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## What Is Pedagogy?: Discovering the Hidden Pedagogical Dimension

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WHAT IS PEDAGOGY? DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN  
PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

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**ABSTRACT.** What is pedagogy, exactly? *Merriam-Webster* defines it simply as “the art, science, or profession of teaching.” In contemporary academic discourse, however, pedagogy is generally left undefined — with its apparent implicit meanings ranging anywhere from a specific “model for teaching” (e.g., behaviorist or progressivist instruction) to a broadly political philosophy of education in general (most famously, a “pedagogy of the oppressed”). In this paper, Norm Friesen and Hanno Su follow the Continental pedagogical tradition in giving pedagogy a general but explicit definition. They do so by looking at how pedagogy arises both in everyday life and in school as unavoidably ethical activity undertaken primarily for the sake of the young person or child. Such activities, the authors maintain, are structured not so much by processes, methods, and outcomes, but by irresolvable oppositions and the tensions between them. They illustrate this inductively through a series of images and examples — moving gradually from ones involving parenting and early childhood to ones from elementary and secondary schooling. In this way, Friesen and Su show that pedagogy is not so much one or more ideologically focused or evidence-based instructional or psychological approaches to be mastered by a professional or teaching specialist. It is instead an independent but ethically informed practical perspective — one that can (and has) been extended to form a distinctively pedagogical theory and discipline. As such, it is something that is not only a part of our everyday life and culture, but arguably of all human cultures.

**KEY WORDS.** pedagogy; education; practice; theory; antimonies; Immanuel Kant; Friedrich Schleiermacher

What is pedagogy, exactly? *Merriam-Webster* defines it simply as “the art, science, or profession of teaching.”<sup>1</sup> But you would be hard-pressed to find a consensual definition with this concision in recent educational scholarship. Encyclopedias and handbooks for education — for example, the eight volume 2002 Macmillan *Encyclopedia of Education* — do not provide an entry for this term per se. They instead direct the reader to texts like *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or to teaching models such as “brain-based,” “critical,” or “culturally responsive pedagogy.” Over the past fifty years, however, a relatively small number of texts from the United States and the UK have called for greater attention to pedagogy, with a few highlighting the existence of a northern European notion and discipline that goes by the same name. For example, some of the earliest of these texts speak vaguely of a “European tradition” “of study,” but nonetheless go on to locate

1. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (online edition), s.v. “pedagogy,” noun, accessed February 5, 2023, pedagogy.

the meaning of pedagogy using familiar if not especially precise English-language coordinates — ones that place it in the realm of empirical research and practical school reform.<sup>2</sup> These approaches look, for example, to establish “codified representations of ... practical pedagogical wisdom” or to “develop pedagogic strategies” to help “pedagogy in school ... become more effective for more students.”<sup>3</sup> More recent examples come from the work of Gert Biesta, who considers specifically German *Pädagogik* both as a disciplinary construct and as an educational process of personal becoming.<sup>4</sup> *Pädagogik*, Biesta says, represents “an autonomous ... normative discipline with its own forms of theory and theorizing.” It is normative in that it “is based on a normative interest” (e.g., what is best for a given child in a particular situation) “rather than an object of study” (e.g., of what occurs in institutions we deem “educational”). Pedagogy, Biesta continues, is correspondingly neither “explicitly or exclusively connected to questions of teaching and school education but has a much wider remit which focuses first and foremost on questions of ... the process of becoming human.”<sup>5</sup>

We take as our own point of departure the proposition that pedagogy is indeed much broader than conventionally understood. It is limited neither to sets of instructional strategies or political programs, nor to what occurs in institutional settings and professional practices. Instead, as Biesta puts it, is closely related to a much broader conception of human becoming. Framing pedagogy in this way raises at least two questions which are our principal focus: (1) If pedagogy is part of the general process of becoming human, then how is such interested activity and practice visible in the world around us?; and (2) What differentiates such commonplace practice and interests from other phenomena in our everyday lives? In this paper, we show how pedagogy is manifest as an unavoidably *ethical* activity that is undertaken primarily for the sake of the young person or child.

2. See, for example, Patricia Murphy, “Defining Pedagogy,” in *Equity in the Classroom: Towards Effective Pedagogy for Girls and Boys*, ed. Caroline Gipps and Patricia Murphy (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), 28; and Francine Best, “The Metamorphoses of the Term ‘Pedagogy,’” *Prospects* 18, no. 2 (1988): 157–166.

3. Lee Schulman, “Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform,” *Harvard Educational Review* 57, no. 1 (1987): 12; and Murphy, “Defining Pedagogy,” 37, 38.

4. See Gert Biesta, “Risking Ourselves in Education: Qualification, Socialization, and Subjectification Revisited,” *Educational Theory* 70, no. 1 (2020): 89–104; and Gert Biesta, *World-Centred Education: A View for the Present* (London: Routledge, 2021).

5. Gert Biesta, “Disciplines and Theory in the Academic Study of Education: A Comparative Analysis of the Anglo-American and Continental Construction of the Field,” *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 19, no. 2 (2011): 188–189.

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As a part of our everyday experience, pedagogy corresponds with particular modes of responding, reflecting, and acting. It is something that is evident even in the way our embodied human world is structured, and in the way this world is “presented” to children. Such an understanding of pedagogy as *practice* becomes comprehensible, we conclude, by taking up a particular *theoretical* perspective, by recognizing a particular dimension or *topos* in our everyday lives and in culture more broadly. This theoretical perspective is discussed not only in German as *Pädagogik*, but also as *la pédagogie* in French and *pedagogía* in Spanish — in each case offering the means to understand pedagogy as a discipline all its own.

We develop our understanding of pedagogy through the inductive exploration of four pedagogical examples (although we also include a brief discussion of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher after the first two). Our examples move from ones involving parenting and early childhood to those proper to classrooms and schooling, always with the proviso that there is nothing ultimate or definitive that connects pedagogy with particular institutional forms. Along the way, we define pedagogy in terms of adults’ negotiation between opposed principles, antinomies, or possibilities for ethical action. These opposites include, among others, proximity versus distance, protection versus exposure, constraint versus freedom, and present versus future. Pedagogy, in other words, is a part of our everyday experience of relationship, time, and space — and is arguably a part of *all* human cultures.

#### BABY CARRYING: PROXIMITY VERSUS DISTANCE

One simple example that connects our pedagogical culture with those from around the globe is provided by the arrangements, practices, and structures of carrying and otherwise being mobile with an infant. These practices and structures can range from the use of one’s own bare arms to carry an infant through to special wearable carriers and slings. They also include elaborate strollers and carriages. Studies have shown how these techniques vary in significant ways in different parts of the globe.<sup>6</sup> Here, we refer as one example to a contemporary North American guide for parents, *The Baby Book*, by William Sears and Martha Sears.<sup>7</sup> The authors deal with some of the many cultural differences in handling infants by simply observing that “in our culture we *wheel* our babies, then *park them* somewhere” while “in many other cultures parents *wear* their babies”:

Infant development specialists who travel throughout the world studying infant-care practices have repeatedly observed that babies who are carried in a variety of cloth-type slings or front packs seem more content than infants who are kept in cribs, playpens, strollers, prams, and plastic seats.<sup>8</sup>

6. See, for example, Betsy Lozoff and Garry Brittenham, “Infant Care: Cache or Carry,” *Journal of Pediatrics* 95, no. 3 (1979): 478–483.

7. William Sears and Martha Sears, *The Baby Book: Everything You Need to Know about Your Baby from Birth to Age Two* (New York: Little, Brown, 2013).

8. *Ibid.*, 291 (emphasis in original).



Figures 1 and 2. Baby slings and carriers are ways of negotiating the tension between the pedagogical antinomies of *distance* and *proximity*. When compared with traditional Western ways of negotiating these tensions, it is clear they emphasize *proximity* over distance. Figure 1 is from the German Federal Archives, likely originating from Tibet (courtesy of Wikimedia commons). Figure 2 shows a contemporary baby carrier (Mats Eriksson; Flickr).

Sears and Sears call the practice that is enabled by these slings, wraps, or pouches “babywearing” (see figures 1 and 2). Such arrangements often encourage direct skin-on-skin contact; at the same time, they also enable considerable freedom of movement for the person doing the carrying. Moreover, they generally also allow the child being carried to observe what the adult is seeing and doing, to share in their mobility, and to hear their words and sometimes also see their facial expressions. From a pedagogical perspective, these slings and wraps — as well as the strollers and prams that have long been familiar in the West — exemplify ways of negotiating the tension between involvement and separation, *distance* and *proximity*. Slings, wraps, and pouches, on the one hand, can be seen to address this particular antimony in favor of greater proximity, emphasizing a kind of re-incorporation, a re-embodiment of the child, as the term “babywearing” itself suggests. Strollers, prams, and cribs, on the other hand, create a clear distance between infant and adult, and represent a rather different way of negotiating this same tension. This opposition has been associated over time with a variety of theories and processes, including bonding, attachment, and separation anxiety. Forms of baby carrying, in other words, are deeply embedded in our self-awareness and culture, representing different (and often implicit) ideas about infants, their well-being, bodily contact, and mother-child or adult-child relations. Writing in a text that inspired this paper, Klaus Mollenhauer explains that the baby sling or carrier, whatever its kind or intended purpose,

constitutes a key element of the cultural structure in that it represents a schema for the body, for the balance between proximity and distance, involvement and isolation. A stroller or baby carriage, as a different example, represents a rather different schema. The manner in which children are protected is therefore culturally-specific.<sup>9</sup>

9. Klaus Mollenhauer, *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing* (London: Routledge, 2014), 21.

The degree of this cultural specificity is illustrated by the many different approaches to baby-carrying that are now available in Western societies: specially made combinations of straps, pads, and fasteners that position the baby on the back, the front, or even on the shoulders of the adult, or baby carriages and strollers that provide different positions for the baby, facing forward, back toward the adult, or even lying and facing upward for the youngest infants. Each of these can be said to reflect a slightly different approach to the baby's comfort and development and a different way of negotiating proximity and distance: Facing forward obviously means exposing the baby directly to the world; facing toward the adult, on the other hand, gives clear emphasis on the importance of the adult-child relation, and carrying the baby on a sling on one's side perhaps points to the importance of the adult's tasks (which include care for the infant). In this sense, these different approaches represent variations on what Mollenhauer identifies as "cultural structures," and various ways for adults to negotiate the tension between possibilities of proximity and distance.

The idea of varying or negotiating the opposites of distance and proximity, however, applies not only to the very particular arrangements of things like strollers and slings. In a perhaps more metaphorical sense, it is relevant much more broadly to relations between children and adults in general: Some parents literally and figuratively keep their children very close, while others are more *laissez-faire*. This is illustrated in today's references to "helicopter" versus "free range" parenting styles and is also indicated in phrases such as "tiger mother" or "latchkey kid." Children themselves put these dynamics into play, for example, through games of peekaboo or hide and seek, and as they grow older, through ever more distant excursions from home.

What is most important for pedagogy as an ethically informed endeavor is to strike a balance between distance and proximity, involvement and isolation suitable for each child as they develop. This balance would reflect an arrangement that is held to be best for their growth and well-being as these are currently understood. But arriving at this balance is no easy matter. As terms like tiger mother or free-range parenting suggest, parents and guardians differ widely in terms of the type of balance they find best for their child and for themselves. Negotiating a balance of distance and proximity by debating different methods for childrearing is, of course, of deepest concern for new parents — as well for pediatricians and other early childhood caregivers.<sup>10</sup> However, as Mollenhauer's comments above suggest, there is no final answer to the question of proximity and distance that is "right" or "wrong" in some ultimate sense. It is not an issue that evolutionary science or psychology will be able to settle definitively, since what parents see as most appropriate depends on the specific situation of both the adult caretaker

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10. See, for example, Steph Wu, "All about Slings: The Pros and Cons of Baby-Wearing," *News.com.au*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.kidspot.com.au/baby/baby-play-and-gear/buying-guides/all-about-slings-the-pros-and-cons-of-babywearing/news-story/03cedd456261d53276ca0e70d893be67>.



Figure 3. Cyclist and bike trailer with children. (Public domain: <https://www.wallpaperup.com/593177/593177.html>)

and the individual child — as well as on cultures of childrearing, parenting, and childhood that are themselves continuously changing.

#### THE BICYCLE TRAILER: PROTECTION VERSUS EXPOSURE

Questions of proximity and distance, as well as the dynamics of a second pair of pedagogical opposites are further illustrated in figure 3. It shows an adult and two girls on a bike ride. The adult, presumably (and from here on) the father, pedals his mountain bike determinedly, while the girls do the same from behind. They are all speeding along a roadside that is almost certainly shared with other vehicles. From the perspective that we are taking up here, this picture reveals a range of specifically *pedagogical* features and dynamics. These become apparent through a closer examination of how roles and responsibilities are distributed between the three individual riders.

There is the simple fact that although everyone in this picture is “cycling,” they are not all doing it in the same way. Each has a slightly different role and set of responsibilities, and the way that these are structured and divided can itself be said to be pedagogical. The father is engaged in cycling in the way it is most commonly conceived: He is sitting on a bicycle with full-sized wheels, pedals, steering, multiple gears, brakes, and a headlight. The girls, on the other hand, are riding on what is called a “bicycle trailer.” And although this trailer also has handlebars, seats, pedals, and even gears, these are all smaller in scale. A close examination shows that the bike trailer has no steering or brakes. Of course, it cannot be used on its own; it must be hitched to a full-sized bike. Close observation also shows that the second set of handlebars on this trailer are lower than the first, with the lever for shifting gears being available only on the first, higher set of handlebars. The different

functions that the bike and the bike trailer have in this scenario — pedaling and gear-shifting (common to both), steering and braking (only on the father’s bike) — divide and structure the roles and responsibilities of adult and child. The adult is responsible for navigating the path of both bike and trailer, and for the most part, for controlling its velocity using both brakes and pedals. The children are active in propelling the bike and the trailer, and they contribute to keeping both in balance.

Speaking in terms of the opposition of protection and exposure, one could say that the children are exposed to some things (e.g., pedaling, gear-shifting, traffic, and speed) while being protected from others (e.g., steering, braking, navigating traffic, and compliance with the rules of the road). This exposure and protection, moreover, is further differentiated between the two children: The one at the front of the bike trailer (arguably with greater exposure to the father’s actions and the road and traffic itself) can shift gears while the one behind cannot. The arrangement of the bike trailer, however, seems to strike a kind of balance between more and less responsible or ethical possibilities or arrangements that one might envision for a bike ride with young children. In its placement of riders and selection of the functions available to each, it can be said to provide the structure that successfully navigates between what the children are *exposed to* and what they are *protected from*. Pedagogical structures which seek to strike a similar balance can be identified in many other artifacts, spaces, and processes that are a part of children’s lives. These include baby walkers, tricycles or bicycles with training wheels, all of which enable a child’s mobility while limiting it and protecting the child in certain ways. Thinking more metaphorically, a similar dynamic is also at play in climbing structures (which enable free bodily activity while protecting children from unforgiving corners and surfaces) and in age-appropriate reading material (which arguably expose children to content they can incorporate and protect them from what they cannot). Such devices, structures, and forms of organization can also be understood as being pedagogical, as negotiating exposure and protection in ways that are focused on both the child’s being and their future becoming.

The example of the bike trailer is pedagogical in other ways. It implies a type of temporal, developmental differentiation between the girls and by extension, between both of them and their father. For the smallest and (presumably) youngest of the girls, who cannot shift gears and is arguably more exposed to her sister’s pedaling action than to any other operation of the bike and trailer, there is the implicit promise that she will not only be able to later participate as her (presumably older) sister does, but that both she and her sister will one day be able to cycle like their father. The bike trailer in this sense embodies a kind of temporality, a particular relationship between present and future. This is one in which the youngest girl (and her sister) are *already* active in specific ways in the experience of bike riding, but in which the two girls are also *not yet* full participants in that activity. The first, the notion of “already,” implies a particular emphasis on the present, on what is already accessed and further actualized. The second, “not yet,” gives specific significance to the future, to what will become possible, but from which the children are currently not able to do. Differentiations in function, size, and position can be said to represent a way of addressing the possibilities



for what the girls can *already* do and what they cannot *yet* do in a way that again strikes a satisfactory balance. Something similar could be said for different types of climbing and exercise structures and types of books and reading material: they offer the child an “already” (i.e., the structures, material, and access already available) while still suggesting a “not yet” (still more challenging and complex possibilities).<sup>11</sup> At the same time, though, we should repeat that we are not advocating this specific approach to cycling or any other pedagogical arrangement that would balance pedagogical tensions as either “better” or “best.” There is also no normative predefined developmental telos on which pedagogy rests. In other words, just as there is no one distance that is ideal for every educator and child, there is also no one combination of exposure and protection or — as we discuss below — of “already” and “not yet” that is suitable for all situations.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL INTERMEZZO: KANT AND SCHLEIERMACHER

The precise characteristics and nature of pedagogical opposites or antinomies of the sort we have been discussing ultimately brings us to questions of philosophy. There are two important Continental philosophers whose thinking is characterized by antinomies and the tensions that arise between them. Each has also identified antinomies that have proven indispensable in understanding the nature of pedagogy. The first is Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a philosopher of the Enlightenment who wrote and lectured on education and summed up education in general as working in and through one principal antinomy (or “paradox”): the opposition between “freedom” and “constraint.” The idea behind Kant’s opposition is that in order to cultivate freedom in children and young people, adults need to impose some constraints. Today, these constraints might range from exercises in toilet training through learning to walk or even learning to read or to drive:

One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one’s freedom. For constraint is necessary. How do I cultivate freedom under constraint? I shall accustom my pupil to tolerate a constraint of his freedom, and I shall at the same time lead him to make good use of his freedom.<sup>12</sup>

The question, Kant is saying, is, How does education (and how do I as educator) develop *freedom* — and the distance and exposure it entails — through *constraint* — and the proximity and protection it implies? For example, how can the constraint involved in child carrying or in safe bicycle riding result in freedom — ultimately in a person who is both free and responsible in their movements, actions, and expressions?

11. This childhood experience of time and of one’s own abilities as a “not yet” has been recognized at various points in the literature and discourses of education. It appears, for example, in Carol Dweck’s articulation of her “growth mindset,” in which she argues that — given the potential for growth that children should recognize in themselves — any setback should be viewed not as a failure, but as a matter of “not yet.” Carol S. Dweck, “Even Geniuses Work Hard,” *Educational Leadership* 68, no. 1 (2010): 16–20.

12. Immanuel Kant, “Lectures on Pedagogy” (1803), in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 447.

The answer to these questions — or to respond pedagogically to any of the antinomies presented thus far — is something that can only be realized in concrete everyday practice. This is where the *constraint* that is implied in activities from toilet training through learning to walk and ride safely have as their logical inverse myriad *freedoms* — freedoms whose value far exceeds what toilet training or, say, safety wheels might initially presuppose. By being temporarily constrained in these ways, the child or young person will later gain exponential degrees of mobility and independence. To remain with the examples referenced thus far, this includes the physical freedoms provided by continence, by bodily mobility or the ability to ride a bike, or by the capacity to read or to drive a vehicle. Of course, the substantial freedoms that a given form of constraint might offer in the *future* does little to reduce the difficulties that such constraint is likely to represent while it is applied in the *present*.

It is precisely the question of the present moment of constraint or, to put it slightly differently, “sacrifice,” that brings us to the fourth pair of opposites in our paper, and to the second philosopher included here: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), a contemporary of Kant, is known primarily as a theologian and hermeneutician, but he also spoke with deep insight about questions of pedagogy.<sup>13</sup> The antinomy that we take from Schleiermacher is evident in all of the examples and images considered thus far and was already implicitly highlighted in the case of the bicycle trailer. It is expressed in the form of what Schleiermacher calls an “ethical question”: “Is one permitted to sacrifice one moment of life” of the child “as a mere means to the end of another?” Whether on a bike or in a sling or carriage, a moment or a freedom on the part of the child — namely, to be independently mobile — is sacrificed for the sake of something in the future. In these examples, this future aim might simply be the children’s healthy and safe development. Similarly, the more challenging moments of toilet training, of learning to read or to operate a vehicle can all be seen as “sacrifices” in the present that are often justified for moments and accomplishments in the future.

In each case, one could say that there is a recognition of a *present* reality for the child (an “already”) or young person that is in tension with one that will only unfold in the *future* (a “not yet”). Schleiermacher acknowledges that especially younger children “live ... in the present, and not for the future.” Such a child “therefore cannot [fully] participate in [adult] purpose[s] and cannot have an interest in [these] for the development of his or her own individual character.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, “in all purely pedagogical moments,” Schleiermacher asserts, “practice ... encourages something to appear that has not yet come into appearance.”<sup>15</sup> The sometimes difficult lessons in pedestrian safety, in being a good bike

13. For an English translation of F. D. E. Schleiermacher’s most famous pedagogical lecture, see *F. D. E. Schleiermacher’s Outlines of the Art of Education: A Translation and Discussion*, ed. and trans. Norm Friesen and Karsten Kenklies (New York: Peter Lang, 2023).

14. Schleiermacher, *Outlines of the Art of Education*, 66.

15. *Ibid.*

rider or a good driver, all aim at freedoms in the future. As a result, we can say with Schleiermacher that “it is truly the nature of the pedagogical influence to be oriented toward the future.”<sup>16</sup>

The antinomy of present “pain” for future “gain,” we note, is one that has been identified by others in education. John Dewey, for example, famously declared in his “Pedagogical Creed” that “education is” or should be “a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”<sup>17</sup> Schleiermacher was also aware that a reconciliation of living in the moment and living for the future would be very valuable. Ideally, each constraint imposed by a “not yet” should be balanced by a freedom embodied in an “already” — already mobile, already climbing, already cycling, or already reading. But Schleiermacher also emphasized the many challenges presented by such a reconciliation. And as we do, he stressed that work toward reconciliation can only happen in the variability and uncertainty of actual, concrete practice.

#### THE CLASSROOM: ANTINOMIES INTERSECTING

The four pedagogical antinomies we have identified thus far — distance versus proximity, exposure versus protection, freedom versus constraint, and present versus future — all intersect in compounded and abstracted form in the school and the classroom. Although these oppositions are evident in physical arrangements and structures outside of educational institutions, they reappear in the classroom in terms that are perhaps more concentrated and also more mental or cognitive in nature. Nonetheless, it is clear that overall, the times and spaces of the school constantly demand the constraint of students — they can’t just go outside and play or hang out. At the same time, the arrangements of school simultaneously do grant increasing freedom as students get older. Independent projects, free periods, ever more autonomous schoolwork, as well as choices of academic streams, all introduce the student to increasing freedom of choice. Such work and arrangements enforce a sacrifice of students’ present for the sake of their future. At school, students are obviously also *distanced* from their parents or caregivers; but at the same time, they are clearly put into *proximity* with teachers and other personnel who effectively work in *loco parentis*.

Although all the antinomies mentioned above are evident in the classroom, the one that is most important at this point is *exposure* versus *protection*. The classroom and its arrangements can be said to perform a task similar to the exposure and protection exemplified in the bicycle trailer or baby carrier, but with an emphasis on directing *mind* and *attention* rather than on the body and physical safety. The classroom works to *expose* students to the widest range of the most carefully selected and organized topics and curricular materials. At the same time, it also apparently *protects* students from an equally wide range of diversions and distractions coming from outside — extending from the noise and interruptions

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16. *Ibid.*, 68.

17. Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, 7.

of the street to many ubiquitous digital media forms. It also protects students from all aspects of culture that have not been included in the classroom space, either because they were deemed inappropriate or simply not worthy of their attention.

The classroom shown in figure 4 richly illustrates how this exposure and protection of mind and attention takes place: Children are verily bombarded with myriad words and types of information, particularly of the kind used for the earliest stages of reading. These include CVC (consonant vowel consonant) combinations that are especially easy to sound out and thus to read and spell. These include “fat,” “cat,” “mat,” and “sat,” as well as “zip,” “dip,” “hip,” “tip,” and “rip.” The rows and columns of words across the very top of the photo are alphabetically ordered, consisting of basic place names and (presumably) student names. What is privileged and *exposed* here, in other words, are textual forms of information and communication. But these are selected and arranged differently than they are in everyday life: They are not like myriad store signs or advertisements on a downtown street that work to attract and entice; they instead follow specific patterns to draw attention to the most basic aspects of letter recognition and phonetics. Finally, the absence of any windows or digital screens in the photo indicates that the students are also protected from disruptions from both digital devices and the larger world outside.

The careful selection and exclusion evident in the classroom shows how these spaces represent a discrete environment built *especially* for children and young people. And as the classroom furniture and other content make clear, the students are engaged in activities that are also exclusively for them. To think of the school and classroom in this way — as uniquely pedagogical, rather than as derivative of, say, industrial or managerial production — is to participate in a Continental tradition of theorizing that is directed at the school, *Schultheorie*.<sup>18</sup> Theorizing along these lines, Klaus Mollenhauer observes that in the classroom the world is no longer directly and immediately “*present*” to students, but is instead only indirectly “*re-presented*” to them.<sup>19</sup> This “re-presentation” happens in the form of words, letters, and numbers, but also through images (e.g., like those on the front board, or the race cars hanging from the ceiling). As Mollenhauer explains, such representations, such words and images, are all ways that the world is represented “once again” to children.<sup>20</sup> In such a context, the entirety of life outside of the

18. See, for example, Malte Brinkmann, “Purposes of School — a Phenomenological Analysis via Hegel, Langeveld and Fink,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 53, no. 3 (2021): 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1855255>; and Ilmi Willbergh, “The Problems of ‘Competence’ and Alternatives from the Scandinavian Perspective of *Bildung*,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014): 334–354, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2014.1002112>.

19. Mollenhauer, *Forgotten Connections*, 31–35. See also Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education” (1958), in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 187–196.

20. See Hanno Su and Johannes Bellmann, “Inferentialism at Work: The Significance of Social Epistemology in Theorizing Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 52, no. 2 (2018): 230–245, esp. 240–242.



Figure 4. A primary classroom at St. Pius X National School, in Dublin, Ireland. (Mediawiki commons: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:St.\\_Pius\\_X\\_school\\_classroom.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:St._Pius_X_school_classroom.jpg))

classroom is “no longer presented to the child as a ... whole, but only in part,” Mollenhauer observes. He continues, “The part that *is* presented is offered through a kind of pedagogical rehearsal or practice, as it would be for someone from a foreign land.”<sup>21</sup> As Figure 4 makes clear, schools select, isolate, rearrange, and clarify phenomena from the complexity of the outside world — a world in which competencies in reading and in navigating general background knowledge are taken for granted. In the classroom, these phenomena are isolated, systematized, and simplified; words like “zip,” “dip,” and “rip” are removed from their everyday use, then “re-presented” in their most basic form, and finally ordered according to a pedagogical logic, i.e., following principles of recognition in both speech and writing. They are then integrated into pedagogical practice and rehearsals (as opposed to being integrated into everyday life) as if they had indeed come from a faraway place or a foreign land.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes this kind of selection and

21. Mollenhauer, *Forgotten Connections*, 31.

22. Here we are making an argument, as others have, specifically for the “artificiality” of the classroom environment. (See, for example, Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, *In Defence of the School: A*

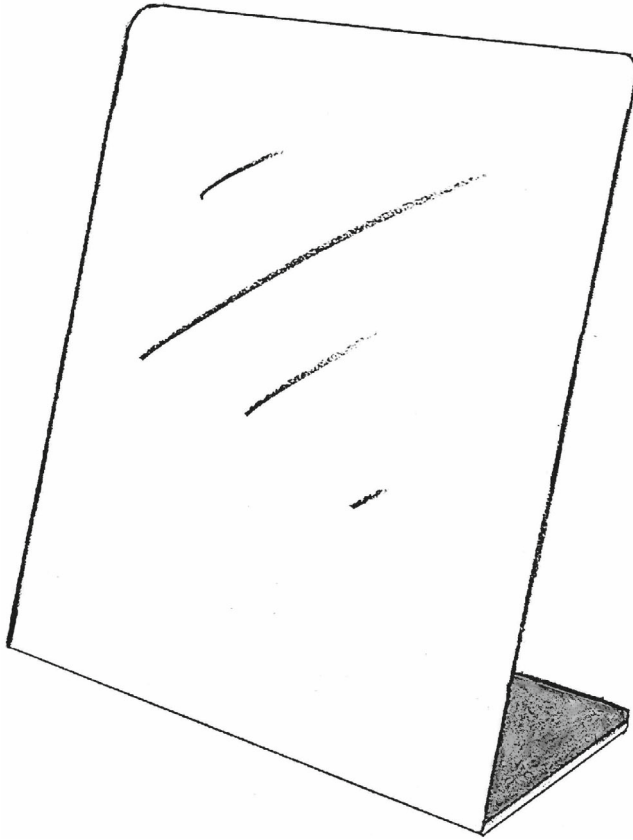


Figure 5. Free-standing plastic self-portrait mirror. (Sketch by authors)

arrangement, this curriculum, is mistaken as being pedagogy per se. But as our previous examples — and as our next, specifically academic example — illustrate, this is not at all necessarily the case.

#### SELF-PORTRAITURE: PEDAGOGY AND THE SELF

The final concrete artifact to be discussed here as specifically “pedagogical” is a mirror (figure 5). This specific mirror is an unbreakable “free-standing, single-sided self-portrait mirror” that is readily available at teacher supply stores. This artifact and the structures that it implies can help illustrate some of the less tangible types of human development that emerge from various combinations of the antimonies discussed earlier. Like the student desks in the previous example, or the carriers and bike trailers highlighted still earlier, this mirror entails a certain positioning of

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*Public Issue*, trans. Jack McMartin [Leuven, Belgium: E-ducation, Culture & Society, 2013], <https://philarchive.org/archive/MASIDO-2>). The point of such a space, we are effectively saying, is a kind of overt artifice aimed at showing the world to children in a way that is purposefully different from the way they encounter it otherwise.

the child or student. In this paper's earlier, more concrete examples, children were positioned relative to the adult and to each other in very specific ways — e.g., with the gaze positioned in a certain direction — in order to achieve a particular balance between opposites. This free-standing self-portrait mirror also positions the child or young person — specifically in relation to themselves, to their own reflection. In so doing, it places the individual student both in the role of an observer and of the one being observed. Consequently, mirrors of this kind are used in art class, specifically for student self-portraits. In this context, they can be seen to provide a further, fundamental pedagogical structure, one that directs students back to themselves and thus implicitly to the question of how they see themselves and are seen by others.

Lesson plans are readily available that list the many approved (e.g., Common Core) curriculum outcomes that an exercise in self-portraiture can help students to attain. These include outcomes associated with “creative expression,” with various forms of symbolic expression and awareness and — through an accompanying exploration of historical self-portraiture — with “historical and cultural context” as well. However, exercises in self-portraiture using a mirror can be seen to take the student well beyond any predetermined learning objectives. The simple matter of asking someone to “take a good look at yourself in the mirror” already implies a process of self-examination, an engagement with both the literal and figurative reflection of oneself. It further suggests a kind of evaluative test of one's own authenticity and the viability of one's own self-image. But first and foremost, looking in the mirror requires the individual to view themselves as if from the outside, as others do. In this sense, it forces a person to abandon an exclusively subjective first-person perspective, the perspective that is most reflexively their own. Instead, the “assignment” of creating a self-portrait requires that the young person constantly oscillate between the *first-* and *third-*person perspectives. This third-person perspective is one in which they are placed at some distance from themselves, in which they not only see themselves as others do, but also as an observable object (a body) among others in the world. It is not difficult to recognize that this is an indispensable aspect of socialization and maturation.<sup>23</sup> In seeing ourselves from this third-person perspective, we recognize ourselves in multiple ways as being no different from, even interchangeable with, others. At the same time, this type of recognition is equally important to developing our own ways of relating to and understanding ourselves: I am no longer simply me at the center of my world but am split into both myself and the one that says “I” to myself. In this process, the self-portrait produced by gazing into one's own eyes and face can be said to bring these fragments of the self together as an aesthetic or imaginary whole.

Questions of individuality, selfhood, embodiment, and identity are naturally of special importance in middle-school and high school years, and it is the

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23. The developmental significance of this process receives clear emphasis, for example, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which posits the “mirror stage” as marking the inauguration of the unfulfillable desire of the imaginary order.



Figure 6. Students showing their self-portraits, accompanied by their art teachers. (Edgar Jerins Self Portrait Workshop with Regina Nicholas's Drawing and Painting Class at Farmingdale High School; used with permission: <https://farmingdale-observer.com/2017/04/25/artists-create-dramatic-self-portraits/>)



Figure 7. Detail of student self-portrait on the far right of figure 6. (Carly Monteaugudo, high school junior; used with permission: <http://edgarjerins.com/teaching>)

self-portraiture of students in this age range that further illustrates the pedagogical potential of the self-portrait mirror. Figures 6 and 7, photographs taken at a U.S. high school, illustrate the intensity of self-examination and self-projection that can be involved in the task of creating a self-portrait while using a mirror.<sup>24</sup> Each student's portrait thematizes something of their individuality — whether this is expressed through an object, arrangement, or gesture. This includes the self-possession suggested by the careful positioning of the young woman's hand in the self-portrait on the far right in figure 6.

It is the poise and focused self-study evident in the self-portrait of this young woman that is of particular interest here (figure 7). What this portrait makes visible can be described as an encounter of the self with the self as (an observable) self-creation (as suggested by the self-illustration that she is completing on the left), as well as a social self with others (situated as viewers of the portrait). The artist directly engages us as viewers through her intensive outward gaze, as though letting us know that she knows that she is being watched.

Both the subject matter and the skill evident in rendering the portrait in figure 7 communicate an expressive and creative ability and multifaceted self-awareness that is also given striking expression in the self-portraits from the Renaissance

24. Teacher Regina Nichols confirms this supposition, adding that students also used photographs as a basis for their self-portraits (private communication, November 1, 2021).



and early modern eras.<sup>25</sup> In *The Mirror: A History*, Sabine Melchoir-Bonnet describes how the invention and perfection of the mirror as a technology enabled a flourishing of self-portraiture that she describes in terms of a kind of “staring at the self in order to imagine the self.”<sup>26</sup> She also describes how the mirror simultaneously fragments and divides the self and the gaze, specifically explaining how in studying and creating from their own reflection, the artist engages in “a doubled gaze” — one that is simultaneously “introspective and mimetic.”<sup>27</sup> Such a gaze allows the individual to examine themselves carefully, with ever-greater care, to recreate themselves through a negotiation between visual reality and visual imagination.

The ultimate point of this last example is to highlight two further pairs of pedagogical tensions. The first of these can be called “individuality” versus “commonality,” (indicated in the various self-portraits in figure 6) and the second, “explicit education” versus a kind of broader “self-development” that goes well beyond easily articulable instructional goals (highlighted especially in figure 7). The first of these sets of opposites is comparatively straightforward and refers to the fact that educating any group as a whole also always involves the simultaneous recognition of group members’ individuality. This is illustrated in figure 6 in terms of what unites and simultaneously differentiates the students and their portraits: They have all created paintings similar in size and visual characteristics, apparently all using the same mirroring technique, and all of roughly the same scale, with similar backgrounds. This immediately makes their work analogous and comparable. However, such comparisons inevitably lead to a recognition of students’ individuality, which is expressed by the simultaneously introspective and expressive personhood communicated in each of the self-portraits. The general opposition of individuality and commonality is manifest in many other everyday pedagogical situations. In the bicycle trailer example (figure 3), it is evident in the way the three family members are sharing in the common experience of a bike ride while each is given, is exposed to, different roles and different levels of participation and responsibility. Engaging in class discussions, grading class assignments, or dealing in any way with an individual student in a class necessarily places teachers in the continuum demarcated by the extremes of commonality and individuality. Discussing the specifically dialectical nature of educational practice, one author takes

as an example the teacher who has to give a grade of “unsatisfactory” on a school essay. The teacher looks at the student performance objectively, and at the same time recognizes that he must not give such a grade in this particular case, because by doing so he would discourage

25. See, for example, “Self-Portrait” by Albrecht Durer from 1500, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dc/Albrecht\\_D&uuml;rer\\_-\\_1500\\_self-portrait\\_%28High\\_resolution\\_and\\_detail%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dc/Albrecht_D&uuml;rer_-_1500_self-portrait_%28High_resolution_and_detail%29.jpg); the “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” by Parmigianino from 1524, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-portrait\\_in\\_a\\_Convex\\_Mirror#/media/File:Parmigianino\\_Selfportrait.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-portrait_in_a_Convex_Mirror#/media/File:Parmigianino_Selfportrait.jpg); or the “Self-Portrait of Johannes Gump” from 1646, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Self-portrait\\_by\\_Johannes\\_Gumpp.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Self-portrait_by_Johannes_Gumpp.jpg).

26. Sabine Melchoir-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History* (London: Routledge, 2001), 156.

27. *Ibid.*

the student, who has tried very hard.... [This represents] a subjective situation, the nature and expectations for a particular student are opposed to the claim of an objective social standard. The teacher stands in between and simply must decide.<sup>28</sup>

As with the negotiation of the other tensions discussed here, there is of course no single answer or position on the continuum between collectivity and individuality that guarantees an appropriate response to this opposition. Instead, a suitable “mediating” position must be constantly redefined in practice from one situation to the next.

The opposition between explicit education versus a kind of broader self-development is the final tension we consider here. It is in some ways the most complex of the oppositions discussed, and it returns our examination to Biesta’s account of pedagogy as a kind of “becoming human.” This tension is illustrated not only in the difference between the instructional objectives for an exercise in self-portraiture and the kind of encounter with oneself that such an exercise can enable, but also in some of the examples considered earlier. Consider the difference between the more explicit lessons being learned by the girls on the bike trailer versus the less tangible possibilities that are also available through such an experience. The girls not only gain familiarity with riding in traffic and following the rules of the road; they are also likely discovering opportunities for new enjoyment, risk-taking, and trust in each other. The girls in this photo may well view both themselves and each other slightly differently after such an exhilarating ride.

This encounter with the self, this becoming human, is not as much an epistemological process — about skills, knowledge, and their acquisition — as it is an ontological one — about *being* a self and also becoming one. It is a biographical process of self-formation, self-realization, and self-expression. This process has been discussed most extensively using the German term *Bildung*.<sup>29</sup> The term was famously defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt at the end of the eighteenth century as “the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay,”<sup>30</sup> and it has been more recently defined as the idea “of the autonomous, self-determined, and self-reflected personality in its full realization.”<sup>31</sup> It is a question of the increasing exercise of freedom and responsibility, a matter of both “being a self” and “becoming oneself ... something that cannot be completely contained by terms such as education, socialization,

28. Helmut Danner, *Methoden Geisteswissenschaftlicher Pädagogik, Einführung in Hermeneutik, Phänomenologie und Dialektik* [Methods of Human Science Pedagogy: Introduction to Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Dialectics] (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 2006), 219–220 (translation by the authors).

29. In other languages, it is known, for example, as *Formacion* (Spanish), *образование* (Russian), or *modustus* (Finnish).

30. Wilhelm von Humboldt, “Theory of *Bildung*,” in *Teaching as Reflective Practice: The German Didaktik Tradition*, ed. Ian Westbury, Stephan Hopmann, and Kurt Riquarts (New York: Routledge, 2000), 54.

31. Rebekka Horlacher, *The Educated Subject and the German Concept of Bildung: A Comparative Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.

instruction, or schooling.”<sup>32</sup> Notably, the term *Bildung* has long been used in English to designate the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman*, the “coming-of-age” novel, which today includes Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*. In each case, the focus, to use Biesta’s terms, is placed on experiences of “subjectification,” on both becoming and “being a subject of your own life.”<sup>33</sup> These and other *Bildungsromane* gain their dynamism from their central characters gradually taking up the position of the subject of their own lives, the protagonists in their respective narratives.

The tension between this “subjectification” and the externally set goals and outcomes that dominate instructional planning is one that can still be said to subsist in any instructional activity or pedagogical moment.<sup>34</sup> These activities and moments can foster processes of self-examination and self-definition for which an educator can *prepare*, but which cannot be explicitly *planned*. In fact, the kind of self-awareness, self-realization and autonomy implied in the term “Bildung” can be seen to constitute the final goal of pedagogy — one that, unlike so many others, is irreducible to means-ends rationality. If this is the case, then preparing for and engaging spontaneously with such unplannable processes could be described as the ultimate pedagogical task.

#### CONCLUSION: FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY, ACTION AND JUDGMENT

There is one set of opposing principles, as has been noted, that appears common to all of the examples above, one also more general than all the rest: Kant’s paradox of freedom versus constraint. Figure 8 shows how this more general, or perhaps more universal, paradox can be understood in alignment with the other antinomies highlighted in this paper.

Terms like “proximity,” “protection,” and “education” are associated with constraint, and ones like exposure, distance, and *Bildung* itself, with freedom. As originally articulated by Schleiermacher, the opposition of present and future, meanwhile, can be aligned variously with the paradox of freedom and constraint. Schleiermacher would have us avoid the sacrifice, the constraint of the possibilities of the present for the sake of the future, but it is precisely the possibility of the constraint of opportunities in the future that compels such restrictions in the present. Under different circumstances, both present and future can be seen as embodying various degrees of freedom and constraint.

32. Biesta, “Risking Ourselves in Education,” 94; Horlacher, *The Educated Subject and the German Concept of Bildung*, 1.

33. Biesta, “Risking Ourselves in Education,” 94.

34. Learning outcomes are expected to reference student learning *behaviors*, appropriate assessment methods, and student performance criteria. They are to be formulated using simple, specific action verbs. Such requirements, with their emphasis on observable behavior, performance, and action could not be less suited to address the kinds of self-development and self-awareness that can be given expression to in the creation of a self-portrait.

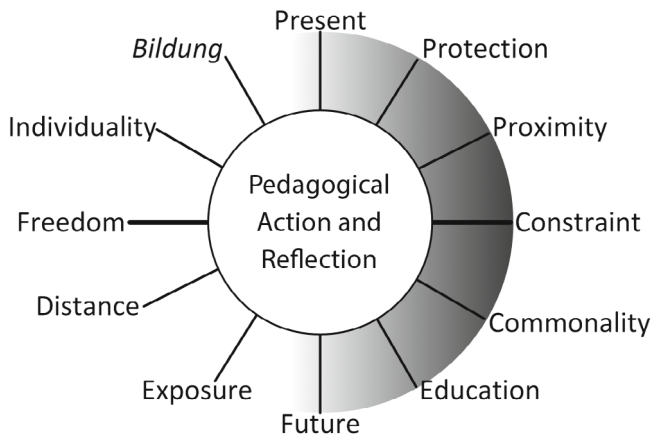


Figure 8. One possible way of understanding the interrelationship of the various tensions and antinomies discussed in this paper — as associated (to various degrees) either with freedom or with constraint. (Diagram by authors)

Taken together, the tensions described in this paper and integrated in figure 8 can be seen as demarcating a terrain, *topos*, or dimension that presents myriad possibilities for forms of *action*, *experience*, and *reflection* that would all be clearly pedagogical — having to do with ways of both thinking about and engaging in upbringing and education. In contradistinction to even the broadest definitions of pedagogy typical for English — for example, as “the art, science, or profession of teaching” — this *topos* covers a wide range of practices and concerns, from formalized and rationalized instructional activity to more unassuming types of care and sharing in inexpert, unformalized, and improvised settings. Indeed, this *topos* or dimension only becomes visible when we extract educational thought and discourse from the strategies and instrumentalities of the classroom and begin to articulate these in terms of more general human values and practices. Because we, like all other societies we know, share our adult lives with those who are growing up, pedagogy does not only remain in the specialized world of teachers and psychologists, but represents a set of values, practices, and arrangements that are part of human existence and human nature more broadly.

The intersection of a range of oppositions or antinomies, we conclude, structures both pedagogical engagement and pedagogical thought, broadly defined. This space or dimension of human existence is also hidden in that it generally remains beyond the scope of the educator’s or adult’s immediate awareness. This is not only because this way of thinking is unfamiliar in English. It is also the case that that we typically do not pay attention to general patterns and tensions that may subtend our thought and action in our engagement with those who are younger. Instead, we tend to be aware of the specific problem before us: the “best” solution for carrying a particular infant, how to comfort this crying child, or ways to deal with limits for a particular teenager eager to assert their freedom and independence. These tensions nonetheless come closer to the surface in statements like

“no pain, no gain,” or when we consider how we might have handled a situation with a child or young person differently. Depending on our previous actions, a teenager’s withdrawal may make us wish we had been closer and more supportive — or perhaps less proximate and insistent — just as the protestations of a young child may lead us to encourage expressions of their freedom and individuality rather than emphasizing social expectation and constraint.

Making these tensions and our practical and reflective negotiation of them explicit represents a kind of theory, a way of understanding pedagogy. Following Biesta, this pedagogical theory — along with some of the more general understandings it implies — illustrates the potential for “an autonomous ... discipline” of pedagogy replete “with its own forms of theory and theorizing.”<sup>35</sup> Whereas practice locates itself at points between the antinomies and tensions outlined here, theory has as its focus framing this practice in terms of such structures and tensions, and in myriad other ways. Theory can frame this practice as it appears in the classroom, for example, by theorizing the school as a specifically educational and pedagogical institutional form, or by understanding the “professionalization” of pedagogical practice in terms of multiple ways of viewing the opposition of “proximity and distance,” as has recently been done in German.<sup>36</sup> Theory can further reframe pedagogical practice in the context of the family, of children’s play, of peer relationships or sports, with each seen as bringing with them their own variations on pedagogy as both practice and study.<sup>37</sup>

Further, following Biesta’s description of “pedagogy” as bringing with it its own forms of theory and theorizing, the theory we have developed here is notably different from that which dominates English-language discourse. It is descriptive and inductive rather than prescriptive and deductive. We do not start with analyses or meta-analyses of student outcomes, teacher practices, or from general principles of social, psychological, or personal development. Unlike constructivist pedagogy or, say, a pedagogy of the oppressed, our starting point is not statistical evidence of student success or theories of oppression and emancipation. Our end goal is also not to identify good, better, or best ways to teach under given circumstances. In this sense — and in contradistinction to some of Biesta’s characterizations —

35. Biesta, “Disciplines and Theory in the Academic Study of Education,” 189.

36. See, for example, Margret Dörr, *Nähe und Distanz: Ein Spannungsfeld pädagogischer Professionalität* [Proximity and Distance: A Field of Tension in Pedagogical Professionalism] (Weinheim, Germany: Juventa, 2019); and Werner Helsper, “Pädagogisches Handeln in den Antinomien der Moderne” [Pedagogical Action in the Antinomies of Modernity] in *Einführung in Grundbegriffe und Grundfragen der Erziehungswissenschaft*, ed. Heinz-Hermann Krüger and Werner Helsper (Toronto: Barbara Budrich, 2013), 15–34.

37. This is illustrated by the existence, in German, of areas of research and practice such as *Familienpädagogik*, *Spielpädagogik*, *Sozialpädagogik*, or *Sportpädagogik*. It is significant that the ways of theorizing pedagogy in German and Continental contexts go well beyond questions of the antinomies and tensions discussed here. See, for example, Norm Friesen and Karsten Kenklies, “Continental Pedagogy and Curriculum,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Education*, 4th ed., ed. Robert Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye Ercikan (Dordrecht, Germany: Elsevier, 2022).

theory and theorizing in pedagogy incorporates both normative and non-normative moments. Such a discipline is normative insofar as it can help guide pedagogical reflection and engagement that is concretely responsive to and responsible for a particular child's or group's needs. It is non-normative, for example, in its account of the structures and tensions within which such reflection and engagement take place. It is not by chance that the pedagogical antinomies discussed here also appear in German in contexts both concretely normative and more abstract. They appear in university courses and professional development seeking to cultivate particular kinds of practical awareness among (student) teachers as well as in more theoretical accounts of pedagogical professionalization.

To speak and think of education as is generally the case in English is also to simultaneously think and speak of practical educational reform, to implicitly or explicitly assume a position of knowing more and better than what teachers and parents may already know and may already realize through their practice. While it is certainly important to address oversights and injustices, the reform of education — and specifically of school systems — has rightly come under much criticism lately, particularly in the United States.<sup>38</sup> In this context, the approach outlined here aims more at an *appreciation* of practice precisely *as* practiced. Instead of demanding something new, more effective, more “scientific” or “evidence-based” from teachers and parents, it offers particular ways of viewing and understanding the social and practical structure of pedagogy as entailing irresolvable oppositions, ambiguities, and moments of success and failure.

Our appreciation of myriad existing arrangements and practices — however traditional or uninformed by contemporary evidence they may be — focuses on drawing out embodied, relational temporal and spatial patterns and continuities. In other words, we proceed from a concrete pedagogical situation to formulate questions or highlight dilemmas, for example, about greater or lesser distance, exposure, freedom, or individuality. We have not sought to explain these practices in the sense of accounting for why they are the way they are. In our analysis, we have also refused to link to broader psychological or sociocultural theories that might explain distance and proximity in terms of parent-child attachment, or that might try to explain baby carrying (for example) in terms of developments in pediatric science or in reference to communal values. Whether it is a way to engage with a crying infant or adolescent self-expression, we have endeavored to work descriptively, outlining dilemmas and questions rather than providing ready or definite answers.<sup>39</sup> The tensions that lie at the core of our approach, as we have said,

38. David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Jack Jennings, *Fatigued by School Reform* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

39. If the above account is reminiscent of phenomenological description, with its focus on body, time, and space, and its bracketing of both the natural attitude and scientific explanation, it is not by accident. Although not explicitly phenomenological, both Schleiermacher and Mollenhauer either substantially influenced or were influenced by the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) of the late-nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries. These human sciences included dialectics, historical hermeneutics,

are not resolvable in theory — whether through a theory of teaching and learning or of emancipatory, social change — but can be worked out only through practice.

The result of this effort is a sketch or an outline of the broad parameters within which other, more specific pedagogical advice and prescription is typically provided. The tensions and antinomic structures explored in this paper can be seen to underlie a wide range of political and instructional “pedagogies” that have been popular at various points over time. In fact, these tensions and structures can be used as ways to locate, analyze, and elaborate on such solutions. Looking at figure 8, and thinking of the other examples discussed here, it is clear that many contemporary classroom pedagogies, in their theoretical articulation, would place the core of pedagogical action to the left of the center we identify for pedagogical practice and reflection. Although they certainly emphasize safety, pedagogies like constructivism or exploratory learning generally privilege exposure over protection, distance over proximity, and freedom over constraint. Students are supposed to be free to learn through self-direction and exploration, to construct their own knowledge, to realize their own individuality, and to be exposed to complex and challenging problems and environments. At the same time, also as suggested above, many contemporary approaches to pre-school childrearing indicate a movement in precisely the opposite direction. Today’s recommendations for mothers and for child carrying emphasize proximity, bonding, and the careful protection of young children. Historians of childhood have spoken in this regard of a move from a view of young children as hardy and adaptable creatures to a contemporary emphasis on their fragility and vulnerability.<sup>40</sup>

In emphasizing its scope and possibilities — and in consciously *not* offering specific solutions and prescriptions — we have worked to portray pedagogy as an intensely interpersonal realm, a place of open-ended negotiation and improvisation for both children and adults. Adults are free in this space, but they are also bound by responsibility to the child; similarly, the freedom that is increasingly granted to children as they grow is also defined by constraints — however moderate they may eventually become. As this gradual process unfolds, children and young people explore ever-wider and more risky spaces and places. Significantly, this exploration also includes the progressive discovery and development of their own being, their own individuality and identity, precisely as a resource for their maturity. However, it is the curious fate of both adult pedagogical responsibility and the constraints placed on the young that they gradually diminish and eventually become unnecessary and obsolete. It is the achievement of the young person’s maturity and autonomy that marks their departure from pedagogical constraint, proximity, and protection. But during the time that pedagogical tensions remain in play, no theories or findings — no matter how new or compelling — absolve

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and phenomenology in their methodology. See, for example, Norm Friesen, “Dilthey and Human Science: Autobiography, Hermeneutics, and Pedagogy,” *Phenomenology & Practice* 15, no. 2 (2020): 100–112 <https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr29443>.

40. See, for example, Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood*, 2nd ed. (London: Polity, 2018), 1–10.

the adult of either their responsibility or their freedom in relation to the young person. While their thoughts and actions are in the domain of pedagogy, adults are still required to rely on their *own reflection* and *judgment*. We hope that the understanding of pedagogy we have outlined here offers further options, context, and perspective for such reflective judgment and practice.