

# CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE AND PRACTICAL WISDOM: SIMONE WEIL AND THE ETHICS OF LEARNING BY DOING

Paula Nicole C. Eugenio  
*University of Santo Tomas, Philippines*

*This paper argues in favor of experiential learning as a moral and spiritual practice rather than an instrumental method for workforce preparation. Contemporary educational systems, shaped by neoliberal and technocratic frameworks, often reduce “learning by doing” to a utilitarian process aimed at measurable productivity and employability. Drawing from Aristotle’s phronēsis (practical wisdom) and Simone Weil’s philosophy of “attentive labor,” I propose a contemplative model of education grounded in ethical formation and spiritual receptivity. Through philosophical hermeneutics and conceptual synthesis, it demonstrates how experiential learning, when rooted in embodied engagement and humility, fosters moral discernment, virtue, and spiritual transformation. Such an idea is formed having in mind that Aristotle’s ethical habituation develops character through action and community, while Weil’s notion of attention deepens this process by emphasizing receptivity, self-emptying (kenosis), and the redemptive value of labor and suffering. Together, they offer a counter-narrative to instrumental rationality by reuniting intellectual, bodily, and spiritual dimensions of learning. This reimagined framework of paideia restores education’s sacred and formative purpose: to cultivate wisdom, compassion, and moral responsibility. By situating education as a contemplative praxis, I argue for pedagogies that integrate moral attention and practical wisdom to form whole persons capable of acting justly and lovingly in an increasingly fragmented and technocratic world.*

*Keywords: attentive labor, contemplative education, experiential learning, moral formation, phronesis*

## INTRODUCTION

The educational discourse has adopted “learning by doing” as its core principle to develop practical education systems that encompass vocational training, service learning, community-based education, and professional development. The widespread acceptance of this method stems from its ability to connect theoretical knowledge with

practical skills while fostering key qualities required in modern technocratic environments. Educational systems favor experiential learning as their primary teaching approach because it allows learners to address complex real-world problems through active participation, reflection, and problem-solving activities.

The philosophical foundation of experiential learning comes from John Dewey's pioneering work *Experience and Education*, which presents education as a democratic and pragmatic approach through the vital connection between direct experience and acquiring knowledge. Dewey showed that education is a reflection of life itself because real experience creates an essential link with educational growth (Dewey 1938, 20). This revolutionary educational idea transformed learning environments by emphasizing direct involvement with meaningful, concrete activities over passive content absorption. Since Dewey's time, this educational approach has gained wide acceptance because it combines intellectual knowledge with physical engagement to foster cognitive skills, moral judgment, and social awareness.

The practice of experiential learning today faces the risk of becoming an instrumentally focused approach that reduces it to a mere tool for skill and workforce development. Educational initiatives within neoliberal and market-driven policy frameworks prioritize measurable results and employability data while stressing efficiency (Giroux 2014, 14). In this context, learning by doing shifts into an operational system that produces a flexible workforce but loses its spiritual and moral core. Through market forces, education transforms into a product that loses its identity as a holistic human development process, which the Greeks called *paideia*. When learning is marginalized, the educational process sacrifices its ethical, contemplative, and transformative elements, resulting in an education that remains transactional and fragmented, ultimately becoming impoverished.

In this paper, I introduce an alternative educational framework that reestablishes experiential learning as a profound moral and spiritual practice, rather than merely an instrumental technique. By synthesizing Aristotle's concept of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) from the *Nicomachean Ethics* with Simone Weil's philosophy of "attentive labor," I argue that experiential learning can be reimaged as a contemplative *praxis*—a form of reflective action dedicated to ethical and spiritual formation. In this framework, Aristotle's emphasis on developing virtue through active community involvement provides a foundation for character development (Aristotle 1999, 1140b4–21), while Weil's focus on attention cultivated through disciplined labor offers a path toward spiritual receptivity and moral clarity (Weil 2001, 111).

Through philosophical hermeneutics and conceptual synthesis, this paper develops a model of experiential learning that moves beyond technocratic and outcome-oriented frameworks. The model shows how genuine engagement with material and social realities through embodied interaction and humility allows for formative learning that addresses the whole learner, including intellectual, physical, and spiritual aspects. This approach reclaims the classical idea of *paideia*, which offers a comprehensive education in virtue and wisdom that goes beyond traditional academic goals.

The current era of knowledge fragmentation and standardized testing requires an immediate redefinition of how we understand "learning by doing." This redefinition emphasizes guidance over results, values mindfulness, and prioritizes ethical

commitment above functional outcomes. The model views education as a sacred practice that fosters transformation while encouraging competence and character development, aiming to create individuals capable of acting wisely, justly, and compassionately. This paper, therefore, intends to restore the spiritual essence of education while promoting experiential learning as a pathway to human development.

## ARISTOTLE'S PHRONĒSIS: PRACTICAL WISDOM AS ETHICAL FORMATION

In *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999), Aristotle outlines three main categories of human knowledge: *epistēmē*, *technē*, and *phronēsis*. Each type of understanding functions as a distinct category that aims at specific goals and different kinds of truth. Theoretical knowledge, known as *epistēmē*, seeks universal and necessary truths about the world by studying what must always be true in all situations. *Technē* refers to knowledge of production and craftsmanship, involving systematic procedural methods for creating external objects and artifacts. Practical wisdom, called *phronesis*, exists to guide human behavior by helping people determine how to achieve eudaimonia, or human flourishing, in unpredictable everyday situations (Aristotle 1999, 1139b15–17). The essential nature of *phronēsis* stands apart from both *epistēmē* and *technē* because of their significant differences. *Epistēmē* pursues eternal truths, but practical wisdom deals with the ever-changing aspects of human life which Aristotle describes as *ta endechomena allōs* meaning things that “may be otherwise” without established rules (1139b21–24). *Phronēsis* stands apart from *technē* through its need for flexible reasoning which adapts to real life complexities instead of following standardized production methods. For instance, a teacher with *phronesis* might change a lesson plan if they see students are not interested or are confused. Instead of sticking to a set teaching method (*technē*), the teacher adjusts how they teach, maybe by using examples from real life, getting students to talk about the topic, or making hard concepts easier to understand. Aristotle explains *phronēsis* as the capability to recognize what benefits oneself through understanding what is beneficial and good (1140b4–6). This definition of practical wisdom focuses on identifying appropriate actions to enhance human welfare rather than abstract cognitive processes.

In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that practical wisdom involves thinking about actions that benefit oneself rather than focusing solely on health, strength, or specific aspects (1140a24–28). The integrative nature of *phronēsis* becomes clear because it combines rational thinking with moral understanding to guide decisions in uncertain situations toward the highest good. This wisdom goes beyond technical skill and clever thinking because it unites intellect with moral purpose and character. Aristotle shows that practical wisdom requires virtue as he states, “Practical wisdom cannot exist without goodness” (1144b30). The moral requirement of *phronēsis* arises from its nature as a virtuous disposition that needs both proper goals and appropriate methods to achieve those goals in real-life situations. This raises the crucial question of how such a virtuous character is formed. *Ethismos* leads to the development of moral sensitivity by establishing virtuous behavior patterns within community environments. Through consistent deliberate actions people build lasting character traits (*hexeis*) that provide the foundation for their ethical decision-making

process (1103a15–25). Aristotle explains that his ethical education approach consists of embodied practice through social life rhythms, where learners learn by performing actions. Practical wisdom exists within a communal and situated context because it depends on the lived experiences that form ethical perception and decision-making.

Martha Nussbaum, among modern interpreters, helps illustrate the physical aspects of *phronēsis* through her interpretations. Nussbaum shows in *The Fragility of Goodness* that practical wisdom requires aesthetic perception (*aisthēsis*) as its core element. Moral agents need to recognize the specific details of situations that standard rules cannot capture, and this perceptual ability develops from cultivating virtue through repeated experiences in real-life situations (Nussbaum 2001, 305–6). Moral perception demands the same sensitivity as reasoning because practical wisdom involves a responsive awareness of the world.

Nussbaum's emphasis on perceptual sensitivity in moral judgment may help us better understand Aristotle's point that practical wisdom is grounded in holistic formation. He argues that genuine ethical education requires complete personal transformation which includes intellectual development as well as emotional and physical habituation. The integrated system of practical wisdom aligns personal desires and judgments with a reasoned understanding of the good. MacIntyre shares Aristotle's perspective on moral development by describing practical wisdom as a method to discover important matters in new situations through coherent narratives about human life and purpose (MacIntyre 2007, 154). Through narrative ethics, MacIntyre supports Aristotle's position that moral knowledge and character unite with practical action to create ethical discernment, which understands context and time.

From Aristotle's ethics, one may suppose that an Aristotelian idea of education rejects approaches that reduce learning to mere instrumentalism. The main purpose of moral education extends beyond teaching external success or pragmatic effectiveness to develop complete human beings who achieve the state of eudaimonia or living well at its most complete and flourishing level. The development of practical wisdom through action-based education and social habit formation gives learners the ability to exercise ethical freedom while making decisions that allow them to handle life challenges with integrity instead of following rules or possessing technical skills only. The Aristotelian educational approach based on habituation and moral character development shows that knowledge cannot exist independently from ethical conduct. The educational approach develops virtues through practical experiences because wisdom develops from direct involvement with the world rather than theoretical concepts. As Aristotle stresses the role of action and habituation in developing ethical discernment, Simone Weil, meanwhile, presents a revolutionary educational approach that deepens this concept. Weil presents an expanded educational framework that emphasizes attention as well as labor's redemptive qualities and suffering's transformative potential for moral and spiritual development.

## **SIMONE WEIL'S ATTENTIVE LABOR AS SPIRITUAL EDUCATION**

The spiritual and moral education provided by Simone Weil occurs through three essential pathways and also includes her philosophy of attention combined with her views on labor and suffering.

The philosophical works of Simone Weil offer an alternative to traditional Aristotelian ethics by redefining how attention, labor, and suffering function as educational tools for moral and spiritual growth. Weil presents attention as a fundamental moral practice that teaches the self to accept truth, connect with others, and engage with reality beyond ego-centeredness, rather than following traditional ethical methods that emphasize habituation and rational deliberation. The practice of attention—combined with manual labor and suffering, forms spiritual exercises according to Weil—serves as a transformative disciplines that refine perception and strengthen the will for deeper ethical and spiritual development.

### **The Moral and Spiritual Dimension of Attention**

The concept of attention according to Simone Weil goes beyond regular mental attention by revealing a profound and nonconformist understanding. Weil maintains that attention represents, “the rarest and purest form of generosity,” because it requires the ego to step back to fully receive the world, truth or another person in their genuine state (Weil 2001, 111). Through this concept, Weil transforms attention into a spiritual practice that enables people to clear their self-concepts and let true things emerge without any alteration. The practice of attention stands both as ethical and spiritual practice.

The educational approach from this perspective opposes the utilitarian view of learning, which sees education solely as about practicality and achievement. Weil argues that genuine learning requires full receptive attention, which leads to moral responsibilities. She describes authentic and pure values rooted in a kind of attention that acts like prayer (Weil 2001, 105). This process uncovers moral understanding because it allows learners to respond with compassion toward others, not through emotional reactions, but through a clear and humble perception of their needs. Peter Roberts (2011) maintains that Weil’s theory of attention provides a new approach for higher education to build ethical character instead of merely academic achievement. Weil emphasizes the ascetic nature of her learning theory which focuses on attention and self-emptying creates educational opportunities where grace can operate on learners (Roberts 2011, 276–77). Stuart Jesson (2014) also understands Weil’s attention as an experience of suffering which enables compassionate ethics through “letting-be of the other” against mastery and control (Jesson 2014, 165). Thus, attention serves as more than a teaching method since it represents an ethical practice of being receptive to others and the suffering world.

Weil’s insights have even found application in medical and caregiving contexts. Mark Kissler (2024) highlights that medical professionals must develop attention as a moral skill when providing clinical care. Contextualizing Weil, he argues that the caregiver must refuse to rush for solutions while maintaining a present state which lets the patient’s experience tell its own story (Kissler 2024, 3). The process of attention requires complete openness because it enables us to restore human dignity in others through refusing to reduce them to objects.

The foundation of both intellectual and moral development rests upon Weil’s definition of attention. Through this methodical and generous way of focusing on

reality, other people develop the essential traits of justice and compassion along with spiritual discernment that define education as formation instead of instruction.

### **Attention, Labor, and Obedience to Necessity**

Weil argues that attention reaches its deepest development when people work with their hands while submitting to their needs and experiencing pain which creates spiritual understanding beyond philosophical understanding. The factory works she experienced during the 1930s exposed Weil to “forces she could not control” that included machine rhythms, material weights, and bodily constraints. Through her submission, Weil gained spiritual knowledge that revealed truth in its pure form while she lost her belief in self-control (Weil 2002, 207–10). She maintains that true transformation through surrender of necessity leads to what she calls “decreation” which represents a complete self-emptying process. For example, workers learn to connect their efforts with real environmental requirements and task needs after they stop their attempts to control the process. The process of decreation creates space for truth to enter the soul while grace can flow in after the removal of pride. In this way, Weil extends Aristotle’s notion of *ethismos* by showing how disciplined, attentive labor changes not just the character but also the soul, turning ethical practice into a path toward spiritual insight.

Aristotle’s ethical system reveals a connection between habitual practice (*ethismos*) which shapes character through repeated ethical actions (Aristotle 1999, 1103a17–26). Weil transforms this Aristotelian concept into a spiritual practice by showing how mindful work becomes an ethical practice that reveals metaphysical truth. Simone Kotva situates Weil’s attention framework within French spiritualist philosophy to show how human effort interacts with divine grace (2020). Kotva argues that Weil presents attention as a spiritual practice that balances effort and receptivity to divine grace (Kotva 2020).

Attention develops from simple focus into a deep moral and spiritual practice through the combination of physical work, its necessary conditions, and its inclusive nature of suffering. Through humble self-alignment the self transforms through clear and just practices which do not involve mastering the world.

### **Moral and Spiritual Education through Suffering**

Weil presents a highly unconventional educational approach by using suffering as an instrument to develop both spiritual maturity and moral development. She does not support the simple romanticization or sanctification of suffering. She argues that suffering maintains its worth only when people face it with attention that avoids self-pity and resentment. The process of attentive suffering transforms into a tool which reveals truth and purifies the soul. Weil teaches that suffering has the power to eliminate false beliefs and artificial identities so we can discover our authentic nature which accepts divine love based on ultimate goodness (Weil 2001, 111). Suffering exists as a spiritual practice that trains the will and expands the soul’s capacity for empathy. The form of suffering that Weil calls “attentive” creates an embodied connection to others’ pain in a way that differs from stoicism or intellectual

understanding. For Diogenes Allen (1997), Weil uses suffering as a spiritual tool to purify the soul and bring it closer to divine love through transcending selfish desires (144). Through suffering, education teaches by dissolving barriers to self-centeredness, allowing the soul to develop an openness toward experiencing the difficulties and needs of others.

Weil's analysis of contemporary education reveals her belief that attention stands as the essential core of proper learning. Weil establishes a fundamental opposition to modern educational methods which separate academic knowledge from real-world experiences while emphasizing abstract knowledge and technical skills above attention and moral development. According to Weil (2001, 105), modern education has transformed into an instrumental activity that focuses on fact-gathering and technical skill development while ignoring moral and spiritual concerns. She believes this educational approach fails to achieve its proper goals. She argues that proper education requires learners to develop attentive awareness as its core goal. The discipline of soul development helps learners prepare for spiritual needs like prayer, justice, and moral action. Intellectual activity only remains valuable when guided by attention that leads learners to understand the truth. A proper understanding of education results in a spiritual growth process that transforms individuals into better versions of themselves by teaching attention as a tool to open minds and hearts to reality.

Current teaching methods follow Weil's ideas by focusing on *kenosis* (self-emptying) as an educational strategy for character development. Weil's philosophical ideas inspire modern scholar Anna Mercedes to create learning approaches which use self-emptying as an educational method for ethical development. Mercedes (2011) argues that Weil's *kenosis* concept serves as a strong framework to develop learner humility along with ethical perception and decentered action (68). This pedagogical model opposes conventional educational methods since it directs learning toward relationship-based ethical responsibility which originates from Weil's theological investigations about attention and affliction.

Through this method, Mercedes argues, it neither strips away learner control nor transforms education into mere compliance yet develops an ethical relationship with others and the world. The approach builds moral character through active listening and empathetic presence while developing awareness of human vulnerability that education needs to promote holistic human growth.

### **Weil's Educational Theory Unites Religious and Moral Education**

Weil's philosophical system links educational development with spiritual growth through her unique approach of a decentered self, while echoing Aristotelian virtue ethics. Weil argues that spiritual growth relies on recognizing necessity, embracing otherness, and experiencing suffering, rather than following Aristotle's method of habituation and rational deliberation to cultivate virtues. Weil offers a path that guides learners beyond abstract self-absorption, encouraging them to engage deeply with the world through loving submission to its fundamental truths. Through this submission, learners participate in a sacred education that transforms learning into an act of obedient love toward reality. Weil's focused labor transforms education into a transcendent practice that forms learners entirely while uniting their physical

existence with their intellectual and spiritual essence. Education functions as an educational experience of love, justice, and truth that enables complete human development.

The dominant educational approaches of today focus on utilitarian ends, but Weil presents education as a process that forms the moral and spiritual aspects of learners. The vision of Weil opposes the modern tendency to break down human beings into separate abilities or competencies because it promotes a complete development of body, mind, and spirit through disciplined, practical engagement. The neoliberal educational paradigms have replaced the holistic learning model that existed before. The current emphasis on experiential learning needs critical evaluation to determine its distance from a more comprehensive learning approach that benefits economic productivity, ethical, and spiritual development of learners.

### **REIMAGINING LEARNING BY DOING: FROM INSTRUMENTALITY TO FORMATION**

The present educational discourse employs experiential learning to develop particular abilities and credentials that meet global employability requirements. The dominant *technē* framework values experiential learning based on its instrumental usefulness which leads to measurable outcomes that enhance employability and productivity. Wendy Brown (2015) argues that the neoliberal logic transforms education into a system which optimizes human capital while reducing knowledge to calculable commodities (15). The focus on utility in educational practices leads to the suppression of moral and contemplative aspects of learning that results in turning meaningful human experiences into mechanical work.

Through philosophical perspectives from Aristotle and Simone Weil, we find alternative views about experiential learning that transform technical preparation into deep ethical and spiritual development. For Aristotle, character formation stands as the central element for achieving human flourishing. In his theory, virtue emerges from consistent practice of moral actions among communities that demonstrate and support moral standards (Aristotle 2009, 1103a33–1103b5). The formation of habits takes place through direct experiences within specific locations and physical bodies. Practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) emerges directly from the combination of practical experience with real-world particularities and complex moral choices made within different situational contexts (Aristotle 2009, 1140a1–1140b15). Aristotle believes that practical learning through direct experience is essential to develop into a person who correctly sees the world and makes right choices.

The Aristotelian view is further expanded by Simone Weil, who describes attention as the essential moral and spiritual practice that enables transformation. She explains that working with humility and openness fosters a spiritual learning process called “spiritual apprenticeship,” which trains the will to see reality beyond self-created illusions (Weil 2001, 108). Through physical labor, individuals develop the capacity to accept necessary conditions and cultivate patience as a crucial character trait.

This approach directly opposes the conventional Western mindset, which positions intellectual concepts above practical work and manual skills. Both Weil and

Aristotle contest this dualism. Aristotle maintains that moral virtue develops through active involvement in the world because our transformation into wise and good moral beings happens through practical experience rather than abstract thinking (Aristotle 2009, 1103a33). Weil raises the status of manual work repetition to spiritual training, which honors the body as an educational space for personal development. The body functions as an independent force that helps form ethical character.

Apprenticeship is a way to develop skills and transform the whole person through this process. Repeated practice of a craft enhances both perception and willpower, enabling learners to observe materials closely and persevere through failures while accepting the limits that tasks impose. Through this experience, learners learn to listen to the material, environment, and their own physical boundaries. This type of knowledge goes beyond factual understanding because it fosters habits of both mental insight and personal conduct. This form of knowledge does not fall into the category of *technē* since *technē* is about production and control but *praxis*—action oriented toward virtue and the good (Aristotle 2009, 1140a1). The action of *praxis* requires moral awareness and self-directed action without seeking technical outcomes. Through her concept of attentive labor, Weil demonstrates how practical activities help people develop moral and spiritual awareness that leads to self-transformation toward truth and justice (Weil 2001, 106).

This philosophical approach demonstrates that experiential learning functions as a contemplative *praxis*. The practice slows down ego-based thinking which helps learners connect their minds to their bodies in the present instance. The practice creates humility through the understanding of real-world boundaries alongside the need for attentive listening. Through ethical presence, the learner receives “grace” which represents a transformative truth encounter that transcends instrumental measurement (Weil 2001, 111).

This philosophical perspective strongly opposes modern educational systems which emphasize quick results, performance indicators above deep learning, moral development, and attention. Educators and institutions need to reevaluate learning goals because they should serve as an ethical and spiritual development path which unites mental and physical aspects with spiritual development. Such an education shows respect for working dignity by understanding that repetition together with failure and sustained focus serve as deep learning tools.

Aristotle and Weil share a view that experiential learning goes beyond just gaining technical skills. Both thinkers see experiential learning as part of *praxis*, which means reflective, ethical, and transformative action. Through their ideas of *phronēsis* and attentive labor, they show that repeated embodied practice builds both skills and virtues such as patience, humility, discernment, and moral clarity. This *praxis* slows down the ego while connecting the mind with the body, helping learners develop receptive awareness of reality that includes ethical and spiritual dimensions. This view shifts educational methods away from utilitarian thinking and toward developing well-rounded human beings through learning that also promotes ethical growth. It shows that practical activities are ways to gain knowledge, and that acquiring knowledge is a path to being—by uniting mental understanding with emotional response and willpower in the pursuit of a virtuous life.

## Implications for Educational Practice

A new educational framework that incorporates Aristotle's moral wisdom and Simone Weil's principles creates deep consequences for both teaching practices and educational institutions' fundamental purposes. The current educational system faces content and structural challenges because this approach transforms education into a moral process that encompasses spiritual elements and physical engagement. Education has evolved from being a neutral technical process for market preparation into a vocational mission that forms the soul through focused reality attention, patient receptivity, and moral training in communal human experiences.

### *Embodied Learning as Ethical Formation*

Education discourse over the past several decades has mainly focused on intellectual growth, knowledge acquisition, and theoretical thinking as key signs of academic rigor. The overlooked aspect of education appears through Weilian-Aristotelian thought which emphasizes the bodily, manual, and sensory dimensions of learning. Gardening, woodworking, caregiving, and studio arts should not be seen solely as technical training or recreational activities. These practices take on new ethical and spiritual meanings as ways to develop moral qualities such as attention, humility, patience, and care.

For Simone Weil, attention stands as the fundamental basis of moral existence. How does one develop this capacity? The development of this capacity occurs mainly through extensive practical work with real objects rather than through theoretical discussions. The educational process transforms into a process of inviting learners to endure difficulties while teaching them how to surrender their control of learning. For example, a vocational carpentry or horticulture class develops ethical awareness to the same extent as traditional courses in ethics.

Aristotelian moral theory focuses on reconnecting with bodily experiences and the natural world. The ability to recognize goodness in specific situations develops neither naturally nor through intellectual thinking alone. Instead, practice combined with our bodily interactions with the world gradually transforms our desires and emotions, shaping our judgments over time. The basis for developing ethical judgment comes from experiences that involve the body rather than existing solely as an intellectual supplement.

Nel Noddings and Parker Palmer support this educational perspective in their work. According to Noddings, education should both teach ethics as content and implement care as its method because learners must experience both being cared for and learning to care for others through their bodily encounters (Noddings 2005, 21). Palmer also argues that teaching means creating an authentic environment which enables learners to both connect with themselves and deepen their experience of the world through honest and vulnerable engagement (Palmer 1998, 15). The research demonstrates that embodied relational and affective elements play a vital role in education beyond their marginal status.

### *Institutional Critique and Ethical Design*

The reimagined educational vision directly conflicts with neoliberal educational systems that currently govern schools around the world. Modern educational institutions, from elementary schools to prestigious universities, adopt an approach that emphasizes efficiency and competition alongside quantification and instrumental rationality in how they operate. These institutions now see learners as customers who receive educational services aimed at achieving measurable results, including grades, qualifications, and employment readiness. This system shows its presence through multiple educational institutions. The QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education Rankings have become essential policy tools for universities because they evaluate institutions based on research output and learner employability and citation metrics instead of intellectual and moral development. Standardized testing systems in basic education through No Child Left Behind in the United States and PISA assessments worldwide create an environment where learners learn to pass tests instead of developing their critical thinking skills and creativity. Educational technologies that monitor learning analytics have strengthened the data-driven approach which turns learners and teachers into monitored subjects for optimization purposes. Educational institutions now present themselves as institutions that train learners for immediate employment while treating education as a system for optimizing workforce performance instead of developing complete human beings. Academic governance now operates under managerial and corporate models which transform departments into cost centers while forcing faculty members to focus on measurable outputs such as publications and grants instead of teaching with depth. Learners develop this competitive mindset through their education because they view their classmates as competitors while seeing their academic work as a means to enhance their professional prospects. This educational paradigm has transformed educational organizations and learner identities through its focus on optimization and productivity rather than reflection and wonder (Brown 2015, 176).

An institution based on Weilian-Aristotelian principles establishes an alternative approach which views education as a pathway to human fellowship rather than human capital investment. In this educational approach, schools exist to develop learners who can discern ethical and spiritual truths. According to Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, educational institutions need to function as “suspensive spaces” where regular time stops so learners can experience knowledge alongside reality and each other without market-driven conditions (Masschelein and Simons 2013, 58). The approach requires resistance against all attempts to measure educational outcomes and to merge curricula with market demands and to reduce learners to economic value. For example, educational practices that slow down learning instead of speeding it up create suspensive learning spaces through their implementation of seminar-based classrooms and contemplative pedagogies and experiential learning environments like community gardens and service-learning projects.

The approach demands complete opposition to every effort which attempts to quantify educational success and to link academic content with market needs and to treat learners as financial assets. A Weilian–Aristotelian educational institution would eliminate performance-based incentives and standardized assessments and

employability quotas to focus on qualitative assessments based on learner self-assessment and mentorship and community involvement. The educational utility critique Simone Weil envisioned in her time proves accurate today. She argues that education needs to focus on something other than social service or monetary gains. The essential purpose of education consists in guiding the human soul toward understanding truth and justice despite these objectives being impossible to quantify (Weil 2001, 107). In such a model, the school would need to make genuine organizational changes to achieve this vision by creating time for in-depth reading, dialogue, building small learning groups that practice mutual care, and redefine success through moral growth instead of grades or productivity. This model presents teachers as role models who demonstrate both intellectual patience and ethical presence instead of focusing on learning outcome management. The school transforms into a place of formation instead of production through these practices which enables education to fulfill its original purpose of seeking wisdom and building moral relationships.

The educational managerialism analysis presented by Gert Biesta aligns with the current educational system criticisms. According to Biesta, the reduction of education to learning outcomes and competencies results in the loss of its existential value and democratic character (Biesta 2010, 11). Education serves to form persons who develop into self-responsible agents through the process of subjectification which allows them to respond to the world (Biesta 2010, 21). The failure of institutions to defend subjectifying aspects leads to their complicity in creating compliant workers instead of free human beings with moral responsibility.

### *Toward a Renewed Humanism*

The educational framework is based on a philosophical understanding that supports a modern humanist perspective, which recognizes human beings as complete entities with both physical bodies and spiritual souls. It sees them as capable of working, thinking, experiencing limitations, and striving for higher goals. Modernist humanism emphasizes reason but overlooks the universal aspects of human existence. Meanwhile, neoliberal pseudo-humanism reduces people to economic agents by judging their worth through productivity. This form of humanism preserves its roots through relationships, acknowledging both the vulnerability and noble qualities, as well as the growth potential, of bodies that exist in specific times and places within communities.

This educational framework views learning as a communal process to grow into full human potential as a collective group. These dismissed educational elements prove essential again for the modern world. These traditions serve as practice collections and question repositories which help us understand how to live meaningfully with others, suffer meaningfully, and care for the world. For Rowan Williams, education truly aims to discover the kind of life truth enables rather than seeking applications of knowledge (Williams 2014, 35). This humanistic approach unites contemplation with practical work which Weil and Aristotle both emphasize. For Weil the pursuit of spiritual knowledge exists in the same category as manual work because she believed that mathematical truth or religious devotion requires the same kind of attention as showing

care for others or woodworking (Weil 2001, 105). According to Aristotle, the pursuit of contemplation represents the greatest human achievement but requires development of virtues which occur through social interactions and practical experiences (Aristotle 2009, 1177a10). Education based on a restored humanist approach needs learners to combine intellectual pursuits with practical application without resorting to abstract elitism.

The practical effects of this educational approach include teaching literary comprehension through ethical understanding and biological knowledge through life appreciation and historical education that teaches memory responsibility. Education depends on these essential elements for developing a human being.

## CONCLUSION

This paper explores modern education systems that use experiential learning practically and establishes an ethical framework for spiritual growth based on the philosophies of Aristotle and Simone Weil. This initial analysis explains how current experiential learning methods now focus primarily on delivering market-oriented outcomes, such as employability and productivity, rather than fostering moral insight and deep understanding.

For Aristotle, moral habituation is the fundamental approach to education because learners learn ethical character through practical experiences. This view suggests that education transforms the soul through consistent engagement with ethical behavior within a structured moral community. People develop their natural virtue by actively participating in activities that require discernment, responsibility, and care. For Aristotle, *phronēsis* is the highest form of moral development, emerging from handling real-life situations that demand both ethical awareness and decision-making skills. Aristotle explains that wisdom cannot be learned solely from books or abstract teaching because people must experience life firsthand and develop their wisdom through practical learning and reflection after facing setbacks.

Simone Weil expands the ethical framework of experiential learning by emphasizing the spiritual aspects of action. Weil describes attention as a moral state that requires genuine generosity, achieved by suspending ego and willpower to genuinely receive the world and its inhabitants. Her idea of “spiritual apprenticeship” stems from her factory work experience, where she found moral growth through manual labor. Weil sees the challenging nature of work as an opportunity to develop patience, humility, and the ability to accept essential realities. This moral discipline counters both academic intellectual arrogance and the dehumanizing aspects of capitalist production. Through spiritual realism, education derives its core from the fundamental structure of the world, which imparts important lessons.

Both thinkers strongly oppose reducing education to instrumental purposes. Their unified framework rejects dualism by promoting holistic development which unites body, mind, and soul through meaningful and repetitive world engagement. The shared perspective reveals that experiential learning functions as a form of praxis which involves reflective ethical actions that focus on living a good life instead of production or control. The contemporary education policy requires this vital vision to

counterbalance its current trend of assessment-focused, performance-based, and market-driven education approaches.

A redefined perspective about experiential education provides crucial directions for educational transformation through changes to curriculum development and teacher preparation, as well as institutional declarations and nationwide educational guidelines. The first requirement integrates moral and spiritual learning targets into educational success measures. Schools, alongside universities, need to establish assessment criteria that measure the ethical development of learners, as well as their ability to pay attention, exhibit empathy, and demonstrate a sense of responsibility.

The educational system should view manual labor, artistic practice, caregiving, and craft as essential areas for human development rather than considering them inferior fields of knowledge. The distinction between liberal and technical arts should be abolished. Schools should incorporate apprenticeship models alongside studio-based learning, service-learning, and community engagement programs into their main strategic curricula instead of treating them as extra activities. These educational approaches provide a comprehensive learning experience for the whole person instead of just offering additional cognitive education. The argument presents work as a respectful setting where learners can gain valuable lessons. The blend of practical repetition, close observation, and self-evaluation of personal setbacks and progress helps cultivate persistence along with humility across all types of educational environments, from agricultural schools to vocational programs to humanities classrooms. These virtues serve as vital components for building fair communities that thrive, as they extend beyond the label of “soft skills” often used in HR training modules.

The development of teachers must incorporate ethical discernment training alongside the formation of contemplative presence. A teacher serves as a guide for character development in learners, rather than being limited to content delivery. Teachers demonstrate the values that the educational program seeks to establish when they possess *phronēsis* and sustained attention to their learners. A teacher’s focused attention on a struggling learner surpasses all methods and teaching techniques, according to Simone Weil. Educational institutions need to provide teachers with resources that promote both pace and learner dignity while learning, instead of focusing on immediate success. The practice of “learning by doing” requires a release from its current limited interpretation through innovation rhetoric, startup culture, and discussions on future skills. The real purpose of experiential learning surpasses human capital optimization since it focuses on developing people who possess wisdom and responsibility together with spiritual awareness. The educational goal should be to develop individuals who can perform ethical actions, rather than focusing solely on creating economic producers.

The educational perspective is expected to create significant changes for future democratic institutions. Education serves as a vital center for ethical and spiritual renewal during periods of ecological, social, and spiritual breakdown and loss of meaning. A system that measures success by profit and visibility fails to teach learners how to navigate the complex moral dilemmas of modern times. Through education that incorporates attention, repetition, and humility, along with embodied practice, learners can find a hopeful educational framework. Through these practices, learners

experience deceleration as they learn to both hear and observe properly, developing a deeper communion with the realities of their community and the world at large. The educational perspective developed by Aristotle and Simone Weil presents an alternative vision that opposes mainstream educational practices and provides a more dignified approach to learning. Proper implementation of experiential learning transforms learners into ethical actors through their experiences rather than serving as an efficiency tool for market purposes. The educational process serves as a spiritual learning process that develops virtue through dedicated effort alongside necessary awareness and receptive openness to divine guidance. The educational method of experiential learning transforms into a complete moral and ontological process that leads learners toward full human development. Educational policies need to embrace the depth of this vision. Policy makers should advance education beyond its current limitations by avoiding efficiency measures, employability metrics, and scalability targets. Learning means transformation because it involves the process of being reshaped by our activities while working together to meet the demands of our world. Through repeated action, learners discover clarity in their vision while developing justice in their actions and wisdom in their daily lives, which fulfills education's essential purpose.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Diogenes. *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1997.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 2nd ed. Translated by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by W. D. Ross and Lesley Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Biesta, Gert. *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2010.
- Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books, 2015.
- Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1938.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014.
- Jesson, Stuart. "Simone Weil: Suffering, Attention and Compassionate Thought." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2014): 161–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946813514011>. Accessed August 22, 2025.
- Kissler, Mark. "The Rarest and Purest Form of Generosity: Simone Weil's Attention and Medical Practice." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 45, no. 4 (2024): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-024-09846-5>. Accessed August 22, 2025.
- Kotva, Simone. *Effort and Grace: On the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

- Masschelein, Jan, and Maarten Simons. *In Defence of the School: A Public Issue*. Translated by Jack McMartin. Leuven: Education, Culture and Society Publishers, 2013.
- Mercedes, Anna. *Power For: Feminism and Christ's Self-Giving*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011.
- Noddings, Nel. *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press, 2005.
- Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Roberts, Peter. "Attention, Asceticism, and Grace: Simone Weil and Higher Education." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (2011): 271–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022211408037>. Accessed August 22, 2025.
- Weil, Simone. *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind*. Translated by Arthur Wills. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Weil, Simone. *Waiting for God*. Translated by Emma Craufurd. New York: Perennial Classics, 2001.
- Williams, Rowan. *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons*. London: SPCK, 2014.