

## a comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy

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### abstract

The paper presents an innovative approach to teaching philosophy, which the authors name as a comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy. Such creative application of comics in the teaching of philosophy fully corresponds to the skandalonic and dialogical character of philosophy itself. The methodical value of using comics in philosophy teaching is manifested exactly in comics' distinctly skandalonic character. The skandalon is a methodical process that seeks to provoke students' curiosity by questioning something that otherwise seemed unquestionable, self-evident, to present it in a new light, in order to make it the subject of critical questioning and reflection. Given the visuality of the comics, its fun and root in popular culture, it is an excellent motivational tool for philosophical reflection and understanding of reality, philosophical issues, ideas and concepts in teaching philosophy. By introducing comics as recognizable products of pop culture close to students' reading interest and experience in teaching philosophy, it is easier for them to connect what they learn in school with real life, ie to apply what they have learned in everyday life situations. Comics can be used as a source of information, a form of learning new content, as well as a basis for encouraging dialog and discussion in the classroom. Also, comics can be used as a stimulus in philosophy for children (P4C) approach. P4C and the comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy are particularly complementary, which allows them to be combined effectively. Students can individually or in pairs/groups create comics on specific philosophical topics, thus developing creative, critical and collaborative thinking. The paper presents specific criteria for evaluating comics on philosophical issues that students create in philosophy classes.

**keywords:** comics; philosophy; teaching; comicsophy; comicsophy for children.

### un enfoque cómicsófico en la enseñanza de la filosofía

#### resumen

El trabajo muestra un enfoque innovador para la enseñanza de la filosofía, nombrado por los autores como "comicsofía" (sabiduría de los cómics). Esta creativa aplicación de los cómics en la enseñanza de la filosofía, corresponde totalmente al carácter dialéctico y cuestionador de la enseñanza. El valor metodológico de los cómics en la enseñanza de la filosofía se manifiesta precisamente en su carácter distintivamente cuestionador. El "skándalon" es un proceso metódico que busca provocar la curiosidad de los estudiantes, cuestionando algo que de otro modo parecía incuestionable, obvio, para presentarlo bajo una nueva luz, con el fin de convertirlo en objeto de cuestionamiento y reflexión críticos. El uso de cómics en la enseñanza de la filosofía, dada su visualidad, diversión y arraigo en la cultura popular, es una excelente herramienta de motivación para la reflexión filosófica y la comprensión de la realidad, y de los temas, ideas y conceptos filosóficos. Introducir los

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cómicos, como productos reconocibles de la cultura popular cercanos al interés lector y la experiencia lectora de los estudiantes, en la enseñanza de la filosofía contribuye a que sea más fácil para ellos conectar lo que aprenden en la escuela con la vida real, es decir, aplicar lo que han aprendido en situaciones de la vida cotidiana. En la enseñanza de la filosofía, los cómics pueden utilizarse como fuente de información, una forma de aprender nuevos contenidos, y también como una base para fomentar el diálogo y la discusión en el aula. Además, los cómics pueden utilizarse como estímulo en el enfoque de filosofía para niños (FpN). Los enfoques de la FpN y el de la comicsofía para la enseñanza de la filosofía son especialmente complementarios, lo que permite combinarlos eficazmente. Los estudiantes pueden crear, individualmente o en parejas/grupos, cómics sobre temas filosóficos específicos, desarrollando así el pensamiento creativo, crítico y colaborativo. El artículo presenta criterios específicos para evaluar los cómics sobre temas filosóficos que crean los estudiantes en las clases de filosofía.

**palabras clave:** cómics; filosofía; enseñanza; "cómicsofía"; cómicsofía para niños.

### **uma abordagem de comicsofia para o ensino de filosofia**

#### **resumo**

O artigo apresenta uma abordagem inovadora para o ensino de filosofia, que os autores denominam como "comicsofia" - uma sabedoria das histórias em quadrinhos. Tal aplicação criativa dos quadrinhos no ensino da filosofia corresponde plenamente ao caráter escandaloso (*skandalonic*) e dialógico da própria filosofia. O valor metódico do uso dos quadrinhos no ensino de filosofia se manifesta exatamente no caráter distintamente escandaloso dos quadrinhos. O *skandalon* é um processo metódico que procura provocar a curiosidade dos alunos ao questionar algo que de outra forma parecia inquestionável, auto-evidente, para apresentá-lo sob uma nova luz, de modo a torná-lo objeto de questionamento crítico e reflexão. Dada a visualidade dos quadrinhos, sua diversão e raízes na cultura popular, é uma excelente ferramenta motivacional para reflexão filosófica e compreensão da realidade, questões filosóficas, ideias e conceitos no ensino de filosofia. Ao apresentar os quadrinhos como produtos reconhecíveis da cultura pop, próximos ao interesse e experiência de leitura dos alunos no ensino de filosofia, é mais fácil para eles conectar o que aprendem na escola com a vida real, ou seja, aplicar o que aprenderam em situações da vida cotidiana. As histórias em quadrinhos podem ser utilizadas como fonte de informação, uma forma de aprendizado de novos conteúdos, bem como base para estimular o diálogo e a discussão em sala de aula. Além disso, os quadrinhos podem ser usados como estímulo na abordagem da filosofia para crianças (P4C). A P4C e a abordagem comicsophy ao ensino de filosofia são particularmente complementares, o que permite que sejam combinados de forma eficaz. Os alunos podem, individualmente ou em pares/grupos, criar histórias em quadrinhos sobre temas filosóficos específicos, desenvolvendo assim o pensamento criativo, crítico e colaborativo. O artigo apresenta critérios específicos para avaliar histórias em quadrinhos sobre questões filosóficas que os alunos criam nas aulas de filosofia.

**palavras-chave:** história em quadrinhos; filosofia; ensino; comicsofia; comicsofia para crianças.



## a comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy

### *introduction*

Comics and graphic novels are increasingly used in classrooms. Multimodal nature of comics has a great potential for collaborative learning in different subject areas. The possibility of applying comics and graphic novels in teaching is wide open, it is possible to use them with adequate adaptation in almost all subjects and with all ages. Given the specific visual-verbal information modes that characterizes comics and graphic novels, their reading implies both visual and interpretive skills. Eisner states, “the reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic and intellectual pursuit” (Eisner, 2008, p.2). One of the biggest advantages of using comics and graphic novels in teaching is that it allows teachers and students to move towards „unflattening“ of the text in the way that Sousanis advocates. He considers that united words and pictures lead to new forms of knowledge, that is, to knowledge that is beyond what we normally understand. Criticizing the primacy of words over pictures that is deeply rooted in Western culture, Sousanis views comics as a medium in which words and pictures are equal partners in shaping meaning: „Embedded within the sequential- simultaneous ecosystem that is comics, words and pictures, long kept apart, are allowed to cohabit. Joined in relationship, visual and verbal intermingle, interpenetrate, interanimate, interweave, interdependent, each informs and enriches the other to achieve a meaning“ (Sousanis, 2015, p.64). In the language of comics, therefore, both words and pictures retain their distinctive identity while contributing to the whole. Comics and graphic novels, precisely because of their distinctly visual format and the complex interaction of words and pictures, also provide more possibilities for creating meanings beyond the printed word in conventionally written textbooks and books. Meaning making, according to Zittoun and Brinkmann (2012), designates the process by which people interpret situations, events, objects, or discourses, in light of their previous knowledge and experience. “Learning as meaning making” is an expression emphasizing the fact that in any learning situation, people are actively engaged in making sense of the situation – the frame, objects, relationships – drawing on their history with similar situations and available cultural resources.

Therefore, comics and graphic novels, due to their combination of visual and verbal language modality, not only present an interpretive challenge for students, but also contain the potential to develop various knowledge, abilities and skills, including critical thinking, media literacy, multimodal understanding and the like.

One should also not lose sight of the motivational power of comics and graphic novels in teaching. Due to their clarity, exemplariness, fun and popularity among students, they are an excellent motivational tool in teaching, especially for those students in whom traditional teaching methods fail to arouse interest. This motivational potential of comics comes from its rootedness in popular culture of which children and youth are the most ardent consumers. The influence of popular culture on everyday life, especially for children and young people, is particularly conspicuous nowadays. By incorporating content from popular culture into the classroom, teachers can bridge the gap between students' lives in and out of school, i.e. they can contribute to making the teaching and learning process more interesting and attractive.

Theoretical justification for the use of comics in teaching can be found in approaches and models in the field of neuroscience and related scientific disciplines regarding the ways in which the human brain processes verbal-visual information - *brain-based learning* (Sperry, 1974; Medina, 2008; Gangwer, 2009), in cognitive science - *dual coding theory* (Paivio, 1986; Sadoski i Paivio, 2004) and *cognitive theory of multimedia learning* (Mayer, 2005), as well as *semiotically framed theory of text-picture relationships* (Sipe, 1998). There are undoubtedly implications of the mentioned theories regarding the possibility of using comics and graphic novels in teaching - the basis of each is the assumption that the learning process is enhanced if the information is simultaneously presented visually and textually. In this regard, Scott McCloud, one of the world's most important comics theorists, states the following about the power of visually presented information, i.e. the differences in the processing of visually and textually presented information: „Pictures are received information. We need no formal education to 'get the message'. The message is instantaneous. Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language“ (McCloud, 1993, p.49).



Thus, comics and graphic novels, with their dual visual-textual information register, are multimodal teaching tools that enable the information received to be presented simultaneously visually and textually, which significantly simplifies and speeds up the learning and comprehension process.

*on the skandalonic and dialogical character of teaching philosophy*

Our basic idea of philosophy is in line with that of Socrates' famous words that „an unexamined life is not worth living“, which can be understood as an obligation of a human being to fulfill its own potential in life. Since we understand philosophy as a dynamic process, as well as an activity, we believe that the goal of teaching philosophy should be to teach students to philosophize, to think philosophically, and in other words to think critically, autonomously and freely. Students should not be taught only to differentiate various philosophical ideas and theories, but to be able to reflect on any content or idea proposed to them, not exclusively philosophical content. Philosophy is the method by which we approach the world we inhabit; It reflects our personal place in the world and our relationship with others, human and non-human alike.

“Doing” philosophy or thinking philosophically is to think critically about oneself, as well as personal beliefs, values and the ideas of others. It requires challenging, analyzing and evaluating these beliefs, values and ideas, taking into consideration different perspectives and trying to avoid bias. Thinking philosophically requires an ongoing process and reflection. Building our own arguments and identifying any presumptions in our thinking; Giving the reasons for our conclusions is possible only when engaging and participating in a dialogue with other persons. This is precisely the reason why collaboration and engagement of each participant is so important in teaching philosophy. The role of any philosophy teacher should be the same as a facilitator in the P4C approach, where student is allowed to participate in a dialogue. This also relies on Dewey's position that “no inquirer can keep what he finds to himself or turn it into a merely private account” (Dewey 1999; cited after: Echeveria and Hannam, 2016, p. 5).

Teaching philosophy in the digital age, when all (dis)information are easily available to students, may seem like a pointless and futile job. But, if we understand philosophy as a critical reflection of the world around us, teaching philosophy has never been more necessary. It has never been easier to access the sea of information and to make "swimming" in it a very demanding skill, where students urgently need the help of teachers. The teachers has not been the ultimate source of information for a long time, so that makes his role in teaching more complex than the one they had before. It is not surprising, then, that along with the dizzying development of information science and highly sophisticated technology, more extensive research on the role and importance of critical thinking in education has begun to emerge in recent decades. The fundamental role of philosophy teachers, as well as other teachers today, is to teach students how to critically and creatively approach the world around them and themselves. Undoubtedly, the teacher's role is to teach students how to find, evaluate and select information and draw sound conclusions based on it. As Baudrillard observes, we produce more information that we do not manage to give meaning to. Similarly, De Rougemont states that "to inform does not mean to know," and so information alone, in his words, "does not mean the formation of a spirit, but even its possible deformation" (De Rougemont, 2005). In Plato's terms, if knowledge is a "justified true belief," that justification can only be obtained by a subject (mind) who seeks the reasons for that justification.

Thus, Liessmann in his book *Theory of Miseducation* argues: "Ignorance today is therefore not an intellectual deficit, it is not a lack of information, it is not a defect of cognitive competence, but a renunciation of the will to understand something at all" (Liessmann, 2008, p.61). The essential role of philosophy teachers is to facilitate students to search for the meaning of what has been learned.

Yet Russell (2004) argued that the purpose of education at an early age is to teach children to read with distrust. According to him, education must accelerate the development of freedom of thought and action. Freedom is the ultimate purpose of learning and teaching and it arises directly from Russell's skepticism. Only a free human being can be a skeptic; and conversely, only a skeptic can finally attain true freedom. A teacher of a skepticism-based curriculum must be free to express his or



her beliefs honestly. The teacher must have time for reflection and learning and, ultimately, he must inevitably be a skeptic.

Philosophy is taught and learned, not because of giving definitive answers to the questions it asks, but because of the questions themselves. The reason for this is that these questions increase the scope of our understanding of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and free us from dogmatic certainties.

What, then, would be the most important goal of teaching philosophy? Above all, to teach students to philosophize. "Only one who philosophizes can learn philosophy. To philosophize, on the other hand, means to be in a certain relation to the world. One who does not create cannot learn to create" (Marinković, 1990, p.13). To philosophize means to question generally accepted beliefs, attitudes that have hitherto been self-evident. Teaching philosophy is nurturing intellectual virtues and improving thinking skills. Philosophy is first and foremost an activity. Teaching philosophy must not be the presentation of other people's ideas and opinions, without the commitment of teachers to engage students to question, analyze, evaluate and, finally, present their interpretations and grounded criticisms of those ideas and opinions. Only then does the teaching of philosophy become a creative act. Thus, the teacher is responsible for all kinds of growth of his students. Lipman sums it up nicely as follows: "The teacher, whose professional life is given over to making judgments of how best to prepare students to make judgments (unlike a judge, whose professional life involves passing judgment upon someone else's past judgments), exemplifies judgment in its forward looking aspect. This is what is so fulfilling and liberating about the life of the teacher, and helps make up for the drudgery that such a career often entails" (Lipman, 2003, p. 307).

The teacher of philosophy should, in Platonic terms, arouse in students a philosophical eros - a philosophical aspiration and desire for knowledge, wisdom, and at the same time the teacher himself should possess "pedagogical eros". According to Marinković (1990), pedagogical eros inspires one who, in his teaching practice, admires knowledge and the ways in which that knowledge is communicated. They never teach only the specific knowledge, but also they share

own attitudes towards what they teaches. We can conclude that neither knowledge nor teaching can ever be value neutral, it cannot happen in a value vacuum.

In the history of pedagogy, the essentialist view is that pedagogical eros or love for children is a fundamental and unique (original, substantial, essential) teaching competence. All other questions about the teacher, according to Marinković (1990), are of secondary importance. No matter how reductionist this view may seem to us, there is no doubt the importance we can attribute to pedagogical eros in the entire network of teacher competencies today.

Teaching methods and strategies are particularly important in philosophy classroom. In addition to reflexivity, these methods must stimulate the creativity and curiosity of students, giving them the opportunity to express themselves freely and to argue. The philosophy classroom should be a small oasis, a free and safe space, a territory that students come to with joy, knowing that everyone has an equal chance to express and oppose their ideas, question their views, values and beliefs, through clearly articulated dialogue and mutual respect.

Nevertheless, in order to encourage students' creativity, the teacher must be creative, constantly rethinking ways to attract students, consciously draw them into this labyrinth of the search for truth, while fulfilling the goal and purpose of teaching philosophy. Why is encouraging creativity in students so important in teaching philosophy? Because philosophy is possible only in and through freedom. Freedom is realized here as creative freedom for students to form and present their own ideas, based on what they have previously learned, as well as their overall experience. The teaching of philosophy, by its nature, should be the most suitable and relevant platform for achieving the highest levels of Bloom's taxonomy, both in the cognitive and affective domains.

The task of philosophy teachers is to provoke ambiguity and skepticism among students. This confusion has a motivating role and it should provoke a feeling of intellectual discomfort in students. Regarding to that, Gardner (1995) emphasizes the role of facilitator/teacher in the community of philosophical inquiry in creating "an environment which is 'relatively' risk-free". As she claims facilitator should "also be a model in her passion for truth; a dictator in her demands for





excellence in reasoning; a philosophical sensitizer in demonstrating a capacity to focus on the philosophically fruitful; and a leader in ensuring that direction is maintained" (Gardner, 1995, p. 47). The methodical procedure that is used to provoke students' doubt and curiosity, sometimes to shock them, is called *skandalon* (Greek *skándalon* - scandalize, shock, doubt). Teachers' usage of *skandalon* inspire students to rethink and question their existing beliefs, values and ideas. Given that leaving the zone of intellectual comfort here is necessary, such an approach requires a dose of intellectual courage, for students and teachers. That is what we want to achieve by teaching philosophy. In other words, what the student had been sure of, what he believed it must be questioned and unsettled. Aristotle himself, like Plato, believed that the source of philosophy was wondering ( $\tau\acute{o}$  θαυμάζειν), and that the teacher must provoke wonder in students. Also for Dewey (1989) the main goal of education was practicing reflective thinking, which has skandalonic dimension, i.e. perplexity, hesitation, doubt are stimulus to think more deeply and investigate about a particular belief, attitude, or event.

Ćurko (2017) lists three approaches to teaching philosophy that are present in the world today, as follows: thematic (historical-philosophical), problem-based and a discussion-based. We can agree with Ćurko, who, explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each of these three approaches, concludes that their success mostly depends on the teacher. Our position is that, although the thematic approach is not the best possible, with adequate engagement and effort of teachers, it also provides an opportunity to encourage and develop students' critical thinking. The philosophy teaching approach, which we consider very effective and purposeful is a combination of problem- and discussion-based approaches. The *Philosophy for Children* (P4C) program, under different names and variations, is present in over sixty countries around the globe. This approach was established by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s in the United States with the intention of encouraging and developing critical, creative and caring thinking in children and youth through rigorous dialogue. Stimulus, which can appear in various forms within this approach, aims to intrigue the students, provoke their curiosity and doubt in what

is taken as known, so what is considered as usual becomes unusual, and the self-understood becomes incomprehensible.

*comicsophy: comics in philosophy teaching*

The thesis that philosophy as a conceptual reflection has a privileged epistemological position in comparison to the arts was very common throughout history of philosophy. One of the earliest and most prominent advocates of that standpoint was Plato. According to Foucault, knowledge (discourse) and power are correlative, that is, they directly condition each other in such a way that power produces knowledge, and knowledge establishes power relations. That is why Foucault (1980) pointed out that it is important for us to analyze precisely the knowledge that is considered unimportant, and that which is disqualified as inadequate (comic discourse is that kind of knowledge). The power of discourse refers to the ways in which discourse regulates the actions of citizens by shaping their identities, characteristics, and relations in society. Foucault's analysis of the power of discourse offers us the possibility of perceiving the functioning of different discourses in society, those discourses that dominate as well as those that are under domination. In this sense, comic discourse fought for its cultural legitimacy in the 1970s, when it was recognized as the ninth art.

Creating comics requires much more than the inspiration and creativity of its author. It also requires an element of the deepest rationality, that is, the ability to reflect critically on the world we live in. One of the reasons why comics as an art began to be intensively brought into close connection with philosophy lies in its rationality, which in the peace of art manifests through the constant discovery of its meaning.

Comics, as an art form, can inspire philosophical reflection like any philosophical text. Observed from the didactic-methodological point of view, one of the most important contributions of comics to the teaching of philosophy lies in its role in motivating and stimulating students to think and reflect on philosophical problems. Comics can philosophize with clearly grounded argumentation and presentation of philosophical thoughts and ideas. Due to the possibility of pictorial presentation, it can do so more vividly than exclusively written texts.

Considering the connection between philosophy and comics, Meskin and Cook (2012) distinguish *philosophy in comics* from *the philosophy of comics*. Philosophy in comics refers to the study of philosophical topics and ideas that are presented and researched in individual comics, while philosophy of comics refers to studies, primarily aesthetic, but also semantical, metaphysical or epistemological, about the nature and functioning of comics. Speaking of the relationship between comics and philosophy in the context of teaching, comics can help us understand philosophical ideas, and in turn, philosophy can help us appreciate and understand comics.

Given that the terms *philosophy in comics* and *philosophy of comics* only partially cover the possible intertwining of philosophy and comics, we believe that it would be necessary to introduce a generic term that would determine all philosophical thinking of comics. Cmok (2017) introduces the term *comicsism*, which describes a particular inclination towards comics, which is reflected in reading and collecting comics, but also in the analytical study of the phenomenon of comics. The analytical approach to comics, more precisely the effort to philosophically think and understand reality with the help of comics, that, in our opinion, represents a starting point for establishing the term of *comicsophy*<sup>3</sup> as a general philosophical approach to comics. Why comicsophy? First of all, because of the etymological closeness with the term philosophy, which in combination with the first part of the compound (comics), already conceptually indicates its subject of interest. Comicsophy, therefore, encompasses both the philosophy of comics and philosophy in comics. It is not just finding philosophical content in comics, but it is also related to the problem of comics as a medium of philosophical thought. In addition to that, comicsophy considers potential of comics in philosophical thinking and rethinking of the world.

Based on all the above, and taking into account Marinković's (1990) claim that philosophy, as a teaching, is the exclusive domain of philosophy itself, it is possible

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<sup>3</sup> Smaniotto (2020) also uses the term comicsophy but in different meaning. He uses it as a generic term for a methodological proposal for the conceptual classification of stories in comic as to their philosophical approach.

to mark the application of comics in the teaching of philosophy *as a comicsophy approach to the teaching of philosophy* (Cerić & Cerić, 2020).

Comics as a medium is able to present all the complexity of philosophical problems such as the meaning of life, identity, truth, freedom, the question of good and evil, equality, etc. As such, comics are not merely illustrations of philosophical ideas, arguments, and problems, nor material for philosophical analysis and judgment, but they fully contribute to philosophical discussions of particular philosophical questions, offering new interpretations and solutions.

As a product of the author's reflection on the real world, comics refers to the real world in an indirect sense, symbolically or metaphorically, and the reader by reading the comic judges how much the author's perception corresponds to his own experience. The comic should reveal to the reader something new and unfamiliar to his experience. Comics are not just books with pictures. Comics unite two very different but intertwined sign systems (pictures and words). The reader is invited to create meanings in different directions using these two sign systems; the linear direction of the text invites readers to continue reading; pictures encourage them to think. It is also important that the "gaps" between the text and the pictures, i.e. between the two comic panels, can be experienced and interpreted differently. It is a challenge for teachers to listen to the reactions and interpretations of students. These narratives provoke a philosophical dialogue, generating questions focused on meaning rather than learning, on understanding rather than truth. This peculiarity of comics as a medium can justifiably be interpreted in the context of Gadamer's (2004) "hermeneutic circle", i.e. the view that "any understanding is influenced by the preconception brought by the one who understands", as well as in the context of Derrida's (1976) notion of deconstruction as uncovering and finding what is hidden in the text, discovering the gaps and contradictions. Using comics as a medium in teaching philosophy enable and inspire philosophical dialogue that happens not only between individual student and comics, but also between students and between students and teacher, thus creating a relational network of different interpretations and perspectives that enrich each individual and class as a whole.

McCloud's notion of closure<sup>4</sup> tells us that when reading and interpreting comics, the reader must be active, loading the missing text. That is why reading comics requires a high degree of participation. Readers not only understand comics differently, but also interpret them in ways that even the authors themselves could never imagine.

Because of its sequentiality, the comics provides great opportunities for a chronological account of the development of certain philosophical ideas and a historical analysis and interpretation, which will ultimately result in revealing connections between different philosophical ideas and solutions. The fictional elements of comics can serve as a creative complement to reflective argumentative discourse. On the other hand, the nonlinear character of comics shows the development (not necessarily progress) of philosophical ideas, i.e. it allows understanding the history of philosophy as a philosophical problem, and understanding history itself, as Gadamer understands it as simultaneity of past, present and future.

Philosophical reading of comics is not about deciphering denotative meanings. Instead, it requires sensitivity to merge what is said with what is not. This is often a complex and unpredictable process involving emotional, imaginative and rational response, not necessarily with a focus on philosophical concepts that are of interest to adults. Philosophy in comics draws students into philosophical questions about the world between imagination and reality, not about the world as it is. Thus, philosophy in comics does not place the philosophical in the text, but in the space among the text, pictures, students and teachers.

In addition to its epistemological benefits, the use of comics in teaching philosophy has also an experiential and emotional character. These benefits were proven by empirical research that explored perceptions of teaching philosophy with the use of comics in comparison to traditional teaching methods (Cerić, 2012) and

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<sup>4</sup> Closure is a term McCloud took from Gestalt psychology, using its basic assumptions to explain comics as a functional whole, whose features cannot be deduced by summing up its parts – panels as its most elementary logical elements. According to McCloud (1993, p.63), closure is a "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole", which represents process of passing from panel to panel. As McCloud states: „Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous unified reality“. (McCloud, 1993, p.67).

the impact of using comics in teaching philosophy on the quantity, quality and permanence of knowledge (Cerić, 2016). This is also confirmed by Marinković's reflection on the elements of art in philosophy: "It is rare to find visual representations in publications intended to introduce philosophical thinking. If they are found, they most often refer to elements that are not philosophical but historical. The images published in them show portraits of philosophers, pages of their books, the house in which they lived or an illustration of some interesting historical period. Elements of the visual were used mainly in logic textbooks. However, visual representation can be a stimulus to philosophical thinking, the basis of skandalon and a means of clarification" (1983, p.142). Also, considering Rius's attempt to portray Marx's philosophy in comics, Marinković concludes that comics cannot replace the reflection on philosophical questions, and states: "Although comics can be a mediator of philosophical message, it does not make philosophy more approachable if it only talks about philosophy, and does not teach 'how, and in what way philosophy is', no matter if it is (supposedly) as a form of communication more friendly than thick books. Moreover, comics, therefore, if it wants to 'bring' philosophical thinking closer to the unknowable, it should first encourage and introduce the problem and thinking about it. If it does not do that, it does not meet philosophy, no matter what it says about it" (Marinković, 1983, p.39). We can agree with Marinković and stress the motivational power of comics, where comics, as Marinković noted, can serve as a stimulus to philosophical thinking, the basis of skandalon and a means of clarification.

In research conducted by Cerić (2012, 2016)<sup>5</sup>, comics were used as a motivational tool rather than a substitute for textbooks and original texts that are irreplaceable in the philosophy teaching. In addition to the motivating, problematizing and provoking functions of comics in the philosophy and logic teaching, the use of comics facilitates the formation of philosophical and logical concepts in students through methodical procedures such as analysis, synthesis,

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<sup>5</sup> The aim of the research was to experimentally examine the possibilities of using comics in philosophy and logic teaching in high school. The findings of this study show that students from the experimental group, that used comics, achieved better results in terms of quantity, quality and permanence of knowledge. In addition, they had more positive perception of comics-based teaching in comparison to traditional method of teaching, in relation to students from the control group, where traditional teaching method was used.



abstraction, generalization and determination. They also facilitate deriving and establishing judgments through induction and deduction. This is achieved in such a way that philosophical contents, from one abstract argumentative and logically strictly structured form, are transposed into more receptive and attractive comics form, without losing the meaning and complexity of philosophical issues.

In philosophy teaching, comics can be used as a source of information and a form of learning new content. It appears both as teaching content, and a teaching tool to master the content. The most efficient form of the comics approach in teaching philosophy is certainly the use of comics as a starting point for encouraging conversation and discussion in the classroom, that is, the use of comics as a means of skandalon. Furthermore, students can be asked to create (individually or as a team) comics on certain philosophical issues (e.g. presenting the thoughts and ideas of certain philosophers and philosophical schools, the development of certain philosophical problems throughout history of philosophy, etc.). This encourages and develops students creativity, critical thinking and allows them to link philosophy with other subject areas such as art, literature, humanities, science and languages. Students can draw comics by hand, make photo-comics, use free computer programs to make comics, and use matrices of finished comics drawn by professional comics artists. They need to represent the chosen philosophical issue they studied. This embraces their creativity, foster critical thinking, and encourages collaboration. During this process, students achieve the highest levels of knowledge according to Bloom's revised taxonomy. Students create something new, using their creativity derived from a previous reflection on a philosophical problem. Creating comics impacts their sense of satisfaction and pride in the end. They can see results of the work. Besides the fact that their work is visible, through this process, they also solve some problem, which, according to Bloom et al (1956), belongs to a higher level of cognitive abilities. Creating comics, in addition to enabling the links across the subjects, i.e. interdisciplinarity, is also an artistic presentation of non-artistic, philosophical content.

Barone and Eisner (2012) propose certain criteria for evaluating artistic-based research in teaching, which can be taken as a starting point for evaluating

comics that students make throughout different subjects, including philosophy. They opt for criteria, not standards, because unlike standards, criteria are more flexible and not based on "quantitative measurement". These criteria are incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, and evocation / illumination (Barone and Eisner, 2012, pp.148-154).

In addition to the criteria offered by Barone and Eisner, we propose the following specific criteria for evaluating comics on philosophical issues that students create in philosophy classes:

- identification and presentation of philosophical problem,
- organization (clarity, coherent structure and focus on the problem),
- knowledge and understanding (use of philosophical terminology, relevance of presented ideas, accuracy of data),
- quality analysis (convincing argumentation and counter-argumentation presented),
- clarity of the presented philosophical idea / problem through the use of comics language,
- creativity (originality, imagination and innovation).

In addition, it is always important to point out to students that they will not be graded on how well they draw. This will avoid discouraging those who are not very good at drawing, and that they could make photo-comics, use computer programs to create comics or use matrices of ready-made comics. What would be evaluated is the way they use comics as a medium to convey ideas and meanings within philosophy.

### *comicsophy for children: comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy and philosophy for children*

Philosophy for children and the comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy are particularly complementary. They are provocative and dialogical, they stimulate a student's intellectual curiosity, develop critical and creative thinking, as well as creating a positive and stimulating learning environment, which allows them to be combined effectively.





Philosophy for children is based on the idea of enhancing children's thinking using provocative stimuli as a starting point for philosophical inquiries. For that purpose, Lipman (2003) wrote and used novels which encouraged children's critical thinking. Additionally, the stimulus can be a picture, a film, an ethical problem, or even comics. A stimulus which is used in the philosophical education of children should cause uncertainty, contain ambiguity, offer a common narrative, lead to philosophical questions of common interest, provoke discussion of "big" ideas / concepts, reflect the needs and interests of students, encourage emotional response, and if possible, to be conceptually meaningful and relevant to the group. Comics as a part of this have the function of a skandalon - what the student was sure of until then, including what they believed in, should be questioned by the stimulus (Cerić, 2013; Cerić & Cerić, 2020), i.e. it causes what Festinger (1957) calls cognitive dissonance.

When selecting comics as a stimulus for teaching philosophy, it is necessary to keep in mind a child's compliance with the goals and themes of the subject, as well as respect the psychological specifics of age (cognitive, emotional and social characteristics of students). It should also be taken into account the educational and artistic value of comics. We think that using certain comics in teaching sensitive or controversial topics can be a very effective tool for enhancing a student's sensibility and empathy while also expanding their reflexivity and moral imagination. Our position here is in line with what Murriss and Haynes propose: "In selecting our material, we do not avoid books that refer to painful, difficult, uncertain, surprising, or disturbing aspects of human experience or that may provoke enquiry about controversial social issues. The choice of books is important because both text and images either extend or limit the potential scope for enquiry" (Haynes and Murriss, 2012, p. 22). Censorship of certain teaching material may produce the adverse effect of the desired result - bias and one-sided interpretations, in which different and non-dominant perspectives are not taken into consideration. This is exactly what we want to avoid by using comics as a subversive media. It is also greatly important to use comics from different cultural contexts, thus bringing and celebrating

diversities of all kinds in our classrooms and avoiding religious and cultural stereotypes.

Using comics in philosophy classes offers the opportunity for students to challenge and explore dominant ideas, as well as to propose and experiment with alternative solutions, what Dewey (1922) calls “dramatic rehearsal” (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action. In that sense, it is totally acceptable to be wrong, it is the very essence of a rehearsal. But, at the end it is expected from us to make the most reasonable choices possible.

Comicsophy for children, (i.e. a combination of a comicsophy approach to the teaching of philosophy and philosophy for children) certainly enables the acquisition of all important features advocated by modern pedagogy. In particular, the involvement and engagement of all students in all phases of the teaching and learning process, from planning to evaluation, making students co-responsible for the events in the classroom; students acquire knowledge and skills through research, claims and attitudes are questioned through critical dialogue where disagreement is desirable. Critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinking is encouraged and developed as a major part of this approach. Comics as a stimulus in the philosophical education of children, due to its motivational power, is a kind of code that can unlock many philosophical questions. The use of comics as a stimulus corresponds to Freire's (2017) views that teaching requires openness to dialogue and that both teachers and students must be accepted as epistemologically curious people who ask questions and think critically about one's own questions, i.e. that the power of epistemological curiosity and dialogue leads to the strengthening of critical consciousness. Likewise, comicsophy for children with its persisting request for philosophical inquiry is in line with Dewey's understanding of reflective thought as "the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (Dewey, 1989, p. 118). Although Dewey never used the term critical thinking, from this definition it is evident, that what he meant by reflective thinking is what we call critical thinking.



This approach to teaching philosophy requires both students and teachers to reflect on teaching practices while adapting it to the needs and specifics of the community of philosophical inquiry and individuals, all while achieving individualization and inclusiveness of the teaching process.

### *conclusion*

The use of comics in philosophy teaching is, in our opinion, the starting point for establishing a new approach to teaching philosophy, which we named the *comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy*. Comics in philosophy teaching have a distinct emancipatory dimension, in a way that its use encourages critical thinking, creativity and student freedom to form and present their own ideas based on their prior knowledge and experience. At the heart of the comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy is the idea of guiding students to the paths of freedom by allowing them to think, express and judge freely, and to evaluate and value the world they live in. In this sense, we believe that there are at least five qualities of comics that make it an excellent philosophy teaching medium. It is subversive, transcendent, reflexive, interesting and provocative. In the preface to Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Palestine*, Edward Said highlights the subversive potential of comics, and states: "I don't remember when exactly I read my first comic book, but I do remember exactly how liberated and subversive I felt as a result." (Said, 2002, p.i). Subversive is, by its definition, desirable in the teaching of philosophy, because it calls for critical questioning. It is, in Derridian terms, emancipatory and deconstructive. The comic crosses the boundaries of experience, allowing the imagination to manifest and realize, introducing us to a world of fiction and transcendent timelessness. Reading comics requires, in Coleridge's words, a "willing suspension of disbelief." The transition from what "is" to what "could be." This may also be related to McCloud's view that comics allow the reader to be immersed in the comics' character and safely enter a world that stimulates the senses. That way can easily achieve identification with archetypal figures and landscape, or encourage active participation and engagement, evoking some illusion of direct participation. The multimodal nature of comics, i.e. its dual visual-textual register enables students' reflection on the messages and ideas that are

mediated by it, thus opening space for the development of aesthetic sensitivity and creative imagination. Pustz (1999) notes five different types of reflexivity that comics allow: authorial awareness, demystification, reader awareness, intertextuality, and intermedia reflexivity. Through these reflective strategies, comics' authors and readers are able to contextualize the narrative act, giving it different meanings, treating it philosophically, or finding the philosophical in it. Due to its visuality, fun and popularity among students, comics is an excellent motivating tool in teaching, especially for those students for whom traditional teaching methods fail to arouse interest. This motivational effect of comics stems from its rootedness in popular culture whose children and youth are the most loyal consumers. At the very core of the comicsophy approach to teaching philosophy is a methodical process known as skandalon. The skandalon seeks to provoke students' curiosity by questioning something that otherwise seemed unquestionable, self-evident, to present it in a new light, in order to make it the subject of critical questioning and reflection. The methodical value of using comics in philosophy teaching is manifested exactly in comics' distinctly skandalonic character.

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