

INNOVATIVE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION: SOCRATIC GAMES FOR ALL

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Abstract

“Socratic Games for All” is an innovative experiential philosophy and artistic education program developed through the Philosophy and Art Laboratory of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA). The program includes two educational models: “Socrates Games” for primary school students and “The Artistic Socrates” for junior high school and high school students. Designed within the framework of doctoral and postdoctoral research under the supervision of university professors, the workshops combine philosophical inquiry, artistic expression, with emphasis on performing arts, and experiential learning to cultivate critical thinking, emotional awareness, democratic dialogue, and social participation.

The pilot experiential workshop “Socratic Games – Artistic Socrates” was implemented by members of the Philosophy and Art Program at NKUA and was based primarily on active student participation as its central pedagogical approach. The workshops aimed to encourage students to think independently, develop argumentative skills, express themselves creatively, and respect different perspectives and experiences. With Socratic dialogue, students explored philosophical concepts such as justice, freedom, friendship, happiness, responsibility, and identity by connecting them to personal experiences and contemporary social issues.

Keywords: *Socrates, experiential education, Socratic dialogue, critical thinking, dramatic skills.*

1. Introduction

Philosophy and theater in combination are best captured in recent performances based on the Platonic text and as an adaptation of different texts referring to the personality of Socrates.

¹“Socratic Games for all”, as an educational innovation program, was inspired by a series of performances under the general title “Socrates on Stage”². The connecting link of all performances is the active participation of the spectators, which functions as a precondition for the success in sharing the theme of the play with a variety of audiences. However, the main goal of these performances is not the theatrical production itself, but the representation that will arouse critical interest and guide the theatrical mediation in search of a timeless truth as a paradigmatic use of philosophical counseling. Contemporary theatrical representations of Socrates transform Platonic philosophy into an experiential educational practice that combines artistic performance with active philosophical inquiry. Through dialogue, participation, and reflection, audiences engage critically with ethical and social questions both inside and outside the classroom. These performances highlight the continuing global relevance of Socratic thought as a dynamic tool for education, culture, and democratic dialogue. Other significant moments of previous research have been:

- *The dramatic persona of Socrates between philosophy and drama during the 20th and 21st centuries* (PhD thesis 2022 by I. Spyridis), (Spyridis, 2022),
- a series of articles published in English and Greek by Anna Lazou and Giannis Spyridis (Lazou & Spyridis, 2023; Lazou, 2020; Lazou & Spyridis, 2019),

¹ *Apology of Socrates* (Yiannis Simonidis), *Socrates on Trial* (Andrew Irvine - Anna Lazou), and *Socrates Now* (Dimos Abdelioidis). These productions have recently been presented before the public of *diaspora* Hellenism with encouraging results.

² The project *Socrates on stage* started in 2015, performing Andrew Irvine’s play *Socrates on Trial* (premiere in Athens, October 2015- in the theatre *Alcmene*). Ever since, there have been several repetitions of the performance based on Giannis Spyridis’ translation and Anna Lazou’s direction, with the participation of amateur and professional actors and students of philosophy.

- experiential educational programs for young and adult people and teams,³
- *staging* philosophical texts in the context of the newly established laboratory of Philosophy & Art of Athens University (*Phil.Art.Lab.*).
- In 2023, members of the Laboratory's research team (Dr Yorghos Voutos, Dr Giannis Spyridis, and Dr Anna Lazou) presented a critical survey of the 'Socrates on Stage' project at the 1st International Conference for the theatre of the Hellenic Diaspora Campus Solbosch, Université Libre de Bruxelles.⁴
- The school project "Philosophizing.... a tour through moral values" since 2020, involving students 12 to 15 years old, at the 8th Junior High school of Chalandri, Athens (coordinated by Nektaria Skouteli, MA)

Our research proposes that Plato reinforces a radical change in the Athenian theatrical reality, at a distance from the old ways of creating and conveying drama and by applying new methods such as: reading texts by a performer to small audiences, provoking philosophical questioning and finally, avoiding spectacular movements or dance – chorus – acts (Puchner, 2010).

2. Design

The experiential workshops were designed as two-hour sessions or as two consecutive sessions of 45 minutes, to be implemented both within the school environment and in alternative educational and cultural settings outside the classroom. In addition, the program included the possibility of a two-day educational and cultural visit to Ancient Epidaurus, where students, parents, and teachers could participate in workshops functioning as a summer school centered on theatrical adaptations of Platonic dialogues and Aristophanes' comedy related to the figure of Socrates.

2.1. Philosophy in action: A Socratic journey through dialogue, drama and dance

The work team, consisting of members of the Philosophy and Art program at NKUA (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens), coordinated by Dr. Anna Lazou, associate professor of Aesthetics of performing arts, visited the 8th Junior High School of Chalandri, Athens, Attica, in the context of presenting the pilot program on 17 March 2026 (Figure 1).

Initially, the school's Philosophy Group, consisting of thirty students from all three grades of junior high school, was divided by the program facilitators into two groups of fifteen participants. The facilitators began with ice-breaking and relaxation games through experiential activities that encouraged the students to express themselves creatively and spontaneously. Among the activities was the depiction of their emotions on A4 paper through drawing, which contributed to the creation of a warm and familiar atmosphere that fostered cooperation. Subsequently, Anna Lazou, setting the rhythm with the accompaniment of a drum, introduced the students to the 9/8 meter, bringing them closer to the rhythm and aesthetics of ancient Greek dance. The students participated with remarkable enthusiasm and vivid interest.

Afterwards, photocopies of Aristophanes' comedy *Clouds*, adapted by Andrew Irvine, Professor of Philosophy of Columbia University and author of the play *Socrates on Trial* (translation in the Greek language by Dr Giannis Spyridis), were distributed to all groups of students. Each group read the text and assigned roles among its members. The theatrical presentation of the dialogues created amusement and excitement among the students, while also inspiring a friendly sense of competition regarding which group would deliver the best performance.

³ For reasons of historical documentation of our contribution to the 1st International Conference for the Theatre of the Hellenic Diaspora, it is worthwhile to mention that the Research and Artistic group of Athens University *dryos topoi* has participated several times to international University theatre events in Europe and other continents (Belgium, Italy, Germany, Poland, Belarus, Mexico, Tunisia, Canada) with various plays and performances of ancient and modern drama and dance theatre. In February 2005, *Dryos Topoi* presented *Nekyia; the Archetypal Journey* (after Homer) at the University Theatre Festival of Liege *RITU* (pres. Robert Germain), and at the same period, in Brussels' theatre *Scarabaeus* (dir. Irene Chalkia). https://www.greecece-athens.com/article.php?article_id=29; <http://dryostopoi.phil.uoa.gr/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.hellenicbridge.org/news/theatre-hellenic-diaspora/>

In Andrew Irvine's *Socrates on Trial*,⁵ the first act refers to the *Clouds* and the second to *Apology*. Initially, the comic atmosphere created by Aristophanes' mocking of the Sophists for their paid teachings and, on the other hand, the corruption that Socrates induces in young people, shapes the theme of the play, where the dominating moral question is about what is and what is not right. The meeting culminated in thoughtful reflection and questions from the students about issues inspired by Aristophanes' text, which the coordinators handled with skill and pedagogical sensitivity. The event concluded joyfully with traditional Greek dances that matched the comedy's joyful atmosphere.

3. Objectives

We argue in favor of a validly applied interrelation between philosophy and theatre today, in which the Platonic drama proves to be of great value as a literature genre that stands among them. Therefore, we support that in Andrew Irvine's play and the experience of staging *Socrates on Trial* in its Greek version, we have a genuine example of an educational and therapeutic application of philosophy through art. Our aim, among others, had been to support the idea that this goal of a theatrical project like the one we experienced with 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 academic learning processes. Applied to the school environment, our objectives allow students to engage intellectually, emotionally, and socially with philosophical themes while linking abstract concepts to everyday adolescent concerns.

Outside the classroom during a summer school to be realized in June and October 2026, in the monumental surroundings of Ancient Epidauros, where theatre, history and culture unite, assuming that Socratic philosophy is a starting point for an alternative method of philosophical education, 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 open audiences e.g. students and their parents (Lazou & Spyridis, 2023).

4. Methods

A central methodological component of the program was the Socratic method, in which facilitators guided students through questions rather than direct instruction. Educators acted as facilitators and co-participants in dialogue, encouraging reflection, inquiry, and collaborative learning. Knowledge emerged through observation, discussion, interpretation, and self-expression rather than through traditional teacher-centered teaching practices. The workshops incorporated a wide range of experiential and artistic methods, including role-playing, theatrical improvisation, creative writing, visual and performing arts activities – including dance & music –, sharing views on philosophical dilemmas, and group dialogue. Topics explored included peer relationships, bullying, social media, human rights, ethical dilemmas surrounding artificial intelligence and technology, and questions of personal and collective responsibility.

5. Discussion / Conclusions

The evaluation of the pilot workshops demonstrated significant educational and social benefits. Students participated actively and freely in a safe and inclusive environment without fear of evaluation or criticism. Increased engagement was observed even among students who are usually reluctant to speak in traditional classroom settings. Participants strengthened skills related to critical thinking, argumentation, active listening, empathy, collaboration, and creative expression. They also demonstrated an increased ability to connect philosophical reflection with real-life experiences and contemporary ethical issues.

Overall, the program contributed not only to students' cognitive development but also to their emotional and social growth. By transforming philosophy into an experiential and participatory process both inside and outside the classroom, "Socratic Games for All" demonstrated how philosophical education can function as a powerful tool for democratic participation, personal development, and creative coexistence within a genuine community of dialogue.

Conclusively, the Platonic drama is of great value today as it has the potential to offer self-evaluation and personal development through philosophical thinking. Art and drama unfold the human soul and strengthen it through physical action, emotional expression, and social exploration.

⁵ Andrew David Irvine teaches philosophy at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus. He is the author of the internationally acclaimed *Socrates on Trial* (Irvine, 2008), a stage play based on Aristophanes' *Clouds* and Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. Author of *Lysistrata- An Adaptation* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yn1xSa7z00>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNKkd4xMyW8>

The next phases of the project include the repetition of the workshops outside the classroom and in the monumental surroundings of Ancient Epidauros, encouraging the young participants with their parents to philosophize in the historically significant countryside as part of their educational experience.

Figure 1. Photographic instance of the pilot workshop at the 8th Junior High School of Chalandri, Athens, Greece, 17 March 2026; featuring Dr Anna Lazou, Mrs Nektaria Skouteli, the team of coordinators, and the students.



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