'The Science of Liberty is Not So Simple': Teaching Democratic Thinking in Revolutionary France

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This article examines education's place in the French Revolution of 1789 and, more specifically, how ideas about education shaped the pursuit of a democratic and participatory politics in revolutionary France. Highlighting three foci of revolutionary pedagogy – skills, habits, and dispositions – as well as the ways in which ideas about education underwrote the social, political, and cultural ambitions of the Revolution, it explores education's role in making democratic politics and a democratic society appear desirable, attainable, and sustainable. Analyzing these eighteenth-century efforts to "teach democratic thinking," this article also aims to clarify what is at stake in contemporary discussions of democratic education, offers an historically-minded approach and a genealogy to current debates about the purposes and practices of education, and suggests criteria with which to consider pedagogical, institutional, technological, and social issues regarding education and its future.

Keywords: democratic education; French Revolution; political pedagogy

Amidst on-going debates about the purpose of education, about the ambitions and practices that shape curricula and classroom cultures, and about education's role in shaping our economic, social, and political future, some historical perspective may be useful. For while questions and concerns about the purpose and practices of education – and about education's relationship to democratic society – have been sparked in recent years by new technologies, new social dynamics, and new economic realities, neither these questions nor these concerns are, in fact, new. They have been with us for centuries and, in their focus on the relationship

between education and democracy, they have been with us since the revolutionary attempt to establish a participatory and democratic politics in eighteenth-century France.[1]

In the wake of the absolute monarchy's collapse in 1788-1789, those who sought to establish a participatory, representative, and democratic politics in France did so aware that this would require not just institutional change, but a new sort of polity. They understood, in Honoré de Mirabeau's words, that "the science of liberty is not so simple as it appears," and thus undertook the ambitious project of transforming the institutions of the state, re-imagining the nature of political engagement, and "regenerating" French society knowing that their efforts might fail (Mirabeau, 1791, p. 9). Their efforts were complicated by a pair of interwoven concerns. First, the future was not only uncertain, but was resistant to foresight in ways that were deeply unlike the sorts of political uncertainty experienced under the absolute monarchy. Second, and a sort of democratic corollary to this uncertainty, was the idea that the people – rather than princes or providence – would lead one future to be realized rather than another. This sense of "possibilism against the givenness of things…. [the] conviction that the human condition is malleable, not fixed, and that ordinary people can make history instead of suffering it" (Darnton, 1996, pp. 27, 29), was simultaneously a source of ambition and anxiety in 1789. It has remained so for democratic societies ever since, as both the promise and peril of 'possibilism' rest on what it demands of an engaged citizenry. Indeed, it has shaped the very concept of "civic engagement" (e.g. Adler and Goggin (2005) write of civic engagement as "citizens participat[ing] in the life of a community in order to… help shape the community's future" (p. 236)).

Recognizing the experimental nature and uncertain outcome of their social, political, and cultural projects, the revolutionaries of 1789 sought simultaneously to identify and establish the social conditions and cultural dynamics that would make collective self-governance not just a good idea, but a successful one. A reformed and expanded system of public education was central to their thinking about how that might be done (Palmer, 1985), a point Mirabeau himself emphasized in pairing the aforementioned warning with the reassuring promise that "a good system of public education [would]… found the people's well-being on their virtues, and their virtues on their enlightenment," and would thus make liberty – and democracy – possible (Mirabeau, 1791, p. 73). As we think about teaching democratic thinking in the early twenty-first century, we would do well to remember Mirabeau's warning, as well as the broader revolutionary emphasis on how and why education could make democratic governance and democratic society achievable and sustainable.

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[1] Similar issues were of interest to the founders of the United States, a point that has received increased attention as scholars have engaged with the concept of "deliberative democracy" and its history (Gustafson, 2011). However, the French revolutionaries took up these questions in more ambitious, explicit, and tangible ways, and so the French case is a more fruitful point of reference for contemporary concerns and debates.

What follows is by no means an exhaustive survey of French revolutionary thought regarding education, about which there is a vast historical literature and which, more to the point here, included much that was far from democratic in inclination or intent. Nor does this essay aim to find "lessons" in the revolutionaries' experience, as the past does not have "answers" to today's problems or responses to today's dilemmas. And so the question arises: why should this be of interest now, in a far less revolutionary time, under fundamentally different political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances?

This question is particularly important to address here at the outset because doing so allows us to clarify why one might want or need to "teach democratic thinking" while also moving our historical discussion beyond the revolutionaries' rather limited success in reforming the educational practices and institutions of eighteenth-century France. Despite the creation of several important and celebrated institutions devoted to "public instruction" (including the transformation of the Louvre into a museum and the royal library into the Bibliothèque nationale, the consolidation of the academies into the Institut de France (after a brief dissolution), and the establishment of the École normale to train teachers), the attempts to remake French education during the early years of the Revolution largely failed. Most of the proposals discussed below remained just that – proposals – and the most memorable (and most often remembered) of the Revolution's pedagogical efforts remain the attempts to promote a republican civic identity and culture through public festivals, oath-swearing ceremonies, and other such "extra-curricular" initiatives (Boulad-Ayoub, 1996; Kennedy, 1989; Leith, 1965; Ozouf, 1988).

When it came to designing and implementing reforms in the schools, the revolutionaries were repeatedly overwhelmed by the pace of revolutionary change and conflict, were perpetually short of resources, and were often torn between the desire to dismantle the institutions inherited from the Ancien Régime, on the one hand, and the task of constructing a new educational system, on the other (Barnard, 1969; Palmer, 1985). This has led some to dismiss the revolutionary proposals regarding education (along with the Revolution's democratic and liberal elements) as more chimerical than practical, as so many castles in the Enlightenment sky (e.g. Barnard, 1969; Furet, 1978; Tocqueville, 2011, esp. pp. 127-130). While influential and, in some cases, plausible, this view tends to ignore the constraints placed upon the revolutionaries by limited resources and rapidly changing circumstances, and too often it duplicates the very characteristic attributed to the revolutionaries by divorcing the contests and conflicts of revolutionary politics from the practical forces and uncertainties that shaped the revolutionary project. More immediately to the point here, this view also cuts us off from the force and value of some of the Revolution's most compelling ambitions and most enduring legacies. Despite its failures, the Revolution contributed in very real ways to the ushering in of a new political and pedagogical epoch, one in which "teaching democratic thinking" seemed plausible, desirable, perhaps even necessary (Graff, 1991, pp. 266-267). It thus serves us well to return to these origins as we make sense of what democratic education might look like in the twenty-first century.

More specifically, I believe there are at least four reasons a return to the French Revolution is suggestive for contemporary debates over education. First, the revolutionaries of late-eighteenth century France took up the question of how education and democracy relate to one another in ways that have influenced the principles and the pursuit of democratic politics ever since. Second, the Revolution responded to and ushered in a period of vast social, cultural, economic, and political change, both within France and far beyond its borders. Recognizing that our own efforts to understand and articulate the place of democratic education in a rapidly changing and increasingly global society are not unprecedented – that for all the novelty of our age it is not entirely new – may help us to think more clearly about the changes taking place around us as well as how we might best accommodate, respond to, and participate in those changes. Third, the pedagogical ambitions of the Revolution were grounded in ideas about the power of information and the nature of communication, about the promise and peril of a society in which more people had access to more information (and to a wider array of opinions) than ever before. They were at once an outgrowth of and a contribution to the Enlightenment project of spreading knowledge throughout society and of imagining what an "enlightened" society might be. This project not only continues into (and has been re-energized by the possibilities of) the digital age, but it has been and remains central to the more than two-hundred-year-old experiment that is modern democracy. Finally, and as the preceding reasons suggest, examining the French Revolution is worthwhile because the revolutionary case helps focus our attention on the first principles of "teaching democratic thinking" and why democracy relies on education to succeed.

With these points in mind, this essay will discuss how the revolutionaries of 1789 understood the relationship among education, civil society, and democratic governance, will analyze three foci of the revolutionaries' pedagogy (skills, practices, and dispositions), and will suggest ways in which this history may be relevant to "teaching democratic thinking" today.

Why – and how – Democracy?

Those who took up the pursuit of democratic politics in the eighteenth century had good reason to be pessimistic. From the writers of Antiquity (especially Plato and Aristotle) and of the Enlightenment (notably Montesquieu and Rousseau), they had learned that democratic politics was at best a difficult endeavor, perhaps a futile or dangerous one. They were nonetheless confident that they could make a democratic politics, and a democratic polity, succeed. This mix of confidence and caution gave rise to restrictions on the franchise, the division between "natural" and "active" citizenship, and the conditional nature of "liberal subjecthood" (Hanson, 2004, p. 15; Hilliard, 2013, pp. 655-666). While in hindsight we are struck by the exclusionary ways in which the idea of liberal subjecthood was applied, both enfranchisement and its limits reflected an Enlightenment view of political debate and of the appropriate role for the "public" in deciding questions of collective importance (similar points arose with twentieth-century anxieties about mass politics and totalitarianism, as noted in Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 26). Articulating the attributes necessary for

membership in the public – and so too the possibility of exclusion from it – was among the conditions that made establishing a self-governing polity and a democratic society seem achievable in the first place.

The "public" was not the same as the "people" in the eighteenth century (Chartier, 1991, p. 34). The "public" was literate, educated, and enlightened, and it could legitimately pass judgment on the issues and affairs of the day. Public opinion could thus be "the enlightened expression of active and open discussion of all political affairs" and could be imagined "independent of all powers and respected by all powers... the sovereign judge of all the judges of the earth" (Baker, 1990, pp. 188-189). The "people," however, was an emotional, passionate, and dangerous mass; as Chartier (1991) notes, "the public sphere... had nothing in common with the shifting opinions and blind emotions of the multitude" (p. 37).

This faith in the "public" and fear of the "people" highlights a point that has long been central to democratic theory: "democracy cannot thrive without a well-educated citizenry" (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 35). Put another way, in order for democratic politics to seem like a desirable and attainable future, the "people" would have to be transformed into the "public," a process that was central to Enlightenment ambitions for society and politics. The Revolution's view of itself as both beneficiary and inheritor of this project was affirmed at the presentation of the (ill-fated) constitution of 1791 when, speaking on behalf of the committee that had drafted the constitution, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand warned: "the public powers have been organized: liberty and equality exist under the all-powerful protection of the Law... and yet the Constitution will seem incomplete if there is not attached to it, as a preserving and invigorating element, a system of public instruction" (Talleyrand, 1791, p. 1).

That such a process was thought both possible and desirable stemmed in large part from the influence of sensationist philosophy in Enlightenment France. Rooted in the late-seventeenth century work of John Locke, sensationist thinkers considered the mind and character of the newborn a "*tabula rasa*," a blank slate on which experience would write, thereby offering those responsible for her upbringing and education an opportunity to shape what sorts of things she would know and what sort of person she would become. These ideas became immensely influential in eighteenth-century France, culminating in the work of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Claude-Adrien Helvétius (Gill, 2010; O'Neal, 1996; Yolton, 1991). They also became sources of both anxiety and excitement with respect to France's political and social future. As sensationist views of the self became intertwined with debates over how to define the "nation" and the national character, how to best order society, and how the institutions of civil society (such as schools) might serve the public good (or the state's interests), the so-called "education question" became central to the problem of imagining France's future (Bell, 2001, pp. 24-26; Goldstein, 2005, p. 36; Julia, 1981). When the need to plan France's future became more pressing in and after 1789, the revolutionaries embraced this aspect of Enlightenment philosophy and turned to education as an instrument with which to simultaneously improve and mold French society and politics. So while the private tutor and pastoral seclusion of *Émile* may have been largely irrelevant to the effort of

designing a national system of public instruction (Palmer, 1985, p. 52), the Revolutionaries' sense that education was central to the process of establishing a new social and political order was one they shared with and inherited from Locke, Rousseau, Helvétius, and many other *philosophes* of the pre-Revolutionary decades.

The Revolution's effort to transform the "people" into the "public" was thus a fundamentally pedagogical task, and it focused on three points. First, citizens had to have the skills necessary for participation in the public sphere and in political debate. The most important of these skills was the ability to read and write, but citizens had also to be able to think critically and independently. Second, democratic politics required that citizens come to know the practices, behaviors, and forms of engagement through which political participation takes place. That is, they had to become familiar with the institutions and institutional cultures, and had to develop the sorts of personal and political habits, that make democratic politics sustainable. So familiarized, and with these skills and habits, citizens would have learned how to 'play' what Sophia Rosenfeld (2011) calls "the intersubjective game that is politics" (p. 328).

Even then, however, democracy remained a risky proposition, one that threatened the well-being of the body politic and of French society, and so a third element was necessary. For the transformation of the "people" into the "public," skills and habits had to be combined with the sort of civic sentiment that would "connect the individual to the larger relationships in which he or she lived (the society, or the family, or the state)" and, in so doing, would turn an aggregate of educated individuals into a democratic and sustainably self-governing society (Rothschild, 2001, pp. 49, 9). It was this civic sentiment that would allow for "civilized conflict" and would prevent the sorts of disagreements that come with democratic politics from becoming fatal to the democracy itself (pp. 204-206).

The revolutionaries did not themselves employ these terms, and some revolutionary proposals excluded one or another of these foci (or emphasized one over the others in virtually exclusionary ways). Nonetheless, skills, practices, and dispositions (or sentiments) formed the core of what the Revolutionaries came to call "public instruction" and, collectively, they were fundamental to the pursuit of democratic politics at the end of the eighteenth century.

Skills

The first of the revolutionaries' educational goals was to establish among the citizens those skills necessary for participation in political society, most fundamentally the ability to read and write. As the anonymous author of a 1791 pamphlet put it: "for every individual living under a representative government… the art [of reading and writing] should be considered the fundamental source of his moral existence, and so truly indispensable" (Anonymous, 1791, pp. 2-3). Similarly, Abbé Grégoire described "reading, writing, and speaking the national language" as "indispensable skills that every citizen must know" (Sepinwall, 2005, p. 133), and Mirabeau suggested that, in the future, one should have to demonstrate the ability to read and write to be eligible to vote and to be considered a full citizen (Mirabeau, 1791, p. 24).

This may seem a rather minimal pedagogical ambition, but it remains a critically important part of democratic education. Indeed, the pursuit of "full literacy" was among the goals that the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences (2013) recently highlighted as contributive to the project of "educat[ing] Americans in the knowledge, skills, and understanding they will need to thrive in a twenty-first century democracy" (p. 10). While full literacy was a more distant goal in the France of 1789 than it is today – the literacy rate was between forty and fifty percent – the real force of the revolutionaries' ambition lies in what they meant by literacy; to be literate meant not just being able to read and write, but also having the skills necessary for independent judgment. This was particularly important because the revolutionaries knew that political society had to simultaneously wrestle with and capitalize upon the long-term consequences of a "new" and revolutionary communications technology: the printing press.

For many Enlightenment thinkers, the fifteenth-century invention of the movable-type printing press represented the dawn of a new era in human history. The press seemed to ensure that useful knowledge and important information could be disseminated more widely and more rapidly than ever before, thereby improving the lives of people across and throughout societies. The Marquis de Condorcet (1796), for example, claimed that "all those means which render the progress of the human mind more easy, more rapid, more certain, are... the benefits of the press" (pp. 145-147). By its very nature the press seemed to serve as a bulwark against efforts to maintain power or influence through disinformation or popular ignorance, and even "a single corner of the earth free to commit their leaves to the press" was thought a "sufficient security" against the efforts of such despots (p. 149). These thinkers also recognized, however, that a new technology did not in itself create new social, political, or cultural dynamics. Texts, after all, required readers, and democratic society required that those be readers of a particular sort. As Condorcet put it elsewhere (1804), citizens had not just "to understand the truths presented to them," but also to "reject the errors intended to victimize them" (p. 8).

Thought of in this way, "literacy" entailed more than the ability to read or to sign one's name (though the latter is among the few indicators upon which we are able to draw when assessing eighteenth-century literacy rates); it also required a particular way of reading, a critical and independent engagement with multiple and varied texts. This new mode of reading spread inadvertently, almost accidentally, in early modern Europe. During this period, the proliferation and distribution of inexpensive texts (especially the *Bibliothèque bleue* in France) made reading a practice at once more accessible and less solemn than it had earlier been. While these books often presented moral and religious themes, light or fantastical entertainments, or practical information (such as in almanacs), their significance transcended their contents, for "when reading penetrated the most ordinary circumstances of daily life.... a new relationship between reader and text was forged," one in which readers took up, consumed, judged, and discarded texts readily and rapidly. The resultant practices and interactions (between readers and texts, and, through them, between readers and other people) contributed to the development of "a critical attitude freed from the ties of dependence and obedience" (Chartier, 1991, pp. 90-91; also Furet and Ozouf, 1977; Woloch, 1982, pp. 222-225). While such practices did not

necessarily promote the distribution of accurate information or balanced judgments, they contributed to the spread of cultural dynamics and habits that made the pedagogical ambitions of the Revolution both possible and necessary; to put it simply, there were so many texts available – and there was so much reading being done – that the revolutionaries had no choice but to engage this new economy of information and opinion.

This tangle of concerns related to communication, consumption, and competence shaped the revolutionaries' view of how literacy figured into democratic citizenship. Skills such as the ability to read and to write were important not just because they made political communication possible, but also because they contributed to citizens' views becoming independent, the result of autonomous judgment. As Talleyrand (1791) put it: "Do we not know that, even under the freest constitution, the ignorant man is at the mercy of the Charlatan" (p. 4). The transition from even well-educated subject to informed-and-engaged citizen thus required that functional literacy be coupled with the ability to evaluate and assess information, to think critically and independently, to adjudicate among competing arguments and opinions, and to recognize the "Charlatan" when one met him. Without the spread of these skills and of this sort of independence of mind, both individual autonomy and participatory politics would remain a farce, one in which the many merely followed and reproduced the views of the powerful few or in which the public sphere was no better than an echo chamber of rumor, speculation, misinformation and prejudice.

This expanded sense of literacy suggests ways in which the revolutionaries' ambitions are relevant to contemporary debates about the relationship between democracy and education. In relatively specific curricular and institutional terms, it is relevant to debates surrounding the "Common Core" and the more general desire to codify the "knowledge and skills... need[ed] for success in college and careers" (http://www.corestandards.org). This is, it seems, a contemporary version of the eighteenth-century view that there are specific and, to repeat Grégoire's phrase, "indispensable skills that every citizen must know" (Sepinwall, 2005, p. 133). While much of the controversy surrounding the Common Core has focused on questions of local or regional autonomy, the more pressing (and more legitimate) questions focus on the need to strike a balance between establishing rigorous standards and promoting the sort of independence necessary for democratic and participatory politics to be meaningful in the first place. The overarching pedagogical question remains, with or without the common core: how do we best equip children "for deliberating and thereby participating in the democratic processes"? (Gutmann, 1987, p. 45). Living up to this more ambitious understanding of literacy and its role in "teaching democratic thinking" will require preserving, cultivating, and promoting educational practices and institutional cultures that emphasize rigorous, critical, and independent thinking, and that stress that these are not secondary or "bonus" skills, but are at the very heart of what it means to be educated.

More generally, the revolutionaries' interest in the transformative power of the printing press calls to mind contemporary hopes and concerns about the influence of new communication and information technologies on our lives and our societies. While there seems to be general

consensus that new and rapidly changing technologies will have important consequences for the nature and practices of democratic politics (and for the theory and practice of education), it remains an open-question just what those consequences will be and whether they will be for good or ill. As Morozov (2013) points out, many hope that "Internet-enabled transparency will give us a more vibrant and responsible civic life, [but] this is hardly a foregone conclusion" (p. 63).

At least part of the challenge on this point concerns the relationship among radically expanded and expanding access to information, the inculcation of critical and democratic thinking, and the establishment of cultural, social, and individual behaviors and attitudes conducive to collective debate and decision-making. New digital and information technologies have led to dramatic advances in access to information and, in so doing, have raised hopes similar to those that Condorcet and other Enlightenment thinkers had for the legacy of the printing press. The connection is often explicit, as when Robert Darnton (2013) writes of the Digital Public Library of America [DPLA] as "harken[ing] back to the eighteenth century.... the DPLA expresses an Enlightenment faith in the power of communication" (p. 4). Similarly, new technologies promise to radically expand the ranks of those with access to educational or instructional materials and to expert research in all fields of human inquiry. That such technologies also create opportunities for individuals and institutions to contribute in heretofore unimagined and unimaginable ways to "improv[ing] conditions for others" and to "shap[ing] the community's future" seems clear (Adler and Goggin, 2005, p. 236).

And yet there are very real concerns that these technologies have also polarized social, cultural, and political discourse (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Hargittai, Gallo, and Kane, 2008; Sunstein, 2009) and, more fundamentally still, that the Internet might "make us stupid" (Carr, 2008). While the nature and scale of this polarization remain points of contention among scholars, the premise underlying these claims and the studies upon which they draw – that new technologies do not *naturally* or *necessarily* create a more open society and a more attentive or open-minded citizenry – is an important one. Similarly, new technologies – and even some of the seemingly-beneficial opportunities they present – raise questions about the conditions for access to different types of information and for the dissemination of controversial points of view (Zuckerman, 2014). For education and educational institutions in particular, new technologies raise questions about the inequalities that may arise from or be reinforced through different forms of access and about the political, cultural, and social logics implicit or embedded in different modes of instruction or engagement (Morton, 2013). As new technologies and new pedagogies interact with one another, the degree to which those technologies contribute to the success of democratic society and democratic education will not be determined by the technologies themselves; it will depend, instead, upon the degree to which those pedagogies give students the analytic and critical capacities to maintain their independence of mind, the ability to differentiate between legitimate and specious arguments, as well as the desire to do so. Without these attributes citizens may be able to read, but they will not be literate in any meaningful sense.

A literate populace and an open society – one in which citizens have access to important information as well as the technical and analytic skills required for participation in public debate – were and are necessary for the success of a democratic politics and a democratic polity. Citizens with access to information and critical thinking skills are not, however, *sufficient* for democracy to succeed, and the French revolutionaries recognized that these had to be embedded in the sorts of practices that give shape and meaning to civic, social, and political lives. Moreover, such skills and practices had to be combined with the sorts of civic sentiments and dispositions that allow citizens to consider the issues of the day knowing that more is at stake than private or immediate interest and that other, also well intentioned people might come to conclusions at odds with their own. And so it is to habits and then dispositions we now turn.

Habits

The transition from a political system in which "politics took place in... the remote world of the king's court" to one in which the government's legitimacy was founded upon the people's participation required the simultaneous development of a "political vocabulary" and a shared sense of what the new politics would be (Darnton, 1996, p. 19). Citizens had to learn where politics happen (if not just at court), how to think about and how to engage in the behaviors that comprise democratic political action, which forms of participation are legitimate and which not, as well as how political debates and disagreements take place (and are resolved). Learning the practices, rituals, and routines through which democratic society is mobilized and maintained was thus central to the French Revolution's version of "teaching democratic thinking."

Revolutionaries approached this element of democratic education in four ways. The first was to teach students about the institutions, ideas, texts, and laws that were expected to define the new political order. That is, they introduced a civics curriculum. Second, they turned to the socially integrative function of schools to establish a shared sense of civic and national identity. The third relied upon "emulation," which meant establishing models for students to imitate (abstract, historical, or immediate, such as the teacher) and also promoting constructive competition among the students (allowing students to become models to themselves and to one another). Finally, they sought to reimagine pedagogical and institutional routines so that schools might offer an apprenticeship in collective governance and in living under a constitutional regime, what Dewey (1915) would later call "an embryonic community life" (p. 27).

These four approaches to what we might call "democratic enculturation" were thought to be mutually reinforcing and complementary. Genuinely understanding lessons about the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, for example, or about the new constitution, would both require and entail having been socialized in ways that made the idea of a fellow-citizen meaningful, having internalized the lessons offered by worthy role-models, and having

recognized the practical ways in which a constitutional and participatory polity worked. This multi-faceted approach was supposed to bridge the divide between political principles and practices, between a student's experience in the classroom and his or her future in civil society. It also recognized that democratic engagement was something one learned, that democratic politics depended upon education to succeed.

After 1789, arguments about how to reform schools so that they might serve as microcosms and training grounds for citizenship and for politics were presented by legislators, thinkers, and teachers across France. Many who weighed in agreed with Léonard Bourdon (s.d.) that the schools ought to "put [students] into a state of society, one that is an accurate model of the society in which they will one day live" (pp. 1-2). Part of this was the relatively limited imperative that students be educated publicly (rather than by private tutors) so that the schools could serve as a site for civic socialization, a place where children would come into contact with one another and become accustomed to the idea that together they comprised a society of sorts. This quotidian contact was expected to promote social bonds of "*fraternité*" and to contribute to the emergence of a "French" culture that was democratic in the sense of being both accessible and familiar to French citizens from across the country and from all walks of life.

More ambitiously, Bourdon called for schools to be administered under a "constitution" that included a "separation of powers" between students and instructors and was analogous to and preparatory for the national constitution. Similarly, he proposed ways in which classroom dynamics might be reimagined so that they would "inscribe in [students'] hearts notions of justice, of order, and of virtue" (Bourdon, s.d., p. 1). The schools' obligation to provide an "apprenticeship for life and for liberty" (Bourdon, 1790) would thus shape how schools were administered, how students engaged one another, and how students interacted with their instructors.

Others pursued this element of democratic education by emphasizing the links among educational institutions, political bodies, and social groups. In his proposal for a new system of public instruction, Gabriel Bouquier called for students to be familiarized with "their rights, their responsibilities, as well as the laws and the morals of a republic" through attendance at the "public sessions of the departments, the districts, the municipalities, the tribunals, and, above all, the popular societies" (Guillaume, 1897, p. 57). Like Bourdon's call for democratically-administered schools, proposals such as Bouquier's emphasized that democratic education ought to transcend the division between the theoretical and the practical, should embed political principles within institutional and social practices, and should highlight how social and institutional practices give force and meaning to seemingly abstract principles.

This sort of "democratic enculturation" has been approached in a variety of ways in modern schools and pedagogical regimens. Among the most straightforward of these is the recent push – headlined by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor – for more and better civics education in American schools (Blume, 2011). There are also more directly "engaged"

forms of civics education, such as university courses in which students get credit for internships, participating in political campaigns, working on community service projects, and the like (what are often called "service-learning" courses). These courses are very much in the tradition of Bourdon and Bouquier, and they have the related benefits of offering a more visceral sense of what political or social action is (and is not) and of making clear that democratic engagement is not a mere abstraction (Scourfield-McLauchlan, 2009). And yet, they run the risk of undercutting democratic principles in their promotion of democratic practices, and of mistaking contributive action for critical thinking. After all, teaching democratic thinking needs to extend far beyond teaching students to behave in particular ways or to accept a certain set of social, political, and legislative norms as legitimate (Gutmann, 1987, pp. 43-45). On this point the French Revolution and its excesses are a cautionary tale – reminding us of the need to distinguish between promoting democratic thinking and a healthy democratic culture, on the one hand, and promoting uncritical allegiance, unthinking patriotism, or even uninformed consent, on the other (Bouquier's proposal, or at least part of it, was approved during the radically undemocratic "Reign of Terror"). Promoting particular habits and civic practices is clearly important to democratic education, but so too is critical thought about the normativity of such lessons and about how such critical thought might be built into curricular and classroom cultures (Cress and Donahue, 2011; Porfilio and Hickman, 2011).

More of a kind with the Revolution's focus on socialization and on schools' role in promoting civic and affective bonds among the citizenry are contemporary debates over whether the state has a compelling enough interest in promoting interaction among different populations to warrant busing programs or affirmative action policies (debates that seem destined to continue after the Supreme Court's rulings in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013) and in *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action* (2014)). Rather less attention has been paid to how schools' social and administrative dynamics might promote healthy forms of democratic citizenship (Gutmann, 1987), though such questions promise to become more complicated as the institutional and technological dynamics of education change. To cite just one example (albeit a crucial one): proponents of online education tout technology's role in the democratization of information and the access it makes possible for those with limited time, mobility, or traditional educational options, and yet many others worry that online education promotes social atomization and contributes to a culture in which virtual encounters adversely affect how we engage with others, how we live as members of society (Wilcox and Stephen, 2013).

The revolutionaries' emphasis on the benefits of constructive interactions between instructors and students, and among the students themselves, highlights ways in which the multi-vocal and multi-directional Socratic classroom is and should remain a model and a standard, for it is a wonderfully democratic institution. The aim in such a classroom is to establish a "shared dialogue between teacher and students in which both are responsible for pushing the dialogue forward" and in which "there is no pre-determined argument or terminus to which the teacher leads the students" (Reich, 2003, p. 1). While an imbalance undeniably remains between

instructor and student, classroom interactions are nonetheless governed by identifiable institutional and cultural norms and the instructor holds her position by virtue of merit and training, reinforcing the conditional nature of meritocratic authority (Brighouse, 2005, p. 73). More important still, she "is as much a participant as a guide of the discussion" (Reich, 2003, p. 1), meaning that she can be, may be, and indeed should be questioned (and, ideally, will answer in ways that foster recognition and comprehension across the teacher-student divide) (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 47-77). To invert the scenario described by Minnich (2003), students can ask their instructor: "how did you get there? We were here; you went there. Can you retrace your thinking for us?" (p. 20).

Perhaps most important of all, and as Bourdon and his compatriots recognized, a democratic classroom dynamic includes encounters in several directions at once: between students and information or ideas, between students and instructors, and among the students themselves. This form of socialization highlights the classroom's immense value in socializing students for democratic citizenship. This is true not only in elementary and secondary schools (and not necessarily there, as the racial, socio-economic, and political self-segregation patterns of American society undermine the socializing work schools might be expected to achieve (Badger, 2014)), but also in institutions of higher education, where students are likely to have traveled across greater social, political, cultural, and geographical distances and are likely to come into contact with both student and non-student populations dissimilar from those among whom they were raised (Morton, 2013). At all levels, these sorts of contact contribute to students "learn[ing] about a range of ways of living and [give to students] the kind of education that will enable them to reflect on their own way of life in the light of these alternatives and, ultimately, to revise or reject the way of life their parents would pass down to them" (Brighouse, 2005, pp. 2, 72-73). In this sense, while students may not be able to select their administrators, instructors, or classmates, the encounters that they have with those groups will mirror in microcosm (or at least can and should mirror) the sorts of critical but respectful engagements that make democratic society both vibrant and sustainable (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 54-55). These are points on which an expanded notion of the "classroom" and the inclusion of dialogue, debate, and engagement with an array of communities might allow democratic society and the democratic classroom to reinforce one another in healthy and lively ways (Colby et al., 2007, pp. 60-72). That, however, is a question of disposition as much as of habit.

Dispositions

Of the revolutionaries' three pedagogical ambitions, the cultivation of a democratic disposition seems to have suffered the most complicated and least receptive translation into contemporary debates over education. Despite the efforts of prominent figures such as Martha Nussbaum (2010), Anthony Grafton (Grafton, 2011; Grafton and Grossman, 2013), Harry Brighouse (2005), and Elizabeth Minnich (2003), as well as institutions like the Carnegie Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Academy of Arts

and Sciences (2013), attention to the role of education in shaping students' dispositions or "sentiments" is too often viewed as crass "indoctrination" or as a luxury, a fringe benefit available to those who do not have to worry about the "real world." While such criticisms were not unknown in Revolutionary France – in 1791 the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris had to defend teaching the literature and language of the Ancients, which they did by arguing that such lessons contributed to the political education of a free people and to the establishment of an enlightened society – it was nonetheless a commonplace that democracy depended on the dispositions, virtues, and sentiments of the citizenry (Faculté des Arts de l'Université de Paris, s.d. [1791]; Linton, 2001). This element of French Revolutionary history is often (and understandably) drawn upon to indict figures like Robespierre, who turned the pursuit of a virtuous politics into a rationalization for state-sanctioned and state-imposed Terror, intolerance, and dogmatism. And yet, focusing too narrowly on the Terror not only leads us to a view of the Revolution that is incomplete and misrepresentative, it also cuts us off from important elements of what teaching democratic thinking meant to those who first pursued it.

While Robespierre and others emphasized the need for political unanimity and univocality, many others understood that democratic politics entailed debate, dispute, and disagreement and that democratic society had to be able to survive arguments about even the nature of the social good, not to mention legislative particulars. Indeed, revolutionaries anticipated that some of the most divisive arguments might focus on fundamental issues of value, justice, and worth. This was part of the motive for Condorcet's argument (1804) in favor of a national system of education. On this view, education could be enlisted to address the concerns that he shared with Adam Smith and others about economic competition, the division of labor, and about what might follow if their less desirable consequences were not countered by social "benevolence" and civic sentiment (Campbell, 1967; Coker, 1990; Rasmussen, 2008; Rothschild, 2001; Smith, 1914, p. 264). It could, in other words, help democratic society to transcend the tension between "individual interest" and the "democratic practices upon which both individuals and their interests depend" (Barber, 1984, p. 4).

Condorcet is a particularly interesting example on this point, for while he argued repeatedly that the state ought to limit its pedagogical ambitions to giving students the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be independent in their political, economic, and social judgments (and argued against any system of political indoctrination, even about the merits of the constitution and new political order), he nonetheless recognized that the cultivation of a healthy civic sentiment was necessary for democracy to succeed (a similar pairing of concerns is apparent in Brighouse, 2005). The sort of "civilized conflict" upon which democracy depends, and for which Condorcet hoped, was impossible without these sentimental attachments. More specifically, he claimed that citizens' views regarding the nature of the social good, as well as their willingness to accept outcomes other than those for which they had hoped, depend on their recognition of other people as legitimate political actors and their acknowledgement that at least some range of alternative values and views are reasonable and defensible (Rothschild, 2001, pp. 204-211). In short, for democratic deliberation and political debate to be possible,

the Revolution had "to ensure that passions destructive of [civic] harmony were extirpated from the... population" (Kaplan, 2003, p. 241).

Revolutionaries pursued this sentimental or dispositional aspect of democratic education in a variety of ways, and they did so both within the schools and in what we might think of as formalized but extra-curricular activities. As noted above, the most famous of their attempts to promote a new civic sentiment were also the most spectacular (and likely the least relevant to contemporary debates), as they staged monumental festivals, parades, and celebrations, held mass readings of documents like the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, organized collective oath-swearing ceremonies pledging fraternal and civic devotion to one another and to the state, and destroyed monuments thought to inculcate divisive or corrosive sentiments (Bianchi, 1982; Kennedy, 1989, pp. 197-234; Leith, 1991; Ozouf, 1988). While such episodes have long captured historians' attention (and have led to many indictments of the revolutionaries' pedagogy as aiming to indoctrinate rather than educate), the cultivation of particular dispositions among the citizenry was also considered important by those who aimed to create a democratic culture that would protect and promote a truly democratic politics. These efforts focused not on what one knows or to whom one has been exposed (on the page or in person), but on how one thinks, how one engages with information, individuals, arguments, uncertainties, and ambiguities. Their ambitions were of a kind with Gutmann's (1987): "a democratic state of education tries to teach... what might best be called democratic virtue: the ability to deliberate" (p. 46). It is thus worth looking past the spectacle of these episodes to consider how they might inform our thinking about democratic education more broadly. Short of spectacular festivals and coercive oath-swearing ceremonies, how might we effectively promote this sort of democratic sentiment?

In recent years, attempts to answer this question have often focused on curricular issues, on the value of a Liberal Arts education and, more specifically, on the role of the Humanities in such an education. This is not by chance, as the Humanities classroom approximates well the central tenets of teaching democratic thinking and the values of a democratic society. In a variation on a point raised above, the *Humanities* classroom is a particularly apt training ground for the skills, habits, and dispositions needed for contributive citizenship. [This is not to imply that disciplines other than the Humanities do not or cannot develop or promote such skills, habits, or dispositions, but rather that the Humanities do so in particularly suggestive ways.]

Humanistic practice requires attentive engagement with another person's words and ideas, the accurate representation of those ideas and clear presentation of one's own thoughts, as well as a sort of constructive uncertainty that mirrors nicely the difficulties of collective decision making and political choice. For while there may be many implausible or fundamentally inaccurate readings of texts and presentations of ideas (hence the need for "attentive" engagement), even the best interpretations remain contested, and humanistic questions resist univocal or definitive "answers." While this is a point on which many criticize the Humanities and humanistic research, it is in fact their defining virtue, especially for teaching democratic

thinking. Humanistic questions are almost by their nature the sorts of "ill-structured problems" that offer opportunities to promote "reflective judgment," which is itself a practice that reflects the skills, habits, and dispositions upon which a robust and healthy democratic politics depends (Colby et al., 2007, p. 54; King and Kitchener, 1994). Recognizing this reminds us that democratic engagement is not just about presenting one's opinions and tallying up votes, but is about trying to come collectively to a decision based upon information that is, by definition, imperfect and incomplete (political decisions are, after all, about the future) (Barber, 1984, pp. 47, 169-170).

In thinking of this ideal, I am reminded of Alexander Nehamas (1998) on "uncertainty":

> We think that it's impossible to act unless you're certain that you're right; but certainty about yourself is also the quickest road to fanaticism. Now, uncertainty – the sense... that many complex issues are irresolvably ambiguous – is sometimes the most productive way of allowing you to act while at the same time respecting that others are not going to accept your view, approve your action, or follow your example. It produces a tentativeness that permits you to see many things from many points of view.

Likewise, Elizabeth Minnich (2003) reminds us that "thinking is neither coerced nor coercive," that certain characteristics of mind are central to democratic debate, and that foremost among these are being "inclined to listen to many sides... and desirous of persuading others rather than reducing them to silence by refuting them" (p. 20). Both Nehamas and Minnich ask us to recall that listening attentively to others, presenting oneself clearly and coherently, and coming to an informed judgment without embracing dogmatic certainty or closing off future discussion are fundamentally democratic activities, are essentially humanistic activities, and are at the very heart of what it is to teach democratic thinking.

As Immanuel Kant recognized more than two centuries ago (and Hannah Arendt re-emphasized more recently (1992, pp. 40-41)), this sort of thinking requires both community and communication. Thinking about the dynamics at work in and across our communities (institutional and otherwise), as well as the terms on which such communication takes place, will be crucial to the success of any effort to capitalize on the relationship between humanistic and democratic thinking or to promote what Lynn Pasquerella (2011) calls "humanistic practice." Engaging with "humanistic questions and endeavors in the classroom and beyond" (Pasquerella, 2011), and allowing those questions to influence how we think about the promotion of "authentic relationships" both in the classroom and beyond (Bok, 2013, p. 149; Mitchell, 2008) should offer us opportunities to reflect upon, reject, and think past existing social hierarchies and inequalities, and to do so in ways that promote fundamental reconsiderations of the "possible" and of the political. This should help students to recognize that the "possibilism" of the French Revolution remains relevant and, moreover, will highlight possibilism's cooperative and collaborative nature. In short, promoting an expansive sense of "humanistic practice" might help to promote a sense of the possible that is emphatically democratic.

This call to critical reflection is especially important for how universities (and university faculties) think about themselves and their socio-intellectual ambitions (Martinez-Saenz, 2012; Pasquerella, 2011). Again, while these dynamics are central to the Humanities, they are not *particular* to the Humanities (though it does appear that there are disciplinary distinctions in terms of efficacy and emphasis (Bok, 2013, pp. 207-208; NSSE, 2010, pp. 10-16)). Cultivating these dispositions across institutional and disciplinary boundaries can help us to recognize why they are so important, makes it more likely that we will preserve and promote the benefits of a Liberal Arts education, and may help to remind others why universities are so valuable to democratic society. It might also help us to imagine new ways of introducing students to the world of ideas and of demonstrating to students (and to a broader public) how ideas are reflected in, inhabit, and shape the so-called "real world" beyond the campus walls.

With that we return to why teaching democratic thinking matters.

Teaching Democratic Thinking, 200 years later

Skills, practices, and dispositions. As insights born of more than two hundred years of history, these may seem pretty thin gruel. And yet, there are a number of ways in which both remembering and reflecting upon this history may prove suggestive, provocative, or useful in thinking about teaching democratic thinking in the twenty-first century.

First, the mere fact of this history should serve as a source of both comfort and caution: a source of comfort because it reminds us that we are not the first to encounter and tangle with the dilemmas, anxieties, ambiguities, and ambitions of teaching democratic thinking, and that both the democratic project and pedagogical ideal to which we hope to contribute have survived a tumultuous two hundred years intact; caution because of those two hundred years, because of the all-too-apparent fragility of democratic governance and democratic societies, the record of human atrocities and false certainties that have tarnished the idealism of Condorcet, Talleyrand, and the many others who hoped their work might help to usher in a more prosperous, more peaceful, and more enlightened era of human history. History gives us many reasons to be idealistic about the power of democratic education but little reason to be complacent, or even optimistic, about its ability to sustain itself without active support and promotion.

The history of the French Revolution also reminds us of how certain historical moments can be transformative in how we think about and approach education as a social, cultural, and political endeavor. It seems to many that we may be living through such a transformative moment at present, and there are great hopes and concerns about new and future technologies and what they might mean for education – especially higher education. Clearly, such technologies have the potential to transform our individual and collective relationship to information (and opinion) as well as the ways in which people(s) interact with one another. The opportunity to make more information available to more people and to encourage relatively direct (even if not always immediate) contact and conversation among people of vastly different

backgrounds and across great social and spatial distances opens up incredible opportunities to build upon the highest and most admirable goals of the Enlightenment. As always, however, the consequences are uncertain, and for education they will depend on how, where, when, and to what end new technologies are mobilized in the classroom and beyond. This should lead us to think critically and carefully about what we mean by "teaching democratic thinking" and about how that translates into pedagogical, curricular, administrative, social, and cultural practices.

This is particularly true because of the apparent devaluation of those practices, habits, and routines that make the classroom such a valuable incubator for democratic citizenship. Current trends in pedagogical practice and assessment seem to emphasize skills or "nuggets" of information at the expense of truly critical thinking, substantive "play," and dialogue. That is, they devalue the sorts of intellectual virtues and dispositions that form the bedrock of democratic thinking and, when spread widely, democratic society. And yet, this tangle of factors also presents an opportunity (and a reason) for those who would promote democratic education to re-emphasize the logic and importance of scholastic engagement, critical inquiry, and non-coercive thinking.

A second concern for the future of democratic education – one shaped by the combination of financial hardships, criticisms of the Liberal Arts and Humanities as "elite" or "elitist," and the emphasis on professional training and economic returns in evaluating educational materials and programs – is that the hierarchies of access to different types and modes of education will become even more undemocratic than they already are (Pasquerella, 2011). While access to education has and continues to be shaped in undemocratic ways by regional variations in the existence and quality of educational institutions, by inequalities of wealth, and by dramatically different levels of financial, political, and institutional support, the tendency to reduce discussions of education's purpose (and to peg assessments of its success) to purely economic outcomes threatens to aggravate such inequalities further still. On this point, Antonio Gramsci's critique of Italian education under Mussolini seems troublingly germane: "The tendency today is to abolish every type of schooling that is 'disinterested' (not serving immediate interests) or 'formative' – keeping at most only a small scale version to serve a tiny elite of ladies and gentlemen who do not have to worry about assuring themselves of a future career. Instead, there is a steady growth of specialized vocational schools, in which the pupil's destiny and future activity are determined in advance" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 27). While invoking criticisms leveled against the Italian Fascists might seem hyperbolic, the reduction of so many debates over education to economic and financial consequences does open itself up to this Gramscian critique and threatens to violate what Gutmann (1987) rightly identifies as one of the requirements of "democratic education": to give students an "education conducive to deliberation among conceptions of the good life and the good society" (p. 45). Such an outcome would undermine the classroom's value as a site of democratic socialization and its capacity to promote democratic dispositions throughout society. Designing curricula and pedagogical practices that encourage the student's recognition of him- or herself – and others – in terms that extend beyond the 'bottom line' will be critical to teaching democratic thinking

in the twenty-first century and to bridging the gap between training the individual and educating the citizen (Brighouse, 2005, p. 23). Doing so might also help us live up to Michael Roth's (2012) Dewey-inspired imperative: "We should not think of schools as... industries generating human capital. Rather, higher education's highest purpose is to give all citizens the opportunity to find 'large and human significance' in their lives and work" (p. A27).

Finally, the pedagogical and political history of the French Revolution is valuable because it gives us both a language and a barometer with which to think about the promises, perils, opportunities, and challenges of teaching democratic thinking. Skills, practices, and dispositions may seem simple enough, but the triumvirate is more challenging when we recognize that all three are necessary for education to simultaneously embody and promote the values of democratic politics and of a democratic society. This recognition gives us a means by which to evaluate those forces – social, technological, economic, political, and cultural – that would transform education, as well as a clear, concise, and yet demanding set of terms with which to articulate the importance of democratic thinking and its cultivation through education. Articulating why these pedagogical ambitions are important, why they ought to command our attention and our care, and why they are necessary for the success of the historic experiment that is democratic governance will be crucial if we are to make the relationship between our scholastic and democratic communities a constructive one, if we are to make "teaching democratic thinking" more than a catchphrase in the twenty-first century.

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