

## INNOVATIVE TEACHING OF PHILOSOPHY THROUGH DRAMA: SOCRATES

**Anna Lazou<sup>1</sup>, & Giannis Spyridis<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Philosophy Laboratory of Philosophy & Art National & Kapodistrian  
University of Athens, Assistant Professor (Greece)*

*<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy Laboratory of Philosophy & Art National & Kapodistrian  
University of Athens, PhD Philosophy (Greece)*

### Abstract

Is it possible for a philosophical text to be something more than words? As philosophers we're trying to understand what constitutes life and in which ways, we can improve ourselves. Socrates with his proposal for an 'examined life' provides us with a perennial means of how we and our mental skills can benefit from philosophical inquiries. Art and drama on the other hand unfolds the human soul and strengthens it through physical action, emotional expression and social explorations. Assuming that Socratic philosophy is a starting point for an alternative method of philosophical education then the platonic allegories can be used by employing specific dramatic techniques as teaching tools addressing most of the problems concerning human life, culture and critical moral issues. In philosophical drama young students in class are invited (following the track of the Platonic Dialogues) to discuss and interpret situations and emotions using guidelines based on the Socratic Method of teaching philosophy with many educational and therapeutic applications.

*Keywords: Socratic method, teaching philosophy, philosophical drama, platonic dialogues, critical thinking.*

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### 1. Introduction

Teaching children & young students as 'young philosophers' marks the beginning of a new educational approach with the aim among others at closing the comprehensive gap between ancient and modern philosophy. Platonic drama and in particular the 'artistic' Socrates provide children and young people with the necessary background to reintroduce ancient philosophy in a playful way that can enhance their ability in complex matters such as critical thinking, expression of an emotion and interaction with others. The Socratic method combines different elements of approaching truth since dialectic and negation of knowing anything can be used in classroom between children and young students under the supervision of their teacher. The main purpose of this educational procedure is to exemplify philosophical thinking by exploring the personality and teachings of Socrates and adapting his famous curiosity in modern problems and situations. In addition, platonic drama intermingling philosophy with theater and dramatic practices addresses different educational issues related to both theoretical and practical matters (Lazou, Spyridis, 2019). Philosophy in collaboration with theater could insert movements upon theories (etc. platonic dialogues) and the result could be an interesting philosophical play referring to Socrates and his teachings. Thus, 'young philosophers' are invited to reconstruct a Socratic moment either derived from the platonic dialogues or using their own imagination to bring philosophy to life. Imagine a classroom transformed into an Athenian Street (agora) and the students as citizens of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC!

### 2. Design

Previously obtained experience in the field by our research team had been staging Andrew Irvine's play, *Socrates on Trial* (2008) for university students and the open public. This experiment was repeated several more times in Athens and Municipalities of Greece (2015-2017) including those members of the audience who were actually participating to the deployment of actions on stage, by asking their own questions– interrogating the actors who played Socrates and Meletus- at a specific moment of the

performance, also voting as supposedly members of the Heliaia (Ἠλιαία) court and becoming at the same time ‘actors’ and revivers of the historical events concerning Socrates’ trial (Ibid, 2019).

Our aim among else in that experiment had been to support that a theatrical project like the one realized by playing Andrew Irvine’s *Socrates on Trial*, could enrich philosophical didactics within the University by adding an innovative and wider, as well as socio-political perspective, outside the typical classroom and different than the established learning processes.

### 3. Method

Teachers of philosophy should embrace alternative methods of teaching while concentrating on the importance of renewing the value of educational procedures. Our educational example about applying artistic Socrates in class does not refer only to drama, but also on several occasions, for example using dancing or other arts. This means that platonic philosophy may be approached and understood as something more than doctrines, words or ideas and reaching therapeutic ways which respond to an old question: Can philosophy be teachable through art? (Lazou, 2017)

Philosophical drama and in particular the platonic drama on the other hand has many applications which can be also found in other sciences. The innovation of the Socratic Method consists in the inquiry of what is believed as false and how we can achieve truth. During this process of examination everything we know can be altered in the same way that a theatrical play can appeal to our thought and change our beliefs. The proximity between philosophy and drama lies in the fact that both seek for freedom and critical thinking. The method discussed has been inspired by actual examples from all educational grades out of the authors’ experience in class and aims to further expand previously published research.

### 4. Objectives

The proposed method has further theoretical dimensions and educational applications concerning the role of philosophy in the contemporary world which are:

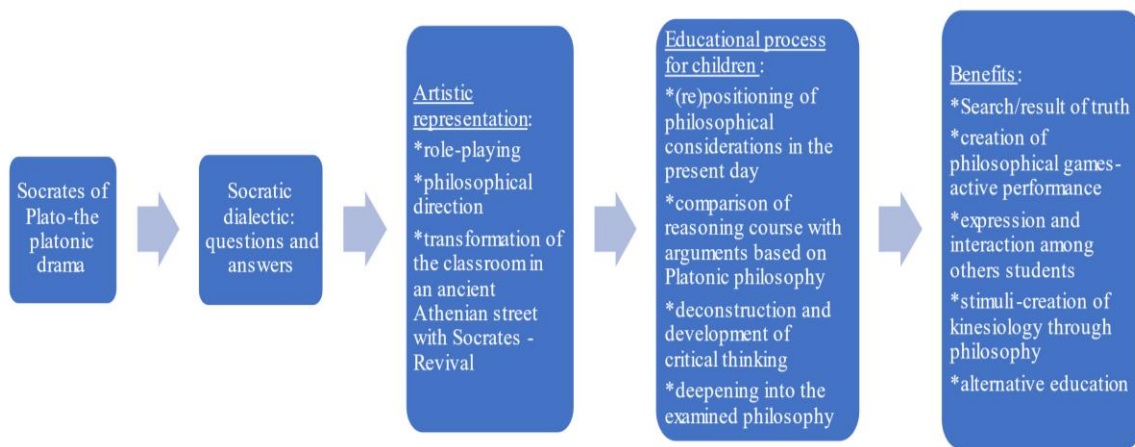
- a) The abridgement of theoretical teaching with experiential forms of education and art.
- b) Better understanding of the crucial bond between art and philosophy.
- c) Revealing unexplored psychological (such as the problem of personal identity, human relations, therapeutic needs of modern man etc.) and social aspects and situations (e.g., problem of justice, social role of the wise man, philosophy in education etc.) of drama practices in education.
- d) Application of the Socratic dialectic in the theatrical presentation of philosophical ideas as a specific therapeutic form of philosophical counseling – such as the so-called philosophical “Praxis” – since the 1970’s (Lazou, Spyridis, 2019).
- e) Providing innovative methodologies of teaching philosophy (e.g., Game-based-Learning of Philosophy and other technologically enhanced forms of learning) with substantial experiential material (Anagnostou, Enea, Ktena, Lazou, 2022).
- f) Enriching emotional intelligence by applying platonic drama in class for elementary school pupils or younger students.

### 5. Conclusion

Consequently, the benefits of such an educational procedure are many, because of the multiple applications philosophy possesses. Teaching philosophy in a classroom should be adaptable and stimulate participation of young students in such a way as teaching practice does not look like an exact lesson but it appears to be a playful creative exchange of interesting ideas. Moreover, the artistic representation of Socrates through the platonic drama explores the differences between understanding ideas and thinking philosophically because ‘young philosophers’ not just follow the footsteps of Socrates, but they are trying to make philosophy on the spot.

Table 1.

## Teaching philosophy: The platonic drama



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