

# THE PRESENCE OF CULTURE WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

A member of the Superior Council of Education, the Estates General on Education, and the Working Group on the Curriculum Reform, Paul Inchauspé was a primary participant in curriculum reform in Québec. In response to the Corbo report, Inchauspé and his working group examined questions of school and culture, asking: (1) What should constitute curriculum content for compulsory schooling? (2) What curriculum content confirms “inclusive culture”? (3) How can the presence of “culture” be insured within the curriculum? In these questions curriculum is defined as those “learnings, skills, and attitudes that a student must master ... in their basic formation.”<sup>1</sup>

Inchauspé reviews events that led to these questions. He starts with America’s *A Nation at Risk*,<sup>2</sup> following which (in 1986) the Quebec National Assembly organized public meetings focused on the quality of education, attracting almost 6000 participants; one criticism widely expressed was that the school had become a “catch-all.”<sup>3</sup> In 1992 and 1993, two ministerial committees also critiqued the curriculum, but the reform they proposed was judged “too cosmetic.”<sup>4</sup> In 1993, the Superior Council of Education issued a statement concerning the nature and scope of curriculum reform; entitled *Renovating the Elementary and Secondary School Curriculum*, it appeared 15 days after the publication of the Corbo report.<sup>5</sup> These public statements and debates concerning curriculum content were influenced by lobbies representing the various academic disciplines; Inchauspé laments that the “climate around these questions was likened to the Tower of Babel and the merchants in the Temple.”<sup>6</sup>

Many critics focused on the secondary school, where the “framing-study programs” were judged to be “fiasco,” a failure to be corrected by the imposition of Skinnerian programs of behavior control.<sup>7</sup> As in America (evidenced by *A Nation at Risk*), in Quebec the school had also become a “scapegoat” for politicians determined to deflect criticism of their handling of the economy; schooling (not their economic policies) was judged the “cause” of “economic failure.”<sup>8</sup> As in America, the cry became “return to the essentials,” led by the business lobby (evidently innocent of any responsibility for the economy), which forged an alliance with universities, establishing the Business-University Forum, in which Claude Corbo participated.<sup>9</sup> Still inspired by school reform in the United States,<sup>10</sup> the Business-University Forum issued *Learning Goals from Kindergarten to Secondary*, outlining the “basic competencies” required for entering the “job market.”<sup>11</sup>

While a few had “high hopes” for the Working Group on Curriculum Reform, more were confident of its failure. Inchauspé recounts facing a crowded schedule, an absence of research assistance and guidelines, as well as the fact that members of the Group did not know each other. Besides the documents provided by the Business-

University forum, the Corbo report constituted the “matrix” of what counted as curriculum reform.<sup>12</sup> “The first working days were horrible,” Inchauspé remembers, as Group members managed to talk past each other while taking positions “very far apart from each other.”<sup>13</sup> Inchauspé could not imagine himself signing any report that promoted a “purely instrumental view of school.”<sup>14</sup>

Debate subsided when Group members agreed upon the “essential characteristics” of the “emerging world,” among them “globalization, knowledge explosion, accelerated technological development, a more complex social life,” a world for which, they agreed, children must be prepared.<sup>15</sup> Passing over school subjects in favour of “larger knowledge areas,” the Group identified broad areas focusing students’ study of “methodological competencies, language, mathematics, the social world, science and technology, the arts, physical education.”<sup>16</sup> Evidently the mandate of the Group – issued by the Minister of Education – included the question of “training profiles,” but Inchauspé wanted to “answer in such a way” that avoided the “reduced” and “instrumental” curriculum toward which the back-to-the-basic movement was “pulling us.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he hoped that such a conceptualization of the curriculum – as broad areas - might evade the “disciplinary lobbyists ... by bringing another player into the debate, the public.”<sup>18</sup> “Even more important,” Inchauspé continues, by emphasizing “major learning domains, we were saying that it is by introducing the child in the context of the school to this human heritage that we allow the child to live in this world.”<sup>19</sup> That “human heritage is that which makes civilizations,” he continues, a heritage comprised of “language and its works, science and mathematics, the arts and institutions,” those “human productions that have transformed our natural world.”<sup>20</sup>

Inchauspé characterizes their proposal a curriculum of “culture, ” one that all students must study, even those who do not intend to pursue post-secondary academic study. To inculcate such culture, more than the curriculum must change; the school itself must be “making sure that students learn and enjoy learning” as they are initiated into the “world of culture,” a concept incorporating the concept of socialization as well as preparation for “adult life,” emphasizing “success.”<sup>21</sup> Despite the economic sound of “success,” Inchauspé and his colleagues – in contrast to the Corbo Report (“Preparing Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”) – considered study of – instruction<sup>22</sup> in - both the contemporary and historical world important, the so-called “little subjects” as well as the traditional humanities.<sup>23</sup>

What of the contemporary pluralist world should be studied? Inchauspé cites the conception of “common public culture” advanced by Julien Harvey and Gary Caldwell, the elements of which they declined to specify, except to say “common public culture” represented their effort to “understand what could bring Québécois together beyond their origins, and their religious and ethnic background,” a “sense and awareness of common belonging,” requiring a “common curriculum” addressed to all.<sup>24</sup> Raising this question raised the matter of religious instruction in Quebec schools, as well as questions of “value, history, and language,” difficult even contentious questions that

“had been touched upon in the Corbo Report,” but now required a more complete engagement.<sup>25</sup> Inchauspé adds: “Since as a commissioner I had the opportunity to listen to more than 900 hours of public testimony, I was resolute, when I accepted to preside the Working Group on the Reform of the Curriculum of Study, not to avoid addressing these difficult questions.”<sup>26</sup>

Another element of the contemporary world demanding curricular attention, Inchauspé continues, is the “integration of immigrants,” e.g. including immigrants in the “common public culture,” a challenge that raised questions of “national identity,” “common language,” the curricular role of religion, even the nature “integration” itself, all of these concerns raised within the context of nationalism (specifically the second referendum on Quebec’s sovereignty), questioning the multiculturalism that had been included in the Canadian constitution.<sup>27</sup> “Ethnic” nationalism could be contrasted to “territorial” or even to “civic” nationalism; Inchauspé notes that the philosopher Charles Taylor advocated a conception of “converging” “communal” values.<sup>28</sup> Would 300 years of Francophone history become a curricular “center of gravity that would enable the newcomers to integrate,” or would it become incorporated in what Dimitrios Karmis had described as “comprehensive collective identities”?<sup>29</sup>

“The Working Group [over which] I was presiding,” Inchauspé tells us, “could therefore not avoid these questions, but it was a minefield.” Despite the danger, he proceeded, determined to grapple with “integration” in an expansive cultural sense: “what should be a curriculum of study that takes into account the new student population ... helping their integration into the host society?” He asked: “[C]annot schooling accelerate this passage towards integration with the children of newcomers and what is the role of curriculum content?” These “questions posed by integration” Inchauspé knew were “crucial” if the curriculum were to encourage “a sense of belonging: language, religions, values, history. We thus had to touch upon them.”<sup>30</sup>

The answers to these questions are registered in the second chapter of the report *Reaffirming the School* titled “Expectations Regarding the Curriculum of Study,” in a section titled “Answering Expectations Regarding the Mission of Socialization.” Four topics are named: (1) the quest for meaning, (2) the communal values resting on communal purpose, (3) the question of national history, and (4) the question of language. There emerged a fifth topic: the question of social exclusion. Together, these five, reasoned Inchauspé and his colleagues in the Group, would strengthen the social cohesion prerequisite to “any school seeking to be democratic.”<sup>31</sup>

Public consultation followed – he estimates that as many as 40,000 attended regional meetings on curriculum reform – from which a report was issued. *Exposing the Situation* (1995) describes the debates, among them (1) “the nature of the educational mission, (2) accessibility and success, (3) the first four years of elementary school, (4) pedagogical dynamics, (5) professional training and technique, (6) continuing studies, (7) sharing power and responsibilities, (8) private education, (9) confessionality [issues of religion], and (10) financing.”<sup>32</sup> A conference followed featuring 64 speakers, among

them representatives from education, health, social services, community groups, municipalities, and churches. The conference was covered by the media, including television. A final report was submitted to the Minister of Education on September 23, 1996, and made public on October 10, 1996.<sup>33</sup>

Inchauspé reviews the history and present teaching of mathematics,<sup>34</sup> history,<sup>35</sup> science,<sup>36</sup> noting that education professors in Quebec have not been especially “interested with questions concerning the curriculum of study,” focusing instead on “theories of learning, teaching modes, and assessment.”<sup>37</sup> Also contributing to the contentious complexity of curriculum reform was the pervasiveness of lobbying, including from those advocating for more art and literature; others emphasizing the political history of Quebec. Even Prime Minister Jacques Parizeau lobbied, insisting that “too little place” had been accorded to those “course subjects” said [to be] cultural,<sup>38</sup> endorsing an effort by those advocating for more time devoted to art. Inchauspé reports that the Group declined to see support for the arts reduced to the number of hours devoted to it; what was important, he reiterates, were “broader questions on the entire conception of school as a “culture breeding ground.”<sup>39</sup>

To address those questions, Inchauspé suggested that the Working Group’s report start with be a signed statement on “the state of the school,” asserting that: (1) schools must provide equal opportunity for all; (2) all stakeholders must take responsibility for the state of the schools; (3) schools should ensure mastery of what needs to be known; (4) schools should attend to the “personal work” students undertake in schools; (5) schools are also cultural institutions; (6) schools are insufficiently demanding; and (7) schools should save curricular space for professional and technical training.<sup>40</sup>

Of the seven, number five is primary, as Inchauspé and his colleagues felt the relationship between the school and culture was crucial, worrying that schools might forget they function “within the universe of culture, ” by which they mean that all “school subjects are not sufficiently taught within a perspective of cultural formation,” a complaint made also, apparently, by Québec youth: “The essential of culture is missing, the links between what is learned in school, their synthesis, their meaning.”<sup>41</sup> Declaring that language curriculum cannot be reduced to a series of skills, the Group asserted that one’s “mother tongue [is] a site of belonging,” a “country and a heritage about which we need to know the significant expressions and the key works.”<sup>42</sup>

One’s formation as a citizen depends on such knowledge, Inchauspé and his colleagues continued, asking: “Can the initiation to democracy one engages in school be devoid of the political and social history of those institutions that have shaped our society?”<sup>43</sup> So that students are positioned as democrats in their everyday experience at school, the classroom must be seen (as progressives, after John Dewey, have argued) as a laboratory of democracy, but also linked – Inchauspé affirmed – with the acquisition of knowledge, a long-time conservative position. Both progressive and conservative positions have been superseded by science and technology, but Inchauspé

is determined that these too be placed within culture, asking: “How could the study of sciences and technology, which is also an integral part of culture, be detached from the study of the conditions prerequisite to their discoveries and from their effects on human activities?”<sup>44</sup>

Inchauspé and his colleagues asked if the school could “take more advantage of cultural institutions?”<sup>45</sup> In the same vein they questioned the reduction of teaching to instruction, asking: “Is not the teacher’s role, besides organizing, directing and evaluating learning, first and foremost to open up horizons, to prompt thinking, to awaken and even to disturb?”<sup>46</sup> They concluded that “one cannot truly be literate if one remains uneducated,” that last term connoting “uncultured.”<sup>47</sup> All schooling constitutes a cultural education, they reiterated, requiring revision of curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher education, all concentrated in a final question: “How do we divert the student from a deeply utilitarian conception of instruction if it is not rooted in a living culture?”<sup>48</sup>

Despite this eloquence and clarity, Inchauspé starts the next section with the admission that “the question does not take hold.”<sup>49</sup> While no one opposes “cultural enrichment” – just, as he notes, no one opposes “virtue” – many reasserted utilitarianism as the compulsory structuring force of what students must study.<sup>50</sup> In this response mathematics, science, and technology were rarely mentioned, perhaps because their (utilitarian) value is universally assumed? Inchauspé wonders: “what is happening?”<sup>51</sup> Cannot others see that simply adding hours in certain subjects will not make the school a “breeding ground of culture?”<sup>52</sup> Utilitarianism is incompatible with a curriculum of “comprehensive formation” and the “fulfillment of the person.”<sup>53</sup>

Inchauspé notes that the arts curricula were often organized around “personal expression,” but, he adds, emphasizing personal expression by itself is “not cultural,”<sup>54</sup> as the immediacy of personal expression splits it off from the past, specifically from art history. For the school to become a cultural “breeding ground,” the curriculum must convey not only the arts and humanities but also the sciences and their “techniques,” as “all school subjects [are] cultural productions.”<sup>55</sup> While his colleagues concurred with his critique of utilitarianism, they were skeptical that his “cultural perspective” could be “the antidote.”<sup>56</sup> They would allow the disciplinary specialists to develop the curriculum.<sup>57</sup>

Inchauspé resisted, asking why this aversion to a “cultural perspective?”<sup>58</sup> Had, he wondered, the obsession with objectives and Skinnerian behaviorism “chloroformed minds?”<sup>59</sup> The focus was only on the “how,” not on the “what,” e.g. curriculum content and meaning.<sup>60</sup> Why had behaviorism taken such “hold” in the schools, without “distance or critiques,” and with the “unanimous complicity and the scurried ‘expertise’ of the Faculties of Educational Sciences?”<sup>61</sup> Inchauspé resolved to write a book on these questions.

Inchauspé also organized a conference - School and Culture - focused on the question: “how can we correct curriculum shortfalls on matters of culture?”<sup>62</sup> The

“result,” he tells us, citing the report of his working group - *Reaffirming School* – was “the enhancement of cultural content, and what that means.”<sup>63</sup> The report advised that the “cultural perspective” must (1) determine the selection of subjects comprising the school’s curriculum of study, (2) “re-balance” the school subjects to include “a more comprehensive knowledge of cultural productions,” and (3) ensure “that the cultural approach is taught in every subject.”<sup>64</sup> The report specified “essential knowledge” in each of the “large learning domains” (e.g. the “social universe,” the “arts,” “technology, science, mathematics” as well as “personal development”) and it indicated how “the integration of the cultural perspective in each of these fields [can be] taught as school subjects.”<sup>65</sup> Two appendices provided analyses of each school subject according to this inclusion of a “cultural perspective,” specifying what needs to be altered to achieve inclusion.<sup>66</sup>

The proposed curriculum reform did not only concern the “cultural perspective,” as it included many recommendations concerning curriculum organization, long-term goals (including what broad concepts students should know), course content (e.g. within history, science, etc.), the “freeing of professional space for teachers” (including abandoning the formulation of curriculum through objectives and the use of “closed questions” in assessment) as well as the presence of the cultural perspective in all school subjects.<sup>67</sup> The revision was implemented.<sup>68</sup>

But the curriculum was implemented, Inchauspé reports, in “silence,” then redirected toward “competence,” recasting curriculum reform as pedagogical reform, provoking “cacophonous debates,” so that “the essentials ... were lost.”<sup>69</sup> Once pedagogy replaced curriculum and competence replaced culture, the behaviorists in the educational sciences reclaimed control: “It is enough to make you cry,”<sup>70</sup> laments Inchauspé. To reactivate the relations between “culture” and “curriculum of study” requires, he suggests, “experience,” not the Ministry of Education nor the Faculties of Educational Sciences; he concludes wistfully: “I trust only in the teachers themselves and in the professional associations representing them.”<sup>71</sup>

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## COMMENTARY

A member of the Superior Council of Education, the Estates General on Education, and the Working Group on the Curriculum Reform, Paul Inchauspé was a primary participant in Québec curriculum reform. This remarkable first-person account of his and colleagues’ work registers the insidious influence of instrumentalism – and (Inchauspé suggests), its handmaiden, Québec faculties of education – in curriculum reform. In his insistence on culture I detected (a possibly intentional) ambiguity between anthropological and aesthetic senses of the term; however expansive the concept, it seems to me to smuggle instrumentalism back in, evident

when Inchauspé and his colleagues invoke the formation of future citizens as one rationale for the knowledge they deem of most worth. I prefer to rationalize curriculum choices upon ethics not outcomes. That said, I am heartened by his emphasis upon culture, including the study of science and technology as cultural phenomena, not as vocational entrepreneurial opportunities. If ethics require us to constrain instrumentalism, its academic subspecies – such as vocationalism and social engineering - need to be constrained as well. Culture could be a contrapuntal curricular concept, if rationalized ethically, that is.

## REFERENCES

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Inchauspé (2014, 5) quotes an opening line of the report - "If another country had imposed on us the education system that we gave ourselves, we would be in our rights to declare them war" – but there seems (from my point of view) insufficient recognition of the profoundly political (and jingoistic) nature of the report, rendering it, one should think, ineligible for even inspiration in Quebec.

<sup>3</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 5-6. The Tower of Babel refers, of course, to the narrative in Genesis 11:1–9 that purports to explain why the world's peoples speak different languages. The

“merchants” phrase refers to Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-18.

<sup>7</sup> Inchauspe 2014, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Inchauspe 2014, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Inchauspe 2014, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Whether Quebec critics took curriculum reform in the U.S. to be sincere or whether they saw how curriculum could become a public political issue I’m in no position to say. That it was the latter in the U.S. is undeniable: see Berliner and Biddle 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 7. He notes that the Forum also issued *Learning for the Future*, a document he judges as “much more interesting” than the one on competencies (2014, 7).

<sup>12</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 8. To have signed such a report, he explains in a footnote, would have meant disavowing the “school of my childhood, a school that made me who I am, a school where I learned to read, write and count, and where these instrumental learnings were surely considered as essential, but as preliminary, not as aims. The aims and purposes were the knowledge [in original French, the author uses knowledge in plural form: Bérard’s note] teachers allowed us to access, knowledge we were already tasting due to exceptional pedagogues.”

<sup>15</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 9. Save “methodological competencies” (a problematical phrasing to be sure, extracting methods from the disciplines they structure and produce), this list seems curiously close to school subjects already taught, despite the embrace of “larger knowledge areas,” akin to the “broad fields pattern” sometimes followed in the United States (Pinar et al. 1995, 687).

<sup>17</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 10-11. The phrase “making sure” connotes to me a culture of authoritarianism, something it surely did not to Inchauspé and his colleagues.

<sup>22</sup> There was a debate over the concept of “instruct,” as it seemed to reaffirm traditional even authoritarian pedagogical practices, but Inchauspé declined to quibble: see Inchauspé 2014, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 18. Civic nationalism would be congruent with French nationalism: “[T]o be French is a matter of committing yourself to being French,” Ryan (2020, March 26, 56) writes, “and that is open to foreigners under appropriate conditions. Conversely, one can cease to be French by emigrating.”

<sup>29</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 24.

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- <sup>32</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 25.
- <sup>33</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 25.
- <sup>34</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 28.
- <sup>35</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 28-29.
- <sup>36</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 29.
- <sup>37</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 30.
- <sup>38</sup> Quoted in Inchauspé 2014, 32.
- <sup>39</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 33. Bérard notes that the French word *bouillon* means “broth,” casting culture not as an itemized list but “as a ‘soup’ in which one swims.”
- <sup>40</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34, n. 43.
- <sup>41</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34.
- <sup>42</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4.
- <sup>43</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4.
- <sup>44</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4.
- <sup>45</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4.
- <sup>46</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4.
- <sup>47</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4. Bérard notes that the French term she translated as “uneducated” literally means “uncultured.”
- <sup>48</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 34-35. Quoted from Estates Generals, 1995-1996. *Overview of the Situation, Foreword*, p. 4.
- <sup>49</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 35.
- <sup>50</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 35.
- <sup>51</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 35.
- <sup>52</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 36.
- <sup>53</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 36.
- <sup>54</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 36.
- <sup>55</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 36.
- <sup>56</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 38.
- <sup>57</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 38.
- <sup>58</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 39.
- <sup>59</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 39.
- <sup>60</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 39.
- <sup>61</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 39.
- <sup>62</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 41.
- <sup>63</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 41-42.
- <sup>64</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 41-42.
- <sup>65</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 41-42.
- <sup>66</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 41-42.
- <sup>67</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 42.
- <sup>68</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 42.
- <sup>69</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 43.

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<sup>70</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 43.

<sup>71</sup> Inchauspé 2014, 44.