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Diverse Pasts, Standard Futures

The Experience of Education in France from 1762 to 1789

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History Thesis

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Abstract

This paper considers the experience of primary and secondary education in France from 1762 to 1789. By analyzing both the memoirs of men who were students in this period and the *cahiers de doléances of 1789*—official grievances from all of France solicited by Louis XVI—the paper asks which aspects of education were important to students. The paper explores experience across four main categories: setting and institutional backdrop, pedagogy (including punishment and competition), and general views. Using these four areas of analysis, the paper concludes that the diversity of experiences in education were reflected in popular political demands for the standardization of education in 1789.

Introduction

“Since the fall of the Jesuits and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s useless book, people have not ceased to write about education.”¹ This observation from an educated diplomat in 1763 accurately describes the lively debates about education in France starting in 1762. The twenty-seven-year period before the Revolution of 1789 was a time of major change and attempted reform in French education at the institutional and ideological levels. The main catalysts for this period of change were the two events mentioned above: the expulsion of the Jesuits from education, and therefore from their central role as educators, and the prominent Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s publication of *Émile, ou de l’éducation*, both in 1762. The Parlement of Paris’s decision to ban Jesuits from education was highly disruptive for French education given the institutional weight of the Jesuits; they controlled a third of the main secondary educational institutions, the *collèges*, and approximately 1,250 Jesuits worked with students prior to their expulsion.² The same year as this institutional shakeup, Rousseau published *Émile*, his treatise on education and childhood. Although the book outlines little in the way of a systematic educational system, it nonetheless stirred up debate on the topics of pedagogy and the larger purpose of education. The period considered in this paper comes to a close with the start of the French Revolution in 1789, which was both the culmination of twenty-seven years of educational change and the beginning of a new, even more dramatic period of educational reform.

¹ Friedrich Melchior Grimm, cited in Roger Chartier, Marie-Madeleine Compère, and Dominique Julia, *L’éducation en France du 16e au 18e siècle*, 208. For the original French for this quotation, and for all other quotations, see Appendix 2. All translations are my own.

² R. R. Palmer, *The Improvement of Humanity: Education and the French Revolution*, 47; Dominique Julia, “Les professeurs, l’église et l’état après l’expulsion des Jésuites, 1762-1789,” 459, 470. The expulsion of the Jesuits followed religious and political conflict with the Jansenists.

The late eighteenth century was a period of intense change in attitudes and of institutional reform. Twice as many books on education were published between 1760 and 1790 as those published between 1715 and 1759.³ Some responded to *Émile*, but most addressed the expulsion of the Jesuits and the questions that this educational vacuum raised about reforming secondary education.⁴ A broad range of writers contributed to the frenzy. Some were intellectuals or philosophers, while others were important actors in the education system, especially clergy and professors.⁵ The most prominent theme among was the call for “national education,” which quickly became a key part of the vocabulary of education reformers.⁶ To these reformers, national education meant a uniform system of public schools, imposed and organized at the national level.⁷ For example, Rolland d’Erceville’s prominent plan for national education created a hierarchy of control within a given territory, with the university in control of local *collèges*.⁸

These specific reform discourses combined with and contributed to broader changes in the landscape of education and French society. For example, the plans for national education fed into nationalism, and education became a new way to inculcate children with shared national morals and identity.⁹ Often, reformers envisioned this new system of national morality as a replacement for the existing Church-controlled system of morality, and they hoped that schools would produce students who were useful to the nation.¹⁰ As the state’s moral role in education grew, so too would its institutional role. Reformers envisioned the state taking more control over

³ Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France*, 42.

⁴ Chisick, 42.

⁵ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 5, 54.

⁶ Palmer, 37.

⁷ Palmer, 55, 74. Dorinda Outram, “Education,” 360. Rolland d’Erceville, Caradeuc de La Chalotais, and Guyton de Morveau published the three most prominent plans for national education.

⁸ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’éducation en France*, 209.

⁹ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, 296.

¹⁰ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 3. Palmer, 37, 56.

schooling—such as through the production of schoolbooks and the training of teachers—which corresponded with a decreasing role of religious orders in this area, especially after the expulsion of the Jesuits. Another broader change that influenced educational discourse in this period was the Enlightenment belief in progress and in the ability to change humanity.¹¹ This Enlightenment optimism about education was tempered, however, by a real fear of instructing the lower classes, and philosophers tended to object to broader schooling for lower classes. In fact, the clergy were more supportive of it.¹² These developments, coupled with reform efforts, make evident the centrality of education in public life and debates in France between 1762 and 1789.¹³

I argue that the prevailing trend in French education from 1762 to 1789 is a move from diversity of experience to standardization. Students had vastly different experiences of education in the domains of access and equality of institutions, and of curriculum and pedagogy. Education meant something different to each student and to each person in their life. This diversity of experience is reflected in the *cahiers de doléances*, official grievances from 1789. The *cahiers* push for many reforms of education, but their most important role is in calling for a standardization of the institutions and experience of education.

What did an education look like in this period? There was hardly one path that all young French people followed. Even the elite minority who entered formal educational institutions rarely followed the same path; switching between schools and forms of education was very common. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on two main forms of education: primary education, which I define as learning to read, write, and do basic arithmetic, and the elite secondary education institution the *collège*. Because primary education was accessed by more

¹¹ Chisick, *Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment*, 238. Palmer, 56.

¹² Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 37–39; Chisick, *Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment*, 89.

¹³ For more about the education reform movement during this period, see Jean Morange and Jean-François Chassaing, *Le mouvement de réforme de l'enseignement*.

members of the French population than secondary education, and because it did not always take place formally, it is difficult to isolate one institutional arena of primary education as particularly important; therefore, this paper considers the totality of primary education. The *collège* is easier to isolate as a single impactful institution of secondary education, and it also has a clearer legacy in modern secondary education, so it will be the focus of my inquiries into secondary education. Several domains of education remain outside the realm of this paper: universities, women's education, military school, and trade-specific education such as trade school and apprenticeships.

Primary education happened either at home or in a school. At-home primary education was more common than schools.¹⁴ It is difficult to fully understand what at-home primary education looked like because it was so variable. It could range from the poor farmer taught to read by his father to the wealthy aristocrat taught by a private tutor.¹⁵ Primary schools are slightly easier to document, although they were still riddled with differences. For example, only some took place in a physical building, while others were in teachers' homes or in church buildings.¹⁶ Primary schooling was deeply embedded in the operation of churches, and teaching was nearly always done by clergy or by religious orders, even outside formal schools.¹⁷ Primary schools made no separation between religious and secular content; they taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as Catholic plainchant and catechism.¹⁸ There was a desire, especially by clergy, to teach the poor, so some primary schools accepted children from very modest social backgrounds, although this was far from being universal.¹⁹

¹⁴ Pierre Caspard, "Les souvenirs d'anciens élèves, de la Renaissance à la fin de l'ancien régime scolaire. Esquisse pour une analyse historique," 53–54; Outram, "Education," 360.

¹⁵ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 179.

¹⁶ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, 31.

¹⁷ Outram, "Education," 362; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 36, 67–68.

¹⁸ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 34–35. Plainchant is a collection of chants that are part of the Catholic Church's liturgy. Catechism summarizes the doctrine of a religion for teaching it, especially to children. In the case of this paper, catechism usually refers to the Catholic religion.

¹⁹ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, 58, 85.

One (limited) way to measure the breadth and success of primary education is to look at literacy rates in France. Using signatures on marriage licenses as an indicator of the ability to read and write, historians have presented some figures about literacy in France.²⁰ Literacy was geographically divided in the country—the Northeast generally had higher literacy rates than the Southwest. Between 1780 and 1789, greater than 80% of men in the North could read, whereas only 30-50% of men in the South could read. There was also higher literacy in cities than in the countryside, and among men than among women.²¹ Literacy also, understandably, fragmented around background and occupation. People deemed “notables” had nearly a 100% literacy rate, whereas salaried workers in Lyon, for example, had a literacy rate of under 35% until the French Revolution.²² Literacy increased in the period leading up to the French Revolution, suggesting a growth in the breadth or effectiveness of primary education.²³

Following a basic primary education, most boys began working and ended their formal education; for those who continued, some entered the *collège*. Typically, boys—the *collèges* were not open to girls—entered this elite secondary education institution at age 11 or 12 and could continue until adult age.²⁴ *Collèges* were institutionally diverse; in 1789, there were 347 of them.²⁵ *Collèges de plein exercice* offered eight years of education, including two years of philosophy at the end, while *collèges d’humanités* ended after six years, forgoing the years of philosophy and ending with rhetoric.²⁶ Some *collèges* accepted boarding students, and many—

²⁰ François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Reading and Writing*; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’éducation en France*, 87–88.

²¹ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 10–11; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’éducation en France*, 89–90.

²² Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’éducation en France*, 100–103.

²³ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, 108.

²⁴ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 12–13. Understanding the *collège* can be complicated for people familiar with twenty-first century secondary education, since the *ancien régime collège* corresponds neither to the modern American college, meaning university, nor to the modern French *collège*, which is the rough equivalent of American middle school.

²⁵ Palmer, 13.

²⁶ Palmer, 13–14.

especially Jesuit ones—did not.²⁷ Around 10% of *collèges* belonged to a university, although these *collèges* functioned similarly to non-university ones.²⁸ *Collèges* were overwhelmingly run by religious orders. Before 1762, the Jesuits ran 105 *colleges*, the Oratorians 26, and the Pères de la Doctrine Chrétienne 29. After the expulsion of the Jesuits, most of their *collèges* were taken over by secular clergy—members of the clergy who did not belong to a religious order.²⁹

Access to the *collège* system depended highly but not entirely on family background. In total, there were 48,000 students at *collèges* in 1789, which was one in every 52 boys aged 8 to 18.³⁰ In this student population, the wealthier members of French society were about three times overrepresented in *collèges* compared to the general population.³¹ The *collèges* largely fed into the “existing social hierarchy,” and even a robust scholarship system sometimes served to reintroduce birth privilege.³² However, the breadth of social classes represented in *collèges* extended beyond the highest rungs of society. Only some nobility attended the *collège*, with many favoring.³³ On the other side, many from the lower classes did attend *collèges*, although they still tended to come from the upper end of the lower classes.³⁴ There were also limitations on the access of lower classes to the *collèges*. These students often stopped attending before the end of the full program, for example.³⁵ Lower-class families were also likely to send only their first son to *collège*, and only the wealthier classes could afford to send multiple sons.³⁶ The

²⁷ Palmer, 14.

²⁸ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 254.

²⁹ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 14–15; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 188, 211–15.

³⁰ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 190.

³¹ Willem Frijhoff, *École et société dans la France d'Ancien Régime : quatre exemples, Auch, Avallon, Condom et Gisors*, 17.

³² Frijhoff, 92.

³³ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 179.

³⁴ Frijhoff, *École et société*, 92; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 193.

³⁵ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 23.

³⁶ Frijhoff, *École et société*, 37; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 193.

collège, then, was the next step in education for the diverse but limited group of students who did not immediately enter the workforce after their primary education.

The history of education in the French *ancien régime* has been well-studied. Much of the scholarship, however, focuses on institutions, reform movements, and the most elite echelons of education. The most prominent scholarly works on French education history come from the 1970s and 1980s.³⁷ In recent years, there has been another push to study French education, with the emphasis now on centering students, rather than institutions, in this history.³⁸ One angle of investigating the student experience—analyzing textbooks from the period—has been well-studied since the mid-twentieth century and does not offer many possibilities for new contributions.³⁹ Instead, Pierre Caspard calls for a focus on “les souvenirs d’anciens élèves”—recorded memories from former students.⁴⁰ Caspard is part of a larger initiative to collect and prepare French autobiographies of the past.

But because of the unreliability and subjectivity of former students’ recollections of their schooling, these works have not been the basis of most existing French education history. Three exceptions stand out. Philippe Lejeune’s *Les instituteurs du XIXe siècle racontent leur vie* analyzes recorded memories from teachers.⁴¹ François Grézès-Rueff and Jean Leduc’s *Histoire des élèves en France de l’Ancien Régime à nos jours* relies on 75 student memoirs. However, by considering the eighteenth century through the twentieth century, it loses sight of changes in the

³⁷ See, in particular, Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’éducation en France*; Furet and Ozouf, *Reading and Writing*; Jean de Viguerie, *L’Institution des enfants. L’éducation en France (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)*. *Reading and Writing*, originally published in French in 1977, became the most famous and influential of the works.

³⁸ See Pierre Caspard, “Le paradigme institutionnel et ses effets en histoire de l’éducation. Un exemple”; Jean-François Condette, “Pour une histoire renouvelée des élèves (France, XIXe-XXIe siècles). Bilan historiographique et pistes de recherche.” This centering of students is not confined to French *ancien régime* education history, but common in all education history and sociology.

³⁹ Alain Choppin, “L’histoire des manuels scolaires. Un bilan bibliométrique de la recherche française.”

⁴⁰ Caspard, “Les souvenirs d’anciens élèves.”

⁴¹ Philippe Lejeune, “Les instituteurs du XIXe siècle racontent leur vie.”

education scene of the late eighteenth century.⁴² Lucien Bély's 1981 article "L'élève et le monde, essai sur l'éducation des Lumières, d'après les mémoires autobiographiques du temps" draws from the memoirs of over 50 former students to study the relationship between students and 'the world.'⁴³ Bély's article is a thoughtful example of what we can learn from the memoirs of former students. However, it leaves room for further studies of the student experience, both because the sheer richness of memoirs allows for many new angles of inquiry and because Bély is limited by the source material to focus on nobility and more elite bourgeois, whereas subsequent historians have unearthed and published a handful of memoirs from students outside of this group.

The historiography, thus, would benefit from focusing on students from varying class backgrounds. *Reading and Writing* sheds light on the education of much of the French population through its focus on literacy, employing quantitative methods to draw broad conclusions about literacy.⁴⁴ Harvey Chisick explores the question of lower-class education in 1981 in *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France*.⁴⁵ This book, however, focuses on the elite discourse around the education of lower classes, not on the experiences of the lower classes themselves. There is a need for historical work that attempts to reconcile the student experience with a focus on students of diverse origins.

This paper seeks to show how educational reform and broader changes in French society at the time were reflected (or not reflected) in day-to-day experiences with education. Which aspects of education were important in students' lives? How did social class and wealth affect

⁴² François Grèzes-Rueff, *Histoire des élèves en France*.

⁴³ Lucien Bély, "L'élève et le monde, essai sur l'éducation des Lumières, d'après les mémoires autobiographiques du temps."

⁴⁴ Furet and Ozouf, *Reading and Writing*.

⁴⁵ Chisick, *Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment*.

the experience of education? How did the experience of education influence or play out in political complaints about education at the beginning of the French Revolution?

To answer these questions, I use two main groups of evidence. To start, I consider first-hand accounts of education as recounted in men's memoirs and autobiographies. Years later, in their adult lives, what do people remember about education in their childhood, and might the specific things that they remember reveal which aspects were especially important to them? Second, I consider the *cahiers de doléances*, official complaints solicited by Louis XVI in 1789. The massive volume of the cahiers includes hundreds of pages on education. These official complaints, from a wide variety of French people, can help us understand how the experience of education impacted calls for reform in the early French Revolution.

There was a proliferation in autobiographical writing in the mid to late-nineteenth century; people wanted to share their stories of the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the rapidly changing world of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ As Denis Bertholet put it, they “believed that their story was worth being told.”⁴⁷ Most memoirists provide chronological accounts of their lives. Some begin with major historical events like the Revolution, but others start with their childhoods and educations. Because these memoirs primarily focus on later historical events, we can hope to learn things from their accounts of education that they did not explicitly intend to tell us. This paper will focus on the memoirs of eleven men, born between 1741 and 1775. Nine of them were selected for their long, in-depth descriptions of their education. The other two were selected because they come from significantly more modest means than those normally included in similar studies of education, even though they recount their education much more briefly. While

⁴⁶ Caspard, “Les souvenirs d’anciens élèves,” 39–40; Bély, “L’élève et le monde,” 4; Alfred Fierro, *Bibliographie critique des mémoires sur la Révolution écrits ou traduits en français*; Denis Bertholet, *Les Français par eux-mêmes, 1815-1885*.

⁴⁷ Bertholet, *Les Français par eux-mêmes, 1815-1885*, 10.

many of these men were of a high status by the time they wrote their memoirs, they came from diverse backgrounds. Among other occupations, their parents were a miller, a rural notable, a wealthy tax farmer, and a member of the old nobility.⁴⁸ I also draw from the writings of a twelfth man which, while not autobiographical in nature, reference his personal experiences.

Autobiography is not a straightforward historical source. Rather than showing an objective truth, autobiographies show what the author believes to be true, or wishes to portray as true. They are also retrospective accounts of people's lives, and the memories of childhood are often written over half a century after the fact. The author's condition in life when they wrote the memoir shapes how they recall their childhood.⁴⁹ In particular, these authors are influenced by the cataclysmic events that occurred since childhood, starting with the French Revolution.⁵⁰ Therefore, these sources should be used in conjunction with other sources about education that are less prone to the biases and inaccuracy of memory, such as institutional records.⁵¹ Because other sources besides memoir form the basis of the history of *ancien régime* education, we can inquire into experience and put it into conversation with institutions. For example, we can compare our knowledge of one aspect of education with students' experiences of it. To this end, autobiography is helpful for the history of *sentiments*, as Lucien Bély put it.⁵²

The *cahiers de doléances* tell us about student experience in a different way. Rather than revealing the parts of their education that people remembered and shared later in their lives, the *cahiers* tell us which issues were of great interest in education, as reported in 1789 by people advocating for their communities. Solicited by Louis XVI in 1789, the *cahiers* were written by

⁴⁸ Caspard, "Les souvenirs d'anciens élèves," 43. Pierre Caspard writes that there were 212 male memoirists born between 1750 and 1799 who wrote about their time as students. Of these, 61 were from the nobility, 103 were from the bourgeoisie, and 48 were from the "people."

⁴⁹ Caspard, 44; Condette, "Pour une histoire renouvelée," 78.

⁵⁰ Bély, "L'élève et le monde," 4.

⁵¹ Condette, "Pour une histoire renouvelée," 123.

⁵² Bély, "L'élève et le monde," 4.

electoral assemblies from all three orders, with no restrictions from above on how they were written.⁵³ Their production varied widely between different parts of France, but, in general, they were written by various assemblies of elected delegates or municipal leaders.⁵⁴ Although influenced by the people writing them and by the political motivations of communities to portray the state of affairs in a certain way, the *cahiers* provide a glimpse into which ideas were prevalent at the time.⁵⁵ Because many of the *cahiers* were about education, they can help us understand what people from diverse backgrounds thought about education in 1789.⁵⁶ They can also help us understand which aspects of education figured heavily in the public imagination of different groups.⁵⁷ I will use the *cahiers* to examine the political impact of the aspects of education that I have identified as important in the memoirs.⁵⁸

The paper is divided into two parts by source base. Part One focuses on memoirs from men who were students in the decades before the French Revolution. The aim of this part is to answer the question: During this period, what was important in education from the perspective of students? Part One is divided into two main sections. The first section focuses on primary education. The second section examines the experience of the *collège*. Part Two analyzes excerpts from the *cahiers de doléances* that pertain to education. The purpose of this structure is to address the following questions: How are certain themes in education, identified as important

⁵³ Allain, *La question d'enseignement*, 1. The “three orders” refers to the three estates into which French subjects were divided before the Revolution. The first estate was the clergy, the second estate was the nobility, and the third estate was everyone else.

⁵⁴ Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff, “Officially Solicited Petitions: The Cahiers de Doléances as a Historical Source,” 79–80.

⁵⁵ Allain, *La question d'enseignement*, 9.

⁵⁶ Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 5; Allain, *La question d'enseignement*, 9.

⁵⁷ For an example, see the following discussion on peasants and school: Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'éducation en France*, 43.

⁵⁸ Allain, *La question d'enseignement*. France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*. Most passages on education from the *cahiers* are documented in Ernest Allain's book. Using this book as guide, I have located the original passages from the *cahiers*, which are freely accessible online through the Archives Parlementaires.

by memoirists, reflected in the *cahiers*? How did the experience of education influence attitudes towards education right before the French Revolution? The two parts explore four different themes around education: Who were the students experiencing education? What did they learn? How did they learn the material? And finally, why did education matter to them?

My argument about the shift from diversity to standardization has a broader impact on French history and on our understanding of education in several ways. It provides one example of the ways that broad societal and intellectual changes affect everyday life for people who are not directly driving these movements. It also contributes to studying the social order on the eve of the French Revolution, when social distinctions and tensions were about to get amplified and put in the spotlight. By analyzing the *cahiers* in concert with memoirs about the preceding years, we can understand how calls for reform in the early revolution reflected the social situation of the *ancien régime*. Finally, it contributes to the history of education in general, which is relevant today as educational reform—and resistance to reform—have once again become central topics of concern. In this context, it is helpful to study how these kinds of massive reforms affected the experience of education at another politically and socially tense time.

1. Memoirs: Education According to Former Students

Breadth of Sources

The twelve authors in this section had diverse backgrounds, educational trajectories, and careers. They were born in different parts of France: Two are from Paris (Mercier and Norvins). Six are from Northwestern France; one from Brittany (Chateaubriand) and five from the Pays de la Loire (Simon, Lablée, Besnard, Larevellière-Lepeaux, and Bédé). One is from the Hauts-de-France region of Northern France (Tillette). Three are from Southern France, coming from

Occitanie, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (Boyer, Verneilh-Puiraseau, and Raymond-Latour, respectively). Their families' socio-professional backgrounds varied as well, although this sample of memoirists is disproportionately wealthy and noble; people from wealthy families were more likely to obtain the education and career necessary to write a memoir. Two come from very modest artisan backgrounds (Simon and Bédé). Five are members of the wealthy bourgeoisie, in the third estate (Mercier, Lablée, Besnard, Larevellière-Lepeaux, and Raymond-Latour). Five were born into nobility, with two of these coming from newly ennobled families (Boyer, Norvins, Tillette, Verneilh-Puiraseau, and Chateaubriand).

In terms of professions, one memoirist became an urban laborer and one a modest artisan (Bédé, Simon). One became a chemist (Raymond-Latour). Two became writers (Mercier, Chateaubriand). Two became lawyers, although more were trained in law (Lablée, Boyer). One joined the military (Tillette). Four held prominent positions in government leadership (Larevellière-Lepeaux, Besnard, Verneilh-Puiraseau, Norvins). The prominence of the memoirists' careers, overall, is explained by the idea that only the prominent have a story worth telling in this genre. In addition, the memoirists all navigated the French Revolution differently. Two left France (Tillette, Chateaubriand). Three were moderates and two were radicals (Mercier, Besnard, and Verneilh-Puiraseau for the former, Lablée and Larevellière-Lepeaux for the latter). One held leadership in the consulate (Boyer). Again, they tended to prominent roles in the Revolution or the following years, since this experience was worth memorializing. The variety of family backgrounds informed the twelve writers' educations, and the variety of professional and political experiences informed their perspectives at the time of writing memoirs.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For more information about each memoirist, see Appendix 1 for individual biographies.

Memories of Primary Education

This section considers primary education according to the memoirs of eleven former students. These memoirs illuminate the experience of primary education, from the more concrete, institutional side to the abstract meaning of education. First, the section considers where primary education happened, whether at home or at a school. It then examines the academic content that made up primary education, from the perspective of student recollection. Next, it considers punishment, a theme that occupies a large portion of memories of education. Finally, it seeks to draw out the meaning of primary education to students and to parents.

Settings

While several memoirists reflect explicitly on the role of their different family backgrounds in their *collèges*, the same is not true when they reflect on their primary schooling. In this context, the different settings in which people received their primary education become the most revealing of different backgrounds.

Many students received part of their primary education at home. Unless they were illiterate themselves, parents tended to teach their children to read and write. They sometimes also taught other rudimentary knowledge, such as arithmetic and Latin. Often, this at-home education preceded primary education outside of the home. Students had different amounts of knowledge upon entering schools. François-Yves Besnard, born in 1752 to a well-off bourgeois family from Saint-Aubin des Alleuds, started his education at home. Besnard wrote that “I barely knew the letters of the alphabet when I entered his [schoolteacher’s] school.”⁶⁰ Besnard did begin to learn before primary school, albeit not very much. Students from wealthier families

⁶⁰ François-Yves Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire, mémoires de François-Yves Besnard*, 16–17.

might learn more before primary school. Charles Joseph de Verneilh-Puiraseau was born in Nexon in 1756 to an old, moderately wealthy family. His father taught him to read before entry into formal schooling.⁶¹ Louis-Marie de Larevellière-Lepeaux, born in Montaigu in 1753, came from a countryside bourgeois family; his aunt taught him to read and write.⁶² Finally, Jean-Michel Raymond-Latour's parents taught him the alphabet and some Latin.⁶³ Raymond-Latour was born in Southern France in 1766, and he added that his father, a county magistrate, would speak in Latin at home; his at-home exposure to Latin contributed to his primary education because it would have facilitated his learning of the language in later primary schooling.⁶⁴

While at-home education was only a fragment of the educational journey for these four, who would go on to continue their educations, learning to read and write at home was the entirety of their education for many students from modest backgrounds. This group is underrepresented in memoirs, but a few students with only a basic primary education wrote memoirs.⁶⁵ One such memoirist was Louis Simon, born in 1741 in La Fontaine Saint-Martin as the son of a clothmaker. He wrote that, because his father noticed that "I understood well what he said to me and that I responded nicely," he taught Louis Simon reading, writing, arithmetic, and plainchant.⁶⁶ Since Simon's village of La Fontaine Saint-Martin did not have a primary school, Simon's father provided the entirety of his education.⁶⁷ This explains why Simon's at-home education was more extensive than the other memoirists; it accounted for all of his

⁶¹ Charles Joseph de Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 10.

⁶² Louis-Marie Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux, publiés par son fils sur le manuscrit autographe de l'auteur et suivis de pièces*, 9.

⁶³ Jean-Michel Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 15.

⁶⁴ Raymond-Latour, 9.

⁶⁵ These memoirs generally existed as unpublished family documents until historians published the memoirs, often over a century after the author's death

⁶⁶ Louis Simon, *Souvenirs d'un villageois du Maine: Louis Simon (1741-1820)*, 96. Spelling reflects the original text.

⁶⁷ Simon, 96.

education. In addition, it was only because the father took exceptional notice of Simon's intellectual capacity that he decided to teach his son; his education was not a guarantee.

That Simon's father was his sole teacher is a good example of the outsized influence that family had on primary education. Besnard, Verneilh-Puiraseau, Larevellière-Lepeaux, and Raymond-Latour also received their first education from their families. In addition to the role of family in at-home education, wealthier parents used their family networks and social networks to contribute to their children's primary education. After learning to read from his father, Verneilh-Puiraseau received a primary education from a private teacher, hired by a family friend to teach their children.⁶⁸ He then went to live with his uncle, who facilitated his attendance at a formal primary school.⁶⁹ Besnard's education also benefited from his family network, as he lived in Doué with his great-grandmother for seven years while he received his primary education.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, students whose family networks or social networks were unable to provide them a primary education took a different educational path. For those who were even able to receive any education, primary schools could take on the entire role of teaching reading and writing. Jacques Étienne Bédé was born in Chateauneuf-sur-Loire in 1775, and his father was a miller who could not read or write.⁷¹ The father encouraged Bédé to "go to school assiduously and to learn well."⁷² Bédé stayed in primary school until at least 1787, when he was about 13 years old. He does not share details about his primary education; nevertheless we can infer that it was the sole source of his primary education, just as Simon's father was for him.

⁶⁸ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 11.

⁶⁹ Verneilh-Puiraseau, 12–13.

⁷⁰ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 7, 10.

⁷¹ Jacques Étienne Bédé, *Un ouvrier en 1820*, 72.

⁷² Bédé, 72.

For students from wealthier backgrounds, primary school was the next step in their educational journey. Such was the case for Verneilh-Puiraseau and Besnard, who both attended primary schools of varying sizes. Verneilh-Puiraseau attended M. Bardinet's primary school, which had about 60 students.⁷³ Besnard attended M. Bidon's school, which had only ten to twelve students.⁷⁴ In both students' accounts, the figure of the teacher dominated their descriptions of their primary school.

Another interesting case comes from those who received a primary education later in life. Larevellière-Lepeaux describes how his servant René Giraud educated himself: "Since his childhood, he came to read by himself, by comparing words and letters with the sounds he heard at church."⁷⁵ Later on, Giraud used similar self-education methods, and Larevellière-Lepeaux's family's books, to learn Latin, Italian, geometry, and algebra.⁷⁶ Giraud exemplifies a unique type of primary education; while nobody taught him to read, write, or do mathematics, exposure to a family with informative books allowed him to educate himself. Raymond-Latour similarly recounts an example of a pastor who taught "the first principles of the Latin language" to his servant Magdelon, who would sometimes step in to teach Latin to students in the pastor's absence.⁷⁷ This is another example of someone who likely received a primary education later in life because of her exposure to an employer who decided to teach her for the purposes of his job.

It is important not to lose sight of students' individual trajectories. While students from very modest backgrounds might only have one source of primary education, bourgeois and noble students rarely had the same constraint. Rather, a student could expect to pass through a variety

⁷³ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 15–16.

⁷⁴ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 16.

⁷⁵ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 6.

⁷⁶ Larevellière-Lepeaux, 6–7.

⁷⁷ Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 23.

of educational settings and institutions, including at-home learning, boarding with a relative, private teachers and tutors, and primary schools. Verneilh-Puiraseau's primary school trajectory exemplifies the diversified path typical of a wealthy student. His father taught him to read at home, then he joined in the private education of a family friend.⁷⁸ At eight years old, he went to M. Bardinet's school, then left to go to M. Dumonteil's school.⁷⁹ He passed through these four different locations of primary education before beginning *collège*. Beyond the insights into any one form of primary education, what the memoirs give perhaps the greatest insight into is the instability and constant change in the environments of any one student's primary education, and the diversity of primary education institutions.

Curriculum

Reading, writing, and arithmetic were key in primary education. Besnard wrote that boys were sent "to school to learn to read and write".⁸⁰ At M. Bidon's school, he learned reading, writing, and "the first four rules of arithmetic."⁸¹ Often, Latin was also part of primary education. Here, the lines between primary education and *collège* become blurry; those who entered *collèges* at an early age would learn Latin there, while others learned Latin before *collège*. For example, Besnard wrote that students learned Latin in *collège*, while Raymond-Latour began to learn Latin at home, from his parents.⁸² In addition to Latin, students might learn plainchant, especially if they were learning in a church environment.⁸³ The presence of plainchant emphasizes the religious materials that overwhelmingly structured primary education.

⁷⁸ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 10–11.

⁷⁹ Verneilh-Puiraseau, 12–16.

⁸⁰ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 27.

⁸¹ Besnard, 17.

⁸² Besnard, 27; Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 15.

⁸³ Simon, *Souvenirs d'un villageois* 96. As mentioned on page 20, a chaplain named Mr Guiard taught Simon plainchant.

Many groups and individuals were involved in deciding the content taught in the course of primary studies. A passage from Raymond-Latour provides an example of the groups involved when two teachers disagreed on curriculum. While putting on a play in primary school, the two teachers involved disagreed. One was Raymond-Latour's Latin teacher, and the other was "a distinguished doctor from the town."⁸⁴ The two came into conflict over the correct way to pronounce "Madame" in a verse from the play; seeing as it was a declamation, the Latin teacher insisted on pronouncing it as one syllable—"Mame,"—while the doctor threatened to cancel the play if this pronunciation was adopted.⁸⁵ They resolved the conflict in the following way:

Both teachers therefore decided to refer, on this contentious point, to the decision of a tribunal composed of the most educated men of the area. The assembly having gathered, on the indicated day, decided, almost unanimously, that the word *madame* should be pronounced with all its syllables, whether it is spoken or declaimed.⁸⁶

The process of overcoming disagreement on academic content gives us valuable insight into the authorities behind such content. Individual teachers had a strong role in primary education; it is notable that one of the only instances where multiple teachers are mentioned working together ends in a dispute between the two of them. The dispute also shows that primary education was deeply situated within the local community, since both teachers agreed to turn towards the community as an authority to resolve their conflict. In particular, when it came to education, local people with high levels of education were considered to be the authorities, and the teachers turned to them to adjudicate on matters of curriculum dispute.

One other key authority in the materials of primary education was the Church. Evidence from this comes from Jacques Lablée, born in Beaugency in 1751 to a moderate merchant

⁸⁴ Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 20.

⁸⁵ Raymond-Latour, 20.

⁸⁶ Raymond-Latour, 20–21. Theater was often an important part of curriculum as well, as an exercise in public speaking and as a way to expose students to Classical materials.

background. Until formally entering Latin education at age 6, Lablée only read church books, meaning that these books were his first exposure to reading.⁸⁷ Similarly, Simon learned plainchant from old songbooks published in 1510, until the bishop of Mans bought new books in 1750.⁸⁸ That these books were well over 200 years old speaks to the tensions between old and new in the curriculum, which I will discuss in the section on the *collège*. These church materials were not separate from primary education, but formed the materials that students used to learn. As children learned to read, then, they also learned Christian principles and practices.

Pedagogy and Punishment

While some students quickly and successfully mastered the material taught at the primary level, others struggled to succeed with the methods of teaching. Larevellière-Lepeaux praised his teacher, the abbé Séguillon, for helping him swiftly advance and enter *collège*, and Besnard sung the praise of M. Bidon's primary school.⁸⁹ While Verneilh-Puiraseau did eventually learn the language, he criticized his primary school's method for teaching Latin:

The teaching of the Latin language was very different from what it is today; there did not exist yet any method for teaching it, besides the rudiment of Gaudin and of a certain Despautère, of which I never understood anything. We had to learn the books by heart, without any explanation which would have prepared an understanding. Each student was called to come recite, in his turn, his lesson in front of the teacher sitting gravely in a chair and holding his *martinet* in his hand.⁹⁰

His teacher prioritized brute memorization over understanding, which Verneilh-Puiraseau did not feel was effective. The final words of this excerpt involve his teacher's use of corporal

⁸⁷ Jacques Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres, ouvrage anecdotique, faisant suite aux Mémoires sur la révolution française*, 3.

⁸⁸ Simon, *Souvenirs d'un villageois du Maine*, 96.

⁸⁹ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 10; Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 17.

⁹⁰ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 19–20.

punishment in his lessons. Pedagogy and punishment were not distinct in the memoirists' educations; punishment was central to the pedagogy of *ancien régime* France.

Punishment, and specifically corporal punishment, is the most prominent theme in descriptions of childhood education. As a broad trend, the use of corporal punishment in schools was actually decreasing in the eighteenth century, in line with pedagogical literature that demanded reforms in punishment and with a broader Enlightenment turn against public torture. Instead of corporal punishment, these reformers advocated for anticipatory, psychologically based measures of discipline.⁹¹ Nevertheless, corporal punishment was central to students' memories of their time in school. Memoirists dedicate large portions of their writings to punishment, and there is a unique richness of emotion that surrounds such discussions. Nearly every memoirist who writes about their primary schooling recalls the punishment used. They recall their teachers beating them with whips, ferules (a type of stick with a widened edge), martinets (whips with leather lashes), and their fists.⁹²

The memoirs illuminate the centrality of corporal punishment to pedagogy, even in primary education. Take the next part of Verneilh-Puiraseau's explanation of his school's method of teaching, the first part of which is included at the beginning of the *Pedagogy* section:

Each student was called to come recite in turn his lesson in front of the teacher sitting gravely in a chair and holding his *martinet* in his hand: we called as such a type of whip with a long wooden handle, made up of five or six parchment straps, well twisted and tied at the end. At the slightest fault in memory, the student reciting was whipped on his legs, which were not like today protected by pants; but we did not find it bad that he arrived wearing his tricorne hat, with which he blocked the blows as best he could.⁹³

⁹¹ Laurence Brockliss, "Contenir et prévenir la violence. La discipline scolaire et universitaire sous l'Ancien Régime (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)," 58–60; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 55.

⁹² Verneilh-Puiraseau, 14, 19–20; Louis François de Paule Tillette de Mautort, *Mémoires du chevalier de Mautort, capitaine au régiment d'Austrasie, chevalier de l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)*, 3; Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 19; François René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 1:31.

⁹³ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 19–20.

Teachers punished students for failing to memorize the required Latin passages; corporal punishment was not separate from the teaching process but was an integral part of how teachers wanted students to acquire new information. This passage also suggests a low threshold for punishment; teachers would whip students' bare legs at any small error in memorization. Other memoirists confirm this deep connection between pedagogy and punishment. Lablée writes that he had to work "to avoid the punishments that the teachers who taught me to read and to write hardly spared"; punishment became part of his learning process.⁹⁴ Raymond-Latour writes about learning to act in plays "under the ferule of my teacher."⁹⁵ The casual mentions of punishment highlight the centrality of corporal punishment to pedagogy.

Corporal punishment was central to pedagogy not only through the actual act of punishment, but also through the environment of fear it created in the classroom. By using a hat to mitigate the pain of the whips on the legs, Verneilh-Puiraseau's teacher emphasized the ritual of punishment more than the actual pain from the whipping. Of course, the punishment was still intended to, and did, inflict pain on students. Nevertheless, it is the ritual of the act rather than the act itself that motivated students to learn, as they sought to avoid the punishment. As Michel Foucault wrote, "To find the suitable punishment for a crime is to find the disadvantage whose idea is such that it robs for ever the idea of any crime of attraction"; it is the idea of punishment that discourages undesired actions.⁹⁶ Similarly, as Lablée sought to avoid punishments, it was the fear of the punishments that motivated him to learn. In this way, discipline in the eighteenth century does become psychological and anticipatory as desired by reformers. However, it was still intimately linked to corporal punishment, and the latter was still used in the classroom.

⁹⁴ Lablée, Jacques, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 3.

⁹⁵ Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 19.

⁹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 104.

An interesting case from Lablée shows the extent to which punishment could become quantifiable and systematized, contributing to the ritualization of punishment and the atmosphere of expecting corporal punishment:

My Latin teacher introduced a unique idea: he gave immunities to his students with whom he was happy, which were cards stamped and signed by him. These cards, of different colors, read: *Good for one time, good for two times*, etc. When one of his students had deserved a punishment, they freed themselves from it by presenting the immunities in a number proportionate to the pain they had to endure; if there was any missing, the student could borrow it; but if students who were poorly liked by their classmates could not find enough to free themselves of the correction, they endured it.⁹⁷

In this system, the teacher systematizes punishment because the process becomes clear, understandable, and rational (if not justifiable) to the students. He quantifies punishment because he decides exactly how much punishment each action deserves. One effect of the new forms of discipline in the eighteenth century, according to Foucault, is that “it is possible to quantify this field and work out an arithmetical economy based on it.”⁹⁸ Therefore, this system represents a tension between old and new: old in the centrality of corporal punishment, but new in the ability to precisely quantify punishment. The system also points to the strong social nature of the classroom, where, in this one case, cultivating friendship and camaraderie among classmates could be crucial to saving them from physical pain. By incentivizing students to develop these positive relationships in the classroom, punishment thus also acted as a form of social discipline.

Corporal punishment and psychological punishment could go hand-in-hand in explicit ways as well. François René de Chateaubriand, born in Saint-Malo in 1768 to a noble family, provides testimony. For Chateaubriand, his teacher, M. Després, accompanied his punches with name-calling, using the term “tête d’achôcre.” Although Chateaubriand did not understand the

⁹⁷ Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 4.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 180.

term, he assumed, correctly, that it was an insult.⁹⁹ For M. Després, punishment was not just a pedagogical technique, it also appeared to carry a sort of vitriol and anger toward his students.

Teachers sometimes carried punishment to the extreme. Such was the case with Larevellière-Lepeaux's Latin teacher, M. Perraudau: "Upon leaving these mystical meetings with his devotees, which he prolonged one-on-one for two or three hours in his bedroom, he came and brutalized his miserable students, either by this indecent correction that we never should have permitted in schools and that he loved to give, or by the most cruel blows on every part of the body."¹⁰⁰ The inclusion of a more sinister, private form of punishment for students in addition to hitting students shows the extremes to which teachers could take punishment. It suggests sexual abuse and that teachers had a very high level of power over their students.

These punishments often provoked harsh negative reactions from the students on whom they were inflicted, which are reflected in their memoirs from the perspectives of their adult selves. Larevellière-Lépeaux credits M. Perraudau's hits to his back with "the deformity of my size and, in large part, the weakness of my chest."¹⁰¹ He was not the only one to speculate about the lasting effects of his childhood punishment. Another memory comes from Louis François de Paul Tillette de Mautort, born in Abbeville in 1752 to a family of the low nobility. Tillette recalls with horror the punishment he endured while boarding at primary school in Amiens from his teacher, Mr. Duquet, who would give "hits with the whip, indistinctly anywhere he could hit."¹⁰² The result, according to Tillette when he wrote his memoir, is that "he dazed me so much and made me fearful by his bad treatments, that I do not doubt that I am indebted to him for a certain

⁹⁹ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 1:31; Henri Moisy, *Dictionnaire de patois normand: indiquant particulièrement tous les termes de ce patois en usage dans la région centrale de la Normandie*, 8. The term *achocre* is Norman slang for an "a brutal, violent, rude man."

¹⁰⁰ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Larevellière-Lepeaux, 9.

¹⁰² Tillette de Mautort, *Mémoires du chevalier de Mautort*, 3.

timidity that I have always maintained.”¹⁰³ By attributing their development later in life to the punishment received in primary education, Larevellière-Lépeaux and Tillette show the extent to which early punishment affected them and remained deeply in their memory.

Some students even reacted harshly and violently in the moment. Verneilh-Puiraseau recounts the story of his classmate Toutou:

Toutou, already a big child, was condemned to the whip for some big fault; he had resigned himself to go behind a screen to endure his punishment. But, at the first hit of the *martinet*, he got up furiously and jumped to the teacher’s hair, calling him all the names, notably of *Cardeur*; it’s the nickname that we gave him in our anger.¹⁰⁴

The story of Toutou shows forms of student resistance to corporal punishment in the moment. Although it is difficult to verify this story, which was recounted by a classmate over fifty years later, the incident nevertheless shows a recognition by Verneilh-Puiraseau that students, in his childhood, did resist punishment.

Another way to assess student sentiments around punishment comes from students’ opinions of teachers. Students’ descriptions of teachers, when they provide in-depth descriptions, nearly always include or are adjacent to their descriptions of the teacher’s punishment. Students tend to positively describe teachers who do not use corporal punishment and negatively describe those who do. Besnard describes his teacher M. Bidon as having a “a gentle character, for he very rarely inflicted on his students any of these corporal punishments so used in all the schools.”¹⁰⁵ Also of note in this description is that not every teacher used corporal punishment.

We can contrast this description of M. Bidon’s gentle character with Larevellière-Lepeaux’s description of M. Perraudou, his Latin teacher who used extreme punishment. He described this teacher as “a gentle figure, a put-together exterior, hid in him an irascibility that is

¹⁰³ Tillette de Mautort, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 16.

most dangerous in a teacher. He was false and hypocritical.”¹⁰⁶ Larevellière-Lepeaux immediately follows this negative characterization of his teacher with a description of his punishment. Similarly, Tillette precedes his description of Mr. Duquet’s punishment by remarking that “I never knew a figure more hostile and less likely to do well with children than this animal,” and he later calls him “my brutal teacher.”¹⁰⁷ The historian Laurence Brockliss argued that teachers who used excessive force were probably exceptional at this time.¹⁰⁸ However, the close link between perceptions of teachers and their decision to punish or not, and the long-lasting emotional effects of such punishment, suggests otherwise.

Slightly more ambiguous is students’ perceptions of whether corporal punishment made a teacher more or less effective at teaching. On the one hand, Besnard and Larevellière-Lepeaux highlight the effectiveness of their teachers who did not use corporal punishment. Besnard shared that M. Bidon’s teaching method was highly effective.¹⁰⁹ Larevellière-Lepeaux compared his teacher who never hit students, the abbé Séguillon, to M. Perraudau, writing that the former was “infinitely more suited to teaching” than the latter, and that he quickly advanced under the abbé Séguillon.¹¹⁰ However, not every memoirist attributed their academic success to a teacher who refrained from punishment. As a student, Lablée had a strong negative emotional reaction to punishment in his Latin school, writing “my heart raised, my pride was indignant at the idea of seeing the sons of men treated like vile animals.”¹¹¹ However, retrospectively, he held the opinion that punishment made teaching more effective. Despite his revulsion for corporal punishment, he wrote that “I did not recognize that the fear of punishment often produced

¹⁰⁶ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Tillette de Mautort, *Mémoires du chevalier de Mautort*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Brockliss, “Contenir et prévenir la violence,” 61.

¹⁰⁹ Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 17.

¹¹⁰ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 10.

¹¹¹ Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 5.

salutary effects.”¹¹² He also attributed his success in learning to read and write in primary school to his effort to avoid his teachers’ punishment.¹¹³ While some students benefited most from teachers who did not use corporal punishment, there was also the opinion, at least in retrospect, that punishment was conducive or necessary to learning.

How was corporal punishment in primary schools received at the time? Besides the story of Toutou, most of what we learn from memoirs shows the perspective of the memoirist at the time of writing. One source that helps illuminate the *ancien régime* perspective is Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *Tableau de Paris*, published in between 1781 and 1788. Mercier was born in 1740 and received his primary and secondary education in Paris. This work is comprised of his observations of countless aspects of Paris. He wrote the following about corporal punishment in his entry on *Petites Ecoles*:

We torment this lovely childhood; we inflict it with daily punishments. Shouldn’t the weakness of this age be an interest in its favor? Let us penetrate nevertheless into the interior of these primary schools. There, we see tears flowing on children’s cheeks: we hear sobs and whines, like if the pain was not made for formed men and not for children. There, we see teachers, of whom merely the sight inspires terror, armed with whips and ferules, treating with inhumanity the youngest.¹¹⁴

This passage confirms that people found corporal punishment in primary schools objectionable at the time, not only in retrospect. Further, Mercier suggests that the age of children in primary education is significant in the objection to corporal punishment for primary school. Because of its publication date, this sentiment is notably not informed by any discourse around education arising during the French Revolution or the nineteenth century.

¹¹² Lablée, 5.

¹¹³ Lablée, 3.

¹¹⁴ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 2, page 48–49.

Mercier's judgment is, however, heavily informed by Rousseau, of whom Mercier was strong supporter. In *Émile*, Rousseau makes the distinction between childhood and adulthood."¹¹⁵ With this distinction in mind, he calls on people undertaking the education of a young fictional child, Émile, to "Never inflict any punishment, for he does not know what it is to be at fault."¹¹⁶ Rousseau inspires both Mercier's insistence on childhood as a specific stage in life and his revulsion at corporal punishment for children. For supporters of Rousseau such as Mercier, then, corporal punishment for young children takes on an especially abhorrent character.

Two more cases inform us about parents' reaction to punishment at the time. Let us return to Verneilh-Puiraseau's classmate Toutou. The day after Toutou's outburst, he returned to school, "driven this time by his father M. Foucault-de Malebert; he made his excuses, and the matter did not go farther; Toutou did not return to school."¹¹⁷ That the father withdrew Toutou from school suggests disapproval of the punishment, but not so strongly that he broke from norms dictating that his son apologize for his reaction. For other parents, some teacher behavior was unacceptable. Discussing M. Perraudau's punishments, Larevellière-Lepeaux's wrote that, "Our parents did not know any of this. Sorry to not have been informed of it earlier, they took us, as soon as they knew, from the hands of this man whose appearance was so deceptive."¹¹⁸ M. Perraudau seems to have perpetuated more abuse than the norm. However, as discussed earlier, the parents' disapproval of his behavior towards their children shows that punishment was not so total that all parents were willing to accept it in any forms; there was a line for some parents for what they considered acceptable in terms of corporal punishment.

¹¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Emile of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Selections*, 34.

¹¹⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 17.

¹¹⁸ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 9–10.

General Views

Primary school had different purposes for different sectors of the population. Students and parents from relatively precarious professional backgrounds might see a primary education as useful or necessary for a professional future. Bédé wrote that his father encouraged him to go to school because “he felt the consequence of not knowing to read or write.”¹¹⁹ While he does not explain this consequence, it is possible that reading and writing could be helpful to his father’s profession as a miller. Besnard came from a modest landowning family. His older brother left Latin school “and declared that he preferred to stay at the house, to work with the cows and learn to labor.”¹²⁰ For someone with Besnard’s social background, then, the alternative to continuing with school was to engage in manual labor. Instead, Besnard’s primary education in Latin allowed him to obtain a full *collège* education. Mercier also strongly supported the importance of primary education, writing that it is “absolutely necessary to each individual to know how to read, write, and do addition.”¹²¹

For Simon’s family, however, reading and writing did not serve a professional purpose. He wrote that his father liked to spend time with educated people “because he really liked to teach himself reading and arithmetic, but this science that he estimated so much did not give him bread.”¹²² While his father enjoyed the culture around education, as a cloth maker, it did not serve him professionally, and so he could not see his education as more than a leisure activity.

¹¹⁹ Bédé, *Un ouvrier en 1820*, 72.

¹²⁰ Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 22.

¹²¹ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 2:48.

¹²² Simon, *Souvenirs d’un villageois*, 97.

Conclusion

This section brings to light the diversity of experiences with primary education. The setting of primary education could be indicative of the family background of the student. Backgrounds also affected the trajectory of education, as bourgeois and noble students tended to have much more diversified trajectories of primary education. The curriculum for primary education was equally diverse. It included reading, writing, arithmetic, Latin, and plainchant. There were multiple authorities on curriculum; the local educated community and church books played important roles. In terms of pedagogy, corporal punishment was widespread and central to pedagogy. Despite its prevalence in primary education, it was not universally accepted. Finally, primary education was especially meaningful to students of modest or precarious backgrounds because it opened up opportunities in terms of their livelihoods. In contrast, a student of a very low-status profession may have no professional use for a primary education.

Memories of *Collège*

For those who accessed this elite secondary education institution, *collège* was a memorable time in their young lives. Memoirists recorded it in detail; in addition to being the location for formative years of adolescence, the institution's student composition and unique pressures make the recorded memories especially rich. Students recall the diverse backgrounds of their classmates, the curriculum during these years, and the punishment they received. They reflect on the academic competition and on their own relative academic success, on the outcomes of their education, and on the value that their parents gave to a *collège* education.

Different Backgrounds in the Collège

If primary education was limited to certain segments of the population, *collège* was reserved for even fewer.¹²³ Two memoirists leave our narrative at this point: Simon and Bédé. While these two men received primary educations, they did not continue on to the institution of *collège*, instead beginning their careers of clothmaking and industrial labor, respectively. It is no coincidence that our two memoirists who come from the lowest socio-professional standings are the ones who did not attend *collège*; this is representative of broader trends in *collège* attendance, where wealthy students were three times overrepresented in *collèges* and where the principal non-elite attendees came from the upper rungs of the lower classes.¹²⁴

Despite the limits in access to *collège*, not all memoirists perceived *collège* to be a bastion of inequality. For Jacques de Norvins, the picture was more complicated. Norvins was born in Paris in 1769 to family of wealthy tax farmers.¹²⁵ Famous for writing a history of Napoleon, Norvins framed his memoir as more than a straightforward account, writing that “Despite myself, I am a moralist, instead of being of simple and brief chronicler.”¹²⁶ His moralist reflections on his childhood emerge clearly in his account of his *collège* education, which began at the Collège du Plessis-Sorbonne in 1777 and continued at the Collège d’Harcourt.¹²⁷ Heavily influenced by his attitude toward memoir—and by the fact that his *collège* education took place within twelve years of the outbreak of the French Revolution—Norvins provides a detailed reflection on the nuances of equality and inequality in the *ancien régime collège*.

¹²³ Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’éducation en France*, 190. Roughly one boy for every 52 aged 8 to 18 attended *collège* in 1789. For a further discussion of the students who attended *collège*, see the introduction.

¹²⁴ Frijhoff, *École et société*, 17, 193. Again, see the introduction for more on the social composition of the *collège*.

¹²⁵ Jacques Marquet de Norvins, *Souvenirs d’un historien de Napoléon. Mémorial de J. de Norvins*, iii.

¹²⁶ Norvins, xxxv.

¹²⁷ Norvins, 9–10.

Norvins argues that equality took greater hold in the *collège* than in the rigidly divided *ancien régime* society. This manifested in “friendships struck with inequalities,” which could only survive in the *collège* environment.¹²⁸ After leaving *collège*, “Students could only maintain friendships from *collège* that could continue in their father’s house.”¹²⁹ Thus, *collège* was almost a utopic time in a young French man’s life, where he could establish friendships with more equality than in the outside world. Norvins further highlights what the mixing of noble students and non-noble students. Contrasting France with Germany, which had schools reserved for the nobility, Norvins observes the following about students from the highest families of France:

The Montmorencys, the Rohans, the Tavannes, the La Trémoilles, the Richelieus, the Fitz-James, the d’Harcourts, the Duras, the Séguiers, the d’Aligres, etc., were at the *collèges* of Plessis and of Harcourt, where I did all of my classical education, sitting on the same benches at church, at the cafeteria and in class, as the sons of artisans who worked for their households.¹³⁰

Despite the aforementioned inequalities in access to *collège* and the overrepresentation of wealthy students, Norvins paints the *collège* population as unusually blended, again highlighting the greater equality of this institution relative to rigid hierarchy of the surrounding world.

Nevertheless, Norvins shares the ways in which students at the *collège* were aware of their different backgrounds. While the *ancien régime collège* may have had more equality than the surrounding world, in Norvins’s eyes, it had far less equality than the *collège* at his time of writing, around 1840¹³¹. To start, physical signs of inequality were visible to students. Norvins frames them as a dichotomous difference between “patricians and plebeians.”¹³² They included differences in “grooming,” housing, tutors, and servants, for example.¹³³ Norvins’s observation

¹²⁸ Norvins, 11.

¹²⁹ Norvins, 11.

¹³⁰ Norvins, 11.

¹³¹ Norvins, xxi, xxxiv, 10. According to Norvins, at the time of writing, *collèges* had “the most complete equality,” which he normatively called “an incontestable advantage.”

¹³² Norvins, 11.

¹³³ Norvins, 11.

here that each student wore the clothing of his father's profession suggests a more nuanced gradation of inequality than his dichotomy between patricians and plebeians.¹³⁴ Since Norvins remembers these differences, we can infer that they were visible to students, and that they therefore reinforced the social differences students had upon entering *collège*.

How did students feel about this visible inequality in *collège*? Three memoirists provide insight into this question, and they give very different answers. On one end of the spectrum, Norvins points to a total acceptance of inequality in *collèges*: "For the social order was at the time so solidly, so naturally established by a long tradition that never had something more proximate or provocative been so strongly supported."¹³⁵ For Norvins, acceptance of this inequality was strongly rooted in the *ancien régime* social inequality relative to which, as discussed above, Norvins felt that the inequality in *collèges* was not a problem. He even indicates a respect by the bourgeois students for students in the high nobility for having worked hard, "he who did not need to for his future."¹³⁶ Of course, the desire to emphasize the inequality of the *ancien régime* to highlight the changes of the French Revolution likely colored Norvins' portrayal of inequality in *collèges*, but he nonetheless presents this picture of acceptance.

However, not all students content with *collège* inequality, and those who felt the negative ramifications of the obvious differences remembered inequality in a more negative light. Take Chateaubriand, for instance. Born in 1768 to a noble family from Brittany, Chateaubriand must have entered the Collège de Dol near the top of the social ladder. Nevertheless, he felt limited by what he saw as his lower wealth, writing "I could not have these quick friends that fortune provides, for there was nothing to gain with a poor scoundrel who did not even have money for

¹³⁴ Norvins, 12. Norvins complains about this difference in clothing, preferring the uniform instead as more rational.

¹³⁵ Norvins, 11–12.

¹³⁶ Norvins, 12.

the week.”¹³⁷ Clearly, the relative status of each student was complicated, and both wealth and social standing conveyed power. Chateaubriand’s difficulty making friends is made more urgent by the importance of friendship in schools. As shown in Section One, friendships could literally save people from physical punishment.¹³⁸ These friendships could even have deeper long-term implications; Norvins wrote that, during the Revolution, only one person from his two *collèges* condemned a former classmate in the Revolution’s trials.¹³⁹ This supports the importance of friendships, and elevates the urgency of Chateaubriand’s inability to form friendships, thus elevating the negative effects of inequality in *collège*.

Larevellière-Lepeaux falls even further on the spectrum of discontent with the inequality in *collèges*. For him, the stakes were high because he believed that inequality between students disrupted a meritocracy in academic success. Judging himself the second best in his class, Larevellière-Lepeaux tells the story of his classmate Gendry, the best student in the class during *seconde*.¹⁴⁰ Gendry was a baker’s son, and Larevellière-Lepeaux describes that “he was poor, and always covered in a coat of indigence.”¹⁴¹ While Gendry far surpassed the other students in every subject, he only won the second place prize in academic competitions because of his background.¹⁴² Students from modest social backgrounds often excelled at *collège*, but it is unsurprising that background impacted the recognition of such academic excellence.¹⁴³

Larevellière-Lepeaux contrasts Gendry with another student, Boylève de la Mourousière. Despite

¹³⁷ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, 1:76.

¹³⁸ See page 23.

¹³⁹ Norvins, *Souvenirs d’un historien de Napoléon*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Seconde* is a grade level near the later end of *collège*.

¹⁴¹ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 15.

¹⁴² Larevellière-Lepeaux, 15.

¹⁴³ Frijhoff, *École et société*, 83.

being an average student, La Mourousière's father was a *syndic* for nobility, as well as a Jansenist—La Mourousière routinely won the first prize.¹⁴⁴

Larevellière-Lepeaux reacted strongly against the results of Gendry and La Mourousière, which he saw as an injustice.¹⁴⁵ For him, this injustice was especially pernicious because students were impressionable:

We did not know how to believe how gruesome these unjust preferences were! They pervert the morals of students, who only receive from their teachers examples of injustice and of partiality... Acting in this way is committing a crime; because it is in youth that one forms to vice and to virtue, and the example of parents and of teachers will always be the strongest lesson.¹⁴⁶

The strength of Larevellière-Lepeaux's judgment here is a notable difference from Norvins' assertion that students accepted differences as a reflection of the unequal social order. We can explain the vast variation between these answers in two ways. First, the memoirists may simply remember the events of their adolescence differently. With Norvins' self-admitted tendency to moralize and his background as a historian of Napoleon, he likely exaggerated students' contentment with inequality in the *ancien régime* to emphasize the differences that the French Revolution produced. Second, students simply had different moral reactions to the inequality. While Norvins may not have batted an eye at the visible inequalities at *collège*, Chateaubriand may have been more aware of the negative ramifications of these inequalities because he was personally affected by them, at least in one respect. And Larevellière-Lepeaux likely developed a much more negative view of the role of inequality in *collège* because he paid particular attention to Gendry, whom he perceived to be the only student more academically gifted than him in class.

¹⁴⁴ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 15. The Jansenist status was important because of the alignment of Jansenism among the order of Oratorians, who ran the Collège of Angers that he attended during this debacle. That Larevellière-Lepeaux mentions that La Mourousière's father was a Jansenist suggests that he perceived that the Oratorians at the Collège of Angers were biased towards students with Jansenist parents.

¹⁴⁵ Larevellière-Lepeaux

¹⁴⁶ Larevellière-Lepeaux, 16.

Beyond Larevellière-Lepeaux's judgement of the situation, his story about Gendry indicates specific roadblocks for students, produced by inequality in *collèges*. First, poor students could not always participate in academic activities. Gendry could not attend an end-of-year rhetoric exercise at the Collège d'Angers because "He did not have the means to buy the clothing and to use his scholarship for the expenses. For the same reason he had no role in the play that happened at the end of the exercise before the distribution of prizes."¹⁴⁷ While poorer students were allowed into *collège*, once there, they faced continued barriers to their full participation or full ability to succeed. Larevellière-Lepeaux also writes that teachers' unequal preferences for some students "also harm instruction very much, by taking teacher's esteem away and by discouraging their students."¹⁴⁸ Thus, poor students also faced discouragement. Ultimately, inequalities were perceived, felt, and played out in the institution of the *collège*.

Curriculum

Student accounts of curriculum generally align with historical research on the variation in *ancien régime* curriculum. Many students studied the writings of ancient Greek and Latin authors, while one also studied French poetry.¹⁴⁹ Chateaubriand, for his part, studied mathematics.¹⁵⁰ *Collèges* introduced new topics during philosophy, the name for the final two years of the program, in which not all students participated. Larevellière-Lepeaux studied logic, metaphysics, morality, and physics during his two years of philosophy, while Verneilh-Puiraseau wrote a thesis in logic during his.¹⁵¹ While these memoirists shared many commonalities in their

¹⁴⁷ Larevellière-Lepeaux, 17–18.

¹⁴⁸ Larevellière-Lepeaux, 16.

¹⁴⁹ Norvins, *Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*, 45; Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe.*, 1:100; Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 9–10; Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1:254-255.

¹⁵⁰ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 1:100.

¹⁵¹ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 18–19; Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 27. Larevellière-Lepeaux specified that he learned physics "to the degree that it had arrived at this time."

collège curriculum, the variations between them accurately show a *collège* program—which was not nationally uniform to begin with—in flux with the changing ideas of the eighteenth century.

Student complaints in their memoirs reveal that many students perceived the curriculum to be stuck in the past. Larevellière-Lepeaux felt that his two years of philosophy were poorly executed because they were not as useful as they should have been.¹⁵² Verneilh-Puiraseau criticized his two years of philosophy for a different reason, writing that “they regarded it as useless or even dangerous to deal in depth with the secrets of nature and of reasoning.”¹⁵³ The importance that he places on a deep examination of nature and reasoning are reminiscent of Enlightenment thought; his criticism of the curriculum, then, suggests that it is not in line with what he valued at the time. Rather, it was stuck in a system of beliefs around education that had other priorities besides deeply exploring nature and reasoning.

Mercier provides another criticism of his *collège* education: despite living in Paris, he learned so much about ancient Rome that he felt that “I was far from Paris, a foreigner to its walls, and that I lived in Rome.”¹⁵⁴ This was not a wistful observation but rather a criticism of the curriculum for its prioritization of Latin and ancient Rome, which is shown through Mercier’s critical and sarcastic tone, exemplified one page prior with his exclamation, “How we have been heavily mistaken in all the systems of studies!”¹⁵⁵ His complaint about the focus on Rome aligns with reformers in the eighteenth century such as La Chalotais, who criticized the focus on Latin in education.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 18–19.

¹⁵³ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1:254-255.

¹⁵⁵ Mercier, 254.

¹⁵⁶ David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Invention Nationalism, 1680-1800*, 123.

Lablée best exemplifies the tension between past and present, as his love for French literature brought him at odds with his school's Latin-heavy curriculum.¹⁵⁷ While his teachers emphasized Greek and Latin authors, he and his classmates read French literature, which "we procured without our teachers' knowledge."¹⁵⁸ Thus began the tension between his own interests and those that the school promoted. He was distinctly aware of this tension, since he and his classmates procured these books behind their teachers backs, anticipating disapproval by their teachers. He further explains this atmosphere in the following quotation:

Already I did not limit myself to writing verses in Latin. It displeased the heads of instruction that we were unfaithful to the Latin muses, in whose mysteries they wanted to exclusively initiate us.¹⁵⁹

Lablée was correct in assuming that his teachers would be unhappy that he was reading French literature, and to describe it as an infidelity to the Latin poets shows the extent to which Latin, and antiquity in general, was entrenched in the curriculum. Nevertheless, Lablée continued to focus on his interests in contemporary French literature, such as the eighteenth-century poet Charles-Pierre Colardeau, over a curriculum that he saw as outdated.¹⁶⁰

Pedagogy and Competition

While many students held critical views of their curriculum, by and large they were still invested in their success at school. The primary motivation for academic success was the environment of competition at *collèges*.¹⁶¹ Also known as *émulation*, competition was a primary

¹⁵⁷ Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 7. Lablée technically attended a seminary at this point, which he entered at age 12. However, I have included his testimony from this institution in this section because of the way he describes the seminary: "This *collège*, although it was called a seminary, and although it was led by clergy, did not prepare students for the religious estate."

¹⁵⁸ Lablée, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Lablée, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Lablée, 16.

¹⁶¹ Another motivation, the professional utility of education, is discussed in the *General Views* subsections in Section I and Section II.

pedagogical method of motivating students to learn.¹⁶² As Foucault describes it, “In discipline, punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment.”¹⁶³ The gratification side of the equation becomes much more prominent at the *collège* level. Six of our memoirists mention this system of prizes and competition, and five of them mention that they won a prize. The sheer volume of students who mention these prizes—decades after being students—shows that they occupied a forefront place in students’ consciousness about *collège*.¹⁶⁴

There were different prizes available to students, and there was no shortage of prizes one could win. First, there were prizes for specific compositions that students wrote. In this category, Verneilh-Puiraseau came in first for *composition en thème*, and Larevellière-Lepeaux for Latin and theme.¹⁶⁵ Prizes could be even more frequent; Besnard recalls a weekly prize awarded to the student who did the best composition each Friday, a prize which, of course, Besnard won often.¹⁶⁶ Then, there was a prize for the best in the class; Verneilh-Puiraseau won this—a prize named *d’Excellence*—at the Collège de Limoges for three years, and another student, Pierre-Joseph Boyer, won the prize in his later years of *collège*.¹⁶⁷ There was often an end-of-year, which Lablée felt he should have won.¹⁶⁸ The prizes were often accompanied with small material commemorative objects: Verneilh-Puiraseau’s *d’Excellence* won him “a crown” and Besnard won a silver cross for his weekly prizes.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶² Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 24–25. Brockliss, “Contenir et prévenir la violence,” 58–59.

¹⁶³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 180.

¹⁶⁴ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 20, 26; Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 56; Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 14–15; Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 9, 16–17; Pierre-Joseph Boyer, *Souvenirs et causeries*, 4–5; Norvins, *Souvenirs d’un historien de Napoléon*, 25.

¹⁶⁵ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 20; Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 56.

¹⁶⁷ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 20; Boyer, *Souvenirs et causeries*, 4–5.

¹⁶⁸ Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 20; Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 56.

Was winning academic prizes important to students? Given the prominent place of prizes in memoirs, they clearly mattered a great deal to the students winning them. It is notable that, of our memoirists who write about *collège*, a majority mention prizes, and of those, nearly all mention winning them. Besnard provides evidence for the personal import that these prizes could hold for students. He writes that he was eager to return to school one year after vacation to see his classmates and to “obtain and show this precious cross, that I well intended to not let leave my buttonhole.”¹⁷⁰ To link his enjoyment of *collège* to his academic rewards highlights the motivation that they provided to students. In further support of the motivation of rewards, Besnard congratulated himself for his hard work in class because he avoided punishment and managed “to maintain over my classmates the superiority that I had acquired for myself the year before.”¹⁷¹ The atmosphere of *émulation* led him to enjoy this feeling of superiority.

Of all the memoirists, Besnard reflects the most on his personal attachment to winning prizes. It appears that Besnard was especially invested in winning prizes and in feeling superior to his classmates. However, Lablée shows a similar avidity for awards, writing about himself and his friend at his seminary:

although having done our first studies... we did not fear competition with the other students of our class. This pattern of emulation, and the excessive rigor of the priest Ser... [*sic*] our teacher, made us make lots of progress in little time. Almost all the prizes in this class and in the *troisième* were shared between us two. I was fervent for these prizes, as I had been for the immunities/special privileges.¹⁷²

Lablée explicitly links *émulation* to his progress as a student and to his winning of prizes, and he speaks of the strong desire that he felt for these prizes.

¹⁷⁰ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 61.

¹⁷¹ Besnard, 61.

¹⁷² Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 9.

Students not only benefited internally from winning academic prizes; they also saw real benefits from the people around them. For Lablée, his academic success was important to him because it was important to his father, who proudly received a letter from the person in charge of Lablée's boarding that read "*I send you your son with crowns.*"¹⁷³ It was not only parents who celebrated the results of students. Besnard writes that, at dinner with several neighboring priests, they praised his academic progress and the career possibilities it opened up for him.¹⁷⁴ The praise could even come from the school itself. Verneilh-Puiraseau describes the day of winning awards:

It was for me like a day of scholastic glory, I was almost ashamed of it. I had to, after the distribution, attend an afternoon tea in my professor's room; I went there with my bundle of books and of crowns.¹⁷⁵

Beyond a small token for winning academic rewards, *collèges* rewarded academically successful students with private celebrations and other material awards.

Besnard in particular appears to have profited from his academic prizes. Speaking of the silver cross awarded to students for the best work every Friday, Besnard wrote the following:

I frequently, and almost constantly, obtained this award, which was not a pointless distinction for me; because the relatives that I would run into in the streets or whose houses I would visit, besides inevitable compliments, almost always offered me graciousness, either in small candies or in several small pieces of money. I did not even wait to use the same means to take advantage of this source of kindness by multiplying my visits, and by wandering in public areas and streets during days of fairs and markets, where I was sure to come across some uncles, aunts, or other relatives, who never failed to give me a little coin.¹⁷⁶

Besnard portrays an entire community of adults who were cognizant of the significance of academic prizes, and who would give him small rewards to congratulate his success. The wealth that Besnard now possessed upon his return to school, in addition to extra vacation time the

¹⁷³ Lablée, 17.

¹⁷⁴ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 70.

¹⁷⁵ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 56.

school awarded him, gave him “a certain air of superiority in the eyes of my classmates”.¹⁷⁷

Although this statement may stem more from hubris than from reality, it suggests that academic success was very visible in the *collège*, if not through the presentation of the reward and the cross awarded to the student, then by the secondary advantages that the student gained by virtue of having won the prize. This confirms the importance of competition in the *collège* and explains the outsized importance it occupied in the student consciousness.

Amid this atmosphere of *émulation*, punishment continued to be significant in the pedagogy of *collèges*. Similarly to primary school, students tend to describe teachers who do not punish as more likable, whereas they dislike those who punish frequently. When Verneilh-Puiraseau’s classmate wrote an unflattering poem about his teachers, his teacher, the abbé Vitract, joked around by reading the verse about himself rather than reacting negatively.¹⁷⁸ Verneilh-Puiraseau immediately follows up this story by writing that “This respectable pastor died at Limoges on April 27, 1805, justly missed by all.”¹⁷⁹ He thus thinks the abbé Vitract’s lack of punishment with the high esteem in which everyone held him. Lablée shares a story of a similar incident where he wrote a poem “that caused enough scandal for someone to complain to M. Va.... [*sic*] our superior.”¹⁸⁰ Calling him “the best man in the world” and “a man full of virtues,” Lablée describes the mild reprimanding that M. Va.... gave him.¹⁸¹ These two professors showed remarkable kindness by taking in stride students’ criticism, and the students rewarded them by looking kindly upon them many decades later. Besnard similarly praises a teacher as likable for never using corporal punishment.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Besnard, 62–64.

¹⁷⁸ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 21.

¹⁷⁹ Verneilh-Puiraseau, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 10–11.

¹⁸¹ Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 11.

¹⁸² Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 102–3.

On the other side of this phenomenon, Lablée shares his negative reaction when a teacher tried to punish him. In this instance, many students were talking to their neighbor in class. When the teacher began to hit students' hands with a ferule, Lablée informed him that he had not been talking, which only caused the teacher to double the punishment. Indignant, Lablée left the classroom.¹⁸³ His poor reaction to the attempted punishment shows that students rebelled against punishment at the *collège* level, as some did at the primary school level.

Despite the dislike of teachers who punished, there is a more clear correlation at the *collège* level between punishment and academic success; the two students who wrote about it suggest that the threat of punishment motivated them to work harder in school. Besnard wrote of the double benefit of listening closely in class and trying hard on his schoolwork: "I managed to save myself from any punishment and to maintain over my classmates the superiority that I had achieved for myself the year before."¹⁸⁴ Here, he links the fear of punishment to the desire for academic prizes. Lablée draws this conclusion even more explicitly:

It is not only to this ardent desire for distinction that I owed the little that I learned in my classes, but several of my teachers knew how to, ferule in their hand, convince me by strong arguments that I had more of an interest to put their lessons to use; I similarly benefitted well by those of the priest Ser.... [*sic*].¹⁸⁵

It is notable that the main observations of punishment at the *collège* level also came from the three memoirists who wrote the most about academic success. Since winning academic rewards was so important to these three, they may have been more inclined to accept any action that they saw as contributing to their success. This further supports the importance of the 'gratification' aspect of Foucault's gratification-punishment system, especially at the *collège* level.

¹⁸³ Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 14–15.

¹⁸⁴ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 61.

¹⁸⁵ Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 9.

The memoirs also suggest that, continuous as the dislike for corporal punishment may have been in *collège*, this dislike lacked the same urgency and vehement condemnation that memoirists and their communities gave it for primary school. Besnard contrasts his likable, non-punishing teacher at the Collège d'Angers with the harsh teachers at the Collège de Doué, where “ferules and even the whip were still used even in the highest classes.”¹⁸⁶ The use of the word “even” suggests that corporal punishment was less common in the older grades. Lablée supports this point. After refusing punishment in class, Lablée was sent by the regent involved to a council of teachers, whom the regent informed of the incident. The council took Lablée’s side, and “disapproved that people used the ferule with students in rhetoric. This teacher did not reappear again in the class.”¹⁸⁷ By disapproving of punishment for higher classes, the council’s decision suggests that corporal punishment was less accepted as a pedagogical strategy for older students. If this same institutional disapproval of punishment did not exist for younger students, it makes sense that it remained up to students and their parents to condemn punishment in primary school more strongly and more emotionally.

Outcomes and General Views

Many memoirists reflected on where their *collège* education led them. Some felt that, despite their *collège* education, their estate or family wealth limited which careers they could pursue. On this topic, Mercier writes:

These *collèges de plein exercice*, for those who do not have any fortune, leave in the world a host of scribes whose only resource is their quill, and it carries them by their indigence and their aptitude to fruitful work.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 102–3. I have classified some of Besnard’s time at the Collège de Doué as primary education because he started out young and the content overlaps more with that which many students learned in the broad, unsystematized category of “primary education.”

¹⁸⁷ Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1:253.

He points to limited options for *collège* graduates of little wealth. Lablée confirms the difficulty of finding a job befitting of his education level, coming from a bourgeois background. He criticizes parents for putting their children in *collège* “when they do not have enough fortune to procure for them, at the end of their studies, an estate where the means can help them support the high rank that their studies and their acquaintances made them take.”¹⁸⁹ Because of his family’s lower wealth, Lablée needed to find a profession where he could make a living once his father died, but found his options limited because he did not come from a very elevated background.¹⁹⁰

Besnard further explains the mechanics of the different career options available to students of different bourgeois backgrounds after *collège*. According to Besnard, only the high bourgeoisie were able to enter into the professions of medicine and law, while students of lower social backgrounds could only become clergy:

For that matter, it was established by custom, as much in medicine as in law, to not confer the degrees necessary to practice as doctors and lawyers to candidates known to not belong to honorable families in the bourgeoisie. It was also regarded as certain, that all the children of simple bourgeois or of artisans or of farmers, who were in *collèges*, had no other destinations than the ecclesiastical estate.¹⁹¹

This limitation played out in his own life, where, being the third son of a bourgeois family, his parents chose the ecclesiastical estate for him from a young age.¹⁹² While Mercier, Lablée, and Besnard have slightly different ideas of exactly which professions a person of a lower social status could join, they all agreed that such limitations did exist. This has important implications for social mobility and for the idea of *collèges* as places of equality or inequality. As mentioned above in the subsection on *Different Backgrounds*, the *collège* may have been a more equal space

¹⁸⁹ Lablée, *Mémoires d’un homme de lettres*, 18–19.

¹⁹⁰ Lablée, 20–21.

¹⁹¹ Besnard, *Souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, 124–25.

¹⁹² Besnard, 1.

than the surrounding society, but there were clearly limitations to this equality of existence and opportunity, both during the time as students and afterwards.

Although status upon entering *collège* could determine the career outcome of this education, other memoirists nevertheless found their *collège* education to be a necessary step in determining their careers. Larevellière-Lepeaux had to choose a profession after *collège*, and his choice was informed by the low level of wealth his parents had left: “They had nearly exhausted their modest fortune to educate us. Nothing more important than the choice of a profession, they repeated to us nonstop and with reason.”¹⁹³ Because of this financial situation, Larevellière-Lepeaux chose to enter into law, which he saw as the most practical choice, even though he believed he was best suited to medicine.¹⁹⁴ Larevellière-Lepeaux’s extensive *collège* education gave him access to these different choices of career, and therefore to the possibility of financial stability through choosing the most practical, lucrative career.

While Chateaubriand had less financial need, he also saw *collège* as the path to more career options. He records his mother’s wish for him to receive a classical education because “The profession of marine officer to which they intended me ‘would not maybe be to my taste,’ she said; it seemed to her good in any case to make me capable of following another carrier.”¹⁹⁵ For Chateaubriand, *collège* would allow him to choose the career path he liked best. Chateaubriand did take advantage of education in this way; he declared that he would join the clergy, but “the truth is that I was only looking to take some time, for I did not know what I wanted. They sent me to the Collège of Dinan to do my humanities.”¹⁹⁶ Here, *collège* became a way for him to delay while he decided what career he really wanted.

¹⁹³ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ Larevellière-Lepeaux, 19.

¹⁹⁵ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, 1:64–65; ARTFL Project, “Marin.”

¹⁹⁶ Chateaubriand, 1:128.

The rest of the memoirists pursued a diversity of careers. Three went to law school following *collège*.¹⁹⁷ Tillette's parents sent him to the artillery, which he complains about.¹⁹⁸ Others took on prominent positions in the government. There is a notable difference in the careers of those who attended *collège* and those who did not. The two memoirists who did not attend *collège*, Simon and Bédé, became a clothmaker and an urban laborer, respectively. Every memoirist who attended *collège*, in contrast, went on to a prominent and successful career. Of course, this is heavily influenced Simon and Bédé's modest backgrounds, and the link between the other memoirists' professional success and decisions to write memoirs. Nevertheless, *collège* appears to have had a positive impact on memoirists' professional success.

Conclusion

As with primary education, diversity continued to characterize the experience of *collège* for our memoirists. Only some could attend the institution, and once there, students faced continued and salient inequality. Curriculum varied by *collège*, and it faced criticisms for being behind the times. Students invested in their studies because of academic competitions, the prizes from which mattered highly to students and the people around them. Because of this, they were more accepting of the threat of punishment as a pedagogical tool to motivate them. Students saw very different—but overall successful—outcomes from their *collège* education, echoing the diversity of their time in the institution.

¹⁹⁷ Boyer, *Souvenirs et causeries*, 5; Norvins, *Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*, 29; Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 37.

¹⁹⁸ Tillette de Mautort, *Mémoires du chevalier de Mautort*, 4.

2. *Cahiers de doléances*: Official Grievances about Education

How was the experience of education, as revealed through these memoirs, reflected in the political demands of 1789? While not as personal a source as memoirs, the *cahiers de doléances* show the grievances from, in theory, everyone in France. In reality, notable community leaders constructed the *cahiers*, but they are still a useful source for us to understand the specific perceptions of education that people in different geographic and social groups held at the end of the time period in question, 1762 to 1789.¹⁹⁹ In their consideration of the same areas of education that the memoirs revealed as important (settings and access, curriculum, pedagogy, and general views), the *cahiers* reveal a desire for more standardization of institutions, of experience, and of ideology. The overwhelming demand in the *cahiers* is for the uniformity of education in France, a demand that is reflected in various different grievances of education. I reference the *cahiers de doléances* that discuss education, as compiled by Ernest Allain in his 1886 book.

Access to Educational Institutions

One of the most recurring and unambiguous demands in the *cahiers* was that more students have access to educational institutions. The authors varied in their vision for increasing accessibility of schools: many wanted to build more schools, others called for schools to be free for some students, and yet others demanded meritocratic admissions. With each of these demands, French people called to standardize who had access to education—a stark contrast to the vast inequality in *ancien régime* education, where primary education was unorganized at best, and where *collège* was reserved for the few and rife with inequality.

¹⁹⁹ Shapiro and Markoff, “Officially Solicited Petitions,” 79–80.

First, the petitioners demanded an expansion in the institutions of schooling.²⁰⁰ Many simply demanded the establishment of more schools, because “by multiplying them we spread the benefits [of the beginning instruction] to a larger number of individuals.”²⁰¹ The establishment of new schools was especially important in places where such schools did not already exist, which was generally in the countryside. By building rural schools, petitioners sought to grant more poor students access to education, especially to primary education.²⁰²

Beyond the expansion of schools, petitioners of all three estates (clergy, nobility, and everyone else) overwhelmingly called for free schools. Petitioners often specified that new rural schools should be free for rural populations.²⁰³ One even called for proof of poverty: “That there would only be received in free schools students with certificates of poverty.”²⁰⁴ Each estate had their own specifications for how they wanted to enact free education. The clergy, for their part, desired scholarships or free education for students—especially poor students—who may want to join the clergy.²⁰⁵ The nobility wanted schools to be free for poor nobles, or to reserve seats for poor nobles.²⁰⁶ The third estate sometimes called for scholarships to be given based on academic merit.²⁰⁷ This renders ambiguous the scope of free schools that the petitioners imagined, whether it was free education for all or free primary education only for a specific group.

The third estate also demanded equal admission to existing schools. Entrance to schools, they wrote, must be “assured by preference for talent and for virtue.”²⁰⁸ These demands were

²⁰⁰ In calling the authors of the *cahiers* “petitioners,” I draw on Shapiro and Markoff’s argument that we should consider the *cahiers de doléances* as petitions. See Shapiro and Markoff, 105.

²⁰¹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires: recueil complet des débats législatifs imprimé par ordre du Sénat et de la Chambre des députés*, 5:593.

²⁰² See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 1:692, 3:177, 5:546.

²⁰³ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:254, 4:354, 5:758, 2:87.

²⁰⁴ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:87.

²⁰⁵ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:462, 5:553.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 1:766, 2:665, 4:255, 4:278.

²⁰⁷ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:158, 3:262.

²⁰⁸ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:651.

especially strong for state-funded schools, such as military schools.²⁰⁹ The third estate wanted to compete for admission “like the children of nobles.”²¹⁰ They forcefully demanded that the state either admit the third estate equally to state-controlled schools or eliminate the schools altogether.²¹¹ Beyond equal admissions, one grievance even aimed to promote equal participation of poor students once admitted to schools by providing books to students who could not afford them.²¹² Through these grievances, petitioners sought to standardize the process of admission to and participation in schools, replacing privilege with meritocracy as the prevailing principle.

Curriculum Reform

Petitioners also sought to reform the curriculum. On the one hand, the *cahiers* support the continuation of some subjects. For primary schools, reading, writing, and arithmetic remained key. A special interest in teaching these three areas to children in the countryside accompanied the push to create more rural educational institutions.²¹³ In addition, some petitioners emphasized the importance of teaching Latin.²¹⁴ This is significant because the emphasis on Latin and on ancient texts was a lightning rod for criticisms of curriculum by memoirists. That some petitioners continued to demand Latin in schools shows the strength of the perceived importance of Latin among petitioners.

On the other hand, many petitioners shared a desire to modernize the curriculum, in line with our memoirists’ complaints about outdated curricula. The following *cahier* article, from the third estate in Essonnes, exemplifies the prevailing vision for curricular reform:

²⁰⁹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:123, 2:194, 2:561, 4:285, 6:36.

²¹⁰ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:260.

²¹¹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 6:36, 3:703.

²¹² France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:772.

²¹³ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:611, 4:163, 4:565, 4:573, 4:688, 5:280.

²¹⁴ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:371, 2:376, 5:25, 5:374.

That the regime of public studies in cities be reformed, that the morning be used following the degrees of knowledge of subjects: 1° to the study of the French language and to the composition in the same language; 2° to the study of morality; 3° to the first principles of public right. That the evening be used for the studies of dead languages.²¹⁵

For the moment, we will focus on the issue of language. In seeking to reform the curriculum taught to their children, petitioners prioritized living over dead languages, but generally they did not entirely turn their backs to dead languages, such as Latin. Instead, they sought to add and prioritize subjects that they saw as more useful, such as French, but also other subjects like foreign languages, physics, natural history, and chemistry.²¹⁶ In short, they wanted to prioritize “the teachings that are suitable for the present time” over “the dull study of a dead language.”²¹⁷

On a broader scale, the petitioners specified which materials would be used in schools. Until the Revolution, students primarily learned to read from church books—ones from 1510 in Simon’s case.²¹⁸ The *cahiers* reflect a tension between this continued desire to use education to convey religious principles and a new push to include national morals. The following *cahier* article from the nobility in Saint-Mihiel exemplifies this tension, demanding that village schools:

continue to teach, joining to the study of religious catechism that forms the base of all the moral duties, that of a patriotic catechism that exposes in a simple and elementary manner the obligations that the title of citizen hold and the rights that necessarily result from these obligations when they are well-filled.²¹⁹

Clearly, the principles of religion and morality do not disappear in the *cahiers*. Many petitioners categorically demanded that schools continue to teach religious principles.²²⁰ In fact,

²¹⁵ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:532.

²¹⁶ On the subjects they wanted to teach, see France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*; On the principle of utility in curricula, see France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:165.

²¹⁷ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 2:405.

²¹⁸ Morange and Chassaing, *Mouvement de réforme*, 104. See page 20 of this document for the discussion of Simon’s learning materials.

²¹⁹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 2:243-4.

²²⁰ See, in addition, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 1:692, 2:376, 3:251, 3:524, 4:602.

many frame these demands as something new that needs to happen (i.e. they need to *ensure that* they teach religious principles in schools).²²¹ For these petitioners, the problem was not the overly strong presence of religion in education. Rather, it was a perceived deprivation of education that included poor efficacy for religious education. Reform did not seek to eliminate the teaching of religion, it aimed for religion to be taught *better*. It is also of note that the third estate, as well as the clergy, continued to strongly push for the clergy to be the ones in charge of education. This all but guaranteed that religion would continue to be embedded in education.

The Saint-Mihiel article excerpted above represents a broader belief that a patriotic curriculum must *join* the existing religious curriculum. According to this article, a new patriotic curriculum would entail teaching students the rights and obligations of citizenship.²²² Saint-Mihiel was not the only region to ask for unified religious and national teachings.²²³ Often, as in the article from Saint-Mihiel, petitioners used language to describe new patriotic education that drew on the language used to describe religious education—a “patriotic catechism” in this case. However, this was not a replacement of religious material but a synthesis.

Overwhelmingly, petitioners demanded the establishment of uniform books for teaching that would be shared throughout all French schools, in contrast to the disorganized and extremely varied books which formed the base of *ancien régime* curricula.²²⁴ The most important element here is uniformity: “there will be only one single catechism for all of France.”²²⁵ Uniformity, then, became the greatest demand of petitioners for curriculum reform. They sought to achieve uniformity by joining new knowledge to old without necessarily eradicating the old.

²²¹ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:615.

²²² See also France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:163, 5:211.

²²³ See France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 1:692, 2:243-4, 6:2.

²²⁴ See, for example, France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:244, 3:325, 4:510, 5:273, 5:571.

²²⁵ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:97.

Pedagogy Reform

In some areas of pedagogy, the *cahiers* align with the memoirists' experiences of education. Where the *cahiers* mention competition, they encourage it as a pedagogical method, lending more weight to the perceived validity of competition as a determiner of academic success.²²⁶ The *cahiers* even show another material benefit of competition, which is access to scholarships for students who win.²²⁷ This further increases the urgency of success in academic competitions for students, whose entire access to education may now rest on their success. In addition, these demands reveal a desire for the standardization of competitions and their results.

However, any discussion of punishment is notably absent from the *cahiers*. While surprising at first glance, given the centrality of punishment in memoirists' discussions of their education, this absence indicates that, generally, corporal punishment was likely accepted as a pedagogical strategy. While there were clearly strong objections to harsh punishment, there were a few aspects that made them stand out from the norm. First, memoirists and their communities reacted most strongly to corporal punishment against young students, and much less strongly against it in older students. The moments where parents withdrew their children from schools, and thus implied a condemnation of the punishment, seem to have been the extremes. Rather than indicating a dislike for the institution of corporal punishment in schools, they indicate a dislike for specific teachers who took punishment too far. Furthermore, while students disliked their teachers who punished them, some nevertheless believed that punishment positively affected their education, and was thus as a valid pedagogical method. Corporal punishment continued to exist in French schools even after the French Revolution.

²²⁶ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:273, 6:113, 6:221.

²²⁷ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:181.

Instead of focusing on punishment, petitioners in the *cahiers* focused on the improvement and oversight of teachers. Petitioners demanded a better process for choosing teachers, by some combination of competition and careful selection and appointment by religious and local officials.²²⁸ Additionally, the teachers themselves were to be more virtuous and more passionate about teaching.²²⁹ Once appointed, teachers needed to be subject to oversight and accountability. They should be rewarded if teaching well, and dismissed “in the case of bad conduct.”²³⁰ Petitioners disagreed on who would provide the oversight, but many suggested that it be members of the higher clergy.²³¹ This further emphasizes that the concern lay not with the central role of corporal punishment in education, but with teachers who were seen as under-trained or of poor moral quality. Much as the problems with curricula would be solved by implementing one national curriculum, the problems with pedagogy would be solved by a standardization of the selection, training, and oversight of teachers.

General Views

Discussing the purpose of education was a central mission in the *cahiers*. At the broadest level, the petitioners saw education as the means to make people more useful and more virtuous, to the public and to themselves. Education as a public good could produce utility, some petitioners argued. This utility could manifest in greater production value by educated people.²³² Much more frequently, however, petitioners wrote that education was useful to the public

²²⁸ For competition, see France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:524; For appointment, see France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 1:692, 2:248, 6:654; For both, see France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:4-5, 6:699.

²²⁹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 4:10, 4:14, 6:654.

²³⁰ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:504, 5:581, 6:645.

²³¹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:73, 6:699. We must remember here that nearly all teachers are members of the clergy at this point.

²³² France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:354.

because it socialized French citizens capable of fulfilling the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.²³³ With education, citizens would have a better understanding of the laws around them and of “their duties towards the Supreme Being, the king and the motherland.”²³⁴ As is suggested with the reference to the “Supreme Being” in this quotation, petitioners also saw education as a public good because of its role in forming morally good citizens.²³⁵ As one article ominously stated, “The king and the Estates General do not forget that education is the mother of morals and that empires do not prosper without morals.”²³⁶

But petitioners, especially from the third estate, also recognized education as a private good because of its utility to individuals. Some of this language emphasized the general benefit to the individual, pointing to teaching students “knowledge that will be necessary to them.”²³⁷ One article notes that, with schooling, people in the countryside could deal with legal documents like tenant agreements and wills without the need for a notary.²³⁸ Most of the personal utility of education, however, aimed at better preparing people for their professions.²³⁹ This reflects the recognition by many memoirists that education opened up more doors for them in their careers or was in some way useful to them in a professional capacity. Many scholars have highlighted utility as the main personal value of education in the Revolution.²⁴⁰

However, petitioners wrote that education not only benefited citizens in terms of utility but also in terms of morality. One article calls for educating poor rural children “until the age

²³³ The idea of education producing citizens who can participate in French society draws from Rousseau’s idea that a father is obligated raise his son to be prepared for citizenship. For more, see Rousseau, *Emile*, 18.

²³⁴ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 2:274, 2:383 4:228, 4:347; See also France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*.

²³⁵ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 2:3, 3:334, 3:86.

²³⁶ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:86.

²³⁷ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*; See also France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:602, 4:623.

²³⁸ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 2:697.

²³⁹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 1:734, 3:254, 5:382, 5:644.

²⁴⁰ For example, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 211.

where they will be in a state to be employed for the work of the countryside.”²⁴¹ Because the children were not entering professions that would require high levels of schooling, this implies a personal benefit for education, not a professional one. This aligns with the story of Simon’s father, who enjoyed his education but could not apply it professionally.²⁴² Petitioners even saw utility in the development of good morals, as some promoted educating people in everything “necessary” for their morals.²⁴³ Where some historians emphasize the social aims of Revolution-era education reform rather than the individual aims, the petitioners of 1789 sought to use education for the personal moral development of man, as exemplified in the following entry:

There will be made a plan of national education of which the principal goal will be to give to students a robust constitution, patriotic sentiments and the knowledge of principles necessary to the man, to the Christian, and to the Frenchman.²⁴⁴

Petitioners did hold utility as a principle of education, but this went alongside the moral and religious development of man. With this national plan of education, every student in France would receive the same moral formation.

Conclusion: Diversity of Views

In Allain’s collection of over 1,100 *cahier* articles, how representative were the views of the handful of *cahiers* we have considered? The grievances that petitioners brought forward depended strongly on their estate. The clergy wanted to maintain control of education as they faced questions about their right to exist, nobility focused their efforts on extending free education to poor nobles, and the third estate looked to expanding education to the countryside

²⁴¹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 5:390.

²⁴² See page 29 for a discussion of Simon’s father.

²⁴³ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 3:254, 4:297, 5:95.

²⁴⁴ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*; See also France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:350, 3:487, 4:10, 4:381.

and to the poor. The third estate—which included far more members excluded from education than the first two estates—at times used a bitter or aggressive tone in their grievances.²⁴⁵

Overall, a purely secular or utilitarian view of education was held by the minority. One article demanded building charity homes in the countryside to put children to the work of weaving cotton and the like directly after school. The article specified that this came uniquely from “one member of the nobility,” an uncommon specification that highlights that this intensely utilitarian view of education was an anomaly.²⁴⁶ Another petitioner proposed modifying the principle in *collèges* “that, in subjecting indistinctly to the Catholic religion all the young people who frequent it, necessarily distance from it those who profess a foreign religion.”²⁴⁷ This also was a minority opinion, and considerations of non-Catholics were all but absent from these *cahiers*. Another radical demand was to eliminate contemplative orders and redirect their funding to teachers.²⁴⁸ And one *cahier*, cited above, used the language of a “Supreme Being” to speak more broadly about a divine figure than the Catholic God specifically.²⁴⁹ All of these opinions were in the minority, however, and most of the *cahiers* remained concerned with the continuation of the role of religion and morals in education in addition to reform and progress.

The *cahiers de doléances* overwhelmingly show that the diversity of people’s experiences with education—affected most clearly in these documents by estate and locale—were reflected in their complaints about education. Just like our memoirists, the petitioners drafting the *cahiers* had navigated the disjointed institutions of *ancien régime* education. At the same time as these grievances reflected variety in their differing demands, they overwhelmingly

²⁴⁵ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 3:28, 3:334, 3:703, 6:36.

²⁴⁶ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:666.

²⁴⁷ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 3:483.

²⁴⁸ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:753.

²⁴⁹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), 4:233.

aimed at uniformity. They wanted their vision of education to become *the* national plan for education. In all, national standardization was the main demand of the *cahiers*.

4. Conclusion

The *cahiers de doléances* reflect the experiences of education in the preceding years, as revealed by our memoirists. A synthesis of these two source bases reveals the following about who experienced education, what it entailed, how teaching worked, and why education mattered.

Primary education was a highly varied experience, both at the institutional level and in terms of individuals' trajectories. At the *collège*, experience varied widely based on family background. At both the *collège* level and the primary education level, then, different backgrounds created a vast diversity of experiences, in terms of both institutional access and experience in educational institutions. This wide diversity of experience was reflected in the *cahiers*, as petitioners sought to standardize who had access to schools in order to reduce the educational inequalities and inequities that were characteristic of *ancien régime* education.

Memoirists also learned different materials in school, since curricula were highly varied based on school, teacher, location, and year. At the primary education level, curricula were based on church materials, and at the *collège* level, they were based on the Classics. This lent itself to criticism that the curriculum was stuck in the past. In the *cahiers*, petitioners wanted to add modernized subjects to the traditional ones, and to add patriotic materials to the religious. While petitioners did not always agree about the specifics of what this new curriculum would look like, they wanted it to be *one* uniform curriculum for the nation.

Students not only learned different materials, but they also learned the materials differently. Punishment was central to pedagogy, and some students and communities reacted

negatively to punishment when it was taken to the extremes, especially in primary school. In *collège*, punishment became less prominent because academic competition made students invested in their academic success. The *cahiers* validate the stakes of academic success through their use of competition as a tool for standardizing access to education. Amid these high stakes of academic success and amid an environment where some teachers crossed the line with punishment, the petitioners sought to improve pedagogy by demanding a standardized system that provided for better choice and more oversight of teachers.

Education had different meanings for each of our memoirists and for the people around them. Primary education had a professional benefit for some but was simply a pleasure for others. Similarly, *collège* provided some with greater choice of careers but served mostly as cultural enrichment for others. The *cahiers* show that education continued to have different meanings for different people in 1789. Education was a public good, but it was also a good for the individual, for both utility and moral development. While petitioners sought to standardize educational institutions and experiences, it is harder to standardize what education means to different people. Nevertheless, it is significant that we do not see one view of the purpose of education prevailing over another; utility does not take over for moral development, and the nation does not take over for religion in the meaning of education. Rather, the diversity in meanings of education continued to coexist on the eve of the French Revolution.

Looking back from 1789, the experience of education in the twenty-seven preceding years was characterized by diversity. There was no *experience* of education, but rather *experiences*, which were highly influenced by estate, wealth, location, school, curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher. Looking forward, the petitioners of 1789 sought to change the state of education by standardizing it. They aimed to create one experience of education.

What do we gain from looking at experience rather than looking at institutional sources or at high-level discourse? We gain an understanding of what was really important in education to the students who lived through it. What is important to the memoirists is not the same as what stands out as important from reading institutional records of schools or treatises on education. We also come to understand the variety of experience in a more intimate way. Memoirs allow us to illustrate diversity through anecdotes and named characters, not through numbers on a page or names on a list. Finally, we get closer to the “history of sentiments” that Lucien Bély proposed.²⁵⁰ Reading the *cahiers*, we sense the atmosphere of excitement and desperate need to reform. As the petitioners from the third estate in Vienne wrote, “How many reforms to make, useful regulations to pronounce!”²⁵¹ Looking at the memoirs, we can ask how the memoirists reflect on their education, decades and decades later. Do they look back on it fondly, critically, or somewhere in between? As with everything concerning the memoirs, the answer is “all of the above.” Ultimately, education was important to our memoirists. In the story of their lives, they chose to include their education among everything else. In the introduction to his memoir, Bédé wrote that “It is good to have a memory that does not recall everything.”²⁵² Bédé made this reflection in the context of letting go of anger and preserving peace. In the context of our history of sentiments, however, we can look on this imperfect memory as a beacon of what people saw as important, and our memoirists certainly considered education to be important.

²⁵⁰ Bély, “L’élève et le monde,” 4.

²⁵¹ France and John Boyd Tacher Collection (Library of Congress), *Archives parlementaires*, 3:86.

²⁵² Bédé, *Un ouvrier en 1820*, 393.

Appendix 1: Memoirist Biographies, Ordered by Birth Year

Louis-Sebastien Mercier²⁵³

Mercier was born on June 6, 1740 in Paris and died on April 25, 1814 in Paris.²⁵⁴ He came from a bourgeois family; his father was a successful artisan who worked with swords (*un fourbisseur*).²⁵⁵ He received his primary education in Paris, and he then attended the Collège des Quatres Nations in Paris. Also known as the Collège de Mazarin, this was one of the *collèges* that was part of the University of Paris.²⁵⁶ After completing his secondary education, he worked at a *collège* and as a writer for some time. He held positions of power during the Revolution, and he was a moderate partisan against the Jacobins.²⁵⁷ The first of the twelve volumes of his *Tableau de Paris* was published in 1781.

Louis Simon

Simon was born in 1741 in La Fontaine Saint-Martin (in the Department of the Sarthe, Northwestern Loire region) and died in 1820. He came from a modest artisan background; his father was a clothmaker (*étaminier*). He did not attend a primary school, since his village did not have a school, and he did not attend secondary school.²⁵⁸ Like his father, he held a career as a clothmaker, remaining in the Maine region. He wrote his memoir between 1809 and 1820, and it was first published in 1984.

Jacques Lablée

Lablée was born in the village of Beaugency (in the Loire) on August 26, 1751, and died in 1841.²⁵⁹ He came from a moderately wealthy background; his father was a wine merchant who had associations with high society, but Lablée nevertheless felt outside of the high bourgeois class of his town.²⁶⁰ Lablée attended a form of primary school focused on teaching Latin.²⁶¹ For his secondary education, he first attended school at a seminary near his hometown, entering in the class level *quatrième*.²⁶² At the age 15, he entered an Oratorian *collège* at Vendôme (in the Loire), boarding near the *collège*.²⁶³ He continued to accomplish his final two years of *collège*, the two years of philosophy, at a different seminary.²⁶⁴ Lablée went on to become a lawyer in Paris until 1789, and then held several leadership positions during the Revolution; he aligned with Danton, a member of the radical Jacobin Club.²⁶⁵ Under Louis XVIII, he received the cross

²⁵³ “Louis-Sébastien Mercier.”

²⁵⁴ Adolphe Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français comprenant tous les membres des Assemblées françaises et tous les ministres français depuis le 1er mai 1789 jusqu'au 1er mai 1889: avec leurs noms, état civil, états de service, actes politiques, votes parlementaires, etc.*, 4:341.

²⁵⁵ Léon Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier, sa vie, son œuvre, son temps*, 1–2.

²⁵⁶ Béclard, 6, 8; Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 3:245.

²⁵⁷ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 4:341.

²⁵⁸ Simon, *Souvenirs d'un villageois*, 96.

²⁵⁹ Joseph Michaud and Louis Gabriel Michaud, *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, 22:283-284.

²⁶⁰ Michaud and Michaud, 22:283; Lablée, Jacques, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 1–3.

²⁶¹ Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 3–4.

²⁶² Lablée, 7–9. Lablée writes that the seminary was the “Séminaire de Me...” Based on his description of it as two leagues from his hometown, Beaugency, “Me...” may refer to Meung-sur-Loire.

²⁶³ Lablée, 14; Marie-Madeleine Compère and Dominique Julia, *Les collèges français: 16e-18e siècles*, 2:685.

²⁶⁴ Lablée, *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres*, 17. He writes that this seminary was the “Séminaire d'O...”

²⁶⁵ Michaud and Michaud, *Biographie universelle*, 22:283.

of the *Légion d'honneur*.²⁶⁶ Lablée published his *Mémoires d'un homme de lettres, Ouvrage anecdotique, Faisant suite aux mémoires sur la révolution française* in 1825.

Louis François de Paul Tillet de Mautort

Tillet was born on April 3, 1752 in Abbeville (Hautes de France) and died in 1802.²⁶⁷ He came from a family of the small nobility.²⁶⁸ He boarded in Amiens to attend primary school until age 11.²⁶⁹ He then attended the Oratorian Collège de Juilly, and he boarded at this *collège*. He stayed at this *collège* until age 15, through the years of rhetoric in the *collège* curriculum.²⁷⁰ After the *collège*, he entered the military, which took him to different parts of France and overseas, including to French posts in the Indian Ocean. He left France a year into the French Revolution, and returned in 1800, returning to his hometown of Abbeville in 1802.²⁷¹ His *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort, Capitaine au régiment d'Austrasie, Chevalier de l'ordre royale et militaire de Saint-Louis* was published by his great nephew in 1895.

François-Yves Besnard

Besnard was born on October 10, 1752 and died in 1842.²⁷² He came from well-off bourgeois family that was powerful in their rural town of Saint-Aubin des Alleuds (Maine-et-Loire department).²⁷³ At age six, Besnard went to stay with his great-grandmother in Doué-la-Fontaine (Maine-et-Loire department), where he attended M. Bidon's school, a *petite école*, for six months.²⁷⁴ Around age seven, he began to attend the Collège de Doué, run by secular priests, still living with his great-grandmother.²⁷⁵ In 1765, Besnard left the Collège de Doué for the Oratorian Collège D'Angers.²⁷⁶ He stayed in Angers to attend seminary school, and eventually took a part in the Directory as a moderate republican.²⁷⁷ His memoir, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire, mémoires de François-Yves Besnard*, was published posthumously in 1880 from Besnard's manuscript.²⁷⁸

Louis-Marie Larevellière-Lepeaux²⁷⁹

Larevellière-Lepeaux was born on August 24, 1753 in Montaigu (Vendée) and died on March 27, 1824 in Paris.²⁸⁰ He came from a prominent rural bourgeois family in the region; his father was the mayor of Montaigu for thirty years.²⁸¹ He stayed in Montaigu to learn Latin from two

²⁶⁶ Michaud and Michaud, 22:284.

²⁶⁷ Tillet de Mautort, *Mémoires du chevalier de Mautort*, 1.

²⁶⁸ Tillet de Mautort, 1.

²⁶⁹ Tillet de Mautort, 3.

²⁷⁰ Tillet de Mautort, 3–4; Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 2:342.

²⁷¹ Tillet de Mautort, *Mémoires du chevalier de Mautort*, 505, 508, 510, 512.

²⁷² Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, iii, 1.

²⁷³ Besnard, 2; Martine Taroni, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire: François-Yves Besnard (1752-1842), un curé aux prises avec la Révolution*, 17, 67, 79–80, 90.

²⁷⁴ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 7, 16–17; Taroni, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 93.

²⁷⁵ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 10, 22, 55; Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 2:283.

²⁷⁶ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 95, 102.

²⁷⁷ Besnard, 103–4; Taroni, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, 18.

²⁷⁸ Besnard, *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, i–ii.

²⁷⁹ “Louis-Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux,” April 7, 2024.

²⁸⁰ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 1; “Louis-Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux.”

²⁸¹ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 1–2; Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 3:594.

different teachers.²⁸² He entered the Collège de Beaupréau, run by secular priests and Sulpiciens, in 1766 in the level *troisième*.²⁸³ In 1767, he entered the Oratorian Collège d'Angers in the level *seconde*, and he stayed at this *collège* through the final two years of *collège*, the years of philosophy.²⁸⁴ After *collège*, he attended law school in Angers.²⁸⁵ He was an important figure in the French Revolution, holding roles such as the Third Estate representative to the Estates General and National Assembly and President of the Convention. Notably he voted for Louis XVI's death, but also defended the Girondins.²⁸⁶ He went into hiding until the fall of Robespierre. After Thermidor he returned to the National Convention and became a first President of the Directory government.²⁸⁷ He intended for his memoirs to be published posthumously; his *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lepeaux, Membre du directoire exécutif de la République française et l'Institut national* were published by his grandson in 1895.

Pierre-Joseph Boyer

Boyer was born on November 14, 1754 in Toulouse (Occitanie region) and died on February 24, 1853 in Paris.²⁸⁸ He came from a family that had recently been granted nobility.²⁸⁹ It is unclear whether he attended primary school. He attended *collège* through the two years of philosophy at the Collège de l'Esquille in Toulouse, which was run by *Congrégationists de la doctrine chrétienne* after the expulsion of the Jesuits from education.²⁹⁰ After *collège*, he became a lawyer and took on judicial leadership positions under the Consulate and he was called to the *Chambre des pairs* and made a *grand officier* of the *Légion d'honneur*.²⁹¹ His memoir, *Souvenirs et causeries, par le Pt B****, pair de France* was published in 1844, before his death.

Charles Joseph, Baron de Verneilh-Puiraseau²⁹²

Verneilh-Puiraseau was born on July 29, 1756 in Nexon (Nouvelle-Aquitaine region) and died on June 3, 1839 in Limoges (Nouvelle-Aquitaine region).²⁹³ He came from an old, moderately wealthy noble family that had held leadership positions in Nexon for a century and a half. His father was a royal notary.²⁹⁴ For primary school, he first joined in the education of another family, who had hired an instructor for their children. At age nine, he went to Saint-Yrieix to live with his uncle, during which time he attended two different primary schools.²⁹⁵ He then attended the Collège de Limoges, run by secular clergy, entering in the level *troisième*.²⁹⁶ He went on to study law, and was subsequently elected as mayor of Thiviers. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1791 as a moderate, and for the rest of the Revolution he alternated between holding positions of power and falling out of favor with the revolutionary leaders. He was a

²⁸² Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 9–10.

²⁸³ Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 2:99.

²⁸⁴ Larevellière-Lepeaux, *Mémoires de Larevellière-Lépeaux*, 10, 14, 19.

²⁸⁵ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 3:594.

²⁸⁶ “Louis-Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux”; Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 3:595.

²⁸⁷ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 3:595.

²⁸⁸ Boyer, *Souvenirs et causeries*, 1; Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 1:463.

²⁸⁹ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 1:463.

²⁹⁰ Boyer, *Souvenirs et causeries*, 3–5; Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 1:686.

²⁹¹ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 1:464.

²⁹² “Jean-Joseph de Verneilh-Puyraseau.”

²⁹³ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 1; Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 5:504.

²⁹⁴ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 2–3, 8; Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 5:504.

²⁹⁵ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 11–16.

²⁹⁶ Verneilh-Puiraseau, 20; Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 1:365.

member of the French Parliament for several years after 1815.²⁹⁷ His memoir, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, was published in 1836.

Jean-Michel Raymond-Latour²⁹⁸

Raymond-Latour was born in 1766 in Saint-Vallier (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region) and died in 1837.²⁹⁹ His father was a county magistrate (*échevin*) and a *lieutenant-de-juge*.³⁰⁰ He received a primary education from a schoolteacher, and also had professors of theater as part of his primary education.³⁰¹ He pursued the rhetoric years of his secondary education in a private *collège*, and he attended a Sulpician seminary for his two years of philosophy.³⁰² After *collège*, he studied medicine and went on to become a chemist. He held various positions; for example, he worked as a chemist for the Committee of Public Safety during the French Revolution, he taught chemistry at the École du Palais Bourbon, and he invented a procedure to dye silk blue.³⁰³ He received several awards for his dye procedure, including a medal from the *Légion d'honneur*.³⁰⁴ His memoir, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, was published in 1836.

François René de Chateaubriand³⁰⁵

Chateaubriand was born on September 4, 1768 in Saint-Malo (Brittany region) and died on July 4, 1848 in Paris. He came from a noble background, and his father was the *seigneur*, or lord, or Combourg.³⁰⁶ It is unclear whether he attended primary school. He attended three *collèges*, all run by secular clergy after 1762: the Collège de Dol, the Collège de Rennes, for two years, and the Collège de Dinan for the “humanities” portion of his *collège* education.³⁰⁷ He went on to travel to Canada as a *sous-lieutenant*, and spent time abroad before returning to France in 1800. One of the most important writers of his generation, he held multiple political positions and wrote and published multiple works.³⁰⁸ His *Mémoires d'outre tombe* was published around 1849, shortly after his death.

Jacques Marquet de Montbreton, baron de Norvins³⁰⁹

Norvins was born on July 17, 1769 in Paris, and he died in 1854 in Pau (Nouvelle Aquitaine region).³¹⁰ He came from a family of *financiers* that had recently become nobility.³¹¹ It is unclear how he received a primary education. He entered the Collège du Plessis-Sorbonne in 1777 and

²⁹⁷ Verneilh-Puiraseau, *Mes souvenirs de 75 ans*, 37; Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 5:504-505.

²⁹⁸ “Jean-Michel Raymond.”

²⁹⁹ Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 9; Emmanuel Grison, “Deux figures de l’ancienne Ecole du Palais-Bourbon : le préparateur-chimiste de Fourcroy et le bibliothécaire-philosophe,” 1.

³⁰⁰ Raymond-Latour, *Souvenirs d'un oisif*, 9.

³⁰¹ Raymond-Latour, 19–20.

³⁰² Raymond-Latour, 23–28.

³⁰³ Grison, “Deux figures,” 1, 6–7.

³⁰⁴ Dominique Saint-Pierre, *Dictionnaire Historique Des Académiciens de Lyon : 1700-2016*, 1103.

³⁰⁵ “François-René de Chateaubriand.”

³⁰⁶ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 2:69.

³⁰⁷ Compère and Julia, *Les collèges français*, 2:245, 2:247, 2:546.

³⁰⁸ Robert, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 2:69.

³⁰⁹ “Jacques Marquet de Montbreton de Norvins.”

³¹⁰ Norvins, *Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*, iii; Marie Nicolas Bouillet, *Dictionnaire Universel d'histoire et de Géographie*, 31:61.

³¹¹ Norvins, *Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*, iii; Bouillet, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 31:61.

continued his education at the Collège d'Harcourt.³¹² After *collège*, he studied law and then held various positions as a Secretary and a Lieutenant both in France and abroad.³¹³ After 1814, he dedicated his time writing. Famously, he wrote his *Histoire de Napoléon* in 1827.³¹⁴ He began writing his memoir in 1838, and it was published posthumously in 1896 as *Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon, Mémorial de J. de Norvins*.

Jacques Étienne Bédé

Bédé was born on June 27, 1775 in Chateauneuf-sur-Loire (Loiret department). His father was a miller. Bédé attended primary school from 1780 until 1787, when he left Chateauneuf-sur-Loire.³¹⁵ He came from an extremely modest background; his father was a miller with no fortune at birth, who acquired a small house and a mill through marriage.³¹⁶ He attended primary school in his village from 1780 to 1787.³¹⁷ He did not attend secondary school. He went on to become a soldier for several years, before beginning a career as a laborer as a wood turner. Eventually, he became a chair turner in Paris, where he became involved in a labor dispute.³¹⁸ He wrote his memoirs between 1820 and 1830, and they were not published until 1984 under the title *Un ouvrier en 1820*.

³¹² Norvins, *Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*, 9–10.

³¹³ Michaud and Michaud, *Biographie universelle*, 31:61; Bouillet, *Dictionnaire Universel d'histoire et de Géographie*, 2:77.

³¹⁴ Bouillet, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 2:77.

³¹⁵ Bédé, *Un ouvrier en 1820*, 45, 71–72.

³¹⁶ Bédé, 71.

³¹⁷ Bédé, 45, 72.

³¹⁸ Mark Traugott, "Jacques Etienne Bédé: A Worker in 1820," 47.

Appendix 2: Original French Translations with Corresponding Footnote

1. Depuis la chute des Jésuites et le livre inutile de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on n'a cessé d'écrire sur l'éducation
47. Des hommes et des femmes ont estimé que leur histoire méritait d'être racontée
60. Je connaissais à peine les lettres de l'alphabet lorsque j'entrai à son école
66. je comprenais bien se quil me disait et que je lui faisais de jolie Reponces
72. aller assidument à l'école et de bien apprendre
75. Dès son enfance, il était parvenu à apprendre à lire seul, en comparant... les mots et les lettres avec les sons qu'il entendait à l'église
77. les premiers principes de la langue latine
80. à l'école, pour apprendre à lire et écrire
81. les quatre première règles d'arithmétique
84. un médecin distingué de la ville
86. Un avis fut donc ouvert et approuvé de part et d'autre, de s'en rapporter, sur ce point contentieux, à la décision d'un tribunal composé des plus lettrés du lieu. L'aréopage s'étant réuni, au jour indiqué, décida, à la presque unanimité, que le mot *madame* devait être prononcé avec toutes ses syllabes, soit qu'il fût parlé ou déclamé
90. L'enseignement de la langue latine était bien différent qu'il est aujourd'hui ; il n'existait encore aucune méthode pour l'apprendre, si ce n'est le rudiment de Gaudin et un certain Despautère, auquel je n'ai jamais rien compris. Il fallait apprendre les livres par cœur, sans aucune explication qui en eût préparé l'intelligence. Chaque écolier était appelé à venir réciter à son tour sa leçon devant le maître assis gravement dans un fauteil et tenant son *martinet* à la main
93. Chaque écolier était appelé à venir réciter à son tour sa leçon devant le maître assis gravement dans un fauteuil et tenant son *martinet* à la main : on appeleait ainsi une espèce de fouet à long manche de bois, composé de cinq ou six courroies en parchemin, bien tordues et nouées par le bout. À la moindre faute de mémoire, le récitant était fouaillé aux jambes, qui n'étaient pas comme aujourd'hui protégées par un pantalon ; mais on ne trouvait pas mauvais qu'il arrivât muni de son chapeau à trois cornes, avec lequel il parait les coups le mieux qu'il pouvait
94. pour éviter les punitions que n'épargnaient guère les maîtres qui m'ont appris à lire et à écrire
95. sous la fêrule de mon maître
97. Mon maître de latin avait introduit un singulier usage : il donnait aux écoliers dont il était content des immunités, ou cartes timbrées et signées de lui. Ces cartes, de diverses couleurs, portaient : *Bon pour une fois*, *bon pour deux fois*, etc. Lorsqu'un de ses élèves avait mérité une punition, celui ci s'en affranchissait en présentant des immunités dans un nombre proportionné à la peine qu'il devait subir ; s'il lui en manquait, il pouvait en emprunter ; mais si des écoliers peu aimés de leurs camarades n'en trouvaient pas suffisamment pour s'affranchir de la correction, ils la subisaient
99. homme brutal, violent, grossier
100. En sortant de ses mystiques entretiens avec ses dévotes, qu'il prolongeait en tête-à-tête pendant deux ou trois heures dans sa chambre à coucher, il venait brutaliser ses malheureux élèves, soit par cette indécente correction qu'on n'aurait jamais dû permettre dans les écoles et qu'il aimait fort à prodiguer, soit par les coups les plus cruels sur toutes parties du corps
101. la difformité de ma taille et, en grande partie, la faiblesse de ma poitrine

102. des coups de fêrule indistinctement partout où il pouvait attraper
103. il m'avait tellement abruti et rendu craintif par ses mauvais traitements, que je ne doute pas lui être redevable d'une certaine timidité que j'ai toujours conservée
104. Toutou, déjà grand garçon, fut condamné au fouet pour quelque grande faute ; il s'était résigné à se mettre en devoir derrière un paravent pour subir sa peine. Mais, au premier coup du *martinet*, il se lève furieux et saute aux cheveux du maître, en le traitant de tous les noms, notamment de *Cardeur*; c'est le sobriquet que nous lui donnions dans nos petites colères
105. caractère doux, car il n'infligeait que bien rarement à ses élèves... quelque'une de ces punitions corporelles si usitées alors dans toutes les écoles
106. une figure doucereuse, un extérieur composé, cachaient en lui une irascibilité des plus dangereuses chez un instituteur. Il était faux et hypocrite
107. Je n'ai jamais connu de figure plus rébarbative et moins propre à faire fortune auprès des enfants que celle de cet animal; mon brutal maître
110. infiniment plus propre à l'enseignement
111. mon cœur se soulevait, ma fierté s'indignait à l'idée de voir les fils des hommes traités comme de vils animaux
112. je n'en ai pas moins reconnu que la crainte du châtement produisait souvent des effets salutaires
114. On tourmente l'aimable enfance ; on lui inflige des châtements journaliers. La faiblesse de cet âge ne devrait-elle pas intéresser en sa faveur ? Pénétrons néanmoins dans l'intérieur de ces petites écoles. On y voit couler des pleurs sur des joues enfantines : on y entend des sanglots & des gémissement ; comme si la douleur n'étoit pas faite pour des hommes formés, & non pour les enfans. On y voit des pédagogues, dont la vue seule inspire l'effroi, armés de fouets et de fêrules, traitant avec inhumanité le premier âge de la vie
117. conduit cette fois par son père M. Foucault-de Malebert ; il fit ses excuses, et la chose n'alla pas plus loin ; Toutou ne revint plus à l'école
118. Nos parents ignoraient tout cela. Désolés de n'en avoir pas été informé plus tôt, il nous tirèrent, dès qu'ils le surent, des mains de cet homme dont le mine était si trompeuse
119. il en sentait la conséquence ne sachant ni lire ni écrire
120. et déclaré qu'il préférerait rester à la maison, pour y toucher le bœufs, et apprendre à labourer
121. absolument nécessaire à chaque individu de savoir lire, écrire, & chiffrer
122. parce qu'il aimait beaucoup à s'instruire particulièrement Sur l'écriture et l'arithmétique, mais cette science qu'il estimait tant ne lui donnait pas de pain
126. Malgré moi, je suis moraliste, au lieu d'être un simple et rapide chroniqueur, parce que le compte de ma vie sociale renferme celui de ma vie intérieure
128. amitiés frappés d'inégalités
129. Les élèves ne pouvaient conserver des amitiés de collège que celles qui devaient continuer dans la maison paternelle
130. les Montmorency, les Rohan, les Tavannes, les La Trémoille, les Richelieu, les Fitz-James, les d'Harcourt, les Duras, les Séguier, les d'Aligre, etc., étaient aux collèges de Plessis et d'Harcourt, où j'ai fait tout mon éducation classique, assis sur les mêmes bancs à l'église, au réfectoire et en classe, que les fils des artisans qui travaillent pour leurs maisons
131. l'égalité la plus complète; un avantage incontestable
132. les patriciens et les plébéiens
133. toilette

135. Car l'ordre social était alors si solidement, si naturellement établi par une longue tradition que jamais grandeur plus voisine, plus provocante fut mieux supportée
136. lui qui n'en avait besoin pour son avenir
137. Je ne pouvais avoir ces prompts amis que donne la fortune, car il n'y avait rien à gagner avec un pauvre polisson qui n'avait pas même d'argent de la semaine
141. il était pauvre, et toujours revêtu de la livrée de l'indigence
146. On ne saurait croire combien sont funestes ces injustes préférences ! elles pervertissent la morale des élèves, qui ne reçoivent de leurs maîtres que des exemples d'injustice et de partialité... En agir ainsi, c'est commettre un crime ; car c'est dans la jeunesse qu'on se forme au vice ou à la vertu, et l'exemple des parents et des maîtres sera toujours la leçon la plus puissante.
147. Il n'avait pas le moyen d'acheter un habit et de mettre à la bourse pour les frais. Par la même raison il n'eut point de rôle dans l'espèce de comédie qui termina l'exercice avant la distribution des prix
148. nuisent aussi beaucoup à l'instruction, en enlevant aux maîtres toute leur considération et en décourageant leurs écoliers
151. au degré où elle était arrivée à cette époque
153. on regardât comme inutile ou même dangereux, d'approfondir les secrets de la nature et du raisonnement
154. j'étais loin de Paris, étranger à ses murailles, & que je vivois à Rome que je n'ai jamais vue, & que probablement je ne verrais jamais
155. Comme on s'est lourdement mépris dans tous les systèmes d'études !
157. Ce collègue, quoiqu'on lui donnât le nom de seminaire, et qu'il fut dirigé par des ecclésiastiques, ne formait pas des élèves pour l'état religieux
158. nous se procuraient à l'insu de nos maîtres
159. Déjà je ne me bornais point à faire des vers latins. Il déplaisait aux chefs d'instruction qu'on fit des infidélités aux muses latines dans les mystères desquelles ils voulaient exclusivement nous initier
169. une couronne
170. obtenir et montrer cette précieuse croix, que je me proposais bien de ne pas laisser échapper de ma boutonnière
171. à conserver sur mes camarades la supériorité, que je m'étais acquise l'année précédente
172. quoiqu'ayant fait nos premières études... nous ne craignons point la concurrence avec les autres élèves de notre classe. Ce motif d'émulation, et l'excessive rigueur de l'abbé Ser.... notre régent, nous firent faire en peu de temps de grands progrès. Presque tous les prix de cette classe et de la troisième, furent partagés entre nous deux. J'étais avide de ces prix, comme je l'avais été d'*immunités*
173. *Je vous envoie votre fils chargé de couronnes*
175. C'était pour moi comme un jour de gloire scolastique, j'en étais presque honteux. Je devais, après la distribution, assister à un goûter dans la chambre de mon professeur ; je m'y étais rendu avec un faisceau de livres et de couronnes
176. J'obtins fréquemment, et presque constamment, cette décoration, qui ne fut pas une distinction stérile pour moi; car les parents que je rencontrais dans les rues ou chez qui je me présentais, outre force compliments, avaient presque toujours quelques gracieusetés à m'offrir, soit en petit friandises, soit en quelques menues pièces de monnaie. Je ne tardai même pas à employer les moyens d'exploiter cette source de douceurs en multipliant les visites, et en parcourant les places publiques et les rues aux jours de foires et de marchés, où j'étais sûr de

- rencontrer quelques oncles, tantes ou autre parents, qui ne manquaient guère de me donner la petite pièce blanche
177. un certain air de supériorité aux yeux de mes camarades
179. Ce respectable pasteur mourut à Limoges le 27 avril 1805, justement regretté de tous
180. qui causa assez de scandale pour qu'on s'en plaignit à M. Va.... notre supérieur
181. le meilleur homme du monde; un homme aussi rempli de vertus
184. je parvins à me préserver de tout châtiment et à conserver sur mes camarades la supériorité, que je m'étais acquise l'année précédente
185. Ce n'est pas seulement à cet ardent désir de distinction que j'ai dû le peu que j'ai acquis dans mes classes, mais plusieurs de mes maîtres ont su, fêrule à la main, me convaincre par de forts argumens, que j'avais plus d'un intérêt à mettre à profit leurs leçons: aussi ai-je bien profité de celles de l'abbé Ser.....
186. les fêrules et même le fouet s'administraient encore dans les classes les plus élevées
187. désapprouva qu'on fit usage de la fêrule avec des rhétoriciens. Ce régent ne reparut plus dans la classe
188. Ces collèges de plein exercice, pour ceux qui n'ont point de fortune, répandent dans le monde une foule de scribes qui n'ont que leur plume pour toute ressource, & qui portent par leur indigence & leur aptitude à des travaux fructueux.
189. lorsqu'ils n'ont point assez de fortune pour leur procurer, à la fin de leurs études, un état où les moyens de s'en faire un qui puisse les aider à soutenir le rang élevé que leurs études et leurs relations leur ont fait prendre
191. Il était d'ailleurs consacré par l'usage, tant en médecine qu'en droit, de ne pas conférer les grades nécessaires pour exercer en qualité de médecins & d'avocats à des candidats connus pour ne pas appartenir à des familles honorables dans la bourgeoisie. Aussi regardait-on alors comme certain, que tous les enfants de simples bourgeois ou d'artisans ou de paysans, qui se trouvaient dans les Collèges, n'avaient d'autre destinations que l'état ecclésiastique
193. Ils avaient presque épuisé leur mince fortune pour nous élever. Rien de plus important que le choix d'un état, répète-t-on sans cesse et avec raison
195. L'état de marin auquel on me destinait « ne serait peut-être pas de mon goût », disait-elle ; il lui semblait bon à tout événement de me rendre capable de suivre une autre carrière
196. la vérité est que je ne cherchais qu'à gagner du temps, car j'ignorais ce que je voulais. On m'envoya au collège de Dinan achever mes humanités
201. en les multipliant on en fait recueillir le fruit [de la première instruction] à un plus grand nombre d'individus
204. Qu'il ne sera reçu dans les écoles gratuites que les enfants munis de certificats de pauvreté de la part des curés et visés par l'écolâtre
208. assurée de préférence au talent et à la vertu
210. comme les enfants des nobles
215. Que le régime des études publiques dans les villes soit réformé, que le matin soit employé suivant les degrés de connaissances des sujets : 1° à l'étude de la langue française et à la composition dans la même langue ; 2° à l'étude de la morale ; 3° aux premiers principes du droit public. Que le soir soit employé aux études des langues mortes
217. les enseignements qui conviennent au temps présent; l'étude aride d'une langue morte
219. continueront à enseigner, joignent à l'étude du catéchisme religieux qui renferme la base de tous les devoirs moraux, celle d'un catéchisme patriotique qui expose d'une manière simple et

élémentaire les obligations que renferme le titre de citoyen et les droits qui résultent nécessairement de ces obligations quand elles sont bien remplies

225. il n'y aura qu'un seul catéchisme pour toute la France

230. en cas de mauvaise conduite

234. leurs devoirs envers l'Être suprême, le roi et la patrie

236. Le roi et les États généraux n'oublieront pas que l'éducation est la mère des mœurs et que les empires ne prospèrent pas sans les mœurs

237. connaissances qui leur seront nécessaires

241. jusqu'à l'âge où ils seront en état d'être employés aux travaux de la campagne

244. Il sera fait un plan d'éducation nationale dont le principal but sera de donner aux élèves une constitution robuste, des sentiments patriotiques et la connaissance des principes nécessaires à l'homme, au chrétien et au français.

246. un membre de la noblesse

247. qui, en assujettissant indistinctement au culte catholique tous les jeunes gens qui les fréquentent, en éloigne nécessairement ceux qui professent un culte étranger

251. Combien de réformes à faire, d'utiles règlements à prononcer !

252. Il est bon d'avoir une mémoire qui ne se rappelle pas du tout.

Appendix 3: Archives parlementaires to Allain

This appendix shows the page number and item number in Ernest Allain's *La question d'enseignement en 1789 d'après les cahiers* to which each article of the *cahiers de doléances* from the *Archives parlementaires* correspond.

Item number in Allain	Volume and page in Archives parlementaires	Page number in Allain
11	2:462	139
17	4:10	140
26	1:692	142
27	1:692	142
33	1:734	143
36	2:3	143
60	2:248	148
89	2:376	153-154
108	2:504	159
123	2:615	161
144	3:4,5	167
149	3:73	167
177	3:325	174
193	3:524	176
204	3:772	179
248	4:273	190
260	5:390	195
278	5:553	200
285	5:581	201-202
310	6:2	206
383	1:766	218
404	2:383	221
425	2:665	225
427	2:666	225
446	3:177	
469	3:666	232
483	4:255	234
486	4:278	235

489	5:273	235
509	2:243-4	238-239
514	2:244	239-240
534	5:280	243-244
558	6:113	247
564	2:123	248
569	2:158	249
573	2:194	250
591	2:405	253
603	2:561	255
614	2:697	257
625	3:28	259
638	5:644	260
641	3:350	261
643	3:167	261
646	3:181	262
648	3:251	262
650	3:254	263
661	3:334	264
664	3:334	264
678	3:483	266-267
688	3:611	268
694	3:651	269
715	6:645	272
718	4:163	273
719	4:163	273
726	4:260	273-274
731	6:654	275
736	5:242	275
734	4:285	275
751	5:374	277
753	5:382	277
783	5:546	283
787	5:571	283
792	3:487	284
813	5:758	287-288
817	6:699	288

826	6:36	290
843	6:221	292
844	5:425	292-293
850	2:87	295
851	2:274	295
853	2:410	295
876	3:703	298-299
880	3:97	299
891	4:14	301
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905	3:86	303
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913	4:347	305
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935	4:532	309
947	4:565	311
950	4:573	311-312
954	4:602	312-313
959	4:623	313-314
972	4:688	315
979	4:753	316-317
984	5:25	317
1001	5:95	320
1032	5:211	324
1046	4:228	326-327
1052	3:262	327
1055	4:381	328
1061	4:439	329
1066	4:233	330

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