

# ICPIC : The variety of schools of philosophy for children in France and in Philolab

**Nathalie Frieden**, maîtresse d'Enseignement et de Recherche en didactique de la philosophie, Université de Fribourg (Suisse), [natalia.frieden@unifr.ch](mailto:natalia.frieden@unifr.ch)

## What I will talk about

My subject is vast because there are so many, inventions, new schools, and new tendencies of Philosophy for children in Europe to choose from. I will therefore talk of only a few tendencies among the ones represented by Philolab.

Philolab is the organisation that encompasses and brings together all those important different inventions and tendencies of philosophy in France and in francophone countries of the world. It works with Unesco to promote philosophy in all its aspects.

I choose to talk of concrete inventions. There are two reasons for this choice. The first one is that one must try to focus on real experiences, and I consider the inventions I will present to arise from a real need and therefore be proofs/consequences of concrete experiences.

And the second one is my own profession. I am a professor of didactics of philosophy. I teach at University, to future philosophy teachers in high school how to teach. Therefore I am interested in the methods that help young teachers to teach philosophy and especially, [of course,] in what is really effective.

## Why it is important to introduce you to this moment of philosophy

How positive is creativity to society! While for years in France, philosophy was only taught during the last school year before the *Baccalauréat* and at University; and its teaching was formal, conservative, and centred on the cultural history of the subject; since 1995, something has happened in society that has liberated philosophy of its confinement within the walls of schools. Philosophy has developed in society. It is the discovery of philosophizing as a practice versus philosophy as a knowledge of a content.

A need for the benefits of philosophy has emerged. What has become known as "the new practices of philosophy" (NPP) developed through "Cafés philosophiques" (philosophical cafés), philosophical counsel, philosophy in companies, philosophy with vulnerable people such as old people, or young, difficult children in vulnerable neighbourhoods, or in psychiatric environments. All those new practices found in Philolab a place to develop and flourish, a place of militancy and creativity.

Among these new practices, philosophy for children appeared (P4C).

At the time, Lipman was little known in France. Therefore the people who began P4C were, in a sense, original inventors. Indeed, all of them discovered Lipman, long after having begun P4C. If Lipman is well known in France today, it is thanks to those pioneers who reinvented their own strand of P4C.

Each of them had to fight his way against continuous opposition from traditional teaching. They did this through much publishing, organising events and eventually achieved a certain marginal yet ever growing success in France and elsewhere, and Unesco's recognition.

## What are the main schools of P4C in France?

There are three important aspects of P4C that distinguish its different French schools.

- The aim
- The frame of the discussion (ploy, scheme, stratagem, protocole)

- The place of the teacher (or animator or facilitator)

**1) Oscar Brenifier and Isabelle Millon** are present here and do not need to be introduced. Also, they would account for their own method much better than I can, so I will merely attempt a small synthesis of their practice. They head a group of research called Institute of Philosophical Practices. The aim of their work is to encourage people to work on their work, think on their thought and develop a better understanding of what they think and say. They therefore aim at stimulating one's acquisition of an intelligence awareness about, and transparency on the functioning of one's own thought. Therefore their method is critical and demanding, taking inspiration from Socrates, the Socrates that is a horsefly. In their school of thought, any discussion is transformed into a specifically philosophical discussion. Thus the role of the teacher is accentuated, and the biggest interest is for the shape or form of thoughts and attitudes rather than for the contents.

## **2) Michel Tozzi is an inventor that has an essential impact on P4C as the world knows it, today**

He is a professor of Philosophy in High School and a Professor of Science of Education at the University of Montpellier. He has created a school of P4C that is influenced by the institutional pedagogy of Freinet. The latter is aimed at developing community or civic skills within schools through the creation of class councils where each pupil has a well-defined role. Tozzi promotes these civic aims and values in his P4C. He adopts the structure of the "class councils" created by institutional pedagogy and adapts it to the needs of a philosophical discussion. His idea is that by practicing those defined roles one can find in a parliamentary debate or in a wider span of community discussions, one eventually acquires civic skills and one understands the meaning and necessity of civic values. He shares Habermas's deep conviction that the basis of our possible life in society, is an ethos of communication.

Within philosophical discussions shaped by Tozzi, roles are partially social (a president will for instance give the floor to other participants) and partially philosophical in that they allow children to develop reasoning skills such as summarising or reformulating the thoughts that have been expressed so far. There are also a fair amount of active observers whose work is to detect the actualisation of certain skills by their debating counterparts. As they try to differentiate whether their colleagues are arguing, building a concept, or asking questions, they learn to evaluate how much progress has been done in their colleagues' skills, and eventually understand what argumentation, conceptualisation or problematisation made of.

Although this device appears as rather complex to implement, it is functional and effective once it has been drilled, because it simultaneously develops many different skills, among which many metacognitive ones, and is particularly stimulating to all participants. Also, it is rather versatile, for I can attest to its successful use from kindergarten onwards. The role of the teacher (or the animator) is quite similar to that suggested by Lipman. He/she does not contribute to the discussion by giving his/her own point of view, but rather by questioning the children so as to help them in the development of their different civic, linguistic, reasoning and philosophical skills. He/she is the guarantee of the requirement.

(The choice of the subject is, as in Lipman's method, made through a discussion and a vote, but the source for the question is different. It can range from a children's literature story to a myth by Plato, or directly addressing an important question).

**3) Jacques Levine** was a very original inventor who died two years ago. His background was Psychoanalysis and Philosophy. He formed set groups or workshops called AGSAS, an acronym which stands for [Association des groupes de soutien au soutien], that is, more or less, the Association of groups who support people who support, or care for people who care Nurses and teachers). Those groups attempted a reflection on the human condition.

He once saw a child on a balcony and asked him what he was doing. The child answered: "I think the world". This convinced Levine that children needed a space, a moment and a silence to think for themselves. He brought P4C in classes from kindergarten up to high school. The discussions with children he created give important space to the fundamental questions a child asks him/herself. These discussions offer real freedom of thought, and much attention is given on not influencing the child. The teacher is silent and only writes down or records what the child says, so that during the following week, the child might read or listen to what was said and grow with it. A big space is given to silence, to think by one self, freely. And most of the time the reflexion and the discussion is on a concept and not a question, therefore confrontations are avoided altogether.

Thoroughly detailed research and reflection fed into Levine's book, *L'enfant philosophe, avenir de l'humanité - The Child Philosopher, Future of Humanity?* [1](#) et [2](#). As this title suggests, reflection on the Human Condition is central to Levine's approach to P4C.

Levine does not give a priority in the process, to the development of reasoning skills. He does not work their skills. It happens by the repetition of discussions.

He is probably of all the French inventors, the one that has more differences with Lipman and who also emphasises them more

I consider the differences between these methods described up to here, lie in the very concept of what philosophy is, which underlies the discussion, the place of reality in the discussion that is somewhat aimed at through the development of the latter. In Brenifier, the teacher is a teacher, in Tozzi, he is an animator, in Levine he is a facilitator.

Now that I have provided this somewhat incomplete spectrum of the theoretical framework behind French practices in philosophy for children, I would like to concentrate on a more concrete example.

**4) Jean-Charles Pettier**, another colleague present in Jinju, is one of the most demanded practitioners of philosophy for children in France [3](#). He most famously works with children's magazines published by a successful editor, Bayard Presse. This editor publishes a range of magazines aimed at specific age groups, up to high school. The magazine most read in nursery schools is *Pomme d'Api* [4](#) which provides, in its monthly edition a double page of P4C. The support for philosophy is a big drawing (on a poster) accompanied by a question formulated for small children. (In Astrapi for first grade kids, the support is a page of a comic strip book presenting familiar situations problems). With time this page of P4C began to be used by teachers and has earned some success within schools. So JC Pettier created a practical information sheet, that one can download free from charge from the Internet. It is intended for teachers who want to work in P4C in their classes yet have not been trained for it. These educational help-guides accompaniments, answer to three basic needs: " the worked skills developed through philosophical workshops in kindergarten", " how to prepare this philosophical workshop ", " the teacher's role during the workshop ". This has a big success, it is spreading P4C and it is hard to account for how many classes practice P4C on the basis of this method.

An internationally successful movie was made by one of JCP's students, in a class that uses this method (*Ce n'est qu'un début* was broadcasted in many countries) (Japan and Australia for instance and it will soon be in Korea)),

(The page of PFC, the method of working on images as support, the practical sheet for the teachers, and the idea of the movie all come from Jean-Charles Pettier. As for the teacher in the movie, she also is one of his students)

## Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to insist on the vivid, creative climate for P4C in France today.

The best signs/examples of this are the vast variety:

- First, of new material to base discussions on, such as "classic" youth literature, tales, fables, theatre, situations problems, posters (*Pomme d'api* and *Philéas et Autobule*), comic books, movie excerpts etc.
- Secondly, a lot of researchers have analysed the question of the aim of P4F discussions, and the method to obtain this aim.
- And thirdly, of types of public those adaptable methods are aimed at, for they go beyond the context of primary school children to reach groups ranging. from teenagers with great difficulty, to intellectually impaired children, elderly people, groups subjected to violence, and groups in government institutions.

All these inventions are assimilated and celebrated within our organisation **Philolab**.

During November each year, Philolab organises, thanks to the hospitality and the help of Unesco, a conference for the international philosophy festival. During this conference new practices are constantly being promoted and analysed, while new inventors are discovered. The great support of UNESCO helped us to expand, and we now

work in seven different workshops on practices of philosophy. Unesco also promotes the spread of this creativity by providing free spaces allowing everyone to discover philosophy.

All this inventiveness has a huge influence on teaching in the schools.

It provokes success and consequently a demand in training. Therefore, one of our seven fields of research is training. Nowadays, with the help of Veronique Delille, I head a group of 20 researchers working on a textbook training in different ways of practicing P4C. This will be available in next years on the Unesco website.

Because we have found that more and more people choose, create, vary, mix methods and ways of practicing P4C, our textbook provides a pluralist view on P4C, for each person to have the possibility of choosing and building his own style of P4C.

---

(1) Lévine J., Moll J., *Le Je est un autre*, éditions ESF, 2001.

(2) Lévine J., Chambard G., Sillam M., Gostain D., *L'enfant philosophe, avenir de l'humanité ? ?Ateliers de réflexion sur la condition humaine, ?ESF, 2004.*

(3) *Diotime* n° 35, 10 2007.

(4) [www.pommedapi.com](http://www.pommedapi.com)

*Diotime*, n°51 (01/2012)