Everyone Teaches, Everyone Learns:
Rediscovering Communities of Inquiry

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The communities of inquiry model (CoI) is widely used internationally to develop, implement and evaluate online discussions. Even with the inclusion of new and innovative technologies, many discussions still fail to achieve the CoI goal of sustaining communication and advancing understanding. It is argued here that one important reason for this failure is that the model itself is misunderstood. In current practice, as in online practice generally, the emphasis is placed on teachers teaching learners. CoI, however, as originally conceived by Garrison, Anderson and Archer, are based on the American philosopher John Dewey's analysis of practical inquiry in How We Think*; and here, as in all of Dewey's work, equal emphasis is placed on learners teaching teachers. In the CoI model, teachers and learners are identified as "participants," and participants are said to teach and learn from each other. Furthermore, given that participants are to search for and find "collaborative solutions" to "shared problems," it is just as important that learners share their solutions with teachers as it is for teachers to share their solutions with learners. Whether learners "teaching the teacher" will be found to prolong communication and advance understanding depends on future research. The theoretical investigation reported here is intended to convince empirical researchers to test the hypothesis that it* will *have this result.*

Keywords: Communities of Inquiry, John Dewey, Learner Teaching, Randy Garrison

Introduction

Following the pioneering work of Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson and Walter Archer, online teachers in the U.S. and internationally see their discussion boards as communities of inquiry (CoI) in which "participants…construct meaning through sustained communication" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 89). CoI are based on John Dewey's model of practical inquiry in *How We Think*. "The product of…inquiry" in both "is the resolution of [a] dilemma or problem" (Ibid., p. 98). CoI are also based on Dewey's "My Pedagogic Creed," where he says that education is a social process. In CoI, "collaboration is seen as an essential aspect of cognitive development since cognition cannot be separated from the social context" (Ibid., p. 92). CoI research has produced mixed results (e.g., Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2009; Saadatmand et al., 2017; Stover & Holland, 2018). According to Garrison (2007, p. 65), CoI can have "great difficulty" sustaining communication beyond an initial, exploratory phase. To reach the final, resolution phase there must be "shared goals requiring a collaborative solution" (Ibid., p. 66). According to Garrison, however, many CoI are not true CoI at all. They are either not problem-based or, if they are, the problems are shared by learners but not by teachers: teachers already know the solutions.

Communities of Inquiry

In the communities of inquiry model, teachers teach learners *and* learners teach teachers. The model has three essential elements: cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence. "Teaching presence…may be provided by any of the participants in a community of inquiry" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 101). Teaching presence includes two main functions: discussion design and organization and discourse facilitation. Design, organization and facilitation, "though likely to be the primary responsibility of the teacher" (Ibid., pp. 89-90), "may be performed by any one participant in a Community of Inquiry" (Ibid., p. 89). Discourse facilitation specifically, one indicator of which is direct instruction, "is a responsibility that may be shared among the teacher and some or all of the other participants or students" (Ibid., p. 90). Issues have arisen concerning the effectiveness of participants' teaching presence (e.g., Shea, Vickers, & Hayes, 2010), of the communities of inquiry model itself (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009), and of online discussions generally (Cho & Tobias, 2016), in sustaining communication and producing collaborative solutions. But are current self-identified "communities of inquiry" truly communities of inquiry? Are they designed to give learners an opportunity to teach (as well as learn) and teachers an opportunity to learn (as well as teach)? Multiple searches of multiple databases using the phrases "learners teaching teachers" and "students teaching teachers" confirm Garrison's (2007) conclusion that many CoI are not true CoI at all. Each search produced only single digit

results, including an article by Terry Anderson, one of the architects of the communities of inquiry model (Anderson & Dron, 2011); and in none of the articles and eBooks located is learner teaching and teacher learning the main topic.

Dewey's New Order of Conceptions

According to Garrison (2007), for communities of inquiry (CoI) to be effective they must have shared goals requiring a collaborative solution. Problem-based discussions, discussions which challenge all participants, teachers as well as learners, are one example. Problem-based discussions would fulfil the promise of John Dewey's "new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice" (1938/1963, p. 5), the philosophical foundation for his *How We Think* and "My Pedagogic Creed." Education for Dewey was a collaborative enterprise (Vanderstraeten, 2002). His Laboratory School in Chicago at the turn of the 20th century was conceived as a "cooperative society on a small scale" (Dewey, quoted in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 5). Teachers transmitted "established custom" (Dewey, 1916, p. 79); students experimented with new ways of doing things; and the goal was to discover the ways that worked best for the group as a whole. For Dewey, teachers and learners are participants in educational activities. Teachers contribute by teaching. But they also learn. Learners contribute by learning. But they also teach. In a process that involves learners assessing teacher knowledge, teachers assessing learner knowledge, learners and teachers seeking new knowledge and coming to a shared understanding on some topics and agreeing to differ on others, everyone teaches and everyone learns. Furthermore, given that the aim of educational activity is to increase group knowledge, it is just as important that learners share their knowledge with teachers as it is for teachers to share their knowledge with learners.

In communities of inquiry, as inspired by Dewey's new order of conceptions, what ultimately counts is not what teachers teach (or learn) or what learners learn (or teach) but the impact their teaching and learning has on the group as a whole (Beckett, 2018). Teachers and learners are members of a group—a class; an academic and professional community; a society—and their goal is to increase the knowledge of the group. Evidence of success comes from what the group does: the decisions it makes and actions it takes with respect to the problems being discussed are more knowledgeable. Dewey saw the role of the teacher as a "guide and leader" (Dewey, quoted in Engel, 2008, p. 118) in activities intended to promote social renewal. If he were with us today, teaching in a community of inquiry, he would guide learners as together they seek to renew their academic and professional community and, in the process, in however small a way, renew their society. Unlike communities of inquiry to date, Dewey's CoI promise to be as effective in achieving their goals as historians tell us his Laboratory School was in achieving its goals (Cremin, 1969; Cuban, 1993; Spring, 2013). Most CoI today are designed to advance learners' understanding of current theories and practices. Dewey and learners would have to work harder and longer to achieve a truly collaborative solution, knowing that the future of their academic and professional communities depends on them. They would focus on understanding current theories and practices *and* on ways those theories and practices can be improved.

Teacher/Learner Engagement

Placing as much emphasis on learners teaching teachers as teachers teaching learners will, it is argued, increase the chances of success by increasing the ways participants can engage in and contribute to online discussions. No longer dependent on the altruism (and professionalism) of teachers (whose role is to help learners learn) and the selfishness (and emerging professionalism) of learners (Dewey's "egotistic specialists," 1916, p. 9), an avenue will be opened for the selfishness in teachers and altruism in learners. When participants have more ways to contribute and are motivated in more ways to make contributions, assuming other factors are held constant, educational activities will be more successful. Conceiving discussions in this way will also increase the chances of success by increasing the control participants have over a wider range of teaching and learning. In the old modes of practice Dewey criticized, with the possible exception of drilled teaching and rote learning of facts and skills, what learners learn from teachers cannot be predicted in advance. Given the range of beliefs learners bring to new topics and the number of associations they make with them, what they actually learn might be almost anything. In the new modes of practice, teacher teaching is just the first step. The additional steps—learners assessing teacher teaching, etc.—will give participants greater control over a wider range of teaching and learning. They can achieve a shared understanding, not just of what the facts are, but of the evidence which supports them.

In communities of inquiry, as originally conceived, discussions are focused on a current issue or problem. Teachers have *their* solution, learners have *their* solution, but no one has *the* solution. When communities of inquiry are conceived in this way, learners will learn from teachers *and* teachers will learn from learners. The present author teaches a research course for preservice and in-service teachers, focusing in the discussions on understanding the role of the teacher-researcher in education and on the reliability or lack of it of classroom research. Students understand the role of the teacher but not the role of the teacher-researcher. They have experience of the former but not the latter, and they

have difficulty seeing teachers, seeing themselves, as researchers. The present author can help. He has experience of both. In other ways, however, the students help him. Many have more PK-12 teaching experience than he does; and while his background is in the humanities and social sciences, some students' have backgrounds in the natural sciences. He knows the arguments pro and con with respect to teacher research, knows its weaknesses as well as its strengths, better than students; but before teaching this course he had never seriously doubted its reliability. Since teaching the course, however, he has learned from students that in classrooms there are many more uncontrolled variables than he had previously imagined; and whenever he begins to think he has mastered this topic a student will introduce him to one more. He has learned from students as much about the "teacher" in the "teacher-researcher" as they have learned from him about the "researcher," because the course has been designed based on issues related to the role teacher-researchers play in education and the reliability of the research they conduct.

Learners teaching teachers is potentially important even in discussions where it seems instructors know "everything" and students know "nothing." Dewey (1916) concedes that students' experience may be limited and fragmentary, but he also reminds us that it is the only context they have for understanding new material. What's true for them is what's true to their experience; everything else seems, at least at first, to be false (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). The implication for Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) is that learners in communities of inquiry (CoI) never learn exactly what teachers teach, because the experience they bring to discussions is unique to them. This is the reason they see learners as "participants" in CoI who have as much to share with instructors as instructors have to share with them. Given that learners' experience is unique to them, sharing what they learn will test teacher knowledge in ways it has not been tested before, and it will be found that, no, teachers don't know everything. Similarly, given that teachers' experience is unique to them, sharing what they know will test learner knowledge in ways it has not been tested before; and, yes, it will be found that they do know something. As a result, the group will have taken one step closer to fulfilling the purpose of the discussion, that is, to agree—or agree to disagree—on a solution to the issue being examined. For Garrison, Anderson and Archer, participants in CoI are people, people with different backgrounds, different life experiences. The knowledge they possess is uniquely theirs. Participants can and should teach each other. They have something unique to contribute, something which, as participants, they should contribute. And participants can and should learn from each other. Others have something unique to contribute, something they should have the opportunity to contribute.

The present author also teaches a course on the history of American public education, a subject he has studied extensively but which is new to the majority of his students. The issues the course addresses are whether American education has been in the past and is today inclusive of all people, and whether the histories written about American education have included all relevant perspectives. The author sees American education from the perspective of an observer, having immigrated from Canada as an adult. He contributes what he knows from the literature, which for the most part is limited to the people and events that have had national impact. The majority of students are native born Americans who received all of their education in the U.S. Though most didn't study the history of education in school or college, they experienced its latest developments in their home states. Furthermore, while the author is a white male, and most of the literature is written by white males, the majority of students are female and people of color. They contribute what they know of their families' and communities' educational histories and compare them with the history he teaches. The rationale for this approach to teaching and learning the history of American education is that an important issue education faces—inclusion—has yet to be resolved and important aspects of the scholarship which supports it—who conducts the scholarship and what they focus on—are limited. Given that education in the U.S. is a state responsibility, state-level histories need to be written; and given who has written the histories we have, the voices of more female, LGBTQ+, Native American, African American and LatinX historians need to be heard. Today's students could be the scholars the profession needs.

Conclusion

John Dewey developed his philosophy of education during a period of rapid social change: American history's Progressive Era. Garrison, Anderson and Archer developed their communities of inquiry (CoI) model during another period of rapid social change: our current Information Revolution. Our homes and classrooms are changing, driven largely by new technologies, with even young children having direct access to information on the internet and a seeming need to share it on social media. The CoI model is nowhere more important than in our emerging global classrooms, where the need to collapse distances between participants is great and working towards a common goal can be effective. Now that learners know more and, when compared with what there is to know, teachers know less, learners have as much to teach teachers as teachers have to teach them; and just as teachers challenge learner knowledge, learners can be expected to challenge teacher knowledge. The surprise would be if learners' doubts were *not* new to teachers and did *not* have the potential to test and strengthen teacher knowledge. Living in a connected

world with urgent issues in front of them 24 hours a day, the surprise would be if they were not concerned, did not want to help, and did not have ideas of their own.

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