

Philosophy, philosophy instruction and philosophizing with Children in Croatia

Joint Report to UNESCO

by

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I. Philosophy, logic and ethic at pre-university level

by

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In all Croatian high schools, there is a school subject **ethics** as an elective. Pupils are allowed to choose between ethics and Roman Catholic religious instruction (in some schools there is also Christian Orthodox religious instruction). Ethics is taught in all grades of high school, once a week, i.e. 35 school lessons a year.

**Logic** as a school subject comes in the 3rd year of secondary school (the 11<sup>th</sup> grade). Logic is taught once a week, i.e. 35 school lessons a year. Units are Introduction to logic; Relations of logic, philosophy and science; Concept/idea, judgment; Conclusion, syllogism; Logic of judgment, logic of predicate; Inductive and deductive method and scientific research and logic.

**Philosophy** as a school subject exists in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade or final year of all secondary schools (gymnasia), but it is also offered as electoral subject to some professions in professional high schools (preparation for academies). Philosophy is held twice a week, i.e. 70 school lessons a year, and has three versions of syllabi. One approach is so-called historical approach that is processing a history of philosophy from Thales to Gadamer. This is the most popular approach among philosophy teachers in secondary schools. Another approach is the so-called problems approach, where philosophy is taught through certain philosophical issues (what is world, cognition, morals, God, epistemology...). The third and the least-used version of philosophy instruction among philosophy teachers is a combination of these two approaches.

The Agency for Education and the Croatian Philosophical Society (CPS) organize **Logic and Philosophy Competitions** at the school, county and state level. Eleven competitions in logic and eight competitions in philosophy have been held so far. Logic competition is mostly based on contemporary logic assignments. The philosophy competition has two parts. The

first is an exam with questions from the history of philosophy. The second part involves writing essays based on predefined selections from philosophical literature. On the state level of the competition, there is a third, the deciding part, in which the competitors respond to questions also from a selection of philosophical literature provided in advance. An initiative to have our students participate in The International Philosophical Olympiad came from the CPS. A Croatian delegation first took part at the 15<sup>th</sup> Olympiad held in Anatoly in May 18-21<sup>st</sup> 2007.

## II. Major challenges currently faced by the teaching of the human and social sciences in general, and by philosophy teaching in particular

by

Marie-Élise Zovko

The vital importance of the study of the humanities in the traditional sense, and of philosophy, culture and humanity in their contemporary context, has received insufficient attention in European Union policy on Education and Training in recent years. Yet many of the goals set by that policy, eg. promotion of tolerance and of cultural diversity, human rights' education, education for civil governance and education for sustainability, are directly or indirectly dependent on the permanent and ever-renewed cultivation of our tangible and intangible cultural heritage, in the main the special task and calling of the *humanities*. The humanities are not and cannot be sciences in the sense in which that word may be used of the natural and social sciences. Yet their study is of equal dignity and worth, and is as indispensable to the achievement of our full humanity as these.

Since their aim is not technological advancement, the humanities appear to many today to serve no particular purpose, yet with them lies the key to the advancement of civilisation and the cultivation of our humanity, to the promotion of human rights and social cohesion, to the preservation of the natural environment and the conditions of human existence on earth, to the promotion of a just world order and to world peace. The question, "how then should we live?" - the motive question of the twenty-first century, requires namely a type of reflection that differs from the methods of empirical research and experiment applied in the natural and social sciences. The subject matter of the humanities is not quantifiable and cannot be reduced, measured or "resolved" by quantitative or deductive methods. Rather, the organic products of human culture, of the arts, music, literature, philosophy manifest and explore the living depths and infinitely variable complexity of the human spirit in the highest form of its expression, and it is precisely in their integral complexity that they are able to captivate our interest and motivate us to seek for the best and fullest realisation of our humanity as individuals and in society, as free moral agents and in our specific role as participants in the history of humankind and natural order of the universe.

Symptomatic of a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the humanities by EU policy on education and training is the fact that the cultivation of writing and effective writing practice has up till now been absent from EU strategy on education, higher education, and

research. Effective writing instruction and effective writing practice, however, must form an integral part of EU strategy, if that strategy is to succeed, since writing is the basis not only of civilisation and culture itself, but also of complex problem-solving, expository and argumentative ability, and hence of complex learning ability and advancement of knowledge as a whole, as well as creative and innovative thought. Expository and argumentative writing also ultimately provides the only firm basis for education for civil governance, participatory democracy, peaceful conflict resolution, and consequently the assurance of social cohesion and quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

The contradictory tendencies of EU strategy are also visible in certain aspects of the Bologna Process, like the introduction of the ECTS system. The ECTS, which ought to be a tool and instrument of reform, has threatened to become an end in itself, and to stifle genuine educational reform by attempting to quantify aspects of learning which in themselves are not quantifiable or measurable, and inhibiting individualisation, interdisciplinarity, and innovation essential both to the genuine advancement of knowledge and to the participatory nature of the democratic process. This represents a transformation of the original meaning of the Carnegie credit-hour which is not in the original spirit of the Bologna reform process, since it disregards qualitative differences of individuals, denying them both the recognition and nurturing of their unique abilities and their individual human dignity which is their basic human right and which must be taken into account, if highest standards of excellence in study and research are to be achieved.

The present global economic, political and environmental crises are above all the expression of a *crisis of judgment*. Our educational systems, in the race toward the realisation of the knowledge, i.e. the information society, have neglected to consider this most essential aspect of human intelligence. In the demand for innovative thinking, the manner in which the creative imagination may best be encouraged to unfold – through cultivation of the complex phenomena of the arts, religion, culture and their study, interpretation and preservation by the humanities, has been pushed aside to make room for ever greater quantities of information – without regard for the need for an understanding and nurturing of criteria and the capacity to judge, i.e. to compare and contrast, weigh and select, appreciate and affirm, that which is most in accord not only with immediate need or desire, but with who we are and who we were meant to be in the larger scheme of things.

Terms like "quality of life", "social cohesion", "sustainability" must remain empty jargon without reflection on the underlying assumptions upon which these perceived values are

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion of conflicting goals underlying EU policy on training and education and the Bologna Reform Process, and the associated need for a "writing revolution" formed the topic of a paper held by the author at the Tempus Seminar *Furtherance of Bologna Promotion in Croatia*, at the University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia March 9-10, 2007, Marie-Élise Zovko. "Bologna and Beyond: A Critical Reflection of the Ends and Means of the Bologna Process," to appear in revised form in: *Studia philosophica Jaderensia*. Ed. Andreas Arndt/Jure Zovko (Hannover: Wehrhahn-Verlag, 2010). Cf. the study by the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools and Colleges, *Writing and School Reform*, including *The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution*, (CollegeBoard, May 2006). Downloadable at: <http://www.writingcommission.org/report.html>.

based. In order to conceive of and freely espouse the proper ends of our actions and the means by which best to attain them, it is necessary to cultivate a permanent attitude of openness and questioning regarding the explicit and implicit goals of local, national and international policy, as well as the aims and values promoted by commercial advertising, marketing, manufacturing, global corporations, and the research and development which serve them. In order to be able to comprehend and evaluate the meaning and implication of the goals and values promoted by political, commercial and cultural entities, however, permanent reflection on foundational ideas like goodness, beauty, justice, individual and cultural identity, friendship, community, happiness, as well as on the possibility of knowledge, the manifold forms and functions of intelligence, and corresponding aspects of reality, is indispensable.

The capacity for empathy and for individual and social communication which form the basis of our humanity and our specific human sociability are cultivated properly by the *humaniora*, the humanities. The promotion of social cohesion, i.e. the harmonisation of individual freedom and respect for the freedom of others, requires cultivation of moral feeling and education of reflective judgment. Such formation, however, cannot be advanced by general rules or quantitative measures. Neither is the content to which reflective judgment refers to be found among the quantifiable empirical data of the natural and social sciences, nor can the rightness or soundness of judgment be assured by legal regulation. The means of assuring the proper standard for reflection and judgment is to be sought in a kind of apprenticeship to the proper exercise of judgment in exemplary situations – a hermeneutic circle requiring continual recourse to universally recognized principles and their creative application in action, word and work. The best condition for this kind of apprenticeship is the cultivation of self-examination and inquiry concerning the conditions and principles of human judgment, a philosophical attitude of reflection for which permanent mediation between the foundation of culture and nature in human consciousness, productivity and action forms the necessary basis.

In the philosophy of Kant and the German Idealists it is art which provides the preeminent expression of the unity of our human freedom and our participation in and dependence on the natural order. The cooperation of natural necessity and intentional activity in the creation of the work of art becomes thus an embodiment and form of expression for their ultimate harmonisation or unification, as well as of their postulated original identity. The unification of free self-determination and determination by the immanent necessity of the natural order and the laws according to which natural processes unfold are for the German Idealists the clearest expression of our humanity. Our unforced contemplation and enjoyment of the free play of freedom and necessity in the work of art provides us with a higher enjoyment, an internal echo and affirmation of the inalienable dignity of the human individual. At the same time this experience awakens hope for the realisation of an analogous harmonisation of individual self-determination and free acquiescence to the bounds set to individual freedom by the necessary self-limitation which forms a condition of peaceful coexistence in human society. Thus the ability to appreciate art and nature appears both as a condition, and as the ultimate achievement of the process of civilisation of humanity whose final aim in our time is perhaps most clearly manifest in the ideals expressed in the Universal Declarations on Human Rights and related declarations regarding the rights and duties universally attributed to human beings.

Socrates, in the dialogue *Phaedo* warns his interlocutors against losing heart with regard to

arguments, of which some prove to be sound, some unsound, but most of which fall somewhere in between. To abandon argument, however, because of the complexity and difficulty of the task is to risk becoming a *misologos*, a hater of argument, and by consequence a *misanthropos*, or hater of human beings. For *logos*, the word, reason, speech, definition and the associated ability to expound, explain, argue, justify, is that which is most specifically human, and *philology*, the cultivation of the word and all the literary, philosophical and cultural monuments associated with the word, appears to be consequently the best path to becoming a *philanthropos*. This connection is today threatening to be lost, although ever more attention is being paid to the preservation of humankind's "tangible" and "intangible" cultural heritage. In the field of philosophy, however, the neglect of "philology" is particularly acute. The now conventional division of philosophy into "analytical" and "continental", as well as their more or less haphazard association with the division between "contemporary" philosophy (taken to represent philosophy *per se*) and "history" of philosophy (taken by nature to be unphilosophical or "merely" of historical significance) is accepted unconditionally and uncritically on the basis of the unquestioned assumption that anything worth studying or thinking in the field of philosophy has to be new (more recent than the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and based more or less exclusively on the kind of research characteristic of the natural and social sciences, whereas insights into philosophical problems which may be gained by study of works of philosophers from previous centuries and millenia are believed to have been superseded and are hence relegated to the realm of the obsolete and superfluous, overcome by the ineluctable march of "progress" (a concept which itself comprises an historical phenomenon worthy of study), for which no "contemporary" philosopher can have any use.

This situation is typical not only for the division of philosophy not only at faculties in Croatia but throughout Europe, the U.S. and industrialised countries. And although the form of philosophy known as "analytic" represents only one type or historical school of philosophy alongside others, the so-called "Anglo-American analytical" school has come to dominate faculties around the world – often to the forced exclusion of other approaches. In Croatia, the point of view according to which study of so-called "contemporary" philosophy (clearly a misnomer for a philosophical school whose roots, ironically enough, date to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) by itself *implies* the knowledge of previous works and movements from the history of philosophy, has led some analytically inclined faculty members to regard the study of those works as superfluous, and to adopt an autocratic stance with respect to study of the great works of philosophy, even to the point of implementing repressive measures against students who express a desire to study premodern classic works of philosophy in their original form. That this stance violates and undermines the principle of academic freedom goes without saying. However, there is a more important respect in which it represents an implicit attack on the integrity of research and of the researcher. Namely, whereas in other fields a condition of valid research is familiarity with and acknowledgment of the accomplishments of previous generations of researchers in one's field, the uncritical acceptance of the division of philosophy described above tends to undermine this fundamental principle. Refusal to study or permit to study the works of philosophy of previous generations at best results in ignorance of and negligence of the obligation to acknowledge previous achievements in one's field, at worst to a denial of history or of the historicity of one's own position.

It is not the case, however, that "progress", whether with regard to technological advances, or to new knowledge gained by research in the natural and social sciences, has rendered reflection and argument concerning philosophical problems from pre-modern works of philosophy superfluous or obsolete. On the contrary, the quality and content of reflection on philosophical problems related to the subject matter of the natural and social sciences from classic works from the history of philosophy remains in many cases unsurpassed and even unparalleled by more recent research in the field of philosophy in their ability to illuminate the results of that research and relate them to moral considerations and to the higher aims of our humanity.

### III. Current perceptions with regard to the value of philosophy teaching at all levels of education – The situation of philosophizing with children in Croatia (M.-E. Zovko)

With regard to need to reexamine the division of philosophy and the neglect or even repudiation of philosophy's cultural heritage among philosophers, as well as with regard to the preservation and promotion of the principle of freedom of research, philosophizing with children comes as a timely development in the field of philosophical research. Still widely looked down upon by professional philosophers as dealing merely with educational methods, rather than as comprising a legitimate branch and constitutive part of philosophical research, philosophizing with children, young people, students and members of the wider community has exercised a liberating influence on the field of philosophical research as a whole. The involvement of wider portions of the general population in philosophical reflection on issues as varied as virtue, goodness, beauty, happiness, identity, individuality, community, friendship, justice, knowledge, being, reality, permanence and change, space and time, finitude and death, eternity and God, has fostered renewed interest in the cultural heritage of philosophy as well as in a variety of new approaches to philosophical reflection and to philosophical dialogue, including through study and appreciation of works of music, literature, dance, and visual and dramatic arts, as well as through creative production of artistic, literary and philosophical works.

In Croatia, two projects have emerged in recent years which have made philosophizing with children a central concern of their activities: *Petit philosophy* or *Mala filozofija*, Zadar, directed by Bruno Ćurko, and *Project Stohrenschule*, directed by Marie-Élise Zovko. Demand for activities and workshops organized by these two projects is high and growing, and the need for continuing education of participating volunteers, as well as expansion of support structures, especially as regards sources of financing and employment for many younger colleagues and students interested in specializing in this form of philosophy, continues to grow accordingly. Because of their shared interests, the directors of the two projects recently joined forces to work towards establishment of permanent forms of cooperation. Their short-term goal at present is the preparation of a joint application to the EU Life-Long Learning program under the subprogram Comenius for funding to conduct a multilateral project with the title: *Promoting diversity and creativity in education: The Role of Philosophizing with Children* and involving schools from Croatia, Slovenia, Germany and one or two other countries. In an initial phase, cooperative workshops devoted to the theme: "Philosophizing through Artistic Creation" will be conducted by participating schools and project members.



In the following, Bruno Ćurko of *Mala filozofija* and Marie-Élise Zovko of *Project Stohrenschnule* provide a summary of their individual projects.

#### IV. Project Stohrenschnule: Philosophical Dialogue on Children and Adults regarding questions of value, purpose and meaning

by

Marie-Élise Zovko

Project Stohrenschnule, directed by Marie-Élise Zovko of the Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb and Renate Kroschel, of Stohrenschnule, Münstertal and Margarete-Ruckmich-Akademie, Freiburg, is a program of philosophical activities and workshops for children and adults concerning topics like beauty, virtue, goodness, and the good life, happiness, friendship and justice, identity, individuality and community, knowledge, emotions, and reality, freedom and necessity, nature, culture, and art, permanence and change, space and time, life, finitude and death, God. The project forms an integral part of the research project: Platonism and Forms of Intelligence, directed by M.-É. Zovko. Members of the research project strive to apply their philosophical research on human values, existential questions, and epistemological and metaphysical problems as a basis for initiatives devoted to education for creative and critical thinking, participatory democracy, civil governance, cultural diversity, tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution, human rights and sustainability. Eight undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Zagreb Croatian Studies Dept. of Philosophy cooperate as volunteers on the project.

Project Stohrenschnule takes its name from the unique one-classroom elementary school Stohrenschnule, which also serves as its model, and is directed by Benno and Renate Kroschel. The school is located in Stohren, a small rural community in the upper Black Forest. It is the smallest state-run elementary school in Germany and located at the highest altitude. In the unique setting of the Stohrenschnule, once serving grades 1-9, now grades 1-4, Renate Kroschel has applied her specific understanding of the idea and method of philosophizing with children for over thirty years. As a result of a 2-year study commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and directed by Ms. Kroschel, the principle of philosophizing with children was made universal principle of elementary school instruction in all subjects in the state of Baden-Württemberg.

The inspiration for Project Stohrenschnule was the expression of a philosophical friendship which began in the 1980's, when Renate and Lise were both regular participants in lectures in philosophy by Prof. Werner Beierwaltes and his former assistant, the late Privatdocent Dr. Michael Elsässer at Freiburg university. The idea for the project grew out of a shared interest in philosophy, philosophizing, and in promoting a shared "dialogical culture of learning", by nurturing a permanent attitude of questioning and of wonder, a spirit of exploration, inventiveness, optimism, and endeavour among children, young people and adults. The original program for Project Stohrenschnule was conceived pursuant to a joint lecture and

forum discussion on the topic "Platonism and Forms of Intelligence in Education" held by Ms. Kroschel and Prof. Zovko at the Intl. Symposium, "Platonism & Forms of Intelligence", organized by M.-E. Zovko in Hvar in October 2006 (cf. proceedings of the conference at: <http://www.akademie-verlag.de/olb/de/1.c.1495209.de>). Concrete plans for the initial workshops began to take shape in 2007, in seminars and meetings involving several younger colleagues, graduate and undergraduate students from Zagreb university, Croatian Studies Department of Philosophy. Based on the principle of dialogue and shared exploration of philosophically relevant themes, the original project activities were proposed and formulated by the individual participants, revised in common, and later tested with children in the German International school in Zagreb in early 2008. In March 2008, participants (8 graduate students from Croatian studies dept. of Phil, Renate & Benno Kroschel, M.-E. Zovko, Konrad Ruh, former School principal of Staufen elementary and middle school, and Edwin Johannes de Staerke, doctoral student in Bern, Switzerland) then conducted a week-long project in Stohren, including a full program of workshops for children, meetings and activities for parents, and philosophical discussions on the topic: "Virtue, Beauty and Happiness".

Since then, project members have conducted workshops and activities in elementary schools in Sinj, Hvar, Stari Grad (Hvar), and most recently in Žakanje, in Croatia, where a workshop series was initiated this Spring. Project participants continue to expand and adapt the project activities for use in a variety of settings, both with younger and high school age children and with adults. Volunteers on the project have participated and continue to participate in continuing education programs at the Akademie Kinder Philosophieren in Freising, Bavaria with whom a cooperative project is now being planned.

The approach to philosophy and philosophizing with children, young people, and adults applied in Project Stohrenschule is inspired by the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and the Platonist tradition of philosophy, as well as by the humanist ideal of Immanuel Kant, especially by Kant's understanding of the role of reflective and aesthetic judgment, education of taste and culture, in bridging the divide between knowledge and morality, nature and freedom. It places special emphasis on artistic and creative exploration of philosophical questions, based on recent insights of neural science as well as older insights of the philosophical tradition of Platonism according to which noetic thought (higher-level perception), symbolic and analogical reasoning – the so-called "right-brain" hemispheric functions – play an integral and indispensable role in higher mental processes, and consequently in the achievement of our best possible moral and intellectual development. The role of these forms of thought in the integrated functioning of our higher mental processes, however, are frequently underemphasized, neglected, even negated or undermined by regular school education, which on the other hand overemphasizes purely analytical reasoning, as well as a quantitative and positivistic/reductive approach to learning content. The present economic and environmental crisis can in this respect be viewed as a crisis of judgment, stemming from a failure to nurture the indispensable role of the neglected aspects of intelligence mentioned.

In our activities, the principle of compassion and absolute respect for the dignity and integrity of every human being entails a culture of mutual respect and voluntary self-limitation for the good of the community, teaches subordination of immediate need and desire to shared aims



and universal values in a spirit of empathy, solidarity and compassion for other living beings - an attitude which at the same time entails affirmation of a positive self-image, self-confidence, and the individual's sense of his or her own self-worth. Exploration of human beings' specific relationship to body and nature teaches humility and respect with regard to 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

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 hold regular meetings for discussion of philosophical topics and reading interpretation of philosophical works, part of the initiative *Zagreb New School of Philosophical Discourse*. The *Zagreb New School of Philosophical Discourse* also includes an initiative to found an international, interdisciplinary and interuniversity program of studies in *Philosophy, Culture and Humanity*.

## V. Petit philosophy, Zadar

by

Bruno Ćurko

***Petit philosophy*** is a small project, conducted in the private elementary school *Nova* in Zadar and in the elementary school *Stjepan Radić* in Bibinje. *Petit philosophy* is aimed at introducing philosophy to children in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. The program for these grades was launched in the year 2008. At the beginning of 2010, *Petit philosophy* teachers also began a series of workshops in the children's house *Dokkica* in Osijek. In *Petit philosophy* program, a lot of children's stories and games are used, but the program itself does not differ essentially from other philosophy for children programs, insofar as far as it makes use of discussions, questions, arguments and counterarguments. Teachers of *Petit philosophy* use Power Point presentations which feature animated teachers, such as, Sofia the Owl, Morskić the Sea Horse,

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Bibica the Fish and many others, occasionally including animated guests (philosophers, writers, scientists, characters from popular stories...). The task of all the animated characters is to raise the main issues related to a particular topic and to encourage children towards fun and unencumbered thinking about the chosen theme. The Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009 provided its official opinion concerning the project *Petit philosophy*. The Ministry and the Agency for Education evaluated this project as "very good and innovative, especially because of its quality, but also for attempting to direct children from an early age towards analytic and creative thinking." (Opinion of the Ministry: Class: 007-02/09-03/00056; Number 533-12-09-0004). For further information on the program of *Petit philosophy*, please see our web-page at: <http://www.petit-philosophy.com/index.php/en/>.