Can the "world of culture" be introduced through philosophical dialogue?

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At the 90th Congress of the *Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences* (ACFAS), we took part in a colloquium on the following theme: "For a philosophical school: philosophy with children, a paradigm for a democratic and humanist school?" To help answer this question, we examine in this paper the relationship between philosophy for children (P4C), also known as "practice of philosophical dialogue", and humanism.

The relationships between P4C, philosophy and democracy are well known. From its earliest beginnings, in Lipman and Sharp's work, P4C has been presented as the practice of philosophy within a deliberative democratic process (Lipman and coll., 1980). However, the relationship between P4C and humanism is more nebulous: if there is one, it has not been as clearly explained in the literature. To answer the shared question of the colloquium, we felt it necessary to study how the P4C could contribute to a humanist school.

First, it's worth mentioning that the question of the relationship between humanism and Quebec's schools is not a new one. As part of our doctoral research into the philosophical foundations at the heart of the Quebec school system since the great reform of the 2000s - also known as the "pedagogical renewal (*renouveau pédagogique)*" - we took an interest in the writings of Paul Inchauspé, the man nicknamed "father of the reform[1]" (UdS, 2009). For him, the greatest novelty of the reform was neither the skills (or "competencies") nor the new pedagogical practices, but rather the introduction of a *cultural perspective* into the curriculum (Inchauspé, 2007). However, this idea has not been fully understood: it has often been reduced to the mission of "transmitting a culture". As we shall show, Inchauspé's desired cultural perspective is part of a genuine effort to organize Quebec schools around a *new humanism*.

Our aim with this presentation is to introduce the idea of a cultural perspective within the school, and to propose some reasons why we think P4C could help bring the school closer to this new humanism. To do this, we'll begin by setting the context for this new humanism we're seeking to promote. Secondly, we will present Inchauspé's cultural perspective, which aims to reaffirm the school's cultural mission, defined as the act of *introducing young people to the world of culture*. Finally, we'll briefly outline how the P4C could contribute to bringing Quebec schools closer to this goal, via: 1) philosophy itself as a framework and a common thread of culture; 2) the epistemological posture of this practice, to engage young people in collective reflection; 3) its tools, to "arm" young people and contribute to making them free beings.

1. Contextual Setting

Although Inchauspé is nicknamed "father of the reform", he preferred to see himself as the "midwife" of the reform. He saw his achievements as the realization of a process of reflection initiated by the Parent Report, and which found its impetus in the problems set up by the post-conquest Catholic school system (Inchauspé, 2007). To grasp the meaning of the concept of cultural perspective, we need to present this context in order to understand the undergoing problems it addresses.

First, the "Parent Report" is the simpler, better-known name for the *Rapport final de la commission royale d'enquête sur l'enseignement dans la province de Québec*, a commission begun in 1961 and nicknamed the "Parent Commission" in honor of its chairman, Mgr. Alphonse-Marie Parent. The purpose of this commission was to analyze the Quebec school system, identify the sources of problems and make recommendations to ensure the progress of education in the province. Quebecers remember the Parent reform fondly because they owe it a major change in school structures which led to the democratization of education (especially for girls). However, the members of the commission were more fundamentally concerned with changing the *culture* that had given rise to these old, problematic structures. In fact, the concern that drives the entire report is that of "transforming the culture of contemporary civilization" (Rapport Parent, 1964, par. 30). For the commissioners, the problems of education at the time were to be found in a certain philosophical conception: classical humanism. Such was the superiority accorded to the humanities that science, technology and knowledge were refused inclusion in school knowledge, in the name of the superiority of this humanism.

> *"Reflecting the state of culture, teaching is strongly marked by the division of knowledge. [...] A scientific and commercial education has opened alongside the humanities; a technical sector has proliferated alongside the rest; new branches and sometimes mushrooms have sprouted from the old trunk of the universities"* (Rapport Parent, 1964, par. 11).

This is why the commissioners asserted the need for a "new humanism". A humanism that could challenge the *fragmentation of culture*, that could subsume science, technology and popular culture, and bring them together under a more diversified conception of humanity than the one advocated by the ancients. They were looking for a humanism that could establish "a relationship of complementarity in unity, that would surpass oppositions, that would draw on the tradition of the ancients as much as it would be inspired by modern science, that would initiate the young into the history of thought they inherit while preparing them for the society of the future" (Rapport Parent, 1964, par. 15).

2. Inchauspé's cultural perspective

It is in this light that we must understand the cultural perspective put forward by Inchauspé. This element, never fully realized even today, seemed to him to be necessary for tackling the school's fundamental problems, even the school dropout issue, as we will show below. He therefore saw it as

the most innovative and important element of the 2000 program reform (Inchauspé, 2007). He went to great lengths in all the working groups in which he participated to convince his partners of the necessity of this aim.

Despite his efforts, the concept of cultural perspective has not been fully grasped by all. When we read the new programs, we don't find this idea of a *perspective*, even though they have been enriched with cultural *content* (MEQ, 2000, 2006). Moreover, this idea, put forward at the General assembly on education (*Les états généraux sur l'éducation*) in 1995-96, was not taken up by the public in its deliberations either (Quebec, 1995, 1996). In our view, this apparent indifference can be explained by a misunderstanding of the concept: in ministerial writings, there is a conceptual ambiguity that can led to interpret it as "classical cultural transmission", i.e. as the teaching of past and present knowledge.

In the following subsections, we present an analysis of the concept of cultural perspective, which is very close to Dewey's ideas on knowledge and the place of culture in humanity.

2.1. To introduce to the world of culture

A careful analysis of the working groups' reports and Inchauspé's writings[2] reveals how the concept of cultural perspective is more complex than mere cultural transmission, how this concept is presented as a new humanism, as called for by the Parent commission. We come across the idea that knowledge is a *tool* with which we adapt, that is, with which we *transform* the world around us. To the question "What is culture?", the Inchauspé Report answers that:

> *"Culture is opposed to nature. Culture is that which is constructed by man [emphasis added]. The whole difference between animal and human lies in the difference between the given and the constructed, and in the part each plays in their respective lives. [...] The human world in which we live is no longer the natural world, it is a world transformed by the cultural productions of men [emphasis added]" (Rapport Inchauspé, 1997, p. 23-24).*

Culture must therefore be understood in a broad sense: it is not just the arts, literature, or politics, but it is more fundamentally *any manifestation of human intelligence*. Culture encompasses the humanities, of course, but also mathematics, science, and technology. They are all means by which humanity transforms the natural world into a world which is properly human. It is this interpretation of culture that was to represent the diversified, all-embracing humanism that the Parent Report sought to promote.

In this *instrumentalist* view of culture, culture is not something to be "known for the sake of knowing": it has no intrinsic value, nor is it presented as superior to other forms of knowledge in shaping the mind (Hirst, 2010). "If schools provide students with culture in this way, it is to enable them to adapt and integrate more quickly into this world, the fruit of the cultural achievements of successive generations, a world of extreme complexity in which they will have to live" (Québec, 1994, p. 15). Culture is transmitted because it is the mean by which humanity has transformed the natural

world: we need to understand it *to understand the meaning of the world in which we live*. Culture serves both to transform the natural world and to help us better integrate into the cultural world.

If we recognize that schools have a cultural mission, it seems necessary to bring young people into contact with humanity's most significant cultural productions, those that have profoundly transformed the world. But this is only *one* aspect of this mission. "It is possible to teach subjects that are considered cultural without emphasizing the cultural perspective" (Québec, 1997, p. 26). A distinction must therefore be made between cultural *production* and *perspective*, between *transmitting* culture and *introducing* students to the world of culture. In this sense, culture is less an object than a process or activity: it is *humanity's march* in the transformation of the natural world. This is why "[o]ne doesn't pass on culture like one pass on parcels. You can't pass on culture just by applying a more cultural program. It requires a spirit, an attitude that knows how to [...] give students a glimpse [...] of perspectives that they will never forget, because they place them squarely in the world of culture" (Inchauspé in Grégoire, 2007). In fact, we can't introduce children to the world of culture by adopting an essentially "top-down" approach, i.e. by effectively transmitting cultural productions via explicit, strategic teaching. What's needed instead is an approach that *raises* young people to another level: one that gives them a glimpse of the great creative process that is humanity, that invites them to understand its various manifestations and their repercussions on their lives and enables them to *participate* in and *renew* it.

2.2. History as framework

To achieve this goal, we need to find a framework that reveals the different types of knowledge as cultural productions, i.e. as *moments* in the unique process of creation, reflection, interpretation and transformation pursued by mankind through culture. For Inchauspé, this framework could be provided by history. Because knowledge is an instrument, he asserted that history makes it possible to present the context of these creations, the problems that gave rise to them, the uses to which they were put and the beliefs they challenged (Inchauspé, 2014). To reveal the humanity that produced them, to show the traces of a science in the making, it was vital, in his view, to show the underlying *thinking*. Regarding mathematics before the reform, the Inchauspé Report asserts that: "[i]t seems like geometry, calculus, algebra and trigonometry had emerged from the heads of mathematicians ready-made, without any trial and error or development" (Québec, 1997, p. 135). According to the Inchauspé Report, presenting the results at the same time as the process would interest young people in science and keep them in school. "To foster intellectual curiosity in students, they need to grasp that the development of the human mind is linked to the development of representations and knowledge about the world" (Québec, 1997, p. 28-29). In this way, the cultural perspective could increase motivation among young people and tackle the dropout issue.

In brief, Inchauspé sums up the message that schools should convey with the following passage, which effectively sums up the meaning of the new humanism that is the cultural perspective desired for Quebec schools:

"At school, you will become more human. The world in which you live is the result of man's productions and creations. You need to know about these productions, at least the most significant ones, because by showing you humanity in action, they show you what we are, and what you are. [...] You need to know about these productions, because this knowledge will help you better understand the world in which you live. And so you will live more as men, that is, as free beings. Armed with this knowledge, you won't have to suffer the world entirely, and you'll be able to approach it with the optimism and calm that comes from mastering it. [...] The world in which we live is not natural, it is constructed by men, but you too are human and, in your turn, you will have to, you will be able to perfect its construction". (Inchauspé, 2007, p. 25-26).

This new humanism means that: 1) culture is the great creative process by which humanity transforms the natural world into a properly human world. We need to reveal this process to children by presenting the contexts in which knowledge has emerged in history: both problems and uses; 2) knowledge is both the instrument with which humanity adapts to the world by transforming it, and the means with which individuals can adapt and insert themselves into the cultural world; 3) school serves to make us more human, i.e. *freer*. On the one hand, because it reveals to children what they really are, i.e. creative, enterprising, supportive beings who are always striving to surpass themselves. On the other hand, because it arms them: it transmits the tools of knowledge.

3. P4C and humanism

Now that the cultural perspective has been clarified, we can ask whether the practice of philosophical dialogue can help instill this perspective in schools. Can it introduce children to the world of culture? The question arises, even more so as one of the criticisms frequently levelled at the P4C is that it ignores the philosophical tradition. In these workshops, children are not exposed to the dialogues of Plato, the treatises of Aristotle or the meditations of Descartes. If one wants to take part in the construction of the cultural world, shouldn't it be necessary to him-her to understand this world first to avoid pushing open doors and falling into repetition?

We'd like to put forward the hypothesis that the practice of philosophical dialogue could help to bring us closer to a more humanist school, as defined by Inchauspé. Firstly, through philosophy, as a guideline for revealing humanity's creative process. Secondly, through the epistemological posture required by this practice, which helps to raise awareness of this guiding thread. And lastly, through the tools it uses to facilitate the integration of knowledge and the liberation of children.

3.1. Philosophy as framework

To begin with, one of the criticisms that can be levelled at Inchauspé is that he has based awareness of the cultural perspective primarily on history, which serves to reveal knowledge as moments in the march of humanity. However, while we agreed to see history as a necessary means to this end, it is by no means sufficient. On the contrary, we see a limit to making it the principal means: that of interpreting this march of humanity not as the *construction* of a human world, but rather as the

discovery of the natural world, as the progressive attainment of truth. Whereas the first perspective sees subjects matters as tools for tackling problems, for transforming the world, and thus as open organizations, the second sees them as divisions that follow *the very structure of reality* (Bégin, 2009). According to this point of view, if we teach chemistry, physics, or biology, it is because reality is divided into different phenomena that have different laws and require different methods, and that we teach to young people by starting from the simple, before progressing to the complex. In so doing, history, even when presenting us with the context of emergence of disciplines and knowledge, could be used to show and justify the *separation* of knowledge, preventing us from grasping the *unified* character of culture we are researching. Even if this view doesn't necessarily recognize one form of knowledge as superior to the others (as in classical humanism), we still end up !
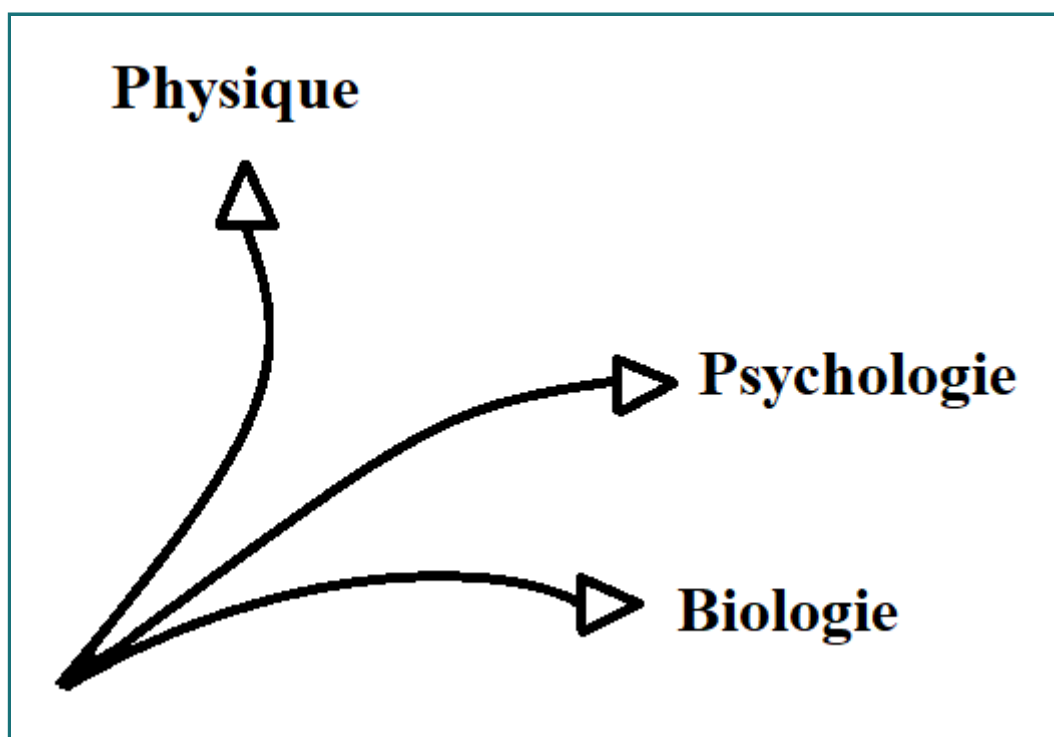
with a cultural explosion (as shown in *Figure 1*).

If philosophy can help us, it is by offering us the thread we need to link these different cultural splinters. As proposed by Lipman in *Philosophy goes to school*, philosophy can serve as the heart of a school curriculum because it reveals the continuity of the various traditional school subjects in that they all share *contestable* elements: elements that resist a perfectly objective, precise and reproducible approach (Lipman, 1988). These include the epistemological, aesthetic, ethical, metaphysical and even logical dimensions of human experience: how do we know? What should we do? What is beauty? Etc.
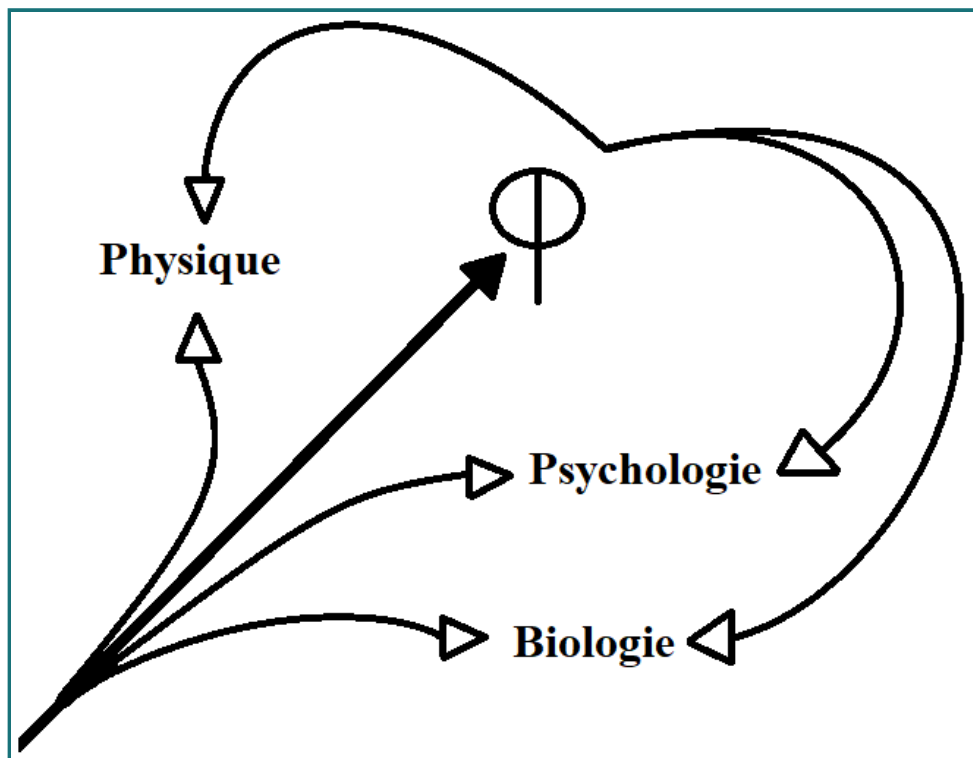
It is philosophy, long before science, that represented the first movement of reasoned human reflection. The first "scientists" were philosophers of nature: think of Thales, Democritus, Aristotle and so on. A discipline becomes a science when it succeeds in isolating its object of study (from nature to life, for example) and finding a methodology that enables it to obtain "objective" results, i.e. that can be reproduced by others (as shown in *Figure 2*). To put it another way, a science separates itself from philosophy when it succeeds in *freeing itself from its contestable elements*. In this march of culture, philosophy continues to investigate the dimensions of human experience that resist this scientific reduction[3].

Yet these questionable elements are always present in science: scientists don't address them because they don't need to in order to make progress. It's up to the philosopher to ask scientists questions such as: how can you claim to be telling the *truth*? Does this force *exist*? Is it *ethical* to use this technology in this context? Etc. Philosophy can therefore return to the sciences and show their continuity (as shown in *Figure 2*). This doesn't make philosophy a super-science, but it does make it the discourse *par excellence* for reminding us of the complexity of experience.

Philosophy could therefore support history to unify culture, because it would show how diverse knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is linked in a single, complex and problematic human experience. Far from being the reflection of an objective world, our knowledge is a cultural production: a tool to help us orient ourselves in our human condition.

3.2. The epistemological posture of P4C

If philosophy in general can help us reveal the unified character of culture, we would argue that P4C could contribute even more specifically to establishing this cultural perspective at school by revealing, exploiting, and concretizing these questionable dimensions of subjects, and by offering us its *epistemic posture* as a model.

Indeed, if we want to reveal subjects matters and knowledge as human constructs that can questioned, we need to give young people the opportunity to question and evaluate them, *right in the classroom*. Teachers are recognized as *role models*: pedagogy itself and its underlying epistemic posture are important in the classroom since both have consequences for learning[4]. We can therefore present the history of mankind, present the reflections of researchers, show ethical dilemmas and epistemological questions, but still expect young people to learn *our correct interpretation* without tolerating any questioning on their part. Who would they be after all to criticize their teachers : they are *preparing them* to play the role of creators. They still must learn before they can do so.

We believe, following Dewey, that to interest young people in the development of culture, to prepare them to play their role, the message must match his medium: the classroom must not only prepare for a future role, but it must also offer the opportunity to practice in the *present* (Dewey, 1916). The teacher therefore needs to incorporate more opportunity for research in the classroom; proposing the realization of projects that don't necessarily have *one right* answer that is carried out according to *one right* method, but where we could deliberate and question *collectively*. Teachers need to be open to questions from all disciplines, including epistemological, ethical, logical, metaphysical and even aesthetic ones, and to ask them for themselves, as role models should do. In short, they need an openness, a relationship to knowledge that is no longer of the objectivist order - where knowledge depends on the structure of the object to be learned, as found in behaviorism and cognitivism - but is more constructivist and even ideally socioconstructivist. We need to recognize that knowledge is a social construct, situated and endowed with use; that it is not a mirror of reality, but a human instrument and interpretation that we can question, educate, rework, improve and so on.

In this sense, the practice of philosophical dialogue represents an excellent model of socioconstructivist practice: children are helped by a more competent peer to collectively deliberate, produce common meaning, share and elaborate, using reasons and knowledge that can come from any discipline, but where everything can be questioned, evaluated, used and thus *appreciated.* Mathieu Gagnon, Sébastien Yergeau and other collaborators have clearly shown how this practice is a good way of inducing a change, an evolution, in the teacher's epistemic posture (Gagnon and Yergeau, 2017; Van Der Straten Waillet *and al.*, 2015; Haynes and Murris, 2011). It's a change that takes time and effort, of course, but we feel that it is necessary if we are to achieve the cultural perspective that Inchauspé is aiming for.

3.3. The Tools of P4C

However, if providing the space for research and questioning is another necessary step in approaching this cultural perspective, we still need to have the *tools* to tackle the problems, to understand the articulations of the reflections of those who have gone before us, to recognize their accuracy, their validity, and their limits. If the practice of philosophical dialogue can help bring us closer to a cultural perspective, it is also thanks to the transmission of thinking skills via rehearsed reflective practice. These thinking skills can be defined as *the instruments that thinking uses to advance research*. To give just a few examples:

• To give reasons;

• To use examples;

• To infer consequences;

• To define;

• To draw an analogy;

• Etc.[5]

By asking young people to recognize the skills they use unconsciously, by asking them to mobilize them, by questioning the quality of their use, and sometimes by working directly with them, we contribute to transmitting cultural tools with which to shape their thinking: we help them to reason, to search, to organize information, and so on.

This emphasis on thinking skills is not found in all philosophical dialogue practices, but it seems to us fundamental within *a thinking formation program* and for the attainment of the cultural perspective we are aiming for our schools. It is fundamental because they represent a new language through which to learn to see and control our thinking, but also through which to communicate with other researchers, to work towards a common creation. In our more than eight years' experience of philosophical dialogue with a university audience, students in every course have been fascinated by they individual and collective progress that they attribute to these skills. The more skills are integrated, named, conscientized and interpellated, the more research evolves from the sharing of mere opinions to co-construction. Students understand each other better, articulate their thoughts better, recognize what needs to be used, what's missing - in short, they learn how to research.

It seems that nowhere in school these tools are introduced explicitly. My students (aged between 19 and 70) are explicitly practicing these skills for the first time. This may be because organized common research is not sufficiently established at school, because the posture required is not quite right, even though these skills are (or should be) found everywhere. In fact, these skills are not just the tools of philosophical research: they are also used in science, literature, mathematics, art and so on.

Transmitting them through practice is another way of demonstrating the unity and complementarity of disciplines, and of highlighting the cultural character of these productions.

Finally, the transmission of these skills, through the training of thought and critical thinking, would also bring us closer to this new humanism, by liberating young people, enabling them not "to suffer the world", as Inchauspé put it. The practice of philosophical dialogue quickly reveals to children the ambiguity of language, as words have several meanings. It can also be an opportunity to show them that this ambiguity can be used to manipulate them, to present arguments or facts as incontestable when they are not. Practicing philosophical dialogue also means providing the opportunity and the tools to question the meaning of words, which are omnipresent in our lives. It's precisely words that probably best represent "the cultural world produced by mankind". It's a way of making them more autonomous, more alert, more independent - in short, *freer*.

Conclusion

In this presentation, we have sought to present a certain conception of humanism: the cultural perspective put forward by Paul Inchauspé, which was one of the aims of the Quebec school, and to suggest reasons why the practice of philosophical dialogue might bring us closer to this mission. On one side, because philosophy could serve as a common thread for demonstrating the unity of culture. On the other side, because the practice of philosophical dialogue can induce in teachers the change in their epistemic posture needed to raise awareness, to interest, and to introduce young people to the world of culture, and initiate them into cultural production, invention, and transformation. Then through the tools she passes on, practices and helps children master: the thinking skills, at least according to an approach inspired more by Lipman's work and which, it seems, fits in well with this perspective, probably via Dewey.

However, this linking of the P4C with the cultural perspective can raise questions, especially when we consider the diversity of existing practices. One of these questions seems to me to concern the place of philosophical culture, both past and present, in P4C. According to the perspective presented, children must be brought into contact with the significant cultural productions of humanity. Doesn't this raise the question of the *material* to be used in P4C? Should children be exposed to Plato's dialogues? What are we to think of philosophy movements with children, in which dialogue is initiated based on the children's spontaneous questions, without necessarily looking to the transmission of skills? Would they have a place in a *humanist* philosophical school? Could they *introduce the world of culture*?

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Notes

1. Paul Inchauspé is a retired college philosophy professor of Basque origin who was heavily involved in the various education committees in Quebec that paved the way for the pedagogical renewal. He was a member of the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* from 1989 to 1993, participated in drafting the report *Préparer les jeunes au 21e siècle; rapport du groupe de travail sur les profils de formation au primaire et au secondaire*, known as the "Corbo Report", was a commissioner during the General assembly on education of 1995-96 and even headed the working group on curriculum reform, whose report *Réaffirmer l'école; prendre le virage du succès*, is nicknamed the "Inchauspé Report" in his honor. ↩

2. Interested readers can find the Paul Inchauspé archives on the Collège Ahuntsic website at the following address: https://www.collegeahuntsic.qc.ca/notre-college/publications/archives-de-paul-inchauspe. ↩

3. This is not to say that philosophy is not rational, but the same article in philosophy will convince or not convince the same philosophers for a variety of reasons. In science, if the methodology is coherent and well-conducted, whether we like it or not, we often have to accept these results. ↩

4. There's a saying in education that "you teach the way you've been taught" which indicate how the posture of the teacher's teacher teach even more than his sayings. ↩

5. Interested readers should consult *Penser ensemble à l'école ; des outils pour l'observation d'une communauté de recherche en action* by Sasseville et Gagnon (2017), mentionned in the references. ↩