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## Fostering Ethical Dialogue through Philosophy with Children:

*Practice-Based Insights from Association Petit Philosophy Projects*

**Bruno Ćurko** · *The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Split*

**Filip Škifić** · *Association "Petit Philosophy," Split*

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### SAŽETAK

The present article examines the manner in which ethical dialogue and philosophical inquiry are integrated into education through a selection of European projects implemented by the Croatian non-governmental organisation Association *Petit Philosophy* (Mala filozofija). Utilising a qualitative, practice-based approach, the study analyses project materials, workshop designs, teaching manuals, implementation notes, and practitioner observations from initiatives such as ETHIKA, ETHOS, PEEC, ZOOM OUT, Young Minds, and PLATO's EU. The projects encompassed children and young people from early childhood to secondary education, in addition to teachers and educators in both formal and non-formal learning settings. The analysis identifies recurring pedagogical methods, including storytelling, Socratic questioning, role-play, film-based discussion, digital scenarios, and the community of inquiry model. The observed outcomes of these practices suggest that they support critical thinking, reasoning, empathy, perspective-taking, dialogical competence, ethical awareness, and civic engagement. In view of the fact that the extant data are of a qualitative nature and non-experimental in nature, it is imperative that the findings are interpreted as practice-based insights, rather than as statistically generalisable evidence. The article posits that philosophical dialogue has the potential to serve as a valuable framework for ethics and values education, and it calls for more systematic evaluation of such practices.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** community of inquiry, critical thinking, civic engagement, case studies, Erasmus+ projects.

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## I. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, education is expected to address not only the transmission of knowledge, but also the development of values, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility. It must also encompass the cultivation of values and ethical reasoning.<sup>1</sup> It is asserted by global frameworks that young people require knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values if they are to successfully navigate diversity, respond to global challenges, and contribute meaningfully to society.<sup>2</sup> In the contemporary era, formal curricula are increasingly incorporating Ethics and Values Education (EVE) as a pedagogical strategy to cultivate responsible, reflective, and socially engaged citizens.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary approaches to EVE eschew the imposition of fixed answers, favouring dialogical methods that foster independent judgment, critical inquiry, and mutual understanding.<sup>4</sup> Research identifies childhood and adolescence as crucial periods for the formation of moral, civic, and social competence.<sup>5</sup> In this context, pedagogies such as Philosophy with Children (P4C) and the Community of Inquiry model have been promoted internationally as effective approaches to developing children's reasoning, communication, and reflective capacities. P4C, an approach originally developed by Lipman in the 1970s, employs collaborative, Socratic-style dialogue to facilitate children's examination of stories, concepts, dilemmas, and real-life questions.<sup>6</sup>

A mounting body of evidence indicates that regular philosophical enquiry can facilitate cognitive and non-cognitive development, encompassing enhanced reasoning, communication, creativity, confidence, and social-emotional skills.<sup>7</sup> For instance, evaluations of P4C have reported gains in reasoning, reading, mathematics, and classroom interaction, with some benefits being particularly visible among disadvantaged pupils.<sup>8</sup> These findings are in alignment with the objectives

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, "Global Competence," accessed April 28, 2026, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/global-competence.html>; UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom: Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize; Status and Prospects* (UNESCO Publishing, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> OECD, "Global Competence."

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*; Bruno Ćurko and Ana Kovačević, "European Projects Related to Ethical Education in Primary and Secondary Schools," *Metodički ogledi* 25, no. 2 (2018): 85–107, <https://doi.org/10.21464/mo.25.2.5>.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Tim Sprod, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education: The Community of Ethical Inquiry* (Routledge, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*; Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

<sup>6</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*; UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Gorard, Nadia Siddiqui, and Beng Huat See, *Philosophy for Children: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary* (Education Endowment Foundation, 2015); Nadia Siddiqui, Stephen Gorard, and Beng Huat See, *Non-Cognitive Impacts of Philosophy for Children* (School of Education, Durham University, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Gorard, Siddiqui, and See, *Philosophy for Children*; Pippa Lord, Afrah Dirie, Kelly Kettlewell, and Ben Styles, *Evaluation of Philosophy for Children: An Effectiveness Trial* (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021),

of Association *Petit Philosophy*, a Croatian civil-society organisation whose name may be translated as Little Philosophy. The association has been found to promote informal education, critical thinking, and philosophy in practice, especially through activities with children, young people, teachers, and the wider educational community.<sup>9</sup> Operating within the framework of Erasmus+ and other international frameworks, Association *Petit Philosophy* has implemented projects such as ETHIKA, ETHOS, ZOOM OUT, Young Minds, and PLATO's EU. These projects integrate ethical dialogue and philosophical inquiry into both school and non-formal educational settings.<sup>10</sup>

The present article focuses on selected practices developed and implemented by the Association *Petit Philosophy* within the scope of these international projects. The article employs a comprehensive analysis of workshop designs, teaching materials, and project-based educational practices to examine the operationalisation of values education through philosophical dialogue with children and youth. The pedagogical methods employed in this programme are diverse and include storytelling, Socratic questioning, role-play, film-based discussion, dilemma analysis, and the Community of Inquiry model. The article also identifies recurring ethical themes addressed in these practices, such as justice, inclusion, responsibility, empathy, dignity, mental health, and digital citizenship. The study is guided by two research questions:

1. What pedagogical approaches did Mala filozofija employ to foster ethical dialogue and values education among children and youth?
2. What outcomes, in terms of skills, attitudes, and civic engagement, were observed across these projects?

Addressing these questions helps clarify how dialogical philosophy pedagogy can support twenty-first-century competencies, including critical thinking, empathy, democratic participation, and global citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

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<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/philosophy-for-children-effectiveness-trial>.

<sup>9</sup> Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

<sup>10</sup> Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects"; Bruno Ćurko et al., *Ethics and Values Education: Manual for Teachers and Educators* (ETHIKA – Ethics and Values Education in Schools and Kindergartens, 2015); Elisabeth Schlenk et al., *Methodology Guidelines: A Manual for Teachers and Educators to Support the Development of Educational Materials and Tools for Ethical Education*, ed. Elisabeth Schlenk (ETHOS Consortium, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> OECD, "Global Competence"; UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*.

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## II. *Methodology and Research Design*

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The present study employs a qualitative, practice-based research design. The present study analyses documentary evidence from Association *Petit Philosophy* projects implemented between 2012 and 2025, focusing on selected cases that illustrate ethics and philosophy pedagogy in practice. The primary materials encompass project outputs such as curricula, workshop plans, teaching manuals, facilitator guidelines, digital toolkits, and implementation notes. The analysis draws on qualitative feedback documented during project implementation and evaluation processes, including teacher reflections, participant journals, workshop observations, and facilitator reports.<sup>12</sup> The cases examined are drawn from a range of sources, including Erasmus+, EU-funded, and national projects, all of which have a clearly defined focus on ethics, values education, dialogue, philosophical inquiry, peace education, digital citizenship, or mental health education. The following are included:

- The ETHOS project (2012–2014) focused on the provision of ethical education in pre-schools and primary schools with a view to achieving a sustainable future.<sup>13</sup>
- The ETHIKA project (2014–2017) concentrated on the promotion of ethics and values education in schools and kindergartens.<sup>14</sup>
- The PEEC (2019–2021) project concentrated on the implementation of peace education in early childhood as a preventative measure against bullying and the cultivation of cooperative classroom cultures.
- PLATO's EU (2021–2023) initiative focused on the development of online philosophical learning activities, with the overarching objective of enhancing critical thinking, digital resilience, media literacy, and civic engagement.
- ZOOM OUT (2023–2026) is an initiative that fosters critical thinking, inclusivity, and intercultural awareness in children's literature through an intersectional approach.
- The Young Minds programme (2024–2027) employs European films and film-based pedagogy to facilitate teacher training and encourage open dialogue on youth mental health.

The participants encompassed preschool children aged 3–6, particularly in PEEC and early ethics education projects, as well as primary and secondary school students, including adolescents aged 14–18 in Young Minds and PLATO's EU. Adults, in particular teachers and educators, participated in

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<sup>12</sup> Schlenk et al., *Methodology Guidelines*; Ćurko et al., *Ethics and Values Education*; Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

<sup>13</sup> Schlenk et al., *Methodology Guidelines*; Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ćurko et al., *Ethics and Values Education*; Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

training activities, workshops and implementation processes. The projects were carried out in both formal and non-formal educational settings, including kindergartens, schools, teacher-training workshops, community-based events, and digital learning environments.<sup>15</sup> The selected cases were chosen because they illustrate different age groups, educational settings, and thematic focuses within Association “Petit Philosophy” project work. The materials were reviewed inductively in order to identify recurring pedagogical strategies, ethical themes, and reported outcomes. The study employs a thematic, case-study analysis. Firstly, selected case descriptions present key educational activities, such as the use of fairy tales, ethical dilemmas, film clips, digital scenarios, and structured dialogue to initiate reflection. Secondly, the analysis identifies recurring pedagogical methods, including storytelling, Socratic questioning, role-play, community of inquiry discussions, film-based reflection, and digital media activities. Thirdly, it examines recurring ethical and educational themes, such as justice, empathy, dignity, respect, responsibility, inclusion, mental health, and democratic participation.<sup>16</sup> The analysis also considers outcomes reported by participants, teachers, and facilitators, including the development of reasoning skills, perspective-taking, communication, ethical vocabulary, and student-led initiatives. This approach is interpretative in nature, as opposed to being quantitative. The article does not report statistical measures, since participant numbers, rating scales, and pre-/post-test data were not consistently collected or disclosed across all projects. Instead, the objective is to furnish an analytically grounded account of the implementation of ethical and philosophical dialogue across diverse educational contexts and the observed educational effects. The methodology employed in this study is deemed appropriate for the study's objectives, as the primary aim is to capture educational practice rather than to measure a single intervention through experimental means. The analysis identifies patterns in pedagogical design, ethical content, and perceived educational outcomes by triangulating multiple qualitative sources, including project materials, workshop documentation, facilitator observations, and participant feedback.<sup>17</sup>

### III. *Results and Observed Outcomes*

Across the examined projects, several recurring outcomes were observed. Despite the heterogeneity of the projects in terms of context, age group, thematic focus, and educational setting, they exhibited a shared emphasis on dialogue, reflection, ethical inquiry, and participatory learning.

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<sup>15</sup> Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

<sup>16</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*; Sprod, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education*; UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*.

<sup>17</sup> Sprod, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education*; Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

The outcomes that were observed can be grouped into five main areas: critical thinking and reasoning, empathy and perspective-taking, dialogical and communicative competence, ethical awareness and vocabulary, and civic and social engagement.

### 1.1. *Critical Thinking and Reasoning*

In all projects, participants were encouraged to formulate reasons, question assumptions, compare perspectives, and justify their views. In ETHIKA and ETHOS workshops, for example, children were tasked with discussing moral dilemmas and fairness scenarios that required them to explain why a particular action might be right, wrong, fair, or unfair.<sup>18</sup> In the ZOOM OUT module, primary school students analysed fairy tales and children's literature by "zooming out" beyond stereotypes, familiar narrative roles, and first impressions. In Young Minds, adolescents critically discussed film scenes related to mental health, stigma, self-image, peer pressure, and emotional vulnerability. These practices align with the broader literature on Philosophy with Children and philosophical enquiry, which demonstrates that collaborative dialogue can enhance higher-order thinking, reasoning, argumentation, and reflective judgment.<sup>19</sup> In the projects analysed here, teachers and facilitators reported an increase in children's use of logical arguments, consideration of alternatives prior to conclusion formation, and an increased willingness to support claims with reasoning.

### 1.2. *Empathy and Perspective-Taking*

A significant proportion of activities encouraged learners to adopt the viewpoints of others. In the context of story-based workshops, children are frequently prompted to reconsider characters who have been marginalised, misunderstood, feared, or judged negatively. For instance, activities based on *The Ugly Duckling* or alternative readings of fairy-tale figures, such as the wolf, encouraged children to reflect on the feelings of the characters, the reasons for others' potentially unfair treatment of them, and the reliability of first impressions.<sup>20</sup> Within the context of PLATO's EU, digital scenarios and online communication dilemmas have been instrumental in prompting students to contemplate the emotional ramifications of cyberbullying, exclusion, and disrespectful communication. Across age

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<sup>18</sup> Schlenk et al., *Methodology Guidelines*; Ćurko et al., *Ethics and Values Education*.

<sup>19</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*; Gorard, Siddiqui, and See, *Philosophy for Children*; Siddiqui, Gorard, and See, *Non-Cognitive Impacts*.

<sup>20</sup> Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

groups, children and young people demonstrated increased use of empathic language, as evidenced by questions such as "How do you think he/she felt?" or "Why did the others treat him/her that way?" These observations are in alignment with research suggesting that dialogical philosophy and community of inquiry practices can support social-emotional awareness, empathy, and perspective-taking.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3. *Dialogical and Communicative Competence*

Participants were also instructed in the art of respectful dialogue. It was observed that even young children gradually acquired the ability to wait for their turn, listen without interrupting, respond to others' ideas, and request clarification. The community of inquiry format, typically organised through circle discussions or other participatory arrangements, engendered an environment wherein children were able to articulate uncertainty, evaluate concepts, and receive feedback from their peers without the concern of derision.<sup>22</sup> Teachers reported improvements in oracy, confidence, and collaborative learning. The facilitators emphasised simple dialogical rules, such as listening carefully, avoiding put-downs, respecting different opinions, and welcoming all ideas. These findings correspond to existing research on P4C, which suggests that regular philosophical dialogue can foster communication, classroom participation, and collaborative reasoning.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.4. *Ethical Awareness and Vocabulary*

It is evident that children and young people are engaged with ethical concepts such as justice, respect, responsibility, freedom, solidarity, dignity, honesty, and care through concrete stories, situations, dilemmas, and personal experiences. In ETHIKA and ETHOS, lesson plans introduced values through classroom situations such as sharing, helping, inclusion, conflict resolution, and fairness in everyday life.<sup>24</sup> ZOOM OUT explicitly addressed stereotypes, diversity, equality, and inclusion in children's literature, while Young Minds connected ethical reflection with emotional well-being and mental health. Following deliberations, students demonstrated an increased tendency to

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<sup>21</sup> Sprod, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education*; Lipman, *Thinking in Education*; Siddiqui, Gorard, and See, *Non-Cognitive Impacts*.

<sup>22</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*; Sprod, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education*.

<sup>23</sup> Gorard, Siddiqui, and See, *Philosophy for Children*; Siddiqui, Gorard, and See, *Non-Cognitive Impacts*.

<sup>24</sup> Schlenk et al., *Methodology Guidelines*; Curko et al., *Ethics and Values Education*.

utilise moral vocabulary in context, for instance by articulating "That is unfair because...", "We should show respect by...", or "Someone should help because...". Teachers reported that participants were able to connect abstract ethical ideas to real-life situations, such as bullying, exclusion, peer conflict, environmental responsibility, or online behaviour. This finding suggests that philosophical dialogue can facilitate a shift in learners' understanding from abstract moral language to practical ethical understanding, which is a fundamental objective of ethics and values education.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.5. *Civic and social engagement*

In several cases, ethical reflection was followed by practical action. In certain educational institutions, discourse pertaining to bullying, mental health, fairness, solidarity, and inclusion has been observed to elicit the initiation of peer-support activities, awareness campaigns, diversity-themed events, and small community-oriented projects by students. In younger groups, activities related to peace education and classroom cooperation contributed to the establishment of shared classroom norms, such as the creation of a "peace corner" or the formulation of rules for respectful interaction. Such outcomes are consistent with the broader educational objective of integrating values education with democratic participation, civic responsibility, and agency.<sup>26</sup> Despite the absence of formal evaluation of the impact of these initiatives across all projects, the documented cases indicate the potential of philosophical dialogue to promote democratic participation within micro-communities, such as classrooms, schools, and youth groups. Participants in the study demonstrated an increased sense of self-efficacy regarding their ability to contribute to their communities, which was concomitant with their learning to discuss ethical questions collectively. The reviewed project materials did not identify adverse outcomes; however, this should be interpreted cautiously, given the descriptive and non-experimental nature of the available documentation. Conversely, facilitators noted increased engagement, enjoyment, and motivation among students. Interactive and participatory methods appeared to be particularly effective in sustaining children's attention and encouraging active involvement. In PLATO's EU, there has been an occurrence of older students sharing digital philosophical activities and puzzles with family members, thereby extending philosophical dialogue beyond the confines of the classroom. The examples given demonstrate that ethical and philosophical

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<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*, Ćurko and Kovačević, "European Projects."

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*, OECD, "Global Competence."

inquiry has the capacity to engender both educational and social value when implemented through age-appropriate, dialogical, and participatory methods.

Table 1. summarizes the key projects analysed in this article, including their duration, target age groups, pedagogical methods, and observed outcomes.

Project	Duration	Age Group	Key Methods	Observed Outcomes
<b>ETHIKA</b> (Ethics & Values Education)	2014–17	Kindergarten & primary (3–12)	Story-based ethics lessons; teacher training workshops; Socratic circle discussions	Greater awareness of values (fairness, respect); enhanced reasoning about moral problems; teachers gained EVE resources
<b>ETHOS</b> (Ethical Ed. in Early Years)	2012–14	Preschool & primary (3–12)	Creative role-play; dilemma discussions; curriculum codes of conduct	Children articulated ethical ideas; reported more thoughtful behavior; educators shared best practices in ethics
<b>Zoom out</b> (Intersectional Lit)	2023–26	Primary (6–12)	Analysis of European fairy tales; guided reflection on stereotypes; inclusive literature projects	Increased empathy; critical view of biases; projects promoting inclusion; enhanced media literacy
<b>Young Minds</b> (Mental Health & Film)	2024–27	Secondary (14–18)	Film viewing (EU films); group debates on mental health scenarios; teacher training modules in critical thinking	Reduced stigma discussion; higher student empathy; student-led awareness activities; stronger critical discussion skills
<b>PLATO's EU</b> (Digital Philosophy)	2021–23	Secondary (14–18)	Online platform with philosophical games; digital storytelling tasks; civic forum activities	Improved digital media literacy; critical reflection on information; students engaged in civic topics; teachers reported greater student interest in philosophy
<b>PEEC</b> (Peace and Early Childhood)	2019–21	Preschool (3–6)	Teacher workshops on peace education; play-based conflict resolution games; story circles about friendship	Children learned conflict resolution; educators used “open communication” techniques; classroom culture became more cooperative

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#### IV. *Observation*

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The observed outcomes support the view that philosophical dialogue can function as a valuable pedagogical framework for ethics and values education. They mirror research evidence that P4C supports intellectual, social, and emotional development. For example, the repeated finding of enhanced reasoning and communication in our cases is in line with longitudinal studies where P4C-treated students gained and maintained cognitive skills over time. The increases in empathy and oral skills match reports from large trials (e.g. EEF 2015, 2021) showing non-cognitive benefits like confidence, active engagement, and respect for others. From a policy perspective, these findings support the inclusion of philosophy-based approaches in curricula. European and international educational frameworks, including those developed by OECD and UNESCO emphasize global competence – a mix of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values – as essential for students. The practices here directly address those dimensions. For example, community-of-inquiry dialogues foster global and intercultural dispositions by getting students to discuss diverse perspectives and moral issues, aligning with OECD recommendations for integrated global learning. Policymakers might therefore consider funding similar programs or incorporating their materials into standard teacher training. This study is descriptive and qualitative. We did not have quantitative impact data, and participant numbers varied by project. Thus, conclusions about scale or statistical effect sizes are not possible. In addition, projects were implemented by committed practitioners, which may limit replicability. Future research should include controlled evaluations, larger samples, and longer follow-up to establish generalizable outcomes. Nevertheless, the consistency of positive reports across different settings and age groups provides a strong practical validation of the methodology.

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#### V. *Conclusion*

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The experience of Association Petit Philosophy demonstrates that even young children are capable of engaging profoundly with ethical concepts when guided through dialogue. The integration of narrative and Socratic methods has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of reasoning, empathy, and a sense of community among participants. It is recommended that educators integrate structured philosophical dialogue into lessons on citizenship, literature, or health. It is imperative that teacher education programmes incorporate facilitation techniques, as demonstrated in the ETHIKA and ETHOS manuals. Concurrently, there is a necessity to strengthen the evaluation of such programmes. The practices analysed in this article suggest that philosophical dialogue can contribute

to the development of reflective, responsible, and dialogically competent learners. This approach is explicitly endorsed by global education goals, underscoring the importance of such initiatives in nurturing well-rounded individuals capable of contributing to their communities and the global society at large. Subsequent publications may be able to build on this work by means of a systematic measurement of outcomes (e.g. using pre-post surveys of ethical reasoning or social attitudes) and by extending the case analysis to other countries and contexts. The implementation of such research would provide more robust evidence on the impact of ethics education that is based on dialogue. The practices documented here offer a valuable model for values education: they are accessible to children, engaging for teachers, and aligned with educational priorities in the 21st century.

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