

What's in a name? The uses of 'Community of Inquiry'

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*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.*

Juliet, in Act 2 Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

Chapter VI, *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll

Abstract

The term 'Community of Inquiry', introduced by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, is central to, and widely used within, the Philosophy for Children movement. However, it has not been used consistently, having at least two distinguishable meanings—a narrow-sense and a wide-sense—and possibly as many as five, if we distinguish the narrow-sense CoI session from the narrow-sense CoI pedagogy and the narrow-sense CoI group, and recognise a transcendental sense. After exploring usages of the term, together with the various meanings they carry, I will argue that, in the interests of clarity, separable meanings require separate names, and make some suggestions as to what those names might be.

Keywords

Ann Margaret Sharp, Community of Inquiry; Ideal Speech Situation, Matthew Lipman, pedagogical techniques, Philosophy for Children

Introduction

It would be rare, when reading books and articles from the broad Philosophy for Children field, to not come across the phrase 'Community of Inquiry (CoI)'.¹ However, as I shall illustrate, it is not at all clear that everyone is using the phrase in the same sense—nor, indeed, whether the same author is using the phrase consistently at all times, even within the same work.

Matthew Lipman says in his intellectual autobiography that he wanted:

to write a text that would allow both teachers and children to engage simultaneously and openly in inquiry at the same time in the classroom. In this way, both groups *could explore what they felt was problematic about the text* at the same time, and in that way consolidate the classroom into a single community containing both children and adults *engaged in a single inquiry* ... borrowing a phrase invented by Charles Peirce, I would call such a group a 'community of inquiry'. (2008, p. 109, emphases added)

Elsewhere (1991a, p. 15), he says: 'This phrase, presumably coined by Charles Sanders Peirce ...', citing in a footnote Peirce's 1877 article 'The Fixation of Belief' (as found in Buchler 1955, pp. 5-22). However, analysis of this text shows that, while Peirce used the word 'community' only once, and 'inquiry' nine times, the whole phrase does not occur anywhere in this work. Indeed, an exhaustive study by Maughn Rollins Gregory (2022) shows that the exact phrase appears nowhere in Peirce's writings. Nor does it appear in the writings of John Dewey, who has been credited with the phrase by other authors (Gregory, personal communication, October 2022). Gregory attributes the origin of the phrase to Lipman and Sharp's 1978 article 'Some educational presuppositions of philosophy for children' (see Gregory 2024, in this issue, for more information on this matter).

The purpose of this article is to explore the ways in which the phrase is being used within the broad Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, to make the case that we need to think more carefully about that usage, identifying at least two distinct senses

¹ Or 'Community of Enquiry' in some, mainly British, contexts. I shall use the 'I' spelling throughout. It is an interesting question as to what import the capitalisations of Community and Inquiry carry, but I shall not enter into that here, and mostly retain the capitals throughout, including in the acronym CoI.

it has, and to urge us to introduce at least one new term to obviate the confusion this causes. But before undertaking that task, I need to clarify a few things.

Firstly, it is not the purpose of this article to map the pre-P4C history of the phrase, nor the ways in which it has been used by those outside the broad P4C movement (see Gregory 2022 for more details on these matters).² My focus is on educational settings, where teachers take responsibility for educating students.

Secondly, I have used the phrase 'the broad P4C movement'.³ It covers all those who have derived their practice from the foundations established by Lipman and Sharp plus, in many cases, practitioners who independently started on the route of doing philosophy with others (often schoolchildren), before being influenced by P4C writings (see, for example, Jespersen 2017; McCall 2009; Worley 2021). My focus in this article is relevant to all those P4C-related groups that use the phrase 'Community of Inquiry' or some modified version of it (e.g. Community of Philosophical Inquiry – CoPI).⁴ While we might ask how much variation from Lipman's original characterisation there can be, while still maintaining the name CoI, I will not explore this in any detail. Nor will I investigate the relationship other group dialogical approaches—such as The Philosophy Foundation's PhiE (Worley 2021), or Brila's Philocreation® workshops (Fletcher 2020)—bear to CoI, though such practitioners might find my considerations still relevant to their work.

Thirdly, my focus will initially be, like Lipman's in the extended quote above, on dialogical inquiry, though I will briefly explore the role of other inquiry methods later. Such thoughts raise the question of the relationship of CoI to philosophy. While acknowledging that a CoI may well take another discipline (science, history, language etc.) as its focus, I am going to make the claim that, in a well-run CoI, the focus will often (though not always) dig down into the philosophical roots of the discipline, and

² I note that the phrase has also been used for professional communities (see Seixas 1993, pp. 308ff; Pardales & Girod 2006, pp. 304ff; Burgh 2021, pp. 15ff), but I shall later contest this use, at least within the P4C world.

³ I am assuming that the reader is somewhat familiar with the Lipman/Sharp approach. A detailed explanation of that approach—not to mention all the various permutations, such as those mentioned below, that have arisen from it—is well beyond the scope of this article, and is better covered in many other places.

⁴ I leave aside the question of translation into other languages here, other than to say my remarks will apply equally in the cases where the term used is clearly a direct translation of 'philosophy for children' or 'community of [philosophical] inquiry'.

hence dialogical inquiry will take centre stage. However, defending that claim is well beyond the scope of this article.

Fourthly, in an article exploring names, it is useful to sketch in some general factors pointed out by others that need to be taken into consideration when naming things. It is to this task I now turn.

Naming

Names pick out certain features of our reality, to allow us to discuss them. Without delving deeply into the philosophy of naming, we might look at some factors that people in other fields have considered important in allocating names.

Benner (2022), in the field of software engineering, identifies (amongst other factors) the need for consistency (each concept should be represented by a single, unique name), understandability (a name should describe the concept it represents), and specificity (a name shouldn't be overly vague or overly specific). From medical technology, Harp (2009), identifies (again, amongst others) uniqueness (the same name should never represent two different concepts in the terminology), stability (the name should never be re-used to represent another term), concept orientation (a name must correspond to at least one meaning—not be vague—and no more than one meaning—not be ambiguous). From the area of corporate branding, Foden (2022) advises a name ought to be unique within its industry, while Chiaravalle and Schenck (2017) say it should describe the brand's offering. In what follows, we can bear in mind these recommendations.

We can see some of these factors at work in names used within the broad P4C world. Take the modification of Philosophy for Children to, say, Philosophy with Children (partly to get away from an implication that philosophy is supplied *for* children, rather than done *with* them), or Philosophy in Schools (partly so as to include teenagers, who might object to being called children), or even expansion (by SAPERE) into Philosophy for Children, Colleges and Communities. We see names for organisations that get away from using some variation on P4C altogether, such as Brila (Canada), Mind Boggles (South Africa) and SAPERE (UK), which is both an acronym for the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education, and a play on the Latin phrase *sapere aude*, or 'dare to know'.

Two factors already mentioned seem to be driving this diversity of names: a desire for a name to more accurately describe that which it is naming (Benner's

understandability), and a desire to create a differentiation from others in the same field (Foden's brand uniqueness), though other factors are probably at play as well. But let us now turn to the usages of the term 'Community of Inquiry' — the focus of the main part of the article.

Community of Inquiry as a specific pedagogical technique

As already noted, the precise phrase Community of Inquiry was coined by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp (1978). It was used to denote an event where students and their teacher 'engage simultaneously and openly in inquiry at the same time in the classroom' about a purpose-written text (Lipman 2008, p. 109). In *Thinking in Education*, Lipman (1991a) claims 'the pedagogy of the 'community of inquiry' should be the methodology for the teaching of critical thinking' (p. 3). Later in the same work he:

unpack[s] the notion of the community of inquiry by examining it stage by stage ...

I. The offering of the text ...

II. The construction of the agenda ...

III. Solidifying the community ...

IV. Using exercises and discussion plans ...

V. Encouraging further responses. (pp. 241-243)

It is clear from these (and many other) comments that Lipman initially used the term CoI to identify a particular session within a scheme of work (aspect 1), engaged in by a class and its teacher (aspect 2), using a specific pedagogical technique (aspect 3 - I shall return to these three aspects below). The teacher will also use other specific pedagogical techniques with the same class in other sessions. Indeed, as the references to the 'text' and to 'exercises and discussion plans' make clear, the term CoI initially only applied to this technique when it used the novels and manuals that Lipman, Sharp and their colleagues had written and collated for this purpose.

Subsequently, philosophers and teachers who had been trained in the running of a CoI came to believe that other texts could be used. Lipman and Sharp resisted this move for some time, unless the new texts were also part of a considered curriculum utilising philosophical novels-as-texts. See their interviews in Naji and Hashim (2017)

pp. 3-52, especially pp. 14-16, pp. 18-24, pp. 30-31, pp. 33-35. That said, it can be argued that they did accept that some other texts, such as picture books, might be used in a role subsidiary to the novels (Chetty et al. 2022, pp. 65-66).

Such alternative 'texts' (often now called provocations or trigger materials) were drawn from a wide variety of sources, ranging from purpose-written stories that tried to mirror Lipmanesque features such as having child characters exploring philosophical ideas together, to pre-existing stories such as picture books and excerpts from literature, through newspaper articles, film and TV clips, works of art and many more. Often, supporting exercises and discussion plans were devised. Despite this variety of texts, the CoI was retained, often with little alteration, as a means for setting an agenda and then entering into dialogue based on that provocation.

We need to note, as well, that the setting of the phases II to IV of a CoI—a circle where students respond verbally to each other (sometimes called the 'plain vanilla CoI')—can be temporarily augmented by other pedagogical techniques, such as splitting into smaller groups, or breaking so some individual research can be carried out, before returning to the whole group. I take this to be uncontroversial and, indeed, covered by Lipman's reference to the use of exercises and the encouragement of further responses.

The CoI, as a specific classroom pedagogical technique used by teachers with their class in sessions interspersed with other techniques such as lectures, chalk-and-talk, comprehension exercises, essay writing, practical activities, individual research, group work and so on, remains a recognisable entity to this day. Part of the craft of teaching is having such an array of techniques and being able to choose which one will serve one's educational purposes well at a given juncture. A scheme of work consists, in part, of a well-chosen sequence of such pedagogical techniques.

Thus already, depending on where we lay the emphasis, we have recognised three closely related aspects of CoI: the name of a particular session in a classroom ('today, I'll hold a CoI after lunch'), the group with which it is done ('my class is growing as a CoI') and the specific pedagogic technique used in such a session ('I often use CoI when introducing a new unit'). Below, I will characterise these as three aspects of the narrow-sense CoI.

Expanding the notion of a Community of Inquiry

Right from the start, Lipman and colleagues had more on their minds than merely introducing a stand-alone philosophy strand into classrooms, based on their curriculum and delivered through the CoI as described above. The first chapter of Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan's early book *Philosophy in the Classroom* (1980) is titled 'The Need for Educational Redesign': they have a total overhaul in mind. In advocating for a reflective education in *Thinking in Education* (1991), Lipman expands: 'Education is the outcome of participation in a teacher-guided community of inquiry ... the reflective paradigm assumes education to be inquiry' (p. 14). Looking back, he says 'When conceived as broadly as possible, the purpose of implementing Philosophy for Children can be seen rather as the conversion of elementary school education into *inquiry*' (2008, pp. 119, italics in original).

Soon, many in the P4C world expressed this desire, using phrases such as '[t]ransforming the classroom into a Community of Inquiry' (Splitter & Sharp 1995, p. 140); see also Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980, p. 45), and Lipman (1991a, p. 121), who uses the phrase 'converting the classroom into a community of inquiry'. Indeed, we might note that, while *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (Lipman 1974) does not contain the phrase CoI, the accompanying manual *Philosophical Inquiry* (published 10 years later) does. In the notes for the very last Leading Idea (Ch 17, line 7: Achieving objectivity through a community of inquiry), we read 'Ultimately, what Harry and his friends are bound together by are two things: the *community of inquiry* to which they both belong, and the *method of inquiry* to which they are all committed' (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1984, p. 442, italics in original). Unsurprisingly, the novel nowhere describes the teacher setting up a CoI as described in the last section. Lipman clearly has in mind that Harry et. al. have started down the road of converting their group into a CoI.

In my *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education* (Sprod 2001, pp. 153-156), I pointed out that this has led to two distinct ways of using the phrase 'community of inquiry', and labelled them the narrow-sense community of inquiry (NCoI): i.e. a distinct pedagogical technique in a session with a group; and a wide-sense community of inquiry (WCoI): i.e. an overarching transformation of education.⁵ Gil Burgh (2021) has

⁵ I have since wondered at the wisdom of choosing the words 'narrow' and 'wide', given the possible negative connotations of 'narrow' (e.g. in narrow-minded). It is narrow only in the sense of being constrained to a particular, specific pedagogical technique, while 'wide' is meant to denote a much broader—and hence less specific—nature of a classroom.

expanded on this distinction and looked carefully at its implications. Without going too far into his conclusions, I note that he says that while it is relatively easy to identify what is meant by NCoI (as I have in the previous section), '[t]he more difficult task is to explain what is meant by the wide-sense community of inquiry' (p. 15). Both Burgh and I point out one thing that it cannot mean: sitting students in a circle, reading a text, and entering discussion as the only activity in the classroom. In his introduction to a reprinting of Sharp's article 'What is a 'community of inquiry''? (2018), Philip Cam agrees:

The idea that the knowledge base to be acquired through education is to result entirely from students' own inquiries, which thereby signify the limit and measure of the truths and conceptions they come by through their education, would severely curtail their access to objective knowledge ... This is not a problem for Sharp so long as the kind of collaborative inquiry process that she envisages remains an *adjunct* to the child's overall educational experience. It would be another matter were the [narrow-sense] community of inquiry to entirely supplant more standard approaches to education. (2018, p. 32, emphasis added)

However, in the final paragraph of the same article, Cam also says:

Practitioners of Philosophy for Children sometimes talk about 'doing a [narrow-sense] community of inquiry'. As Sharp makes clear, however, the [wide-sense] community of inquiry is not a special kind of session in which students engage. (p. 35, my square brackets)

Cam is slipping between using CoI in the narrow sense and the wide sense, without signposting that these are different entities.

Sadly, nowhere in Sharp's 2018 article *What is a 'community of inquiry'?* does she explicitly answer her own question—just as, in *Teaching for Better Thinking*, Splitter and Sharp (1995) say 'We shall not try to give a precise definition of "community of inquiry"' (p. 17). It seems we are to construct our own understanding of what the phrase means from more oblique comments.

It is interesting to look at the sorts of details both Lipman and Sharp give in some of their major writings about the CoI, with the distinction between the narrow-sense and the wide-sense in mind. The index for *Thinking in Education* (Lipman 1991a) has 30 discrete entries for community of inquiry. On my reading, 25 of these seem to be

referring to an NCoI (though, for a few of these, a case might be made that the wide-sense is intended).⁶ In the Sharp article referred to in the previous paragraph, I read nine of the references to CoI to be talking about the narrow-sense, and five to the wide-sense. Certainly, all the examples of student comments she gives are clearly drawn from NCoIs. I will return to further analysis of Sharp's article below.

What exactly is the wide-sense CoI?

Answering the question 'What exactly is the wide-sense CoI?' is not easy, as Burgh noted above. Much of what has been written about converting or transforming the classroom into a CoI is exceedingly general. Practical detail is very thin on the ground, especially any mention of the teacher's role in it. See, for example, Lipman's oft-quoted extended description in *Thinking in Education*:

we can now speak of 'converting the classroom into a community of inquiry' in which students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions. A community of inquiry attempts to follow the inquiry where it leads rather than being penned in by the boundary lines of existing disciplines. A dialogue that tries to conform to logic, it moves forward like a boat tacking into the wind, but in the process its progress comes to resemble that of thinking itself. Consequently, when this process is internalized or introjected by the participants, they come to think in moves that resemble its procedures. They come to think as the process thinks. (1991, pp. 15-16)

There is no mention of the teacher here. Similarly, Splitter and Sharp (1995, pp. 18-21) describe a classroom full of dialogue, almost entirely between students. In four pages, teachers are mentioned six times—three in the phrase 'students and teachers' (implying they are equivalent) and three in relation to an atmosphere of trust with students. What other roles a teacher might have are missing. In addressing 'the challenge to the idea that every classroom in every discipline ... can be transformed into a community of inquiry', they admit that 'we do not pretend to understand how

⁶ See the section 'The practical and the theoretical' below for the criteria I used.

this transformation might take place' (p. 24). It is also worth noting that the form of inquiry referenced in both works is purely dialogical inquiry.

Teachers cannot afford to ignore such details. They need to be able to plan how to approach each day, each lesson. While it might be possible (though probably unwise) to use the NCoI as the only methodology in a philosophy course, it would seem to be a disastrous approach in either a generalist primary classroom, or in a secondary course in another discipline. Converting the classroom into a CoI cannot, therefore, mean making every lesson a CoI. The WCoI is not merely a concatenation of many NCoIs and hence the WCoI and the NCoI are two distinct entities. In saying this, I am not arguing against the idea of bringing inquiry, as opposed to transmission, more centrally into education (Lipman 1991a, pp. 13-14); far from it. But we need to know how it could work.

So here is my attempt to map what it might mean to turn a classroom into a WCoI. The first step is for the teacher to introduce the NCoI as a part of the mix of pedagogical techniques. For example, it could be used to introduce a new topic, or to help students synthesise the knowledge they have just gained. As students start to internalise the inquiry capacities and dispositions they experience in regular NCoIs, inquiry starts to seep out of its boundaries and into other activities within the classroom. A student will say 'What about X? Can we have a discussion about that?', and so an informal CoI—that might only last five minutes—breaks out. Over time, such inquiry becomes more common: the teacher can choose to build it into other activities, and the students will inject it themselves. I want to emphasise here the key role the teacher must play in both establishing and maintaining a WCoI—a role that, as we have seen, tends to be glossed over in discussion of the WCoI. (The importance of the teacher's role tends to be much more front and centre in discussions of the NCoI. Interested readers can find a detailed discussion of the importance of the teacher's role—which I have termed 'pedagogic action'—in Sprod 2001, pp. 74-79).

Anecdotally, if you talk to any teacher who has regularly incorporated NCoIs into their scheme of work, you will hear of this sort of development. Unfortunately, however, I know of no research that considers the process of converting a classroom into a WCoI apart from the following. I documented this progression (more or less in passing as the main focus of the study was elsewhere) in a Year 7 science class, where I used full NCoIs in 28% of lessons, but found over the year that discussion 'that could be loosely described as CoI' occurred in 76% of them, increasingly student initiated (Sprod 1994, p. 27). This supports the contention that we can see the direction of

causation: the NCoIs equip students with the capacities and dispositions necessary for the WCoI.

This WCoI—the body of students-and-teacher(s) who have internalised, and commonly use, the dispositions and capabilities of dialogical inquiry well beyond just NCoIs—might be confined to a single disciplinary area (say, philosophy), but P4C practitioners believe they will apply these to all their learning across all subject areas. Claims for such long term, far transfer (Adey & Shayer 1994) of dispositions and capabilities can be difficult to sustain, given that large scale longitudinal studies are required to do so. Topping and Trickey (2007) in Scotland and Fair et al. (2015) in Texas provide good evidence that P4C does achieve such transfer. Note, however, that there is still an important role for the teacher in a WCoI—perhaps to initiate inquiry at a teachable moment, or to scaffold a student-initiated inquiry or, at the very least, to make space for student inquiry at appropriate times.

In this, I have been confining my comments to dialogical inquiry—as Lipman and Splitter & Sharp do. We do need to recognise, though, that not all inquiry is dialogical (even if other forms may be somewhat dependent on it), nor is all of it communal either, and that the WCoI will include these too. More on this later.

More than two senses?

As I have delved deeper into the literature on the CoI, I have started to suspect that even the narrow vs wide distinction is too simple. Burgh (2021) observes:

The wide-sense conception of the community of inquiry could be viewed as both an organizing or regulative principle of scholarly inquiries and a classroom-wide ideal for the reconstruction of education.
(p. 18)

As Burgh explores, there are both parallels and divergences between ‘scholarly inquiries’ and a reconstructed education.⁷ Without going into these, I draw attention to Burgh’s mention of ‘an organizing or regulative principle’ and an ‘ideal’. These phrases bring to mind both Immanuel Kant’s use of transcendental ideas, which ‘have an excellent ... regulative employment ... of directing the understanding towards a certain goal ... [but which] lies quite outside the bounds of possible experience’ (1965,

⁷ Burgh’s analysis of the relation of the sort of professional communities Peirce discusses (the community of scientists, the community of philosophers) to the idea of a reconstruction of education is well worth reading, though I lack the space to consider it further here.

p. 553, A644/B672) and Jürgen Habermas' (1981, 1990) similar use of counterfactual ideals in his theory of communicative action (see Sprod 2001, pp. 59-66 for a much fuller discussion of both).

Bearing this in mind, we may now have three (or even five) senses:

- the NCoI with three aspects: a specific pedagogic technique, a specific session using that technique, the group that uses it in such sessions;
- the WCoI as a way in which everything (or, maybe, nearly everything) that happens in a classroom is, in some sense, guided by, or subject to, inquiry;
- the transcendental-sense CoI which is a counterfactual ideal⁸—i.e. one that cannot be realised in practice, but serves as a guide to how education can be reconstructed as inquiry.

Let us recall the advice on naming that I gathered earlier. We can see that the name Community of Inquiry lacks consistency and uniqueness (being applied to different concepts), understandability (at least, in the two latter senses), specificity (being too vague), and stability (having its meaning shifting over applications). It is ambiguous. Admittedly, at least in the narrow sense, it has been unique within education and does a good job of describing the P4C 'brand'. My assertion is that we need to give up on trying to distinguish these using the adjectives 'narrow-sense', 'wide-sense' and even 'transcendental-sense', and look at finding different names to identify each of these senses. Only in this way can we avoid the potential for conflation and confusion.

For an example of differential naming within an overall theory, we might look at the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1981, 1990). When laying out the various aspects of communicative action, Habermas chooses a different name for each (well, mostly. See Sprod 2001, p. 60 for some infelicities in the terminology). Thus, success-oriented action is subdivided into strategic and instrumental action, and again into open and concealed versions. When discourse moves up a level, we have communicative action, which itself can be escalated to critical discourse. The regulative (transcendental, counterfactual) ideal that ties all this together is the Ideal Speech Situation (Sprod 2001, pp. 60-66). I don't intend here to go into the details of

⁸ Splitter and Sharp claim, without argument beyond a vague reference to Pragmatism, that the WCoI 'is at once immanent and transcendent' (1995, p. 18), but I cannot see how that is possible.

each of these—I present them as an example of how careful naming can tease out the separate but related elements of a theory.

Descriptive naming and evaluative naming

Sharp starts her article ‘What is a “community of inquiry”?’ (2018, p. 38) with an anecdote. She encounters a teacher who, after an intensive seven-day workshop, claims that the group ‘had achieved their goal: they were now truly a community of inquiry’. Sharp reports ‘experiencing a pang of revulsion’, though she admits that the group had been immersed in (what I have called) a series of NCoIs throughout the week. Quoting a previously written poem of hers on CoI, Sharp says, amongst other things, that the ‘focus must always be on the improvement of the inquiry itself in its relation to the problems under discussion’ (clearly a reference to an NCoI), but ‘it’s something you live year after year, so that, after a while, it becomes a part of you’ (clearly a reference to a WCoI) (p. 39). She further asks (p. 39), ‘how would a teacher know when she had finally transformed a classroom of students into such a community?’ (again, WCoI). Sharp here seems to be making an impossible demand in order to call a classroom a CoI. For a start, few class/teacher combinations last more than a single school year. By secondary school, students are in different classes with different teachers for each of their subjects—this is even true in *Harry*. Is she here hinting at a transcendental-sense CoI? It seems to me that a failure to carefully distinguish different senses of CoI lies at the root of Sharp’s revulsion.

If a seven-day intensive workshop is insufficient to deserve the name CoI, then a single, hour long, NCoI must not merit the CoI name at all. Yet I have been present when Ann Sharp ran such a CoI, with students, for an audience of parents and teachers, and she certainly described what she was running as a Community of Inquiry.

Here we are seeing some of the confusions that can arise when the very same term is used to designate some related but distinct concepts. My proposal is, as it was in 2001, that we should restrict the term ‘Community of Inquiry’ to the narrow sense and find other terms for the other senses. More of that anon. For now, let’s have a closer look at the usage of Community of Inquiry in the narrow-sense.

The objection to the use of CoI to describe a specific pedagogical technique, even if it is used in only one session with one group, seems to arise from the feeling that the CoI needs to build over time (‘year after year’) to be a *real* CoI. I am certainly not denying that this is highly desirable. But I think that we need to separate out descriptive names

from evaluative ones. My case is that CoI *describes* a specific pedagogic technique: sharing of the provocation, setting the agenda, discussion under the facilitation of a teacher. This is a somewhat evolved version of Lipman's original CoI (1991, pp. 241-243, as presented above).

Yet this technique, as for all the tools in a teacher's toolbox, can be done well or badly, as a one-off or as a key repeating activity, and so on. When we *evaluate* the use of a technique, we standardly use adjectives or qualifying phrases. We don't say 'that wasn't a lecture—it was boring', we say 'that was a boring lecture'. Here are some examples of how this could be applied to CoI:

- a one-off CoI
- a demonstration CoI
- a competitive CoI involving having participants marked to determine winners
- a shallow CoI that did not reach any philosophical depth or rigour
- a beginning CoI, where students (and possibly the teacher) are inexperienced
- an on-going CoI group, that enters CoI sessions regularly
- a mature CoI group, that has been holding CoIs often, and has made progress in internalising the processes
- school-wide use of CoI (philosophy sessions for all classes, or even CoIs across all subjects)

The idea that one-off, or demonstration, or competitive CoIs are not real CoIs seems to me to arise precisely from a failure to clearly distinguish between the related, but nevertheless quite distinct, notions of the NCoI and the WCoI, and to insist that only the latter counts as a *real* CoI. If the two had distinct names, such confusion would not arise.

To return to Sharp's article, what she might be arguing for as a real CoI is a school or system-wide approach in which each student, no matter which teacher they have, participates in narrow-sense CoIs across all the classes they are part of, 'year after year'. Or maybe not. Maybe she is arguing for something much wider still—an education system where everything is driven by student inquiry. Maybe she envisages

this inquiry to be not merely dialogical but taking in all forms of inquiry, not always communal. Whichever it is, this is a something that needs another name.

The practical and the theoretical

In my reading for this article, I have noticed that the NCoI is far and away the more commonly used sense, across a wide variety of authors with quite disparate aims. It is rarer for authors to explicitly use the term Community of Inquiry to denote the WCoI. We have seen above that this is true even of Lipman and Sharp.

Intriguingly, I have noticed a tendency that those few who do discuss the WCoI are those with little day-to-day classroom teaching experience. Writers who are, or have been (like me), a teacher, spending their career in classrooms, use CoI in the narrow-sense. If this generalisation is sound, why might it be? Here is my guess. Choosing an appropriate technique—lecture, reading comprehension, practical work, group work, individual research, and so forth—to match to their learning aims for their students is a daily demand on practitioners. CoI is another such technique, and the name differentiates it from the others. So they generally think of CoI in this classroom technique way—the NCoI. Those more removed from constant lesson planning are more likely to look at the broader picture and envisage the WCoI.

I'll make another observation. Even within the work of a given author, the more practical the focus of a particular passage concerning the CoI, the more likely it is that what is being described is an NCoI, and the more fine-grained is the detail provided. Conversely, the more theoretical the focus is, the more likely what is being described looks like a wide-sense (or even transcendental-sense) CoI, and the more general it is.

These are, of course, empirical claims, and to support them properly would require wide-ranging textual analysis, which I have not done. I can, however, point to some limited support from an analysis of two recent multi-author edited volumes.

Despite the fact that I have demonstrated that the NCoI is clearly a different concept from the WCoI, it is not always easy to distinguish which an author is talking about when they use that term CoI. In my analysis, I have used the following markers. An author is referring to the NCoI when there is mention of one or more of:

- the use of a teacher-selected provocation;
- engaging in dialogue in a circle;

- the teacher's role in facilitating the dialogue and/or;
- the verbatim reporting of dialogue facilitated by the teacher or facilitator.

A reference is to the WCoI when there is mention of one or more of:

- focused student dialogue across a number of types of pedagogical techniques;
- student use of the markers of inquiry (see, for example, the list in Sharp 2018, p. 40) independent of teacher facilitation;
- the transformation of education in all its aspects into inquiry.

In my trawl through all the 23 indexed references to CoI or CoPI in *History, Theory and Practice of Philosophy for Children: International Perspectives*, edited by Naji and Hashim (2017), I interpreted the majority (18) to be referring to an NCoI, with only two of these making theoretical points—the rest are oriented on practice. All the references to a WCoI are theoretical in nature.

Turning to *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*, edited by Gregory, Haynes and Murris (2017), I looked at the use of CoI in each of the 29 chapters (three of the 29 chapters made no significant mention of CoI and so were excluded from this analysis). All but four of these were using CoI in the narrow-sense. Of those four, two referenced both senses, and for two I was unable to be certain of the usage. Each of these four was written (or, in one case, co-written) by a theorist.

I have also invited representatives of national or regional groups on the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) email list to tell me (a) whether they used the term CoI or something very similar (perhaps in translation) or not, and (b) what they understood by the term. Of 11 respondents, eight did use CoI. Of these eight, all but one (who did not describe the CoI) gave a recognisably narrow-sense description.

From this admittedly sketchy research, we can draw the tentative conclusions that (a) by far the most common usage of CoI is the narrow sense, even amongst those most closely involved in the broad P4C movement, and (b) that the closer to day-to-day teaching a person is, the more likely they are to interpret CoI in the narrow sense.

Why does this matter? Two reasons. If we agree that most people, most of the time, think of the NCoI when they hear the term Community of Inquiry, then it will be best to retain the phrase for that meaning. Moreover, if the people we are most trying to

convince to introduce the Community of Inquiry into their everyday practice think of, and are most interested in, the NCoI as another technique to add to their teaching toolkit, we need to concentrate on that sense with them. To avoid confusion, then, we need to look for another term for the WCoI.

Community, inquiry, and the link between narrow- and wide-sense CoIs

A quick web search will reveal that there are many resources and websites devoted to the task of binding a disparate group of students into a classroom community. Likewise, inquiry-based learning is something of a buzzword at the moment. However, it is rare to see the two linked together as we see in the phrase 'community of inquiry' (Siegloff & Poulton 2022, timing: 3.28 - 5.10). As they document, much of the community work revolves around feel-good factors, encouraging positive affective relationships between students. Much of the inquiry-based learning is individualistic (each student follows the thing that interests them), or works by putting students together into ad-hoc groups, usually without close teacher facilitation. Little of it is centrally dialogical.

Within the P4C world, the two concepts of community and inquiry are inextricably linked—centrally, within the NCoI. We build community through the inquiry. Thus, the students are seated in a circle or similar. They talk one at a time, and listen respectfully to each other, often finding out that their classmates have different ideas from them. They are encouraged to state whether they agree or disagree with previous statements, and why. As Splitter and Sharp (1995) say, 'care for persons should flow from the care that the classroom community elicits towards the procedures and subject matter of the inquiry itself, rather than from an "irrational emotivism" in which reason is replaced by pure affect' (p. 30, n28).

Furthermore, we strengthen inquiry through communal dialogical interaction—the Vygotskian process, often discussed within the P4C literature, of internalising the inquiry capabilities and dispositions that occur on the interpersonal plane in the CoI (see, for example, Lipman 1991b, 1996; Sprod 2001, pp. 50-54). Both community and inquiry in close interaction are essential to the claimed effects of an NCoI, and both are strengthened by that interaction (Reznitskaya & Gregory 2013; Splitter & Sharp 1995, p. 18).

While it is possible that both community and inquiry can be separately developed in other ways, within the P4C movement it is surely taken for granted that this is best done through the medium of the NCoI. Indeed, as I argued above, the possibility of

instituting a WCoI is dependent on students having already, through repeated participation in NCoIs, developed a well-knit community while building the capacities and dispositions needed for inquiry. The NCoI is the engine that powers the WCoI, and both are constituted under the transcendental CoI.

The implications for names

Using the same term 'Community of Inquiry' for these three distinguishable concepts runs afoul of most of the advice presented in the section 'Naming' above. It further risks confusing those we most need to be able to communicate with: the educational profession.

Therefore, I recommend that the name 'Community of Inquiry' should be reserved to label the specific pedagogical technique that we train teachers in—that is, the narrow-sense CoI. If we need to distinguish the aspects of the NCoI, we can then talk of the CoI pedagogy being used within a CoI session with a CoI group. Drawing on my arguments above, I advance four main reasons. The narrow-sense Community of Inquiry is, as I hope I have shown:

- prior—historically, conceptually and in practice—to the WCoI.
- a distinctive and powerful teaching and learning tool that needs to be picked out by a distinctive name.
- our brand, which sets us apart from other educational approaches, and which is widely recognised by those who have any knowledge of the broad P4C movement.
- the core, the engine for transforming education, by creating wide-sense Communities of Inquiry in classrooms and across schools.

So, what of the other meanings that have accreted to the name? I assert that we need to find other names for them. While I have suggestions below, it may be that others can come up with better ones.

The more important term to find is one to cover the transformed classroom (or even school)—that is, the WCoI. Here, I am going to recommend that we use the phrase 'Inquiring Community'. Indeed, Splitter and Sharp (1995) use precisely this in the name of their second chapter: 'The Dynamics of the Inquiring Community' (pp. 32-63). This term would maintain the twin aspects of community and inquiry, and the

connection between them. Indeed, it also allows for other forms of inquiry than the dialogical. Modifiers can be used to describe their reach: e.g. Ms Doe's Inquiring Community; the philosophical Inquiring Community; the Anytown School Inquiring Community.

These two terms are the most important to consider—and to clearly distinguish—so as to avoid confusion in both the literature and when talking to educationalists.

I now turn my thoughts to the transcendental CoI. It is likely that this concept is of most interest to P4C theorists, and is not one that will be used widely outside the literature. When the CoI is discussed solely in terms of student capacities and dispositions (e.g. Lipman 1991, pp. 15-16; Sharp 2018, p. 39), we are no longer talking about real classrooms, but the ideal when students have entirely internalised them, and are interacting perfectly with each other. This is why the teacher is not mentioned; they are no longer required. This is the transcendental guiding ideal. With its deep Peircean roots (Sprod 2001, pp. 147-8), I suggest the term Habermas (1981, p. 25) uses: the 'Ideal Speech Situation' (Fletcher 2016; Sprod 2001, pp. 63-66; Weber 2008). If there are objections to the Habermasian baggage that term carries, maybe we need to coin a new phrase.

Finally, I'll make a comment here about the naming of professional communities, as discussed by Seixas (1993), Gregory (2002), Pardales and Girod (2006) and Burgh (2021). I do not see the need for those of us in the broad P4C movement to use the phrase Community of Inquiry in these contexts at all. Rather, I would use Peircean terms: the community of scientists, the community of philosophers, the community of historians, and so on. Note here the use of the definite article (in this age of globalisation, there is only one such community), and the lack of any formal role overseeing that community: there is no equivalent of the teacher or facilitator.

In summary, to extend Juliet's point, it is as if we have been calling a rose and a sweet pea by the same name. It is a recipe for confusion. Let's give each a separate name and we will be able to talk about them much more clearly: they will still smell as sweet.

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