Food Literacy Education: A Philosophical Perspective

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will argue through a critical democratic education lens for the inclusion of philosophical perspectives in a comprehensive food literacy education program in Ontario high schools. Food is a democratic issue of philosophical concern, requiring critical educational attention. I maintain that if we do not properly deal with food issues in schools we fail to fulfill the democratic social reconstruction aims of education.

Utilizing a critical democratic dialogue framework, I combine the work of Laura Pinto and Heesoon Bai, whose approaches to collective communication promote social justice and critical democratic education. To conclude, I offer two concrete pedagogical applications of this framework to high school classrooms.

This paper supports initiatives already underway to expand the teaching of food literacy in Ontario high schools, but is significant because of its focus on critical democratic education, and my strong insistence on the inclusion of philosophical perspectives and teachings.
I would like to thank family members and friends who showed great patience and understanding throughout this long and trying process.

Special thanks go to Laura Pinto and James B. Gould for generously sharing their work; Sarah Cashmore, Brad Rowe, Sharon Lax, and Nassim Noroozi for advice and inspiring conversations during the early stages; Mary Ellen, Ian, and John for their tough love; and Mom and Dad for their tireless encouragement and belief in my capabilities. I couldn’t have completed this project without the ongoing support of my wonderful community.
I like being human because I know that my passing through the world is not predetermined, preestablished. That my destiny is not a given but something that needs to be constructed and for which I must assume responsibility. I like being human because I am involved with others in making history out of possibility, not simply resigned to fatalistic stagnation.

-Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Personal Context

Throughout my life, my personal experiences with food have led me to develop connections between food and philosophy. As a young child, I just wanted to eat what delighted my taste buds with salt and sugar; what was deemed frequently off-limits by my relatively conscientious parents; whatever brightly packaged and processed items appeared like magic from inside my classmates’ lunch boxes but were missing from my own. An understanding of the significance of food was passed to me via basic nutrition lessons at home and at school, which were iterations of the Canada Food Guide at the time; instructions on how to eat based only on nutritional needs required by the body for healthy functioning. In my early teens I switched to a vegetarian diet, but purely for pragmatic reasons: an unwieldy overbite meant chewing fibrous pieces of meat had become an unpleasant and arduous chore. As I grew politically conscious throughout my high school years, my justifications for leaving animal flesh off my plate widened to include misgivings regarding the right of humans to control the fate of animals. Health concerns around specific dietary choices would take nearly another decade to resound in me.

From the ages of twenty-two to twenty-nine I worked mostly full-time in professional kitchens downtown Toronto, Ontario. I fell into this line of work almost accidentally, starting as a dishwasher and moving my way up to sous-chef. Everything I learned, I learned on the job, from talented people whose passion and enthusiasm for cooking oozed from their hands and knives and the plated dishes they presented at the pass. My social consciousness came later, since initially I was dazzled and seduced by artistry and flavor. I began to see connections between the origins of the food I was preparing and the consequences of serving such foods. There were the obvious, short-term effects of taste and health impact on the consumer, but also long-term effects

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on humans, species, and ecosystems at various points in the supply chain. Food, and its far-reaching tentacles, suddenly mattered profoundly.

The significance and impact of culinary trends and food choices became paramount to me. By this time, I was hooked on cooking; I relished tasting everything I prepared, pouring over revered cookbooks by famously respected chefs in my limited free hours, and researching novel ingredients and food culture. I learned about how certain foods were assigned value: foie gras was incredibly expensive because of the intimate attention it required in preparing the liver for ‘harvesting’ — force-feeding a captive goose or duck with grain to create a fatty liver, six to ten times the size of the typical organ.\(^2\) European truffles were pricey because it took highly trained pigs or dogs to find them, snuffling around near the roots of trees during limited times of the year.\(^3\) Bird’s nest soup was a delicacy in Chinese cuisine partly because it was believed to be incredibly nourishing, but also due to its rarity and the dangers to harvesters, who retrieved the nests from the high walls of limestone caves in South East Asia.\(^4\) Chilean sea bass was outrageously expensive at the time because illegal fishing had decimated the fishery stocks, driving up the price on menus such as the one at the restaurant where I worked.\(^5\) Within the space of a few years, I saw costs of various ingredients both dip and soar, and I observed the names of certain creatures being moved to the “endangered” list in response to relatively short-lived eating trends. Through this experience, I came to realize that there is immense power wrapped up in the food choices we make; often devastating and long-lasting repercussions to how and where we spend our money. But more importantly, it became clear to me that food was a precious resource, and that it would take democratic action to set our food system on a more positive course for the future.


1.2 Food and Philosophy: The Problematique

Our food choices have consequences that affect the lives of sentient beings, as well as plant species, their ecosystems, and the larger environment. But the philosophy—or rather, lack thereof—behind this impetuous and ostentatious consumption was what really began to upset me. How could we be so arrogant as to think all these beautiful earthly things were equally viable as ingredients? Why didn’t we see the responsibility we held, independently but also collectively, for environmental stewardship? Did we have the actual right to eat anything we wanted? How were humans different from the things we chose to eat? How could we come to an agreement about what food is, and what it is not? And what was living in this unexamined manner teaching us about who we are, and how to think and behave toward others? What was the best way to eat, and essentially, to be; to live?

Ultimately, these questions—paired with a physical burn-out—contributed to me leaving the professional kitchen and returning to school, where I began to study philosophy. I went on to earn a Bachelor of Education degree and became certified to teach philosophy in Ontario high schools.

In the month-long classroom practicum (a program requirement), I observed and taught Grade 11 and Grade 12 Philosophy classes. I was struck by the opportunity for critical democratic dialogue, developing out of a philosophical tradition of Socratic dialogue. Though the curriculum for Ontario high school philosophy doesn’t explicitly demand it, space exists within these courses for critical concepts to be approached dialogically. This would enable students to consider and interrogate their own value systems and problematize what it is to live a “good life”, and then determine where society fails to live up to their standards. The available option for teaching applied philosophy—by grasping contemporary societal issues of immediate relevance to the lives of students, and then inviting students to analyze and consider the implications of these issues through reasoned philosophical debate—planted a seed somewhere in me that I have not been able to shake. During that practicum experience, I made a connection between the topic of food and its many inherently philosophical questions, and my interest in this intersection has only grown since.

My ongoing investment in food issues has led me to focus my thesis not just on food literacy education (henceforth FLE) in Ontario high schools, but specifically why we must include a
philosophical viewpoint in our initiatives around food education. Thus, the philosophical problematique that this thesis deals with is why education must have a philosophical component if it is to serve Dewey’s vision for democracy.

1.3 School and Curricular Context

The Ontario High School curriculum only addresses food in a cursory manner. Courses that explicitly deal with food units include some in Social Sciences and Humanities, and Physical and Health Education across a range of grades. Not only are these classes elective for the most part, but the content leans toward a practical focus on food, ranging from nutritional information to food preparation skills. This means that few, if any, high school students will receive a comprehensive education about food or be given the chance to participate in critical philosophical discourse about the food system.

Where evidence in the Ontario curriculum exists of critical analysis of food issues, the focus is mainly on factors that affect people’s food choices and health. The prescribed course expectations fall short of revealing the oppressive, undemocratic workings of our food system, and veer away from identifying corporate greed and lack of government regulation as crucial factors underlying lack of sustainability. Instead, by framing students as consumers rather than democratic actors, the curriculum reveals an individualist philosophy, which reaffirms the neoliberal messaging of the global corporate food system instead of working toward resistance. By continuing to encourage students to think about food merely in terms of how it affects their own health, and limiting the extent of citizens’ power to spending choices, this education fails to model and promote democratic practice. Furthermore, and in accordance with the Ministry of Education curriculum, students are not given a chance to confront how they might philosophically determine what food is or is for beyond its extrinsic teleological purpose, or why they should even be concerned with such questions. However, the answers will guide their actions at least thrice daily, and help them to become invested in how collective action could transform the future of food.

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Currently, several initiatives are underway to bring FLE into public schools in Ontario. Some of these come in the form of curriculum supplements prepared by NGOs and non-profits, and most are created for elementary schools. In these curriculum supplements, the term *food literacy* “…encompasses a wide range of knowledge and skills related to healthy food choices, including knowing how foods are grown, and practices related to choosing, preparing and consuming food.”

Websites of these groups reveal a common focus on health and nutrition, gardening, and cooking, and urges for the need to build local food systems for the development of future food sustainability.

FoodShare Toronto is an example of an organization that offers a progressive FLE initiative in Ontario high schools. This organization offers prepared workshops and lesson plans for teachers, available for free on FoodShare’s website. Additionally, FoodShare ambassadors can be brought into classrooms to facilitate hands-on workshops through their Field to Table Schools program.

One unit within the program, *What Toronto Eats*, shows a commitment by the developers of the plan to upholding the values of social justice and critical democratic education. To do so, this unit asks students to consider structural, systemic causes of food insecurity felt by many of Toronto’s residents. The lessons encourage learners to share their personal, lived experiences and ideas around food security and food justice, and to participate in dialogue in small groups where they collectively imagine a more emancipatory food system. This document is a good example of how food issues can be approached through a critical lens, while undermining hegemonic power and empowering learners collectively. The biggest drawback is that very few initiatives and resources such as this exist, but FoodShare Toronto provides inspiration for further development, especially with the possibility of including further critical democratic dialogue and philosophical questioning about food issues.

A review of current initiatives aimed at bringing “comprehensive” food literacy to public high schools in Ontario reveals an absence of *philosophical* inquiry. I argue that if we claim to be concerned with the future of our food system, and hold fast to the belief that our education

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8 FoodShare, “Teaching Teachers.”

9 FoodShare, *What Toronto Eats.*
system aims to enable graduating students on the brink of adulthood to participate fully as democratic citizens in reimagining and *remaking our world*, such philosophical inquiry is a necessary component of a democratic curriculum.

1.4 Food Literacy Education: Definitions, Current Issues, and Role of Philosophy

The subject of food is a daily concern for everyone on the planet. In recent years, various issues affecting the global food system have been brought to public consciousness through often-conflicting media reports and food-focused television programming. Authors like Michael Pollen, Alice Waters, Raj Patel and Eric Schlosser have published books centered on local and global food issues that have soared up best seller lists and captured popular attention. Public debates abound as to the cost-benefit analysis of the effects to the environment and our health of eating local vs. eating organic; how the patenting and distribution of genetically modified seeds has contributed to creating national crises in the developing world; and wide-ranging disagreement over what, ultimately, counts as a “sustainable” diet. Quite often, these public arguments contain elements of philosophical questioning. We should be doing more within our education system to ensure that food issues be framed in a philosophical light from the start.

My view of philosophical inquiry, partly based on the Socratic tradition, and the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, is that it is a process that challenges the participant(s) to reconsider their beliefs and knowledge claims about the meanings they attach to being in the world with others. This process includes both questioning and reflecting. Philosophical questioning is about examining philosophical topics with the aim of coming to reasoned, justifiable conclusions. Often, the process of questioning leads to the development of further questions, in addition to the process of reflecting. Philosophical reflection is a form of deep thinking that causes the thinker to examine not only what she believes, but why and how she has come to those beliefs.

When philosophical inquiry takes the form of philosophical dialogue, the processes of examining philosophical topics and developing reasoned arguments takes place among members of a group. Philosophical dialogue allows individuals to hear multiple viewpoints, and encourages those}

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engaged to measure their deeply-held values, rethink and then recapitulate their position or argument premise. This communal activity helps participants to make their ideas clear so that they may live in integrity with themselves and act accordingly in the world.

Food is undoubtedly a philosophical topic. If philosophical inquiry is in any way about determining what is the “good life”, or in what way one should go about living, then our food system and food choices are absolutely central to these considerations; as they should reflect these values. We must engage deeply and collectively with these questions: What sort of world do we want to have? Do we want the sort of world where some people are starving while others profit from this suffering? Do we want the sort of world where humans exert domination over the land and other beings simply because we can, because we always have, and not because we need to? Do we want to eat foods that have been modified in laboratories? Do we want to eat foods that have been shipped on trucks or planes or boats? Do we want to grow our own food? Cook our own meals? Divert food waste? What do we want to eat? How do we want to live?

These questions are philosophical ones, and as I have shown, appear glaringly absent from the Ministry-prescribed public high school curriculum in Ontario, but for education to support democracy, they must be included at once and given serious time and consideration. Though the facts concerning our food system are rapidly changing and arriving from many sources, this information and its implications concern us all, and not just a few specialists across diverse academic fields. If I can make free decisions about food that will alter these systems, then to live democratically I must have this knowledge available to me or else my choices are not free; not democratic. I am merely living and making decisions within the confines of a limited scope of vision, and not the actual state of the world; a world that nonetheless my choices affect.

Furthermore, if I am being instructed from within the public education system to make specific choices—if certain values are being overtly fed to me without analysis or debate—then this lack of philosophical agency can only serve to temporarily signal what the “right” and “wrong” answers are in terms of a kind of rote learning, as opposed to fostering thoughtful and weighted democratic choices. Most importantly, as a democratic citizen, I must be given the opportunity within my education to think deeply about what food means in regard to good living. In cooperative communication with others invested in these questions, I should practice the democratic activity of conceptualizing a more progressive food system that serves the needs of all citizens, without it wreaking havoc on the environment and other living creatures.
In this thesis, I will argue that without a critical, philosophical component intentionally woven into a comprehensive FLE program in public schools, such an education would not be fully consistent with the claim that our education system is democratic. As explained above, the topic of food includes a wide variety of issues that deserve philosophical consideration. At present, such a dimension is lacking. This thesis offers an argument for the necessity of including the philosophical dimension. The argument is partly based on a critical-democratic perspective, and is grounded in critical democratic education theory. The thesis will also argue that within the broader philosophical dimension, a particular philosophical-pedagogical approach based on the work of Laura Pinto and Heesoon Bai would provide a strong, democratic framework with possibilities for classroom application as a way to deal with the thorny issues that arise in FLE.

1.5 Development and Structure of Thesis

The aim of Chapter 2 is to establish the necessity of a particular kind of education to serve democratic aims. I divided Chapter 2 into three distinct parts. Section 2.1 establishes the theoretical groundwork for my main argument: that a philosophical perspective is a necessary component of FLE if we are to take democracy seriously. Relying on the work of Dewey, I point to the fostering of democracy and democratic citizenship as the aim of education. I approach this task systematically, by first outlining Dewey’s notions of democracy and education. I explain that education is a process of societal reconstruction, where learners engage through experience to remake their world into a more progressive version for the future of civilization. Dewey determined that for education to work this way, it must have an idea of the kind of society that this reconstruction will serve; through the process of outlining an “ideal” society, he determined that this pointed to a democracy. Next, I underscore that Dewey’s collective, democratic social reconstruction can only be realized in a society that enables the equitable access for all its members to these common interests and discourse. Therefore, for Dewey, the principles of social justice are inherently important for democracy to succeed in its aim.

In section 2.2, I argue that to achieve Dewey’s vision of democracy, efforts must be made to ensure that the kind of public education being offered adheres to a model of critical democratic education. Here I explore the work of Joe Kincheloe, Freire, and other contemporary philosophers of education. Kincheloe’s work in particular is relied on to insist that critical democratic education and critical pedagogy are necessary elements for a public education system
that is committed to social justice in its democratic project. I rely on Kincheloe to show that critical democratic education works to reveal and critique the hidden forces of hegemony that powerfully implicate our society and prevent democracy from functioning as it should. After identifying these forces, citizens might work collectively to make plans for building progressive and socially just alternatives. This is democratic work. Critical pedagogy honours this practice with its special focus on how this process of “invisible” oppression works in institutional schooling; applying the use of critical pedagogy in schools helps teachers and students come to understand the political messaging that underlies the education system.

Section 2.3 presents a philosophical-pedagogical framework that incorporates both the aims of Dewey’s democracy and the project of critical democratic education to create a model for application in schools. This framework, which I call critical democratic dialogue, combines the work of theorists Pinto and Bai. I first introduce Pinto’s argument that the ideal form of liberal democracy is agonism, since it allows for diverse viewpoints and encourages critical dissent among its members, but unlike deliberative democracy, does not insist on consensus. Thus, agonism upholds the values of social justice in doing democracy, aiming for inclusion while supporting lively democratic dialogue. Next, I present Bai’s work on subjunctivity and intersubjectivity, in which she describes these processes as necessary elements of a democratic dialogue that fosters care and concern for others, leading to the possibility of a “common good”. In democratic dialogue, intersubjectivity is the process by which individuals communicate their inner consciousness to others, and subjunctivity is the phenomenon of coming to understand the position of others through this process. Bai notes that this requires attentional work by the person on the receiving end of this sharing, since individuals tend to otherwise centre themselves, which prevents an authentic understanding of others. By taking these suggestions by Pinto and Bai together, I create a framework for critical democratic dialogue that stays true to Dewey’s vision and the goals of critical democratic education, but also presents a tangible way of understanding how this democratic activity might take place in classrooms.

The aim of Chapter 3 is to elucidate the connection between food, philosophy, and Dewey’s social reconstruction, and to show why critical democratic education is necessary for revealing this connection. This chapter contains four main sections. In the first, I link democracy to the topic of food by briefly investigating our global corporate food system and showing why it is oppressive and anti-democratic. Locating food among Dewey’s shared interests, I argue that
democratic citizens must be given opportunities to collectively remake this system. This practice is that of social reconstruction that Dewey frames as the aim of education; I contend that our public education system must provide these opportunities.

Section 3.2 gives an overview of the current state of food education in the context of Ontario high schools. I show that food is dealt with in Health and Physical Education courses, as well as Family Studies courses in the Social Sciences and Humanities, but that because these courses are elective most students will not benefit from them. Next I demonstrate that the curricular expectations for these courses are lacking in deep analyses and fail to uncover systematic oppressions that drive the food industry, and for the most part do not present the topic of food through a philosophical lens. Because these curriculum documents fail to call for these critical democratic elements, and do not encourage the activity of social reconstruction through democratic dialogue, I maintain that they fail democracy’s aims. Next, I look at recent FLE initiatives by non-profit groups outside the education system to provide supplementary food education in high schools. Food literacy has widely been defined by these groups as a knowledge of food preparation skills, nutrition, and health aspects, and is determined to help students make healthier decisions with their food choices. There is little critical analysis within these supplementary resources, with a few specific exceptions. As these initiatives are still underway, and may very well forecast policy changes that drive the future of food education in Ontario, I insist that a philosophical element must be incorporated in FLE to support democracy’s aims.

Section 3.3 divides the subject of philosophy into discussions of practice and place. The first, in section 3.3.1, is devoted to my argument that collective philosophical inquiry is crucial for a thriving democracy. I elucidate that philosophy is an inherent element of critical democratic education. Education that nourishes intellectual autonomy is important because students need to develop their own ethical frameworks for acting in the world. I also note that the development of this autonomy through philosophical questioning and reflection requires communal philosophical dialogue, since this allows students to hold up their beliefs and knowledge claims against those of others for critical examination.

In section 3.3.2 I will deliver a brief overview of current philosophy education in Ontario high schools, where food issues are notably absent. I show that philosophical dialogue is not stressed in the curriculum, and the subject matter teachers use to present the “Big Ideas” and branches of
philosophy is up to their own discretion. These absences in the prescribed curriculum illustrate some openings where critical democratic dialogue and philosophical dialogue, along with investigation of food issues, could be presented in classes while still upholding Ministry expectations. To follow this discussion, I present the results of a study of Ontario high school teachers, which found that although most teachers claimed the use of philosophical dialogue in their classrooms to be a very effective pedagogical tool, they were much more likely to use a lecture-style approach in their teaching. I suggest this may still point to the possibility that teachers committed to critical democratic education could be amenable to trying critical democratic dialogue in these spaces. I finish this section by explaining that the topic of food must be tied to philosophy education, because food is of philosophical import. I express here that food issues are connected to the character of our lives, since our beliefs and practices concerning food reflect who we are and what we value. To understand our connections with food, we must recognize its philosophical relevance, and that means ensuring that philosophical questioning and reflection is included in food education.

To close Chapter 3, Section 3.4 will provide two possible applications for integrating food and philosophy in the high school curriculum. For the first, I look to the work of James B. Gould for guidance. Gould explains how he uses the topic of food to design a single-topic course on ethics for undergraduate philosophy students. I use his work as inspiration for imagining how high school philosophy might take the same approach with ‘strand’ units, and the practices of philosophical questioning and argument-building. The second possible application I suggest involves the embedding of philosophy into courses in other departments that deal with food issues. For illustration of this approach, I look at an example from lesson plans devised by Ecosource, another organization currently undertaking FLE efforts. These lesson plans demonstrate that, just as food is a cross-curricular topic, so too does philosophy have significance in multiple subject areas. However, for these classes to be representative of education that takes democratic reconstruction as its aim, teachers will need to incorporate critical democratic dialogue as part of their pedagogy.

1.6 Significance and Contribution

This thesis offers arguments that support initiatives already underway outside of the mandated Ontario Curriculum to expand FLE in high schools, but is significant because of its focus on
critical democratic education, and my strong insistence on the inclusion of philosophical
dialogue and reflection. I offer a justification for the necessity of a philosophical dimension for a
FLE program that claims to serve democratic aims. My argument adds a new perspective to
those of groups already working hard to advocate for broader food education in Ontario high
schools.

The framework for critical democratic dialogue provides a way for teachers committed to social
justice and critical democratic education to approach developing a pedagogy for their
classrooms. In Chapter 3, section 4 of this thesis, I have included two practicable applications of
this framework for classroom use; these are meant to spark interest in educators and perhaps
even encourage further possibilities.
Chapter 2
Taking Democracy Seriously

2 Developing the Groundwork: A Critical Democratic Education Lens

Democracy is a contested concept with conflicting definitions and applications. It is often erroneously conflated with the right to vote for political representation. Alternatively, democracy can be conflated with freedom of speech; or the right of citizens to express and practice their religious beliefs. Jesse Goodman concurs that our democracy is routinely conceived of as something rather flat; a mere procedural tool, instead of a vital part of social life: “For most, democracy has become viewed as an artifact (governmental agencies) or a set of cultural rituals (passively observing elections or voting), rather than a dynamic process in which the public actively participates on a daily basis and which involves face-to-face contact.”11

Pinto compares and contrasts various definitions of liberal democracy.12 Generally, liberal – or procedural – democracy is highly limited, since in viewing people essentially the same, it ignores systemic injustice and precludes the possibility of equity-based emancipation.13 Market democracy fails to concern itself with issues of societal injustice, instead conceiving of citizen-consumers, casting votes with their dollars.14 Deliberative democracy reflects the narrower notion of representative democracy by positing greater participation of citizens through democratic debate. This form of democracy underscores as its criteria both argumentation based on reason, and the aim of reaching a consensus.15

But democracy is not just about political procedure, or even individual freedoms. As Dewey demonstrates, democracy also describes a way of life; of being in the world together.

13 Pinto, 155-156.
14 Pinto, 156-157.
15 Pinto, 157-158.
Furthermore, Dewey asserts that the overarching aim of public education ought to be the cultivation of democracy. At its foundation, this thesis relies on Dewey’s conception of democracy, which is tied to his teachings on the purpose of education and the process through which social life is collectively renewed. Applying a critical democratic lens bolsters Dewey’s notion of democracy by highlighting the principles of social justice, and insisting on equity, instead of equality, between citizens.

Democracy and education are inextricably tied to one another; so much so that it is difficult to talk about one without the other. Much of Dewey’s work centers on the relationship between the two, and how the principles of democracy – and education that supports democracy – are essential to a free and just society.16 His values and priorities line up with my vision of a system of education that facilitates a socially just and democratic life. To open this chapter, in section 2.1 I refer to Dewey for a comprehensive understanding of this relationship, which will lay the foundation for my argument: that FLE must contain a philosophical element if it is to honour democracy.

After providing an overview of Dewey’s key ideas in this area, I argue that when we talk about democracy and cite both liberation and reconstruction as our goal, then what we are describing is critical democracy. Critical democracy goes beyond Dewey’s ideal, as it is focused on identifying issues of inequality that plague our society, and working collectively toward a more socially just world. In section 2.2, I use the work of Kincheloe, Freire, and other contemporary philosophers of education to illustrate the meaning of critical democratic education. I insist on the necessity of this theory for a society that values plurality, equity, and critical renewal.

In this thesis, I am interested in providing a theoretical framework through which these central values of critical democratic education can be upheld, while also supplying an imagined process by which the first steps of social reconstruction might be undertaken in an educational setting. In section 2.3 I rely on the work of Pinto and Bai to build such a particular philosophical-pedagogical framework. Pinto concludes that to align with the values of critical democracy, agonism is the ideal approach, since it encourages emphatic debate and mutual respect, without insisting on consensus. Bai takes democratic dialogue as her focus, offering the concepts of

16 Dewey, Democracy and Education.


**intersubjectivity** and **subjunctivity** as processes through which diverse subjects may work together – through inclusive democratic activity – toward a notion of the common good. Considering elements of these theories in conjunction, I present criteria for a framework of **critical democratic dialogue** for use in educational spaces.

Taking steps toward reimagining how education can truly serve democracy unleashes some evident tensions, such as the apparent hypocrisy of teaching for democracy within the authoritarian institution of schools; and the conservative hysteria about the dangers of education that isn’t “value-neutral.” I will respond to these issues as they arise, demonstrating why they should not derail the project in mind.

### 2.1 Dewey: Democracy and Education

According to Dewey, education broadly conceived is a means of ensuring the continuity of social life through transmission, from those with the most life experience and understanding of the cultural practices and interests of the group, to those with the least.\(^1\) This process allows civilization to carry on through generations, instead of dying off when the eldest members of society pass away.\(^2\) Additionally, this transmission of culture through education is an intentional process requiring the direction of the young, since “[b]eings who are born not only unaware of, but quite indifferent to, the aims and habits of the social group have to be rendered cognizant of them and actively interested. Education, and education alone, spans the gap.”\(^3\)

Responding to various conventional concepts of how education functions, Dewey explains that these fail to express the connection of education to experience and renewal, and the process by which students learn. For instance, the idea of education as the result of a teacher simply forming the mind of a student – that the contents of the mind are molded through the introduction of subject matter by an external force – lacks a nuanced recognition of the learner as an active agent in the educative process, and of the environment as an influencing factor.\(^4\) Another view (at the

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time of Dewey’s writing) used biological evolution as its foundational premise, arguing that students, like animals, will pass through a repeated set of “stages” as they grow, and only certain types of instruction, routinely prescribed, will be suitable for each stage.\textsuperscript{21} Dewey dismisses this premise, arguing that evolution resists set rules of historical repetition, otherwise evolutionary change would not be possible.\textsuperscript{22}

Finding these versions of education limiting and wrong-headed, Dewey presents instead a new conception of education, the central focus of which is \textit{reconstruction}. He notes that looking at the past for tools to guide educational growth ignores the fact that \textit{the process of growth itself in the present} is educational.\textsuperscript{23} The inclusion of educational content should nurture this process of growth into the future.\textsuperscript{24}

Growth in education heralds transformation – of both the self, and the environment. Dewey believes it is against our very nature to live in a static way, having no effect on our environment. Instead, in order to live, each of us moves through the world making changes to, and being changed by, everything with which we come into contact: “There is no such thing in a living creature as mere conformity to conditions…In the interests of the maintenance of life there is transformation of some elements in the surrounding environment. The higher the form of life, the more important is the active reconstruction of the medium.”\textsuperscript{25}

This process of affecting change on our environment, and the changes we undergo as a result of our observation of this process, form the foundations of our experience.\textsuperscript{26} Consequently, we \textit{learn}; we take the meaning of this experience as a guide by which to act further:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Dewey, 72-73.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Dewey, 73
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Dewey, 75
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Dewey, 75
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Dewey, \textit{Reconstruction in Philosophy}, 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Dewey, 50.
\end{itemize}
Experience becomes an affair primarily of doing. The organism does not stand about, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up. It does not wait passive and inert for something to impress itself upon it from without. The organism acts in accordance with its own structure, simple or complex, upon its surroundings. As a consequence the changes produced in the environment react upon the organism and its activities. The living creature undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its own behavior. This close connection between doing and suffering or undergoing forms what we call experience.  

Because continued growth is the ideal, and people learn through their experience, this points to education as “…a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience,” and its end as the “…direct transformation of the quality of experience.” For the learner, this means education “…increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience.” Dewey’s conception of education as reconstruction not only focuses on present and future experience, rather than external or prescribed material from the past, as its main educative element; it also allows the learner some control over their future learning through adapting what they have learned from past experiences to direct their experiences, and education, to come. Since we learn in moments of experience through interaction with our environment, which is also continuously in flux, we must continue to adapt and respond to these new changes. These adaptations make way for further learning experiences, which indicates that the process of education is an on-going one: “Our net conclusion is that life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, that means (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming.”

With a clearer notion of education in hand, I must now turn my attention to the kind of society we aim toward. Following Dewey, an understanding of this is crucial to knowing what society needs from education, and how these concepts connect to democracy: “The concept of education

27 Dewey, 49.
28 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 76.
30 Dewey, 49-50.
as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind.”  

Reconstruction of experience refers not only to the personal, but also to the realm of society. For societies in which the reproduction of things as they are is prioritized, change and growth are not welcome.  

However, “progressive” societies “…endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on their own.” For societies that wish to become better, a different kind of education is necessary; one that prioritizes social improvement over reproduction.  

A society consists of various groups, each with its own interests. As different – sometimes even oppositional – as these groups’ interests might seem to one another, what is similar about them is what makes each group possible to begin with: a cohesion built through honour, fraternity, and loyalty. Because these groups have distinct aims, they will reflect various values in their systems of member socialization. Thus, it is necessary to conceptualize a singular “ideal” society, in order that a system of education might successfully serve its aims.  

Dewey argues that the ideal society must be based on what exists, otherwise it will be impractical. To construct such an ideal, we must utilize the positive elements in society that we find now and access these to refine the elements we perceive as negative. He names two positive, recurrent aspects with which to build on: first, the members of each group have

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31 Dewey, 97.  
32 Dewey, 3-4.  
33 Dewey, 79.  
34 Dewey, 81.  
35 Dewey, 82.  
36 Dewey, 82-83.  
37 Dewey, 83.  
38 Dewey, 83.
interests in common within the group; second, the various groups must have some communication and cooperation between them.\(^{39}\)

Members of a society will always have some values and interests in common, and the society’s education will best serve the capacities of all its members.\(^{40}\) This means all members must be in frequent communication with one another to develop these shared interests, such that each can benefit equally from the fruits of this free interaction:

In order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves. And the experience of each party loses in meaning, when the free interchange of varying modes of life-experience is arrested.\(^{41}\)

Here we see Dewey’s commitment to diversity, social justice, and equity in his efforts to design an ideal society on which to base an educational model – for both the good of individuals and society at large.

To elaborate on the need for interconnectedness, Dewey warns that groups that isolate themselves from others tend toward a desperate protecting and maintaining of static identity, rather than activity toward progressive reconstruction, which interaction with others invites.\(^{42}\)

These two elements necessary for constructing an “ideal” society – common interests and communicative interaction – both suggest that democracy is the target toward which this construction of an “ideal” society aims.\(^{43}\) Citizens’ recognition of common interests will lead to methods of social control that take these interests into account meaningfully. Ongoing

\(^{39}\) Dewey, 83.

\(^{40}\) Dewey, 83-84.

\(^{41}\) Dewey, 84.

\(^{42}\) Dewey, 86.

\(^{43}\) Dewey, 86.
communication between groups points to perpetual and progressive change resulting from the effects of novel influences. These criteria describe the qualities of a democracy.44

A democratic society is especially invested in its education system, not just because it requires an educated and engaged citizenry to elect its government officials; but directly due to the common interests and commitment to reconstruction shared by its citizens.45 Because we live in a society where people’s diverse interests overlap, developments that grow from contact among citizens are crucial to social progress. The shared investment of a society of co-dependent members in its progressive functioning necessitates an education system that will foster these concerns.46 More to the point, Dewey states: “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”47 Because democratic societies call for this constant social interaction, the influence on individuals which results from this contact facilitates greater opportunity for learning, and the development of intellectual capacities.48 Democratic citizens must be educated equally and freely, so that they may realize their individual potential and become better adapted to participate in and sustain the activity of societal change.49

In a democracy, education means to provide the preparation that students will need to become active, free, and self-determining members of the public. They will need to understand the contextual fabric - scientific, literary, historical, geographical, and sociopolitical - of the world they live in. They will need to acquire skills to compete to find work, and achieve a livelihood in response to the demands of our capitalist system. Most crucially for democratic life, they will need the ability to critically deconstruct ideas and materials which are presented to them - by people close to them, by the media, and by politicians and institutions sworn to act in their best interests. This means that it is not sufficient to hand over information in a one-way manner

44 Dewey, 86-87.
45 Dewey, 87.
46 Dewey, 87.
47 Dewey, 87 (my italics).
48 Dewey, 87.
49 Dewey, 87-88.
through schooling, but that an insistence on active, critical apprehension is crucial. Without the ability to see what is wrong, and perhaps even to pinpoint how we got here, there is no hope for individuals to find freedom in society, nor is there any way to imagine solutions to the current crises throughout our world, and encourage a remaking of society by its youngest and most optimistic constituents.

An objection may arise as to the legitimacy of any notion of schooling that serves a democratic function. Some will say that, by virtue of their hierarchical and authority-based organization, schools themselves are not democratic either in structure or function, and therefore have no business claiming democracy as their cause. However, providing a democratic education is not the same as educating for democracy, where the former term indicates a modelled whole and the latter, an effort in support of an ideal. As Jane Roland Martin points out, we need not be so exacting in our demands on schools for them to fulfill some of our democratic aims since, “...[p]erfection is not required. Being a democratic culture is a matter of degree and to provide apprenticeships in democracy, the culture of schools need only approximate this ideal.”50 The approximation Martin points to here could be exemplified by a robust critical practice, or even more modest gestures, like encouraging students to engage in Socratic dialogue during class time.

Importantly, Martin does claim that it is not enough to simply endow students with a few democratic skills and dispositions and then expect some sort of miraculous transformation to occur. Rather, a critical exercise is necessary wherein the students must shed their old, nondemocratic ideas to internalize and accept a more democratic system of beliefs, and then undergo change.51

On this topic, Jeffrey M.R. Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell warn against the danger of teachers who attempt to let go of authority altogether. It is important, they advise, for teachers to exercise some authority, even when committed to democratic education. The authors describe the case of teachers who would like to employ critical pedagogy in their classrooms, but in their

51 Martin, 426.
efforts to be democratic (and perhaps, their fear of seeming oppressive) these teachers forgo discipline altogether, instead deferring too often and too broadly to the whim of the students. The result is a classroom without structure, and students with no respect for teachers. Inevitably, the end result is that either these teachers discern that a strict authoritarian style is the only way forward, or else the anarchy of the students causes the teacher to abandon all hope for the class.\textsuperscript{52} Hence, even when championing the principles of democracy in the classroom, it must remain clear that the teacher has authority.

Thus far, I have outlined Dewey’s conception of democracy, as well as his emphasis on the importance of its relationship to education. For democracy to persist, and insofar as it acknowledges our society as a pluralistic one, then its constituent members need to have free and equitable access to the tools and freedoms that allow for their full participation in the project of reconstruction.

Our present society is rife with inequities. Multiple and intersecting forms of oppression, targeting different identity groups, prevent their members from enjoying, and participating in, the elements which make up a good life. A democratic society committed to the well-being and participation of all its members must be intent on achieving social justice, and in all its efforts, must take social justice values as its central principles. To work for positive social change, the causes of societal inequities, as well as the ways they are systemically perpetuated, must be exposed and challenged. This process of communal critical analysis and the resulting action toward improvement is necessary for social reconstruction, and constitutes the very activity of democracy.\textsuperscript{53}

Therefore, Dewey’s notion of democracy should be conceived of as a gateway to \textit{critical democracy}, because it goes beyond an understanding of merely procedural or representative democracy to conceptualize an active participation of its members toward positive change.\textsuperscript{54} Critical democracy is what we ultimately aim for when upholding Dewey’s vision of democratic

\textsuperscript{52} Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, \textit{Critical Pedagogy}, 179.
\textsuperscript{53} Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, 87.
\textsuperscript{54} Dewey, 86-87.
life, while also remaining dedicated to social justice. What makes critical democracy more robust than other definitions of democracy is that it is concerned with experiences and values, and recognizes pluralism and inequity; thus, it encompasses many aspects of ‘associated living’ rather than just focusing on a procedural concept.55

Goodman deduces that even with a political, (procedural) democracy intact, the injustices and imbalances of power in our society (racism, sexism, capitalism, etc.) create widespread inequality among citizens.56 Critical democracy, he maintains, “…presents both a vision of an ideal (and hence never completely realized) society and a process by which this vision can be sought after.”57 A critical democracy announces itself in multiple realms of life far beyond our system of government; it is intent on giving voice to people who have otherwise not been heard, and disseminating knowledge widely.58

Education is not enough to improve our social democratic situation – other important social institutions and citizenship practices will invariably need to undergo drastic changes to bring us closer to Dewey’s vision. However, changes to education are central to this task, in an ongoing way: “It is essential that children’s education be seen at the core of democratic activity prior to changes in other spheres of society, during any changes that take place in these spheres, and after social and economic institutions have been fundamentally altered.”59

Because critical democracy as an ideal must be inclusive, active, critical and creative, so must be the education that provides for it. An education that aims for social reconstruction cannot resemble a strictly authoritarian model of schooling, where students are merely passive vessels and teachers are perceived as holding and transmitting all the knowledge.60 Such a “banking

57 Goodman, 91.
58 Goodman, 92.
59 Goodman, 107.
60 Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, 30-33.
model” of education is not appropriate for the kind of civilization that wants to improve itself with every subsequent generation.

A critical democratic education model is necessary to support realization of critical democratic ideals. In the next section I will examine the goals and claims of proponents of this model in the field of philosophy of education to furnish a deeper understanding of critical democratic education. This step is essential to my thesis, since the theoretical framework on which I rest my central claim is a critical democratic one.

2.2 Critical Democratic Education

Kincheleoe situates critical democratic education in an academic tradition stemming from critical theory. He notes that contemporary critical theorists in the 1960s were against a Marxist determinist view of schools. They endorsed agency and self-determination, positing a more optimistic vision of schools as “…sites of resistance and democratic possibility through concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical framework.” Kincheleoe characterizes critical democratic theory as,

…especially concerned with how democracy is subverted, dominion takes place, and human relations are shaped in the schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life. Critical theorists want to promote an individual’s consciousness of himself or herself as a social being. An individual who has gained such a consciousness understands how and why his or her political opinions, worker role, religious beliefs, gender role, and racial self-image are shaped by dominant perspectives.

Moreover, he also states: “Because critical theory focuses on the element of reflection, it furnishes self-knowledge and an adjustment in attitudes through an understanding of how one’s

61 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 72.
64 Kincheleoe, 71.
65 Kincheleoe, 71-72.
views are formed to begin with. This knowledge allows individuals to more deeply interrogate the psychological schema and sociological forces that work to establish their perspectives.  

In summary, this process includes acts of unveiling, critiquing, reflecting, and drawing up action. Kincheloe points out that there are no set of rules for going about this but only that, “…a framework of principles is developed around which possible actions can be discussed and analyzed.”

Only when teachers are committed to a pedagogy that forces such injustices into the light for examination can education support critical democracy. But the institutional sites at which these educative processes will take place are not immune to this scrutiny. A function of critical democratic education, critical pedagogy encourages a critical discourse around schools themselves, the structures of power that such institutions exemplify, and the ways they go about supporting the messages and values of the status quo and de-legitimizing knowledge students bring with them to the classroom.

Critical pedagogy rises out of a meeting between critical theory and education. Kincheloe explains that like critical theory, it resists static teaching rules, but instead works to reveal to students the way that schooling functions, through the structures of power, to reproduce the status quo and oppress its actors within the system of education.

In their text *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools*, authors Duncan-Andrade and Morrell offer a general survey of thinkers who have been instrumental in developing this movement, as well as provide suggestions for applying their teachings in urban classrooms based on critical teachers’ experiences. The authors state that

[c]ritical pedagogues…challenge the assumption that schools function as major sites of social and economic mobility. Instead, they suggest that schooling must be analyzed as a cultural and historical process in which students are positioned within

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66 Kincheloe, 72.
67 Kincheloe, 72.
68 Kincheloe, 72.
69 Kincheloe, 72.
asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groupings. A major task of critical pedagogy has been to disclose and challenge the reproductive role schools play in political and cultural life.  

Following Peter McLaren’s three forms of knowledge that schools might impart, the authors say that critical pedagogues are concerned not only with technical knowledge, or practical knowledge, but importantly, with emancipatory knowledge, which is “…rooted in the study of past and existing social conditions in order to change circumstances of irrationality, domination, and oppression through collective action. By emphasizing critical thought, action, and liberation, it transcends the false binary that suggests that school knowledge is either technical or practical.”  

Educators must always focus on revealing how schools reproduce society’s inequalities, and be willing to critically analyze this with students. “As educators uncover the conditions for social reproduction they must be critically self-reflexive, raising their own awareness of how they are sometimes complicit in over-valuing certain ways of talking, acting, dressing and certain language practices and values. This heightened awareness is crucial for educators to understand student resistance when it does occur.”  

Freire claims that part of understanding one’s democratic agency is the realization that not only do social ills exist, can be named, and should be challenged; but that this discovery simultaneously inspires hope, in that one may conclude that these conditions in our society do not have to remain as they are: “…even though I know that the material, social, political, cultural, and ideological conditions in which we find ourselves almost always generate divisions that make difficult the construction of our ideals of change and transformation, I also know that the obstacles are not eternal.” Thus, a critical uncovering of the world through critical democratic education brings about a sense of empowerment in the participating community, with

70 Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, Critical Pedagogy, 23.  
72 Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 32.  
73 Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 33.  
74 Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 33.  
75 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, 55.
the recognition that, since things came to be this way, then further intervention can also create improvements. Freire calls this process of coming to realize the existence of structural inequities a “conscientization”, and insists that, not only is it necessary for democratic reconstruction to occur, but that at its essence, it is necessary to the human condition, since part of being human is consciously realizing our “unfinishedness.” “Far from being alien to our human condition, conscientization is natural to “unfinished” humanity that is aware of its unfinishedness. It is natural because unfinishedness is integral to the phenomenon of life itself.”

Kincheloe points out that critical pedagogy is not neutral, and is in fact against a notion of neutrality:

Unlike those following many other educational approaches, critical theorists expose their values and openly work to achieve them. Critical pedagogy is dedicated to the notion of egalitarianism and the elimination of human suffering. What is the relationship between social inequality and the suffering that accompanies it, and the schooling process? The search for an answer to this question shapes the activities of the critical teacher. Working in solidarity with subordinated and marginalized groups, critical teachers attempt to expose the subtle and often hidden educational processes that privilege the already affluent and undermine the efforts of the poor.

He claims that when this can happen, the idea that schools themselves provide socio-economic leverage for working-class students begins to crumble, along with a sense of neutrality or equality in what schools offer students.

Because critical pedagogy incorporates the lived experiences of participants and their discoveries and insights in the act of this critical uncovering, Kincheloe explains that the curriculum for such education cannot be prescribed:

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76 Paulo Freire, 55 (my italics).
77 Paulo Freire, 55 (my italics).
78 Paulo Freire, 55.
80 Kincheloe, 72.
In critical pedagogy the curriculum becomes a dynamic of negotiation where students and teachers examine the forces that have shaped them and the society in which they live. In this context the curriculum is ever changing and evolving, as it seeks to uncover how the world operates and how egalitarian democratic principles can become a part of that operation. Thus, a critical curriculum attempts to engage students in the understanding and implementation of a critical democracy grounded in concerns for community building and social justice.\textsuperscript{82}

A few critical pedagogues acknowledge that some educators may find critical pedagogy ill-suited for classroom use, or at least difficult to practice. These difficulties could stem from relationship and institutional barriers.\textsuperscript{83} Occasionally, it is noted that teachers may struggle with the lack of guidelines or models by which to teach.\textsuperscript{84} For instance, D. Brent Edwards Jr. has remarked that critical pedagogy is simply too abstract for educators to grapple with: “The theory and practice of critical pedagogy remains esoteric, off the radar of most professionals in education.”\textsuperscript{85}

However, critical democratic education is not a mere hypothetical approach to teaching, and the use of particular methods, such as those advanced in this thesis, exemplify its practical use. Teachers who are committed to and inspired by the possibilities raised by critical educators will keep engaging with such pedagogies. Even subversive attempts could lead to unexpected pathways, so it is up to the teacher to try; it is also the work of theorists and practitioners to find ways of sharing their applications with the community of educators interested in this approach.

Protestation against emancipatory efforts in education exist, with the underlying assertion that these methods employ obvious political bias. Those whose perspectives arise from a classical liberal tradition might argue that since democracy champions diverse voices and encourages participation of all citizens, then to be “fair” to all viewpoints, it should follow that education for democracy must be value-neutral. This could not be further from the truth.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{82} Kincheloe, 72-73. \\
\textsuperscript{83} Kincheloe, 80. \\
\textsuperscript{84} Kincheloe, 80; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, \textit{Critical Pedagogy}, 183. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Edwards Jr., “Cross-Pollination,” 223.
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This objection is based on what Kincheloe calls a “…perverted concept of neutrality that undermines analysis of the crisis [of democracy].”86 He asserts that democracy’s crisis stems from an increasing power disparity, which insidiously communicates the undemocratic values of powerful corporate interests through the realm of media and mass communications.87 These values include “competitive individualism, the superiority of an unregulated market economy, (a neoclassical economics) and the necessity of consumption…”88 A conception of democracy strengthened by public education has been replaced by a privatized view of education’s purpose. This turns education into a commodity, and students into consumers; a model (built on inequity) which automatically disadvantages some, and advantages others.89 A panic around non-neutral values in schooling belies the reality, according to Kincheloe, that students – like all of us – will come to form our political opinions not through our communities, but as a result of this corporate neoliberal manipulation: “The process of political opinion formation is not a linear, rational procedure but is grounded on our emotional hopes and fears.”90

In referring to this sweeping influence of corporate media over our emotions and political opinions, he adds that

[i]n addition to this power disparity, a false notion of neutrality exists in schools that impedes our ability as teachers to address such fundamental issues, such basic threats to democracy. In this pseudo-neutral culture of positivism, schooling is depicted as an objective purveyor of truth. In such a culture, educators ignore the social construction of knowledge and the dramatic role that forces of power play in knowledge construction.91
This non-critical act of ignoring leads to the wholesale acceptance of privileged knowledge and the perpetuation of injustice and oppression.  

Positivism, Kincheloe argues, remains the dominant ideological position in school. It de-contextualizes the individual from her lived experiences, and promotes scientific forms of knowledge over philosophical, or deconstructive ones:

The culture of positivism operates in a way that views the world without the benefit of the social, cultural, and political context that gives reality its meaning. Positivism is an epistemology, a way of producing knowledge that privileges the logic and methods of investigation of the natural sciences. Hermeneutical (interpretive) principles of meaning making hold little status in this positivistic culture.

Hence, to resist this de-contextualized and wholesale acceptance of dominant forms of knowledge, educators need critical pedagogy as a tool – they must use critical democratic education to interrogate knowledge through the various contexts in which students experience their reality, and to expose the power dynamics in play.

Because positivism ignores both structural power dynamics and independent or collective interpretation, it forbids education for democratic citizenship and self-determination. This kind of education leaves out the possibility of reconstruction, since it does not highlight the problems that exist in the current system. It also “…tacitly supports forms of domination, hierarchy and control.” Not only does this lack of critical education for reconstruction indicate that Dewey’s criteria for democracy will not be reached, but such a tacit support of the status quo also means that neutral values are never even close to being employed.

Freire agrees that any attempt at neutrality is actually confirmed support for the status quo, since education is political; it always carries with it a purpose conforming with some value system or another: “Because education is politicity, it is never neutral. When we try to be neutral, like

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92 Kincheloe, 75-76.
93 Kincheloe, 76.
94 Kincheloe, 76.
95 Kincheloe, 76.
Pilate, we support the dominant ideology. Not being neutral, education must be either liberating or domesticating.” Additionally, Freire notes that teachers often become so accustomed to the powerful influence of a “banking model” of education, and inculcated with the political messaging it contains, that they cannot even see the ways in which they are doing harm by participating in its perpetuation. In fact, he suggests that these educators might believe they are enabling a form of liberation. In this sanctioned act of passing down hegemonic values to students, any radical alternatives are obscured, and emancipatory education is so far impossible:

Many teachers unfortunately have been destroyed by the dominant ideology of a society and they tend to impose that way of seeing the world and behaving on kids. They usually view it as “saving” kids, as a missionary would… The dominant ideology, which serves the interests of the socially powerful, makes the world opaque to us. We often believe the ideological words that are told to us — and which we repeat — rather than believing what we’re living. The only way to escape the ideological trap, to unveil reality, is to create a counter-ideology to help us break the dominant ideology. This is accomplished by reflecting critically on our concrete experiences, to consider the raison d’être of the facts we reflect on.

Therefore, following Kincheloe and Freire’s assertions, arguments for resisting forms of critical democratic education due to bias actually work to cleverly obfuscate the fact that all education is biased, since the only way of recognizing this fact is by employing the very critical processes argued against.

Kincheloe relates that when critical pedagogues begin the process of uncovering for their students the mechanisms of hegemonic power in the construction of knowledge, they are often met with accusations of this political bias, and insinuation that they are attempting to insert political viewpoints into an otherwise “neutral” curriculum. He says that to become critical educators, teachers must become more political, so that they can identify and expose the hidden curriculum of positivism.

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96 Freire, “Reading the World,” 407-408.
97 Freire, 408.
99 Kincheloe, 77.
Freire reinforces this point by explaining that since education is in fact political by its very nature, then individual teachers’ actions have no bearing on this state:

> Education as a specifically human action has a “directive” vocation, that is, it addresses itself to dreams, ideals, utopias, objectives, to what I have been calling the “political” nature of education. In other words, the quality of being political is inherent in its essence. In fact, neutrality in education is impossible. Not impossible because irresponsible or subversive teachers so determined or because some teacher or another decided so.¹⁰⁰

The process of educating for social justice, or critical democratic education, clearly reveals that education will never be a neutral enterprise. When we engage in discourse that draws attention to hidden and systemic imbalances of power, we can see how imperfect we are – how far we still have to go. Freire explains that education is necessarily political because when individuals become aware of this unfinishedness of the human condition (i.e. undergo conscientization), we therefore become ethical – we must make choices toward our becoming finished, as well.¹⁰¹ These choices may be deemed ethical, or unethical, but they will always be political, since to be human is to be political in the context of our history and our culture.¹⁰² “In fact, if education were not essentially political, it would mean that the world would not be really human.”¹⁰³

However, this does not mean that teachers should not engage with their students in such a way that acknowledges the political nature of their lives. To this point, Freire further claims that teachers who attempt to take a neutral stance in their teaching are merely shirking their educative duties, especially implied by critical democratic education: “What is my neutrality, if not a comfortable and perhaps hypocritical way of avoiding any choice, or even hiding my fear of denouncing injustice. To wash my hands in the face of oppression.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Freire, 56-57.
¹⁰² Freire, 100-101.
¹⁰³ Freire, 101.
¹⁰⁴ Freire, 101.
2.3 Critical Democratic Dialogue: A Framework

Critical democratic education aims to uncover the hidden ways that hegemony works to oppress citizens and resist any acts of social reconstruction. Through critical pedagogy, teachers and students can critically analyze how this dominant ideology works to make education and schooling undemocratic, and finds ways of resisting these messages for emancipatory learning. Pinto’s work on critical democracy, of which I give an overview in this section, further encourages this practice.

Critical democratic education introduces two guidelines for FLE. The first is that education supporting democracy calls for using critical democratic education as a lens through which to look at the cultural artifact of education itself, and identify how it can be made to enact the values and activity of democracy. Secondly, education for democracy indicates an element of preparation of the participants involved in this education – preparation for democratic life beyond the classroom. This is supplied by the framework of critical democratic dialogue, which I outline below, through the activity of communal dialogue and the element of praxis that philosophy provides.

Pinto distinguishes between democratic education (which she calls “democracy in education”) and “education for democracy”,105 where the former means that the education system itself functions democratically, and in the latter, the education provided has as its goal the preparation of democratic citizens for democratic participation in society.106 Full democratic participation signals an engagement in democratic debate around the kind of principles that we value in our society, and how these should inform our system of education to prime students for active citizenship.107 Pinto proposes that in order to come to terms with the tensions inherent in this relationship between democracy and education, it is necessary to conceptualize a democracy that is not only consistent with the aims of education, but also might be fostered in current

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105 Pinto, “Critical Democracy,” 152.
106 Pinto, 152.
107 Pinto, 152.
This concept of critical democracy stems from the definition of democracy handed down by Dewey; the same one I have adopted in these pages. In Pinto’s view, she characterizes critical democracy as building on the idea, set out by Dewey and Freire, of democracy as a way of life; highlighting the importance of social justice to communal social transformation. For critical democracy, the focus must be on “…concern for meaningful engagement among citizens in all aspect of lived experience in which individuals become agents of social change.” Because plurality is a key aspect of this democratic participation, critical democracy underscores the importance of including oft-marginalized voices, with equity at the core of its concern. Thus, critical democracy is a participatory and deliberative form, that recognizes that (unlike with traditional democracy’s breezy definition of equality which points to treating everyone the same) all people are not afforded equal freedoms in society. The ground must be re-levelled – even when that means unequal distribution of goods and opportunities, or the application of rules regarding social interaction – for inclusion to prevail and true democracy to be realized. Although some have criticized the value and efficacy of social justice and argued that simply practicing inclusive dialogue is not a cure-all for eliminating societal inequities, Pinto maintains that critical democracy must still keep social justice in its sites if it is to usher in progress.

When comparing competing notions of liberal democracy, agonistic democracy (as Chantal Mouffe presents it) is the single approach that allows for critical democracy to flourish. Pinto

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108 Pinto, 152-153.
109 Pinto, 153.
110 Pinto, 153.
111 Pinto, 153.
112 Pinto, 154.
113 Pinto, 154.
114 Pinto, 155.
115 Pinto, 158-160.
contends that *agonism* aligns best with the goals of critical democracy since it not only encourages contrasting viewpoints, but positions the “other” in dialogical opposition as a “legitimate enemy”; one whose views may not be convinced or convincing, but who is still to be respected as a worthy adversary.\(^\text{116}\) Further, agonism does not accept that rational consensus can ever be reached, due to a diversity of values and viewpoints; it also acknowledges perspectives built on emotion, instead of just rational arguments, to be relevant views that naturally arise from political concerns: \(^\text{117}\) “What constitutes a good life, Mouffe contends, is not an absolute and so agreement and rational consensus are not always possible.”\(^\text{118}\) Unlike deliberative democracy, agonism contends that the goal of consensus disregards critical democracy’s concerns with hegemonic power, and that instead, striving for compromise actually highlights existing unequal power dynamics and re-focuses on democratic values.\(^\text{119}\) In keeping with this, as a form of democratic discourse agonism’s primary aim is eliminating unequal power, antagonism and exclusion, and reaching compromise rather than consensus.\(^\text{120}\)

In an educational context, Pinto discusses ways that schools can support critical democracy within various structural educational realms such as policy and administration.\(^\text{121}\) One main site of focus, however, is on classroom practice, and she states that teachers who want to foster democratic principles should engage in critical pedagogy by critically investigating the education system – including their role in it – and empowering students to look more deeply at current education policy while considering more progressive alternatives. This type of critical participation in the school system allows for both education *in* democracy and education *for* democracy to be integrated.\(^\text{122}\) Citing Freedman, Pinto notes that one application of this

\(^{116}\) Pinto, 160.
\(^{117}\) Pinto, 158.
\(^{118}\) Pinto, 158.
\(^{119}\) Pinto, 159.
\(^{120}\) Pinto, 158-159.
\(^{121}\) Pinto, 161-162.
\(^{122}\) Pinto, 162.
suggestion is for teachers to invite students to consider a variety of views about contemporary social and political issues, and then have them try to determine where inequities stem from through practiced critical analysis. In this way, critical pedagogy allows for subversive critical democratic practice to take place even where such values are not inherent to the institution in question.

Pinto’s analysis is helpful to envision an opening, or entrance, into critical democratic practice for educators like myself who hold fast to the belief that this reckoning should be the goal of education, despite the limitations and resistance to such activity evident in the structure and functioning of our public schools. By conceiving of a classroom devoted to this subversive exercise as a ‘safe space’ for critical democracy to flourish and Freire and Dewey’s teachings to come alive, teachers might find new and inventive ways to integrate their course content with critical pedagogical praxis involving a) concerns and experiences from the world of the students; and b) a driving pedagogy the aim of which is achieving a living agonism through democratic dialogue. With practice, students will become accustomed to hearing and experiencing one another’s positions and understand that their job is not to antagonize or persuade those whose values and beliefs differ from their own – even when in vociferous disagreement. Rather, while taking part in a dialogue where all community members support one another’s contributions and both reasoned and emotional input (when respectful) are equally legitimized, they may begin to see beyond their own positions to consider and become invested in injustices that affect the lives of others. Individuals might even begin to consider ways in which the decisions they make and the views they hold can be restrictive of others’ freedoms and self-determination.

In the construction of a framework for critical democratic education to take place in classrooms, Pinto’s work seems indispensable. Her ideas bring educators closer to imagining the kind of classroom dialogue where teachers and students, committed to critical pedagogy and social justice, can debate various topics while conducting a critical, philosophical investigation of the very institutions they find themselves a part of. Pinto’s description of agonism as the model of liberal democracy that best serves critical democratic goals can further help structure these

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123 Pinto, 163.
124 Pinto, 163.
discussions so that behavioural limits may be determined within the learning community where respect is insisted upon, even while accepting that conflict is expected.

Bai’s work combines nicely with these suggestions for building this pedagogical-philosophical framework (henceforth critical democratic dialogue). Bai, who also begins with Dewey’s more holistic notion of democracy, insists that a moral element must be cultivated in democratic citizenship.\(^\text{125}\) In this work, Bai is primarily interested in determining what qualities must be nurtured in citizens for democracy to be achieved as a communal activity.\(^\text{126}\) She indicates that this is truly a question of power – power that appears when people relate to one another while attempting the practice of “mutual governance”.\(^\text{127}\) It is important to recognize that not just any collection of individuals constitutes a democracy: “It is only when people in the group interact with each other in mutual inquiry, consultation, and deliberation with the aim of arriving at a common good that we have a democracy. The power of democracy lies precisely in the collective wisdom that emerges from mutual inquiry, consultation, and deliberation.”\(^\text{128}\) She concedes that this is actually a very difficult state to come by, due to a number of barriers.\(^\text{129}\) One of these in an entrenched belief in the “natural” superiority of some people to serve over others, although this view ignores systemic oppression, which works through disempowerment and control to confirm this bias and privilege and excuse the few who have power.\(^\text{130}\) In order that mutual governance be achieved, “ordinary folk” must be free from any type of oppression that would seek to undermine their participation.\(^\text{131}\) This conclusion resonates with the resolve of critical democracy to center the values of social justice and fight for equity among citizens.


\(^\text{126}\) Bai, 307.

\(^\text{127}\) Bai, 307-308.

\(^\text{128}\) Bai, 308.

\(^\text{129}\) Bai, 308.

\(^\text{130}\) Bai, 308.

\(^\text{131}\) Bai, 309.
Unlike the process of bargaining, practicing self-governance is not about being primarily concerned with one’s own ends: “Bargaining is what individuals do; it is not what a citizenry does. Nothing can be further from the democratic spirit and practice than the egocentric game of maximizing self-gain and minimizing self-loss.” Thus, this mutual practice of doing democracy necessitates the development of a mutual commitment to a “democratic spirit of good will and common good”. This spirit is neither naturally occurring in individuals, or effective when insisted upon by an external power, otherwise the task of democracy would not be necessary or possible. Bai concludes that a notion of common good is something that is worked toward in the group while undertaking the activities she outlines for democracy. But citizens must have the inclination to find the common good, and this “good will” toward others must be cultivated.

Just as Dewey insists that society consists not just of communication but in communication, so Bai claims that the development of the democratic disposition comes from the practice of dialogue, which will lead to mutual understanding and support between members of a pluralist citizenry: “Dialogue wherein we share our minds and hearts, therefore, is the most foundational activity of democracy. Understanding that emerges from dialogue is the foundation of sympathy and solidarity. Understanding bridges differences and draws people together. Such understanding is the source of the power that fuels democracy.” It is in the activity of sharing our unique selves with one another that understanding develops; rather than making us all the same, it allows us to fully imagine others’ lives and viewpoints, and to increase and develop our own.

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132 Bai, 309.
133 Bai, 309.
134 Bai, 309.
135 Bai, 309-310.
138 Bai, 310-311.
Two terms introduced by Bai give a clearer understanding of the process of developing care and concern for others through democratic dialogue. The first, *subjunctivity*, describes the phenomenon of empathizing with another person’s discrete experiences and beliefs; something Bai also refers to as “As-ifness”.139 This captures the sense of imagining what life might be like for another person, even though we can never know this for certain. Secondly, *intersubjectivity* describes the sharing that precedes this; the process by which individuals communicate their inner worlds with one another, a “…mutual sharing of thoughts, perceptions, values, in short, the content of consciousness.”140 The process of doing democracy that Bai conceptualizes, and which is the foundation of this thesis – a mode of associated living – is essentially this intersubjectivity.141

This practice demands certain conditions, and again, barriers assert themselves. For instance, an instrumentalist education, which posits the learning as a means to an end, instead of the end in itself that Dewey insisted on,142 creates a problem: “When the self sees itself as the subject and the world as an object, it treats the latter instrumentally, as merely a resource and tool for itself. The self that sees the world as an object is an alienated self.”143 Our consumerist culture serves to divide us, and in education, sets up a competitive model which works against the democratic disposition.144 Another obstacle to intersubjectivity is the inability of students to feel safe enough in the classroom to open up and share their innermost thoughts.145 For Bai, this “psychological danger” exists for students when an environment of mutual respect has not been developed that students can rely on.146 She notes that by loosening up and letting go of anxieties,

139 Bai, 311.
140 Bai, 311.
141 Bai, 311.
144 Bai, 312.
145 Bai, 312.
146 Bai, 312.
one can overcome the alienation of the self and embrace the other; however, she recognizes that it isn’t practical to just “tell” oneself to relax in this manner and expect results. Instead, as a means of fostering the necessary environment to encourage intersubjectivity, we might attempt “attentional work”. This involves turning away from ourselves and re-focusing deeply on others so that our fears and anxieties can dissolve. “The phenomenon describes a fundamental shift in the axes of the psyche, from egocentrism and subjectivity to intersubjectivity, wherein a subject-to-subject, not subject-to-object, relationship emerges.”

Democratic dialogue in particular allows for this attentional work to take place, since it lacks the casual familiarity of our intimate relationships which allows us to dismiss people or take them for granted. Instead, dialogue in a public space calls for a certain level of discipline necessary to achieve a studied attention on the other. Bai concludes that although school classrooms present themselves as ideal places for this democratic dialogue to occur, there is first the necessity of subverting self-serving liberal individualist philosophies that often appear in these sites, which lead us to objectify the other and remain much more interested in our own desires than the common good. The way to do this is though attentional work.

By referring to the ideas set forth by Pinto and Bai, criteria for critical democratic dialogue can be identified. First, critical democratic dialogue should be conceived of as a communal activity of democratic life. It should be grounded in the principles of social justice, which means the teacher facilitating the dialogue must be committed to equity among student voices and experiences. Because consensus is not a goal, critical democratic dialogue should allow multiple perspectives to be heard, and not avoid conflict or disagreement, so long as it is respectful. There must be a strong moral element to the practice, where students develop care and concern for one

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147 Bai, 315.
148 Bai, 315.
149 Bai, 316.
150 Bai, 316.
151 Bai, 316.
152 Bai, 316-317.
another through the process of sharing their inner lives. This moral aspect will help to bring the participants together as a community, and support the development of good will; it represents an expansion of viewpoint beyond liberal individualist solipsism to include the living conditions and life goals of everyone. Additionally, critical democratic dialogue must use critical analysis and critical pedagogy as tools with which to uncover and interrogate hidden hegemonic powers that work to undermine democracy and disempower citizens. It is by making frequent space for the practice of critical democratic dialogue in the curriculum that schools, even when not structured democratically in an institutional sense, can begin to work for democracy.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation: Conclusion

I have presented the work of these two theorists here to propose a philosophical-pedagogical framework of critical democratic dialogue. I believe the work of each deeply compliments that of the other, and that this symbiosis suggests a collaboration of their ideas, which could serve the goal of adding a philosophical dimension to FLE that would be in keeping with democracy’s reconstructive aim and inclusionary spirit. A framework of critical democratic dialogue for such a collaboration includes Pinto’s insistence on an agonistic approach; encouraging emphatic debate and allowing for dramatically different viewpoints, while still demanding mutual respect between those who disagree. It also underscores critical democracy’s dedication to social justice with its attentiveness to equity over equality, and a commitment to revealing insidious hegemonic power that undermines democracy’s aims. The framework looks to Bai for further advice on devising a working concept of dialogue fit for classroom use; her concepts of intersubjectivity and subjunctivity foster empathy and inclusion throughout the interpersonal exchange of dialogue, as well as the development of good will and a notion of the common good necessary for social reconstruction – while still allowing for the growth of non-atomistic autonomy. Like Pinto, Bai’s work also includes the element of participatory democracy, as it positions dialogue as the activity of doing democracy. By combining Bai’s dialogical processes with Pinto’s overarching commitment to agonism, critical democratic dialogue invites us to imagine the application of this model in educational spaces.

When engaged in critical democratic dialogue about the philosophical dimension of food issues and their inherent meaning to democratic life, students will be met with a variety of viewpoints that provide alternatives to their own positions. Critical reflection about these ideas, which
includes the development of philosophical stances that must adhere to one’s internal ethical system, entails action in the world. In the context of food choices, this means students will be altering the way they talk about, think about, and make decisions relating to food and the food system. It means making food choices for themselves in the present – and later, for the families they support – but it could also mean their interest and participation in a new vision for the food system. This includes but also surpasses the demands of political representation; it implies political action on an individual level but also a community level. Activism, organization, and subversion are all on the menu.

I have asserted that in this thesis I am arguing for the necessity of a philosophical dimension to FLE in Ontario high schools if we value democratic ideals; indeed, I boldly state that without this dimension education would not serve democracy. It might seem that I have strayed far from this initial assertion, which lies at the centre of my thesis argument. In fact, it is simply the case that to justify my statement it has been necessary to lay the theoretical groundwork, which I have attempted to do in this chapter.

At this point, the reader might be asking: What does all this have to do with food? In Chapter 3 I answer this question by showing that food is of central concern to the interests of members of a democratic society. Following this premise, if society is to reconstruct itself through education, as Dewey maintains, then inclusion of food issues must be part of this education. Since the education that we find necessary is a critical democratic one, and critical democratic education is committed to revealing and challenging inequities in our society, so too must this inclusion of food be presented with critical aims by educators committed to critical pedagogy.

If students in Ontario are to receive a public education commensurate with the goals of a critical democracy, then it is necessary for them to understand the ways our food system uses forms of systemic injustice to create widespread inequity, and further harms to the public commons on which we all depend. These requirements for critical democratic education also point to the necessary inclusion of a philosophical perspective; not only because a critical examination of the world means turning to philosophy to establish values for the community, but also because food issues, at their core, raise philosophical questions about the kind of life we consider to be worth living. When students and educators can utilize critical democratic education in schools to critically analyse and philosophically consider our current food system, then they will also be
undertaking the project of reimagining more progressive and socially just alternatives, and thus education will be living up to Dewey’s reconstructive standards for democracy.
Chapter 3
Towards a Democratic Food System

3 The Significance of Food: Democracy, Philosophy, and Education

In Chapter 2, I established a framework for critical democratic dialogue, and I will proceed in Chapter 3 to explain why FLE in Ontario high schools must have a philosophical component to achieve the goals of critical democratic education necessary for a flourishing democracy.

The goals of critical democratic education (outlined in the previous chapter) are relevant to food education. The development of a comprehensive FLE program in Ontario high schools should include the cultivation of self-sufficiency in learners, so experiential lessons are necessary. Food self-sufficiency should be supported by lessons that invite learners to grow, harvest and cook food. Students must understand nutritional factors. Students can investigate where foods are grown and shipped, how workers in the food system are treated, the effects on the biosphere, and how animals are raised and slaughtered. To some extent, these important aspects are already included across the array of disparate FLE initiatives being offered as supplements to the Ontario curriculum. However, if we purport to aim to teach for democratic citizenry, then we need to add much more depth to a comprehensive FLE program for Ontario high schools.

Educators and students must identify and deconstruct the obscured ideology behind our food system; to make the political, corporate goals and machinations behind what is stocked in our grocery stores apparent. This is necessary so that, in their present context – and as freshly minted adults upon finishing high school – students can make critically thoughtful, educated food choices for themselves and later, for their families. Such is the self-determination aspect of a democratic education. Without this crucial underlying critique and the thoughtful, philosophical discussion it requires, students would undoubtedly have a much more difficult time understanding the very complicated layers of issues shoring up our food system. Students must see the hidden hegemonic messaging inherent in the functioning of the global corporate food system; they must understand the full scope of choices available to them, and the impact of the ones they ultimately decide to make. If these elements of critical democratic education are missing, FLE will not support an enlightened democracy citizenry, poised for the task of social reconstruction. Thus, without this critical aspect, education will have failed democracy.
Educators must be transparent in which ethical frameworks they use. The social justice goals of critical democratic education should always be made clear to students, lest we end up becoming guilty of the kind of “banking system” of education Freire warned against. Furthermore, students must be given a chance to develop their own ethical framework for acting in the world with democratic agency, as opposed to being “handed” a set of ethical rules. By engaging with philosophical questions through critical democratic dialogue, students will not only be given a chance to test their own beliefs and ideas about the world, but will also be able to hear the experiences and beliefs of others whose well-being, throughout the process of engaging in this dialogue, they will come to care about more deeply. Through philosophically questioning and reflecting about the meaning and importance of food and the ways it affects our different lives, young citizens can begin to imagine a more socially just food system; one that will support the aims of democracy. In this way, the framework for critical democratic dialogue, matched with philosophical dialogue around food, can not only liberate students from living and making decisions in an uncritical, habitual way, but also build care and compassion for others that will inform their actions as democratic citizens and in the practice of reconstruction.

To begin this Chapter, in section 3.1 I argue that food issues are connected to democratic ones, and explain how this necessitates education for social reconstruction. Throughout section 3.2 I emphasize the need for a philosophical perspective in FLE, especially through philosophical dialogue combined with the framework for critical democratic dialogue. I briefly discuss the current state of food education in Ontario high schools, and will demonstrate that a critical, reflective element has heretofore been mostly left out. I argue that this missing element is crucial for meeting the democratic aim of education. Next, I discuss recent efforts to bring FLE to educational sites. Then, in section 3.3 I make explicit connections between the subject of food and the field and teaching of philosophy, providing support for my assertion that food is of philosophical concern. I will give a brief overview of philosophy education in Ontario high schools, revealing some possible opportunities for integrating food issues with the curriculum. Finally, in section 3.4 I will offer two examples of how the philosophical-pedagogical framework for critical democratic dialogue developed in Chapter 2 might be applied in Ontario high school classrooms. I offer these applications for three reasons: as an attempt to inspire

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educators to use them in their classrooms; to encourage further creative discussion about marrying the topic of food to critical democratic dialogue in classroom settings; and as a way of attempting within this thesis to bridge the gap between theory and practice with which philosophers of education often struggle.

3.1 Food Issues Are Democratic Issues

Food is something that every human requires for survival; therefore, our food system – the means through which we acquire nourishment and life – constitutes one of the shared interests of a democratic society. Jennifer Sumner points out that a food system may be small if the group relying on it is insulated and self-sufficient; or it may be large, such as the global corporate food system on which most of us have come to depend. In either case, food systems are of collective concern, as they are “…dynamic entities built by people to satisfy their needs and desires. In this way, food systems are relational – they embody relations among humans and between humans and the environment.” Therefore, food has democratic import not only because all citizens require access to good food for sustaining healthy lives, but also because the process by which we get our food requires collective and cooperative effort.

The global corporate food system, according to Sumner, is “…an interdependent web of corporate-controlled activities at the global scale that include production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food.” This system, driven by money and power, is primarily made up of a few giant corporations vying for bigger shares. More than half of this global system is controlled by only ten corporations, and 95% of food that Americans eat comes from these corporate entities. Citing Patel, Sumner notes that this overarching

154 Sumner, “Conceptualizing Sustainable Food Systems” 327.
155 Sumner, 327.
156 Sumner, 327.
157 Sumner, 327.
158 Sumner, 327.
corporate control of our food is maintained by lobbyists who hold sway over government policy, which then allows their grip to tighten and grow.\textsuperscript{159}

Because the neoliberal free market economy encourages corporate greed and ignores shared social interests, great harms continue to be perpetuated on human beings, living creatures, and the environment through the global corporate food system.\textsuperscript{160} Therefore this current system is unsustainable, and does not support democratic life.

To conceptualize a notion of sustainability, Sumner begins with an idea of the \textit{civil commons} as “…any co-operative human construction that protects and/or enables the universal access to life goods.”\textsuperscript{161} This sphere of the civil commons aligns with a notion of shared interests and necessitates democratic participation, since,

\[\text{… the civil commons is based on co-operation, not competition. It does not occur naturally, but is constructed by people, and thus centres on human agency. It protects through rules and regulations, and it enables through opening up possibilities and opportunities. The civil commons involves universal access, not access only for those who can afford it. And it provides life-goods such as clean air, unadulterated food, potable water, education, and health care.}\textsuperscript{162} \]

The civil commons, then, represents the democratic endeavour of self-organization, and the construction of a system of shared interests that support and maintain life. The civil commons prioritizes these interests above all others, and secures their access by every member of society. Moreover, the civil commons relies on \textit{sustainability} insofar as the latter provides “…a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons.”\textsuperscript{163} Sustainability efforts may take many forms, from government-mandated to community-organized; and operate in a variety of ways,

\textsuperscript{159} Sumner, 327.  
\textsuperscript{160} Sumner, 328.  
\textsuperscript{161} Sumner, 329.  
\textsuperscript{162} Sumner, 329.  
\textsuperscript{163} Sumner, 329.
such as through education or group decision-making.\(^\text{164}\) The requirement is that all efforts must support and strengthen the civil commons, meaning that so far as the food system is concerned, “…to qualify as sustainable, the activities in a food system would have to contribute to co-operative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to the life-good of food.”\(^\text{165}\)

A food system that is run privately, such as the global corporate system, cannot be considered sustainable partly because it does not allow for the cooperative, democratic participation of those who rely on it.\(^\text{166}\) The corporate system chooses “money values” over “life values” and this competitive pursuit of wealth on a global scale is what has led to a crisis of sustainability.\(^\text{167}\) Furthermore, such a system does not live up to the values of social justice to which democracy is committed. Beginning with Basok, Ilcan, and Noonan’s definition of social justice, Sumner claims that food is a social justice issue, since she defines social *injustice* as “…an inequitable distribution of fundamental resources and lack of respect for human dignity and diversity, such that minority groups’ life interests and struggles are undermined and that forms of political interactions do not enable all groups to voice their concerns for change.”\(^\text{168}\)

In her “report card” for social justice criteria, Sumner states that the global corporate food system does not “meet basic human needs”, as evidenced by the hunger epidemic in the developing world. It does not “guarantee freedom from exploitation and oppression” because its practices are responsible for increasing obesity and food consumption-related health problems, destroying ecosystems and threatening species, enacting cruelty to animals, and decreasing the prevalence of cultural food traditions in Indigenous communities and elsewhere. Finally, it doesn’t “provide

\[^{164}\text{Sumner, 329.}\]

\[^{165}\text{Sumner, 329-330.}\]

\[^{166}\text{Sumner, “Serving Social Justice;,” 69.}\]

\[^{167}\text{Sumner, 64.}\]

\[^{168}\text{Sumner, 64.}\]
access to opportunity and participation,” as evidenced by the fact that only a few large industrial leaders make decisions that affect the majority of people, who have no say.169

Because food, and our food system, is part of the civil commons and concerns all members of a democracy, all members must have participatory access to its reconstruction. If our society is to reconstruct the food system, installing a sustainable prototype in its place, then citizens must be able to see what is wrong; reflect on what model would better represent cherished values; and work together to bring about change. Right now, this is not possible, because our food system is controlled by a few corporate enterprises and lobbyist groups with narrow, self-serving interests; but also because our education system has not included a critical, philosophical examination of our food system through which this reality might be exposed and challenged.

3.2 Food Literacy Education: Current Trends and Gaps

Food studies as a discrete academic field has emerged in universities at the level of graduate education only in recent years, and is still under development as an area of study recognizing the interdisciplinary breadth and cultural and sociopolitical significance of issues related to food.170

In Ontario high schools, however, the mention of food has been sprinkled into a few different courses from grades 9 through 12, mostly as an adjunct to the main subject. Currently, in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s curriculum documents, the topic of food surfaces mainly in the subject fields of Health and Physical Education, and Social Sciences and Humanities. Although some emphasis on critical analysis around food issues is included, as I will show in this section, a sufficient critical democratic approach to uncovering the neoliberal agenda is missing. Furthermore, an aspect of philosophical dialogue and reflection, which would allow students to consider the values they deem important for a democratically functioning, collective food system, is also absent. These elements are necessary aspects of a comprehensive FLE if it claims democratic aims.

In the curriculum for Health and Physical Education, the introduction states that students shall gain, “…an understanding of the factors that contribute to healthy development, a sense of

169 Sumner, 66-67.

170 Koç, MacRae, Noack, and Üstündağ, “Food Studies,” 4-15.
personal responsibility for lifelong health, and an understanding of how living healthy, active lives is connected with the world around them and the health of others.” As seen in this case, the thrust of the inclusion of food throughout courses in this department has a very individualist bent. Most references are to students learning how to identify and make nutritious food choices for their own health, and not to investigating food from a philosophical angle. Although in a section on “Instructional Approaches”, educators are advised that teaching in this field should include “constructivist teaching and experiential learning” and “higher-order thinking skills”; these are cited as necessary to facilitate the teacher’s ability to serve the diverse needs of all students, and help students make connections between their choices and the effects of these to their health. Obviously, these are important goals, but requirements are not set out in these course documents for creating a deeper understanding of the meaning of food beyond its teleological purpose.

In the revised 2015 version of this curriculum, occasional mentions of the necessity for critical examination of our current food system appear within learning expectations. These infrequent mentions indicate the possibility for exciting opportunities for critical democratic education. However, the expectations fall short of this ideal by continuously framing the purpose of the analysis as a way for individuals to make choices about their own health, instead of proposing examples of how the food system itself must be retooled. For instance, in the Grade 9 Healthy Active Living Education (HALE) course, under the learning strand “Healthy Living”, specific expectation C3.1 states that,

[b]y the end of this course, students will analyse the influence of social and environmental factors on food and beverage choices (e.g., financial status, culture, religion, media influence, peer influence, family food traditions, accessibility of different kinds of food, restaurant choices, proximity to where food was produced, environmental impact of food production methods).

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172 Ministry of Education, 55-56.
173 Ministry of Education, 106.
The accompanying teacher prompt encourages educators to engage with this goal by asking students to name some factors that affect the way people choose what they will eat.\textsuperscript{174} The follow-up examples of possible student responses list:

- “Families in which the adults work long hours may have less time for meal planning and preparation. It can be harder to make healthy choices when you have less time and less money.”

- “Things like food production, transportation, and packaging can have a serious impact on the environment. To reduce my carbon footprint and other environmental impacts, I try to choose local fresh foods.”

- “I belong to an Inuit family that lives in the city. I haven’t grown up eating traditional foods such as game and arctic fish. Because these foods are important to our culture, I would like to learn about them and ways of preparing them.”

- “Food choices may not be the same in every part of Ontario because of differences in the kinds of foods that can be produced in or easily shipped to different areas, like the Far North, rural areas, or cities.”\textsuperscript{175}

It is encouraging to see some of the complex effects of the global corporate food system in the official curriculum; still, a collective, constructive dialogue linking these factors to oppressive, undemocratic messages from the status quo is necessary. Framing these discussions simply as important for making individual food choices, the curriculum only enforces the neoliberal ideology, equating democratic citizenship with consumerism. Not only does this let the corporate powers controlling the food industry off the hook, but it divides students into single units of questionable power, instead of promoting the collective force of an active democratic community.

In the Humanities and Social Sciences, a similar treatment of food issues can be found. Courses dealing with food in this field are almost exclusively located in the Family Studies curriculum, which contains five courses focused on food and nutrition. This food education curriculum is largely limited to nutritional information for the purposes of meal planning and maintenance of a

\textsuperscript{174} Ministry of Education, 106.

\textsuperscript{175} Ministry of Education, 106.
healthy diet, as well and developing practical skills related to food preparation, such as those related to safe food-handling.\textsuperscript{176}

A short section of the curriculum titled, “Critical Thinking and Critical Literacy in Social Sciences and Humanities” emphasizes the importance of reading for meaning that would be consistent with critical pedagogy. It states:

Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking by focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable, who benefits from the text, and how the reader or viewer is influenced.\textsuperscript{177}

A nascent notion of critical democratic education is apparent, but disappointingly, these critical activities seem to be framed as individual ones, and fail to promote a pedagogy intent on democratic practice.\textsuperscript{178} This begs the question of how educators who are unaware of critical pedagogy could integrate critical literacy in their classrooms, and how they might come to link to the activity of democratic citizenship.

The sparse degree to which food and its conspicuousness in our lives is represented by the courses required in high schools has triggered various initiatives to implement further FLE. Most of these initiatives respond to the fact that in the few places that food appears in the high school curriculum, almost all are relegated to courses that are elective. In other words, there is a groundswell of concern within the organizations leading these FLE efforts that most students are not receiving sufficient education about food required to live healthy lives.

At present, the goal of bringing FLE into high schools has been taken on primarily by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), most of which are non-profit.\textsuperscript{179} It is important to note here that the stated focus of this supplementary education is not the same as that which I have asserted

\textsuperscript{176} Ministry of Education, \textit{Humanities}, 152-211.
\textsuperscript{177} Ministry of Education, 47.
\textsuperscript{178} Ministry of Education, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{179} Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, “Food Literacy in Education.”
the need for. In fact, most agencies dedicated to reaching students with food education programs do not focus on democracy, dialogue, or critical pedagogy; but on hands-on, experiential learning opportunities.

There does not seem to be an “official” definition of food literacy education cited anywhere. In general, these organizations state that the aim of FLE is the delivery of education focused on food, nutrition, and health – underscoring food choices and food preparation skills, as well as establishing access to good food. The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group claims that food literacy, “…encompasses a wide range of knowledge and skills related to healthy food choices, including knowing how foods are grown, and practices related to choosing, preparing and consuming food.”180 This group proposes as a main point of action for increasing food literacy knowledge through schools, to “[i]nclude evidence-based food literacy education about nutrition, food, growing, harvesting, gathering and producing food, and food skills development as a mandatory part of the curriculum at all grade levels.”181 In fact, an insistence on the implementation of a mandatory FLE program for all students in Ontario – and food literacy as a requirement for Grade 12 graduation – is something that groups such as FoodShare, a long-standing not-for-profit organization in Toronto, have been endorsing for years.182 And in 2014, the Ontario Home Economics Association sent a petition to the Premier of Ontario, urging Food and Nutrition courses to be made compulsory.183 Due to this mounting pressure, it is not difficult to imagine a future change in education policy that would demand cross-subject implementation of FLE, echoing the financial literacy and environmental education policies that have been mandated as additions to the curriculum in recent years.184

181 Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group, 26-27.
183 Care2, “Petition.”
184 Ministry of Education, Financial Literacy; Ministry of Education, Shaping Tomorrow.
In Ontario, many FLE initiatives take the form of class-length workshops with hands-on activities delivered by visiting groups to elementary school children. Several organizations described in Chapter 1 provide FLE to high school students – both in and outside of schools – and some critical education is apparent among these interventions. When present, however, a focus on the necessity for sustainability tends to be narrowly tied to individual food choices in the same way that is apparent in the curriculum documents.

Perhaps the most thoughtful and critical example of these FLE projects, however, originates from FoodShare. FoodShare Toronto describes itself as “…an innovative non-profit food distribution hub and a community food education centre, working with a network of like-minded partners. We are committed to serving communities that experience the most food insecurity in Toronto.” As part of their mission, FoodShare emphasizes the development of “community led projects” with a strong attention to supporting “food security and food justice.” This organization is powered by collective community activity, and through their work, FoodShare seems intent not only on uncovering the ways that our current food system acts oppressively, but also on finding methods of collectively constructing new alternatives.

Food to Table Schools is the name of FoodShare’s FLE outreach program, in which adults trained through their educator training sessions visit schools and lead classes in workshops, where students learn about healthy foods and the necessity of a sustainable food system; and make their own salads, pop bottle planters, and composters. On its website, FoodShare includes a page of free, downloadable resources for teachers to use in classes from kindergarten through Grade 12. All resources include explicit connections to curriculum expectations for specific courses already in schools, and many replicate the workshops offered by FoodShare’s outreach educators. Among the options available are 39 workshops, most of which are for the

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185 Toronto Youth Food Policy Council.
186 FoodShare, Strategic Plan, 5.
187 FoodShare, 6.
188 FoodShare, “Just City.”
189 FoodShare, “Teaching Teachers.”
elementary level, and five lesson or unit plans, two of which are designed for high school classroom use.¹⁹⁰

One of these two unit plans, titled *What Toronto Eats*, is designed to connect with learning expectations for classes in Canadian and World Studies, Food and Nutrition, Health and Physical Education, and others in the Social Sciences and Humanities department, ranging in grades from 9 to 12.¹⁹¹ The plan highlights the issue of food insecurity in Toronto, and one of its learning objectives is listed as “…think[ing] critically about food security and the factors that influence it.”¹⁹²

Every FoodShare teaching resource includes notes to educators regarding the importance of a teaching approach dedicated to equity and social justice, and this particular unit instructs teachers to “[f]ocus on systems, structures and outside influences that lead to/force people into making less healthy food choices, rather than shaming or blaming individuals.”¹⁹³ This remarkable insight exposes FoodShare’s ethical agenda, and throughout the document, language emphasizing a framework of “critical thinking and empathy”¹⁹⁴ takes precedence. Within this unit, students are asked to draw from their own personal experiences to list ways that their access to good food has been thwarted in the past; distinguish between notions of food security and hunger; and understand the meaning of food justice, “…a lens that recognizes that poverty and racism are at the root of food insecurity.”¹⁹⁵ Finally, as a culminating activity, students are to form groups and brainstorm methods that could be implemented in the city to help prevent people from becoming food insecure, and then share these ideas with the whole class.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ FoodShare, “Teaching Teachers.”
¹⁹² FoodShare, 1.
¹⁹³ FoodShare, 2.
¹⁹⁴ FoodShare, 2.
¹⁹⁵ FoodShare, 5-6.
¹⁹⁶ FoodShare, 10.
This unit provides an excellent example of FLE that encompasses a more complete view of food issues. The lesson and its activities are dynamic and engaging, encouraging student input and adopting a tone of critical democratic education. Further inclusion of critical democratic dialogue might be implemented to include the practice of democratic activity, and philosophical inquiry would be suitable for this lesson as well. Students may wish to explore notions of justice in this unit, or differentiate between positive and negative forms of freedom. Even so, the unit as it stands honours the spirit of critical democracy; the only unfortunate thing is how few of these resources for FLE currently exist.

3.2.1 Objections

At this stage, it is worthwhile to identify an objection that may arise in this chapter pertinent to the tensions of teaching for democratic citizenship. There are those who assert that framing students as consumers and their food choices as significant enough to change the food system are wrong-headed. This argument is built on a foundational claim that educating students on how to become democratic citizens disempowers these learners in the present and disregards their current participation in their lives and experiences. Van Poeck and Vandenabeele’s objection rests on an argument stemming from work by Robert Lawy and Gert Biesta, which warns against a vision of citizenship-as-achievement, and instead advances the educational model of citizenship-as-practice. Lawy and Biesta claim that citizenship-as-achievement, as the dominant and long-held approach to citizenship education, connects citizenship with “duty and responsibility,” and takes a limited view of democratic acting. The authors conclude that citizenship education that prepares students to become citizens is instrumentalist in nature, as it creates a list of standards on the way to achievement, which can be used to exclude those who haven’t met these standards. Conversely,

197 Van Poeck and Vandenabeele, “Sustainable Development.”
199 Lawy and Biesta, 37.
200 Lawy and Biesta, 37.
201 Lawy and Biesta, 42.
...the notion of citizenship-as-practice, articulated as an inclusive and relational concept, provides a much more robust framework for elucidating what it means to be a citizen. Citizenship-as-practice not only encompasses problems and issues of culture and identity but draws these different dynamic aspects together in a continuously shifting and changing world of difference.  

This model nurtures the practice of dialogue, and acknowledges acts of participation as key to citizenship.

Katrien Van Poeck and Joke Vandenabeele take up Lawy and Biesta’s argument, applying it to the realm of education for sustainable development (ESD), of which FLE might seem a natural part, due to its interest in sustainability. Accentuating the common practice of instructing students in ESD that their choices and actions affect the future sustainability of the planet, Van Poeck and Vandenabeele criticize the citizenship-as-achievement mold as being inaccurate in its accusations of the citizen as a responsible agent when it comes to crises of sustainability:

Sustainability issues are situated in a field of tension between the personal and the political, as almost every ‘private’ decision has ‘public’ consequences and social conditions affect individuals’ freedom of choice. They have far-reaching implications and require a democratic approach based on participation. Yet it is by no means obvious that citizen participation will enhance sustainability and serve the ‘common good’.  

The authors argue that the ESD literature sends out an “empty” call for pluralism. They advocate instead for the citizen-as-practice model, because it emphasizes democratic practices in educational processes over a continued focus on acquiring individual competences.

Though the overarching claims here are compelling, I think that what I have promoted in these pages escapes the wrath of the authors on the basis that the framework for critical democratic

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202 Lawy and Biesta, 37.
203 Lawy and Biesta, 44-45.
204 Van Poeck and Vandenabeele, “Sustainable Development,” 543.
205 Van Poeck and Vandenabeele, 541-542.
206 Van Poeck and Vandenabeele, 549.
dialogue I have constructed follows the citizenship-in-practice paradigm. It is true that I have made mention of the importance of an education that prepares citizens to be democratic actors; I have also claimed that an awareness of being with others in the world fostered by the practice of critical dialogue will encourage students to think about the consequences of their actions and choices on others. Balanced with the employment of critical democratic education that seeks to reveal the forces of hegemony, this growth in autonomy should prove to promote activism and community, not myopia. Even if it is true that students’ individualized food choices cannot make great waves in the context of a massive and powerful global system, democratic autonomy is an important ingredient for citizens to come to develop and express their political and ethical beliefs to one another. Encouraging individuals to share their lived experiences of the food system foregrounds the values of social justice, because it celebrates inclusivity and recognizes students as citizens and actors now and thus, respects the students as they are, instead of how they will be in the future. Additionally, the framework is built on dialogical activity, which is also a characteristic of citizenship-as-practice. It is this collective activity of multiple autonomous individuals that creates the unity required for democratic practice in the public sphere.

I have argued here that FLE will only be comprehensive when it includes a philosophical component. Because my framework depends on critical educators who are dedicated to critical democracy, part of this education involves critical pedagogy; a commitment to looking critically at the education system, as well as other societal institutions, to see how they function to perpetuate injustices. Turning the food system inside out and examining it through such a lens will highlight the inadequate ways that food is distributed and humans and animals are treated, and the messaging from corporate interests and the dominant culture that combine to further inequities and put sustainability at risk. Instead of focusing on blaming individual consumers (students and their families) and encouraging behavioural change through inciting anxiety or guilt, critical pedagogy aims to empower learners by showing them how injustice works and what systems are to blame, and allows them to work together through praxis by naming and apprehending these problems and then planning together for systemic improvements. Furthermore, creating spaces in education for dialogue where students are sensitively encouraged to listen to and respect one another (as the model for critical democratic dialogue underscores), means that discussion of these issues with a view to societal improvement takes on the practice of doing democracy called for by proponents of this critique. This process honours Dewey’s
claim that the aim of education is social reconstruction; giving students the opportunity to reimagine and rebuild their future and think about public problems by way of problem-solving, rather than feeling that their isolated individual behavioural changes may be merely a drop in the bucket.

Critical Pedagogy does the opposite of blaming the consumer; instead, it empowers individuals and encourages them to use their power as democratic citizens to demand change. Encouraging and teaching democratic dialogue by applying the pedagogical framework I have outlined in Chapter 2 is a more emancipatory model of educating, and falls in line with Lawy and Biesta’s model of citizenship-as-practice.

This critical democratic dialogue framework allows students to approach and work through these problems in the civil commons by respecting one another’s views and ideas, even when they disagree heartily. Democratic agonism moderated by teachers committed to social justice gives students an opportunity to practice doing philosophy, as well as doing democracy. This active practice is what critical democratic education is all about.

3.3 Philosophy Education and Food: Practice and Place

The main aim of public education ought to be the cultivation of critical democracy. At its heart, this is a thesis about how practicing critical democratic education is also practicing, or doing, philosophy. Just as critical democratic education is essential to cultivating and maintaining a democratic society, so then is philosophical practice. In every instance, in the element of reflection – that aspect of the praxis insisted upon by critical pedagogues\(^\text{207}\) – we find the doing of philosophy. When students consider the meaning of ideas like power, hegemony, citizenship, and freedom, and how these concepts look and feel and affect their lives, they are practicing philosophical reflection; when they are discussing these ideas among themselves using critical democratic dialogue, they are also engaging in philosophical discourse. Certainly, it is possible – perhaps even usual – for educators to lead students through philosophical lessons without critical pedagogy anywhere in sight. But the same cannot be said when critical pedagogy is implemented; by its very nature it demands a high level of philosophical engagement.

3.3.1 Doing Philosophy: The Importance of Philosophical Dialogue

Up to this point, it has been suggested that critical democratic education must seek to level out the tension between the contradictory values of individuality and community by striking a balance between these. When we examine philosophical dialogue, what emerges is an act that highlights both. Even when philosophical inquiry takes place with critical democratic dialogue in the public sphere, as I have promoted, the element of reflection that it insists upon makes clear that for the democratic project of social reconstruction to be realized, intellectual autonomy is a necessary step.

Educating for democracy also means empowering students to become intellectually autonomous actors in the public, or political, sphere. Students must know that with this power comes the responsibility of considering the impact of their actions on other humans, non-human animals and the environment, and holding a deep belief that one is ethically invested in the wellbeing of others. Just as there can be no autonomous participation in the activity of democratic reconstruction on the part of citizens who suffer from inequitable access, it is also true that continual championing of the insights and aims of critical democracy takes individual, conscious choice and autonomous devotion to this task.

When students participate in philosophical reflection, they make intellectual connections between the ways they think, and the ways they conclude they should act in the world, to remain in integrity with themselves. This process is a fundamental part of becoming a democratic actor, since it foregrounds freedoms that individuals must secure to pursue the life they want to live, while taking meaning from their actions. Although it remains crucial that individual rights and freedoms must not take precedence over the social justice project of the democratic community, educators must not simply attempt to indoctrinate their students with these values through transmission. Bai warns that teaching moral education without autonomy often results in “programming students’ behaviour”; in other words, teaching students how to behave rather than

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209 Goodman, 93.
This conception of autonomy “…celebrates and promotes the individual capacity to think for oneself and to enact such a freedom,” and is distinguished from the atomistic view which privileges the self over the other, and is problematized by postmodern thinkers.\textsuperscript{211} Liberal individualism retains a stranglehold on the values of consumerism and competition promoted through various modes of transmission in our neoliberal world – including schooling. Even so, a notion of intellectual autonomy is missing from the ‘banking model’ of education widely supported by this ideology.\textsuperscript{212} Since social justice, as the guiding principle of critical democratic education, supports inclusion of all members in democratic reconstruction, it is important that these individuals be allowed to decide for themselves what constitutes their personal belief system and blueprint for acting in the world.

This is not to say that philosophical inquiry in educational spaces should only be engaged by individuals in solitary vacuums. On the contrary, collaboration from other members in the intellectual community with disparate viewpoints is essential to the development of autonomous beliefs. Robert Fisher argues that, in fact, one cannot legitimately come to build an ethical framework without interaction with such a community:

Genuine values, like all moral points of view, are best created and tested through reflection and sustained enquiry. The community of enquiry provides a model of values in actions as well as an opportunity to subject values to critical enquiry. It becomes a powerful means of moral education because values are embedded in the very procedures and moral routines of the enquiry. These are the rational passions of moral reasoning without which a community of enquiry cannot successfully function. Values that are practiced in a community of enquiry become part of who you are and what you care about.\textsuperscript{213}

So, the activity of philosophical dialogue is necessary for autonomous moral development because it provides an opportunity for communal, critical examination of one’s moral framework. In Fisher’s view, though, it also acts to promote the very values being practiced

\textsuperscript{210} Bai, “Human Agency,” 36.
\textsuperscript{211} Bai, 52-53 [footnote 1].
\textsuperscript{212} Bai, 43.
\textsuperscript{213} Fisher, Teaching Thinking, 85.
within the dialogical activity. He points to the “rational passions of moral reasoning”. However, as I have established through the development of a framework for critical democratic dialogue, the values of members of a democratic community in philosophical dialogue will extend to a promotion of social justice principles. Furthermore, critical democratic dialogue also fosters and models care and concern for others, along with the agonistic value of communicating dissenting positions. Therefore, following Fisher, the kind of philosophical dialogue that is thoughtfully and sensitively facilitated in classrooms will serve to demonstrate the values that members of the community will come to internalize and perpetuate.

Bai concurs that this act of individuals communicating their views to one another is necessary to the development of philosophical positions. She claims that philosophy’s world-making (or “ontological shape-shifting”) comes about through this dialogue, where we take information and turn it into personal knowledge, come to a subjective understanding of reality/the world, and then share that understanding through language. This dialogical process also allows for the critical examination of subjective concepts.

Philosophical dialogue acts as a way for students to test not just their values, but what they know. Students may arrive at school believing that their knowledge claims are unwavering; that they will not be swayed in their beliefs because their reasoning is sound. But it is through philosophical dialogue that we truly come to understand the world, by adding new information, now subjectively appropriated, to our stores of personal knowledge. Authentic dialogue, à la Socrates, necessitates critically examining our own thoughts and beliefs for contradiction and confusion in our search for truth. Furthermore, our knowledge is strengthened by holding it up to the scrutiny of others, as happens when this dialogue is undertaken in the classroom. To this point, Davis Aspin writes: “The presumption in favour of our acceptance of claims made upon a common framework of knowledge and understanding is our membership in a society that is

\[215\] Bai, 41.
\[216\] Bai, 41-42.
\[217\] Bai, 41.
‘open’ to the checking of such claims to know. It is only on the assumption of the possibility of error that we assert claims to know something.”\textsuperscript{218}

For students to attain the intellectual autonomy required to make thoughtful decisions as democratic citizens, educators should initiate philosophical dialogue, since it challenges students to weigh new information against their current beliefs and values, and further provides the opportunity for other members of the community to respond to these claims.

3.3.2 Teaching Food through Philosophy: The Ontario High School Context

In Ontario, there are currently two high school philosophy courses offered in the Social Sciences and Humanities. These are a) Philosophy: The Big Questions (a Grade 11 course); and b) Philosophy: Questions and Theories (a Grade 12 course). The Grade 11 course is slated as a university or college preparation course, and does not require a prerequisite.\textsuperscript{219} The Grade 12 course is slated as a university preparation course, and requires one previous university/college prep course taken in the Social Sciences and Humanities; English; or Canadian and World Studies subject areas.\textsuperscript{220} Neither course is required by any student to graduate with a high school diploma. These courses, though both elective not available at every school in the province, remain wonderful places to integrate the topic of food, and to foster both philosophical dialogue and critical democratic dialogue – although the curriculum documents do not require either per se.

The summary of the Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum states that the Humanities, represented by courses in philosophy and world religions, should provide the opportunity for inquiry, and that this “[s]ystematic inquiry” will enable learners to “…analyse problems and determine appropriate actions that they can take as individuals, or that can be taken by families, diverse groups, and even societies in response to complex local or global challenges.”\textsuperscript{221} It should follow that this encouragement of collective democratic action would signal a need for

\textsuperscript{218} Aspin, “Autonomy and Education,” 250.

\textsuperscript{219} Ministry of Education, Humanities, 328.

\textsuperscript{220} Ministry of Education, 337.

\textsuperscript{221} Ministry of Education, 7.
practicing this type of activity, such as through repeated classroom engagement in critical democratic dialogue, with the aim of this social reconstruction. In this sense, the revised curriculum documents come so close, but in failing to require this essential activity, miss the mark of providing for democracy’s aims.

In the curriculum documents, requirements are set out for teachers, outlining learning expectations for each class. For “Questions and Theories”, the course overview names a focus on investigating the so-called “Big Questions”, both in term of how major philosophers throughout history have responded to them, as well as students’ own investigation of the questions and formulation of responses. The course also emphasizes that students will come to understand how philosophy is relevant to “…society and their everyday life.” The organization of the course and the included learning strands suggest that it is focused on providing students with a foundation in the field of philosophy, as well as teaching students the ability to build soundly reasoned philosophical arguments, integrating problems relevant to their own lives.

The learning strands for the Grade 12 course also focuses on “research and inquiry skills” and “philosophical foundations”, but the remaining course expectations are devoted to presenting various branches of philosophy. These are listed as: Metaphysics, Ethics, and Epistemology (of which teachers are required to present at least two); and Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, and Aesthetics (one of which must be taught.) The course overview explains that: “Students will develop critical thinking and philosophical reasoning skills as they formulate and evaluate arguments related to a variety of philosophical questions and theories.”

What is interesting about these courses is that first, no specific learning materials are indicated for use. For instance, in the Grade 12 course under the “Research and Inquiry Skills” strand, the specific expectation A3.1 states that students will, “assess various aspects of information

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222 Ministry of Education, 338. Some of the questions listed as examples include: “What is a meaningful life?”; “What separates right from wrong?”; and “What makes a just society?”

223 Ministry of Education, 328-336.

224 Ministry of Education, 337.

225 Ministry of Education, 337.
gathered from primary and secondary sources” and provides the sample teacher prompts: “What values are embedded in the text? Whose perspectives are represented in this source? Whose are absent?” Teachers, then, are free to choose which primary and secondary sources they would like students to critically examine for underlying philosophical viewpoints. This opening provides an excellent opportunity for educators to bring topics like food into the classroom through a rich variety of material sources. Secondary sources may be represented through many different textual options, including books, music, film, advertising, etc., which can help to engage students and guide them to connect philosophical inquiry to matters in their lives.

In addition, both courses, as part of their “Research and Inquiry Skills” strands, indicate that: “Throughout the course, students will explore a variety of topics related to philosophy…to identify topics for research and inquiry.” However, it is not mentioned how these philosophical topics might be explored, or what form the related inquiry should take. The opportunity is ripe for teachers leading these courses to thoughtfully include critical democratic dialogue, with a focus on philosophical inquiry, as a key part of their pedagogy. Practicing this form of critical inquiry will allow students to be doing democracy as well as doing philosophy. But this opening in the curriculum points to subjective interpretation, which also means teachers may simply resort to a lecture-style approach, precluding the possibility for democratic practice in their classrooms.

Ontario’s high school philosophy teachers come from disparate undergraduate educational backgrounds and use a variety of teaching methods. A 2009 study by Laura Pinto, Graham McDonough, and Dwight Boyd investigates the practices of this relatively new group of educators (as philosophy was first added to the Ontario curriculum only in 1995). The authors employed an online survey and follow-up interviews to capture and measure teachers’

227 Ministry of Education, 329, 338. For both courses this is listed as “Specific Expectation” A1.1.
228 Cashmore, “Changing Values.” Sarah Cashmore has argued that current philosophy education in Ontario high schools focuses on teaching about philosophy rather than how to do philosophy, and that the exclusion of philosophical dialogue in these courses is misguided.
229 Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, “Socrates,” 69.
experiences, attitudes and classroom practices regarding teaching philosophy.\textsuperscript{230} Overwhelmingly, philosophy teachers in their sample stated that although lecture and class discussion were the \textit{most commonly employed} pedagogical styles, across the board class discussion was deemed far more \textit{effective}.\textsuperscript{231} In fact, only 44\% of the sample considered lecturing to be a “very effective” instructional strategy, while a whopping 87\% felt the same about discussion.\textsuperscript{232} Interestingly, when surveyed about the use of “problem-based applied philosophy”, 75\% of the philosophy teachers thought this method was effective in reaching students.\textsuperscript{233}

It seems extremely encouraging to a project invested in the adoption of philosophical dialogue that such a high percentage of teachers in the survey considered class discussion to be the most effective pedagogy employed. However, the nature of these discussions and how they may differ from classroom to classroom is not clear.\textsuperscript{234} Nevertheless, it would not be out of line to propose that these same teachers and students might come to find the application of a framework for a \textit{specific kind} of dialogue similarly “effective” as a method for investigating philosophical questions around food in the classroom.

One anticipated barrier to the adoption of critical democratic education in a philosophy classroom, as with any classroom, is the commitment of the teacher herself. Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd’s survey indicated that 75\% of philosophy teachers avoided encouraging students to take part in a critical, or “oppositional” reading of textbooks commensurate with the practices of critical pedagogy.\textsuperscript{235} The authors speculate that one reason for this could be many teachers’

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{230} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 71-72.
\textsuperscript{231} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 72. The sample had 53 teachers total, which the authors estimate represented approximately 16\% of all high school philosophy teachers in Ontario at the time the survey was administered (the article was published in 2009).
\textsuperscript{232} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 78-79. The authors note that this finding might point to the need for further research, since it appears counter-intuitive that teachers who found the lecture style to be ineffective would continue to employ it so frequently (Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 79).
\textsuperscript{233} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 78-79.
\textsuperscript{234} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 80.
\textsuperscript{235} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 78.
\end{footnotesize}
reported discomfort in the field of philosophy, due to a lack of formal academic training. Such discomfort may have lead these teachers to rely on a “dominant”, or straight-forward engagement with the textbooks lest they inadvertently undermine their authority in the classroom by attempting to challenge material with which they are unfamiliar.\textsuperscript{236} Other possible reasons are listed as, “…perceived or real pressure from students, parents or colleagues to accept ‘official’ knowledge in texts and avoid controversial perspectives, and pressure from administrators and others to adhere to provincial curricular expectations.”\textsuperscript{237} In any case, it remains possible that teachers committed to critical democratic teaching might find the application of critical democratic dialogue to be an effective tool with which to interrogate the “hidden curriculum” around food issues in our society.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created a document titled \textit{Teaching Philosophy in Europe and North America} from a summit in France in 2011. The authors of the document emphasize the utility of philosophical dialogue for fostering democratic citizenship and critical education, because,

\begin{quote}
…philosophizing is above all a fundamentally critical approach, which can thus contribute to fostering a democratic culture. Indeed, a democratic culture regards intellectual debates and confrontations not as a problem to be disregarded, but as a central component of citizens’ life in the polis. In this perspective, the critical strength of philosophy can contribute to make this logics of confrontation as rational as possible.\textsuperscript{238}
\end{quote}

Although the language of a “logics of confrontation” may be taken as a dismissal of arguments grounded in emotion, which agonism acknowledges as legitimate viewpoints, the spirit of critical democratic dialogue is endorsed in UNESCO’s vision of philosophical dialogue.

\textsuperscript{236} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 78. The authors note that since 2008, after this study was conducted, Philosophy has finally been offered as a teachable subject at Ontario teacher’s colleges (Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 73). This fact might mean that a higher percentage of current teachers feel comfortable teaching philosophy than indicated in this survey, although the hiring demand for teachers in Ontario has not been significant since then, so the population represented in this sample may not have changed in any notable way.

\textsuperscript{237} Pinto, McDonough, and Boyd, 81.

\textsuperscript{238} UNESCO, \textit{Teaching Philosophy}, 44.
UNESCO’s publication also weighs in on the importance of dialogue in secondary school philosophy classes. The following selection, by Luc Bégin, refers to the importance of an education foregrounding dialogue for positively exploiting a pluralist society to democracy’s aims:

By encouraging young people to engage in discussion and reasoned exchanges, by encouraging discernment and openness of mind, we are not only teaching them cognitive skills but also teaching them to experience this constructive relationship to others…[D]ialogue is something that should enable young people, once they have become responsible citizens, to construct a way of living together that is valid for the pluralistic society that we belong to.\(^{239}\)

Again, this assessment is slightly limited in the sense that it fails to recognize students as democratic citizens now, rather than at a distant point in the future. But it does support the kind of community-building activity demonstrated by the critical democratic dialogue framework.

As far as the matter of how philosophical inquiry can serve a critical investigation of food issues, such an application is not difficult to imagine. Food issues, as I have established, are of intrinsic concern to democratic citizens. Educators committed to critical democratic education who bring food, as a topic, into their classrooms, will necessarily be inviting philosophical inquiry. Not only does philosophical dialogue move students toward a democratic disposition and help them integrate new information with an autonomous knowledge center, but by employing applied philosophy such as looking critically at food issues, teachers can make philosophical questions directly relevant to the world of the students. This practice of integrating content from the lived experiences of students into the curriculum is known as culturally relevant pedagogy. It is a practice of critical pedagogues touted for its ability to engage students by respectfully recognizing forms of knowledge they bring to the classroom, and thus helping teachers to build curriculum that better reflects students’ lives.\(^{240}\)

Some examples of philosophical questions that might be raised in these classrooms can be found in Jonathan Saffron Foer’s book, *Eating Animals*. Foer and his wife, when they discovered they

\(^{239}\) UNESCO, 46.

were expecting their first child, decided it was important to determine what they would feed their new family.²⁴¹ This book is Foer’s personal, philosophical investigation into one aspect of the global food system, through which he faces multiple philosophical conundrums regarding the practice of eating animals. Early on in the text he regards his beloved pet dog George, and wonders why it would never have crossed his mind to eat him. He posits that this sentimentality that humans show for their pets is an interesting place to start thinking critically about eating meat: “Eating animals has an invisible quality. Thinking about dogs, and their relationship to the animals we eat, is one way of looking askance and making something invisible visible.”²⁴²

By tracing his line of thinking, Foer presents the next premise: that our treatment of different animals has a contentious moral basis:

No reader of this book would tolerate someone swinging a pickaxe at a dog’s face. Nothing could be more obvious or less in need of explanation. Is such concern morally out of place when applied to fish, or are we silly to have such unquestioning concern about dogs? Is the suffering of a drawn-out death something that is cruel to inflict on any animal that can experience it, or just some animals?²⁴³

These kinds of questions, and the material they deal with, hold definite relevance and interest for high school students, many of whom undoubtedly will have already considered these problems, and perhaps even discussed them among themselves. Foer unfolds his questioning process for the reader, demonstrating more depth as he proceeds. He tackles these questions as they arise by first asking them rhetorically and Socratically, without providing answers, but just allowing the next natural question to follow from the last, and so on, until he has provided a flow of his philosophical consciousness on the page:

Can the familiarity of the animals we have come to know as companions be a guide to us as we think about the animals we eat? Just how distant are fish (or cows, pigs, or chickens) from us in the scheme of life? Is it a chasm or a tree that defines the difference? Are nearness and distance even relevant? If we were to one day encounter

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²⁴² Foer, 29.
²⁴³ Foer, 31.
a form of life more powerful and intelligent than our own, and it regarded us as we regard fish, what would be our argument against being eaten?\textsuperscript{244}

I believe Foer’s questions provide an interesting model for how this type of inquiry might go in philosophical dialogue with high school students. Having been in Philosophy classes myself as part of my teacher training, I feel confident that these kinds of questions would engage students, and help to naturally raise further questions around food that have ethical, epistemological, metaphysical, existential, and aesthetic grounding.

Food, with its plethora of contemporary issues, provides a wealth of content through which philosophy teachers can guide fundamental philosophical queries. Moreover, issues around food choices are both political, as they have far-reaching implications, but also intimately personal, as they concern choices made at least three times a day at the site of the body. Foer reminds us that,

\[\text{[t]he lives of billions of animals a year and the health of the largest ecosystems on our planet hang on the thinly reasoned answers we give to these questions. Such global concerns can themselves feel distant, though. We care most about what’s close to us, and have a remarkably easy time forgetting everything else…Food choices are determined by many factors, but reason (even consciousness) is not generally high on the list.}\textsuperscript{245}\]

Teaching FLE in public high schools is ineffective without incorporating a philosophical dialogue that allows students to reflect deeply and critically not only about the global corporate food system, but also how the consequences of their own food choices may or may not accord with their personal beliefs and values about life in a democratic society. Food is a complex topic, requiring collective attention to the way we often superficially approach it, since,

\[\text{…as much as we might like to think that the matter of what we eat or how it is produced and distributed will always be simple and clear-cut, the preparation and consumption of foods we eat everyday are replete with opportunities for ambiguity, confusion, and disagreement. Some of the most enduring and deep disagreements}\]

\textsuperscript{244} Foer, 31.
\textsuperscript{245} Foer, 31-32.
occur when one person thinks the ethical choices are easy and unambiguous, but the next person is not so sure.\textsuperscript{246}

Any FLE project without this critical philosophical component is antithetical to these goals and in fact only serves to further support a “banking model” of education.

It is not adequate, for example, to simply teach that conventional factory farming methods employ cruel practices and therefore must be reformed. We must ask by what criteria we measure cruelty, and how we know when animals are suffering. The questions that follow naturally from this place are myriad and implicate us all:

Are animals ours to eat?

How do we differentiate between the value of animal and human life?

Do animals deserve a good life?

What is a “good life”?

What does our ongoing dominion over the animal world say about our species?

Why do these questions matter?

When we ask philosophical questions about such universal, everyday activities as eating or purchasing food – activities that might normally be performed reflexively – we demand that connections be made between these lived experiences and their meaning in a democratic context. That is, critical democratic education is made immediately and obviously relevant to students, as their lived experiences directly inform the trajectory of discussion, and hasten broader understandings and familiarity in their recognition of one another. Furthermore, upon recognizing the vitality of these connections, students will be invested in the project of democratic reconstruction, as the community begins the creative act of imagining actionable changes in the world for improving not only our food system, but also the living conditions for every member of the democratic community. Dewey reminds us that in essence, this collaborative drumming up of creative potential is the raison d’être of philosophy:

\textsuperscript{246} Thompson, \textit{Field to Fork}, 4.
[Philosophy] is an idea of what is possible, not a record of accomplished fact. Hence it is hypothetical, like all thinking. It presents an assignment of something to be done – something to be tried. Its value lies not in furnishing solutions (which can be achieved only in action) but in defining difficulties and suggesting methods for dealing with them.\footnote{Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, 326.}

As students become more fluent in critical democratic dialogue, possibilities for new ways of thinking about food, and ideas about what constitutes ethical eating and participation in social food practices will emerge from the ongoing process of democratic reconstruction.

The following section offers a few possible applications of the critical democratic dialogue framework to pedagogies focused on food and philosophy for high school classrooms in Ontario. These are by no means the only options for using this framework to approach the task of democratic reconstruction of our ailing food system. Teachers dealing with food studies may find other viable ways of making this framework suit the needs of their classroom and the students who comprise it.

### 3.4 Applications: Some Suggestions for Critical Democratic Dialogue and Philosophical Inquiry Around Food

Current extra-curricular FLE initiatives fail to consider food issues from a philosophical viewpoint, rather focusing on nutritional facts and hands-on food preparation as ways of learning about food. Even recent high school curricular development focusing on food education, which includes some critique of the current global food system, does not ask explicitly philosophical questions, nor does it mention dialogical engagement. Although the practical aspects of food nutrition and hands-on skills currently included in supplemental FLE are important for students to come to gain some knowledge about food, philosophy provides a reflective aspect – an element of praxis – to the act of eating.

I propose referring to the framework for critical democratic dialogue outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. In this next section, I rely on the framework to present two possible applications for the inclusion of the philosophical aspect in FLE, both of which may be integrated into Ontario high school classrooms.
3.4.1 Application: Food as a Single Topic in Philosophy Courses

One suggestion for application is the integration of a unit on food into an existing Grade 11 or 12 philosophy course – or even an entire philosophy course dealing with the topic of food. Gould writes that food as a single-topic introductory ethics course, which he teaches to undergraduate philosophy students, is an example of moral education.\(^{248}\) Generally, introductory ethics courses, he explains, teach students how to think: “…forming a sensitive conscience and developing decision-making skills,” and how to act: “…encouraging right action and shaping virtuous character.”\(^{249}\) But the problems with such courses are that a) they tend to take on too many disparate topics, which makes it difficult for students to see a common thread; and b) the topics covered are often not grounded in the real lived experiences of the students.\(^{250}\) Critical pedagogy solves this second problem, because it insists upon a curriculum grounded in the lives of the students, as a way of both respecting the knowledge students bring with them to school, and creating engaged classrooms.\(^{251}\)

Gould explains that a course on food ethics eliminates both problems, since its single topic creates a cohesive narrative throughout, and the issue of food is one to which every student can relate.\(^{252}\) He asserts that the moral grounding such a course provides creates a well-rounded educative approach to tackling food topics:

> It forms the cognitive and affective dimensions of conscience by awakening reflection and stirring feelings. It meets the academic objectives of developing critical thinking skills and introducing standard content knowledge. And it is a first step toward shaping character, an internalized moral commitment to eat ethically. A food course emphasizes analysis, not memorization, exposes students to real-life moral problems and forces students to confront viewpoints that oppose their own.\(^{254}\)

\(^{248}\) Gould, “Good Eating,” 149.

\(^{249}\) Gould, 151.

\(^{250}\) Gould, 152.

\(^{251}\) Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, 36-37; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, Critical Pedagogy, 9, 66.

\(^{252}\) Gould, “Good Eating,” 152.

\(^{254}\) Gould, 152.
As a melding of the investigation of real-world situations and philosophical readings, a food ethics course offers opportunities to engage with a variety of source materials,\textsuperscript{255} giving both students and teachers a chance to connect with the curriculum at different levels.

Gould’s design can be adapted for high school learners in Ontario in which Ethics exists as a Ministry-defined module. The curriculum should provide lessons for mounting a reasoned, philosophical argument, as well as a chance for students to reflect on and challenge their own beliefs and ideas, when faced with new concepts that better express their developing positions. A food ethics course (or unit) could provide both these opportunities.

Gould explains that at the beginning of his course, he always meets students who make claims to believing in moral relativism, but that these students quickly reject this notion when they learn about the treatment of factory-farmed animals. They come to express their belief in some objective moral statements (e.g. that cruel mistreatment of animals is objectively wrong), and this leads Gould to show students how to build a reasoned philosophical argument that rests on a principle.\textsuperscript{256} It seems that this kind of lesson would also be appropriate at the high school level, where some philosophy teachers worry about how, exactly, to deal with questions of moral relativity.\textsuperscript{257}

Ontario teachers could rely on James Rachels’ argument for vegetarianism to illustrate philosophical reasoning in the classroom. It might start with the principle: “It is wrong to cause an animal to suffer unless there is a good reason”, and end with the conclusion that, “Raising animals for food (and eating meat) is wrong.”\textsuperscript{258} Rachels joins these premises by supplying statements of fact and weighing of counter-arguments, until the argument is clearly laid out.\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{255} Gould, 153.
\textsuperscript{256} Gould, 153-154.
\textsuperscript{257} Norris, Pinto, and Bialystok, “Teaching and Learning,” 22-23.
\textsuperscript{259} Gould, 153-154.
Gould relates that once students understand the architecture of Rachels’ argument, they begin to critically and creatively examine it for faults and places where it could be refined:

The argument is valid, and students see the logical connections between its premises. Few reject either the moral or factual premise, and some immediately accept the argument. Others object that both empirical premise and conclusion are too broad and should be pared back to reference factory-farmed meat. This narrower conclusion, of course, still rules out most meat sold in grocery stores and served in restaurants. Some students deny that we eat meat simply because we enjoy its taste—but because it is a natural behaviour, a social custom and nutritionally necessary. Others reply that unlike wild predators acting on instinct we can control our behavior by reason, that popular practice does not make an act right and that a balanced vegetarian diet can fully nourish us. This discussion, whether or not it convinces students to forego factory-farmed meat, illustrates that moral judgements can be supported by reasoned argument.260

This quote by Gould serves to exemplify the kind of discussion that might ensue in a philosophy classroom when the topic of food is taken up. Importantly, it underscores the crucial element of philosophical dialogue among students for providing exposure to a variety of practices and beliefs, which not only helps students understand the breadth of moral positions available to them, but also supplies a situation in which the framework developed in Chapter 2 of this thesis might be applied.

There appears to be no reason why the type of philosophical dialogue proposed by Gould could not be engaged and combined with our understanding of critical democratic dialogue. Such a blending would encourage students to share their own personal experiences and beliefs about food ethics, adjusting their philosophical thinking throughout the dialogical process with others, while still conducting discussion guided by agonistic goals. The practices of intersubjectivity, subjunctivity, and attentional work would aid in students’ development of care and concern for one another, allowing for the development of a democratic spirit and possibly a conception of the common good. Furthermore, with the teacher’s guidance, the inclusion of critical democratic education as a lens through which to examine hegemonic practices and ideology around food in our culture will help to achieve the democratic aim of education, and reveal to students and their teacher how the food system serves to oppress those within it. By engaging philosophically and

communally with food, students will be taking part in the democratic activity of reconstructing the food system – an interest they hold in common.

Although the purpose of this thesis is not to insist on just one particular pedagogical practice in the classroom, I do believe that philosophy classes with food as a central topic would lend themselves quite nicely to implementing critical democratic dialogue, and a reflective element to the activity of eating.

3.4.2 Application: Embedding Philosophical Dialogue Across Subjects

A second possible application for critical democratic dialogue and its approach to food issues is the option for embedding this dialogue, pursuant to philosophical questioning and reflection, within other courses that deal with the topic of food.

One FLE initiative has already taken steps that would lay the foundation for this approach. A document called Classroom Connects was published by Ecosource in 2014, in a partnership with The Durham District School Board, and Compass Group Canada (a corporate foodservice company specializing in cafeteria management). This document is a collection of lesson plans spanning several school subjects and with an aim to “…open meaningful conversations with secondary students about our local food system, and to prepare them to better understand the complexities of our food choices.”  

Classroom Connects contains 15 lesson plans across the subject areas of Science, Business, Geography, Hospitality and Family Studies – all written by teachers in the DDSB who teach these classes. The purpose of these lesson plans is to introduce food – with a focus on local sustainability issues – to these disparate courses, through subject matter and instructional strategies aligned with the courses’ curriculum expectations.

As with many other FLE initiatives, attempts toward critical analysis in many of these lessons seems to be pre-established, rather than co-constructed among teacher and students at the site of learning. As such, it falls short of providing both opportunity for democratic practice, and an

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261 Ecosource, Classroom Connects, 1.
262 Ecosource, 3.
embracing of social justice principles. For instance, in a unit for a Business Leadership class, the teacher is instructed to introduce students to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and have students “…identify the pros and cons for being socially responsible” from the perspective of a company and its stakeholders.263 The culminating activity for the unit is that students will prepare a survey for members of the school community to measure the interest of these stakeholders in having local foods served by the school cafeteria.264 Students learn about what measures companies should take to be ethically responsible by watching a video about Ben and Jerry’s CSR strategy, and filling out a worksheet, in which they are asked if a company’s CSR is an influence for them when deciding where to spend their money.265 By framing the available ethical boundaries of action for a company from a corporate point of view, and then subsequently positioning students as the direct consumers of these company’s products, this lesson perpetuates neoliberal values. But this unit plan, along with others in this document and those not yet written, can do better by shuffling the power dynamic inadvertently presented.

The inclusion of critical democratic dialogue, along with philosophical questioning and reflection, would complement the learning goals of this lesson while ensuring that democracy is centred. Through this practice, students might communicate about what CSR means from the perspectives of citizens, and how the impetus behind companies’ actions and inactions in the corporate food chain might work against citizens’ interests in the civil commons. As a reconstructive activity, students could discuss ways that companies might change their practices to honour democratic values, if they think such a thing is possible. Some philosophical inquiry on this subject may reveal how students feel about the idea of “responsibility”, and whether CSR properly encapsulates the spirit of this notion. This dialogic process would welcome individual experiences and beliefs, opening possibilities for creative reconstruction far beyond the limited offerings of corporate agents whose main concern is the bottom line, and taking into consideration wider concerns around social justice.

263 Ecosource, 26.
264 Ecosource, 26.
265 Ecosource, 27.
An approach to incorporating food into multiple subject areas that also spreads this philosophical dialogue from class to class means that the chances are much higher of reaching a great number of students, and providing the opportunity to practice critical democratic dialogue in a familiar way – as the foundation of citizenship-as-practice. Certainly, this is not a simple task, especially for teachers who are accustomed to more traditional styles of teaching. Like democracy, it will be an on-going work-in-process, with students and teacher learning and teaching, and teaching and learning, together. But the project of reconstruction demands this element of praxis; this conscientization; this reflective, communicative, mode of being and becoming. The more chances our education system provides for this practice to take place, perhaps even ultimately centering it as the essential educative task, the more integrated the practice of reconstruction will become for all citizens – in the present, and for the future.

As a student of philosophy of education, like others in the field it is important for me to register my concern for the lack of communication between theorists and practitioners. For this reason, when approaching the topics of educating in support of democracy, and sustainability issues around our food system, it was necessary for me to think about how to develop a framework that was classroom-applicable. This philosophical-pedagogical framework contains the theoretical bones – or principles – that are a crucial place to begin for teachers interested in educating for democracy. Furthermore, the framework offers enough flexibility that teachers with just a little imagination might find ways to enact it within their lessons. For example, this critical democratic dialogue might constitute an entire lesson, while the teacher provides questions in Socratic form to students, moderating the philosophical discussion around food issues or even different public issues of democratic import. Alternately, the framework might provide a model for a class discussion that acts as an adjunct to another form of learning the teacher has facilitated. Either way, this philosophical model should by no means seem intimidating to teachers who desire an entrance to applying the principles of critical democratic education to their teaching.

Without an environment that fosters critical democratic dialogue, it is difficult to see how education will support democracy. In other words, if educators don’t attempt to create a space

where students feel that their voices are being safely welcomed, engaged, and counted, then intersubjectivity cannot exist; meaning that students may not feel that they are united in a common democratic process. Without the inclusion of critical pedagogy and a critical democratic lens, education in these spaces runs a great risk of simply perpetuating the position of the status quo – in this case, when it comes to issues pertaining to food and our eating habits – due to lack of naming, investigating, and drawing up alternatives to the ways this dominant power prevents citizens from enacting real change. A program of FLE in Ontario high schools that fails to include a philosophical dimension also fails democracy; it prevents students and teachers from engaging with the topic of food inside the democratic process, and thus makes the co-construction of a more progressive food system, and democratic future for all citizens, impossible to achieve.
Chapter 4
Conclusion

This thesis argues that without a philosophical component to FLE in Ontario high schools, such an education does not serve democracy’s aims. In keeping with the field of philosophy of education, the thesis contains two aspects: the theoretical aspect and the aspect of application. The theoretical aspect provides the philosophical foundation for the argument, using the work of contemporary philosophers in the field to build a philosophical-pedagogical framework. The aspect of application is included to provide possible pathways for utilizing the given framework in high school classrooms, thus illustrating the overall vision of the thesis argument.

In Chapter 1, I have first introduced my interests in the subjects of food, education, philosophy and democracy by way of some autobiographical context. I made mention here of how I came to understand that our global food system has dire effect on democratic life on the planet, and therefore concluded that food issues concern all democratic citizens. Working in restaurants for many years, and then studying philosophy and education at university all came to be strong influential factors in the development of this work. My pursuit of a B.Ed. at the intermediate/senior level with a Philosophy teachable further led me to imagine the ways that food and philosophy could live symbiotically within the high school curriculum. I realized that fundamentally, the depth of this connection between food and democracy can best be understood by employing a philosophical viewpoint.

Next, I briefly outlined the ways that the topic of food is approached in the Ontario high school curriculum, noting that there is a focus on practical cooking skills and health and nutritional knowledge. Although critical analysis is mentioned throughout various course expectations, it is often unclear how deep this analysis is intended to go. Investigation into these expectations points to an emphasis on personal responsibility for decoding media messages, and choosing wisely when it comes to health and nutrition. It does not appear that there is at present a concerted effort by curriculum developers to ensure that analysis extends to revealing and undermining hegemonic power and neoliberal ideology, both of which are necessary for understanding the ways the global food system affects democratic life, and imagining alternative possibilities. In philosophy classes, where a deeper level of inquiry would fit nicely with the courses’ “Big Questions” (such as what constitutes a “good life”) and different philosophical
strands (Ethics, Epistemology, etc.), there is no mention of the inclusion of food issues. Of course, these facts do not preclude the ability of enterprising students and teachers to make these connections in the classroom. This thesis is intent on firmly insisting that these connections do take place.

To follow, I claimed that attempts at bringing a broader FLE program into Ontario schools has been the work of non-profit organizations, but has mostly dealt with elementary-level schooling. These groups define food literacy as knowledge and skills around food preparation, health, and nutrition, and their hands-on programming reflects this. As is predominantly the case with the high school Family Studies and Health and Physical Education courses, most deep analysis of structural issues is kept to a minimum or altogether missing.

Finally, to conclude this discussion in my Introduction, I described that the global food system, on which we all depend, is in crisis. This system is driven by the neoliberal market economy, and in the interest of capital, has created great harm to ecosystems, farmers and food producers, animal welfare, and the health and stability of everyone involved in it. This food system is not sustainable and does not serve democratic interests. Moreover, I explained that a philosophical aspect to education around food is necessary for allowing citizens to make food choices that serve the public good. For these choices to be made autonomously, however, students must be given opportunity to explore the complexities of these issues through a philosophical lens, and come to their own ethical decisions. Therefore, to support social justice and democratic activity, this education should foreground collective, democratic dialogue and emphasize collective reconstructing of the world through the employment of critical pedagogy and critical democratic education.

In Chapter 2, I first connected the meaning of the terms democracy and education, and explained why they are necessary for a democratic society. To approach this task, I referred to the work of Dewey, a seminal philosopher of education who was also deeply concerned with these issues. I outlined Dewey’s definition of democracy as “a mode of associated living”, where he focuses on the collective reconstructive activity of its citizens, enabled through common interests held by all members and a free and continuous discourse between groups and individuals. While determining that a democratic society is the type of society we aim for, Dewey points to education as the means for reaching democracy’s goal of social reconstruction, since education
allows students to reimagine and remake their world through experience and praxis. However, I noted that for this collective process to succeed, Dewey states that all members of society must be free from oppressive forces that would prevent their access to the common interests, communication, and democratic practices of the group. Therefore, I claimed that the principles of social justice must be upheld for Dewey’s democratic society to prevail.

Next, I followed Dewey’s illuminations by connecting them to the need for a public education that privileges a critical democratic perspective. Through the work of Kincheloe, Freire and others, I described how critical democratic education, along with critical pedagogy, can aid educators and students in working toward a practice of continuous social reconstruction that is inclusive and socially just, and serves democracy’s aims. Critical democratic education unveils and confronts hidden systemic oppression by hegemonic forces, so that citizens can name and confront these forces, and build more progressive solutions together.

To close Chapter 2, I focused in even further on this argument by suggesting that a specific pedagogical-philosophical framework offered by contemporary philosophers of education may be utilized to provide for the practice of a collective dialogue advancing the values of social justice and critical democratic education. I combined the work of Pinto and Bai here to present a framework for critical democratic dialogue. Pinto affirms the importance of a critical democratic viewpoint, and settles on agonism as the ideal model for democratic practice. Bai’s work adds an explanation of intersubjectivity and subjunctivity, outlining how these devices allow for authentic democratic dialogue in public educational spaces. With the theoretical foundation for my argument established, it then remained for me to fill in the missing pieces by connecting these concepts to teaching philosophy and food literacy education in Ontario high schools.

In Chapter 3, I first justified my claim that food is a democratic issue by showing that we all rely on the global food system for survival, but that this system is unsustainable and continues to do grave damage to all life on earth. Situating food in the realm of Dewey’s notion of shared interests and Sumner’s “civil commons”, I maintained that democratic citizens must be given the opportunity to participate in remaking this system. This describes the process of social reconstruction, which means it must be provided through public education.

Next, I elucidated the current state of food education in Ontario high schools. I showed that the subject of food was represented in the curriculum in elective courses within the Physical and
Health Education and Social Sciences and Humanities divisions. In this section I emphasized that in general, food education is lacking the deep, anti-oppressive, systemic analysis called for by critical democratic education. Additionally, these courses do not present food issues through a philosophical lens, nor do they model democratic reconstruction through collective dialogue – the activity of democracy. Therefore, I have concluded that current food education in Ontario high schools does not uphold democracy’s aims.

Furthermore, in this chapter I noted that supplementary FLE initiatives are currently being taken up by non-profit groups, which mainly target food preparation, nutrition and health aspects of food education. Among these efforts, only very rare examples of deep critical analysis of the food system may be found which would help to uncover systemic oppression, as per the goal of critical democratic education. Philosophical dialogue about food and the food system, which I have insisted is a necessary ingredient of FLE if it is to support democracy’s aims, is missing from these initiatives as well.

Following this discussion of food education, I then proceeded to underscore the importance of philosophical dialogue for critical democratic education to flourish. Through this dialogue, students scrutinize their ethical values and knowledge claims about the world, by holding these up for critical, collective investigation. I claimed that the community of philosophical inquiry, built on critical democratic dialogue, is an essential element of social reconstruction.

Next, I use the Ontario high school Philosophy curriculum to demonstrate that philosophy classes would be good places for educators to include deep investigation into the topic of food. Since the outlined curriculum does not mention the use of philosophical dialogue, I stated that this practice should be implemented. The lack of specifically prescribed content for philosophy courses means that various philosophical strands and questions may be approached through the topic of food. Applied philosophy, I noted, supports critical democratic education because it appeals to the students for the inclusion of their lived experiences and perspectives. As food is an important democratic issue, and philosophical dialogue serves social reconstruction, I have determined that food and philosophy education are a natural match.

I drew this chapter to a close by offering two concrete applications for integrating food and philosophy with Ontario high school courses. The first of these is a suggestion for teaching an entire unit on food in a philosophy course. For this application, I have used Gould’s model of an
undergraduate course in food ethics as inspiration. The second possibility I have presented is the addition of philosophical dialogue in classes that already deal with food. An FLE initiative by Ecosource has given examples of ways that discussion of food may be extended to the content of many different courses; I have used this document to bolster my assertion that philosophical dialogue can and should be included in these classes as well. However, I maintained that educators utilizing this application must embrace a pedagogy of critical democratic dialogue to help foster social justice and democratic reconstruction in these spaces.

This thesis contributes to the field of philosophy of education by instigating a discussion about the need for a philosophical dimension to be included in food education in public Ontario high schools. Following the work of other critical democratic thinkers, I have added to their conversation by insisting that food education must contain a critical democratic component to serve democracy’s aim of social reconstruction.

In addition, this thesis contributes to FLE initiatives. My work fills a “gap” in the literature about the need for broader food education by pointing out the necessity of the philosophical dimension. So far, it has not been clear that the inclusion of such a dimension is a priority for developers of FLE curricular materials, although some aspects of the Ontario high school curriculum, as well as recent work by FoodShare, does consist of limited critical analysis of the food system. However, I believe this analysis will not be complete without the elements of philosophical inquiry and critical democratic education.

Further to this goal, I have presented a framework for critical democratic dialogue to show how these components may be utilized, and to provide an opportunity for the activity of democracy in Ontario high school classrooms. I have underscored the need for philosophical questioning within critical democratic dialogue in these classrooms because I believe that a philosophical investigation of food is essential to a democratic understanding of the “good life.” I am also convinced that the activity of collective philosophical questioning and reflection, combined with critical democratic dialogue, will provide opportunities for teachers and students to make determinations about the kind of food system – and the kind of world – they want to build.

Therefore, this thesis is also important in that it provides educators with tools with which to approach this task.
Moreover, this thesis contains education policy implications. I have anticipated that in the near future, FLE will be required across various subject fields in the high school curriculum, in the same manner that integration of environmental education and financial literacy education have been required in recent years. If this is to occur, my hope is that policy makers will thoughtfully include a philosophical dimension to FLE, by making provisions for models of both philosophical inquiry and critical democratic dialogue within the requirements of the FLE curriculum.

In conclusion, I believe to best serve education’s aim of social reproduction, the problems with our shared food system must be made apparent and resisted. Philosophical dialogue must be facilitated in educational spaces, such that students are able to consider these issues thoughtfully from multiple angles, and through critical democratic dialogue and the work of doing philosophy, move – independently and together – toward the possibility of a more sustainable future.
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