How Can We Promote the Treatment of Philosophical Questions in Primary School? The Perspective of Experienced Teachers

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Abstract: At the international level, philosophical questions are increasingly used to develop students' critical thinking, particularly in elementary school. Yet, despite this growing interest, their implementation in the classroom remains complex and raises several challenges for teachers. This article aims to support teaching practices by identifying the elements that foster philosophical inquiry in elementary school. To do so, we conducted a qualitative analysis of six interviews carried out with teachers experienced in philosophy with children. Based on the multi-agenda theoretical model (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009), the study highlights several elements which, when combined, foster a successful process of philosophical inquiry. The results presented offer promising avenues for teachers to effectively address philosophical questions in the classroom while ensuring the continuity of research and the validity and updating of recommendations formulated for teachers.

Keywords: philosophy with children, critical thinking, philosophical questions, teaching practices, elementary school.

Introduction

At the international level, philosophical questions (PQ) are increasingly present in school curricula. This trend is part of a broader movement toward the democratization of philosophical practices in schools, supported by international bodies that recognize the importance of developing learners' critical thinking from a young age (Chirouter, 2013; Coasne, 2023; Michaud and Gagnon, 2025). Yet, despite this growing interest, the treatment of PQ in the classroom remains complex and presents several challenges for teachers (Daniel, 2005; Daniel, 2007; Daniel, 2008; Michalik, 2019; Jolibert, 2015). In this context, this article aims to support teaching practices by identifying the elements that help foster the treatment of PQ in elementary classrooms. It reports the results of a qualitative study conducted with six experienced teachers from the second and third cycles of elementary school—cycles in which PQ are addressed in the Québec Education Program (MEQ, 2023).

The first part revisits the context in which philosophical practices have been democratized in schools, while the second part focuses on the difficulties teachers face when introducing and treating PQ with their students. These observations lead us to formulate our research question: what elements enable teachers to foster philosophical inquiry in their second and third-cycle elementary classrooms? We then present the multi-agenda model by Bucheton and Soulé (2009), which constitutes the theoretical framework of our study. After explaining the research method selected for this study, which included six semi-structured interviews with teachers experienced in philosophy with children (PWC), we present and discuss our main results.

The results show that treating PQ in the classroom relies on a combination of elements: a classroom atmosphere grounded in openness to differences, attentive listening, and respectful communication; flexible scaffolding focused on guidance rather than control; a spatial and temporal classroom arrangement that alters the teacher's posture as a "holder of knowledge"; and the use of pedagogical supports—particularly picture books—that help connect PQ to students' realities and concerns.

The Democratization of Philosophical Inquiry in Elementary School

Since the 1970s, experiments and research on philosophical inquiry in elementary school have been expanding and diversifying around the world (Chirouter, 2022; Michaud and Gagnon, 2025). With the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the publication of the report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century at UNESCO (Delors et al., 1999), international bodies recognized the importance of developing learners' critical thinking from the start of compulsory schooling, as well as the relevance of philosophy in achieving this goal. In doing so, they contributed to the recognition of PWC practices as a tool for fostering critical thinking within the broader project of forming tomorrow's citizens. Although sometimes subject to criticism (Berton, 2015; Coasne, 2023), PWC is now viewed as an educational practice that promotes student expression, listening, and cooperation while preparing them to exercise active and informed citizenship (Daniel, 2008; Sasseville, 2009). Within this context, philosophical practices have been gaining an increasingly significant place in school curricula and are becoming more widespread around the world (Chirouter, 2013; Coasne, 2023; Michaud and Gagnon, 2025).

Québec, in particular, is part of this movement, which is reflected in the increasingly explicit integration of philosophical content within its curricula. One of the most recent examples of this phenomenon is the reform of the *Éthique et Culture Religieuse* (Ethics and Religious Culture) (ERC) course, replaced by the *Culture et Citoyenneté Québécoise* (Culture and Citizenship in Québec) (CCQ) course. Introduced in 2008 for both elementary and secondary schools, the ERC program already provided a favorable framework for the emergence of philosophical practices (Beaucher, 2008; MEQ, 2008). However, the CCQ program, which has replaced ERC since the start of the 2024 school year, marks a significant shift by prescribing the study of PQ as a formal object of teaching beginning in the second cycle of elementary school (MEQ, 2023; Point, 2025). This institutionalization of philosophy within Québec's curriculum now places the responsibility on second and third-cycle teachers, who must work with content that has been only minimally explored in their initial and ongoing training.

Addressing and Treating Philosophical Questions in the Classroom: Ongoing Difficulties

Although Québec's curricula give increasing prominence to PWC, its implementation in elementary schools remains uneven. Indeed, the practice of PWC often depends on teachers' individual commitment, interest, or personal training (Sasseville, 2009). Thus, even if the institutional framework now recognizes the educational value of philosophical reflection, it remains, in practice, only minimally integrated into teachers' pedagogical routines. Unlike contexts such as French-speaking Belgium, where PWC is institutionalized as a full-fledged subject from the age of six (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles,

2017; Gagnon, 2021), Québec is still in a phase of gradual appropriation, now supported by the CCQ program (MEQ, 2023). Since the institutionalization of PQ, their implementation in schools raises the question of the conditions necessary for the emergence of philosophical reflection and for teachers' successful integration of such questions in their classrooms. Several studies highlight challenges that continue to hinder the practice of philosophy in elementary schools.

Among these studies, Michalik (2019) shows that both teachers and students encounter difficulties when addressing and working with PQ, largely because the ambiguity and uncertainty characteristic of such questions are uncommon in classroom contexts. In her review of philosophical experiences involving a group of elementary teachers and children, Michalik identifies three features of PQ that unsettle both teachers and students: their openness, the broad range of possible answers, and the unpredictability of exchanges. In her view, these elements contrast with more traditional pedagogical approaches and lead to a reversal of the teacher's role, who must shift from being a "holder of knowledge" to a "facilitator of thinking". This shift can disrupt teachers' professional identity and generate a sense of lost control that may be uncomfortable for some. Michalik's findings (2019) echo those of Daniel (2008), who shows that philosophy for children, and particularly the creation of a community of philosophical inquiry, requires teachers to trust in their students' reflective abilities and to allow them to progress by "reducing" their own role to that of a simple guide. Daniel (2005) also notes that establishing such a philosophical community in schools requires a climate of trust and respect that can be difficult to achieve. According to the same study, philosophical inquiry is even harder to implement in certain contexts—for example, socio-economically disadvantaged environments where dialogue is not valued—which slows the development of a climate conducive to philosophical discussion. Time constraints, the need for regular and cross-curricular practice, and the gradual development of thinking skills constitute additional obstacles identified by Daniel (2007, 2008). To these difficulties is sometimes added the lack of teacher preparation. Jolibert (2015) notes, for instance, that initial teacher training in France provides little exposure to philosophy, which limits teachers' ability to work with PQ. Although this observation is rooted in a specific context, in which philosophy holds a strong disciplinary status but is reserved for the secondary level (French lycées), it nevertheless resonates with the situation in Québec. There, philosophy is not a subject taught at the elementary level, which restricts its formal presence in initial teacher education. This situation is likely to evolve with the reform of the ERC course and its replacement by CCQ, which will presumably lead to adjustments in teacher training. Still, this parallel highlights a challenge shared by both France and Québec: the absence of mandatory training preparing teachers to address PQ in the classroom.

Given all these factors, it is highly likely that many teachers in Québec, now responsible for integrating PQ following the recent implementation of the CCQ program, face similar difficulties and could benefit from guidance to help them navigate these challenges.

Research Objective

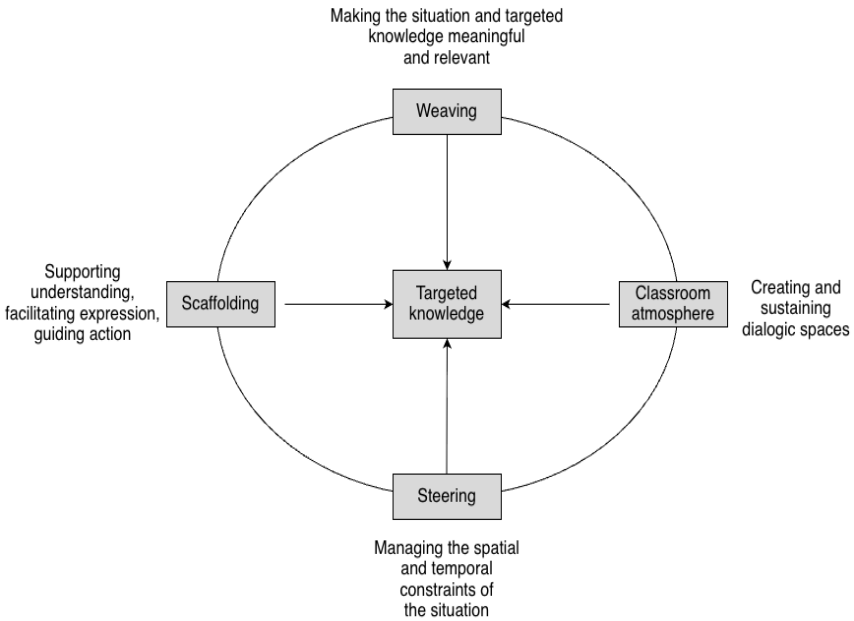
To support teaching practices in this area, this study aimed to identify elements that enable teachers to foster philosophical inquiry in second and third-cycle elementary classrooms. In a rapidly evolving educational context, marked by curriculum reform and increasing polarization in contemporary societies (Hirsch, 2025; Hirsch and Piché, 2023), ensuring the continuity of research and

the validity of recommendations for teachers—who are on the front line of these issues—is vital. Accordingly, this study seeks, on the one hand, to update existing empirical data on the conditions that facilitate PQ treatment in the classroom, and on the other, to produce new data largely grounded in the Québec context, collected during the implementation of the CCQ program. An additional innovative aspect of this research is the use of the multi-agenda theoretical model (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009) to shed light on the challenges teachers face when addressing PQ with their students. The data collection tool was constructed based on the five concerns that make up this model, with the aim of identifying the elements that, in a given classroom context, enable teachers to foster philosophical inquiry. By drawing on this theoretical framework, the study aims not only to identify a set of elements that, when combined, support the treatment of PQ in Québec elementary classrooms, but also to highlight pedagogical aspects that prior research methods may not have revealed.

Theoretical Framework: The Multi-Agenda Model as an Analytical Model of Teacher Action

Developed in the 2000s by the multidisciplinary Educational Technology Research Team 40 in Montpellier, France, the multi-agenda model is grounded in a pedagogical-didactic research approach. In other words, pedagogy and didactics are brought together to elaborate a theoretical model that integrates concepts from both fields. The multi-agenda model serves as a theoretical framework designed to support the analysis of didactic situations. It aims to facilitate understanding of teachers' actions by considering several elements that structure a teaching–learning situation (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009). These elements are organized around five major concerns: weaving, scaffolding, classroom atmosphere, steering, and learning the targeted knowledge. The model and its components are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. – A multi-agenda of embedded concerns (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009, p. 33, [own translation])



The five elements – (1) steering, (2) classroom atmosphere, (3) weaving, (4) scaffolding, and (5) targeted knowledge—are defined by Bucheton and Soulé (2009) as follows.

The first concern of the model involves the teacher's management of steering tasks. This refers to the teacher's interventions in handling the practical constraints of the teaching–learning situation. This dimension requires attention to the spatial and temporal modalities used to teach the targeted knowledge—in this study, the treatment of a PQ. The second concern focuses on creating and maintaining the classroom atmosphere. It refers to the professional gestures teachers employ to establish and sustain a cognitive and relational climate conducive to teaching and learning the targeted knowledge. These gestures may include verbal strategies used to create and preserve dialogic spaces suitable for carrying out the learning activity. The third concern addresses the teacher's scaffolding of the session. Scaffolding includes forms of support teachers use to assist student learning, teaching strategies that help deepen conceptual understanding, and regulatory gestures intended to maintain control over the teaching–learning situation (e.g., asking students to raise their hands before speaking). The fourth concern relates specifically to the weaving of a session—a form of scaffolding that makes the learning situation and targeted knowledge meaningful and relevant (in this case, making the PQ addressed by the teacher meaningful and relevant to students). Finally, the fifth concern of the multi-agenda model, positioned at the center of the others, is the didactic concern. It refers to the pedagogical goal targeted for students, which guides the teacher's actions throughout the session. It is around this pedagogical goal that the teacher mobilizes the various "organizing" elements of the session (weaving, scaffolding, classroom atmosphere, and steering) to achieve the targeted knowledge.

These concerns constitute the matrix of teacher activity in the classroom and its organizing elements (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009, p. 32). They are both systemic, in that they co-act with one another, and hierarchical, in that the teacher may choose, depending on the context, to prioritize the creation of relational conditions necessary to continue the work, sometimes at the expense of specific lesson content. Thus, the organization, importance, and development of the model's concerns may vary depending on the period of the school year, the teacher's training, or the teacher's posture and relationship to knowledge. It is also important to note that this model makes it possible to identify elements relating both to the introduction of PQ in the classroom and to students' philosophical treatment of such questions. Finally, in this study, the targeted knowledge at the center of the multi-agenda analytical model is not the PQ itself but the philosophical treatment associated with it. In other words, the focus is less on the nature of the question posed than on the way it is worked through in class—that is, on the reflective process and intellectual skills students mobilize to turn it into an object of philosophical thought. As Jolibert (2015) points out, introducing a question with philosophical potential does not in itself guarantee a genuine philosophical inquiry. For an intellectual activity to be considered philosophical, specific conditions must be met: philosophical thinking is characterized by critical rigor, universality, and an orientation toward the search for truth. In this sense, the philosophical treatment of a PQ refers not to the topic itself, but to the way it is questioned, discussed, and problematized during the activity. Ultimately, the philosophical treatment of a question, as understood in this study, must lead students to engage in philosophizing through a process of meaning-making that fosters autonomy of thought and the development of critical thinking.

Methodology

Positioned within the field of philosophy didactics in elementary school, this study aimed to identify elements that, when combined, foster the treatment of PQ in elementary classrooms. We conducted six semi-structured interviews with elementary teachers experienced in PWC, from both Québec and France. These interviews provided insight into which teaching practices support the emergence of philosophical reflection among students.

Participants

The sample included six elementary teachers: five from Québec and one from France. The French teacher had participated in a previous study on philosophy in elementary schools, demonstrating her experience and quality of practice in PWC.

The sample spanned the relevant elementary school levels (second and third cycles, ages 6 to 11). While five participants were women and one was a man, the group represented diverse experience levels: three teachers had over 15 years of teaching, two had between five and ten years, and one had less than five years but recently completed university training in PWC.

Teachers were selected based on five criteria: (1) currently employed (not students or retired), (2) teaching in the second or third elementary cycles, (3) holding a teaching degree, (4) practicing PWC, and (5) having completed or received training in PWC. The latter ensured participants had expertise and commitment to PWC, gained through varied pathways. Some participants, trained at a time when university-level opportunities for PWC training were less available, acquired their skills through peers, continuing education, and regular classroom practice of philosophy with their students. Others, more recently graduated, benefited from university programs specifically dedicated to this field.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the five concerns of Bucheton and Soulé's (2009) multi-agenda model. It served as the foundation for our data collection tool, highlighting essential dimensions for analyzing teaching–learning situations: (1) management of task steering in spatial and temporal dimensions, (2) maintenance of an atmosphere conducive to learning, (3) weaving, which seeks to make the situation and targeted knowledge meaningful and relevant, (4) scaffolding, considered central for supporting, deepening, and regulating learning, and (5) the didactic concern, focused on knowledge construction for students (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009). These concerns formed the five categories of the interview guide (see Appendix 1).

Six individual interviews, lasting 40 to 60 minutes, were conducted remotely via videoconferencing. The semi-structured format, conceived as a flexible oral interaction (Savoie-Zajc, 2009), enabled participants to provide coherent, personal accounts of their experience treating PQ in the classroom. Teachers signed a free and informed consent form guaranteeing anonymity (teachers were assigned pseudonyms), confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Interviews were recorded with consent, fully transcribed verbatim, and manually corrected for accuracy and fidelity (Rioufreyt, 2016).

All interviews were conducted following ethical approval from the Education and Psychology Research Ethics Committee at the Université de Montréal.[1]

Data Analysis

Transcripts were imported into NVivo software to facilitate the analysis. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) grouping codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and refining themes, and (6) producing the report. This iterative process, with frequent movement between data and categories, ensured coherence and validity, guided primarily by the theoretical framework but open to emergent contributions from teachers' discourse. Based on Bucheton and Soulé's (2009) five concerns, the analysis identified elements from teachers' accounts that facilitate PQ treatment in the classroom. We added an additional category on teacher training, a theme recurrently mentioned and considered by participants as central to their practice.

Key Findings:
Elements Supporting the Treatment of Philosophical Questions in Elementary School

Classroom Atmosphere: Creating and Sustaining Dialogic Spaces

The interviews revealed that, according to teachers, working with PQ in the classroom first requires establishing "dispositions", rules, or habits with students. Annie, one of the six teachers interviewed, emphasized that these "dispositions", essential to the classroom atmosphere, develop from the start of the school year, initially through non-philosophical activities. Once students internalize these dispositions, their ability to focus on philosophical reflection strengthens, and teachers feel more confident engaging with PQ.

Marie exemplified this approach by dedicating an introductory class session on philosophy before addressing PQ. This session allows her to clarify the "right" dispositions for productive philosophical discussion, such as "all ideas are acceptable and open to discussion," "everyone's voice is to be treasured," and "together we build richer and better ideas." All six teachers agreed that establishing these intellectual dispositions creates a safe, caring atmosphere where students' contributions are valued equally and not judged by peers.

When asked to identify the dispositions they considered essential to a classroom atmosphere conducive to working with PQ, teachers identified three interconnected elements: openness to difference, respectful communication, and attentive listening. These three dispositions apply to both students and teachers and supported PQ treatment in all six classrooms. Teachers always described them in relation to one another: respect and listening foster openness; openness and listening are perceived as forms of respect; and openness and respect both presuppose attentive listening to others' ideas.

Teachers characterized openness to difference as recognizing the plurality of viewpoints, without the need to adhere to or judge them. Over time, maintaining these parameters (openness, respect,

[1] Certificate approved on October 6, 2024. Certification number: 2024-6154

listening) also strengthens the bond of trust between teacher and students. Once this trust is established, teachers report feeling more at ease addressing potentially sensitive or controversial topics. This atmosphere and sense of trust allow teachers to worry less about the kinds of answers students may provide.

Finally, most Québec teachers interviewed also reported using logical fallacies (explicit content in the CCQ program [MEQ, 2023]) to support the development and maintenance of a climate conducive to philosophical discussion. Once students understand and master different types of fallacies (e.g., appeal to authority, false dilemma, stereotyping, overgeneralization), classroom dialogue becomes easier to manage. Several teachers mentioned that students become better able to regulate their own speech or that of their peers once they can identify fallacies in exchanges.

These dimensions, related to creating and sustaining philosophical dialogic spaces, are strongly connected to the other components of the configuration. For instance, the classroom atmosphere supports a specific form of scaffolding used by teachers when working with PQ, and this scaffolding, in turn, reinforces an atmosphere conducive to philosophical dialogue.

Scaffolding a Philosophical Discussion: Helping Students Understand, Express, and Act

During the interviews, we examined teachers' scaffolding postures using Bucheton and Soulé's (2009, p. 41) classification table. This table distinguishes several scaffolding postures (accompaniment, control, release, teaching-conceptualization, and magician) based on the professional gestures and intentions that characterize them. These gestures and intentions are identified for each of the five dimensions of the teacher action model (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009). For example, a control posture is recognized through collective, synchronous, and tightly managed steering, a hierarchical atmosphere, and limited weaving.

Our analysis showed that adopting an accompaniment posture supports the productive treatment of PQ. All six teachers experienced in PWC reported using this posture during philosophical inquiry with their students. It involves demonstrating flexibility and openness in facilitating philosophical discussions and encourages a collaborative rather than a competitive atmosphere (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009). It also allows teachers to help students generate their own knowledge and ideas, guiding them toward a reflective rather than passive stance. In this perspective, the teacher acts as a facilitator of thinking: they support and stimulate students' philosophical reflection by prompting them to articulate, refine, and justify their ideas.

Conversely, a control posture proved counterproductive, tending to hinder dialogue. Teachers must avoid imposing a hierarchical relationship, which would contradict the established classroom climate, as this would imply that one voice dominates others.

We also observed that half of the teachers occasionally alternated the accompaniment posture with others, notably the release posture or the teaching-conceptualization posture. The former aims to allow greater spontaneity within the group, while the latter places students in a focused and attentive atmosphere, helping them draw connections to prior activities and adopt a reflective, post-activity

stance. However, our data do not allow us to conclude that these alternative postures facilitate the treatment of PQ at the elementary level.

Finally, our results highlight the importance of teacher impartiality when working with PQ. Teachers reported being aware that their own words can strongly influence students' thinking, as they are seen as authority figures holding knowledge. Catherine noted that maintaining impartiality is not always easy and that expressing one's opinion can be a "trap" teachers should avoid: "We want our students to be good people, so we end up being biased everywhere. That's the worst trap."

Steering Tasks: Managing the Spatial and Temporal Constraints of the Situation

Regarding task steering, teachers emphasized the circular arrangement of students as an effective spatial setup for working with PQ. While this arrangement is widely recognized as conducive to dialogue, some clarifications offered by teachers deserve attention.

First, students must be able to see and hear one another clearly. Second, it is important that neither the teacher's nor the students' position implicitly creates hierarchy. For example, if the teacher sits within the circle, they should not be seated on a chair while students sit on the floor, as this would imply superiority. The circle arrangement temporarily "suspends" the traditional school form (Vincent et al., 2012; Reuter et al., 2013), in which the teacher stands at the front transmitting knowledge to students sitting in rows. The circle therefore supports attentive listening and the accompaniment posture.

Temporally, teachers agreed that philosophical inquiry cannot be "shortened" without compromising its quality. Providing answers or guiding ideas may seem like a time saver but has the opposite effect by limiting students' autonomous thinking and creating the illusion of successful philosophical inquiry. To support authentic philosophical treatment, teachers should avoid "rushing" students by supplying arguments and should instead encourage the emergence of their own reasoning. Sufficient time for reflection strengthens the possibility of adopting an accompaniment posture and of fostering successful philosophical inquiry, in which students formulate their own ideas, problematize the question, justify their positions, and confront differing viewpoints.

Overall, teachers' accounts suggested that processing a PQ in the second and third cycles typically requires at least three philosophical sessions (workshops, discussions, or communities of inquiry) lasting between 35 and 50 minutes each.

Weaving: Making the Learning Situation and Targeted Knowledge Meaningful and Relevant

To give meaning and relevance to PQ, teachers emphasized the importance of anchoring them in students' realities and concerns, so they engage fully with philosophical reflection. To achieve this, teachers use a variety of pedagogical resources (picture books, scenarios, videos, etc.), as well as examples drawn from students' daily lives, interests, or events in class or during recess. Julie stated this clearly: "When my scenarios are directly connected to them, it really makes sense, because first, they get involved, and second, they become engaged." According to teachers, it is this link between the topic

and students' lived experiences that drives their investment in philosophical inquiry. Pedagogical supports serve both to spark students' questioning—as if they had brought up an existential question themselves—and to provide different perspectives and material for reflection. However, our analysis revealed one support that returned consistently in teachers' discourse: the picture book.

First, picture books serve as triggers for discussion or debate. They allow reflection to begin with a shared reference point: the narrative. Isabelle, one of the teachers, gave an example of a book she uses to provoke reactions among her students:

> I choose books that I know will maybe surprise them [the students]; books that have a slightly unusual ending. There's one where you think it's a knight searching for his princess throughout the story. But no, it's the story of a girl on her horse searching for her princess – it's actually a girl looking for another girl.

In this example, the teacher chooses a story that destabilizes students because it contradicts traditional narrative expectations (a knight seeking a princess) and challenges gender stereotypes. Here, the picture book has students confront social norms and invites reflection on dominant social representations (in this case, heteronormativity). The surprise effect supports students' engagement, and their reactions become a catalyst for philosophical inquiry.

Third, PQ may introduce sensitive themes. Marie explained that using a picture book allows students to "distance themselves a bit more," compared to class discussions where students may feel personally targeted. Fiction creates a buffer that helps protect students from emotional exposure while enabling discussion of sensitive topics. Students can express ideas through characters, situations, or dilemmas in the story, without referring directly to themselves. This distance creates a safer dialogic space.

Fourth, picture books promote participation from all students, especially those who usually speak less. Martin, a participating teacher, observed:

> The philosophical question can encourage participation, but the picture book supports those who don't engage much during discussions. They use examples from the book more easily.

Thus, while a PQ alone may engage some students, the picture book supports those less inclined to speak by giving them shared reference points that facilitate understanding of the PQ and allow all students to participate.

Finally, teachers emphasized that presenting pedagogical materials that spark philosophical questioning is not sufficient in itself. Preparing follow-up prompts (sub-questions, examples, counterexamples) in advance is a key strategy for guiding students toward a reflective posture and preparing teachers to adopt an accompaniment posture.

Training for PWC Through Practice: A Promising Avenue?

Teacher training emerged as a distinctive issue throughout our findings. For this reason, teachers were invited to discuss their own training and to offer advice for those beginning in PWC. Analysis of the transcripts

showed that three of the six teachers recommended attending or participating in philosophical practices to better understand how they work. For instance, Catherine, a Québec teacher, encourages less-experienced colleagues to observe the PWC sessions she conducts with her students. For these three teachers, taking part themselves in philosophical discussions during their training was what motivated them to reproduce such practices with their students. Julie, also a teacher in Québec, explains:

> [During the university training in PWC], the first four classes were dedicated to theory on philosophy with children. Then, during the nine classes that followed, she [the professor] had us experience what a philosophy workshop really is. And that was the best thing in the world. Because I truly understood… and I really loved it. I told myself that this was exactly what I wanted my students to experience too.

Thus, in half of the interviews, teachers emphasized the value of training in philosophical practices by observing experienced peers or engaging directly in philosophical discussion as a form of self-initiation into these practices. Viewed from this angle, training grounded in peer learning or lived experience appears to support the appropriation and classroom transfer of models that have already proven effective. Of course, although the practices experienced or observed by teachers and later reproduced in their classrooms do not necessarily guarantee results identical to those encountered during training, they nevertheless provide concrete reference points regarding strategies likely to support the treatment of PQ. This form of collaborative learning, still scarcely documented in research, represents, in our view, a promising avenue for teachers' professional development in this field. It is important to interpret these findings with caution, however, since only half of the teachers referred to this aspect. They therefore cannot be taken as a guarantee of successful philosophical treatment, but they nonetheless constitute a promising direction to be explored in future research.

Table 1. – Summary of the results

Dimensions	Elements supporting the treatment of PQ in elementary school and their classroom effects	
Classroom atmosphere: Creating and sustaining dialogic spaces	Openness to difference, respectful communication, attentive listening	Develops trust between students and between teacher and students
	Referencing logical fallacies	Regulates students' speech
Scaffolding the session: helping students understand, express, and act	Accompaniment posture Impartiality posture Prompts: invitation to formulate, nuance, and justify an idea	Teacher becomes a facilitator of thinking
Steering tasks: managing spatial and temporal constraints	Circular arrangement	Temporarily removes hierarchical relationships
	Regular practice Allow sufficient time	Fosters philosophical reflection among students
Weaving: making the situation and targeted knowledge meaningful and relevant	Use pedagogical supports, shared reflection supports	Provokes questioning among students, triggers discussion
	Anchor pedagogical supports in students' realities and concerns	Involves students in philosophical treatment

		Engages students in philosophical reflection
	Use fiction (e.g., picture books)	Creates distance during reflection Creates a safe space for discussion
	Offer shared reflection support	Promotes reflection and participation from all students

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the treatment of PQ places teachers in a position of imbalance. They must adjust their posture, accept a degree of uncertainty, and navigate situations that may at times feel uncomfortable. In doing so, PWC practices may come into tension with teachers' conceptions of their own profession, traditional school norms, or their usual planning routines. Yet the key to successful treatment of PQ lies precisely in accepting this uncertainty. Philosophizing with students requires daring not to control everything, recognizing the legitimacy of their ideas, and collaboratively constructing a richer understanding of the world.

This research does not claim to provide "miracle solutions" enabling all teachers to successfully foster philosophical reflection among their students. Rather, its aim was to examine, through an innovative methodology, the practices of teachers experienced in this domain to draw insights from them. In this respect, our approach sought to amplify teachers' voices, strengthening them through scientific and in-depth analysis of their practices so that other teachers may benefit.

In addition to reflecting many of the concerns experienced by teachers who practise PWC and updating existing empirical data, the results align with previous work on these practices. The first dimension of Bucheton and Soulé's (2009) multi-agenda model concerns the classroom atmosphere. As Michalik (2019) shows, the openness of PQ and the uncertainty they generate can make teachers more hesitant to engage in PWC. From this perspective, establishing a climate of trust appears to be a promising starting point. Moreover, our results directly echo several observations in the literature. For example, Michaud and Gagnon (2023) note that philosophical dialogue practices help students develop "certain dispositions" (p. 5) that foster reflection and relationships with others. This resonates with our findings, which highlight the crucial role of dispositions such as attentive listening, mutual respect, and openness to diversity in the treatment of PQ.

Regarding scaffolding and teacher posture, one difficulty identified by Michalik (2019) concerns the shift in posture triggered by PQ. Similarly, Bélanger et al. (2023), drawing on Barrow (2015), remind us that children perceive a change in the teacher's authority relationship after a few sessions of philosophical dialogue. We observed this as well: the treatment of a PQ calls for a modulation, or even a modification, of teacher posture. The posture emphasized by experienced teachers in this study was characterized by accompaniment rather than control. The interviews indicate that adopting a more flexible posture, open to uncertainty, helps teachers feel more comfortable within PWC practices. Following Bélanger et al. (2023), we also observed that participants agreed that teachers have the responsibility to grant each student the status of a "valid interlocutor", as defined by Lévine et al. (2014),

that is, "a human being equal to other human beings with respect to their right to think" (Lévine et al., 2014, p. 68, in Bélanger et al., 2023, [our own translation]). The authors add that teachers have the responsibility to thoughtfully consider each student's ideas, since these ideas hold value within the reflective process and must therefore be heard and understood by their peers. Another perspective on scaffolding comes from Hawken (2023), who examines the role of pedagogical tact in reformulating students' ideas. The author identifies several forms of reformulation, for example, types of prompting that are useful when applied tactfully: "using humor, gently exaggerating a point, stating the need to reformulate in order to understand, highlighting the absurdity of an idea, or simply holding back and delegating to the group" (p. 70, [our own translation]). According to Hawken, the teacher posture conducive to facilitating a philosophical discussion is "always that of a tightrope walker" (p. 79). Our participants discussed such strategies, but their effects on students and on learning remain unverified. Classroom observations and student interviews would make it possible to assess their concrete impact on the quality of philosophical discussion.

Our results are also enriched when compared with research on teacher impartiality in the treatment of sensitive topics at school. In the interviews, all teachers mentioned adopting a posture of impartiality, which they describe as a deliberate suspension of their own ideas, judgments, and beliefs. According to Maxwell and Sénécal (2023), impartiality entails addressing "the sensitive theme under study in a balanced and unbiased manner, showing students multiple sides of the issue and remaining open and tolerant toward different perspectives" (p. 2, [our own translation]). Thus, far from implying withdrawal or effacement, this posture consists in creating a setting conducive to the exploration of multiple viewpoints. Notably, such impartiality also supports a certain distance from traditional school norms and from the image of the teacher as "holder of knowledge". By maintaining this posture, teachers reduce the likelihood that students respond according to perceived expectations (see Maxwell et al., 2020). In doing so, they preserve the reflective and critical dimension essential to the treatment of PQ.

Regarding weaving, our results support the idea that students' engagement in philosophical reflection is strengthened when teachers use common supports. According to participants, youth literature provides shared reference points that allow students to mobilize meaningful examples during philosophical discussions. These findings resonate with Chirouter's work, which examines how young students use children's literature to deepen their philosophical reflections (Chirouter, 2008; Chirouter, 2011; Chirouter, 2013). A major contribution of Chirouter (2013) is the idea of "safe distancing" made possible by fictional narratives. Fictional characters act as a "screen", preventing students from confronting personal vulnerability, shyness, or the shame they might feel if they had to evoke intimate questions directly. We therefore support, along with Chirouter, that youth literature is a valuable resource for teachers seeking to treat PQ.

Finally, it is undeniable that teachers' discourse cannot fully reflect classroom reality. Our study is thus limited to teachers' recollections and interpretations of their own experiences. It is important to acknowledge this inherent limitation: the actions described by teachers do not necessarily mirror the actual actions taken in class.

Conclusion

This article is situated within the broader context of the democratization of philosophical practices in elementary schools and the implementation of the CCQ program in Québec. It sought to answer the following question: what elements enable teachers to foster philosophical inquiry in their second and third-cycle elementary classrooms? Drawing on the multi-agenda model (Bucheton and Soulé, 2009), the methodological approach relied on six semi-structured interviews with teachers experienced in PWC. The thematic analysis of the transcripts highlighted, for each concern of the model, elements that support the introduction of PQ in the classroom, and subsequently, their philosophical treatment: a classroom atmosphere grounded in openness, listening, and respect; a posture of accompaniment and impartiality, steering that promotes attentive listening and minimizes hierarchical relationships; weaving anchored in students' lived experiences; and the use of shared supports, particularly youth literature.

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Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview guide

Semi-structured interview guide		
Beginning of the interview Start of the recording Introductions and reminder of the research topic		
Themes	**Main questions**	**Follow-up and supplementary questions**
Introduction of the interview and reminder of the ethical considerations	This interview is being recorded for transcription purposes. Once transcribed, the recording will be deleted and the data will be anonymized. You may choose not to answer any question or to stop participating in the research at any point during the interview. Are you comfortable with this? The philosophical question appears for the first time in the CCQ program. Was this content something you were familiar with? In general, why do you consider it important to address philosophical questions with your students?	
Management of steering: Strategies implemented in response to the practical constraints of guiding the described session, and the general and cognitive climate of the class at the moment the session was launched	How would you describe the general classroom atmosphere when you address a philosophical question with your students? In this atmosphere, what elements do you consider absolutely necessary for the session around the philosophical question to go well? Why? Describe the best experience in your career addressing a philosophical question with your students. And the worst experience?	At what time of the year or day do you prefer to address a philosophical question? Why? What amount of time do you allocate to working through the question? How do you establish this classroom atmosphere?
Weaving and scaffolding of the session	How do you present the philosophical question to your students? In what way is this manner of presenting the philosophical question, in your view, a guarantee of success?	Do you draw inspiration from any particular pedagogical approaches? (Debate, philosophy for children, children's literature, workshops)

	How does your session around the philosophical question unfold? In what way is this manner of working through the philosophical question, in your view, a guarantee of success?	
Didactic concern	What pedagogical objectives do you set for your session around the philosophical question?	What intellectual skills and knowledge (cognitive) objectives do you set for your session around the philosophical question? What social or affective objectives do you set for your session around the philosophical question? What transversal objectives do you set for your session around the philosophical question?
Profile of the teacher's stated scaffolding posture	How do you regulate your students' participation during the session around the philosophical question? (This may involve dialogue, speaking turns, writing, or other forms of participation.)	
Other elements	Which elements of your background (professional or personal) do you think may have helped you address philosophical questions? If a colleague told you they were having difficulty addressing philosophical questions with their students, what advice would you give them? In your view, what pitfalls should beginning teachers avoid in this area?	
End of the interview. Thanks.		