SOCRATIC EDUCATION: A SCHOOL
OF FREEDOM

This book, simply put, explores the potential of Socratic pedagogy as an effective educational strategy that develops the social and intellectual capacities for active citizenship in a democratic society. The assumption that underpins this claim is that certain kinds of educational arrangement lend more support to democracy than others (Lipman, 2003; Cam, 2006; Burgh, 2003). I am mindful that such a claim is contestable, so let me begin by situating this book in the wider context of philosophy in education. This book began as an exploration of various philosophical approaches to classroom practice that could be described as typically Socratic in form, as well as an attempt to open up discussion about what these approaches have in common—thinking through dialogue. It became apparent that there are also distinct differences between them, and that these differences have important practical implications, to which the pages of this book also attest. These differences notwithstanding, all teaching methods inspired by Socrates have in common questioning and inquiry, in which all answers are subject to further questioning. There is a proliferation of literature on the virtues of philosophical inquiry as a classroom strategy, either as an exemplar of democratic practice or as having the capacity to cultivate democratic dispositions and skills necessary for active citizenship. This has been affirmed in the 2008 UNESCO report, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom.*

This report, based on the results of a worldwide study on the teaching of philosophy, not only made clearer the purpose of the book, but also offered practical grounds for the arguments presented within. The overwhelming need for pedagogy that promotes thinking resonates from the study. It is the ability to think about problems and issues of all kinds that sows the seeds for liberating the powers of the individual and developing the social and intellectual capacities and dispositions needed for active citizenship. While education theorists aim to cultivate thinking for freedom, thinking for harmony or thinking for societal change, what lies at the heart of these aspirations is really about enhancing, quite simply, 'good thinking'. This book, in retrospect, is a response to this study; it makes suggestions for how we might go about cultivating thinking well (that is the key to leading the 'good life') through the development of Socratic classrooms.

My chief concern is to look at philosophy in the tradition of reflective education, of which Socrates was a forerunner; that is, the tradition of promoting learning to think as a foundation for educational aims and practices. The Socratic Method, a form of philosophical inquiry, or more precisely, a dialectic method of inquiry used by Socrates mainly for the purpose of examining key moral concepts and first

illustrated in Plato's early dialogues, is a distinctive pedagogy to encourage people to develop independent thinking by questioning claims about knowledge, to argue about ideas, and to engage in dialogue about important issues of life. While the Socratic Method described in Plato's dialogues would require little scrutiny to come to the conclusion that the practices and views on knowledge purportedly held by Socrates are questionable in terms of their relevance to inquiry about what constitutes a good life, there is much to applaud in relation to the development of higher-order thinking and the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes considered necessary to function in an increasingly changing and diverse world.[1] It is for this reason that the notion of the Socratic Method as philosophical inquiry and as pedagogy is central to the argument that I present in this book, in particular to teaching students to think well in the context of their lives.

PHILOSOPHY: A SCHOOL OF FREEDOM

The primary purpose of the UNESCO study is to investigate the ways in which philosophy can contribute to teaching and learning. It states:

> If we support the teaching of philosophy to children in principle, we still need to answer a pedagogical question. How? What teaching methods or approaches should be used? How can teachers learn to teach philosophy in a way that children can learn to philosophize? Again there has been much debate over these questions. (p. 9)

It is noteworthy that the UNESCO study claims to not presume any method or philosophical orientation. Yet at the outset of Chapter 1, entitled 'Teaching philosophy and learning to philosophize at pre-school and primary school levels', the reader could be forgiven for thinking that the study points to a particular orientation, namely Philosophy for Children or P4C, which has its roots in the educational theories of John Dewey and has been subsequently developed by Matthew Lipman. It is undeniable, as the report states, that (1) Lipman's groundbreaking work on engaging in the practice of philosophy for children represents a certain change in the objectives of teaching, and (2) that it sparked curiosity and interest in his Philosophy for Children curriculum, particularly the emphasis on narratives for children and the notion of converting classrooms into communities of inquiry. However, the entire chapter makes no mention of other classroom practices and strategies for engaging children in philosophy suitable for pre-school and primary school levels. This is somewhat misleading as there are other methods of teaching philosophy in the Socratic tradition that could be said to have similar objectives to those of Lipman. While Lipman drew on Dewey's modern conception of education, he also found parallels in the more ancient teaching methods of Socrates.

In response, I propose a framework for Socratic pedagogy that uses a multi-dimensional approach to thinking. In this book, we will explore three contemporary approaches to collaborative, inquiry-based teaching and learning through philosophy which could be described as Socratic in form, namely Matthew

Lipman's 'Community of Inquiry', Leonard Nelson's 'Socratic Dialogue', and David Bohm's 'Dialogue'. All three can be successfully used in Socratic pedagogy. The framework that I propose is multi-dimensional; comprised of generative, evaluative and connective thinking. By describing each of the dimensions of multi-dimensional thinking in terms of the function they perform, we are able to escape the confusion created by the vagueness of the terms critical, creative and caring thinking. When we look at creative thinking as generative thinking, critical thinking as evaluative thinking, and caring thinking as connective thinking, we move away from the prejudices and disagreements that surround the previously adopted terms. This allows for a greater understanding of the kind of contribution they make to Socratic pedagogy, which in turn informs classroom practice. It also offers a renewed understanding of Socratic pedagogy and a new starting point for discussion on theory and practice.

It is noteworthy that there has previously been little intellectual exchange between the proponents of the three approaches to dialogue featured in this book, despite there being much written on the benefits of each of them. Notwithstanding the recent publication *The Challenge of Dialogue; Socratic Dialogue and Other Forms of Dialogue in Different Political Systems and Cultures* (Brune et al, 2010), the inclusion of an article by Nelson and another by Bohm, which both appear in *Thinking Children and Education*, a collection of works edited by Lipman (1993), a paper by Trevor Curnow and another by Karen Murris and Joanna Haynes, which appear in a collection of papers on philosophy in practice compiled in *Thinking through Dialogue: Essays on Philosophy and Practice*, edited by Curnow (2001), and less than a handful of articles scattered in various journals, intellectual discussion, particularly any extensive comparative analysis, of these different approaches to thinking through dialogue in education, remains largely underdeveloped.

There are many different directions in which these three approaches to thinking through dialogue have developed. For example, Lou Marinoff's emphasis on Socratic Dialogue within the context of philosophical counselling and practice, the development of philosophy for children in schools internationally as evidenced by changes in terminology in Britain to 'philosophy with children', and in Australia to 'philosophy in schools', or more generally 'philosophical inquiry in the classroom', and the use of Bohmian Dialogue in corporate leadership programs and in prisons across Britain and Europe. While my concern is foremost with philosophical inquiry as an educative practice, by bringing these approaches together in order to examine their commonalities and differences, it is hoped that the result of this examination will contribute to a much needed discussion, not only because each approach has much to offer classroom practice, but also because it would broaden the scope for discussion on thinking through dialogue.

It should be noted that the use of the term 'classroom' as it is used in this book does not strictly apply only to the school classroom, or even to tertiary educational settings, but it also has application generally to settings outside of what traditionally is considered to be an educational setting. For example, the classroom can be the staffroom or the boardroom. This view echoes the view of Socrates,

widely considered to be an 'educator', whose purpose was to 'rouse, persuade and rebuke' (Plato in Kolak, 2000). His interlocutors weren't students in a classroom, but Athenian citizens with whom he met by chance, usually in the agora, which was both the market-place and the centre of public life; a place to gather. Education is anywhere that learning can occur, and hence the classroom has many manifestations—it is not simply the right of the child that should be considered but all who come to education at any stage of life. My emphasis on lifelong learning notwithstanding, it is undeniable that the approach to pedagogy that I outline here is directly applicable for school-aged students.

THE FREEDOM INHERENT IN PHILOSOPHY

In a statement by Pierre Sané, Assistant Director-General of Human Sciences (UNESCO), the initiative for the UNESCO study is a response to promoting philosophy and encouraging its teaching as outlined in UNESCO's Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy, which "is built on three key pillars of action: i) Philosophy facing world problems: dialogue, analysis and questioning of contemporary society; ii) teaching philosophy in the world: fostering critical reflection and independent thinking; and iii) promotion of philosophical thought and research" (p. xi). The notion of 'thinking as freedom', and the corresponding principle that the enhancement of thinking is a basic right of the child,[2] attempt to provide ethical and political justification for the claim that philosophy in education is imperative to the 'three key pillars of action' for promoting philosophy and encouraging its teaching. The report explicitly highlights the need for independent thinking, which is a necessary requirement for freedom of thought. The capacity for freedom of thought is becoming increasingly urgent in a contemporary society that sees students being connected to information via state-of-the art multi-media information and communications technologies. With information becoming more accessible, what is required is the disposition and capacity to think reflectively in order to process the increasing amount of information available.

> All too often individuals, families, organizations, communities and sections of society live with the consequences of poorly thought-out decisions, faulty reasoning, biased judgements, unreasonable conduct, narrow perspectives, unexamined values and unfulfilled lives. If only people were better at asking appropriate questions, articulating problems and issues, imagining life's possibilities, seeing where things lead, evaluating the alternatives open to them, engaging in discussion with one another, and thinking collaboratively, then we would all be so much better off. (Cam, 2006, p.2)

Basically, what Cam is referring to is philosophy as liberty, the freedom to think independently and to think for oneself collaboratively. What is inherent in the freedom of thought is the ability to ask questions about 'what is a good life?' which was the question that underpinned Socrates' motivation for engaging people in dialogue.

PHILOSOPHY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE THINKING CURRICULUM

As stated earlier, there is mounting pressure on teachers to engage students in higher-order thinking. This means more than paying attention to literacy and numeracy; it requires placing *inquiry* at the heart of education, lest we allow for the continuation of sections of society that are basically 'insocratic'.[3] If we are to promote thinking that is based on inquiry, then we must ourselves engage in inquiry into various models for good practice. What I propose is an approach to *pedagogy* that is Socratic, i.e., an approach to teaching and learning to develop and enhance Socratic classroom strategies and practices. This is not restricted to but may include methodology.

It is a Socratic pedagogy and not just a philosophical pedagogy as it is necessarily dialogical. Philosophy in general may not pertain to inquiry that is dialogical. It is thinking both philosophically *and* dialogically that is important for Socratic pedagogy. So why is it pedagogy and why is pedagogy important rather than just methodology or curriculum? It is pedagogy and not just a methodology or a method because it is an *underpinning* philosophy of teaching and learning. Throughout this book I will be offering a framework for Socratic pedagogy that should be read as a theoretical way of approaching teaching and learning and should not be mistaken as just a methodology. It is important because in theory and in practice we need to teach to take advantage of when situations arise that may allow for dialogue into matters of importance. We need to educate with an openness to inquiry through embracing wonder. Marshall Gregory (2001) gives us a further understanding as to why we need to focus on pedagogy:

> The fundamental reason *why* pedagogy deserves careful thought is that pedagogy is the primary force, the engine, that accomplishes the "leading out" (from Latin *educare*) that lies as the etymological source of *educate* and that also describes education's most basic aim. Since at birth all human skills and forms of development are mere potentialities, it follows that we have to go someplace else in the world from where we are at any given time—we have to be led out, or educated—in order to turn those potentialities into realities. As Bartlett Giamatti (1976: 194) has said, "Teaching is an instinctual art, mindful of potential, craving of realization." The content of any curriculum, whether a single course or a whole program of study, seldom exerts a sufficient pull on a person's imagination to draw him or her out of the inertia of being a standing body and into the activity that takes mind and heart to new places and new levels of development. (p.73)

This passage further explains why philosophy must be adopted as *pedagogy*; as an underpinning for how we teach and not simply a discipline that we teach. It is not a curriculum, but it contributes to curriculum. It is pedagogy because it needs to underpin how and why we teach. We must develop a learning environment that embraces wonder. The development of such learning environments may be formed by the influences of three approaches analysed in this book that provide various approaches to education in the Socratic tradition. However, I stress that this is

simply a starting point for an exploration into how to approach thinking through dialogue.

There is a large body of literature devoted to philosophy and education. Historically this has consisted of formulating philosophical foundations that would guide educational practice. While painstaking attention to analysis of concepts, presuppositions, and the grounds of knowledge are necessary for philosophical exploration it is also important to keep in mind that education is also concerned with the analysis and justification of practical questions. On the other hand, to abandon philosophical points entirely would be a gross misunderstanding of the contribution philosophical inquiry can make to educational theory. What education and philosophy have in common is that they are both concerned with human affairs. This book attempts to maintain a balance between the issues of interest to philosophers of education, and to teachers and educators together, in the hope that both will see the virtues of such a project.

Chapter 1 examines the relationship between dialogue and the improvement of thinking. To begin, I compare and contrast dialogue with other forms of communication such as conversation and debate. Next, I examine the relationship between monologue, internal dialogue and engaging in dialogue with others. I also point to the importance of identifying silence in dialogue. I refer to what are termed 'Technologies of Silence' to illustrate the many ways in which people may be silenced. Silence is also a part of dialogue and can be used to replace words, to make a point. Similarly, silence can be a time for critical reflection during dialogue and may not necessarily be an inhibitor to dialogue. The Socratic Method also forms the basis of Chapter 1. There are various interpretations of the Socratic Method as a dialectic method of inquiry, ranging from a form of 'cold calling' in universities to a pedagogical method that underpins collaborative classroom inquiry. I refer to the metaphors used to describe Socrates as a facilitator of dialogue—as gadfly, as midwife and as stinging ray—to convey the different types of thinking that may be promoted by using this method in the classroom.

It is not always easy to imagine what the Socratic Method would look like in a contemporary educational setting. Chapter 2, therefore, explores three models of dialogue that share fundamental characteristics of the Socratic Method: the Community of Inquiry, Socratic Dialogue, and Bohmian Dialogue. Firstly, I introduce the Community of Inquiry, a philosophical pedagogy developed by Matthew Lipman, who in the late 1960s commenced development on a series of curriculum materials for children, consisting of novels and accompanying teachers' manuals, aimed at improving children's thinking skills, which he argued would improve the relationship between deliberative judgments and democratic decision-making. I give an overview of Lipman's views on the importance of learning to think; a central theme in his educational theory and practice. To draw out the ties between Lipman's view on thinking, education, and democracy, I examine the ideas of educationalist and philosopher John Dewey and his predecessor, pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce, as well as Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, all of whom supply a theoretical basis for Lipman's theory and practice. Such an understanding sheds light on Lipman's claim that learning to think together is

necessary to develop social and intellectual dispositions and capacities for active citizenship.

Next, I focus on Leonard Nelson, Gustav Heckmann and Jos Kessels, who all contributed to the development of what is known as Socratic Dialogue. Nelson's aim was to educate children to want to seek truth, and to encourage self-esteem. To achieve this, he extended the Socratic Method to large groups. Whereas Nelson gave few guidelines on how to employ the method, his pupil Heckman developed guidelines for how discussion should be conducted. In order to compare Socratic Dialogue with the other two models of philosophical inquiry, I outline the rules for Socratic Dialogue, the role of the facilitator, and the importance of reflecting on experiences common to all participants.

Lastly, I examine a type of dialogue formulated by David Bohm, who emphasised the central place of 'meta-dialogue', but moreover that the actual process of dialogue and thinking is as important, if not more important, than the content. I argue that Bohmian Dialogue can assist in our understanding of the communal dimension of inquiry, and the role of care in the development of genuine engagement through dialogue. In particular, I analyse Bohm's views on listening and social function, especially on listening as key to understanding, and on relationships in the dialogue and the connection between these relationships and thought.

Chapter 3 highlights the metaphors used by proponents of each of the different approaches to dialogue to illustrate their aims and purposes, highlight important distinctions, and to initiate discussion so as to not be uncritical about different ways of understanding dialogue and the way in which dialogue may be implemented in the classroom. I discuss two aspects of the Socratic Method—elenchus, a technique of examination to critically investigate the nature or definition of concepts, and aporia, a state of doubt or perplexity. Next, I examine Lipman's view of the Community of Inquiry as a process of thinking similar to chamber music, whereby each player embellishes on the ideas and notes of others to follow the music where it leads, or in the case of philosophical inquiry, to follow the argument or logic where it leads. I also explain how Nelson compares the process of Socratic Dialogue to that of an hourglass where ideas are narrowed down and then reapplied in a larger context. This metaphor highlights the emphasis on conceptual analysis that characterises Socratic Dialogue. Finally, I turn to Bohm, who uses the metaphor of a dance to illustrate the type of relationship that occurs in his approach to dialogue.

In the next three chapters, I address creative, critical and caring thinking and how each dimension of thinking contributes to inquiry. In Chapter 4, I address creative thinking as a form of divergent thinking. Inherent in divergent thinking is risk. I also make the distinction between creative thinking and creativity. Creative thinking, according to Lipman, is concerned with thinking for oneself. He argues that developing, exploring and extending ideas is at the very heart of creative thinking. Because dialogue is based on the ideas of the participants and following the argument where it leads, generating ideas requires inventiveness. Engagement of a creative kind occurs when we let the argument lead because the ideas must be developed by the participants themselves and cannot be predetermined. I look at Lipman's

metaphor of chamber music and the idea that this kind of thinking is concerned with building on ideas. I then draw on the characteristics of creative thinking that are integral to the development of Socratic pedagogy. This is generative thinking. I assert here that the Community of Inquiry has much to contribute to a model of generative thinking in classroom collaborative inquiry.

In Chapter 5, I explore critical thinking as conceptual exploration, reasoning and logic. The main concern of this chapter is with the application of critical thinking to philosophical inquiry in the classroom and what I think is central to Socratic pedagogy, that is, evaluative thinking. Socratic Dialogue places a great emphasis on conceptual analysis and the use of consensus. Nelson's metaphor of the hourglass describes the process of evaluative thinking, and clearly illustrates the kind of thinking intended through Socratic Dialogue. Participants move from a general definition of a concept to a narrow definition agreed upon by the group through reaching consensus.

Chapter 6 examines care as the other dimension of multidimensional thinking. While there are different ways of understanding care, my concern is with the conception of care first described by Carol Gilligan in her studies on moral development and reasoning. Her work has since gained wide attention, in particular from Nel Noddings, whose work has become a major reference point for an analysis of caring and its place in ethics and education. This chapter aims to initiate discussion on the place of care in communal dialogue. I examine three aspects of care in collaborative classroom inquiry: (1) care for the inquiry, (2) care with others, and (3) care for problems deemed worthy. I also redefine caring thinking as connective thinking which is central to Socratic pedagogy. I argue that connective thinking is necessary to the achievement of collaborative, inquiry-based teaching and learning, and that it works in concert with the generative and evaluative dimensions of thinking.

In the concluding chapter, I propose a framework for Socratic pedagogy and examine the contributions of the three models of dialogue to this framework. The Community of Inquiry has much to offer approaches to generative thinking, whereas Socratic Dialogue can inform evaluative thinking. Bohmian Dialogue highlights what is central to connective thinking. Bohm's exploration of the connections between thinking and dialogue has much to contribute to Socratic pedagogy. I do not attempt to recommend one model of dialogue over another but show how their emphasis on generative, evaluative and connective thinking may contribute to the development of Socratic pedagogy.

By beginning a dialogue between proponents of philosophy, educators and philosophers can continue to think innovatively, reflectively and, most importantly, collaboratively about philosophy as pedagogy and to continue to reconstruct the Socratic classroom. What is consistent, however, is the overarching need for Socratic pedagogy in order to create thoughtful, reflective citizens in any educational context. With this in mind, let us begin the exploration.

NOTES

[1] The character of Socrates is a reconstruction from the evidence of others, mainly from Plato's dialogues written after Socrates' death and to some extent the writing of Xenophon. He also appears

as a caricature in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. My concern is not with Socrates, actual or reconstruction, but with what has been described as the Socratic Method—the dialectic processes of seeking truth.

2   See the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) that stipulates the right to 'express views freely' (Article 12); 'the right to freedom of expression […] to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (Article 13) and to 'freedom of thought' (Article 14).

3   Cam (2006) coined the term 'insocratic' (to be put alongside the terms illiterate and innumerate) to describe anyone who cannot adequately think for themselves in order to think effectively about life.