

Project Stohrenschule

A project of the Plato Society of Zagreb on philosophizing with children and adults

Directed by

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and

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Project Stohrenschule, directed by Marie-Élise Zovko of the Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb and Renate Kroschel, of Stohrenschule, Münstertal and Margarete-Ruckmich-Akademie, Freiburg, is a program of philosophical activities and workshops for children, young people and adults addressing questions of human values in their living context. The project includes activities and workshops concerning topics like beauty, virtue, goodness, happiness, friendship, justice, and related themes like identity and universality, individuality and community, knowledge and reality, freedom and necessity, belief, emotions, intentionality, time and space, nature, culture, art, life, death, God. Graduate students and graduates from the University of Zagreb Croatian Studies/ Dept. of Philosophy and the University of Zadar, Humanities Studies Doctoral Program in Philosophy, as well as volunteers from other walks of life, cooperate on the project.

Project Stohrenschule was inspired by the unique one-room elementary school Stohrenschule, located in Stohren in the upper Black Forest and directed until 2012 by Benno and Renate Kroschel. It takes special inspiration from the work of Renate Kroschel, who in cooperation with her husband Benno and the children of Stohrenschule, practiced philosophizing with children according to her own methods for over thirty years.

A single-classroom "shepherd school" originally serving grades 1-9, Stohrenschule, the smallest state-run elementary school in Germany, now houses around 22 children in grades 1-4 from the local community. As a result of a 2-year study conducted by Ms. Kroschel and commissioned by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Culture, the principle of philosophizing with children was introduced as universal principle of elementary school instruction in all subjects in the state of Baden-Württemberg.

Renate Kroschel and Marie-Élise Zovko met in the early 1980's while attending lectures by Werner Beierwaltes and the late Michael Elsässer at the University of Freiburg. Project Stohrenschule grew out of their conversations regarding philosophy and philosophizing, and out of decades of shared reflection on philosophical themes. Fruit of their philosophical friendship and their shared

interest in promoting a "dialogical culture of learning", the principles and methods which crystallized in those conversations aimed to awaken curiosity and initiative, to instill a permanent attitude of questioning and of wonder, and to inspire a spirit of exploration, inventiveness, optimism, and endeavour among children, young people and adults.

The plan to organize a program of activities, beginning with a week-long workshop in Stohren under the title *Project Stohrenschule: A Philosophical and Pedagogical dialogue on Virtue, Beauty and Happiness*, was launched pursuant to a joint lecture and forum discussion by Renate and Lise on the topic "Platonism and Forms of Intelligence in Education" held at the Intl. Symposium, *Platonism & Forms of Intelligence* in Hvar, 2006. In keeping with the principle of dialogue and shared exploration of philosophically relevant themes, participants in the project proposed their own original project activities. These were formulated according to a unified scheme, revised in common, and tested with children at the German international school in Zagreb. The first week-long project, *Projekt Stohrenschule: Ein philosophisch-pädagogischer Dialog zum Thema Tugend, Schönheit und Glück*, directed by Renate Kroschel and Lise Zovko, in cooperation with Benno Kroschel, former school principal Kurt Ruh, the parents and children of Stohrenschule, and an international group of doctoral students in philosophy, and including a full program of workshops for children, activities for parents, and philosophical colloquia for the activities facilitators, took place in Stohren in March, 2008.

Since then, project members have conducted workshops and presentations in elementary and high schools in Sinj, Hvar, Stari Grad (Hvar), Jelsa (Hvar), Žakanje, Kamanje, Čakovec, Mala subotica, Samobor, and Zagreb in Croatia, as well as an invited presentation and workshop at the Annual Meeting of *Sophia - The European Foundation for the Advancement of Doing Philosophy with Children*, in Ghent, Belgium in November 2009. In 2010/2011, and again in 2012/2013, the project was awarded grants by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport under competitions for NGO's involved in extracurricular education, for proposals regarding the topic *Promoting community, compassion tolerance and peaceful coexistence using methods of philosophizing with Children*. These grants provided funding to conduct workshops and activities in partner schools in five counties in Croatia, as well as continuing education seminars on topics like *Doing Philosophy with Children*, *Philosophizing with Children: Promoting a Creative Approach to Education*, *Philosophizing with Children on Life and Death* directed in cooperation with the Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb, with R. Kroschel of Stohrenschule, and with M. Bralo and K. Zeitler of Akademie Kinder Philosophieren, Freising, Germany. In 2013, The

Plato Society of Zagreb and Project Stohrenschule organized, in cooperation with the Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb, and the City of Hvar, the International Symposium *Bildung and paideia: Philosophical Models of Education* (Hvar, October 12-17, 2013). Project Stohrenschule and the Plato Society of Zagreb also co-sponsored the Annual Network Meeting of Sophia *Ways into Philosophy* which took place in Zagreb from May 8-11, 2014. As first signatory of the international initiative "Charter for Compassion" in Croatia, The Plato Society of Zagreb and its initiative Project Stohrenschule seek to promote the Charter in Croatian schools by means of philosophical and creative activities aimed at exploring the role of empathy in human thought and behaviour.

Members of the Plato Society cooperating in Project Stohrenschule activities are also members of *Sophia* and participate in international projects and continuing education programs in methods of philosophizing with children, for example, in continuing education programs at the *Akademie Kinder Philosophieren im Bildungswerk der bayrischen Wirtschaft e.V.* in Freising, Germany, as well as in workshops organized by Project Stohrenschule at the Institute of Philosophy. Activities are continually being developed and adapted for use in a variety of settings, both with younger and high school age children and with adults.

The approach to philosophy and philosophizing with children, young people, and adults applied in Project Stohrenschule is based on our understanding of the principles of Socratic and Platonic dialogue, as well as on Immanuel Kant's humanist and enlightenment ethics, and his understanding of the role and importance of reflective (aesthetic and teleological) judgment, and education of taste, in bridging the divide between knowledge and morality, nature and freedom, society and individuality.

Modern research in the area of neural and cognitive science, psychology, and artificial intelligence confirms the division of intelligent faculties first described by Plato in his Analogy of the Line, as well as the necessity of their integration and cooperation for the healthy development of the human personality, the successful evolution of socialization processes, the advancement of knowledge, and for encouragement of creativity and innovation. It was clear to Plato and is also clear to neural scientists that "noetic" thought, i.e. higher-level perception, symbolic and analogical reasoning (so-called "right-brain" hemispheric functions) play an indispensable role in achieving the highest potential of human intellectual development. Nevertheless, these abilities are frequently downplayed, neglected, even negated and undermined by regular school education, which emphasizes transmission of information, a

representational view of reality, and analytic reasoning, and applies a primarily quantitative, mechanical, and positivistic approach to learning content in artificial detachment from and to the detriment of perceptual and intuitive abilities, whose cultivation forms an equally necessary prerequisite for the attainment of fruitbearing insights, the formation of balanced judgment, and the kind of satisfaction of mind that promotes joy in learning.

The present global economic, political and ecological crisis could easily be understood as the result of a cumulative crisis of judgment, and as a consequence of the failure of educational systems to nurture intelligence in all its richness and variety and the entire person as an individual in community and a being in nature. Project Stohrenschule strives, by placing special emphasis on artistic and creative exploration of questions of human values within the context of a culture of shared philosophical dialogue, to contribute to a restoration of a proper balance of human intellectual capacities in the individual and in society.

The principle of respect for the dignity of every single human being which guides our activities contributes to a culture of mutual respect and voluntary self-limitation for the good of the community, encouraging a spirit of empathy, solidarity and compassion for other living beings, as well as subordination of immediate need to shared universal values and goals - at the same time affirming a positive self-image, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Exploration of human beings' specific relationship to body and nature teaches humility and respect before the conditions of human existence, both as individuals and members of the human community who reveal themselves to be at once part of nature and beings with a unique calling and responsibility in the history of the universe.

Opportunities to model, mould, draw, paint, compose, perform, conceive and carry out projects of their own inspiration, to embark on interior, meditative and exterior reflective "excursions" into their surroundings enable participants to explore and test philosophical ideas in media that engage the senses, attract and stimulate the imagination, and satisfy the human longing to continually (re)create a "world in one's own image", i.e. to embody in original creative works ever-new perspectives on the journey and path of human existence traversed at the special level of awareness made possible by philosophical reflection.

Activities are aimed at awakening the senses to our passage through time and space, to our rootedness in and connectedness with nature and with one another through nature as individuals in community.

The activities are hands-on, open-ended, evolutionary, a "work in progress" -

based on the conviction that children (young people, parents, adults) *have something to teach us* - about teaching, about learning, about themselves and the world as they see and experience it, about the questions we put to them, and the philosophical themes we reflect on - and that we can only learn from them if we are truly prepared to listen, to change and to grow, to modify our own standpoint, to risk losing what we thought we knew in learning to see through others' eyes.

Alongside their pedagogical activities, members of the project meet regularly in the context of the *Zagreb New School of Philosophical Discourse/Plato Society Lecture and Colloquia Series* for discussion of philosophical topics and reading interpretation of philosophical works.

Project Stohrenschnle - Quick Facts

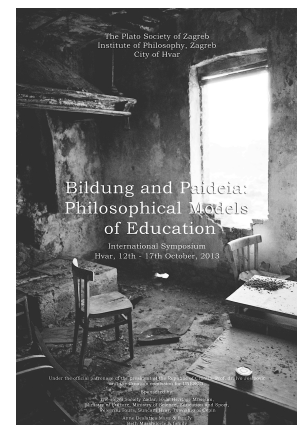
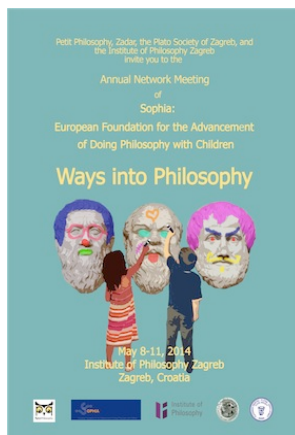
- ✚ founded September 2006, sponsored by The Plato Society of Zagreb
- ✚ takes its inspiration from Stohrenschnle practice/principle of Socratic dialogue/Kantian imperative - principle of respect for human dignity
- ✚ theme of activities are topics central to the meaning, understanding, value of human existence and to active and meaningful engagement in the choices, aims, projects, goals which contribute to a rewarding and meaningful moulding of our possibilities as individuals and members of the human community
- ✚ activities are open-ended, fundamentally democratic, cooperative, inclusive, non-judgmental. Their approach assumes that participants always have something positive and often new and unexpected to contribute both to the theme of the activities and to their method. The activities are thus constantly evolving.
- ✚ emphasis is on cooperation of participants in exploration of ideas and questions and creative production related to the themes of the activities, as an exercise in human encounter and communication, for the cultivation of tolerance, mutual respect, social cohesion and integration
- ✚ activities aim to encourage and nurture the kind of "right-brain" activity generally neglected in school education, and exploration of the integral functioning of subconscious, non-propositional brain activity in reflection, by employing a variety of arts and other media
- ✚ Some media used include:



- theatre and improvisation, based on methods developed by Augusto Boal and others in the Theatre of the Oppressed (cf. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, *Rainbow of Desire*, and other works by Boal)
 - visual arts – based on insights gained from study of functional differentiation of types of neural activity (popularly known as left/right brain functionality, formerly "hemispheric localisation of brain functions). Here we take our inspiration from Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*.
 - myths, stories and fairy tales
 - music appreciation and improvisation
 - meditation and relaxation techniques
 - imaginative nature walks, creation of gardens, practice of gardening
 - creative encounter with advertising and media content – reflection on images from daily life as means for discovery of values
- ✚ members include undergraduate and graduate students of philosophy from Univ. of Zagreb and the University of Zadar, as well as interested persons from a variety of professions
- ✚ collaborators and partners include: Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb; Stohrenschule, Müntertal; German International School, Zagreb; Akademie Kinder Philosophieren, Freising; Sabina Bayruši (using improvisational techniques with marginalized, discriminated, disadvantaged, victims of abuse), Theater-Pädagogisches Zentrum Münster (Wilhelm Neu, Sozialpädagoge); Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb; Mala filozofija, Zadar; Elementary Schools Žakanje, Kamanje, Ribik; City of Hvar Elementary School; Elementary School Petar Hektorovic, Stari Grad; Jelsa Elementary School; Josip Slavenski High School, Cakovec; J.J. Strossmayer Elementary School; Michael Šiloboda Elementary School; Tomaš Goričanca Elementary School Mala subotica; Josip Juraj Strossmayer Elementary School, Zagreb; Ivan Lovric Elementary School, Sinj, Stenjevec Elementary School, Zagreb; Oton Ivekovic Elementary School, Zagreb, Trešnjevka Kindergarten
- ✚ sponsors/funding: Ministry of Science and Education, Republic of Croatia; Croatian Studies Program, Univ. of Zagreb; Parents and children of Stohrenschule; DAAD; Ured za kulturu, Grad Zagreb; City of Hvar, City of Stari Grad
- ✚ members participate in and organize international conferences (Institut für Kinderphilosophie, Graz: "Denken, Kreativität und Philosophie bei Kindern," October 2009, Annual Meeting of Sophia. European Foundation for the Advancement of Doing Philosophy with Children, Ghent, Belgium 2009; Intl. Symposium PvC/Y Brussels, Belgium 2009; DAAD Studienreise Berlin/Münster, October 2009; Institut für Kinderphilosophie, Graz, *Kindheit und Demokratie* (invited paper by M.E. Zovko "Reasons for Democracy") October 2011; UNESCO Human Security, Democracy and Philosophy Section/ Social and Human Sciences Sector: Regional High-Level Meeting on Teaching Philosophy in Europe and North America", Milan, Italy, veljača 2011 (M.E. Zovko, representative of Croatian Ministry of Science, Education & Sport); Intl. Symposium of the Plato Society of Zagreb: *Bildung and paideia*.

Philosophical models of education (Hvar, October 12-17, 2013); Annual Meeting of Sophia: European Foundation for Advancement of Doing Philosophy with Children *Ways into Philosophy*, Zagreb, May 9-11, 2014 (coorganizer) 2012 - Plato Society of Zagreb, Project Stohrenschule - First signatories of Charter for Compassion in the Republic of Croatia

- + members participate in and also organize continuing education seminars in cooperation with Stohrenschule, Müntertal; Akademie Kinder Philosophieren, e.V. Freising; Theater-Pädagogisches Zentrum, Münster, Croatian Center for Drama Education (HCDO), Studio-Kubus, Workshops on Improvisational Theatre, Pula Forum - Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed/ Rio, Brazil, June 2010



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