Educating Democracy: Competences for a democratic culture

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Educating Democracy

Competences for a democratic culture

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Teaching reading so as to position young people as obedient consumers rather than as engaged, critical makers of meaning is inconsistent with the goal of promoting democracy, the health of which depends on citizens educated to simultaneously read the word and the world.
(Boatright & Faust, "Emerson, reading and democracy", p.8)

1. Introduction

The focus within the European tradition of democratic education has increasingly been on personal traits or character traits, values and skills rather than on broad structural features or systemic issues. This is reflected in a recent publication by the Council of Europe titled *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living Together as Equals in a Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies*. In the publication relevant character traits are grouped under the heading "competences for democratic culture". One underlying assumption there is that democracy cannot flourish unless it is grounded in a culture that is not only open to democracy but actively supports it.

> The term "culture of democracy" rather than "democracy" is used in the present context to emphasise the fact that, while democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions and laws, such institutions and laws cannot work in practice unless they are grounded in a culture of democracy, that is, in democratic values, attitudes and practices. (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 15)

Such an approach has direct consequences for how democracy and democratic citizenship is dealt with in the context of compulsory education. Thorbjørn Jagland, secretary general of the Council of Europe, ends the preface to the publication with the following words:

> The aim is not to teach students what to think, but rather how to think, in order to navigate a world where not everyone holds their views, but we each have a duty to uphold the democratic principles which allow all cultures to co-exist. (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 7)

Towards the end of the document the authors write:

> ... the model that is presented here is an attempt to provide a description of the competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to become effective engaged citizens and live peacefully together with others as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies. It is hoped that the current model will prove useful for educational decision making and planning and will assist in the harnessing of educational systems for the purpose of preparing learners for life as democratically and interculturally competent citizens. (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 57)

In the present paper we scrutinize the notion of "democratic competences" which is developed in the publication and suggest a different conceptualization. The Council of Europe presents a model with 20 competences, each of which falls into one of four categories: (i) a value, (ii) an attitude, (iii) a skill or (iv) knowledge and understanding. We, in contrast, suggest a notion of competences where a competence is conceived of as a complex construct composed of elements from all these categories. We then describe seven democratic competences – some might prefer to talk about democratic virtues – which we think are both central to a democratic culture while also educationally relevant and manageable.

Before we get to the discussion of democratic competences – both our own conception and the one offered by the Council of Europe – we explore the underlying notion of democracy and argue in favour of a conception reminiscent of ideas advanced by John Dewey in the early decades of the 20th century. Our believe is that before discussing democratic competences it is important to get a clear idea about the concept of democracy that the work is based on. In the publication of the Council of Europe there is no discussion of the underlying conception of democracy. There may be good practical reasons for this as the document is not meant as an academic publication but a guide for educators and policy makers who might have given up on a complex and abstract discussion of democracy. We, on the other hand, believe that any discussion of democratic competences must rest on a clear conception of democracy; current theories of democracy are so diverse that they are bound to give rise to very different conceptions of democratic competences and democratic culture.

The present paper is part of a larger project which includes a pedagogical part where we suggest a way of cultivating democratic competences in schools through the reading and discussion of literature. That part of the project, however, has to wait for another occasion to be spelled out.

One benefit of thinking about competences as complex structures combining cognitive, affective and dispositional aspect is that it fits with some of the recent work on character education based on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics which has gained recognition and support both inside and outside of the academia (Bohlin, 2005; Kristjánsson, 2015). Some of the democratic competences we identify might actually be described as virtues in the Aristotelian sense so that character education might include the cultivation of *democratic* character along with *moral* character and performative virtues.

We proceed by first considering some pessimistic voices about the future of democracy (section 2). We then proceed to discuss different conceptions of democracy arguing that a theory of democracy suitable for school settings must offer an account of the role of attitudes and practices that are essential for sustaining and cultivating just and democratic community while also relevant for schools as educational settings (section 3). But arguing that a particular conception of democracy is better suited for educational settings than some other is not tantamount to arguing that democracy is needed or useful in the first place – let alone arguing that it is at all possible. We therefore proceed to revisit some arguments for the necessity and possibility of democracy (section 4) and then move on to discuss the difference between *living in a democracy* and *leading a democratic life* (section 5). We then define seven complex democratic competences and offer some arguments to the effect that they are better suited as grounds for the cultivation of democratic character and culture in schools than the simple competences listed in the publication by the Council of Europe (section 6). Finally, we consider the cosmopolitan aspect of our conception of democracy and democratic competences (section 7).

2. Challenges to democracy

Academics and laypersons alike have expressed grave concerns about the challenges to democracy that contemporary western societies face, pointing to increased racism, xenophobia, security terror, financial turmoil, increased gap between the poor and the rich, increased grip of money on politics, less political participation by young people, various forms of sectarianism, etc. Some critics go as far as to declare democracy dead. Thus, reflecting on Central Europe, Ivan Krastev says: "The liberal era that began in Central Europe in 1989 has come to an end. Populism and illiberalism are tearing the region apart"

(Krastev, 2007, p. 56). Writing on the situation in North-America, Lori Latrice Martin and Kenneth Varner say in a paper titled “Race, residential segregation and the death of demodcrayc” that “within a democracy often lie the values, rights, and privileges that, if leveraged, can result in a sea change. Sadly, the revolutionary and transformative changes that are required are rarely achieved” (p. 2017, 9). And Theo Gavrielides writes in the paper “The death of democracy and the forces of power and control: The case of Europe” that “the rise of nationalist and far-right parties in Greece, the Netherlands, the UK, France and so on bear evidence that progress to social justice is being hampered while the widening gap between the powerful and the powerless in many areas of civil rights protection has brought a significant backlash in how we accept what is normal and what is not. This decline is gradually being accepted as justifiable due to the convincing nature of these reactionary forces” (2016, p. 2). These are but three of a myriad of reports on the actual or immanent death of democracy. In the face of such challenges, it is worth asking whether democracy – both as a political and cultural ideal and as as a form of government – is still possible in the west.

We believe that democracy is not only possible but necessary for the continuation of just society and flourishing living. Now is not the time to give up on it but rather to find new ways of working towards democracy which no only demands that politicians support it without ambiguity put also demands that people in the academia explore new meanings of democracy as a political and cultural ideal. The history of philosophy and political thought contains various arguments for the importance of democracy, from Aristotle who argued that although a deviant constitution democracy was the best of a bad lot (Aristotle,), to Popper who argued that democracy was a means of replacing those in power without a bloodshed, to more subtle and substantial accounts such as as those of deliberative

democracy (see e.g. Bohwman & Rehg, 1997, Young, 2002), agonistic democracy (Mouffe, 2000) or epistemic theories of democracy (Ólafsson, 2014, see also Aristotle, *Politics* III.11) to mention a few modern trends in democratic theory. However, most of these theories are what I shall refer to as systemic theories, i.e. theories of democracy as a system of government rather than as a culture or a form of life (see Dewey, 1916).

3. Conceptions for democracy

Different conceptions of democracy entail different *roles* for schools as institutions in a just democratic society, as well as different conceptions of what makes *school practices* democratic. Institutional theories where democracy is conceived of primarily as a form of government and as an institutional design in the public and political sphere are extremely limited as an educational ideal. Such theories may even appear to be rather awkward when applied to school settings, even giving it an awkward position. When teachers and headmasters are asked what they do in the way of democracy in their schools, they usually mention things having to do with structure such as student representation, choice (which often is superficial) and voting. When probed further how democratic principles are reflected in the daily work of teachers and students, they often try to extend these formal principles of structure, choice and voting to teaching and classroom work. As one can imagine, the result is usually disastrous for the school structure is very much hierarchical, choice is severely limited by national curricula and standardized tests, and voting if used at all is rarely about any fundamental things.

To avoid the above situation, people have asked the question: What competences do students need in order to participate effectively in a democratic community? This shifts the focus from structural concerns to individual competences and, thus, may provide for more

tangible ways of developing democratic learning practices. However, it remains to say what the concept of democracy means in this context and, in our view, that concept is often developed too superficially. We identify three general conceptions of democracy which have very different educational implications. The first conception we call *the market conception of democracy*. According to it democracy is concerned with institutional structure which serves to accommodate people's diverse views, preferences and positions by ensuring a free market of ideas and opinions and regulating competition in this market to avoid any form of coercion or monopoly. Accordingly, the democratic role of the schools becomes mainly twofold: schools should (i) strive to make people fit to participate (compete) in the market of ideas, and (ii) provide students with knowledge of fundamental rights and basic principles that are needed for society to function efficiently. On this view, the role of schools is to *prepare* students for a society to which they do not yet belong, in much the same way as schools serves to prepare students for the workplace. Democracy becomes a task for schools; something that schools face and should try to solve, however successfully, just as schools should produce knowledgeable and skilled workers for the workplace (Biesta, 2006).

The above conception is sometimes contrasted with a deliberative conception of democracy (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Gutman & Thompson, 2004; Habermas, 1998) according to which democracy is a means for making collective decisions premised on mutual benefit of people who live together as equals in a free association. This view gives dialogue and mutual recognition a more prominent role in education than the market conception and also places more emphasis on cooperation than competition. However, the deliberative conception still faces problems in the context of schools since in schools (*a*) the individuals involved do not come together as equals but as unequal in important respects

(teacher /student, headmaster/teacher, headmaster/student), (*b*) are not there for mutual benefit, and (*c*) part of the population, namely the students, has no choice but participating independently of whether life within the boundaries of the school has any meaning for them at all.

What is missing in the above conceptions of democracy is an account of the role of attitudes and practices that are essential for sustaining and cultivating just and democratic community while, at the same time, being central for the school as an educational setting. Such a conception of democracy and education was argued for by John Dewey during the first decades of the 20th century (Dewey, 1916) and has been revived in recent decades (Biesta, 2006).

In Dewey's philosophy education and democracy are closely knit together: a democratic process is characterized by mutual learning and any a truly educational setting must be democratic in the sense of being a setting free of any form of coercion where participation is voluntary and meaningful. Moreover, according to Dewey's conception of democracy, issues relating to democratic practices arise in the most mundane circumstances of individuals working together and need not be related to any institutional design nor to any binding collective decision making. Thus, Dewey writes:

> [...] democracy as a way of life is controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others. Democracy is the belief that even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual, the habit of amicable cooperation – which may include, as in sport, rivalry and competition – is itself a priceless addition to life. To take as far as possible every conflict which arises-and they are bound to arise-out of the atmosphere and medium of force, of violence as a means of settlement into that of discussion and of intelligence is to treat those who disagree – even profoundly – with us as those from whom we may learn, and in so far, as friends. (Dewey, 1998 [1939], p. 342)

Fundamental to the Deweyan conception of democracy as a way of living is the ability to approach other people not only rationally but also emotionally – as friends, as he says, and as people from whom one may learn. Thus Dewey thought of democracy as rooted in personal attitudes and habits – democratic character or moral virtue, one could say – arguing that institutions are democratic only in so far as they can be seen, in their day to day functionings, as being projections of democratic character (see Chambers, 2013). This aspect of Dewey's conception of democracy is central for the development of a conception of democratic competences and culture. This conception is in many ways antagonistic to the market conception of democracy as it views individual differences not as a negative fact that must be overcome but as a positive fact that gives rise to learning opportunities.

4. Why democracy?

When comparing different conceptions of democracy it is useful to step back a little and consider why, in the first place, we are so concerned with democracy. At least three kinds of conditions are relevant here:

> **Political condition:** People share limited social and economic space.
>
> **Moral condition:** People are vulnerable and their self-respect is grounded in social conditions.
>
> **Condition of individualization:** People live and form their identity or self-concept in an interplay between the inner world of personal life and the outer world of social relations.

The first condition concerns simply the fact that people live among each other and depend on the same stock of goods, both economically and socially. The political condition is comparable to the external conditions that David Hume (1711–1776) considered as being

part of the circumstances of justice (Hume, 1978). What Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) referred to as the state of nature would also fall under this heading; people share the same space, compete for the same limited goods and have the right to defend themselves while trying to acquire whatever they long for (Hobbes, 2009, Ch. XIII). Hobbes conceived of the state of nature as a perpetual war of everyone against everyone and thought that the only escape from such horrors of war would be for people to surrender part of their rights to an all-powerful ruler who could bring about peace by coercing the population into cooperation. The arguments of both Hume and Hobbes, even if very different, bring out the importance of forming political institutions in order to bring the use of force in society under the rule of law. It is another question whether such political institutions can or should be democratic. Hobbes believed that they would have to be authoritarian in order to succeed. The systemic theories, whether theories about liberal or deliberative democracy, address this condition.

The second condition concerns certain moral aspects of human nature. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas argues that people are vulnerable beings who develop their identity or self-concept in a world of meaning which is the product of social relations. Habermas then argues that any theory of justice must take account of this fact of human circumstances. He framed this in the following way back in 1989:

> "Moral intuitions" are intuitions that instruct us on how to best behave in situations where it is in our power, by being thoughtful and considerate, to counteract the extreme vulnerability of others. In anthropological terms, morality is a safety device compensating for a vulnerability that is built into the socio-cultural form of life. The basic facts of such a socio-cultural form of life are the following: Creatures that are individuated only through socialization are vulnerable and morally in need of considerateness. (Habermas, 1990, p. 199)

Habermas' idea here is, in a way, the dual of Hobbes' idea of the flight from the state of nature. Hobbes thought that because people are self-interested and aggressive, they need some external authority to make sure they keep an appropriate distance from each other. Habermas, on the other hand, argues that because people are vulnerable and morally in need of considerateness, they need to stay close to each other. And since a decently just society must try to guarantee that not only the fortunate few enjoy the good of considerateness but everyone, such a society needs "moral institutions".

In responding to this need for considerateness Habermas moves towards ethics of care; the vulnerability of people calls for considerateness rather than coercion into cooperation and such considerateness must not be left to the whim of individual charity but has to be reflected in the institutional as well as cultural makeup of the society. John Rawls, although viewing matters from a different perspective, leans in similar direction when insisting that the most important primary goods are the social preconditions of self-respect (Rawls, 2001, p. 60). One may question whether the above considerations really point to the necessity of democracy or rather, simply, to the necessity of authorities (whether democratic or authoritarian) showing the citizens or the subjects respect and consideration. The issue at hand is one which Habermas has explored in various writings and concerns both the distinction between the *facticity* and *normativity* of the law (Habermas 1998) as well as the tension between fulfilling the demands of the rule of law on the one hand and the demands of the welfare state on the other. We won't go further into this issue now but turn to the third condition.

We refer to the third condition as the condition of individualization. The underlying question here is how people come to think of themselves as distinct persons with a distinct

character. The Danish scholar Per Schultz Jørgensen, writing about education and schooling, puts the point in the following way:

> The individual has to choose, to decide, to act and to understand [his] own life in a reflexive movement. That means self-centredness but at the same time engenders a profound need for a social context to return to and rely on. The key concepts are 'self' and 'social integration' ... (Jørgensen, p. 117)

Jørgensen continues a little later saying:

> This points to two levels of personal existence: one is the inner world of experience; the other is the outer world of social relations – the private world and the public.

From these considerations about the human condition Jørgensen infers two statements concerning education:

> **First statement:** formation of character: The modern society has placed much more responsibility on the single individual to form its own character – that means the formation of identity, self-understanding and social role.
>
> **Second statement:** participation in learning: If learning should contribute to formation of character then there must be an understandable consistency between the inner and outer learning environment – that means an active participant role in our own learning and in the social environment. (Jørgensen, p. 118)

This interplay between internal and external factors is the core of what we refer to as the condition of individualization. Jørgensen himself is focusing on learning in schools and his conclusion is that only in a democratic learning environment can this dual status of the individual be respected. However, his ideas apply not only to learning in schools but to education and moral development more generally, in particular, they apply to the process of identity formation which is an inescapable part of becoming a citizen.

When these three conditions are considered collectively they point to the necessity of democracy for a just society, i.e. a society where people have a fair chance of developing into flourishing citizens. The first condition points towards the importance of the rule of law, the second condition highlights the need for an institutional structure where care and considerateness are central and distributed among the whole population, while the third condition highlights the importance of thinking of the institutional structure and cultural conditions not only in relation to the fully developed citizen but also in relation to the developing citizen. This last condition obviously applies to an individual who begins as an infant and develops into a mature citizen but it also applies to the adult citizen for the status of being a citizen is never complete but is continuously in the making. To sum, we might say that only in a democratic society will vulnerable people be able to share a common social and economic space and develop into flourishing citizens.

We have only offered an outline of an argument for the necessity of democracy. But our point is not only that democracy is necessary – in fact, that is rarely challenged even by those who believe that it is suffering greatly, even dead – but that a satisfactory theory of democracy must respond to all these three conditions; the institutional, the cultural and the individual. Thus, the question about the possibility and nature of democratic education can be seen as inquiring about three kinds of conditions: (i) institutional design and justification, (ii) cultural conditions, and (iii) individual or personal conditions. As noted above, most contemporary theories of democracy focus on institutional design, both in terms of their positive understanding of democracy and in the defence for democracy against pessimistic charges (Œstlund, 2002; Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Habermas, 1996). However, assuming that the question of appropriate institutional design had been settled, say in favor of deliberative democracy, there is still a question about which competences the

people who are to be governed democratically must possess. There is also a question about whether democracy requires a particular culture for it to work, for instance whether the wider culture must be characterized by openness and tolerance or whether democracy would still be possible in, say, a racist and sectarian culture. Thus, inquiring about the meaning and possibility of democracy we must consider at least three distinct but interrelated levels: The institutional, the cultural and the individual.

In what follows we will pay most attention to the individual level. It may be instructive to recall Hume's idea of the conditions of justice (Hume, 1739-40/1978; Nussbaum, 2006) True to his empirical stance he did not consider justice a transcendental reality but asked what kinds of conditions would make it develop as a characteristic of human society. He observed that if people were either overwhelmingly generous and free of self-interest or if the goods that people seek was in abundance, then the kind of cooperation that justice requires would be unnecessary. He also claimed that if people were incapable of controlling their actions or if goods were too scarce, then cooperation under the banner of justice would pointless. So, Hume concluded, it is when people are to some extent selfish but also able to control their actions and follow established rules, and when the external goods are not in abundance but still enough so that people can get by, then justice becomes not only necessary but also possible.

Reminiscent of Hume's account of the possibility of justice we consider what condition might make it possible that people, vulnerable as they are and dependent on social interaction, might live a flourishing life sharing a common social and economic space. The conditions that first come to mind are similar to those that Hume identified: That despite being somewhat self-centered, people are capable of cooperation and able, to some extent, to identify certain goods as common goods and work towards maintaining them. This

would mean that people could formulate and adhere to certain principles of conduct – for instance law and customs. Thus, for democracy to be possible, people must possess competences for self-control, communication and reasoning, and other similar competences enabling them to live and work together. In addition to the above competences, people must also possess competences or virtues such as compassion and be able to care for one another, while also being able to reflect on themselves, their actions, values and self-concept. We discuss these further when identifying seven central democratic competences.

5. Different fields and Deweyan Democracy

Society is divided into different fields where people compete for different goods and where there are different rules or codes of conduct governing competition, cooperation, exchanges and the use of power. Every person lives in various different fields, both in her personal and public life (Bourdieu, 1977). A precondition for living in a democracy is that the highest field – the political field – is governed by appropriate democratic principles of cooperation and governance. Institutional theories of democracy are primarily an attempt to describe and contextualize such principles. But since the lives of people are not confined to the highest field it is not enough that only that field be governed by democratic principles, other fields must be governed by appropriate principles of democratic cooperation and governance. What makes such principles appropriate may be different from one field to another.

Not only may democratic principles differ from one field to another, it is important that the citizens both accept the principles and know that others also accept them if their coexistence is to be truly democratic, i.e. if the culture is to be democratic. The strong “anti establishment” movements or trends which we have witnessed in the latest years – not only

in USA and Britain – bear witness to the lack of exactly this kind of mutual recognition of democratic principles. Rawls makes a similar requirement when he says that a just society must be well-ordered. He describes it in the following way:

> The idea of a well-ordered society is plainly a very considerable idealization. One reason we form this idea is that an important question about a conception of justice for a democratic society is whether, and how well, it can serve as the publicly recognized and mutually acknowledged conception of justice when society is viewed as a system of cooperation between free and equal citizens from one generation to the next. (Rawls, 2001, p. 9)

Borrowing the term from Rawls we might say that for a society to be democratic the political filed must be well-ordered with respect to democracy. And in order that people live not only *in* a democracy but also *lead a democratic life*, other fields must also be well-ordered with respect to democracy. This does not imply that the same rules and principles apply in all fields, but that different fields are governed and regulated by principles that can be seen as extensions of democratic values to the field at hand. Thus, a precondition for a school to be democratic is not that it be governed by the same democratic principle as regulate the political field (such as threefold division of power, public elections, etc.) but that the school community be based on certain democratic values and that life in the school be characterized by mutual understanding and acceptance of the school as a field of education and growth in a democratic society.

This idea of democracy gives rise to a criticism of institutional theories of democracy as being too narrow or restrictive. Such theories are limited to the political field and do not respect the fact that people live their lives in different fields each of which must be governed by its own rules or principles about communication, cooperation, competition and use of power. The criticism is in fact twofold, (*a*) that such theories focus to narrowly on

institutional design, and (*b*) that they do not attend to the diverse activities and actual lives of the citizens in general. Thus, theories of deliberative democracy have primarily been presented as theories about institutional design and political legitimacy, and although they may give some directions on how to qualify life as democratic in other fields, such as schools (Reich, 2007), the nature of these other fields have rarely influenced the theories themselves.

Dewey's conception of democracy takes, as its point of departure, not institutional design but mutual coexistence. His ideas have often been described as a theory about a certain way of living rather than organization or structure. Dewey conceived of democracy not as applying primarily to the political field and the social institutions in which it is grounded, but rather as applying directly to the way people live their lives in different fields each of which may be controlled by different principles about communication, cooperation and moderation of power.

6. Democratic competences

Neither the cultural nor the individual conditions are alone sufficient for maintaining democratic living from one generation to another. Appropriate institutional design is also needed. However, with the cultural and individual conditions in place we believe that there is a hope that communal living now and in the future may be justly characterized as *democratic*. We further believe that individual competences are more relevant and practical than social structure in order to make democracy a workable objective in formal education. After all, education may change the former by direct teaching or indirect socialization within schools and other educational settings while the latter will not be changed by work

in individual schools. To this end, we outline an educational approach aimed at teaching or cultivating democratic competences which could be adopted by practising teachers.

In line with a Deweyan conception of democracy we identify certain democratic competences having to do with the ability and willingness to work constructively with others, engage in dialogue with people with whom one may disagree, resolve conflicts without the use of violence, be willing and ready to question authority while, at the same time, recognize legitimate forms and uses of authority. We don't maintain that there is one correct list of democratic competences – things may be parsed differently – but some list is useful, even necessary, in order to make democracy a tangible educational objective.

(1) Discursive competence: This refers to the skill and the will to engage in a dialogue with others. This is not just the skill of being able to express ones ideas and listening to others, for it also involves the attitude that one is ready to learn from others, i.e. one is willing to engage in a dialogue with others in honesty and with respect, and value what others have to say and consider it as potentially true or credible. Discursive competence also involves the will and ability to use relevant arguments and identify what are the central issue. Thus, this competence demands knowledge of the relevant issues and the willingness and the skill to acquire knowledge when one finds oneself wanting in the relevant matters.

(2) Competence for conflict resolution: This refers to a complex set of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge that is needed to both formulate and defend, with arguments, ones own point of view as well as respecting others' points of view. Fundamental to this competence is valuing human dignity, rights and culture. It also involves the skill of presenting ones own point of view in a manner accessible to others, especially those who

disagree with oneself. Moreover, it involves the attitude that one will accept legitimate authority when it comes to conflict resolution.

(3) Competence for critical reevaluation: This refers to the ability to reflect on personal and cultural precepts. Although democratic culture, like any culture, relies on various preconceptions of what is right or wrong, good or bad, permissible or not permissible, if such a culture is to develop and not become stagnant and coercive it is fundamental that people question any form of authority and power within the culture while, at the same time, admit that not anything goes. Thus, this competence refers to the willingness of the citizens – and their courage – to question what is taken to be self-evident, also reconsider their own self-conception and not only leave this at an intellectual level but also to do experiments in living according to such critical outlook.

(4) Competence for communal living: This refers to a set of skills, attitudes, values and knowledge that enable people to conceive of their life as a life in a community that is a continuous realization of coming together of individual lives extending from one generation to another. This requires that the citizen be able to value justice, fairness and the rule of law, which entails that they be able to perceive some of the communal preferences as their own preferences while, also, accepting that sometimes the preferences of the wider community or future generations may take precedence over their own immediate preferences. It also requires that people value cultural diversity since the community is (either actually or potentially) culturally diverse.

(5) Competence for resilience: This refers to a set of personal skills and attitudes which support people in maintaining an intention or holding on to a value or goal in the face of challenges or obstacles. Resilience could here be conceived as a virtue in an Aristotelian sense where it lies in the medium between the extremes of obstinacy on the one hand and subservience on the other. In relation with the competence for communal living, resilience in this sense is important for living a meaningful life in a community which is characterized not only by diversity but, at times at least, by agonistic plurality (see Mouffe, 2000).

(6) Competence for forming a conception of a good life: This refers to a competence which is a precondition for all the previous ones. Without a competence for forming a conception of a good life, the individual does not have any position to defend, no intention or value to hold on to, no conviction that might need reevaluation and so on. It will even be difficult to talk about a pluralistic or a diverse community since the defining characteristic would be missing, namely conception of the good life or "philosophies of life" as Rawls puts it (Rawls, 2001). This competence might be referred to as "ethical" rather than "political" but as such it is the competence to form an ethical bases – or moral foundation – on which to stand and from which one views and values the world. For sure, most people have this competence but that does not mean that most people form the *same* conception of the good life, nor does it mean that a person's conception of the good life is ever complete or fixed. The fundamentality of this competence is aptly brought out by John Rawls where he says: "just institutions and the political virtues would serve no purpose ... unless those institutions and virtues not only permitted but also sustained conceptions of the good ... that citizens can affirm as worthy of their full allegiance" (2001, pp. 140-141).

(7) Competence for respecting the natural boundaries of human living: Democratic interaction does not only involve interaction among humans but also interactions with the non-human environment. This extension takes two forms: First, human life is a life on earth and by upsetting the natural balance, human behaviour may undermine the possibility of meaningful living in the future or compromise people's lives in different parts of the world. Thus, a competence to recognize and act in harmony with such global responsibility. Second, human virtues such as kindness, respect, and friendship apply not only to other humans but to non-human animals and even to pieces of land or ecosystems. Thus, quite independently of the detrimental influence that human living has had and continues to have on the conditions for all life on earth, decent living involves non-human animals. In her *Frontiers of Justice*, Martha Nussbaum writes: "The purpose of social cooperation ... ought to be to live decently together in a world in which many species try to flourish" (2006, p. 351).

The above list of competences is not meant to be exhaustive in any way; one might want to define more competences or one might want to construct democratic competences in different ways. However, we believe that identifying democratic competences in this way has important instrumental value for educators and scholars alike.

Our conception of competences differs from that used in the publication *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living Together as Equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies* by the Council of Europe (2016). While we conceive of competences as complex constructs composed of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge, the publication refers to those constituent elements as themselves competences. Thus, in *Competences for Democratic Culture* the authors identify first 55 different competences which they then reduce to a set

of 20, three values, eight skills, six attitudes and three bodies of knowledge (pp. 10–11). The authors of *Competences for Democratic Culture* are well aware that the term "competence" is used in a variety of ways and explain their understanding in the following way:

> For the purposes of the current model, the term "competence" is defined as "the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context". Democratic situations are one such type of context. Thus, democratic competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant psychological resources (i.e. values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding) in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities presented by democratic situations. (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 23)

There seems to be some ambiguity in the text of what competence in the favoured sense actually is. On the one hand, a competence is said to be something simple such as a particular value or a particular attitude. On the other hand, a competence is said to be an "ability to mobilise and deploy" certain values or attitudes. According to the latter, a competence is always a kind of skill – an ability to mobilise and deploy something. Thus, the 20 simple competences that are listed in the *Competences for Democratic Culture* would be only constituent element in a real competence. We shall, however, not dwell on these issues but move on to compare the seven complex competences which we have defined with the list of 20 simple competences in *Competences for Democratic Culture*.

The relation between the simple competences and the complex ones is far from trivial. Although the simple competences – the values, skills and knowledge – all figure in the complex ones, the latter are not defined simply as specific combination of the former. In the table below we have set out in a graphical way the relation between the seven complex

competences we have defined and the 20 values, skills, attitudes and bodies of knowledge that are identified in *Competences for Democratic Culture*.

Table 1: Interrelation between COE definition of competences and our definition of seven complex competences

	Simple competences	1 Discursive ...	2 ... conflict resolution	3 ... critical reevaluation	4... communal living	5 ... resilience	6 ... conception of a good life	7 ... respect nat. boundaries
1	Valuing human dignity and human rights	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2	Valuing cultural diversity	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3	Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
4	Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices	■	■	■	■		■	
5	Respect	■	■	■	■		■	■
6	Civic-mindedness		■	■	■		■	■
7	Responsibility	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
8	Self-efficacy				■	■	■	
9	Tolerance of ambiguity	■	■	■	■			■
10	Autonomous learning skills			■		■	■	■
11	Analytical and critical thinking skills	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
12	Skills of listening and observing	■	■	■	■		■	■
13	Empathy	■			■		■	■
14	Flexibility and adaptability	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
15	Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills	■	■		■			
16	Co-operation skills	■	■		■			■
17	Conflict-resolution skills		■	■	■	■		■
18	Knowledge and critical understanding of the self	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
19	Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication	■	■	■	■		■	■
20	Knowledge and critical understanding of the world	■	■	■	■		■	■

It is far from clear how the squares in the table should be filled out. Some of the competences identified in the publication by The Council of Europe (the left hand side of the table) are so general and basic that they might figure in any complex competence such as the seven we have defined. Consider, for instance, the values (lines 1–3) which all are constituents of all the complex competences. The same should perhaps be true of the attitudes (lines 4–9) and the knowledge (lines 18–20) even if we have left some blank squares to indicate certain difference in relevance or centrality. Perhaps there should be no blank square at all in the table since although some of the simple competences are more central for certain complex competences and less for others – "Knowledge and critical understanding of the self" will certainly be central to "Competence for forming a conception of a good life" but perhaps less so for "Competence for respecting the natural boundaries of human living" – none of the simple ones will be completely absent (whatever that means) from any of the complex ones.

The two conceptions of competences are clearly distinct and although we don't want to maintain that our is the "right" one, we believe that the conception of complex competences is more useful for educational purposes, not least when it comes to arguing for the importance of educational reform. There are at least two problems for the simple competences which we see and hope to avoid with the seven complex competences we have identified.

The first problem – which we might call 'the practical problem' – is that simple competences are so general and figure in so many aspects of life and learning that almost any teacher may well claim to be working towards some of them – even quite a few – just by doing whatever he or she has always been doing. Even an authoritative teacher who

follows a rigid and outdated curricula, and leaves little room for discussion and originality in his class, may claim to be working on the competences of, say, *respect*, *skills of listening and observing* and *knowledge and critical understanding of the world*. So, when asked whether he or she is promoting democracy by cultivating competences for democratic culture, the teachers may well give a confident positive answer. This is, in fact, a common problem and one we have first hand experience of in our work (Jónsson, 2015).

The practical problem hints towards the second problem which concerns directly the very definition of a democratic competence. As has been pointed out by many scholars, many good qualities that people have – such as empathy, resilience, and respect – only make the person better if she is already good. Thus, resilience only makes the good person better, not the criminal. Likewise, the simple competence of respect need not make a person or a culture better or more democratic; the life and workings of the Mafia in Sicily, C*osa Nostra*, is to a large extent based on respect. It is not the right kind of respect, or not respect for the right things, or not for the right reasons. Thus, it is not respect in any form that contributes to democracy but respect which is grounded in certain values and attitudes and is responsive to appropriate knowledge. Even empathy may lead away from democratic character by playing a role in a person becoming pathologically dependent on another. So, the attitudes, skills and knowledge do not make a person *better* or *more democratic* unless the values, attitudes and knowledge from which the person acts are already good or conducive to democracy.

Our criticism here of the simple competences echoes criticism by Kristján Kristjánsson of the view that schools should focus on performative virties rather than moral virtues; he argues that without a moral foundation or moral character from which the person acts the performative virtues may not only fail to make a person better but even be effectively bad:

> ... those '[performative] virtues' can be positively dangerous if they are untethered from moral constraints. The missing element in the character make-up of the 'banksters' in the run-up of the financial crisis, or the avagage heinous dictator, is clearly no a higher level of resilience and self-confidence. (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 6)

In so far as competences are akin to virtues they are bound to be complex rather than simple. Furthermore, insofar as each of the competences is supposed to make a person more democratic or improve her democratic character or make her more fit for democratic living (whichever way we want to put it) we should expect the competences to be more like the moral virtues than the performative virtues.

7. Cosmopolitan democratic competences

The above democratic competences might be thought of as competences for living in a harmony with oneself and others which, given the last one, entails living in harmony with the non-human nature and future generations. These are certainly very demanding conditions and one may raise the question whether by so extending the reach of democracy, one has not stretched the concept too wide. In the time of Plato and Aristotle the global dimension was hardly relevant. This is not to say that the global dimension was not thought of, for even Aristotle extended the moral attitude to animals when telling his students that "we therefore must not recoil with childish aversion from the examination of the humbler animals. Every realm of nature is marvelous ..." (645a15–18). And Diogenes the Cynic,who was little older than Aristotle, is reported to have replied when asked where he came from: "I am a citizen of the world [*kosmopolitês*]" (Diogenes Laertius VI 63).

Although the ideas of global citizenship or cosmopolitanism were known as far back as in ancient Greek, the conditions of contemporary human living have made those ideas not only the subject of theoretical curiosity but also objects of political urgency. The global

nature of modern living has the consequences that almost all human action has some global influence: the clothes people wear in the west are made in the east, the fruits eaten in the north are grown in the south, and thus even the most mundane actions of dressing and putting something on the table to eat is likely to link one almost directly to people in faraway corners of the world. Likewise, given global warming and the huge demands that contemporary economy puts on the planet, almost everything we do is environmentally relevant. And thus, people can influence the global condition of the planet – and thereby the living conditions of generations to come – with almost everything they do. One might then say that it is not the conception of democracy that has changed and is now different from what it was in earlier times but that the conditions of human living have changed so that aspects of human living that could justly be ignored before now require immediate attention and consideration. Thus, in ancient times the cardinal virtues were all virtues that involved other human beings but today one might want to include on that list a virtue such as harmony with nature (Jordan and Kristjánsson, 2015).

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