EDUCATIONAL FUTURES: RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Dialogue and Boundary Learning

Peter Neville Rule

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Dialogue and Boundary Learning

EDUCATIONAL FUTURES
RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Dialogue and Boundary Learning

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For Sarah, dear partner in dialogue and in life

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MICHAEL A. PETERS

FOREWORD

Learning through Dialogue

Peter Rule's *Dialogue and Boundary Learning* makes a persuasive case for a dialogical account of learning. He identifies six senses of dialogue – conversation, literary genre, mutual engagement, being, 'dialogical self' and dialogical learning – and explores the notion is relation to Socrates, Buber, Bakhtin and Freire. He also explores its applications as a vehicle for lifelong education, concluding with an interesting account of diacognition that takes the discussion further and offers new perspectives. His perspective is that of a South African growing up in the 1970s when the nation was actively struggling against its apartheid policies. The notion of dialogue in this context takes on a monumental role and task not only as an anti-racist philosophy but also as a pedagogy and a form of learning. I am greatly heartened by this book partly because it takes up the question of a dedicated scholar and teacher to find a way forward and a mode of being that helps shape a political future through mutual engagement that can be transformative. Peter Rule's investigations show the existential significance of a practical philosophy of education that is historically and culturally sensitive to its own national and continental context. I would have liked to listen to his own personal narrative because of the practical context within which the idea of dialogue determines its value and I am immediately drawn to the dialogical character of Nelson Mandela's thought and the transformative dialogue that motivated his view of advocacy. As the Nelson Mandela Foundation's platform reminds us "Nelson Mandela based his entire life on the principle of dialogue and the art of listening and speaking to others; it is also the art of getting others to listen and speak to each other."[1] The platform goes on to state:

> Dialogue is at once a vital instrument for addressing critical social issues and the most effective vehicle for sharing memory, for growing it, and for engaging it in the promotion of justice and social cohesion.

This gives additional support for the intellectual labours of Peter Rule's extended argument and his development of a practical set of tools within a philosophy that not only embraces the concept but makes it the foundation, the platform if you will, of progressive education based on democratic dialogue aimed at addressing critical social issues.

Desmond Tutu, himself a teacher for many years, employs the notion of dialogue also as the basis for interfaith understanding and spiritual practice and as the vehicle for his anti-apartheid activism in South Africa. One could argue that, when Mandela appointed Tutu as the Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995, the guiding ethos was a notion of reconcilation, social healing and justice empowered through dialogue that enabled victims to give voice to their suffering while encouraging the process of confession from the perpetrators of crimes of apartheid and misdeeds that negated dialogue. Dialogue in this context takes on the power of cleansing and spiritual renewal necessary for the birth of a new society and Rule understands this basic dimension, as his text reveals.

The South African experience and the struggle against apartheid were determining for the greater application for a workable notion of dialogue in the international arena. Intercultural dialogue has emerged in the first decade of the 21st Century as a major means for managing diversity and strengthening democracy. The European Ministers of Education met in 2003 to witness and sign a declaration on intercultural education in the new European context. In the declaration the Ministers of Education reasserted the symbolic value of democracy as the underlying reference value for all states and, noting the diversity of European societies in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages, religions and education systems and the social conflicts and disagreements that result from different value systems, placed their hope in intercultural education as the means to avoid the worst excesses of globalisation, especially exclusion and marginalisation, and the problems of xenophobia and racism that afflict European and other Western societies (Besley & Peters, 2011, 2012).

With Peter Rule's excellent book we move forward to a full intellectual engagement and development of the notion of dialogue and its practical expression in boundary learning.

NOTE

[1] See https://www.nelsonmandela.org/landing/dialogue-advocacy

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Besley, T., Peters, M. A., & Jiang, X. (Eds.). (2011). The council of Europe's white paper on intercultural dialogue. *Policy Futures in Education* (Special Issue), (1).

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Versions of certain chapters in this book have appeared in various journals as follows. Chapter 5, which has been quite substantially modified from the original article, appeared as ‘Dialogic spaces: adult education projects and social engagement’ in the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23(6), in 2004. Chapter 6 appeared in the *Journal of Education*, 40, in 2006 as ‘Bakhtin and the poetics of pedagogy: a dialogic approach’. Chapter 7 appeared as ‘A relational pedagogy in community-based early childhood development in South Africa’ in T. Papatheodorou (Ed.), *Debates on Early Childhood Policies and Practices: Global snapshots of pedagogical thinking and encounters*, published by Routledge in 2012. Chapter 8 appeared as ‘Bakhtin and Freire: Dialogue, dialectic and boundary learning’ in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(9), in 2011. Chapter 9 appeared as ‘Unbinding the other in the context of HIV/AIDS and education’, authored by Vaughn John and me, in the *Journal of Education*, 43, in 2008. I wish to thank Vaughn John for his additions to this chapter and kind permission to include it in this book. I thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of these journals and collections for the valuable comments they provided, although any deficiencies remain my own. In addition I wish to thank Julia Preece for comments on earlier versions of Chapters 1 to 4, and Wayne Hugo and Jenny Kerchhoff for their feedback on earlier versions of Chapter 10, as well as Volker Wedekind, Edith Dempster, Neil Avery, Jane Pennefather and Iben Christianssen who contributed to a seminar based on this chapter. Again, the shortcomings are mine alone.

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INTRODUCTION

Education only began to make sense to me when I understood it from the perspective of dialogue. This did not happen at school, where the idea of being an educator never occurred to me except with a reflex of repulsion. Perhaps this was because my schooling in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the 1970s, during the era of apartheid, was framed within Christian National Education, a monological form of racist, nationalist indoctrination. This included a History curriculum shrouded in Eurocentric myths such as that South Africa was "discovered" by the Portuguese and Dutch, that its history "began" with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck to establish a trading station at the Cape in 1652, and that apartheid was a divinely ordained mission to protect European Christian civilisation from communism and savagery. It also included a weekly period of "youth preparedness" which consisted of marching on the rugby field in preparation for post-school conscription into the whites-only South African Defence Force. On the other hand, I had a handful of wonderful teachers who deeply loved their subjects.

It was only as a university student in the mid-1980s when I began to teach young adults in a tuition project, within a progressive and even prophetic anti-apartheid milieu, that I suddenly discovered the dialogical power of teaching and learning. This book stems from that moment of radical realisation that teaching and learning can transform one's own and others' orientation towards, and engagement with the world. In one way or another, as an educator, an activist, a researcher and a writer, I've been exploring the implications of that moment ever since. This book is the culmination of where I have got to so far in exploring dialogue in teaching and learning.

The term "dialogue" appears in many forms with a range of meanings in contemporary thought. Six related senses are most pertinent to this book. Below I briefly examine each of these in turn. I go on to outline the key concepts of dialogical space, boundary learning and diacognition which will be developed and applied to a range of contexts in the chapters that follow. I then provide a rationale for the book and preview the contents.

SIX SENSES OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue as Talk

At its most straightforward, dialogue refers to a conversation between two or more people – as opposed to a monologue, in which only one person speaks. This kind of conversation involves turn-taking: one person speaks and the other replies, and the conversation develops from there. It is open-ended; neither participant knows exactly where it will end up because the response of each depends on what the other says, or does not say. The dialogue is informed by the relationship between the participants, and in turn contributes to developing this relationship. For example, a dialogue between friends will be very different to one between strangers because it assumes a basis of common knowledge and experience, which has been built up through many previous interactions. Of course, the dialogue also depends on a shared code, whether this be written or spoken, visual or signed language or some combination of these, whether it occurs face-to-face or at a distance, or involves the new social technologies and applications. Context, too, is important in shaping what the dialogue is about, who participates, what positions they adopt themselves and proffer to the other, how they relate, and what the outcome is. Dialogue assumes that it is possible for people to exchange meaning and to understand each other. However, that dialogue generates a common understanding is not automatically given. Dialogue requires communicative work: the effort of making one's meaning clear as an addressor and of attempting to understand as an addressee. No matter how eloquent the addressor or attentive the addressee, the success of the dialogue depends on both. And success does not necessarily mean consensus; it might take the form of "allosensus" in which participants continue to differ but understand each other more deeply and appreciatively.

Literary Dialogue

Dialogue in literature, particularly in fiction, drama and philosophical writing, refers to conversation between two or more characters. In drama, it contrasts with monologue (one character addressing the audience) and, in ancient Greek theatre, the chorus, which is a collective voice. In fiction, dialogue between characters takes a different form, usually indicated by the use of quotation marks, from the narrator's prosaic presentation of the story. Plato's Socratic dialogues sometimes use the dramatic convention of presenting the name of the character followed by a colon and the words ascribed to him. Often a Socratic dialogue includes an ensemble of several characters that move in and out of the dialogue as it unfolds. Bakhtin sees dialogue in the novel not just in terms of conversation between characters; rather the novel, epitomised in the work of Dostoevsky, is a "polyphony" of distinct social voices, often present in one and the same character, which interact, collide, recoil.

Dialogue as Mutual Engagement

A third sense of dialogue is both normative and descriptive. It refers to a particular kind of active engagement between people or groups to develop mutual understanding or gain consensus. In this sense, dialogue takes place between religious denominations (interfaith) or cultural groups (intercultural) or political parties or countries (bilateral or multilateral negotiation), and presents itself as an alternative to persecution, intolerance and war. Figures such as Mohandas Gandhi, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King and, more recently, the Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela, epitomise this approach to dialogue with its emphasis on justice, truth, equality, peace-building and reconciliation. Here the positions of each side of the dialogue are more formally pronounced than in a casual conversation and the participants address particular relevant topics as they explore the possibilities of developing common ground.

Dialogue as Being

Dialogue as an ontological feature of being human perhaps underpins all of the above senses of the term. Here dialogue is not simply about casual conversation between interlocutors or a more profound engagement among different and even antagonistic parties. It is about being human: to be human means to be in dialogue – with others, with oneself, with the world. This dialogical approach to being contrasts with the emphasis on the individual ego as separate, isolated and autonomous. Martin Buber asserts that the "I-Thou", indicating a particular relation of mutuality between self and other, is one of the primary words, and it is a word not of separate entities but of relation. The genealogy of this ontological tradition is further developed in Part One of the book.

The Dialogical Self

Drawing on an understanding of dialogue as a feature of human being, a fifth sense, developed especially in the work of Hubert Hermans and co-authors, conceives of the self as dialogical. The self is constituted in and through dialogue. This dialogue takes place between the self and others, between the self and the world, and within the self. This dialogical self is not a "ghost in the machine" but is substantial, embodied, extended in space and time, and positional in the active sense that it takes up positions ("I-as-learner", "I-as-teacher", "I-as-proud", "I-as-curious") and in the passive sense that it is positioned by the world and others regarding, for example, name, race, class and sexual orientation.

Dialogue and Learning

In education, dialogue is referred to both as a method and a framing concept or principle. Particularly in adult education, dialogue is associated with the work of Paulo Freire and co-authors such as Ira Shor, Donald Macedo and Myles Horton. It is a means of developing the critical consciousness of learners (conscientisation), leading to transformative action to change the world. Here dialogue operates at multiple levels: between teacher and student; within each as they develop the roles of teacher-student and student-teacher; between the word and the world; and between action and reflection. Dialogic pedagogy, drawing on a range of sources, such as Socrates, Buber, Bakhtin, Freire and bell hooks, and acknowledging their differences in context and emphasis, refers to an approach to teaching and learning which views "all ideas as open for testing through dialogic discourse; students' and teachers' voices are equally valued and disagreements are not seen as threats but as opportunities for learning" (Dysthe, 2011: 71). One can immediately see a tension between this type of approach and the prescriptive, standards-based, assessment-centred education systems that tend to predominate in formal contexts across the globe.

DIALOGIC SPACE

My notion of dialogic space is informed by an ontological understanding of dialogue as constitutive of human being and human learning. It is a contextually specific zone of engagement that operates at a number of levels within a learning situation: between participants, within participants, between them and their subject matter, between them and the world. It is characterised by openness and underpinned by values of trust, love, mutual respect and epistemological curiosity. The learning situation might be more or less formal: a classroom, a reading group, community theatre, a children's play group, a research project, a conversation. Dialogic space is constructed and sustained by those who participate in and around it, and by the systems and discourses that frame it, but it exists in a dynamic relation to its context, which might be more or less conducive. Dialogic space does not necessarily entail consensus, although it might; on the other hand, it might involve a productive and unresolved conflict, but this is founded on a spirit of engagement rather than one of antagonism. The notion is developed specifically in Chapter 5 and elaborated in subsequent chapters.

BOUNDARY LEARNING

The idea of boundary learning arises from Mikhail Bakhtin's suggestive notion of the boundary that exists within an individual's words between those that are his own and those that are others', and the tense dialogic struggle that takes place on these boundaries (Bakhtin, 1986: 143). I argue that learning boundaries exist both within and between participants in a dialogic space and that learning occurs as participants traverse and redefine these boundaries. Such boundaries are not rigid demarcations but rather permeable and shifting thresholds of contact and communication. The self-positions, in Hermans' sense, that participants adopt, such as teacher-learner and learner-teacher, can influence what and how they learn on these boundaries of becoming. Chapter 8 develops this notion in more depth.

DIACOGNITION

The notion of diacognition concerns the relations among teaching, learning and knowing. It comprises three dimensions – dialogue, cognition and position – all of which interactively shape teaching and learning as knowing within a particular context. It is based on the assumption, drawn from Paulo Freire, that teaching and learning are constitutively related: learning involves cognition of content by learners, and teaching involves a recursive re-cognition of that content by the teacher, taking into account the learners' cognition, as the teacher instigates the learners' learning. Teaching also involves learning: about the content and the learners, about teaching and how to teach, and includes intercognition, which refers to the emerging commonality of understanding between teacher and learners as the teaching-learning process proceeds. A teacher comes to know how to teach by actually teaching and by reflecting, through a process of metacognition, in and on practice. On the other hand, learning involves not only getting to know content, but also learning how to learn (how to teach oneself), and thus metacognition as well. Diacognition also includes boundary-crossing: the teacher crosses over to take the position of the learner and "experience the other side", to use Buber's term, in order to teach better, and the learner crosses over into the world and discourse of the teacher in order to appropriate it for herself. These movements are acts of meaning making which shift the boundaries of both teacher and learners within the dialogical space of their engagement. They happen in and through dialogue: between teacher and learners, among learners, between participants and their worlds, and within them. Teachers and learners adopt positions – temporary locations of the self – as they teach and learn. Chapter 10 develops and illustrates the notion of diacognition more fully.

WHY A BOOK ON DIALOGUE AND BOUNDARY LEARNING?

There are a number of books which explore the idea of dialogue in education, including Paulo Freire's seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972), the American Jane Vella's (2002) *Learning to listen, learning to teach*, the South African Sarah Gravett's (2005) *Adult learning: Designing and implementing learning events*, the Russian Eugene Matusov's (2009) *Journey into Dialogic Pedagogy* and Wolff-Michael Roth's (2009) dialogic analysis of a Science classroom in *Dialogism: A Bakhtinian Perspective on Science and Learning*. A recent example is Rupert Wegerif's (2013) *Dialogic: Education for the Internet Age*. At a philosophical level, the Russian philosopher Dmitri Nikulin's *On Dialogue* (Nikulin, 2006) and *Dialectic and dialogue* (Nikulin, 2010) offer significant and far-reaching analysis of key concepts, while Sidorkin (1999) explores philosophical and educational issues from an ontological perspective of dialogue. In relation to social and literary theory, besides Mikhail Bakhtin's work which I will examine in some depth in this book, Hans Herbert Kogler's *The Power of Dialogue*, as well as Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2004) seminal work, *Truth and method*, on dialogue as a central concern of hermeneutics, are illustrative. From a political science perspective, Dallmayr (2013) draws on notions of dialogue to elaborate his conception of the cosmopolis and civic education. This is but a sample of the very extensive range of work which addresses dialogue from a variety of perspectives and disciplinary (and often interdisciplinary) locations.

This book differs in that it explores dialogue, and the associated educational concepts of dialogic space, boundary learning and diacognition, in a number of different learning contexts across the spectrum of lifelong learning, ranging from early childhood development to adult, community and higher education, and so explores theory and practice of dialogic education in relation to this wide range of contexts. It has a specific focus on learners and learning in contexts of oppression and marginality, and with a view to personal and social emancipation. It is located in an African context, specifically South Africa, although it engages with empirical and theoretical work from elsewhere.

This book does not seek to be a final word on dialogue and learning – such an aspiration is anyway self-contradictory given the unfinalizability of dialogue and being – but rather to be a dialogical provocation which might contribute to an ongoing generation of praxis.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Part 1 of this book sets out the foundations of my understanding of dialogue and learning. It comprises four chapters, one each on Socrates, Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire. Each chapter explores the biography and work of the central figure, with a particular focus on their ideas and practices regarding dialogue and its place in teaching and learning. While Socrates lived and philosophised in Athens in the fifth century BCE, the other three were twentieth century figures, Bakhtin in Soviet Russia, Buber in pre-Nazi Germany and the new state of Israel, and Paulo Freire in Brazil before and after his exile in several countries. While their contexts and interests differed, the four shared a passion for dialogue and its dynamic contribution to human being and becoming. Part One initiates a dialogue among these thinkers which is developed through the book and which informs the key concepts of dialogic space, boundary learning and diacognition.

Part 2 explores dialogue, teaching and learning in a range of contexts. Chapter 5 investigates adult education projects as dialogic spaces. It draws on a historical case study of a South African non-formal adult education project, the Tuition Project, to illustrate the concept. It concludes by examining the conditions which make dialogue possible in adult education and discusses the broader application of the notion of dialogic space in the field. Chapter 6 draws on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to explore academic development among certificate students in a higher education context. In particular, it explores and applies his concepts of dialogue, language types and speech genres to the context of student development. It argues for a pedagogy which negotiates the boundary between formal and informal knowledge, taking into account both disciplinary foundations and students' experiences. Chapter 7 shifts attention to early childhood education and relational pedagogy. Focusing on a community-based pedagogy for poor and vulnerable young children who do not have access to early education centres, it argues that a relational pedagogy can promote dialogic engagement among teachers, care-givers and children. The relations among teacher, child and care-giver provide a basis for a formative engagement between the home and school environments. Chapter 8 revisits the work of Freire and Bakhtin and brings them into dialogue regarding their notions of dialogue and dialectic. It then teases out some of the implications for education theory and practice in relation to two South African contexts of learning that facilitate the access to education of disadvantaged groups, one in higher education and the other in early childhood education. This chapter also develops and applies the notion of boundary learning in relation to these contexts. Chapter 9 explores the possibilities of a dialogic education in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South Africa. Its focus is on community learning, particularly in HIV and AIDS support groups of persons living with HIV, and its potential contribution to school-based learning.

Part 3 of the book consists of a single concluding chapter which is in a sense a culmination of the preceding discussions but also explores new territory. It introduces and develops the notion of diacognition, a conceptual framework for understanding teaching and learning as moments in the larger process of knowing. It draws on the ideas of dialogue, dialogic space and boundary learning proposed in earlier chapters to generate this framework and its component concepts: dialogue, cognition and position. Diacognition entails coming-to-know through a situated process of positioning and repositioning in dialogical exchange with oneself and others. The chapter applies the framework in analysing a learning episode from Paulo Freire's career as an adult educator.

PART 1

DIALOGUE: A GENEALOGY FOR EDUCATION

Dialogue has a rich and polyvalent resonance within the western philosophical canon as well as in emancipatory discourses of the South. In Part One I review four traditions associated with dialogue which are pertinent to education. I use the word "traditions" rather than referring to single authors or thinkers because I wish to evoke the wider contexts and relations of their thinking and its reception. I understand traditions as dynamic "compositories" that are based on the dialogues both of contemporaries and subsequent generations, and that continue to compose themselves in relation to the particular challenges of the present. By using the term "genealogy" here, I do not mean that there is a strict, linear "line of descent" from one tradition to the next. I present the traditions in broadly chronological order, although the twentieth century traditions overlap in time while developing in very different socio-economic contexts. Some build on preceding traditions explicitly while others have a more implicit association that arises not so much from direct influence as some commonalities in ontological and axiological assumptions.

The first is the Socratic tradition from ancient Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Plato's dialogues featuring Socrates are the key sources here and have important implications for understanding the nature of dialogue and its relation to teaching and learning. While Socrates disavows the term "teacher", the way that he instigates learning – both his own and his interlocutors' – through an elenctic question-answer method, is suggestive for education, as is his understanding of knowledge as a collaborative, accountable and public enterprise. The second is a Jewish tradition associated with the German philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber. His primary word *I-Thou* illuminates the encounter between persons and provides the basis for interpersonal dialogue. In education, he emphasises the importance of inclusion and of "experiencing the other side". The third tradition is that of Russian dialogism which draws on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle, and reaches to later Russian thinkers such as Matusov and Sidorkin. Bakhtin develops ideas about dialogue from his study of the novel and his concepts, including authorship, internally persuasive discourse and ideological becoming, among others, have informed thinking about dialogic pedagogy. The fourth tradition is associated with the Brazilian adult educator and theorist Paulo Freire, working in Latin America in the 1960s, and more widely in the 1970s and 80s. Freire worked with many collaborators in developing and refining his ideas, including Shor, Macedo, Faundez and Horton, with whom he wrote "talking books" in dialogue form. Freire's ideas about emancipatory dialogue within the context of education for liberation have been especially influential in adult education.

In identifying and exploring these traditions, I do not mean to suggest that there are no other relevant traditions of dialogue and dialogic thinking. Numerous other thinkers have explored and applied the notion of dialogue in various ways. Indeed, White and Peters (2011) identify eight moments in the history of the philosophy of dialogue. Besides those that I have highlighted, they include Neo Kantianism (Appel and Habermas), philosophical hermeneutics (Heidegger and Gadamer). Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" and "language games", and Oakshott and Rorty's exploration of conversation as the medium of liberal learning (p. 5). Some of these, such as Jurgen Habermas with his notion of the ideal speech situation and Hubert Hermans' theory of the dialogical self, will be drawn into the continuing dialogue of this book as it unfolds. I present the four traditions as key points of reference in developing and applying my own ideas about dialogue, dialogic space, boundary learning and diacognition within the context of lifelong learning.

The etymology of the word "dialogue" is ancient Greek: *dia* meaning 'in two' or 'apart', with a touch of competition (Nikulin, 2006: 2); and two other closely related words: *logos*, which has a cluster of meanings including 'account, ratio, reason, argument, discourse, saying' and 'word'; and *legein*, 'speak'. The Greek compound word *dialogos* means 'conversation' or 'discourse'. Thus, the term signifies a particular kind of speech that happens between two or more people, and is associated with the pursuit of knowledge (reason, argument, discourse). It also has a connotation of *difference* (*dia* as 'apart'): the two or more who partake in dialogue are separate and distinct as individual beings, as interlocutors and as thinkers, but the conversation brings them together and fashions a unity of process through their joint engagement, which does not necessarily lead to consensus or agreement. Dialogue is an unfolding process, a search or quest for knowledge and understanding usually through the medium of spoken language, but not excluding written and visual codes, involving partners who are committed to this quest. Thus, dialogue assumes relationship and is impossible without it. This is one of the differences between dialogue, on the one hand, and monologue and diatribe, on the other.

In the four chapters that follow, I present a brief biographical sketch of each of the key theorists within the four traditions. This is because their understandings of dialogue are not limited to conversational interaction, but extend to knowing, doing and being itself. I go on to discuss each theorist's key ideas, in particular his conception of dialogue, in relation to education, with a particular focus on their relation to teaching, learning and knowledge. I also discuss how the ideas in each tradition have been developed and applied by others in education and educational theory.

CHAPTER 1

SOCRATES AND DIALOGUE AS VOCATION

INTRODUCTION

Socrates (470–399 BC), a seminal figure in Western philosophy, left behind no written record of his thoughts. He was presented by his student, Plato (c. 427–347 BC), as the main speaker in a series of dialogues, as well as by Xenophon, and by at least nine other of his associates whose Socratic conversations are referred to in various sources, but most of which are now lost. Socrates clearly had a profound and lasting impact on his contemporaries since his conversations continued to confound, provoke and inspire them long after his death, as well as on subsequent generations as a figure who is "renewed in every generation to speak to that age's philosophical condition" (Taylor, 1999: 6). Key modern philosophers such as Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer their own interpretations of Socrates but the "exasperating enigma" that he poses "continues ironically to throw all his interpreters into aporia" (Kofman, 1998: 6). What follows does not attempt to reduce the enigma of Socrates to a dialogic formula for education – an exercise that would pervert the spirit and intent of the Socrates that we encounter in Plato's dialogues. Rather, it explores the implications and complications of a Socratic approach to dialogue for situations of teaching and learning.

THE HISTORICAL SOCRATES

We know a little about Socrates the man, mainly from the writings of Plato and Xenophon, and from the gossipy patchwork of the third century historian of philosophers, Diogenes Laertius. Socrates was born in Athens in 470 BC, the son of Sophroniscus the stone-cutter and Phaenarete the midwife. He was married to Xanthippe, renowned as a shrewish and troublesome woman, and had three sons. He comes across as an eccentric figure, "universally admitted to be extraordinarily ugly" in a fascinating kind of way (Guthrie, 1969: 386), with prominent, protruding eyes that seemed to cast themselves sidelong at his interlocutor ("All the better to see through your rhetorical postures"), a snub nose with wide nostrils ("All the better to smell out your contradictions"), thick lips, a wide mouth ("All the better to feast on your tasty but rather underdone suppositions") and a rather well-endowed paunch ("All the better to digest your dialectical vicissitudes"). His enemies, some of whom had come off second best in a dialectical encounter with Socrates, liked to portray him as a kind of Big Bad Wolf of sophistry and deception. He frequented the streets and squares of Athens barefoot and in simple attire, was physically strong and morally steadfast, had a reputation for courage in battle as a foot soldier without special rank, did not hold political office but stood by his conscience in public affairs, made no claim to wisdom besides an awareness of his own ignorance, and irrepressibly engaged anyone who cared to converse with him. For Socrates dialogue was not simply an inclination but a vocation. As Plato has him say at his trial, “The unexamined life is not worth living” and he examined life publicly, dialogically and inexhaustibly.

SOCRATES IN DIALOGUE AND THE DIALOGIC SOCRATES

Plato’s Socratic dialogues are concerned with the nature of virtue itself and other virtues, such as justice, wisdom, courage and piety. Socrates uses dialogue as a method to explore these issues with various interlocutors. He takes on the role of a questioner who unravels the propositions of his interlocutor by showing, through question and answer, that the consequences of the interlocutor’s initial proposition contradict it. Dialogue therefore constitutes an act of knowing that they did not know what they thought they knew, a cognition of not knowing or a *de*cognition. One insight that the Socratic dialogues yield is that this kind of decognition is a potentially important moment in the teaching-learning process.

Before proceeding to examine the nature of the Socratic dialogue in more depth, it is important to acknowledge that one cannot unproblematically equate the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues and the philosophy of that Socrates with the historical Socrates. Given that Socrates left no written record of his philosophy himself, there is an entire complex literature on “the Socratic problem” – the extent to which the written records of other writers represent the life, character and thought of Socrates. I take the position of scholars such as Santas (1979), Taylor (1999) and Vlastos (1991) that Plato’s body of earlier dialogues best represents the character and philosophy of the historical Socrates, while nevertheless conceding that there is a creative and fictional element in Plato’s portrayals of Socrates which was an accepted part of the dialogue genre. Vlastos argues that Plato’s later dialogues increasingly use Socrates as a mouthpiece for Plato’s own philosophical ideas. Through a thorough and incisive analysis of the corpus of Plato’s dialogues, Vlastos shows that the Early Socrates is exclusively a moral philosopher. His utmost concern is for the well-being of the soul, and this is best served through the pursuit of knowledge about the nature of virtue and what it means to live a virtuous life. He seeks knowledge elenctically (through his method of *elenchus* – examination of propositions through a dialogical question-answer method) but denies that he himself has knowledge, and pursues truth “adversatively” by “refuting theses defended by dissenting interlocutors” (Vlastos, 1991: 49). Unlike Plato’s Middle Socrates, the Early Socrates does not hold Plato’s elaborate theory of forms or of the immortal reincarnated soul which exists before birth and after death and which learns by “recollecting” knowledge from the immortal sphere. Plato retained the character of Socrates in his dialogues even as his own philosophical positions developed and matured, to the extent that

Plato's earlier and later Socrates sometimes hold opposed positions. The historical Socrates is thus elusive, glaring with bulging eyes or peeping with a sidelong glance out between Plato's lines, sometimes authoritatively as his former master, sometimes adversatively in advocating a position that Plato has come to reject, always with an ironic undertone that defies easy categorisation. One might argue that the character of Socrates in Plato's dialogues is thoroughly dialogised in the sense of representing a continuing and evolving dialogue between Socrates the master and Plato the pupil, between Plato and his readers, and within Plato himself.

Taylor (1999) concurs that a body of twelve earlier dialogues of Plato best represent the historical Socrates because they characterise Socrates in a consistent way as an enquirer who disclaims wisdom and subjects his interlocutors' views to *elenchus*; they are all concerned with the definition of virtue or some other ethical concept; they are concerned with the ethical question of how we should live; and they involve a confrontation between Socrates and sophists – itinerant teachers of the day who equipped young people to participate in civic life for a fee, and placed particular emphasis on the skills of oratory and persuasion. Among the early corpus are works associated with Socrates' trial and execution, such as *Apology* (itself not a dialogue), *Euthyphro* and *Crito*, as well as *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*. The later dialogues, such as *Republic* II–X (Book I of the Republic fits into his early period) and *Laws*, appear to be vehicles for the expression of Plato's own philosophy rather than that of his teacher, and hence a shift away from the situated creation of truth, to truth as an ideal form accessed through philosophical contemplation. I therefore draw upon Plato's early dialogues (particularly *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* and *Republic* I) to examine Socrates' use of, and interest in, dialogue, and to trouble their implications for teaching and learning. I also draw on *Meno*, considered to be a transitional dialogue between Plato's Early and Middle periods, because it has a particular concern with learning and arguably presents both a Socratic and a Platonic take on education.

Mikhail Bakhtin, himself a key twentieth century theorist and exponent of dialogue in relation to the novel (see Chapter 3), sheds light on the nature of Socratic dialogue as an innovative genre. Socratic dialogue in its written form developed as a particular "serio-comic" genre as opposed the "serious" genres of Ancient Greek literature: tragedy, history and epic (Bakhtin, 1984). It is rooted in the oral culture of carnivalistic folklore, an emphasis on the living present (the immediacy of contact between interlocutors) and on experience and free invention, rather than legend, as sources of knowledge; and includes many voices rather than a single authoritative voice. It is based on a dialogic understanding of truth: "Truth…is born between people collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, 1984: 110). In a way, this written dialogic form, featuring interlocutors in a quest for knowledge, stands in tension with the idealist ontology and epistemology of its creator, Plato, and perhaps reflects, especially in the earlier dialogues, the differences between Socrates and the mature Plato of *The Republic II-X.* Truth arises from dialogic interaction in the street and the market place, in a home among friends, in the public forum among interlocutors, in the unpredictable and situated to-and-fro of rejoinders.

Nikulin (2006) identifies four features of Socratic dialogue: the question-answer form; the subject matter, which is “generally a problem which allows for a systematic discussion from various points of view through multiple arguments and counter-arguments” (Nikulin, 2006: 6); the characters, who display consistency in their speech, personal features and approach to the topic; and the style, which is uniform and corresponds to the topic. The dialogue form highlights the voice and character of the participants, especially Socrates, whose philosophy and personality are intricately related. Plato’s dialogues are therefore not simply about and for the exploration of philosophical ideas, but also about how these ideas are embodied in persons and embedded in their situated verbal exchanges.

The goal of the Socratic dialogue is shared understanding. It is based on the assumption that one must answer for what one claims to know, an acceptance of the need for accountability: “knowledge … has to prove itself in dialogical coming to an understanding—that is, in an unlimited willingness to justify and supply reasons for everything that is said” (Gadamer, 1991: 52). In addition, the dialogue is a public form: the being of man is understood to be a being with others in a community (*polis*), and knowledge claims are presented and disputed not in isolation but with other knowledge seekers. Dialogue is thus a shared act of cognising (getting to know) what one knows and/or does not know.

One might argue that the Socratic dialogue is also subversive in the sense that it questions established positions and reveals contradictions. The Socratic dialogue creates a critical space within discourse and is an important part of the tradition of critical thinking. Socrates, as portrayed by Plato, did not accept that knowledge should be the preserve of the powerful and influential to be handed down to the masses by experts. The self-proclaimed ‘gadfly of Athens’—Hamlyn (1987: 38) describes him as “a questioner of accepted mores, ways of behaviour and beliefs whom conservatives, at all events, could not stomach”—was eventually executed by the powers-that-be for allegedly failing to worship the official gods, introducing new gods and corrupting the youth.

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC

From the time of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the notion of dialogue has been closely associated with that of *dialectic*. A short diversion regarding the relation between dialogue and dialectic is appropriate here because of its bearing on the Socratic dialogue. Dialectic has a complex history in Western thought that reaches from the Greeks through medieval disputation to Kant, Hegel and Marx (Nikulin, 2010). Dialectic derives from the Greek verb *dialegesthai,* meaning ‘to hold discourse’ or ‘to converse’, and thus might seem synonymous with dialogue, with which it shares closely related etymological roots. However, whereas the emphasis of dialogue is on the exchange of ideas between partners through speech or writing, dialectic focuses on the dynamic of transformation through conflict and contradiction, whether this be in dialogue or in history and society more broadly (see especially Gadotti, 1996; Nikulin, 2006, 2010). The notion of dialectic and its relation to dialogue is explored in Chapter 8, particularly regarding the work of Paulo Freire and Mikhail Bakhtin, and the implications of their ideas for understanding teaching and learning.

In Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*, Socrates identifies dialectic as an art and contrasts it with rhetoric. While rhetoric is the art of persuasion – "flattery", as Socrates deprecatingly terms it – and uses all sorts of devices to exercise power over people, dialectic is the art of argument and seeks truth. Dialectic in this Socratic sense proceeds through question and answer and attempts to build up universal definitions through a process of induction. Thus the genre of Socratic dialogue, in its original oral and later written forms, provides a vehicle for the practice of dialectic. Dialogue brings dialectic to life and gives it a personal dimension. The unfolding argument is not simply presented in an abstract, formal, monologic manner. It is embodied in characters and dramatised through their dialogical interaction.

To conclude this section, it is worthwhile to note the tension between written and oral dialogue. Plato's brilliant written dialogues create a sense of the tenor of the living, oral dialogues between Socrates and his interlocutors. Plato brings to life the characters, their mannerisms and their philosophical positions in the flow of dialogic exchange. However, despite its dialogic form, the written work is Plato's, the characters are Plato's Socrates and Plato's Gorgias, and their voices are subordinated to his voice and his philosophical interests, at varying stages of his development as a philosopher. The written word is planned, finalized and abstracted in a way that contrasts with the 'presentness' of oral dialogue, its unpredictability and dramatic, once-occurrent 'eventness', in Bakhtin's sense of a singular, contextually specific happening involving participants together. Thus, in Plato's early Socratic dialogues, Socrates always gains the upper hand and often has the final word, as in *Gorgias*, *Euthyphro* and *Crito*. Even in *Phaedo,* which records Socrates' final conversation before his death, Plato's character Phaedo concludes by paying tribute to Socrates as, "of all those whom we knew in our time, the bravest and also the wisest and most upright man" (*The Last Days of Socrates,* p. 183). Plato's Socratic dialogues are thus tributes to and apologies for Socrates which simultaneously reveal the brilliance of the form in the hands of a master and the inherent limitations of a written rendition of dialogue.

SOCRATES AND THE QUESTIONS OF LEARNING

What is the relation between dialogue and learning in the Socratic dialogue? Socrates denies that he is a teacher or that he possesses wisdom. This is perhaps because Plato sought to distance Socrates both in title and in philosophical substance from the sophists, with whom the accusers at his trial and later writers such as Aeschines and Androtion associated him. Sophists had a reputation, perhaps undeserved, for useless metaphysical speculations and manipulative oratory. This is reflected in Aristophanes' satirical play *Clouds* and in the charges against Socrates, recounted by Socrates in the *Apology*, as one “guilty of criminal meddling, in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example” (Apology, p. 47). Socrates was thus tried and convicted partly for being a bad teacher, in the worst moral sense. In contrast, Plato’s Socrates places himself in the position, not of a teacher who gives instruction, but of a pupil or learner who ostensibly seeks instruction from his interlocutor. What makes him wiser than the “experts” that he engages in dialogue is his awareness of his own ignorance. Socrates believes that dialogue allows for a process of reasoned argument that can lead to truth and sees himself as a “midwife”, drawing the metaphor from his mother’s occupation, who helps his interlocutors to “give birth” to their ideas. Learning thus happens through dialogue at a number of interrelated levels: learning about one’s own assumptions through critically examining and interrogating them with another; learning about a particular topic through definition and induction; and learning about the process of creating knowledge through participating in dialogue. I will examine these three aspects in turn.

Dialogue helps one to subject one’s own assumptions to careful scrutiny. Typically, Socrates begins with an invitation to his interlocutor to define a particular concept and then to examine the adequacy of the definition through a process of question and answer. A sample of Plato’s early and transitional dialogues shows this move:

An extract from *Gorgias* (454) serves to illustrate how this characteristic move plays out. Socrates and Gorgias, the rhetorician, are discussing the nature of rhetoric and Gorgias agrees to define it as “the artificer of persuasion”. Socrates goes on to interrogate this definition further:

> Socrates: Seeing, then, that not only rhetoric works by persuasion, but that other arts do the same, as in the case of the painter, a question has arisen which is a very fair one: Of what persuasion is rhetoric the artificer, and about what? – is that not a fair way of putting the question?
>
> Gorgias: I think so.
>
> Socrates: Then, if you approve the question, Gorgias, what is the answer?
>
> Gorgias: I answer, Socrates, that rhetoric is the art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies, as I was just now saying, and about the just and the unjust.
>
> Socrates: And that, Gorgias, was what I was suspecting to be your notion; yet I would not have you wonder if by-and-by I am found repeating a seemingly plain question; for I ask not in order to confute you, but as I was saying that the argument may proceed consecutively, and that we may not get the habit of anticipating and suspecting the meaning of one another’s words; I would have you develop your own views in your own way, whatever may be your hypothesis.

Table 1. Interlocutors, questions and definitions in Socratic dialogues

Dialogue	*Interlocutors*	*Questions of definition*	*Initial definition*
Gorgias	Socrates and Gorgias	With what is rhetoric concerned?	Rhetoric is the art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies, and about the just and the unjust.
Protagoras	Socrates and Protagoras	What is excellence? Are wisdom, soundness of mind, courage, justice and holiness five names for excellence?	All of these are parts of excellence, and four of them resemble one another fairly closely, but courage is altogether different from the rest.
Euthyphro	Socrates and Euthyphro	How do you define piety and impiety?	Piety is prosecuting a wrong-doer for a crime, regardless of who he is; not to prosecute such a person is impious.
Hippias Major	Socrates and Hippias	What is the beautiful? What is fineness?	A fine-looking girl is a fine thing.
The Republic I	Socrates and Cephalus, Polymarchus, Thrasymachus	What is justice?	To speak the truth and to repay your debts.
Laches	Socrates and Laches	What is bravery?	If a man is prepared to stand in the ranks, face up to the enemy and not run away, you can be sure that he is brave.

Gorgias: I think you are quite right, Socrates.
Socrates: Then let me raise another question: there is such a thing as 'having learned'?

Here we see how inseparably question and answer are related. The question is built on suppositions about the shared knowledge of the interlocutors. Thus, in the question: Of what persuasion is rhetoric the artificer, and about what? – the shared knowledge consists in the common understanding of rhetoric as an "artificer". What is not shared, and still to be established, is *of what persuasion* it is the artificer, and *about what*? The question consist of elements of the known (already cognised) and the yet to be known (still to be cognised by the questioner in listening/

re-cognised by the answerer in answering). The answer fills in the openings created in the question:

> I answer, Socrates, that rhetoric is the art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies, as I was just now saying, and about the just and the unjust.

The question thus frames a particular response, and this response in turn stimulates further questions. The answers enter into the common understanding, the shared dialogic space of the interlocutors, and become a resource for further exchanges, as the dialogue moves on. This allows the argument to proceed "consecutively" and for the interlocutor to develop his "own views". This question-answer form means that the interlocutors do not merge into one another, as in a monologue where one speaker takes on both roles. The interlocutors remain distinct but reciprocally related. The recognition of voice and the reciprocity of voices are thus central to dialogue. It cannot work without interlocutors opening up a space for the voice of the other. As Nikulin (2006: xi) argues, "The other is recognized – and needs to be recognized – in and through one's self-renunciation, which makes room for the recognition of the other's dignity (rather than honour), thereby providing reciprocal assistance to each other in dialogue."

This reciprocity points to the importance of listening in dialogue. Listening is what "makes room" and "opens a space" for the voice of the other, and dialogue is impossible without the receptivity of the listener. Listening is the invisible and inaudible *sine qua non* of dialogue. It is indirectly evident in the response of the listener to the speaker, whether this is in the form of words, gestures or other paralinguistic signs. We see signs of Socrates' active and incisive listening in his prompts and responses to Gorgias. Socrates shows his receptivity by checking if Gorgias agrees with his question – "is that not a fair way of putting the question?" – before requesting an answer. He also listens for whether Gorgias' answer corresponds with the answer that he expects, in other words, whether the external other (Gorgias) and the internal other (Gorgias-in-Socrates) coincide in the answer: "And that, Gorgias, was what I was suspecting to be your notion". But, while anticipating possible responses is part of active listening, it also requires that one guard against superimposing the answers of the internal other on those of the external other in a way that stifles or distorts his or her voice. Socrates is aware of the danger of "getting into the habit of anticipating and suspecting the meaning of one another's words" – of crowding the space of the other's words with one's own projections of the other's voice. The other should be allowed to develop his own views in his own way.

This recognition of the other allows for the particular kind of generative tension in dialogue. Nikulin (2010: 78–9) calls this productive disagreement "allosensus", as opposed to consensus, which "terminates the life of dialogue", or simply dissensus, which taken to its extreme results in destructive conflict. Allosensus or "*other*sensus" recognises the crucial productive role of the other in the life of dialogue, precisely in their otherness and difference: "it allows one to recognize the difference *of* and *from* the other through a dialogical and unfinalizable unwrapping of the inexhaustible contents of one's personal other" (Nikulin, 2012: 79). Thus the self-examination which dialogical learning enables involves learning the "personal other" in oneself.

The second kind of learning in the dialogues, learning through induction, works through the interlocutors' looking at several examples, identifying what they have in common, and coming to a general conclusion or definition. Aristotle stated in his *Metaphysics* that "two things may justly be ascribed to Socrates, inductive arguments and general definitions, for both are concerned with the starting point of knowledge" (cited in Copleston, 1993: 104). For example, Socrates argues that medicine makes use of discourse concerning disease (example), gymnastic makes use of discourse concerning the good or evil condition of the body (example), all other arts make use of discourse concerning their own subjects (conclusion). After leading Gorgias along this inductive pathway, Socrates then asks: "Then why, if you call rhetoric the art which treats of discourse, and all the other arts treat discourse, do you not call them arts of rhetoric?" (Gorgias, 450). We see this inductive pattern again and again in the early dialogues: "You claim X. But if this is so, and this is so, and this is so, is not Y so as well? And if Y is so, then your initial claim X cannot be true."

The third kind of learning, learning about the process of creating knowledge in dialogue, unfolds through the interaction of interlocutors. It assumes a mutual commitment to finding the truth and breaks down into monologue or silence if one of the interlocutors withdraws. Thus, in *Gorgias* (505), when the exasperated Callicles refuses to persist as Socrates' interlocutor – "I wish that you and your argument would rest, or that you would get someone else to argue with you" – Socrates recognises that the process has lost something crucial: "Must I then say with Epicharmus, 'Two men spoke before, but now one shall be enough'?" Even if Socrates takes on the roles of both interlocutors, asking and answering his own questions, as he does for a while in *Gorgias,* he has lost the vital presence of the other, their difference and their distinctness, as a partner, however agonistic, in the pursuit of truth, "for the discovery of truth is a common good". In *Meno* Socrates affirms the process of pursuing truth even if it does not result in a positive conclusion: searching for what one doesn't know is something that Socrates considers worth "fighting for to the end." The search is in and of itself worthwhile, even if it yields the knowledge that one does not know what one thought one knew.

SOCRATES AS EDUCATOR

What are the implications of the Socratic method for teaching? As noted above, Socrates denied that he was a teacher or that he had any special wisdom. However, he clearly led his interlocutors through a process of learning by means of a question-answer method. The term "Socratic *educator*" – from the Latin *educo* ("to lead out") – is therefore more apt than Socratic teacher. Socrates *educ*-ated his interlocutors, even if this leading out was a "leading from behind" – affording his partners in dialogue a head start by handing over to them the definition of the key concept and so allowing them to bring out their beliefs about the topic, then reining the front-runner in by questioning, redirecting, snagging – until at times they came to a complete standstill, exited the race or agreed to return to the starting line. His dialogic method involved a certain form of dialectical *reasoning*. It presupposes that we can discover what is true through reasoning together in dialogue, even if this truth is, in the end, a *de*cognition – the recognition that one does not know what one supposed one knew. It is a dialectic in the original Greek sense of argument, first, in that it involves clarifying the essence of a notion by addressing the "what is?" question – What is justice? What is virtue? What is piety? – and then testing answers through alternating rejoinders. This testing involves dealing with opposites, contradictions, refutations. As Nikulin (2010: 6) explains:

> Because Platonic dialogue presupposes disagreement in that interlocutors test and try to refute the other's opinion, such dialogue is inevitably *agonistic*, based on struggle and competition. The purpose of *agon* is to win a dialectical competition by revealing a weakness and inconsistency in the other's claim, by gaining the upper hand in the discussion, and by trying to persuade the other of the superiority of one's own argument.

An educator who adopts this approach requires great tact so that the learner (his "opponent") does not feel vanquished if he or she is shown up in the argument; and great humility to recognise and accept when the learner "leads out" the educator. Socrates did not always manage this affective side of his dialogues and his opponents would at times experience the acute discomfort: his opponents would remember an "urgent engagement somewhere" (*Euthyphro*) or, like Callicles, withdraw in exasperation (*Gorgias*) when pressed into a tight corner by the relentless Socrates. Here we see the tension between the interpersonal mutuality of dialogue and the agonistic competitiveness of dialectic within Socratic dialogue.

Plato's dialogue *Meno* is a particularly interesting work because it employs dialogue in two contrasting ways in relation to learning and knowledge. Identified as a "transitional" dialogue between Plato's Early and Middle Periods (Vlastos, 1991), the work shows two ways of employing dialogue as a heuristic. Socrates thus *edu*cates in two ways. The first is characteristic of the early dialogues. Socrates uses his elenctic method to examine his interlocutor's definitions and exposes their shortcomings. The second shows that the interlocutor, in this case a slave boy, knows more than he thinks that he knows. I will examine each case in turn.

Meno asks Socrates whether excellence (*arête*) is teachable (Meno, 70). Socrates answers that he does not know anything about excellence and therefore cannot know whether it can be taught. He turns the tables on Meno by requesting him to define excellence: "by the gods, Meno, what do you say excellence is?" (Meno, 71). Socrates thus positions himself as questioner, learner and examiner and conducts an *elenchus* on Meno's beliefs about the nature of excellence. Meno tries various definitions. Excellence for a man is to be capable of taking part in the affairs of the city and in doing so to do good for his friends and harm to his enemies. He also defines what excellence is for a woman. However, Socrates does not want a "swarm of excellences" – examples of particular cases of excellence – but excellence itself. Meno contends that excellence is to be able to rule men justly. But Socrates points out that justice is an excellence, like self-control and courage, but not excellence itself. He provides definitions of shape and colour as examples. Meno then defines excellence as to desire fine things and to have the power to get them. Socrates similarly unpicks this definition. In exasperation, Meno compares Socrates to a sting ray that numbs whoever comes close to it. Their quest for a definition of excellence ends in perplexity or decognition: recognising that what you thought you knew, you do not know: "now I can't even say at all what excellence is". Socrates concedes that the outcome is negative – "I am most definitely at a loss myself" – but affirms the positive value of the collective quest for truth: "I want to consider it with you and to join with you in searching for whatever it is." (Meno, 80) Meno can't see the point of this pursuit: How can you search for something when you don't have the faintest idea what it is?

This leads to the second kind of "educating" dialogue in Meno (81–86). Here Socrates seeks to demonstrate that knowing in a positive sense is possible. He interacts with a slave boy, chosen at random from Meno's entourage, who has no formal education. Socrates sets the slave boy a geometric puzzle to solve. Initially he gives the wrong answer. Socrates demonstrates that the slave boy, through a process of question and answer, is able to arrive at the correct answer. According to Socrates, this indicates that the slave boy already knows certain things because his immortal soul acquired knowledge of reality before he was born. Learning is thus a process of recollecting what one already knows, a re-cognition of innate knowledge: "the whole of searching and learning is recollection". He also uses the dialogue to show Meno that a state of perplexity – the slave boy's initial wrong answer – provides a starting point: "realising that he didn't know, he felt the need for knowledge". (84.c.6–7) This kind of dialogue is not characteristic of the early Socratic dialogues. Arguably, it reflects Plato's own philosophy of education which is based on a theory of the immortality of the soul and of its access to pre-existing ideal forms.

Given that many early Socratic dialogues end in perplexity and *de*cognition rather than in a positive recognition of truth, it is worth asking what exactly it was that Socrates taught. Certainly it was not a "curriculum of the virtues" since, although primarily concerned with ethical questions, the dialogues almost always end up with what these virtues are not rather than what they are. Nor was it a mastery of public speaking, even though his preferred form was oral and discursive, since he often repudiated long flowery speeches in favour of a short alternation of rejoinders. Nor can one argue that Socrates founded a particular school of philosophy based on a coherent epistemology or ontology. His followers dispersed in all kinds of philosophical directions. While Plato, the most famous of his pupils, was an idealist, Antisthenes was a hard-nosed materialist who advocated a strict asceticism. Aristippus, in contrast, saw the goal of life as pleasure. Ferguson (1970: 4) thus ascribes to Socrates the dubious gift of being "all things to all men."

Perhaps one answer is that Socrates' philosophical quest essentially involved teaching (and learning) *himself*. This has a number of dimensions that relate to Socrates' concern with his own learning and with the learning of others. First, Socrates engaged with others as a way of examining his own life and views, as well as theirs. In this sense he is teaching and testing himself with and against others – is he really the wisest among men, as the Delphic Oracle intimated, even though (or perhaps because) he makes no claim to wisdom? What do the knowledge claims of others amount to? What can they teach him about virtue, justice, knowledge? Thus he adopts the role of questioner, learner, critical examiner engaged in *elenchus*. He teaches himself in the sense of the one who is being taught through instigating his own learning. He is critically concerned with what he can learn from others, and so with teaching *himself* by learning critically from them.

Second, the Socratic dialogues put forward Socrates as a kind of prototypical learner, at once unique and universal, for others to consider as learners themselves. He did not instruct his followers in what virtue or justice or wisdom was, but rather modelled a process of inquiry. He both takes responsibility for his own learning as a learner-teacher, and puts responsibility for learning on his interlocutor as a teacher-learner (Woodruff, 2000). Plato's brilliant rendition of the dialogue form offers the reader explicit positions, as questioner and answerer, interior to the quest for knowledge. We do not simply observe from the outside a learning event. We participate in it from the inside, in the first person, through the positions that the dialogue offers, and so we experience vicariously what it is like to speak and think like Socrates, to conduct *elenchus*, to cognize his interlocutor's belief as his interlocutor is coaxed and prodded to *re*cognise it, and to engage in its *de*cognition. Like the interlocutor, we often end in a condition of perplexity, of aporia, which is for Socrates the beginning of learning the truth. We then step back and inquire, like his followers, and like philosophers through the generations, what Socrates the learner means for us. As Nehamas (1998: 3) argues, Socrates offers "a sort of a blueprint that others with a similar purpose can follow, ignore, deny as they form their own selves." There is evidence that a number of Socrates' followers learnt this way of learning from Socrates and put it into practice, either by engaging those claiming knowledge in dialogue and/or later writing Socratic dialogues themselves. This caused considerable annoyance to those considering themselves knowledgeable – "I suppose", Socrates says in the *Apology*, "they [his followers] find an unlimited number of people who think they know something, but really know little or nothing" – and one of the charges against him was of "corrupting the youth".

A third sense in which Socrates teaches himself to us is through his insistence on what is at stake. This is not only the issue under discussion – the nature of virtue, justice, courage, wisdom, beauty – but the very self, what Socrates terms "the soul". The search for truth is essential to the well-being of the soul. This is why in *Gorgias*, for example, he argues that it is better to suffer evil than to perpetrate it. And in *Protagoras*, he cautions Hippocrates against "entrusting his soul" to the sophist, Protagoras, by becoming his pupil when sophists "don't even know whether the stuff they are hawking around is good or bad for you" (Protagoras 313 d 3-4). Socrates has an essentially moral epistemology: virtue *is* knowledge, and the knowledgeable soul is necessarily virtuous. In the sense that what holds for Socrates' soul holds also for the souls of his interlocutors and everyone else, his quest, situated in particular dialogic engagements with particular participants, is universal. While a number of philosophers, including Aristotle, have criticised Socrates for elevating reason as the overriding moral faculty and neglecting the role of human will and commitment, there is no doubt that for Socrates learning was central to the moral vocation of being fully human. The quest for truth is always value-laden, implicating the whole person; the "soul" of the learner is at stake.

SOCRATES AND CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

How is Socratic education understood in the context of the present? Mintz (2006), writing in a 21st century American context, usefully distinguishes between two types of "Socratic" education, one associated with university Law education, which Mintz terms "Socratic method", and one with schooling, which he terms "Socratic teaching". What they have in common is the use of questions by the teacher to elicit the active participation of students in the learning process. In Law education, the professor is the "Socrates" and uses the Socratic method, also called the "case method", to elicit information from students about the case under study and its implications for, or relation to, legal principles. This typically happens in large lectures. The lecturer and students work together through discussion to elicit the principles of the law exemplified in particular cases.

In "Socratic teaching", which typically takes place in elementary and secondary school settings, the teacher typically initiates discussion with a question and facilitates engagement with the topic. Students are seated in a circular arrangement and engage directly not only with the teacher but also with each other. It is their voices which predominate with the teacher silent for most of the time. The aim is for the students to develop a common understanding of the topic through a process of dialogue. Here Socrates is not held up as a model teacher – on the contrary, his method was to monopolize the questioner role and confound his interlocutor – but as a model for learning in his characteristic moves of questioning, probing and reasoning through induction and definition (*elenchus*).

From these two types, we can see that Socratic education may be understood and applied both as a method of education (questioning and facilitating questions) and as a general normative approach that prioritises the pursuit of truth through reasoning (Sarid, 2012). Within this ambit, one might envisage a range of emphases which draws on both the methodological and the axiological understandings. At the one end of a continuum, we might find a rigorous, authoritative and closely controlled Socratic *educ*-ation that pursues truth by exposing flaws in reasoning. Here we might characterize the pedagogical orientation, with Sarid (2012: 937), as "Dialogical-Autocratic". At the other end, might appear the facilitation of interactive discussion and mutual understanding that builds a kind of critical communality while still valuing difference and diversity – a "Dialogical-Democratic" orientation. The first emphasis views Socrates as a model educator who guides by questioning and exposes wrong reasoning, leading to decognition as a basis for true knowing. The second sees him as a model learner who critically engages in a community of fellow learners, leading to intercognition (a concept which I explain more fully in Chapter 10) as a basis for common understanding.

CONCLUSION

Socrates was a disruptive, ironic questioner who upset the systems and norms of his day. It is difficult to imagine a *system* of education based on the ideas of Socrates because he would no doubt continually question its very foundations: "But what is education?", he would insist, and refuse to take any formulaic response for an answer. Furthermore, he would not regard the quest for an answer as trivial, a mere matter of words or of abstract theory, but as germane to what it means for the "art of living" (Nehamas, 1998). Education would always be about values, a moral rather than simply technical or instrumental enterprise, and about the whole human being, the *soul* rather than simply the intellect. And it would always be about a searching, restless, relentless questioning in which truth, although elusive, is not a set of "facts" or, for that matter, a poststructuralist figment, but an undertaking worth the pursuit, worth living for, and, as Socrates himself demonstrated, worth dying for.