



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Social and Human Sciences Sector



Teaching philosophy

IN THE  
ARAB REGION

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**Teaching philosophy**  
**in the Arab region**

# Background

On 11 and 12 May 2009 in Tunis, Tunisia hosted the High-Level Regional Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in the Arab Region, co-organized by the Ministry of Education and Training of Tunisia, the Tunisian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture, the National Centre for Pedagogical Innovation and Education Research (CNIPRE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

This meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Mr Hatem Ben Salem, Minister of Education and Training of Tunisia. It gathered some forty participants, among whom the representatives of twelve countries from the region: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The meeting was also attended by philosophers, philosophy inspectors and teachers in primary, secondary and higher education, as well as experts and members of philosophy associations.

This publication was elaborated by UNESCO's Secretariat on the basis of a study published in 2007 under the title *Philosophy, a School of Freedom – Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize: Status and Prospects*. The debates and discussions that took place during the Tunis meeting allowed UNESCO to update and complete the data initially collected for the 2007 Study. A series of recommendations, elaborated and validated by the meeting participants, are addressed to Member States, to National Commissions for UNESCO, to philosophers, to philosophy teachers and to UNESCO and are included in the present publication, from page 48 to page 50.

The Social and Human Sciences Sector of UNESCO and the UNESCO Office in Rabat would like to express their deepest gratitude to:

- The Tunisian authorities and their partners for their steadfast support and their warm hospitality;
- The representatives of the participating Arab countries for their engagement and active participation;
- The philosophers, experts and representatives of philosophy associations and institutions for their substantial contribution to the debates.

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# Foreword

The country in which the father of sociology and philosophy of history, Ibn Khaldun was born, the country where Saint Augustine, that lover of wisdom, studied and then taught for a long time, can only be delighted to welcome this high-level regional conference dedicated to the teaching of philosophy. I should like to express my warmest thanks to UNESCO for choosing Tunisia as the host country for this event.

It is a matter of the utmost importance today to discuss the teaching of philosophy.

Some people consider that our world is one of uncertainty, of unstable values and a loss of bearings, to say nothing of the multifarious threats hanging over humanity and life on Earth.

What can philosophy achieve in the face of these threats?

Our answer to that question depends on our capacity to examine what is understood by the word “philosophy”.

If it is confined to “philosophy” as a secondary-school subject or a university specialization, then it would be considered only from a pedagogical standpoint, which, however important it may be, cannot meet our requirements concerning the relationship of philosophy to everyday life and its place in society outside the classroom.

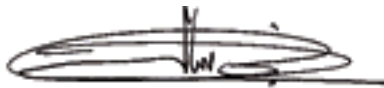
A more judicious approach would be to start with the original meaning of philosophy, dating back to Pythagoras, who defined it as “the love of wisdom”. All philosophers have since understood it thus. All have suggested that humanity follows a line of conduct, whether Stoic, Sceptic, Epicurean or Dionysian, for example – ways of thinking that are ways of being. Socrates was the first to establish philosophy at the heart of society, engaging his contemporaries in a dialogue on the issue – the essential issue – of the sort of Man they wanted to be. His disciple Plato aimed to bring Man out of the cave so that he might take himself in hand and change his way of life. The project of the Arab philosopher Al-Farabi in outlining his “Ideal City” and its wise inhabitants was hardly different. Here we must call to mind Averroes, the Aristotelian who sought to unite reason with revealed Law.

That aside, we now return to the matter under consideration, the teaching of philosophy.

Experts unanimously agree that the difficulty in all learning endeavours is that of “meaning”. Learning is especially relevant and effective if it is meaningful to the learners, in other words, if they grasp its relationship to their own lives.

This raises the following question: Why teach philosophy? To my mind, any philosophy is built around what it rejects. So is education. Their common enemy is stupidity, the daughter of ignorance.

Drawing on this strong conviction, we have given pride of place to philosophy in our schools, so that it will enlighten the minds and sharpen the critical faculties of our young people.



**H.E. Mr Hatem Ben Salem**  
**Minister of Education and Training of Tunisia**



Tunis, Tunisia, May 2009

# Preface

## *Creating UNESCO was in itself a philosophical undertaking.*

Let us look at the history of our Organization. It witnesses to the fact that philosophy has always been at the heart of UNESCO's action. So it is that, since UNESCO was founded, this organic bond has manifested itself in the existence of a programme devoted to philosophy and to the promotion of its teaching. Philosophy is understood here as working for peace, which is UNESCO's primary and fundamental mission. Indeed, building lasting peace requires thoroughgoing and ever renewed reflection on the very foundations of the action to be undertaken, which in turn call upon most creative and diverse philosophical convictions.

The teaching of philosophy is undeniably one of the keystones of a quality education for all. It contributes to open the mind and to build critical reflection and independent thinking, which constitute a defence against all forms of manipulation, obscurantism and exclusion.

The Memorandum on the philosophy programme of UNESCO announced as early as 1946 that, "[i]t is not enough to fight against illiteracy. It is still necessary to know what one is going to have people read". This reflection, philosophically significant in its own right, conveys a powerful and relevant message that applies, and will continue to apply, to today's and tomorrow's educational dynamic.

Since 2005, UNESCO's Member States have been intent upon strengthening the Organization's philosophy programme through, on the one hand, the adoption by the Executive Board of a three-faceted Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy comprising philosophical dialogue facing world problems, the teaching of philosophy, and the promotion of philosophical thought and research; and on the other hand, the proclamation by UNESCO's General Conference of a World Philosophy Day and the inclusion of a reminder of the inherent bond between philosophical reflection and analysis and the building of peace in the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013.

***Philosophy, a School of Freedom***, the study on the state of the art of the teaching of philosophy in the world, published by UNESCO in 2007, represents a milestone in the implementation of the Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy. Based on the results of a worldwide qualitative and quantitative survey, addressed to Ministries of Education, National Commissions for UNESCO, philosophers, researchers, experts, teachers, educationalists, UNESCO Chairs in Philosophy and any other UNESCO privileged partner in the field, this unprecedented work describes what exists, but also, and especially, deals with key questions and, as much as possible, provides proposals, innovative ideas and orientations.

UNESCO's ambition is now to go one step further by involving the largest number of concerned and committed Member States in providing durable support for philosophy within the educational system, both formal and informal. Within this framework, high-level regional meetings on the teaching of philosophy were organized in Tunis, Tunisia, in May 2009, for the Arab region; in Manila, Philippines, in May 2009,



for Asia and the Pacific; in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in June 2009, for Latin America and the Caribbean; in Bamako, Mali, in September 2009, for African Francophone countries; and in Port-Louis, Republic of Mauritius, in September 2009, for African Anglophone countries. The principal objective of these high-level encounters was to engage in concerted action with UNESCO's Member States so as to accompany them in the formulation of policies favouring the teaching of philosophy.

To this end, Member States have been invited to perform a diagnosis that is as thorough as possible of the crucial questions concerning the teaching of philosophy at national level, as well as suggestions for action that would deserve to be implemented.

By means of this publication, UNESCO wants to contribute to deepening the on-going debate by putting forward a certain number of facts, practices having proven their worth and live questions raised by the teaching of philosophy, notably in the debates and discussions that took place in the Tunis meeting in May 2009. We are convinced that combining the preliminary diagnoses performed at national level and UNESCO's specific contribution during each of the regional meetings will lead to a promising synergy. The ultimate goal will be to facilitate the establishment of national action plans, especially through strengthened regional cooperation.

We are most delighted to see the joint efforts undertaken by UNESCO and its Member States in favour of the teaching of philosophy.



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# Teaching philosophy at

# pre-school and primary levels

Quality basic education is education that does not perceive schools as places for the mere transmission and assimilation of knowledge, but as places for questioning and as “the best time to learn to learn”.<sup>1</sup> The 1996 report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, presided by Jacques Delors, stated that “it is at the stage of basic education (which particularly includes pre-school and primary school teaching) that attitudes towards learning are forged that last all throughout one’s life”.<sup>2</sup> In the Arab region, alongside the outstanding literacy movement which resulted in many children learning to read and write, it is quality basic education that will be the strength of a youth confronted by the major challenges the region is to take on.

For several years, Philosophy for Children,<sup>3</sup> or more broadly the idea of introducing Philosophy in Schools<sup>4</sup> and of developing philosophical inquiry, has inspired growing curiosity and enthusiasm throughout the world since it fills a major gap in education today. Indeed, the importance of stimulating reflection and questioning at the youngest age, and of doing so within the framework of basic quality education, is increasingly acknowledged. Even though learning to philosophize at pre-school and primary levels has not yet been developed in the Arab region, this region can contribute to enriching this innovative approach, which is undergoing constant experimentation.

### Learning to philosophize in schools for a quality basic education

The idea of learning to philosophize in schools assumes that a children only fully blossom in school when encouraged to take active, deliberate steps to seek to respond to the questions about existence that they raise at a very early age. Children are actually perceived as being “spontaneously philosophers” by virtue of their extensive, radical existential questioning. The idea of learning to philosophize in schools has given rise to very diverse experiments throughout the world in order to attempt to take this philosophical uniqueness of children into account.

So it is that certain countries make the most of opportunities for discussion and debate about philosophical themes in the classroom and others are rethinking the teacher/pupil relationship in a way that appeals to the pupils’ intellectual curiosity. According to recent research and available information, including responses to the UNESCO Questionnaire,<sup>5</sup> no initiative seems to exist in the field of philosophy for children. The region seems to be a blind spot as far as philosophy for children is concerned, which is an issue that needs to be looked into. Yet, many of the essential questions in philosophy were heavily debated by Arab philosophers of the Middle Ages, and this debate continues today, in particular concerning the relationship between faith and reason – critical to the design of education systems and the practice of teaching with children. These debates take on board the matter of the social status of children and their status within the school system, as well as the matter of school’s role in their education, the role of reason in early learning and the function of philosophy within children’ development.

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<sup>1</sup> *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, Paris, 1996, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> This term was first coined by Matthew Lipman. See in this publication, “Practices that are tried and true”, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Term adopted in Australia about 10 years ago.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO online Questionnaire on the state of the art of philosophy teaching, whose results are published in the UNESCO Study *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2007. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001541/154173E.pdf>

These measures, scattered as they are, are contributing in their way to the reflection of education experts, who stress that “confrontation, through dialogue and exchanging arguments, is one of the tools necessary to education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [...] More than ever, the essential role of education seems to be to confer upon all human beings the freedom of thought, judgment, feeling and imagination that they need to make their talents blossom and also retain as much mastery of their destiny as possible”.<sup>6</sup>

## UNESCO makes a resolute commitment to encourage learning to philosophize in schools

Teaching philosophy for children and learning to philosophize had already been the object of a UNESCO study in 1998,<sup>7</sup> which had stressed that it was possible, and even necessary, to present philosophical principles in simple language accessible to young children. Reflection upon this matter went still further in UNESCO’s 2007 publication, *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, which takes into account discussions currently underway on the subject of learning to philosophize in schools and formulates the principal live questions which, in themselves, constitute suggestions for reflection that altogether shed light on the forms of education we want for our children. What is at stake with learning to philosophize in schools concerns the very meaning we wish to give to tomorrow’s schools, which will have to be places that foster independent thought, reflective citizenship and the blossoming of the child. If education in general must provide children with “the maps of a complex world in a perpetual state of agitation”, philosophy can probably be the “compass enabling one to navigate” in that world.<sup>8</sup>

The impact of philosophy on children may not be immediately appreciated, but its impact on tomorrow’s adults could be so considerable as to make us feel astonished at having refused or marginalised philosophy for children up until now.

# Live questions

## *Is educating children in philosophy possible, is it desirable?*

Ethical and psychological questions often come up when philosophy for children or learning to philosophize in schools is brought up.

## Are children ready to reflect at such a young age?

During the different stages of their psychological development, children naturally raise questions of a philosophical nature. And since they ask questions, at times anxiously so, it is preferable to accompany them in their questioning and to reassure them with regard to the different questions about existence.

There is also the assumption upon which philosophy for children is based that exhorts us to demystify childhood and look at reality, since many children experience very difficult situations, regardless of their social milieu or the state of development of their country. To confront this situation, one can resort to

<sup>6</sup> *Learning: The Treasure Within*, op.cit., pp. 101-103

<sup>7</sup> *Philosophy for Children, Meeting of Experts, Report, Paris, UNESCO, 26-27 March 1998.*

<sup>8</sup> *Learning: The Treasure Within*, op.cit., p. 91.

learning to philosophize in which rational thinking enables one to understand an existential experience and acquire distance with respect to the emotions felt. This work is all the more operative within the context of the classroom since it is collective. In fact, it enables each and every person to experience being drawn out of their existential solitude and become aware that their questions are those of each and every person, which is reassuring and produces feelings of participating in a shared human condition helping one grow in community.

## *Box 1 – What is at stake with the learning to philosophize in schools*

### **1) Thinking for oneself**

Being a matter of existential, ethical, aesthetic questions, thinking for oneself presupposes a reflective process that formulates problems, conceptualizes and argues rationally. Beginning to learn this as early as possible means guaranteeing awakening enlightened reflection on the human condition in children.

### **2) Educating for reflective citizenship**

Learning to think for oneself develops freedom of judgment in future citizens, protecting them from ideological indoctrination and persuasive advertising. Teaching philosophizing through the debating of ideas encourages confronting others with reason while aiming for the truth, an ethical and intellectual requirement of genuine democratic debate.

### **3) Helping the child's development**

Learning how to reflect is important for the construction of the personality of children and adolescents. It is an opportunity for them to experience that they are thinking beings, which strengthens their self-esteem and helps them grow in humanity by experiencing disagreement in discussion in peaceful coexistence. This, in turn, raises the threshold of tolerance with respect to others and prevents violence.

### **4) Facilitating the mastery of language and speech**

Verbalizing in order to think develops cognitive- and socio-linguistic capabilities. By working on the development of their thought, children work on the need for precision in language.

### **5) Conceptualizing the philosophizing**

Practicing reflection with children calls for a redefinition of philosophizing, for a conceptualization of its beginnings, its nature and the conditions for it.

### **6) Developing a theory of teaching philosophy adapted to children and adolescents**

Theories about teaching philosophy are also brought into question. One cannot teach philosophy to children in big lecture halls, with major works or essay writing. But, one can theorize about their learning to reflect on their relationship to the world, to others and to themselves, by means adapted to their age group.

Michel Tozzi,  
Professor Emeritus in Education Sciences,  
University of Montpellier 3, France

## What about their lack of scientific knowledge?

There is also the question of knowing whether children can engage in reflection without having the necessary scientific knowledge. The objection that is often made to philosophy for children is based on the argument that one philosophizes as an after effect of constituted knowledge, in order to go back to the knowledge one has and understand the process in which it was built up. According to that paradigm, philosophy is placed at the end of the course of study.

This argument displays contempt for the scientific processes integrated as early as primary school by children, upon which they may reflect with the help of the teacher, especially when the methods are active, by working on the process and not only on scientific findings to be learned and memorized. Indeed, answering philosophically significant questions for children to which science cannot respond, such as ethical questions, keeps them from thinking for themselves. These questions are ones to which the children themselves will have to find their own answers in the course of their lives and by evolving in their own reflection. So, although one must not answer for them prematurely, one must accompany them as they go along in order not to leave them defenceless. This is the role of teachers at school — supporting them in this searching, by proposing situations to them in which they are going to develop tools for thinking that will enable them to understand their relationship to the world, to others and to themselves, and to orient themselves in these terms.

## *A matter of approach and pedagogy*

Within the framework of philosophy for children, it is appropriate to speak more about learning to philosophize, or to develop philosophical inquiry, than merely about teaching philosophy. The traditional model of teaching philosophy is based on what is called the transmission model. As for the way in which learning to philosophize in schools is practiced, this involves a new pedagogical approach, that of a teaching-learning process that places the pupil at the heart of the learning dynamic.

Indeed, since it is a matter of young children, who naturally cannot understand a purely theoretical course, learning to philosophize in schools fits in with a paradigm that is more problem-oriented and more focused on a logic of learning. It is thus the cultivation of questioning and not of answering that is aimed at in this case. Most of those practicing this method support the idea of leaving the questions open, in order to keep up the exploration of possible solutions.

How, therefore, does one transmit philosophical “not-knowing” if not by continuing to circulate it as a desire? That implies two fundamental attributes on the part of the teacher: on the one hand, modesty with respect to possessing truth; on the other hand, the requirement regarding the desire for truth, where the status of the “discussability” of the remarks allows for a cooperative, shared and non-dogmatic quest for knowledge.

The pupils are therefore principally placed in the foreground in their role of actors rather than recipients. In this case, the process of learning to philosophize in schools is principally based on the discussional approach, in contrast to the institutionalized approach where the expository aspect for the most part prevails (it is the case at secondary and university levels). Of course, discussion as the way to learn to philosophize can generate some reservations on the part of advocates of traditional teaching, for whom

classroom discussion would be a superficial pedagogical method, while the teacher's course would still remain the norm.

However, discussion is understood here as being an interactive process within a group of oral exchanges surrounding a specific subject with the teacher having intellectual responsibility. Many dimensions of this discussion may be philosophically oriented, knowingly the very nature of the subject dealt with often formulated as questions, and the manner in which students are going to infuse this questioning through a rational and not just emotional approach. Besides, discussion is only one of the possible forms of learning, which does not exclude written work or traditional courses.

More generally, the pedagogical approach underlying learning to philosophize in schools requires the necessary conditions for bringing philosophical reasoning by and for children into play. Social psychology and the sciences of education often have recourse to the idea of the "Pygmalion effect". Teachers, confident about the success of what they are doing, will create the material conditions necessary for practicing philosophy, and pupils, finding that teachers have faith in their abilities, will see their self-confidence and their personal self-esteem grow.

### *A matter of teacher training*

Another important aspect requiring adapted action concerns the low level of philosophical training of primary school teachers. In fact, non-institutional training is left to volunteers and is often provided in a private context, or even by associations. Finding teachers without actual philosophical training, or who have only studied philosophy at secondary level, the first reaction would consist in proposing to provide them with classic academic training. This teaching would have its limits, however, because having knowledge is not enough to train skills. It is entirely a matter of having the teachers learn to philosophize, and not only learn philosophy, for them to awaken children's minds to reflective thinking. It is the whole question of a theory of learning to philosophize that is raised for teachers, as well as for the children themselves.

The appearance of a new subject in primary school should therefore lead the institution to introduce into the educational system – both in initial and in-service training – a consistent education of teachers in specific required practices in line with the objectives pursued by the programmes.

## Practices that are tried and true

Ever since its founding by Matthew Lipman in 1974, the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), a pioneering institution as concerns Philosophy for Children, has given rise to several methods and practices throughout the world. Today, one finds a variety of models for teaching children to philosophize at pre-school and primary levels.

### *The Lipman method*

This method is recognized as being the one that has most influenced the development of Philosophy for Children in the world. When it was created, the Lipman programme was the only systematic philosophy



programme for the 6-16 age group. It was therefore a model for many other countries, which translated and adapted it.

In contrast to the Cartesian tradition, for which childhood is the place and time of prejudice and error, Lipman hypothesized that children are capable of thinking on their own once a method adapted to their needs is employed. The method that he developed includes instruction material that is consistent, useful to all teachers who have not received philosophical training. Lipman wrote seven novels (see Box 2) taking into account the major philosophical questions and the age of the children and covering the entire course of study from nursery school to the end of secondary education. Each of the novels is accompanied by a teacher's manual, which consolidates what is learned in the discussions and supports what the pupils and teacher do with diversified exercises which are suggestions, and not obligations, leaving the teacher completely free to use initiative. This method counts at least three well-established strong points: first, cultivating questioning in the schoolroom by relying on the questions of the children themselves; second, proposing written supporting material that is narrative, in order to facilitate the children's identification with the characters and situations, and has highly anthropological content; third, setting up a place in the classroom organized for speaking and exchanging ideas about human problems, where the speaking is democratically shared, but with a critical requirement for which the duty of argumentation is the counterpart of the right to express oneself.

### *Michel Tozzi's "democratic-philosophical" method*

This method pursues goals close to those pursued by Lipman, but proposes a structured democratic mechanism, assigning specific functions among the pupils, and philosophically oriented intellectual requirements (problem-solving, conceptualization and argumentation). Practice is enriched by coordinating debates about the interpretation of a text (literature for young people) and philosophically oriented discussion, as well as by the use of myths as a basis for reflection.

Even if the themes of the discussions vary, the mechanisms remain practically the same: the questions that are the object of the reflections have come from the life of the classroom. The children form a circle. The mechanism is set up through the assigning of various different functions: the *chairperson* oversees the exchanges by recalling the rules of functioning; the *reformulators* explain in their way what they have understood about what has just been said; the *synthesizer* sums up the progress of the exchanges; the *scribe* notes the important ideas he has isolated on the blackboard; the *discussants* participate in the exchanges by giving their opinion; the *observers* have chosen not to participate in the discussion, in order to help a schoolmate make progress in their speaking; the person running the group (generally the teacher) endeavours to maintain the intellectual requirements of philosophizing. Organized in this way, this discussion among peers initiates the children both to reflecting philosophically and to practicing living together as citizens.

### *Oscar Brenifier's Socratic method*

This method harks back to Socratic maieutics, with significant guidance of the group by the teacher with a view to progressive and logical reflection on the basis of questions, reformulations and objections. This method has generated a substantial amount of internationally published teaching material.

## Box 2 – The teaching material for the Lipman method

Whether it is a matter of an innovation to be introduced or to be strengthened, of experimentation to begin, or in progress, or yet the institutionalization of this type of practice, learning to philosophize in primary school can be greatly facilitated with the help of teaching material that already exists or is yet to be created. Several options are possible after the fashion of what many countries have been doing, namely:

- 1 - Translating Lipman's novels into the language of the country, as well and as the manuals he designed for teachers, with many complementary proposals for discussion between and with students;
- 2 - Adapting the content of Lipman's novels to the local culture, by transforming certain episodes in a way that makes them more meaningful for the culture, traditions and context of the country concerned;
- 3 - Writing new "Lipman-style" novels, conceived in terms of the same objectives for the same process, but rooted in the specific culture of the country concerned;
- 4 - Producing new supporting material on the basis of Lipman's material, – such as albums with pictures, comic books, or other audio-visual materials.

### Lipman's seven novels

- *Elfie*, 3 volumes, 1988
- *Kio and Gus*, 1986
- *Pixie*, 1981
- *Mark*, 1980
- *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, 1974 and 1980
- *Suki*, 1978
- *Lisa*, 1976.

Adapted from the publication *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2007, p. 23

It is the teacher who guides the class with intellectual requirements. Faced with a question, a pupil proposes an idea that others must reformulate in order to understand whether they have understood it well. If not, reformulations continue until the idea is understood by everyone. Then, the speaker asks if anyone disagrees with this idea and why. Pupils reformulate the objection until everyone understands it. The teacher then asks the group to respond to this objection, etc. The progress of the group's ideas can be followed on the blackboard in accordance with a methodical, rigorous process.

## Jacques Levine's method

The objective of this method is to foster the development of the children's personality by anchoring it in their condition as thinking beings, by having them experience their ability to comment on a fundamental question that people, including themselves, face. As early as 1996, Jacques Levine formulated a set of practical and research guidelines based on his experience as a developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst. This approach is put into practice as follows.

First, the teacher tosses out a subject or a question of interest to mankind and to all children (for example, growing up), expressing his/her interest in finding out the children's opinion. The teacher then voluntarily remains silent.

Second, children are asked to express their opinions about this topic for about ten minutes. They thus become the author of their own thought, no longer expecting a right answer from the teacher. The session is recorded.

Third, in the presence of their peers, the group listens to the tape for ten more minutes, and children can interrupt whenever they want to express themselves again. By means of this exercise, the conditions of psychological possibilities of constructing autonomous thinking are worked out so as to allow the individual to become aware that he/she is thinking in connection with others, but remains nevertheless distinct from them. Children undergo a community experience that binds them together in a common culture of shared oral expression. This confers on each of them a feeling of being both serious and pacified.

### Children philosophize



UNESCO, *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, p.31

# Teaching philosophy at

# **secondary level**

Teaching at secondary level comes at a time of profound change in an individual's life – that of adolescence. The evolution-revolution experienced during this period has significant consequences to be taken into account in education. During adolescence, one's relationship to the world, with others and with oneself sets into motion a process of structuring and problematic restructuring, with its questioning, fears, joys and suffering. In addition, one's perception of others changes by becoming a determinant factor in the way one sees oneself and reacts. Adolescence is, therefore, a propitious time for philosophical questioning.

Teaching philosophy at secondary level should thus find a legitimate place in the educational system.

To that end, it is necessary to restore the place of teaching philosophy, often the first to be sacrificed in comparison to literature and history which generally benefit from being firmly anchored in the cultural identity of the different countries. It is also necessary to restore the place of the human sciences in general, which they continue to lose to the benefit of the scientific and technical fields. As secondary education has a tendency to become increasingly technical in an overall context of pursuing economic growth, it is fitting to envisage development in terms of all of its dimensions: ethical, cultural, social and human.

## Overview

As a general rule, philosophy in secondary education has a long tradition in some of the Arab states. According to the UNESCO Questionnaire<sup>9</sup>, philosophy is taught at secondary level in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. In the contrary, philosophy is not taught in Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Malta, Oman, Saudi Arabia, nor Sudan. Regarding other countries of the region, no information has been received as to now.

In certain countries, philosophy is taught at secondary level in conjunction with scientific, literary, economic or social studies, as well as in the technical and professional branches of study.

In what follows, the principal questions concerning philosophy teaching at secondary level are set out and some possible responses are presented for the purpose of contributing to the future formulation of appropriate policies on this subject.

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<sup>9</sup> UNESCO online Questionnaire on the state of the art of philosophy teaching, whose results are published in the UNESCO Study *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, op. cit.

# Challenges

## *What place for philosophy in quality teaching?*

It is necessary to stress that teaching philosophy aims at training people to think independently and at fostering a critique of knowledge, rather than mere assimilation. Two main questions that emerge from UNESCO's Study inquire on the place of philosophy and its links with the other subject matters.

On the one hand, one of the main challenges is not confusing teaching philosophy with teaching civics, ethics and religion, whose respective goals are by nature different. In other words, it is a matter of granting philosophy its full place and autonomy because philosophy, like other human sciences, has often been marginalized compared to other disciplines in a number of countries in the region. Philosophy has its own requirements and methodology for educating about the values and ethical principles indispensable for peace and democracy to set in durably. One of the main challenges for the educational systems in the Arab region concerns the provision of sufficient time dedicated to philosophy teaching. In this respect, the participants in the high-level regional meeting on the teaching of philosophy in the Arab region, which took place on 11 and 12 May 2009 in Tunis, Tunisia<sup>10</sup> highlighted the importance of generalizing philosophy teaching and of not confining it exclusively to be an optional subject matter. Philosophy must have a real place in secondary education. Some cases can be mentioned as examples of the diversity of existing schemes: in Algeria, in the two last years of high school, 4 hours per week are allotted to a philosophy class for the literature branch, and 2,5 for the science branch; in Bahrain, 50 minutes per week are allotted to this discipline in the three years of high school, in the literature branch; in the Syrian Arab Republic, 50 minutes per week are allotted to the course entitled "Principles of philosophy and sociology" in the first year of high school; in Yemen, 3 hours per week are allotted to "Philosophy and logic" course in the last year of high school in the literature branch, etc.

On the other hand, as a genuine asset for quality education, philosophy must be conceived of as enabling people to think about knowledge acquired all throughout their secondary education, within a dynamic of complementarity with the other subject matters. Teaching philosophy must thus inspire concrete interdisciplinary reflection that in turn develops the criteria for asking questions about knowledge acquired in other fields. Philosophy courses will then be a special opportunity to encounter different kinds of knowledge, providing coherence in tune with other disciplines taught, through practicing dialogue based on the desire to question. In this regard, in Tunisia, a specific law stipulates that one of the objectives of the educational system is to accomplish a good balance in young generations' education between different disciplines, so that students' interest for sciences, humanities, technique, or manual skills, as well as the cognitive, moral, affective and practical dimensions are equivalents.<sup>11</sup> Philosophy is also conceived as a discipline that develops critical thinking regarding scientific knowledge itself. In Egypt for instance, philosophy has been taught at secondary level since 1925. Courses are entitled "The principles of philosophy" and "Logic and scientific thought" (available in all branches) and "Philosophy and logic" (available as part of the literature branch). The primary focus is on Islamic philosophy, Muslim philosophers and their contribution to the history of science.

<sup>10</sup> The debates that took place during this meeting will be designated in this publication as 'the Tunis debates'.

<sup>11</sup> Law N. 91-65 of 29 July 1991, according to UNESCO-IBE, *Tunisie, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/afrique/tunisie/profile-of-education.html>

### *Box 3 – Excerpts from the Paris Declaration for Philosophy*

“We, the participants in the International Study Days on “Philosophy and Democracy in the World” organized by UNESCO in Paris on 15 and 16 February 1995, [...]

Emphasize that philosophy teaching encourages open-mindedness, civic responsibility, understanding and tolerance among individuals and groups;

Reaffirm that philosophy education, by training independently minded, thoughtful people, capable of resisting various forms of propaganda, prepares everyone to shoulder their responsibilities in regard to the great questions of the contemporary world, particularly in the field of ethics;

Confirm that the development of philosophical debate in education and in cultural life makes a major contribution to the training of citizens, by exercising their capacity for judgment, which is fundamental in any democracy.

Committing ourselves to do everything in our power in our institutions and in our respective countries to achieve these objectives, we therefore declare that: [...]

Philosophy teaching should be maintained or expanded where it exists, introduced where it does not yet exist, and designated explicitly as “philosophy”; [...]

Philosophy as the free pursuit of inquiry, cannot consider any truth to be final, and encourages respect for the convictions of the individual but should in no circumstances, at the risk of denying its own nature, accept doctrines which deny the liberty of others, affront human dignity and sow the seeds of barbarity”.

Quoted from Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy, 171 EX/12, UNESCO Executive Board, Paris, 2005. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001386/138673e.pdf>

### *What approaches to teaching at secondary level?*

Among other things, the UNESCO Study relayed the opinions of many professors pleading for a critical, relevant reshaping of programmes. Indeed, in an age of rapidly accelerating globalization, the traditional manner of teaching philosophy has reached certain limits. Would it not be appropriate to establish new approaches that, while presenting certain ideas and concepts, would open the way to broader debate? Should one, and how, “revolutionize” or reform the ways and means of teaching philosophy?

Too often, in fact, philosophy is taught in a pompous, esoteric, even pedantic way, by summoning up the great names of the history of philosophy. This way of teaching tends to discourage students and to deaden their interest in the field. While teaching philosophy undeniably fundamentally involves a presentation of the history of ideas, it cannot, nevertheless, be limited to that. In that case, would it not



be appropriate to develop new methods oriented also toward the knowledge underlying the theories of the major Arab as well as Greek and Western philosophers in such a way as to stimulate or create genuine philosophical reflection in the students?

The teaching methods must certainly be adapted to different contexts and the most varied audiences, while keeping in mind that philosophy teaching is supposed to educate free, aware, responsible citizens and not necessarily philosophers. Philosophy teachers surely sometimes find themselves defenceless before listeners unaccustomed to analysis or uncomfortable with abstract subject matter that can seem dull by definition.

This question cannot be dissociated from that of supporting materials, such as textbooks, the teaching tools and instruments that should always take into account both the audience to which they are destined and the issues that philosophical reflection grounded in ethical considerations raises. Thus, by starting from concrete examples drawn from daily experience, one can also lead students to ask questions about their conscience, actions, etc. Philosophy taught using these kinds of flexible supporting materials can thus provide students opportunities to think and compare, particularly in relation to their concerns. Finally, the question of traditional types of evaluation should also be dealt with, and especially the preponderance of written exercises such as essays. Why not, for example, envisage taking oral participation throughout the year into consideration when it comes to evaluation, and not just written work? It is fundamental to envisage means of evaluation other than just the written exercises often deemed to be the means par excellence of expressing reasoning. Students must be brought to free themselves of commonplace ideas and reflexes they possess in order to reason fully and autonomously without reciting a lesson. In this regard, the Egyptian Ministry of Education encourages teachers to “develop examination systems [that] should not be confined to measuring the information content learnt by heart, but go beyond that to the measurement of the pupil’s ability to deduce, relate, synthesize and criticize”.<sup>12</sup>

### *What kind of teacher education?*

As for other regions, one of the principal findings regarding the Arab region concerns the lack of preparation of philosophy teachers at secondary level.

The first point is that the training the teachers have received are not always adapted to the real demands of teaching at secondary level. According to the Study, three main scenarios can be identified : cases in which a university diploma in philosophy is required, as in Bahrain and the Syrian Arab Republic; cases in which teacher education is required, as a complement or not, to philosophical training; and cases in which other credentials, such as university diplomas in other subjects, qualify one to teach philosophy, as in Algeria, where a degree in social sciences is considered adequate for teaching philosophy in secondary schools. The last case shows that the educational system has a tendency to consider that teaching philosophy at secondary level does not necessarily require specialization. Added to that is the lack of in-service training, essential to keeping teachers’ interest alive, improving skills and updating knowledge of the field.

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<sup>12</sup> Ministerial Decree No. 71 of 1993, according to UNESCO-IBE, *Egypt, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/afrique/egypte/profile-of-education.html>

## Box 4 – Reform of philosophy teaching in Morocco

**Towards proactive learning.** The reform process of the Moroccan educational system was launched in 1999. This reform has changed the pedagogical approach to philosophy teaching, since it favours the students' proactive learning instead of professors' lectures. Authorities responsible of the reform stress that changes in philosophy teaching have brought up fundamental questions and led to a deepened examination of the act of teaching itself.

**Philosophy teaching reinforced.** Three salient points should be distinguished in this reform: philosophy teaching starting from the first year at secondary level; generalization of philosophy teaching to all branches with no exceptions; and integration of Islamic philosophy in general philosophy programmes as part of universal philosophical thought.

**The programme introduced.** The authors of the curricula have opted for a programme of introduction to philosophy and the promotion of its advantages. This is the reason why only two themes appear in the curriculum accompanied by specific directives that take into consideration the age range of students. These themes are: "What is philosophy?" and "Nature and culture". At lower secondary-school level, 'Citizenship education' is also included. Concepts that are drawn from everyday language are the starting point for analysis, reflection and questioning. The student's manual has become a collection of philosophical texts, whereas before it was made of courses on the history of ideas from which philosophical texts were essentially absent. In 2003, the reform institutionalized the necessity to 'liberalize' school textbook publishing, in order to diversify school manuals by introducing competition.

Adapted from the publication *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*  
Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2007, pp. 61-64

The second point is that teaching in schools only represents one of the professional opportunities open to philosophy graduates, and not always the most enticing one. This situation partly leads to a gap between the number of philosophy teachers and the number of university graduates. Moreover, a coherent, complementary link is missing between, on the one hand, the training offered in universities and, on the other hand, the needs of teachers at secondary level.

The problem of insufficient teacher training in the field of philosophy is also related to a general difficulty, in particular in the case of some countries in the region which are still in conflict or post-conflict situations. Data of the International Bureau of Education indicate for instance that approximately 44% of teachers in Lebanon are not prepared to accomplish their job, be it in terms of scientific or pedagogical preparation. However, a large teacher training campaign was launched both in the private and public sectors after the programme reform launched in 1995.<sup>13</sup> It is vital that countries in post-conflict situation accord a particular importance to the familiarization of teachers to pedagogical methods that are favourable to the education of peaceful citizens. In this sense, in its 2004 survey on the state of the art of the Iraqi educational system,

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Lebanon, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/etats-arabes/liban/profile-of-education.html>

UNESCO concluded that the development of Iraqi teacher training implies a transformation of teaching methods, aiming at fostering an interactive student-centred approach that would stimulate a spirit of enquiry and cooperation, as well as critical thinking.<sup>14</sup> Philosophical reflection can usefully contribute to the aim, notably through the learning of questioning and of critical thinking, as well as through a participative and dialogical approach in the teacher/student relationship.

### *Which discipline for which philosophies of education?*

Observing the principles and general objectives of education and analysing the education priorities of countries of the region give a rather clear general overview of the different educational approaches in place. The philosophies of education which come out from almost every educational system in the Arab region put an emphasis on two main orientations. The first orientation emphasizes the participative and critical approach to education and to the learning process. The second orientation stresses the moral and religious dimensions that education has to transmit onto young generations.

The Tunis debates highlighted that often religious teaching takes place at the expense of the teaching of philosophy.

The question is to understand how philosophy teaching takes position between these two orientations, bearing in mind that: 1. the first orientation is founded on a dynamic teacher/student relationship and on the search for student-centred curricula as to foster democratic culture and to develop a spirit of tolerance; 2. the second orientation aims at guaranteeing transmission of cultural and spiritual values, mainly through secondary education.

Some significant but non-exhaustive examples can be provided in order to illustrate the two orientations mentioned above.

#### **First orientation**

In Saudi Arabia, it is stipulated that teaching is, in general, no longer limited to providing the learner with information, but it is extended to the development of personality, inclinations and capabilities, so as to nurture a qualified citizen.<sup>15</sup> In Bahrain, the main objective of the two documents that define future orientations of the educational system adopted in 2003 is to enhance the democratic concepts and implant the spirit of tolerance.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, one of the principles of education as defined by Djibouti stipulates that teaching methods, in their conception and application, must aim at favouring a spirit of observation, of analysis and of synthesis, so as to combat prejudice and behaviour that threatens social cohesion, by means of promoting a culture of tolerance and respect of others.<sup>17</sup> In Egypt, recent curricular

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO, *Iraq, Education in Transition: Needs and Challenges*, 2004, Paris, 2005, pp. 142-143.

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Saudi Arabia, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/access-by-country/arab-states/saudi-arabia/profile-of-education.html>

<sup>16</sup> Bahrain, Fundamentals Directions for Education Development and the Future Vision of Education Development approved by the Cabinet on 13 April 2003, according to UNESCO-BIE, *Kingdom of Bahrain, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/etats-arabes/bahrein/profile-of-education.html>

<sup>17</sup> Djibouti, Education System Guidance Law of 10 August 2000, articles 8 and 10, according to UNESCO-IBE, *Djibouti, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/afrique/djibouti/profile-of-education.html>

reforms have included: focusing on the acquisition of skills rather than the acquisition of information; replacing rote learning by understanding and analysis by means of discussion and cooperative work, with a view to developing students' feeling of citizenship.<sup>18</sup> In Iraq, renewal of curriculum and textbooks is an urgent challenge, with a need for update, especially in the sciences and technology, and infusion of the values of peace and human rights, respect for others, active citizenship and democracy.<sup>19</sup> In the Syrian Arab Republic, the main principles of secondary education include the development of students' abilities of abstract reasoning, of objective thinking and comprehension, of their intellectual freedom and of positive criticism skills. These skills should then allow students to study national heritage critically, discarding fanaticism and racial discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

## Second orientation

For Algeria, education is in charge of developing the spiritual values, traditions and the Algerian people's fundamental choices.<sup>21</sup> Bahrain considers that one of the missions of education is to inculcate pride in belonging to the Arab and Islamic nations based on the awareness of the genuine value of Arab Islamic thinking.<sup>22</sup> In Egypt, religious education has been emphasized as a way to foster and deepen religious, social and ethical values.<sup>23</sup> In Jordan, the educational process is to be geared in a manner which develops the ability to analyse, criticize, initiate, create and dialogue positively; and promoting values derived from Arab, Islamic and human civilization.<sup>24</sup> In Kuwait, education must simultaneously aim at safeguarding the society's values and ethics, strengthening the Arab/Islamic cultural heritage, and making world culture accessible in the areas of the sciences and the arts.<sup>25</sup> In Libya, education aims at instilling in the student a sense of self-esteem and confidence regarding his/her Arabic and Islamic identity, and building his/her ability to actively communicate with other civilizations.<sup>26</sup> In Qatar, the principal objective of education is to create open-mindedness in the students towards other cultures, experiences and human achievements; encouraging mutual dialogue and interaction while remaining committed to Arab-Islamic cultural identity, legacy and values.<sup>27</sup>

Within this global scheme of educational objectives based on some examples, philosophy, founded on the practicing of reasoning and of independent thinking, can contribute significantly to concretely implement the main educational principles that Arab countries aim at reaching. Furthermore, philosophy

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<sup>18</sup> Series of National Conference for curricula Development from 1993 to 2000, according to UNESCO-BIE data, *Egypt, World Data on Education*, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, *Iraq, Education in Transition: Needs and Challenges*, op. cit., p. VI.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *République arabe syrienne, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fr/dans-le-monde/etats-arabes/republique-arabe-syrienne/profile-of-education.html>

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Algérie, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/access-by-country/africa/algeria/profile-of-education.html>

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Kingdom of Bahrain, World Data on Education*, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Egypt, World Data on Education*, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/access-by-country/arab-states/jordan/profile-of-education.html>

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Kuwait, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/access-by-country/arab-states/kuwait.html>

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.  
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/access-by-country/africa/libyan-arab-jamahiriya/profile-of-education.html>

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Qatar, World Data on Education*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Paris / Geneva, 2006-2007.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/access-by-country/arab-states/qatar/profile-of-education.html>

teaching can contribute to educate individuals capable of critically reflecting upon their own identity, culture and religion, as well as their relationship and interaction with other forms of thoughts, traditions and sociopolitical systems. Philosophy should indeed be confronted not only to artistic and scientific uncertainties, but also to cultural and religious certainties. To this end, the different modalities of this teaching should be thoroughly studied, taking into account the very diversity of scientific productions as well as those of spiritual traditions that belong to different cultural backgrounds. The Tunis debates affirmed that the issue here is to avoid the isolation of the discipline in a privileged reference. In this respect, the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP) showed itself open to the idea of supporting training courses for secondary education teachers, in order to enable the integration of the different cultural aspects in the teaching of this subject.

### *Which language for philosophy teaching?*

The Tunis debates also put forth the importance of the language of teaching at secondary level. Participants highlighted that the issue of the language in philosophy teaching is closely linked to the history of the Arab region, since this teaching entered with the colonizer. Consequently, the image of philosophy in the Arab region is charged from a historic point of view.

According to some participants, there is a generalized Arabization in philosophy teaching in the Arab countries which, within the framework of a struggle against the colonizer and his language, provokes the loss of a lot of elements in this subject's teaching. Philosophy is a transmissible good which does not belong to anyone. It is a heritage – it can be appropriated but it cannot be considered as one region or another's property. As regards language, it does not belong to anybody and can only be enriched by translation.

According to other participants, it remains important that teaching is conducted in the Arabic language, there being a direct and undeniable link between the language of teaching and the construction of national identity. Nevertheless, this should not prevent Arab states from recognizing that philosophy remains a necessity, a human concern, whichever the language used to teach this discipline.

### *Point of view – The complex relationship with the Other highlighted in a study in four Tunisian high schools*

**Deficiency of the pedagogical practice in philosophy.** Analysis of interviews with Tunisian students shows clearly the concurrent frequency of two inferred variables: social and cultural obstacles to the practice of philosophy, and the shortcomings in philosophy teaching in the country. In fact, the structure of philosophy courses seems based on a unidirectional model in which discussion, seen as a value that emerges from the teaching of philosophical themes, is not given any concrete pedagogical weight. Interviewee X7 said that 'in class, students try harder to receive than to participate because it is a heavy curriculum and there's not enough time. Students are only thinking about remembering what is being taught so that they can use it later. Given how little time there is, from the moment he or she enters the classroom the teacher tries to dictate the lesson to us and that's it'.

**Prejudices.** Even though the value of openness to other cultures or ideas is something touched upon frequently in philosophy lessons, the students' actual images of different cultures or different world views are not in fact influenced by philosophical concepts, and instead conform to narrow traditional views, bearing witness to an absence of any reflexive link to philosophy. Thus the interviewees' image of the West is a mixture of a number of different aspects, with scientific progress, atheism, technological power and the colonial past all mixed together. This image remains strongly tied to the collective imagination in terms of prejudice, reductionism and distrust with regard to Western philosophy. Students can feel inspired to criticize Western philosophical culture, but they do so not to rethink particular ideas, nor to reveal the limitations or what is unsaid in a particular philosophical system. Their criticisms serve more to underline contrasts with the traditional values of Islam, from which they draw an essential element of their identity.

**Reactions to defend collective identity.** That is why there is an ideological cast to the doubts and criticism they express. They are acting out a withdrawal into the self more than a natural openness to philosophy. Consequently the collective and conformist 'we' that assimilates the individual wins out over the reflexive 'I', as students' comments show. Interviewee X16 said that 'it is within the reach of anyone who has studied philosophy to enter into a dialogue with Western cultures and to adopt whatever suits his or her personality, society and culture. For example, we can study the intellectual and literary aspects of these cultures, but in studying their philosophies we are still trying to critique them and to adopt whatever suits our thinking and our society, above all because we are essentially a religious society'.

**Difficulties to dialogue.** We have to conclude, then, on the basis of these ambivalent attitudes to other cultures, that these students are not contemplating the values of dialogue and communication in their rational and critical senses. The philosophy that is being taught is not perceived as a form of analysis that enriches the universality of human thought, in what it calls reason or the analytical faculty potentially possessed by every human being. Imprisoned in the elevation of their own beliefs and a purely utilitarian relationship with other people or cultures, the students see in Western philosophical thought only advantages or disadvantages understood in reference to their religious values. That it is impossible to consider this sort of relationship with other people or cultures as real openness is amply proven by the contradictions that we witness in these students' comments.

Zouari Yassine (Tunisia), *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2007, p. 88

# Suggestions for possible action

There is a great variety of means of transmitting a taste for philosophizing and awakening interest and curiosity for this field. The Arab region is a space where innovative practices, when it comes to teaching philosophy, can be engaged in using the rich human and intellectual potential underlying each country's educational system to the best advantage.

## Strengthen the place of philosophy in schools

- Accord a full, complete, autonomous place to philosophy. In doing so, a complementary and interdisciplinary approach in relation to other disciplines can be envisaged.
- Rethink and study the specific contribution of philosophy teaching to the accomplishment of the principles of education mentioned in different countries' official texts.

## Initiate innovative approaches

- Foster creativity and innovation with regard to methods of teaching philosophy. To this end, draw in particular from the store of innovative practices developed for learning to philosophize, such as according value to oral expression in the evaluation process, the use of philosophically oriented discussion, etc.
- Support the exchange, diffusion and circulation of knowledge and practices related to the teaching of philosophy at intra-regional and international levels.
- Optimize the production of philosophy teachers' and students' manuals and textbooks through a permanent search for quality. This requires incorporating innovative teaching methods and taking into account challenges facing philosophy teaching in the Arab region.
- Conciliate philosophy and the different cultural aspects of teaching.

## Conceive adequate training for philosophy teachers

- Accord value to specializing in philosophy in order to ensure specific professional opportunities, knowingly to ensure that philosophy teaching posts at secondary level are filled by faculty members who are specifically trained for that function.
- Guarantee the training of philosophy teachers at primary level that combines both a didactic and pedagogical content and a specialization in philosophy.
- This training could be sustained and updated with relevant in-service training.

# Teaching philosophy in



# higher education

The hybrid nature of university teaching – a mixture of teaching/educating and research – is all the more at work in the area of philosophical studies since they do not in general have other institutional places where they can develop. University teaching does not only contribute to shaping characters and building up human beings in their multiple dimensions – cognitive, emotional, moral, cultural or social. It is above all intent upon putting students in a position to produce new knowledge and making them capable of reacting to the incessant transformations that characterize knowledge within different cultures.

Philosophical knowledge is taught at universities in the form of research methods, categories, concepts, criteria of valid argumentation and more or less formal structures enabling people to construct physical, historical, moral and rational worlds. Whether it is a matter of educating educators, of nurturing historical culture, of learning universal structures of reasoning or of building up the culture of tomorrow's teachers-researchers, it is definitely the presence of technical knowledge of the field and of a properly philosophical savoir-faire that sets university teaching apart and is the basis of all its relevance. Moreover, in the countries where philosophy is taught in the schools, the dynamic between the secondary school teachers and those in higher education constitutes an essential asset in the philosophical educational process.

It is worth noting that this part does not deal with the question of actual philosophical research, but of teaching philosophy at university level. Even though it is obvious that the university structure encompasses the research component, this will be the subject of a separate UNESCO study, since the issues involved there are of a different nature from that of actual university teaching.

## Overview

In most Arab countries, philosophy is taught in higher education. Philosophy is doing relatively well, and has a relatively prominent position: subject matters entitled “Philosophy” are taught almost everywhere. According to reactions collected by the UNESCO Questionnaire,<sup>28</sup> in spite of a certain number of difficulties, philosophy's position in universities is perceived as stable and only in certain particular cases as threatened by ministerial or academic policies. A majority of respondents (56%) noted a tendency to increase philosophy teaching in higher education.<sup>29</sup>

For instance, in Egypt, philosophy is taught as a separate subject matter in higher education. The Philosophy Department of the American University in Cairo offers both a major and a minor in philosophy, and accepts students beyond the introductory level. Courses tackle questions arising from reflections into religion, ethics, art, politics, science and the theory of knowledge. In Lebanon, a notable increase in the number of philosophy courses at university level, and the introduction of a major in philosophy are to be noted. In Tunisia, there are four philosophy departments: in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tunis, at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Al-Manar University, at the University of Kairouan and at the University of Sfax. Philosophy courses are also taught in the country's literary and scientific preparatory schools; in schools and institutes of technology, cultural sciences, theology or primary-school teacher education; in institutions of applied arts; and in university faculties of social sciences, law and, to a lesser degree, science.

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO online Questionnaire on the state of the art of philosophy teaching, whose results are published in the UNESCO Study *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> We do not have any exhaustive list of countries of the region where philosophy is taught as a separate course.

In some countries, however, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, philosophy is entirely absent from almost all levels of education.

## Challenges

### *Philosophy studies and then what?*

The links with the working world and the essential question of professional opportunities for philosophy graduates play a key role in the responses to UNESCO's Questionnaire. The responses collected by UNESCO in fact reveal some sense of the weakening of philosophy teaching throughout the region due precisely to the lack of job opportunities after specializing in the field. Testimonies assembled by the Questionnaire return a vague concern: the tenuous nature of professional positions does nothing to encourage in young people the idea of undertaking studies in philosophy. 'There is no work for graduates' explains a Jordanian academic. In Tunisia, 'graduate unemployment' and the 'job market' are seen as the worst enemies of philosophical studies.

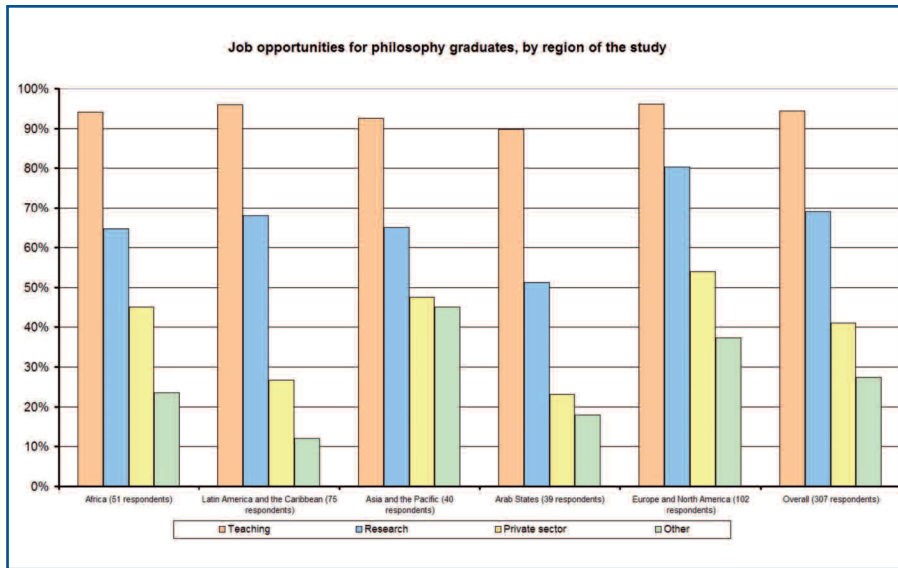
The problem is that philosophy in the Arab region, as in other regions, is often considered as not being very apt to contribute to economic and scientific progress and is therefore considered as marginal, or even useless. It is as if economic development displayed contempt for philosophical reflection. Philosophy also suffers from the redeployment of resources to satisfy other priorities, especially those of the applied sciences and industrial research. According to the International Bureau of Education's data, since 1983 in Djibouti, the Ministry of Education has limited the educational sectors that do not offer sufficient job opportunities. This is the reason why scholarships were no longer granted for higher education in the fields of social and economic administration, sociology, psychology, ethnology, etc. More recently, students at the end of high school are preferably orientated towards science and mathematics instead of literary branches.<sup>30</sup> This is a phenomenon found in other regions of the world as well and could be an area of possible intervention.

Most philosophy graduates in the Arab region manage to find employment corresponding to the training received, even if it can take a longer time than for other types of careers. Not everything is discouraging therefore, even though it is true that a philosophy degree often gives access to a limited number of professions, mainly restricted to the field of education and research. This is shown by Figure No. 1: teaching provides most of the job opportunities for philosophy graduates, followed by research; private sector employment comes in the third position, only representing 25% of job opportunities. In this context, a proposition made during the Tunis debates was to encourage the private sector to recruit graduates in philosophy.

This being said, it is important not to analyze the educational system exclusively through the lens of professional training. The recent education reforms in Morocco show that attempting to relate curricula to job opportunities in the market must not lead to neglecting the whole set of knowledge which is absolutely essential for educating citizens. Therefore, and in order to show that philosophy is not a

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<sup>30</sup> UNESCO-IBE, *Djibouti, World Data on Education*, op. cit.



*Figure No.1  
Job opportunities,  
university level*

discipline that is marginal to life in society, it is important to make it more attractive. To this end, philosophy and its teaching could deal more with the major world contemporary problems and tackle questions which concern particularly the everyday life of people. The reforms in Morocco have thus given a more important place to the teaching of philosophy, seeking to create greater links between academic training and job opportunities.

## *Human resources above all*

### The link between secondary and higher education teaching

It is important to contemplate the ties and interaction between secondary and higher education, particularly from the angle of professional opportunities and in-service training for philosophy teachers. Porosity between the two levels seems endangered today in many cases.

On the one hand, universities need to know what is happening in secondary education. On the other hand, secondary-level students and teachers should be able to benefit from research carried out at university level. Nevertheless, the most frequent case today is that secondary-level teachers are not able to reach university teaching, which leads in consequence to a true breach in the secondary - higher education link. Teaching at secondary level thus no longer leads to a subsequent development to university careers, which may result in a loss of motivation for teachers. In order to find a remedy to this situation and to reinforce the link between secondary and higher-level teaching, the Tunis debates put forth a proposition to create of research laboratories at national and/or regional level that would involve teachers and professors from both levels.

## For mobility but against brain-drain

The issue of the brain-drain in the Arab region in the framework of philosophy teaching was largely discussed in the Tunis debates. Some regretted exchanges involving visiting professors and students in the field of philosophy taking place mostly in the direction North-South. Teachers' and students' mobility in both directions North-South and South-North should thus be encouraged. Other participants highlighted the importance of solving the problem of the exodus of high quality Arab researchers to European, North American, and in the future, undoubtedly, Chinese universities, where they settle permanently, which considerably diminishes the attractiveness of the academic community to young students from the Arab region. It is therefore legitimate to ask the question: how a sufficient number of philosophers can be trained to ensure the continuity of the discipline and its teaching.

## Innovative, varied written resources

As indicated by the *World Communication and Information Report 1999-2000*,<sup>31</sup> “the Arab region imports more books than it exports, resulting in a negative balance in this respect. In Arab countries the number of libraries is limited, but many campaigns have been carried out for their expansion. These [campaigns] were first intended for children but are now aimed at a wider audience”. This same Report notes that “the Arab civilization has been closely linked with the production of books and other printed matter. Historically, its efforts in translation have been instrumental in transmitting the works of Ancient writers, and Arab contributions in many fields of knowledge are well known. Today, the publishing situation is different and the basic production is translated from Western sources. Most of the textbooks used at university level in certain faculties are in English or French, even if the original is Russian or Japanese [...]. However, an important exchange of books is taking place among the Arab countries, including those in the western region. This is facilitated in part by the use of a common language.”

These remarks echo the UNESCO Questionnaire, and Figure No. 2 shows that nearly 50% of respondents from the Arab region are unsatisfied regarding philosophical documentary resources in universities' libraries. As to Figure No.3, it illustrates the most important deficiencies in secondary-school libraries or documentation centres in the respondents' opinions, as far as philosophy is concerned. Respondents from the Arab countries emphasize the lack of access to philosophers' works, and in particular to translations of original works.

Efforts still must be made with a view to providing universities with documentation centres in which to find written sources in the field of philosophy, be it translated works or books in their original languages. There exist many contemporary scholarly publications about philosophy, and international colloquia are held throughout the world, producing proceedings which are important in order to follow the advances in the field. It is those publications, among others, that Arab universities must endeavour to acquire for their libraries.

Moreover, today, information and communication technologies can provide certain solutions, provided that they are well-conceived and adapted. Access to computer technology in fact constitutes an essential factor in strengthening university training and teaching. With regard to higher education, the Union of Arab

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO, *World Communication and Information Report 1999-2000*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 1999, pp. 206-207.

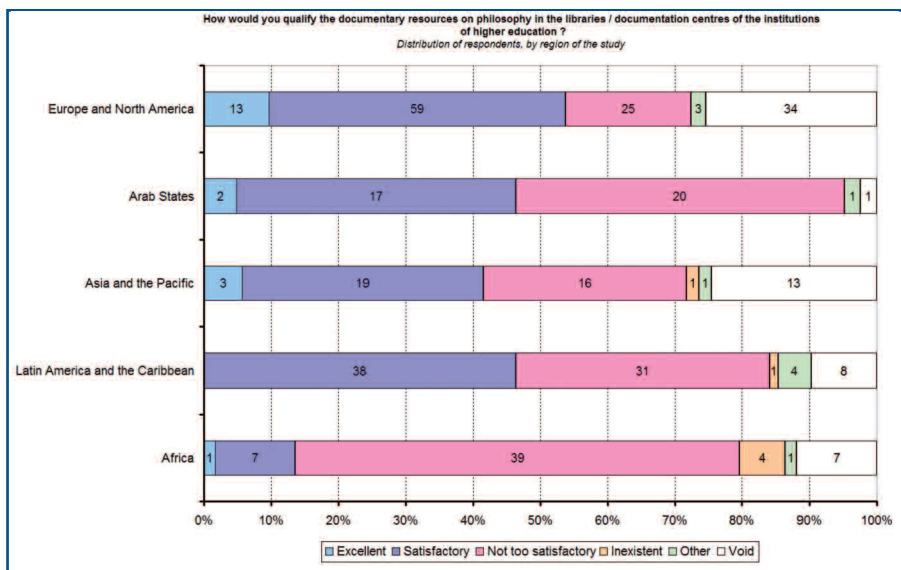


Figure No. 2  
Documentary resources,  
higher education

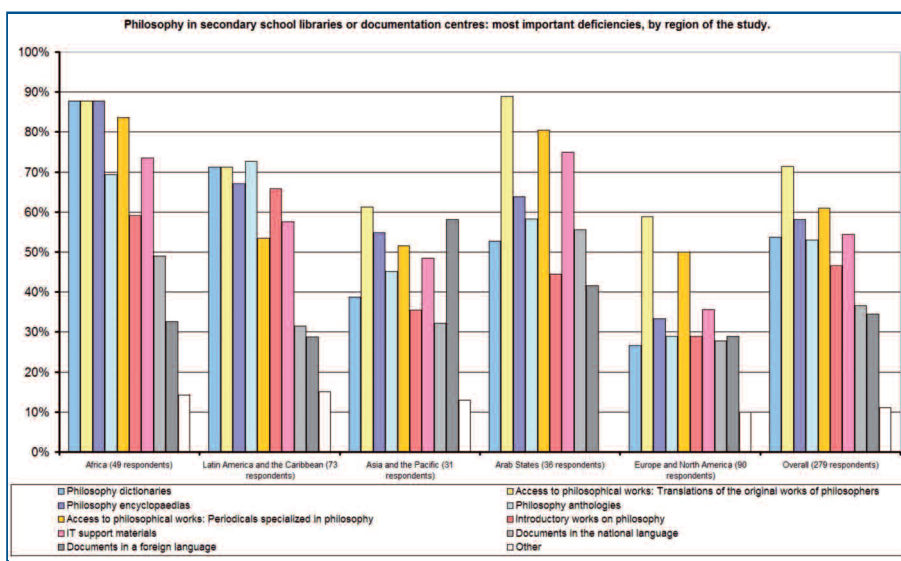


Figure No. 3  
Documentary resources,  
secondary level

Universities guarantees the coordination between these institutions. According to the *World Communication and Information Report 1999-2000*, “[a]most all Arab universities are connected to the Internet, although there is not yet an Arab Backbone Network. In some countries, universities are all connected to a single network. For example, Egypt’s twelve universities are linked through the Egyptian Universities Network, together with Al-Azhar and the American University. Since Tunisia, Kuwait and Egypt were the first Arab countries to have Internet connectivity, they have accumulated more experience in using this technology in the university context. Nevertheless, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon have recently witnessed a sharp increase in Internet penetration [...] However, it should be emphasized that computer penetration is still low in Arab countries, and more funding and teacher training are

essential”.<sup>32</sup> The continuous increase of Internet connections within universities should be considered as a real opportunity for professors and students in philosophy since well directed researches of available data offer great scientific openness.

In parallel, within the evolving context of publishing in the human sciences which, particularly in the case of journals, finds most publishers focusing increasingly on publishing and distributing in a digital format, a new challenge arises when it comes to the means of acquiring access to these intangible collections. Most academic publishers today propose distribution contracts on a nation-wide basis enabling networks of libraries and teaching establishments to acquire access to all their publications. In this context, it was proposed in the Tunis debates that the possibility should be explored of making specialized philosophy journals available online, for instance a year after their publication.

## *How to reinforce philosophy education at university?*

### **Establishing systems of exchange of good practices**

In the field of philosophy, is it reasonable to question the immense resources of the Arab-Islamic world? Arab thinkers' historical links with diverse cultures such as Greek, Persian, Egyptian, Syrian or Indian during the Middle Ages contributed to a great production of scientific and philosophical reflection. Today, this heritage is still re-examined, transmitted and articulated to other traditions by Arab universities. Indeed, several experiences exist in many Arab countries where philosophy teaching at university covers both Arab and Western philosophers, and many fields as diverse as metaphysics, ethics, epistemology and aesthetics.

In most Arab countries, the relationship between philosophy, secular culture and religion is at the centre of academic policies. In this context, the teachings of classical thought (for example, the works of Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd) are studied in parallel with, usually modern, Western authors. Considering the very diverse philosophy curricula in place at the university level, systems of exchange of good practices could be feasible both for students and professors. These exchanges would be based on programmes and teaching methods that have been tried and true in different universities. As instances of some philosophy-teaching frameworks already in place we may mention the following:

In Egypt, philosophy is taught as a separate subject at the higher levels of teaching. It is taught in the Faculties of Arts, Education and Religion as well as in the Faculties of Arab and Islamic Studies, such as in Cairo's Dar El Olum Faculty.

In the United Arab Emirates, the College for Humanities and Social Sciences offers a major in philosophy aimed at developing “an appreciation of the relationship between ideas and cultural development in Arab and Western traditions, an understanding of the foundations and history of philosophy, a capacity to analyse arguments and their structures and to express themselves both in spoken and written English and Arabic”.<sup>33</sup> Among the subjects taught in this major are Ethics, Metaphysics, Symbolic logic, Arab

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<sup>32</sup> UNESCO, *World Communication and Information Report 1999-2000*, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

<sup>33</sup> United Arab Emirates University, College for Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy.  
<http://www.fhss.uaeu.ac.ae/Departments/Philosophy/Goals.htm>

logic, Philosophy of science, Greek and Medieval philosophy, Modern Western philosophy, Theories of knowledge, Philosophical problems, Philosophy of language and Aesthetics.

In Lebanon, philosophy is taught in several institutions. Saint-Joseph University of Beirut offers several philosophy programmes from BA to doctorate levels. This discipline is also taught in the Magister of Arab and Islamic philosophy, as well as in the framework of the preparation of the secondary-school level Certificate of Aptitude in Philosophy. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the Lebanese University in Beirut also offers a philosophy specialization, dealing with various topics such as Philosophy and literature, Eastern philosophy, Philosophical aesthetics, Sufism and the Foundation and epistemology of Arab philosophy. The Philosophy Department of the American University in Beirut offers courses that cover the subject's principal domains, and dealing with authors and texts from Western and Middle-Eastern traditions, from the Pre-Socratics to Ibn Rushd, and Descartes to Rawls.

### Encouraging high-level research in philosophy

As noted by the Senior Inspector General of Algerian philosophy, the lack of high-level and international-level research and analysis often leads some Arab students to the pessimistic conclusion that the time has not yet come to study contemporary Arab philosophical production, because this amounts only to school publications and attempts to catalogue early Muslim philosophy.<sup>34</sup> This is also why it would be useful to collect written production of Arab authors, to organize, to catalogue, to analyse and to evaluate it. While doing so, translations and commentary works carried out by many Arab philosophers for centuries must be indeed included, but it would also be necessary to take into account contemporary production. Attempts to open philosophy teaching to regional and international philosophical creations do in fact exist, both in terms of programme and of pedagogy and didactics, through the organization of the first Summer University on the Didactics of Philosophy in Algeria in 1998 (see Box 5). This initiative is not isolated since in Tunisia and Morocco as well as in Middle-Eastern countries, from the 1970's up to now, there has been a will to elaborate reflections that allow philosophy courses to open themselves up to the world and to participate in pedagogical and didactic production, thereby taking part in contemporary philosophical thought.

### Philosophizing beyond the challenges of language

Languages used for philosophical thinking are another area of debate and reform.

The stake of this question is, on the one hand, making the international philosophical production accessible to the Arab language's public and, on the other hand, opening the productions of the contemporary Arab philosophers to the knowledge of the international scientific community.

The Arabization process in higher education in general, and in philosophy education in particular, is a significant phenomenon of the Tunisian case. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, a central figure of the Arabization process of philosophy education in Tunisia recalls that this movement has disclosed the immense domain of Arab philosophy heritage to researchers. There was a will to provide the general public with a great number of philosophical texts of the second half of the 20th century, which explains all the works initiated

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<sup>34</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, op. cit., p. 136



## Box 5 – The first Summer University on the Didactics of Philosophy in Algeria

For the first time in Algeria from 18 to 30 July 1998, more than one hundred philosophy teachers took part in a summer university of which I was the Director, in the Hassiba Ben Bouali College, Algiers. Here is the introduction to the published summary.

*A glimmer of hope.* Participants in this summer school, despite the organizational difficulties stemming from the topic's isolated nature and lack of framework, came out with a rather encouraging initial education in the important realm of philosophy. The participants hoped to develop these assets on further occasions and organize their teaching and didactic practices using more scientific means of evaluation. This would then make it possible to change and re-establish traditional evaluation methods. The experiment undertaken by the *wilaya* of Skikda during the 1993/1994 school year, in which the didactics of philosophy was tested by teachers in their classes, greatly inspired certain aspects of this gathering.

This experimental summer university attained its goals despite the difficulties encountered. We hope that future events will focus on a more scientific education in this field, in view of optimizing the subject's future development, because isolation results in the extinction of creativity and a decline in society and its human values. This isolation could be breached by the distribution of high-quality documentation; the provision of further ongoing teacher-training, both inside and outside the country; and the encouragement of initiatives such as the summer university, which enlightened participants on their responsibilities in their daily practice and led to a reflection on educational reforms and general social changes.

Abdelmalek Hamrouche (Algeria),

*Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2007, p. 137

then in translating texts of general philosophy, of philosophy of law, of aesthetics and of political philosophy, gathered in a series of anthologies. The general purpose was to bridge the Arab philosophical heritage and contemporary thinking in its global dimensions, in order to combat the pernicious and negative consequences of some ideologies that are at the origins of so many troubles, and thereby to place this initiative in the most positive universal dimension.<sup>35</sup>

The will to open to and communicate with the world's scientific community is confirmed by the Tunisian researchers' efforts to publish their works in international reviews, and to target an international audience through publications such as *Revue tunisienne des études philosophiques*. In this sense, the French language remains a language of reference. The same holds true for Morocco where the Arabization policy started in 1972, but where the French language continues to be practiced and widely known in universities.

<sup>35</sup> Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, « L'arabisation de la philosophie », in *Rue Descartes*, N°61 : *Philosopher en Tunisie aujourd'hui*, Paris, PUF/Collège International de Philosophie, 2008, pp. 78-81.

## *Philosophy: Agora for public debate*

One of the major roles of university, and of philosophy teaching at this level, is to foster the debating of ideas in order to advance the state of knowledge. In these debates, what is political or, in other words, issues related to the evolution and future of the *polis*, has a very significant place. However, for philosophy to be a genuine agora for public debate, academic freedom must be guaranteed at university.

The problem in many countries in the world is to reach an adequate conception of the ties uniting philosophy, politics and academic freedom. A main distinction is to be done between public and academic discourses. The danger arises when political regimes or systems claim the right to impose on teachers-researchers and students certain forms of obedience, or even of political fidelity, thus reducing philosophy teaching to a mere means of dissemination of an ideology. This is the case, for example, when oaths of fidelity or political orthodoxy are periodically imposed on academic communities. Political constraints also concern the prohibition that is still found in many circumstances to include certain subjects in the teaching programmes, or yet again the imposition upon a country's researchers of a philosophical orthodoxy to which they are expected to conform.

These are just some of the hypothetical situations that may interfere with freedom of research, teaching and learning of the academic community and students, especially when their field, philosophy, is specifically based on constantly questioning certainties. There exists also a more subtle form of pressure on teachers and students, difficult to detect, and which several researcher-teachers have denounced. This pressure is caused by the political climate established within a scholarly community taking the form of self-censorship on the part of the members of this community, particularly where politically sensitive or controversial subjects are concerned.

The academic freedom is still currently under threat on a number of different fronts, in particular those related to the radicalization of cultural and religious identities or traditional practices. It is also subject to various types of political conditioning, to increasing pressure to answer to economic considerations and, in a somewhat subtler manner, to the creation of academic climates that have an effect on how teachers and researchers carry out their professional activities. By virtue of its general nature as a theory concerned with different forms of knowledge, philosophy today appears particularly vulnerable to these external pressures.

## *Teaching philosophy and interdisciplinary approaches*

The interdisciplinary approach is all the more well-founded today since cultural studies centres are in fact places of philosophical research as important and as rich as philosophy departments. This expansion reflects a desire for interdisciplinary approaches that many researchers share and plays a growing role in the organization of academic teaching and research. The examples of ethno-philosophy in Africa, reflection on neo-Confucianism in China and East Asia, the dialectic interplay between religion and secularization in the West, or yet again the connections between philosophical rationality and Indian values all illustrate the cultural significance that all philosophical reflection has.

The case of Tunisia shows that, at university level, there is a certain communication between philosophy and other disciplines. According to Fathi Triki, holder of the UNESCO Chair in Philosophy at the University

of Tunis 1, programmes in social sciences, cultural sciences, theology and the arts include subjects of a philosophical nature in their syllabi. The history of science and bioethics has also begun to be taught in some scientific institutions. Institutions of applied arts and schools of fine arts often include courses in aesthetics and other philosophical concepts. Philosophy of Law is taught in Law schools and legal institutes. It is estimated that almost 40% of tertiary level students in Tunisia take at least some type of philosophy class. Also, according to the most recent data, almost half of Tunisia's philosophy students (44%) are women.

With regard to the course content, classical authors representative of the world's philosophical heritage, and especially of the Greek, Arabic, Latin and European heritages are in the programmes of different universities. The central place occupied by the Classics in higher education seems increasingly unclear, however, owing to a more practical approach to the subjects taught. Thus, whereas Tunisia has witnessed a growth of research in logic and epistemology over the last twenty years, nowadays ethics, political philosophy and especially questions related to Law (such as human rights, the rule of law, or civil society) have become central concerns in various higher education programmes.

The relationship between philosophy and other disciplines is therefore not that of opposition but of complementarity. The Tunis debates affirmed the importance of promoting the interdisciplinary model and of including philosophy in other specializations in a continuous way.

## Suggestions for possible action

It is fundamental to take these challenges into account, to study the suggestions for action, and to see to what extent it is possible to implement the educational policies deriving from them.

### Protect academic freedom

- Safeguard the principle of academic freedom.
- Ensure that it is actually respected by preventing anybody external to the dynamic of scientific exchanges from laying claim to setting priorities for research, judging the relevance of the discussions, or placing limitations on the range of the field covered.
- Support research and philosophical teaching with a view to strengthening the place of philosophical communities, while leaving them free to develop in accordance with a maximal diversity of approaches and thematic, methodological and conceptual choices.

### Promote philosophy as an autonomous field

- Encourage the creation and/or the strengthening of autonomous philosophy departments within institutions of higher education with a view to promoting philosophy as a field per se.

### Favour interdisciplinary studies

- Develop an interdisciplinary approach to teaching philosophy, in order to contribute in an effective way to academic reflection on the specific perspectives through which philosophy can help to better understand new forms of knowledge and their application.

### Strengthen human resources

- Encourage the creation and/or strengthening of philosophy departments in terms of human resources and budget, so that they may provide valid opportunities for philosophy graduates.
- Support partnerships with the public and private sectors with a view to promoting professional opportunities for philosophy students.
- Ensure durable, systematic interaction and collaboration between secondary school teachers and university professors, especially through in-service training, joint research projects, or teacher assistance, with a view to guaranteeing the faculty's motivation.
- Take steps to encourage “brain-gain” by fostering the development of young researchers within universities and/or recurring to agencies specialized in supporting research, in order to set up programmes to bring students completing their research courses abroad back to the region.
- Encourage the private sector to recruit philosophy graduates.
- Promote the creation of research laboratories at national and/or regional level, which would involve both secondary and higher-level teachers.

### Consolidate documentary resources

- Work to create networks with publishers, or more broadly with the private sector, in order to ensure the acquisition of recent philosophical publications by Arab university libraries.
- Encourage the creation of digital portals for the acquisition and distribution of scholarly information in the field of philosophy.
- Explore the possibility of making philosophy specialized journals available online.

### Ensure the impact of Arab philosophies

- Work on the collection and exploitation of Arab philosophical texts, this being an effective prerequisite for the direct impact on philosophy textbooks and teacher's manuals. In this respect, relays of regional and international cooperation, such as the UNESCO networks, are high potential support systems.
- Develop and sustain systems of exchange between Arab universities so as to foster and disseminate good practices in terms of philosophy programmes and pedagogical training.

# Conclusion

Philosophy is a most useful tool for training a critical mind and responsible attitudes. Philosophy is not impromptu. It is above all a kind of savoir-faire that requires responding to its own requisites and confronting the necessary challenges for its implementation. It is a field built up all throughout one's life; childhood, adolescence and adulthood, in an interdependent fashion, be it within an institutional framework or not.

Philosophy teaching must be supported energetically and insightfully, infused with new manners of teaching, transmitting and sharing, just as it must also integrate the legacy of the past, without being imprisoned by it, and take other modes of thought into account, all the while constructing its own identity for today and tomorrow.

Teaching philosophy in the Arab region must endorse its full role of stimulating people to the free exercise of thinking, – critical, responsible thinking –, just as it must contribute to the construction of peace and the promotion of sustainable development. The emergence of citizens fully conscious of their role, of their responsibilities and the stakes these represent, is an asset in face of challenges that arise. The teaching of philosophy must emphasize the rich contribution of the different cultures and societies to philosophy, and vice versa. As one of the participants to the regional meeting in Tunis stressed, 'the real issue today is not to know if an Arab philosophy exists and how to teach it, but how philosophy can have more influence on the modern Arab Man'.

Envisaged from the perspective of a quality education, philosophy for everyone, at all levels of instruction, is becoming a necessity in today's world. For this to be realized, a decision must be taken at the highest political level, targeting an educational policy formulation that integrates philosophy into an overall process of reform.

# Recommendations for the teaching of philosophy

**in the Arab  
region**

## High-Level Regional Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in the Arab Region – Tunis, Tunisia, 11 and 12 May 2009



## Recommendations

Recalling the Paris Declaration for Philosophy (Paris, 1995),<sup>1</sup> which states that “development of philosophical debate in education and in cultural life makes a major contribution to the training of citizens, by exercising their capacity for judgment, which is fundamental in any democracy”, and affirming that “philosophy education, by training independently minded, thoughtful people, capable of resisting various forms of propaganda, prepares everyone to shoulder their responsibilities in regard to the great questions of the contemporary world, particularly in the field of ethics”;

Recalling UNESCO’s Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy (adopted in 2005),<sup>2</sup> which stipulates that philosophy “develops the intellectual tools to analyse and understand key concepts such as justice, dignity and freedom, by building capacities for independent thought and judgment, by enhancing the critical skills to understand and question the world and its challenges, and by fostering reflection on values and principles”;

Recalling that the Pillar 2 of the above mentioned Strategy urges UNESCO to encourage the teaching of philosophy in all countries, notably through the development of policy recommendations on the teaching of philosophy at secondary and university levels, as well as a comprehensive curriculum development, which would include the teaching of different philosophical trends as well as comparative philosophy;

Relying on the results of the Study published by UNESCO in 2007, *Philosophy, a School of Freedom – Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize : Status and Prospects*,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy, 171 EX/12, UNESCO’s Executive Board, Paris, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*, op. cit.



Aware of the necessity to overcome the challenges facing philosophy teaching in Arab countries;

Welcoming the perspective of an Interregional Meeting on Philosophy Teaching which UNESCO will organize in the near future, so as to share the results of the regional consultations;

We, participants to the High-Level Regional Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in the Arab Region, held in Tunis, Tunisia, on 11 and 12 May 2009, call on<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Member States of the region to

- Adhere formally to the importance and the relevance of teaching philosophy as an autonomous discipline;
- Enhance the assets of philosophy teaching in the Arab region and encourage philosophy teaching in countries where this discipline is not taught;
- Elaborate a national Action Plan on philosophy teaching at all levels of education, so as to present the results of this Plan to the Interregional Meeting on Philosophy Teaching to be organized by UNESCO in 2010 with a view to allowing interested countries to share perspectives and projects;
- Accord to philosophy an equally important place compared to other disciplines, thus contributing to quality education, aiming at a comprehensive and complete training of reflective citizens;
- Promote interdisciplinarity between philosophy and other disciplines, since the philosophical inquiry and analysis allow students to shed light on the modalities of knowledge acquisition and to question the criteria of truth;
- Undertake pilot experiences in the field of learning to philosophize in primary education;
- Organize workshops with a view to revising philosophy curricula and school manuals, and to promoting in-service training for secondary school teacher trainers;
- Extend philosophy teaching to every branch and level of secondary and higher education;
- Ensure the continuity between philosophy teaching at secondary and higher levels ;
- Designate a resource person within the National Commission for UNESCO in each country, in charge of the follow-up of initiatives related to philosophy teaching;
- Encourage the creation of a scientific journal in the field of philosophy.

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<sup>4</sup> See the list of participants in Annex.

## 2. UNESCO to

### At international level

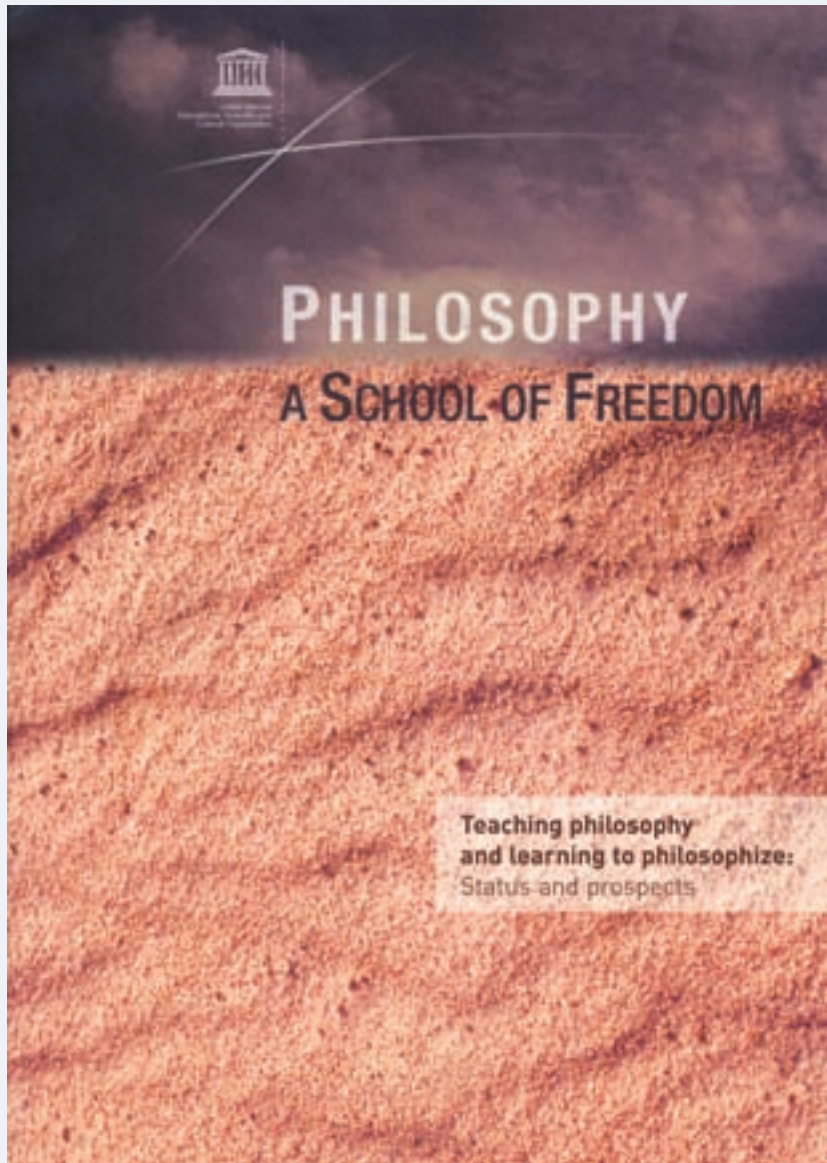
- Continue its initiatives of promotion and advocacy actions in favor of the teaching of philosophy at all levels of formal and informal education;
- Strengthen its initiatives aimed at creating links and establishing networks between philosophers, teachers and students of different regions of the world;
- Continue and reinforce its actions in favor of a philosophical reflection that is open and accessible to the general public, notably through the celebration of World Philosophy Day.

### At regional level

- Continue to act as a clearing-house for exchanges of practices that have proven to work in the field of philosophy teaching, through regional events;
- Provide a special support to countries willing to set up regional exchange programmes between universities and training institutes, in order to build the capacities of philosophy teachers;
- Encourage translation and dissemination of philosophical texts.

### At national level

- Encourage countries to develop national strategies aiming at enhancing philosophy teaching at all levels;
- Provide a special support to countries willing to engage in the process of national policy formulation on philosophy teaching at primary, secondary and tertiary level;
- Provide assistance, to the greatest possible extent, in national policy implementation in favour of the introduction of philosophy in curricula;
- Support the organization of pilot experiences in the field of philosophy teaching, particularly concerning the learning to philosophize in primary schools;
- Help Member States elaborate, in cooperation with relevant institutions such as CIPSH, an anthology which would integrate philosophical texts specific to the Arab countries to texts from other traditions, in order to value and to exploit philosophical texts that belong to the common heritage of philosophy;
- Encourage the use of at least two languages in philosophy teaching;
- Encourage philosophy departments in universities to address the contemporary stakes and challenges in the Arab region;
- Create national databases on philosophy teaching, which would contain curricula, school manuals, activities related to philosophical reflection, teacher training programmes, etc., and link them through a network.



UNESCO Publishing, 2007

# Annexes

# Addresses Participants

## Address by H.E. Mr Hatem Ben Salem, Minister of Education and Training of Tunisia

*Delivered on the occasion of the Opening ceremony of the High-Level Regional Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in the Arab Region – Tunis, Tunisia, 11 May 2009*

**Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

It is a great honour for me to open this high-level regional meeting on the teaching of philosophy in the Arab world, organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training of Tunisia.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our illustrious guests in Tunisia and to thank them for having so kindly accepted our invitation to contribute to the enrichment of the work of this intellectual forum on an issue which is of the utmost importance to us all.

The choices one makes about the teaching of philosophy indicate one's awareness of the central position that this discipline holds in the training of citizens for their rightful role in society, above all expressing themselves on questions of public interest, exercising their rights and fulfilling their duties. This requires clear awareness, relevant opinions, a healthy outlook and a keen sense of responsibility. Such virtues, which the education system endeavours to inculcate in the young, are, of course, conveyed by all subjects, but it is philosophy which has had the pre-eminent role ever since the Greeks laid its foundations, defined its essence and determined its aims. I need not remind you here of the role played by Arabs and Muslims in its rise and spread both inside and outside the Arab world.

**Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

Since the establishment of the modern Tunisian school system immediately after the independence, Enlightenment thought has been its watchword and the liberation of minds its aim. It has also constantly strengthened the modernist task of training people to be thinkers. The 1991 Law on education states that the school system shall "strive to develop the personality of learners, mould their critical faculties and promote their will to act in a manner that will make them acquire clear-sightedness in their judgment, self-confidence in their conduct, a sense of initiative and creativity in their work".

This direction was confirmed by the 2002 Law which stipulates in Article 53 that the teaching of the social sciences and humanities equips learners with knowledge that promotes a critical mindset and helps them to understand the organization of societies as well as their economic, social, political and cultural progress.

The role of philosophy in our education system and its place in comparison with other subjects derive from the lines of emphasis and goals set for learning. Since the reforms of secondary education in 2005, philosophy has been taught at two levels: in the third and fourth years of the secondary cycle and in all streams. These reforms entailed the revision of curricular content and number of hours of lessons and the setting of new aims, namely:

- enabling pupils to exercise freedom of thought through active reflection on the works of renowned philosophers and thinkers;
- improving pupils' understanding and enabling in-depth interpretation and full and clear awareness of knowledge learned;
- freeing pupils from the shackles of stereotype and from the clutches of prejudice and hasty judgment;
- providing pupils with an education that allows them to show good judgment, self-confidence and compliance with principles, without lapsing into self-importance, and teaching them the principles of moderation and tolerance for others that are not a form of dependence;
- assisting pupils in rising above indifference to a state of awareness which strengthens their intellectual and behavioural choices, stimulates their creativity and puts them on their guard against superficial approaches and the temptation to take the line of least resistance.

The practice of philosophical thinking is not confined to philosophy alone, since it is also imparted in the course of Islamic thought, which approaches philosophical issues from the point of view of Muslim thinkers, whether these issues are the foundations of faith, the critical interpretation of texts or the relationship between reason and tradition.

Thus, as His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali recommends, the aim of philosophy education is to develop “an in-depth knowledge of issues concerning Islam and the intellectual and spiritually enlightened schools of thought that have made the *ijtihad* an essential practice which must be cultivated and exercised now more than ever in order to reconcile the precepts of our religion with the requirements of our times”.

In both cases, the goal is the same: to train citizens to behave wisely and moderately, to have faith in tolerance and the highest universal values, to respect others and to lead balanced lives.

Close examination of the aims of philosophy education leads to growing awareness of the extent to which they are consistent with UNESCO's recommendations and strategic lines of emphasis concerning the promotion of philosophy in the education systems that it has initiated since 2005. Such consistency is also apparent throughout the Study published by the Organization in 2007 under the title *Philosophy, a School of Freedom*.

The Tunisian education system, which can rightly be regarded as a school of emancipation and enlightenment, can but elevate philosophy to the forefront of its concerns.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are but a few thoughts that I wished to express as a preamble to the discussions that are about to begin. I am convinced that your work will make it possible to devise new solutions in order to consolidate the place of philosophy in our education systems.

Allow me to welcome you most warmly once more and to wish our illustrious and eminent guests an excellent stay. I wish this forum every success in its work.

Thank you very much for your attention.

# List of Participants in the High-Level Regional Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in the Arab Region Tunis, Tunisia, 11 and 12 May 2009

## *Host country – Tunisia*

### **1. H.E. Mr Hatem BEN SALEM**

Minister of Education and Training  
and President of the Tunisian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture

### **2. Mr Néjib AYED**

Director-General, National Centre for Pedagogical Innovation and Education Research (CNIPRE)

### **3. Ms Fatma TARHOUNI**

Secretary-General, Tunisian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture

## *Representatives of States from the Arab region*

### **4. Algeria**

#### **Mr Tachoua AÏSSA**

Inspector

### **5. Bahrain**

#### **Ms Ahlam Ahmed ALAMER**

Head of First Educational Zone for Academic and Development Affairs  
Ministry of Education

### **6. Djibouti**

#### **Ms Ayane Osman ABRAR**

High-school teacher and pedagogical advisor for philosophy

### **7. Egypt**

#### **Dr Saeed Abdou Sayed Ahmed NAFEE**

Professor, Vice-President, Alexandria University

### **8. Jordan**

#### **Mr Sa'ed RADAIEH**

First Secretary, Embassy of Jordan in Tunisia

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### **23. Prof. Abdelaziz LABIB**

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### **25. Prof. Fathi TRIKI**

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**27. Mr Mohamed BAN DAAMER**

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**28. Mr Khemaïes BOUALI**

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**29. Mr Adel HADDAD**

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**30. Mr Tijani GMATI**

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**31. Ms Houda KEFI**

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**32. M. Habib KTITA**

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