum, where there were clear expectations as to what subjects would be included in the curriculum. McGosh believed that allowing students to chose their own subjects was preposterous because students would not only be able to select “easy” subjects but also would be deprived of subjects necessary to be fully educated. For McGosh, liberal arts colleges and universities were not marketplaces with self-governing students, but rather institutions responsible for providing a holistic and well-defined educational curriculum, which consisted of rhetoric, logic, grammar, the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.⁶⁴ McGosh drew his conception of the liberal arts curriculum from the history, dating back to ancient Greece, of what disciplines were necessary to bring forth virtue and excellence. The curriculum McGosh presents is only slightly different from the seven liberal arts that made up the curriculum of the “modernus University” from the 12th-16th centuries.

Ultimately, Charles Eliot won the debate between the more traditional liberal arts curriculum and the free elective system within the context of liberal arts education in

⁶³ W.B. Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum: Liberal Education and American Experience*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993,) 9-11.

⁶⁴ John of Salisbury, “Humanist, Scholastic, and Sectarian Strains in the Colonial College,” *The Liberal Arts Tradition Documentary*. Ed. Kimball, Bruce A. (Washington DC: UPA, 2010,) 113.

institutions of higher education. Liberal arts universities became increasingly departmentalized with departments competing to win students' interest. The students were ultimately governing the curriculum of the schools; no longer were highly educated administrators deciding what comprised a liberal arts education. In fact, students were not even deciding what comprised a liberal arts education, but rather what comprised an education they would find individual interesting and rewarding.

In the context of higher education, Eliot's free elective system largely gave students the power to define what their education should consist of and therefore what liberal education meant. In the context of K-12 education, it is not students that are defining the curriculum but rather departments of education, political interest groups, and local, state, and federal school boards. In neither case are teachers, principals, or administrators determining what subjects make up a liberal education. Instead students or political institutions are left with a great deal of power in terms of shaping the curriculum. This presents a greater problem: no longer are educational leaders or scholars charged with debating and determining the meaning of liberal arts education. Instead, liberal arts education is increasingly losing its meaning as political institutions and individual students gain power in defining it. No longer are scholars, educated in the history and philosophy of liberal arts education, in positions of power to come together in a dialogue to understand the meaning of liberal arts education. Instead political institutions as well as students are determining the curriculum of educational institutions, with little knowledge or understanding of the history or philosophy behind the original "arêtes" and why they must be pursued in connection to one another.

In the context of contemporary American society, it is difficult to say what subjects should make up a liberal arts education. Perhaps this is because general education has been lost and institutions have somewhat individually defined the content of liberal arts education. With a growing number of “liberal arts institutions”, there is a greater plurality of ideas about what comprises a liberal arts curriculum. Understanding the historical debate over the curriculum of liberal arts education in the United States explains the digression from a more traditional and clearly defined curriculum to a loosely defined and oftentimes contradictory meaning of the term liberal arts education. Central to the debate over the curriculum of liberal arts education are Charles Eliot and James McCosh.

When looking at the curriculum of K-12 public schools, there is not the exact same historical debate between a traditional curriculum as opposed to a curriculum based on the free elective system. The concept of “liberal arts education” is more commonly thought to be a model used in higher education. A typical K-12 public school curriculum consists of the following disciplines: mathematics, science, English, literature, social studies, physical education, and perhaps arts or music, which upon first examination seems very similar to the “arêtes” that make up a liberal arts education in institutions of higher education. However, in recent years there is a noticeable shift from a more traditional or general curriculum towards a curriculum increasingly focused on math and reading.

With the increasing focus on passing standardized tests comes an increased amount of focus and instructional time on subjects that are assessed. Math, reading, and in some cases science receive a prioritized spot in the curriculum while subjects such as

history, see a loss in instructional time. In this way we actually see the opposite problem as the free-election system; students experience fewer subjects in exchange for more instructional time on tested subjects such as mathematics and reading. Both the free elective system and the loss on instructional time in a variety of disciplines run counter to the promotion of liberal arts education. The general education that McGosh argued for in higher education and the ideals promoted by Horace Mann for the Common School have lost their place in our society.

The Council of Basic Education conducted a survey of K-12 principals in order to assess how instructional time was related to what was being assessed on statewide tests. The results indicate that seventy-five percent of respondents report an increased amount of instructional time being spent on reading and mathematics during the 2003-2004 school year.⁶⁵ Additionally, over twenty-five percent of elementary school principals indicate a decreased amount of time spent on social studies, civics, and geography.⁶⁶ Perhaps most startling is the fact that forty-seven percent of principals in high need elementary schools report cuts being made to time spent on subjects aside from mathematics and reading.⁶⁷ Over the last two decades, daily instruction time in math and reading have increased by twenty-nine and thirty-seven minutes respectively, while time spent on history and science has decreased by twenty-two and seventeen minutes respectively.⁶⁸

What these trends illustrate is that what is being tested is indeed what is being taught in K-12 classrooms. With an increasing focus on mathematics and reading other

⁶⁵ Martin West , “Testing, Learning, and Teaching: The Effects of Test-based Accountability on Student Achievement and Instructional Time in Core Academic Subjects.” *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 50.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 51.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 53.

subjects are relegated to less important roles, with little thought being given to how or why subjects such as history, science, art, or music are significant and important in the development of young people and citizens. Whether or not the curriculum of K-12 institutions has the same history or dialogue surrounding “liberal arts education” as institutions of higher education, the narrowing of the curriculum is a noticeable digression away from the traditional disciplines of a liberal arts education. As instructional time is lost in science, history, art, and music there is a loss of value placed on general and holistic education that is quintessential to the meaning of liberal arts education.

The idea that the disciplines are to be studied together and as pieces of a greater whole is fundamental to liberal arts education. A liberal arts curriculum is general and broad in scope, not narrow and restrictive. It is important to note that a broad curriculum is not the sole defining feature of a liberal arts curriculum. Although the disciplines included in a liberal arts education are fundamental, the meaning of a liberal arts education reaches beyond just the content as I alluded to earlier in the exploration of Socratic self-examination, the narrative imagination, and humankind’s liberation to become freethinking. When looking at the current K-12 public education system, I now turn to examine why a liberal arts education model, both contest wise and philosophically, would be a challenging shift, although crucially importance to the development and sustainability of a capable public.

Chapter Four: The Path to Liberal Arts Education in the K-12 Classroom

As we learned in the previous chapter, liberal arts education is defined by not only its content, but also, the way in which it shapes individuals. In this way, it is education becomes a transformative practice rather than a mimetic experience. One leaves a liberal arts education transformed by the content but also by the power to think freely. A liberal arts education creates students who are able to think freely and independently. Those who undergo liberal arts education are transformed upon graduation because they are able to enter the world and independently reason. They are not dependent on their teacher or school to think for them, but rather have developed the ability to think critically. In addition to the ability to think critically, what Nussbaum referred to as Socratic Self-Examination, students who undergo a liberal arts curriculum are also engaged in a general and broad curriculum. This general curriculum contains a variety of disciplines that allow for students to see connections between what they are learning and develop different ways of thinking and seeing the world.

I argue that a liberal arts education is necessary in public K-12 schools because it creates the type of citizens necessary to participate thoughtfully and meaningfully in the American democracy. If citizens of the American democracy are charged with “administering justice”: serving civic duty, voting, and participating in conversations that shape our public sphere, it follows that they must be able to reason independently. Not being able to do so could easily lead to oppression and domination by political leaders. Additionally, I argued earlier that citizens must be well versed in a variety of components that make up their identities and culture. Science, philosophy, literature, religion, art, music and other areas of study are all different components that put together comprise the

American culture and our own identities. A liberal arts education provides broad exposure to and an educational experience grounded in these different fields of study and therefore is necessary for creating citizens that are well versed in both the American and global culture.

With having made the case that liberal arts education is necessary in our public schools, I now turn to examine the barriers that currently exist in making this shift. I raise the question why a liberal arts education model is not widely accepted and used in public schools. What would need to change in order for there to be a wide scale shift towards liberal arts education in K-12 classrooms? The barriers are extensive but of utmost importance are teacher training and backgrounds, lack of connection and engagement between public K-12 schools and other organizations, increased emphasis on standardized test outcomes, which causes a narrowing of the curriculum. In this chapter, I discuss how each of these barriers makes it difficult to make the transition towards liberal arts education in K-12 classrooms.

I present these obstacles not to make the argument that a transition towards liberal arts education is ideal but impractical, but rather to clearly show the complexity of the proposition of shifting towards a more robust liberal arts model in public schools. I ultimately argue that these barriers each present a unique challenge that needs to be taken seriously in order to reshape our public education system. Only through looking at these barriers collectively and seeking to make systematic change, can we restructure the public education system to be one that affords students a liberal arts education and therefore creates strong citizens able to participate in the public sphere.

My argument for liberal arts education in public schools has been largely philosophical and normative. I assert that education is a public good in the United States and therefore has a responsibility to create strong and engaged citizens. Furthermore, I argue that citizens need a particular skillset that a liberal arts education provides. When addressing the obstacles that exist in shifting towards a liberal arts education in public school, I present not a philosophical argument but a practical argument. Only through understanding the practical barriers that are currently inhibiting the liberal arts from gaining prominence in public schools, is it possible to make changes and create reforms that will structurally shift the system of public education to one that is grounded in the liberal arts.

When talking about education reform, teacher quality, training, and preparation often become a focus of discussion. In making the case for liberal arts education in K-12 classrooms, it is necessary to consider the role teachers play in education. Since a liberal education brings a certain curriculum and seeks to create freethinkers it also requires teachers to have a certain type of education. Since the role of the teacher arises out of the type and structure of the education and curriculum, it is important to determine what exactly the role of the teacher is in liberal arts education. In order to be a teacher engaging in liberal arts education and instructing students in a liberal arts curriculum, a certain type of training and education is needed. The majority of public school teachers come from teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities.⁶⁹ When looking at transitioning towards liberal arts education in public schools, it is necessary to examine the history, strength, and content of teacher preparation programs and whether or not they

⁶⁹ Sandra Stotsky, "The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers' Education in The Liberal Arts and What We Could Do About It." *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 96.

successfully prepare teachers to be liberal educators. It is logical that with the structure and aims of school systems shifting, the philosophy and structure behind teacher preparation programs would also need to change.

When looking at the history of the curriculum of higher education, we saw earlier the debate between Elliot and McGosh. Elliot argued for the free elective system, ultimately giving individual students more autonomy over their course of study and taking away power from colleges and universities to determine what each student's education should consist of. McGosh on the other hand argued for a general curriculum that would require students to take specific course in certain areas in order to obtain a degree. Ultimately, in this debate won with most institutions of higher education shifting towards the free elective system.⁷⁰

Stotsky comments on the continual shift in the 1960's of institutions of higher education away from general core knowledge and the impact it held on teachers. She states, "allowing all students to select less intellectually rigorous courses and to major in a politically popular but non-discipline-based area of interest could not help but weaken the academic background of those who would go on to teach in our public schools".⁷¹ Since non-disciplines based majors are often courses of study that are interdisciplinary and offer courses in a variety of fields students may miss out in core content knowledge. To truly pursue such a major one would first need to have a thorough grounding in a variety of disciplines. For example, if one were to major in Urban Studies, a grounding in history, sociology, and politics would be necessary. However, the content of these

⁷⁰ W.B. Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum: Liberal Education and American Experience*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993,) Chapter 2.

⁷¹ Sandra Stotsky, "The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers' Education in The Liberal Arts and What We Could Do About It." *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007,, 97

disciplines is often left out in the pursuit of the interdisciplinary major. The weakening of the rigor of courses and majors in higher education sometimes leaves graduates without a true discipline and instead with a shallow rather than complex understanding of a field. It is of the utmost importance that potential teachers have a thorough understanding of their discipline, as they will be responsible for imparting knowledge to students. While students most certainly do teach their teachers, the primary role of a liberal arts teacher is to open their students' minds to knowledge and different ways of thinking. A rigorous higher education that focuses on strong content knowledge as well as engages students in critical thinking leads to teachers who are then able to provide their students with a quality education.

Now, it is important to consider how this shift impacted the preparation of public school teachers. The introduction of "politically popular majors" although interesting to students, only further undercut the role of the humanities in colleges and universities. Majors including Urban Studies, Sociology, and Psychology, while very interesting and appealing to students, did not require courses in the humanities. Without a thorough understanding of other disciplines, it is impossible to understand the complexities of these interdisciplinary fields. For example, sociology is often rooted in historical events as well as questions of morality and ethics.

In terms of becoming educators, future liberal arts teachers deeply need the knowledge and skills that are developed in humanities courses. Humanities courses require students to wrestle with the difficult questions of the meaning of humanity, citizens, democracy, public education, or other important public questions that are so fundamentally important to a liberal arts education. Additionally, an education in the

humanities as discussed earlier requires one to think critically and gain exposure to a variety of ideas and opinion and then position oneself in the conversation. When institutions of higher education shifted away from a rigorous education, they began to graduate students that were less academically able. Ultimately, those college and university graduates become the pool of possible public school teachers.

Since teacher knowledge and ability is largely dependent on their own education, I argue we must return to an academically rigorous curriculum in higher education in order to make a shift towards a liberal arts model in K-12 classrooms possible. Teachers of public schools grounded in the liberal arts must have the ability to impart knowledge to students and then guide students through the process of learning to think. This is not possible if the teachers themselves have not been exposed to a breadth of knowledge and an education that allowed them to think autonomously. In addition to examining the general strength of curricula in institutions of higher education, it is necessary to focus on teacher licensure programs.

Teacher licensure programs are the gateway to becoming a public school teacher. A teacher licensure program typically requires students to take specific courses in the field of education ranging from curriculum development, learning differences, education psychology, and method related courses. Teacher licensure programs are comprised of an increasing number of credits, which leads to a decreasing number of credits spent on other demand content areas. For elementary school teachers this is increasingly important as many of them are not bound by the requirements of another major and therefore spend a great deal of their academic career in courses necessary for the teacher licensure program. For elementary school teachers, teacher licensure programs can comprise

anywhere from 22%-51% of course credit hours⁷². These programs oftentimes suffer from “suffer from low standards, out-of-touch faculty, and poor quality control”⁷³.

With such a prominent part of the curriculum for elementary school teachers devoted to method courses, non-pedagogical content driven courses hold a less prominent position in the curriculum. This might not appear to be a problem, after all elementary schools teachers are not going on to teach five year olds calculus. The purpose of an educator engaging with liberal arts education is not solely because they will go on to teach their students specific content. Rather by engaging with liberal arts education, which is in part made up of rigorous content, teachers will themselves have a great knowledge based, be critical thinkers, and be able to continue their own journey of learning. Additionally, teacher licensure programs, many with low standards, poor faculty, and low quality, produce elementary school teachers who are ill prepared. Since elementary school teachers bear the responsibility of establishing a strong foundation for students, it is necessary that they be well equipped. Teacher licensure programs that are not content driven, academically weak, and taught by out-of-touch faculty are incongruent with the needs of liberal arts K-12 teachers. A liberal arts education that is general in scope, seeks to build students’ core knowledge, and develop skills of critical thinking, autonomy, and ultimately engaged citizenship requires teachers who possess strong content knowledge and have been challenged to think critically themselves.

In other words, the best preparation for teachers who are going on to be liberal

⁷² Sandra Stotsky, “The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers’ Education in The Liberal Arts and What We Could Do About It.” *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 96.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 97.

arts educators is having a liberal arts education. David Steiner comments on the need to rethink teacher preparation stating, “most obvious is to ensure that those entering the teaching profession are themselves well educated, by which I mean liberally educated, broadly educated, but particularly knowledgeable in the subjects they will eventually teach”.⁷⁴ Steiner is an advocate for liberal arts education of teachers because he believes it to be not only the best form of education, but necessary if we expect teachers to be able to engage students in a variety of disciplines and do so in a critical and meaningful way.

The majority of teachers do not come out of liberal arts colleges, but instead are graduates of education schools’ teacher licensure programs at large state universities.⁷⁵ For this reason, shifting teacher preparation to consist of an education in the liberal arts is a foreseeable and challenging obstacle. It would require a belief that most important to quality teaching in both the elementary and secondary level is teacher’s content knowledge and ability to reason. Right now, with a large emphasis placed on methods courses and child psychology, particularly for elementary school teachers, less emphasis is placed on subject area knowledge.

With teacher licensing varying from state to state and institutions having a great deal of autonomy in how they structure their majors, programs, and courses there is little uniformity from college to college or state to state on how teacher preparation is conducted. This would make a large-scale shift towards liberal arts based teacher preparation even more challenging as it would require institutions of higher education

⁷⁴ David Steiner, “Preparing Teachers to Teach The Liberal Arts.” *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 119.

⁷⁵ Not of direct relevance to this thesis, but interesting is the fact that universities have become divided to have schools of liberal arts and science, schools of education, schools of business etc. The division of the education and separation by field is incongruent to the philosophy of liberal arts education in the first place.

coming together to agree on teacher training programs that meet the needs of liberal educators. It would require professors in higher education as well as students pursuing teaching to rethink the role of teacher in public schools. Together, students and professors would need to see the value and practicality of having a liberal arts education in becoming quality teachers who are then able to engage K-12 students in a liberal arts curriculum. This presents the very real challenge that education departments and professors in colleges and universities hold a strong interest in attracting students, enrolling full classes, and not having to worry about funding cuts.

The reality is that a shift towards a liberal arts education for teacher preparation would threaten the current structure and existence of most education departments. When advocating for the shift towards a liberal arts education for teachers, Steiner states, “liberal arts faculty need to become more involved in training tomorrow’s teachers. This means that the fundamental working relationship between colleges of education and the liberal arts colleges must change”.⁷⁶ What Steiner does not directly state but what this statement implies is that an increased engagement by liberal arts faculty from the arts and sciences in the education of teachers could mean a decreasing need for the faculty of education pedagogy. A changing relationship between colleges of education and colleges of liberal arts could pose a real threat to colleges of education themselves and for this reason is not likely to be viewed positively by those in positions of power in schools of education.

In addition to rethinking the undergraduate curriculum for teacher preparation, it

⁷⁶David Steiner, “Preparing Teachers to Teach The Liberal Arts.” *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 22.

is also necessary to rethink the continued education teachers pursue throughout their career. Stotsky highlights this problem when she states, “few teachers...choose to take graduate courses in the subjects they teach and to complete master’s degrees in the arts and sciences. Most teachers eventually get a master in education degree, usually to increase their salary”.⁷⁷ Stotsky goes on to describe how Master’s degrees in education tend to be less challenging than Master’s degrees in content areas. Additionally, she highlights that a Master’s degree in education may be “mind-numbing, if not mindless” work that can do little to help a teacher with their core subject or knowledge area. Rethinking the current structure and incentivizing teachers to get Master’s degrees in a content area could be a wise move in the movement towards a liberal arts public school curriculum. Doing so would instill ensure that teachers have a solid grounding in the liberal arts through their undergraduate curriculum. However, it would also promote teachers as scholars who are engaged and curious about their own areas of academic interest.

The idea that a teacher is a scholar who is still learning and keenly curious about a specific subject is somewhat different than how we typically conceptualize teacher. Being a teacher is oftentimes viewed as a profession and therefore comes with a great deal of opportunity for professional development. Stotsky, in furthering her argument that teachers need a more solid grounding in the liberal arts as well as their own content, criticizes the lack of professional development opportunities that are geared towards content knowledge. She comments that professional development activities “Rarely...

⁷⁷ Sandra Stotsky, “The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers’ Education in The Liberal Arts and What We Could Do About It.” *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 100.

serve to deepen teachers' knowledge of their own discipline or broaden their understanding of other subject areas in the school curriculum".⁷⁸ Providing more professional development activities that are about teachers' own learning would expand their own knowledge and therefore ability to teach and also foster a sense of intellectual stimulation amongst teachers.

A shift away from viewing teacher solely as a profession and also recognizing its intellectual component is necessary for teachers who are going to engage in delivering a liberal arts education. The reason for this is that a liberal arts education is inherently one that fosters critical thinking and intellectual curiosity. The best teachers of a liberal arts education are ones who are constantly engaging in critical thinking and intellectual discovery because they are able to model this for their students. Additionally, they do not fall victim to becoming teachers who participate in a receptacle style of education. The receptacle style is foreign to them as they are continually engaging in their own education that requires reasoning, analysis, and intellectual development. They are positioned to be transformative educators who are capable of not simply teaching students to mimic but rather think freely. Not only are these skills inseparable from the liberal arts, but also inseparable from being a capable and engaged citizen. As citizens must constantly engage in critically thinking through public issues as well as learning new knowledge in order to make better informed decisions

Restructuring teacher-training programs in addition to undergraduate programs is one way to better prepare teachers to be liberal arts educators. Aside from the roles of

⁷⁸ Sandra Stotsky, "The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers' Education in The Liberal Arts and What We Could Do About It." *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 100.

colleges and universities, it is also important to consider the connection between foundations, non-profit organizations, and other public institutions and public school systems. These entities have much to offer both students and teachers. Through partnerships between public schools and these organizations, liberal arts education for K-12 schools could become a reality. However, currently these connections are lacking and would need to be strengthened in order to provide a strong liberal arts education to every student.

Most teachers are required to complete various professional development activities throughout their career. However, these professional development activities can range in their content, effectiveness, and relevance. Stotsky proposes offering free seminars to public school teachers in order to increase their content area knowledge as well as teaching techniques. Seminars “such as those sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History, and the Center for Civic Education” offer content rich experiences led by experts in the field of humanities.⁷⁹ Seminars can run for up to several weeks but could be useful to teachers during their summer months. By making these seminars more accessible, public school teachers would gain valuable insight. The purpose of these seminars is to, “provide a broadening intellectual experience similar to a graduate course in the arts and sciences for teachers who cannot easily spend time at or afford a full semester or summer in a university course”.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Sandra Stotsky, “The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers’ Education in The Liberal Arts and What We Could Do About It.” *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. Eds. Finn, Chester E. Ravitch, Diane. 2007, 100.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 101.

Free seminars in the humanities would continue the responsibility of the educator to engage in liberal learning. Through these seminars, teachers would be pushed to think critically while increasing their own knowledge and therefore ability to enlighten students. Earlier, I argued that the best preparation for teachers of a liberal arts curriculum is to be liberally educated. These types of free seminars allow for teacher to continue their own liberal education. Additionally, it is possible for public school systems to partner with foundations and institutions of higher education that offer such seminars so that teachers who were not liberally educated can begin the process. By increasing partnerships with foundations that seek to provide these types of seminars, public school systems would have a more educated and capable teaching force that are able to engage students in the type of liberal education they themselves are pursuing.

Teacher engaging in liberal education, either throughout undergrad or throughout seminars and graduate programs, would be necessary if the shift is made towards liberal arts education in K-12 classroom. This type of liberal education would prepare teachers to facilitate true liberal arts education programs for their students.⁸¹ This would necessitate a shift away from evaluation methods that are primarily focused on standardized testing and a more holistic evaluation of student's ability to think critically not simply retain information. The current focus on standardized testing presents two problems; it is limited in its ability to assess growth or critical thinking and it has caused a narrowing of the curriculum.

⁸¹ Also of interest to this would be Dr. Stephanie Mackler's work on the importance of liberal education for teachers. "The Lone Liberal Artists in the Ed School: Reconnecting Foundations Scholars With the Liberal Arts." *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*. Vol. 50. No. 2. March-April 2014. Print.

When looking at how standardized testing has impacted the curriculum of public schools and the time allocation for various subjects, it is evident that standardized testing has led to a cut in subjects that are not tested. Concerns arose about standardized testing creating a narrowed curriculum after No Child Left Behind Act was passed. New York Times published a front-page article that asserted, “thousands of schools across the nation are responding to the reading and math requirements laid out in No Child Left Behind...by reducing class time spent on other subjects and, for some low-proficiency students, eliminating it”.⁸² Because the NCLB act required assessment in reading and math, schools began to focus their teaching and curriculum time on those subjects.

This led to a loss of curricular time for subjects including history, science, art, and music. Data points to “instructional time in English and math increased by 37 minutes and 29 minutes per day, respectively, by 2003–04. Time spent on history declined by 22 minutes and time spent on science declined by 17 minutes”.⁸³ This is indicative of the shift away from focusing on subjects that are not tested. One might believe that the solution is then to create tests for subjects such as math, science, art, and history so that they will gain prominence in the curriculum. Richard Phelps, a test researcher, states, “If not-tested subjects are being dropped, either they, too, should be tested or, perhaps... in a world of tough choices among competing priorities, some subjects must in fact take a backseat to others”.⁸⁴ However, I argue that adding standardized tests into these subjects may in fact bring back their importance into the curriculum and give the appropriate amount of instructional time, it will not increase the quality of the education.

⁸² Martin West, “Testing, Learning, and Teaching: The Effects of Test-based Accountability on Student Achievement and Instructional Time in Core Academic Subjects,” in *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. ed Chester E. Finn Jr and Diane Ravitch. (Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2007), 46.

⁸³ Ibid, 52.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 54.

Additionally, it certainly will not set up the foundation for a liberal arts educational experience in K-12 classroom.

Two leading test-researchers, Laura Hamilton and Brian Stretcher, asserted “the implementation of high-stakes testing has almost always led to increases in test scores”.⁸⁵ This is not widely contested as obviously an emphasis on a certain test can allow an educator to teach students the content of that test. An increase in test scores is not necessarily indicative of an increase in genuine student learning. Many factors can cause the increase in test performance including, teaching to the test, coaching students on specific types of questions, educating students about the structure of the test and giving practical methods for how to devote time and which questions to skip. Additionally, schools, specifically schools that are under-performing and may have a high level of minority students, “classify more students as needing special education, retain more students at grade level, or issue suspensions to coincide with test dates to alter the population taking the test”.⁸⁶ All of these actions do not point to an increase in learning or even a stronger educational experience for all, rather they point to the ability of educators and schools to manipulate circumstances to increase test outcomes.

This is why I make the claim that adding standardized tests into subjects that are currently untested is not congruent with the mission of liberal arts education. Liberal arts education that is rooted in opening one’s mind and ultimately giving individuals autonomy and ownership over their own thoughts can not be done through an easily manipulated outcomes system. In other words, although adding standardized tests may

⁸⁵ Martin West, “Testing, Learning, and Teaching: The Effects of Test-based Accountability on Student Achievement and Instructional Time in Core Academic Subjects,” in *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Arts Education for All Children*. ed Chester E. Finn Jr and Diane Ravitch. (Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2007), 47.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

return a balance to the amount of instructional time spent on the breadth of subjects within the curriculum, it will fall short of assessing whether or not students are able to think independently. In order to make the shift towards liberal arts education in the K-12 classroom, leader in the education system will have to rethink how to measure outcomes and assessments. No longer will tests that measure a teacher's ability to coach students to understanding certain concepts be an adequate measure.

A truly liberal education is a lofty goal from where the system of K-12 public education is currently. Large parts of the system would need to be rethought including teacher education, connection between public schools and other organizations and foundations, access to humanities based materials, as well as the current assessment system. These are all lofty and ambitious aims, however, I agree with Thurgood Marshall that, "life devoted to idealism is the deepest kind of personal satisfaction".⁸⁷ It is only through pursuing the ideal type of education for all that we will find deep meaning and satisfaction. Rather than looking at the current system and saying changes are "unreasonable" it is necessary to think about and pursue the ideal system. Only once we have thought about what is ideal can we aim to pursue it.

In the following chapter, I offer one model of education, The Paideia Program, which presents a model of liberal arts education for K-12 schools. Its structure, foci, and guiding principles are different than most public K-12 schools, and for that reason it does not face the same obstacles as I presented in this chapter: teacher education and professional development is different, assessment measure are varied and not constricted to standardized testing, and access to humanities based materials is crucial. It is my hope

⁸⁷James O. Freedman, *Liberal Education and the Public Interest* (City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 100.

that the Paideia Program can offer a guiding method of how education that is truly liberal in form is possible and necessary to develop the type of citizens and public sphere our country needs.

Chapter Five: The Paideia Program

Thus far I have made the case for the need for liberal arts education in K-12 classrooms by arguing that public education in America is a public good with the purpose being to create a thoughtful and engaged citizenry. After examining the challenges that are present in shifting the structure of K-12 education towards a liberal arts model it is evident that this transition would be complicated. The transition towards liberal arts education in public K-12 schools would require a reshaping and rethinking of teacher certification and education programs. In the previous chapter, I highlighted the varying types of teacher certification programs and how they would need to be modified in order to embrace the ideas of strong humanities education rooted in critical thinking and content knowledge.

I examined the need for teachers in K-12 liberal arts schools to be liberally educated themselves with a deep understanding of their own content area and a continued practice of learning. I argued that in order to be a liberal educator, seeking to create free minded individuals, teachers must themselves be free minded. I also discussed the prominent role of standardized tests in public education, which presents a problem for shifting towards a liberal arts model of education. Most states have standardized testing for math and reading with a few also having science examinations. As discussed earlier, this leads to a disproportionate amount of time spent on these subjects, which makes a holistic liberal arts curriculum impossible. Since a liberal arts curriculum consists of a variety of disciplines studied in connection with one another, the curriculum must be holistic and spend time on other disciplines including history, art, music, and the

sciences. The current emphasis on high scores on standardized testing is not conducive to a well-balanced and thorough liberal arts curriculum.

In this chapter, I will make the case that Paideia schools are a model form of liberal education in a K-12 setting. I discuss the Paideia program to show how teachers and the pedagogies they employ are liberal in nature and how the curriculum is representative of a liberal arts curriculum. Ultimately, I argue that the Paideia program is one model of liberal arts education for K-12 classrooms that is theoretically strong and practically possible. Furthermore, it is liberal in nature, prompting critical thinking and a freeing of students' minds and ultimately allowing for the creation of strong citizens. This creation of strong citizens, as I argued earlier, is the fundamental purpose of public education in America. Liberal arts education that pushes for critical thinking, a thorough exposure to various forms of culture, and develops free thinking people is the best way to develop individuals who can bear the responsibility of being citizens who hold a great deal of power and decision making ability in a democracy. The Paideia model is a model of liberal arts education that can build the type of engaged citizens the United States' democracy desperately needs and I seek to highlight why it should become a more prominent model for American public schools.

“The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus” was written by Mortimer Adler, the founder of the Paideia Program. This work outlines the curricular content, pedagogical strategies, and concepts that make up the philosophy of the Paideia program. I will discuss the role of Socratic seminars, intellectual coaching, and didactic instruction in Paideia schools, the content of the curriculum, and ultimately argue that the Paideia

program be more widely adapted in order to provide a liberal arts education that in turn builds strong citizens.

Let us first turn to what Adler referred to as the three pillars of the Paideia program, Socratic seminars, intellectual coaching, and didactic instruction. I will focus primarily on Socratic seminars as well as coaching as they are the two I find to be essential to liberal arts education and unsurprisingly currently lacking in public schools. Adler believed that “questions without definitive answers are important” because they allow for students to practice their ability to reason and therefore exercise their minds and form own opinions.⁸⁸ This belief explains the importance of Socratic seminars in the Paideia Program, as Socratic seminars seek to develop students’ reasoning abilities through questioning. Socratic seminars, fostering the ability to reason, is essential to creating the autonomous individuals that Nussbaum and Roth, cite as the product of liberal education. In the Paideia program, at all ages, starting in kindergarten it is believed that “children are capable of complex ideas” and therefore complex conversations should be fostered early on.⁸⁹ These conversations are oftentimes fostered through Socratic seminars in which students engage with a certain text or work on a deeper level.

The belief that all aged children are able of complex thought creates an environment where from the beginning of students’ education they are taught to think critically and form opinions. However, their opinions are then placed into conversation with other students’ ideas and opinions in the context of the Socratic seminar. The Socratic seminar allows the class to come together and students to challenge one

⁸⁸ Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), 21.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 16.

another's ideas and present new lines of reasoning. Collectively, students work together as a class to discern meaning and make judgments. This is a microcosm of what is necessary in democratic American society. With citizens being tasked with "discerning justice" and more broadly making political, economic, and social decisions, the ability to reason is essential. Not only is the ability to reason individually necessary, but the ability to come together and be challenged by one another with different lines of reasoning or ways of thinking allows for citizens to create a strong public sphere. By engaging students in Socratic seminars starting in kindergarten, being engaged citizens who think critically becomes second nature.

Now, it is important to also note that Socratic seminars are not simply students holding different opinions challenging one another. Socratic seminars are first rooted in the understanding of a text or work and then focus on the analysis component.⁹⁰ I make this distinction because they are rooted in knowledge and understanding which allow for reasoning and judgments as opposed to merely holding an opinion. Additionally, teaching students this way of thinking early on where you first seek to have a thorough understanding of a text or work and then analyze it is transferable to building a strong public.

Citizens, as administrators of justice, are often asked for their opinion on an issue or political candidate but what would be more useful is the judgment they came to after understanding the information available to them. For example, in a political campaign there are several debates, town hall meetings, articles, and books that give information and insight into various candidates. It is important that citizens first engage with the

⁹⁰ Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), 19.

information available to them and come to a thorough understanding in order to reason through who is the best candidate. Without first having an understanding of content, one cannot reason or make judgments, as they would not be rooted in facts or the truth. As administrators of justice, who create and shape the future of our society, understanding of knowledge and the ability to reason is inseparable from maintaining our democracy. For this reason, I believe that the Paideia Program's use of Socratic seminars prepares young minds to be thoughtful and engaged citizens who have the ability to first understand and then judge.

The leader of the Socratic seminar, oftentimes the teacher, plays a crucial role in the success of this pedagogical strategy. The seminar leader has three essential roles, which are to ask questions and give direction, examine and query answers, and to engage participants in a two-way dialogue with one another.⁹¹ Adler believed that "teachers become better at seminars through experience and watching good seminar leaders".⁹² It is for this reason that he believed teachers themselves must engage in Socratic seminars themselves, stepping back into the role of students both to exercise their own ability to understand and reason and also to learn from experienced seminar leaders. By emphasizing that teachers continue to grow and learn through engagement with Socratic seminars, Adler is advocating for teachers who continue their own liberal arts education.

Earlier, I discussed that oftentimes teachers engage in Master's programs specifically focused on education pedagogy rather than a Master's program specific to their discipline. One of the problems with this is that teachers are not developing a richer understanding of their own content knowledge. By having professional development

⁹¹ Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1984), 23.

⁹² *Ibid*, 26.

activities where teachers are able to engage in Socratic seminars through their own content area not only are they able to expand their knowledge but also practice a pedagogical strategy they can employ as educators. This allows for teachers to continue in the process of learning while simultaneously becoming better educators through watching and learning from experienced seminar leaders.

The second pillar of the Paideia program is referred to as coaching. Similar to Socratic seminars, coaching aims to educate through questions. It is oftentimes used in math and allows students to learn how to solve problems through a series of questions that target each specific step of the solution. Coaching requires students to “produce work showing their inadequacies, otherwise a teacher can’t help”.⁹³ Here we see that students are responsible for their own learning. They first must attempt a problem, showing what they do know, but also what they do not know in order for the teacher to help them. By looking at the mistakes a student makes, the teacher is then able to “coach” them step by step through a problem in order to understand what went wrong and how to correctly solved a problem. It is important in coaching that a student understands “not just what went wrong but why it went wrong” because then they are able to apply the corrections to other problems as well.⁹⁴

Liberal arts education with the aim of creating a free mind necessitates coaching because it ultimately allows for the student to becoming independent form the teacher, able to eventually discern their own mistakes and apply the necessary corrections. By being able to find their own mistakes and adjust their own way of thinking, students are able to be self-teachers. This is essential to the mission of liberal arts education to create

⁹³ Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1984), 35.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 38.

freethinking people. It is reminiscent of the final line of Michael Roth's work *Beyond the University* in which he states, "When liberal education works, it works for a lifetime".⁹⁵ What Roth means by this was that liberal arts education teaches students to be their own teachers, their minds are not dependent upon schools, universities, classroom walls, or educators. Rather, their minds have been transformed for a lifetime and are able to think independently. Coaching and Socratic seminars are both pedagogical strategies that create independence and freethinking amongst students. By employing these strategies, the Paideia program is able to create autonomous individuals who are better equipped to participate in a democracy and the public sphere.

In addition to the three pillars of Paideia Education discussed by Adler, the Paideia Group lays out the various subjects which are to be included in the curriculum. The curriculum includes, English language and Literature, Mathematics, Science, History, Social Studies, a Foreign Languages, Fine Arts, and Physical Education. The Paideia Group explicitly states that the "Manual Arts" should not be a part of the curriculum of the Paideia School. The curriculum is thorough and well rounded with various subjects allowing for the exploration of different ideas and areas of knowledge. The curriculum constructed by the Paideia Group is very reminiscent of the curriculum of Liberal Arts education throughout history. Previously, I discussed that a liberal arts curriculum was comprised of seven different "arêtes" or subject matters, which were rhetoric, grammar, arithmetic, philosophy, physics, music or art, and physical education. Although not exactly the same, the subjects have a great deal of overlap and both

⁹⁵ Michael Roth. *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 146.

illustrate the importance of various form of knowledge that work together to create a free mind and educated person.

For the Paideia group, both art and physical activity and subjects that are to be pursued by all students, not just students who have talent in those areas. When writing of the purpose of physical education, James O'Toole states, "Unfortunately, physical education is too frequently pursued by some students only. And in places where all students pursue it, it is done in a differentiated manner... We think undifferentiated physical education is as important as undifferentiated academic subjects".⁹⁶ Here we see a belief that engagement with education subjects is not based on one's skill or liking for a subject but rather is rooted in the belief that all people should have a thorough exposure to and understanding of different subjects. Subjects have inherent value, they are not valuable simply because a student is gifted in that area of study, but rather because they are subjects that collectively make up a holistic education that allow for the growth of all minds and bodies.

Not included in the traditional subjects of a liberal arts education, but included in the Paideia program is Social Studies. The Paideia Group's philosophy of including social studies education is essential to my argument as to why public schools should adapt the Paideia Program in order to serve the primary purpose of public education, which is to create strong citizens in order to form a strong public. In Chapter 8, "Social Studies" of *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, Adele Simmons and Paul Gagnon write, "Telling people how to be good citizens is not the same as preparing them for the task. Citizens ultimately learn through practice: they become active and wise

⁹⁶ Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, (New York: Macillian Publishing Company, 1984), 161.

participants in the community when they have the opportunity to bring their knowledge, skills, and abilities to bear on a specific issue”.⁹⁷ The emphasis that the Paideia program places on not only teaching student that they will one day be citizens but actually preparing them to be administrators of justice, fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, is necessary if we hope to create the type of engaged public that a democracy requires.

Social studies focuses on educating students about the way in which government works, the fundamental principles of the United States, and knowledge of war, peace, poverty, and how various leaders have struggled in the past. Social studies seeks to raise questions for students such as “What are the rights of minorities?” or “Who should decide whether a developer should build a mall on existing farm land?”⁹⁸ Students are taught from early on that they need to reason through these types of questions and thinking critically about the decisions that should be made. Ultimately, students learn that the decisions that are made shape society and it is for that reason that individual citizens must have the knowledge and resources to exercise their voices. By educating students about the way in which government works, the ramifications of historical decisions, how leaders have exercised their power in the past, and what roles citizens play in a democracy, students have a wealth of knowledge and are able to leave school and enter society ready to engage in the public sphere.

In addition to the curriculum, the Paideia group lays out ten principles of the philosophy that further illustrate how the ideas of collective wisdom, citizenship engagement, and life long learning are fostered in Paideia classrooms. The principles

⁹⁷ Mortimer Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), 124.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 125.

include, “best education for best being the best education for all, school is preparation for becoming generally educated in the course of a whole lifetime, and that the primary cause of learning is the activity of a learner’s mind.”⁹⁹ The first one I highlighted, the best education for best being the best education for all, is widely criticized as being elitist or claiming that the type of education those in power receives has more inherent value than other types of education.

However, I believe this to be an unfair criticism. Adler is simply highlighting that historically different types of education have been afforded to different groups of people based on different levels of power and privilege. Here, Adler is calling for the best education for all people. It is unacceptable to give a minority group in America an unequal education. Since education creates the citizens and therefore strongly shapes the public, in a country that values equality, all people should be given access to the best type of education. Not doing so would risk reproducing the same inequalities that currently exist within society by creating one group of people in power who have had access to a strong liberal education focused on citizen building and one group who has been excluded from such an education.

I see Adler’s statement on education somewhat comparable to civil rights. The majority of Americans agree that all citizens should have the same civil rights, a set of civil rights we deem to be the best and that were previously only afforded to the privileged class of citizens. It is not a widely held opinion that it is wrong to want the best civil rights for all people. The same can be said for education; historically the best education was only afforded to privileged citizens. In my opinion, Adler is actually

⁹⁹National Paideia Center, <https://www.paideia.org/about-paideia/philosophy>. Accessed April 1, 2016.

somewhat radical in asserting that we must extend the best education to all people regardless of their background.

Looking collectively at the ten principles we see that the Paideia Program offers a form of liberal education that places the student in a position of responsibility over his or her education, which promotes in young students responsibility for themselves, their community, and the broader public sphere. The guiding principles include, “primary cause of genuine learning is the activity of the learner’s own mind, each student’s achievement of these results would be evaluated in terms of that student’s competencies, and that school should prepare students to make a good life for one’s self.”¹⁰⁰ Through these principles, we see that the Paideia program is student focused and seeks to make life-transforming change for students. Students are not simply showing up to school to receive information, but rather are improving their own competencies, activating their minds, and forming their own identity.

These principles point to the need for education and schools to put the student’s growth at the center of the philosophy and curriculum. By doing so, students are able to become individuals who have immense talent and capability separate from the school and teacher. By preparing students to create good lives for themselves while simultaneously seeking to engage each student’s individual mind, students are put in positions of responsibility and ownership over their education and future. In this way, Mortimer Adler’s Paideia proposal presents a liberal arts curriculum and approach to K-12 education. His model allows for the development of freethinking autonomous individuals who are prepared to take on the responsibilities of citizens, including the administration of justice.

¹⁰⁰ National Paideia Center, <https://www.paideia.org/about-paideia/philosophy>. Accessed April 1, 2016.

Conclusion

Roosevelt said, “the real safeguard of democracy is education.”¹⁰¹ Since the people are the substance of a democratic society, they must be educated in order to uphold their responsibilities and act as political beings. I extend Roosevelt’s statement by arguing that the real safeguard of democracy is a *liberal* education. A liberal education safeguards democracy as it creates the ability for individuals to think freely, separate from their educators and inherited ways of thinking. A democratic society is defined in part by having citizens that are capable of administering justice and not just shaping but creating the public in a meaningful and thoughtful way. A liberal education safeguards democracy because by creating freethinking citizens it protects society from a tyrannical government characterized by unfairness, cruelty, and lack of freedom for the citizens. Liberal education is a safeguard in so far as it is a necessary element of a democracy

With public K-12 education being the only compulsory education in the United States, I call for a robust form of liberal arts education in all K-12 public schools. Bringing this model of education more broadly into K-12 public schools would allow for the creation of a sustainable public that promotes our founding ideals. This can lead to the development of adult citizens who see themselves not as part of a machine but rather as autonomous and freethinking citizens who are able to exercise control over their own lives and shape the collective society. Without doing so, we run the risk of not having citizens who are prepared or capable of taking on the responsibilities necessary for a

¹⁰¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Message for American Education Week.," September 27, 1938. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15545>.

The full quote is “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”

democracy to prevail. Liberal education transforms the uneducated mind and transforms into a freethinking entity. If we take seriously the purpose and principles of a democratic public, the creation of freethinking citizens is not merely favorable but essential.

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