

# Community of Inquiry: The power of philosophical concepts to enhance reasonableness

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## What is a Community of Inquiry?

Community of inquiry is a pedagogic method used to introduce and cultivate reasoning skills, cooperative learning and encourage intellectual curiosity

- The community of inquiry is at once immanent and transcendent; it provides a framework which pervades the everyday lives of its participants and it serves as an ideal to strive for.

Splitter & Sharp (1995). *Teaching for Better thinking: The classroom community of inquiry*. (p. 18)

## History of community of inquiry/philosophy for children

- Matthew Lipman's concerns
  - College is too late to teach critical thinking
  - Thinking is best improved while thinking aloud with others
- Lipman's response
  - Beginning teaching thinking (philosophy) in elementary schools
  - Harry Stottlemeier and friends

## Social Learning Theories and CI

- All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57).
  - Emphasis
    - Social activity
    - Dialogical interaction
    - Scaffolding
    - Connection between public (external) and private (internal) thinking

## What is a Community of Inquiry?

- A community of Inquiry is defined by its two parts
  - **Community:** evokes a spirit of co-operation, care, trust, safety, and a sense of purpose
  - **Inquiry:** evokes a form of self-correcting practice driven by the need to transform that which is intriguing, problematic, confused, ambiguous or fragmentary into some kind of unifying whole (at least temporarily)

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## Theories relating to community of inquiry

- The long view:
  - John Dewey (1910) *How we think*
  - Stephen Toulmin (1958) *The uses of argument*
  - Robert Ennis (1962,1987) Rational thinking and educational practice
- Rebirth
  - Mathew Lipman et al (1980) *Philosophy in the classroom*
- Current extensions
  - Deanna Kuhn (2005) *Education for thinking*
  - Noel Entwistle (2002) Personal understanding and target understanding: Mapping influences on the outcomes of learning

## Argument Schema

- Frameworks for organizing thoughts (Hounsell, 1984)
  - Arrangements
  - Viewpoints
  - True arguments
- Elements (Toulmin, 1958)
  - Statement of belief, reasons, grounds, warrants, backings, modifications, counterarguments, and rebuttals
  - Rhetorical structure
  - Inferential rules for reasoning
  - Informal heuristics

## What does a Community of Inquiry look like?

- A group of 8 to 15 people sitting in a circle
- A short texts (one to two pages) is read aloud Round robin style
- After reading the text students are given a moment to generate a few questions raised by the text
- A joint decision is made on which of the questions will be pursued
- The point of the inquiry is to articulate the problem and its implications then work collectively toward the most reasonable answer to the issue
- It is the quality of the reasoning process that matters most and not whether a definitive answer is reached

## Wide application

- The Community of Inquiry approach has been used in
  - Mathematics in University and elementary school (Kennedy, 2006; Daniel, 1994)
  - University Psychology classes (Morehouse, 1999)
  - University Literature classes
  - University Biology Classes (Clark, 1994)
  - University Sociology classes (Franco, (2006)

## But can it be assessed?

- Extent and quality of participation
  - Participation rubrics
  - Discussion mapping
- Reasoning skills
  - Pre-posttests of reasoning
  - Argument rubrics for discussion and written assignments
- Critical thinking disposition
  - Rubrics