

## Ann Margaret Sharp, A View from the Classroom: Reviewing Gregory and Lavery's (eds.) *In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp*

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*“The educator must consciously take it upon himself to liberate, rather than indoctrinate.”*  
–Sharp, (ICI, 80)<sup>1</sup>

**I**n *Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp*, is an anthology of essays collated under a variety of themes. Each section starts with an essay on the theme by another academic in the field of Community of Inquiry (CoI) or Philosophy for Children (P4C)<sup>2</sup>, most of whom either knew and/or worked with Ann Margaret Sharp and themselves have made significant contributions to the theory and practice of CoI/P4C. Inspired by the title of the book, this article is going to attempt to be ‘*in* communal inquiry’<sup>3</sup> with Sharp and the other authors. I intend to present a case for how Sharp’s work has influenced the philosophy of education through the lens of my own practice and experience with the CoI methodology, and explain why it is still relevant today.

I first read Sharp while doing my undergraduate degree, majoring in Philosophy, at Latrobe University, Melbourne. I took a subject called *Philosophy with Children*. There were a number of factors that drew me to the subject, however, the most significant reason was because it was being taught by Ross Phillips, who I had come to adore as an educator. I took all of his subjects. Phillips had prescribed *Teaching for Better Thinking*, by Sharp and Splitter,<sup>4</sup> as the core reading for the subject. At the time, the book did not resonate with me; the theory of education, how it was actually applied in the classroom context, and the theories of childhood were not on my radar. But it was fun all the same reading picture story books and looking for philosophically interesting problems. It wasn’t until a number of years later and with hindsight now that I can see its influence on me, not so much from having read it at University but rather returning to it again as an educator. And I say ‘not so much’ because the fact that I came to love and embody (as much as possible) philosophy (both *P*-philosophy and *p*-philosophy<sup>5</sup>) I can safely accredit to Phillips. His style and method of teaching, his ability to interact with students, to help us grow, to not look down upon us and to enter into genuine dialogue, emboldened me and helped me to forge my own philosophical path and desire to *do p*-philosophy the way he did, with openness and integrity. Now knowing Sharp’s philosophy, method and practice of CoI I can see its direct influence on Phillips and I understand why he selected *Teaching for Better Thinking* as the core text.

What follows are thoughts on this book and Sharp’s influence, not from the perspective of a trained academic (perhaps a *p*-philosopher), but rather a keen practitioner of CoI. I’m a secondary

school teacher who has worked hard to promote philosophy within my school and schools throughout Victoria. I have at most written a few papers, presented at a few conferences, developed resources and played a few key roles in the Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools (VAPS). I have trained in CoI to the level of teacher educator. I have also had the pleasure of getting to know several of the authors in this book, many of whom have deeply influenced my practice and whom I consider friends, especially one of the editors, Maughn Gregory. I had the pleasure of meeting Maughn at the 2014 NAACI<sup>6</sup> conference in Quebec. It was the first international CoI conference that I had attended, and presented at, and it is one that I will never forget precisely because of Maughn's contributions. Maughn, like Phillips, represents the key dispositions that CoI inspires in me and that I aspire to generate in society. He is a gentle and warm human being, a critical thinker who wants and works for social justice, whose own facilitation skills and personal interactions embody the theory and practice of CoI. The experience of NAACI, the collective embodiment of CoI, combined with my previous practice of CoI changed my life and indeed, like Gregory and Phillips, I feel as if I am a testament to the work of Sharp.<sup>7</sup> CoI radically changed my teaching practice. I never would have called myself an authoritarian teacher but schools are toxic warehouses of authoritarianism and patriarchy, that suck you into their culture and it is hard to resist. Sharp's work gave me a framework, the power, the confidence, the pedagogy and importantly the pedagogical justification to confront the authoritarian elements in my practice, to move away from chalk and talk, to consider and relate to young people in a more authentic student centred approach, and to push against the neoliberal agenda to commodify education. This is still very challenging and I'm still having to wade upstream against a culture and system that pushes back; even the students are acculturated and push back.

I knew that Sharp was a significant person in the CoI community, but it wasn't until I read the brief biography of her at the start of this book that I began to understand why her work and practice resonates with me, and came to understand her legacy to current educators. Sharp was a bit of a rebel. She challenged injustices when she saw them and she carved a way of being in the world that was consistent with her beliefs. I can only say that I aspire to be this kind of person. She also faced challenges as a fellow female in a male dominated space. I was the only female student in my honours year and it took perseverance to maintain a space and have a voice. Sometimes, to my shame, I had to resort to what I have discussed in a paper I presented recently, as features and practices of debate culture, which I argue reinforce dominant forms of patriarchal masculinity.<sup>8</sup>

For the purposes of being '*in* communal inquiry' within this article I'm going to tell a story of one of the most significant lessons that I've learned. My hope is to be '*in* communal inquiry' with Sharp and the authors through the lens of this lesson and reflect upon how each of the different sections of the book can help me understand this lesson along with aspects of the theory and practice of CoI.

A few years ago my principal sent an email around asking if any teachers would like their students to attend a presentation by a group of Indigenous men of the Arlwpe community, from Ali Curang, in the Northern Territory. The local mayor had arranged for their visit to the area and was offering to bring them to the school for the day. Having been an ally to many indigenous projects in Melbourne I jumped at the opportunity. In the week prior to their visit I asked my junior philosophy

class (year 7-9 students) if they had any questions that we could consider before the presentation. Wow! What had I just done? While many of the questions were philosophical in nature (it was still early days in our CoI journey) many were social and political questions that contained racist assumptions i.e., “Why do they burn the cars?” “Why do they destroy the houses that the government gives them?” “Why are they given special treatment?”

I was shocked and stunned into paralysis. I dropped it. I wasn’t prepared to deal with the questions without preparation. The next week we attended the presentation. The men presented stories from their dreamtime, showed artefacts, talked about projects they were involved in and in general talked about life in an indigenous community. One project they mentioned was a youth project that had young people from the community writing and performing hip hop songs. They showed a video clip of one of the songs which dealt with alcoholism in their community. There was a Q&A session at the end and, in general, the students asked interesting questions, although one did ask if they lived in houses.

The following week when the class reunited, I had decided to use the same clip as the stimulus for our lesson. I was more mentally prepared to deal with the questions that may arise this time. We generated our list of questions, did some sorting of the questions, eliminating mostly empirical questions, and leaving a variety of philosophical, social, political and psychological questions that were sufficiently open for discussion. We then voted on the question they wanted to discuss. The question they chose was “Why do indigenous people resort to alcoholism?” I wasn’t happy about the choice but I respected it and we started to tackle it. We started our suggestion bomb recording possible answers to the question. Then we started to evaluate each suggestion.<sup>9</sup> As we progressed through the list one of the students noted, “I know white people who are alcoholics and they are probably alcoholic for reason X”. It was then requested that we test this idea against each of the other suggestions. And as it turned out every single other reason, except for dispossession from their land, was a reason why people of any culture or ethnic group may ‘resort to alcoholism’. I then asked “so what does this tell us about our own thinking?” And to my surprise a few students identified the racist assumption in their chosen question. That alcoholism is a uniquely indigenous problem. The key discovery for me was that I could trust the CoI process to enable students to discover their own assumptions and resist the impulse to do the work for them.

### The Anthology

*In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp* is organised around seven themes. Each theme is introduced by an academic from the CoI/P4C world who has selected and curated a selection of Sharp’s writing that connect to that theme. Each section therefore has one or two pieces of Sharp’s work.

I was asked to partly critique this book, alongside a discussion of Sharp’s general influence on education.<sup>10</sup> However, as a school practitioner, not an academic, I will leave some of the more heavy philosophical criticism to those with this experience (see reviews already written – Kohan,<sup>11</sup> Daniel,<sup>12</sup> and Gardner<sup>13</sup>).

Part 1's introduction, by Phil Cam, provides an overview of the links between Sharp's work on CoI, her life and the pragmatist tradition of Dewey, Mead and Peirce. He shows how Sharp's work has advanced and greatly contributed to our knowledge and understanding of the philosophy of education, and what she did in her life to make it a reality in classroom practice around the world. Two of the most powerful aspects of Sharp's interpretation and use of Dewey's notions are that 1) "the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end" (ICI, 31) and 2) "that philosophy itself is best understood as a theory of education" (ICI, 9). Furthermore, Sharp embodied her theory and practice; she was an example of *praxis*. The construction of 'self' and personhood through *praxis* were just as important, especially if we want autonomous citizens able to transform society. And she demanded this of those she worked with and those of her readers.

In this section both Cam and Sharp also define the CoI. Sharp also makes the distinction between being '*in*' the CoI and not, or what Susan Gardner called 'Mere Conversation'<sup>14</sup>. Gardner's article "Inquiry is No Mere Conversation (or Discussion or Dialogue)- Facilitation of Inquiry Is Hard Work!" was a foundational text for me when I started my journey. Sharp's project and the project of CoI is hard work. It is one of the hardest things that I have ever faced in my life. However, I haven't found anywhere in the book where Sharp acknowledges this, perhaps for her the work was easy and an obvious way forward. CoI is a multi-layered practice that requires deep critical thinking, personal engagement in understanding yourself and others; it requires deep personal reflection on your own practice and selfhood, being prepared to give up old, bad habits, and acknowledge your faults and weaknesses as a practitioner. It is not for the faint of heart, nor for someone merely seeking employment as a teacher. It is a challenge to who I am not just as a teacher, but as a person who sees the need to embody this practice in everyday life. These difficulties are exacerbated in the 'post-truth' era with the move towards more subjective, emotional responses to events rather than critical, evidence based responses that are also self-reflective. This is encapsulated in section 1 through its focus on the process of self-transformation of the child. Here lies the first criticism. Sharp talks of students in the classroom CoI and uses examples of children to illustrate self-transformation, however, when she describes the process of self-transformation she uses the plural "we". If there is a criticism here, it is that because of the examples she uses, children, she can be interpreted as not actually talking directly to all of us. But I take it that when she says "we" she means all of humanity, children and adults. Since Sharp's passing, this idea has been taken up. There has been much work done in the area of CoI with adults. I have done some, running workshops using the CoI model, when VAPS runs professional development for teachers. We want teachers to be '*in*' the CoI, which was key to Sharp's practice, improving teacher practice. However, many of my colleagues around the world are doing CoI with adults for the purpose of better thinking (as opposed to teaching) - Walter Kohan, Michael Burroughs, Peter Worley, and Jennifer Glaser to name but a few.<sup>15</sup> If we are to model the embodiment, the *praxis*, of CoI then adults too need to be '*in*' the CoI - an even harder proposition than educating teachers.

You might wonder how does this connect to my personal example above? I hope that the discussion I outlined was not "Mere Conversation," but that my students were '*in*' a CoI, and I hope that the example demonstrates why CoI is "Hard Work". There was also a degree of self-transformation when students identified racist assumptions in their own thinking. However, to be true to the pragmatist tradition what was lacking was action. On reflection, I should have followed

through with some kind of action, or encouraged the students to make a commitment that would reflect true self-transformation, to activate them as citizens.

Today in 'Eduspeak' we talk of teaching *and learning*<sup>16</sup>, something Sharp acknowledged and practiced well and truly before its time, that education was not just about what the teacher did and how they did it but also how the student learns. In part two, Stefano Oliverio, (ICI, 63-73) explores the ways in which Sharp challenges us to reconceptualize both teaching and learning, and the relationship between the teacher and student. She questions the nature of authority within the relationship. She sees the teacher as liberator. It is a radical position that in theory I ascribe to but in practice can only aspire but never achieve given the limitations of the system within which I work. For example, I am directed (by school administrators) to think of my relationship with students as friendly but not friends, already creating a barrier.

This section of the book draws largely upon Sharp's use and interpretation of Nietzsche to explore this idea of teacher as liberator. Sharp's radical position requires a complete reimagining of schooling along Freirean<sup>17</sup> lines, and other radical pedagogies. I struggle greatly with the possibility, in practical terms,<sup>18</sup> of such a project, though I know of numerous attempts, some still surviving today, such as the free school, *Paideia*, founded in 1978 in Mérida, Spain.

I also don't feel like Sharp's concept of teacher as liberator totally dismantles the authoritarian role of the teacher. The idea of shaking a "student out of his complacency" (ICI, 67) still privileges the teacher's viewpoint over that of the student. And I have also witnessed the opposite; teachers being shaken out of their *own* complacency when students at my school went on strike for action on climate change. Teachers, and the school, were forced to respond to student initiatives –thankfully in a generally positive and supportive manner. Also, from personal experience I have worked with students who consciously and stubbornly choose complacency. Sharp does not offer us, at least not in this text, any practical ideas on how to address this (except the need to improve thinking); rather we are given only a theoretical possibility, and one firmly placed with the responsibility of the individual. Sharp's work lacks an institutional analysis, although perhaps this is because it is very much a personal project. Also, the teacher as 'shaker' still implies some authoritative role, but in today's technological age I'm increasingly informed by my students about things happening in the world that I would not otherwise come across if it wasn't for them. The relationship is changing whether I want it to or not.

It is not surprising that Sharp selected Nietzsche as a means to her vision of teacher as liberator. Nietzsche's self-overcoming is key to Sharp's concept of self-transformation. I can appreciate the idea that philosophy and its practice in the CoI is a kind of suffering; again, it is "Hard Work". How often have I heard students say "philosophy makes my brain hurt", or the suffering that comes from unsettlement "why can't there be just one correct answer?" But this hard work is ultimately creative, students are empowered to be their own creators. I can also appreciate Nietzsche's view of educational institutions as places that deprive children of freedom and creativity; in most ways and in most places around the world things have not changed, and it could be argued that we are going backwards with the increased neo-liberalisation of schooling.

Further to this, as a classroom teacher, and perhaps more as a secondary school teacher, there are a few tensions and problems with regards to the practical application of Sharp's theory of education, and the practice of CoI. One is the conflict between what Sharp means by education and the capacity for teachers to meet the curriculum demands set out by their individual governments. Curriculums are crowded. There are competing demands and while I like to think that most of these can be approached in a philosophical manner I struggle, as a practitioner, to find the space for the practice of CoI in the everyday classroom and across the school.

Part 3 explores Sharp's views on ethics and the importance of relationships in education. I have done a lot of work in the area of ethics and CoI with regard to the practical aspects of implementing ethics and Ethical Capabilities curriculum in the classroom. For me this means that any discussion of ethics and CoI is relevant and important, especially given some of the attitudes from teachers that I have witnessed with regards to its implementation. I was confronted on numerous occasions by teachers who said it was not their role to teach ethics and values, it was the role of families. If only such teachers had been exposed to Sharp's thinking on ethics; that ethics and ethical thinking is about a commitment to care, not indoctrination towards a particular 'ethic'. Ethics in the context of CoI is not indoctrination, which is sometimes how the Ethical Capabilities curriculum<sup>19</sup> in Victoria has been interpreted.<sup>20</sup>

In one of Sharp's essays in this section she seems convinced that narrative (in the form of novels with deliberate ethical dialogue) is the best stimulus for developing ethical thinking in children,<sup>21</sup> and this has strongly shaped the CoI community as there is a litany of resources and novels to support the teaching of CoI. However, this made me wonder what she would think about how other parts of the world have revised what counts as stimulus for ethical thinking, for example, in the Australian context almost anything can count as a stimulus for thinking. For example, the film clip of the indigenous youth rapping about alcoholism I mentioned earlier.<sup>22</sup> While the steps that the students made in our CoI were important for ethical thinking, perhaps Sharp was right about the use of selective novels that exemplify people engaging in ethical thinking in a deliberate manner. Do such novels prepare students for better thinking?

The essay "Looking at others' faces" was refreshing and personal. It reminded me of a number of experiences that confirmed Sharp's ideas, namely, that looking at faces helps us to "discover ethical responsibility" (ICI, 122) and confronts us with the "needs, desires and vulnerabilities" (ICI, 122) of others. I feel given my current situation<sup>23</sup> that this sense of ethical responsibility is imminent. I have also witnessed how children are more open to looking at faces than adults, having used an activity (participants in pairs staring at each other for a period of time and recording their feelings as a stimulus) with both adults and children. The children were far more open and comfortable with the exercise than the adults, which tells me that children are the best starting place for CoI as they are more open than adults, although not in all cultures.<sup>24</sup>

Part 4, the section on feminism and children, has made me reflect on many of my own experiences as a woman. I started this chapter with great enthusiasm. I had wanted to skip ahead to it because I felt certain I would find even greater affinity here with Sharp. This only partly came to fruition. I found this section too abstract, perhaps because I lack an understanding of Simone Weil's

work,<sup>25</sup> and Sharp's writing not being stridently feminist enough for me. It did not encapsulate what I felt as a woman in the world of *P*-philosophy, and sometimes *p*-philosophy, nor did I find her feminist philosophy helpful in confronting the challenges that we face.

Here is but one example of one of those challenges. Sharp was a reader and admirer of the Anarchist activist and writer Emma Goldman (ICI, 10). Goldman had argued that there were two spheres, a masculine and feminine (or a public and private sexuality<sup>26</sup>). In a recent paper I gave at the NAACI conference in Puebla, Mexico, I made a similar distinction about the spheres of discourse, between debate culture and dialogue culture, arguing that one, debate, was predominantly masculine and the other, dialogue, feminine<sup>27</sup> (to crudely summarise the paper). In Sharp's analysis of the two characters in *Pixie*, *Pixie* (representing speech) and *Brian* (representing silence), this distinction can be seen, though the roles are reversed (ICI, 174-185) and not explicitly described in terms of gender.

The one aspect from Sharp's incorporation of Weil's philosophy that did resonate with me was the idea of creative labour as meaningful, since this is the work of the CoI, that through our creative labour we create meaning and spaces for others to create their own meaning. But does this translate to a world where male assumptions still scaffold how we see dialogue? And again, not to essentialise gender, though I feel Sharp's work forces me here,<sup>28</sup> this "meaningful work", this "creative labour" is often done by the women (at least in the groups that I have been involved, with the exception of men whom have embodied the philosophical practice that Sharp describes). However, on the pedagogical contributions of the idea of creative, meaningful work, Sharp is right that when the CoI is engaged in meaningful work (that feels like play) we escape time "the interruption of the bell - of *chronos* - is a rude awakening" (ICI, 156). I, and my classes, as I am sure is also true of others who practice CoI, experience this "interruption" on numerous occasions.

In part 5 Peter Shea breaks down Sharp's spiritual contribution to the CoI. He is one of the few contributors that offers criticism of Sharp's work. I struggled to engage with this theme coming from a non-religious background and lacking religious experience,<sup>29</sup> and also perhaps because of the highly abstract philosophical treatment of ideas. I'm open to, but yet to be convinced, that the CoI is a form of religious activity, as argued by Sharp. That it, the CoI, is somehow sacred. Why is this gathering, this activity, sacred? For me the CoI is a special place, but I wouldn't say sacred. However, I can recognise the need for an alignment between the two, especially if we want to promote better thinking across all aspects of society. And given that many educational institutions around the world are religious it makes sense to draw connections. And of course many classes will include religious students,<sup>30</sup> (and ideas). However, if we are to accept Sharp's proposition, that we should imbue students with a sense of spirituality it must be a critical form of spirituality, and I'm yet to see what that looks like, and how it can be done 'safely'<sup>31</sup>. Perhaps a conception of CoI as the embodiment of a daily practice is one version of spirituality. Alternately, perhaps the on-going project of cultivating student curiosity should be seen as the "essence" of education (ICI, 186) and therefore sacred.

One of Sharp's greatest contributions to CoI was her philosophy around the theory and practice of caring thinking. This is outlined in part 6. It was not enough to be a critical and creative thinker; one also had to embody a philosophy of care. Caring thinking is one of the most challenging aspects of the CoI; I certainly need to reflect more on why caring thinking is the hardest, at least for

me. It is certainly the hardest to assess, and perhaps hardest in the secondary context given the self-absorbed nature of teens. This section of the book also highlights another area that I find challenging: race and dealing with racism. I was at a presentation by Darren Chetty (ICI, 206-207) on racism within the CoI and it was certainly an eye-opening challenge to my own self-awareness (or lack of) and eurocentric viewpoint. Sharp's desire to incorporate care into her pedagogical practice, and worldly practice, makes her approach significantly stand out from others, though I don't think that to date it has satisfied the likes of Chetty and Suissa (ICI, 206-207) in terms of dealing with the community's 'whiteness'.<sup>32</sup>

For me, there is a real tension that exists between Sharp's ethics of care and the project of CoI that connects to issues like race (as well as other things like sex, and disability). The example I provided earlier of the student question about Indigenous Australians is just one example where this tension arises, and so far none of my experiences within the CoI community have been able to resolve this tension. I did a presentation to a group of radical educators in Melbourne on the practice and theory of CoI. In that presentation I told the above story to illustrate the power of CoI. However, it was pointed out to me that it was possibly insensitive to allow such a question and discussion to occur. Why? Because what if there had have been an indigenous identifying person in the class<sup>33</sup>. If we do what Sharp and the CoI community suggests then we must "follow the inquiry where it leads". But this is dangerous and risky! It may be re-traumatizing (it may also be that the group do not have the necessary skills to deal with such questions). I find this is especially the case in the secondary school context when students have more life experiences. It is likely that I have students in my class who have experienced rape, drug abuse, or have even had an abortion, and sometimes inquiries naturally lead to such topics. In such cases these inquiries must be followed with a sensitivity and care that I'm still not sure CoI has really provided me with the tools to do, nor do Sharp's writings appear to elucidate much on this in practical terms. However, to be fair, what Sharp means by caring thinking is not just the emotional well-being of the participants, but that each participant also care about the quality of thinking. If quality thinking is achieved, then perhaps the resilience of students to deal with sensitive issues is also achieved.

Jennifer Glaser, in part 7, explores Sharp's interpretation and use of Hannah Arendt's views on democracy and public life. Glaser connects this to the ever globalised world and Sharp's desire for a more just and peaceful world. Sharp insists that the CoI be open ended, what we might call unsettled, or as she states it, having a "commitment to fallibilism and self-correction" (ICI, 237), because we are open to inquiry as an ongoing conversation rather than settled on "hard" truths". For me, Sharp's social-political work makes her even more important and relevant in the face of challenging the so-called 'Post-truth' era. Glaser also argues that Sharp successfully constructs the idea and practice of the CoI as philosophically, socially and politically normative through her incorporation of Dewey and Arendt (ICI, 224). However, she notes that this doesn't automatically translate into action (Glaser, ICI, 225).

The theory and practice of CoI, and hence Sharp's work, faces many other challenges in today's crowded pedagogical eco-system. However, I argue that it is more the practice and practical aspects than the theoretical that creates barriers to its wider utilization. The market is flooded with 'pedagogies' and different 'practices' connected to different gurus (many schools have seen them come

and go). However, Sharp's work stands out from the others because of its historical foundation, the research (evidence based, but predominantly theoretical) and its years of successful practice. I'd also add what Dewey argued "that philosophy itself is best understood as a theory of education" (ICI, 9); hence, that the philosophical approach, in this case CoI, to education is education and therefore should be the predominant pedagogy.

If we strip Sharp's pedagogical work back to some of its key origins, outlined throughout the book, in the likes of Dewey, Peirce, Mead, Vygotsky, and her philosophical engagement with other key philosophers like Arendt, Nietzsche, Weil, Putnam, Rorty, and Habermas, we find a wealth of foundational support for CoI. We can also see how it supports so many areas of curriculum and teaching practice (if implemented well). When I am presented with other pedagogical approaches I always see fragments of CoI practice, but often they are deficit in aspects that I find in CoI –be it critical thinking, or caring thinking, or they are insufficiently philosophical. For example, one practice my school has engaged with is the *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* program.<sup>34</sup> It uses what it calls Theories of Action. Many of these Theories of Action are simple tools that you can find in any CoI teaching book. One instructional model connected to these theories of action is called Concept Attainment. It is basically the CoI concept game model<sup>35</sup> minus what I and others would call concept exploration. Yet the Concept Attainment model lacks any discussion of grey areas or borderline examples, and it only talks of exemplar examples and non-exemplar examples. This is just one reason why Sharp's work and the work of the CoI community is superior; it moves us from the scientific to the philosophical and brings a greater richness to learning. It is this aspect of CoI that is missing from many so-called 'new' pedagogies. And in the light of neoliberal challenges to education, CoI is exactly what we need if we are to confront this challenge and bring about Sharp's vision.

The use of data is another face of the neoliberal agenda to control education. I can't speak for the rest of the world but in the Australian context John Hattie's book *Visible Learning*,<sup>36</sup> a meta-analysis of data from across the world, is greatly shaping government policy with regard to education and teacher practice. Hattie's effect size is quoted ad nauseam. The effect size – i.e. the influence on learning – for "inquiry based learning" models is found to be very low. While Hattie's work does not specifically measure CoI, and I would argue it cannot do so, the result has been that the word "inquiry" has become a dirty word and schools are turning away from it. I believe that this is a direct result of Hattie's data analysis and use of effect size, although to be fair to Hattie I don't believe that this was his intention. He does place some caveats on when inquiry can be successful, he just argues that currently, with how it is done, there is no evidence to show that it is successful.<sup>37</sup>

This is therefore a challenge to those who subscribe to Sharp's work, the authors, contributors to this book, and the larger CoI community, including myself. How can we build a bridge between Sharp's work and the work already done in education to confront these challenges to improve the quality of thinking and the quality of inquiry, and thus developing autonomous, active citizens.

Before concluding, I will offer a few more basic thoughts on the overall tone of the book. The book as a whole feels more like a tasting plate than a set menu. I'm not sure that each section is always coherently connected, partly due to the different voices. However, I'm not sure that this is necessarily a problem given that I feel this is reflective of the interconnected and multidimensional

nature of everything P4C, especially CoI, and Sharp's thinking. She engaged in all aspects of theory and practice to produce a political, ethical, spiritual, aesthetic approach and method and applied it to the practice of philosophy, the philosophy of education, and her life.

There is also a lack of critical reflection within the book. Very few criticisms are mentioned, and of those that are, they rarely deal with the theory itself but rather improper practice (ICI, 126-127). For example, Peter Shea offers several criticisms, one being that while CoI is a good practice it is not supernatural. He challenges Sharp's idea that the CoI is safe (ICI, 161-173), although again his example appeals to improper practice.

This lack of criticism is perhaps also connected to the fact that the contributors all come from within this community, they see each other regularly at conferences, work on projects together, and are in dialogue with each other in other areas of CoI. While this is a good thing for the community – and this book further inspires my own practice– I can't help but wonder whether it reaches to where I ultimately believe it should –the larger world of teacher practitioners and the children they teach; I would argue that it does not. For one, it is too inaccessible for the majority of everyday practitioners in the P4C/CoI world. The challenge, then, is to the editors and contributors, as well as for myself as a passionate practitioner, to find ways to embed Sharp's work in schools, communities, and in everyday life.

What's more, I'm not so sure that the book strikes the right balance between theory and practice to make it widely accessible. It is somewhat accessible to teachers, but only in parts, and even less so to teachers with no philosophical training. It is accessible to teacher educators who are interested in pedagogy, but again, less for those educators with little to no philosophical training beyond your standard theories of education. Most books on education often focus either too heavily on teacher tactics or on the theory behind classroom practice and student learning, and so don't achieve the depth of worldly analysis and application that takes us beyond the classroom, to the socio-political, ethical, and spiritual dimensions that Sharp's work offers. Yet, it is precisely thanks to such depth that Sharp's work may not be accessible to all. She was a prolific reader and her work engaged with such a broad scope of philosophical and spiritual writings, from Dewey, to Heidegger, to religious Buddhist texts. This broadness should not be a deterrent as there was plenty to learn along the way, but for those thinkers that readers may be unfamiliar with, it will likely be a struggle.

### **Who Should Read this Book?**

My bias and love for many of the contributors would have me say that everyone should read this book; however, that would not really be an accurate assessment. Whether you should read this book depends on what kind of person you are and what you are engaged in. If you just want to know more about Ann Margaret Sharp and her life then only some aspects are relevant, although highly insightful and inspirational. If you want to learn about CoI, then you will learn a great deal about the theory and justification but not so much about the actual practice. If you are already a member of the P4C/CoI community then it will greatly deepen your knowledge and understanding of the historical and theoretical contexts of your practice.

Educators, especially those interested in radical critiques of education and looking for ideas to support their own thinking and practice in relation to what is wrong with our current state of education,<sup>38</sup> will find the book to be of great value. This is especially true for those who want to challenge the industrial and neoliberal models of education that permeate our societies. Ultimately, however, I believe those who are likely to get the most from engaging with this text will need to first have practiced CoI to truly appreciate much of what Sharp writes. As stated above, I first read Sharp as an undergraduate philosophy student, not as a teacher. It is only after much practice that it has become relevant.

If you are reading this article then perhaps you are already a member of the P4C/CoI world. But if you are not I feel you will get much more from encountering the work if you were first to seek out your local P4C/CoI community, like VAPS, and engage with their training programs. There are many groups that provide such training across the world, and many of them have been directly inspired by the work of Sharp, and Lipman.<sup>39</sup>

“Only when a woman reads her daily experience in terms of a self responding to the world does she discover both her power and the limits of her power” (ICI, 157). This is certainly a true reflection of my experience of reading this book. Through reading this text, I have further explored and reflected on my strengths and weaknesses, as a practitioner and as a person. Perhaps this experience, alongside the strong sense of womanhood I have had while reading it, has enhanced my experience of self responding. I can only hope that I have expressed this in a way that means you, the reader, will further engage in the theory and practice of CoI.

Sharp’s legacy is huge. Philosophy for Children is in 45 nations around the world (ICI, 130). The CoI community is largely volunteer run, which makes it “Hard Work” but again reflects the embodiment of Sharp’s work. I’m not aware of the circumstances of Sharp’s passing but Walter Kohan finishes his review<sup>40</sup> of *In Community with Ann Margaret Sharp* implying that Sharp’s care for others meant she often did not care as extensively for herself. Sharp cared for others and was herself a caring thinker, and perhaps this care was to the detriment of her health. I’m very cognisant of this as I’m writing this review at 38-9 weeks pregnant, experiencing practice contractions and a kicking baby! Last week I also spent several hours (even though I’m on maternity leave) with my year 12 students reviewing Locke and Hume’s theories of personal identity, over hot chocolates and nachos. But to me, and to how I have interpreted Sharp, this is living educationally and philosophically, imbuing my students with a love of philosophy through friendship. CoI continues to inspire others, as it continues to inspire me, because it is such a powerful, and admittedly dangerous, approach to education and life. This book is a great tribute to a person I never had the pleasure of meeting, someone whose work has greatly influenced my life, and the lives of many others. I hope to repay her wisdom and commitment, to do justice to her memory, by continuing to live educationally and philosophically.

*\*I would like to acknowledge and thank the work of Janette Poulton, my professional mentor, for her support to write this article, and my partner, Jonathan Rutherford for his editing and support.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In *Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp* will be cited as ICI in the text. See, Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Lavery, eds., (2018) *In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp: Childhood, Philosophy and Education*, New York, NY, Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Community of Inquiry (CoI) and Philosophy for Children (P4C) are different ideas, but often considered interchangeable. CoI is the theory and practice, it is a pedagogical approach. P4C encompasses any program that involves the teaching of philosophy to children – it varies from programs to pedagogies. The two professional communities largely cross over but are also made up of distinct individuals and groups. For the purposes of this article I will be referring to CoI as I feel Sharp's alliances were more with this community.

<sup>3</sup> Being '*in* communal inquiry' is a very distinct concept and practice for Sharp, it is not just to be 'talking or discussing' but a set of dispositions, both individual and collective, that define being '*in*' (ICI, 38-48). These dispositions are elaborated throughout the book.

<sup>4</sup> Splitter, L.J. and Sharp, A.M. (1995) *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom of Community of Inquiry*. Melbourne: ACER Press.

<sup>5</sup> I'm a lowercase-*p* philosopher, not a capital-*P* Philosopher. This means I have limited capacity to review the other philosophers mentioned, because I'm more engaged with trying to make sense of the world than with the academic texts of Philosophers. This was a distinction made by Rorty, but akin to Sharp's theory of Philosophy for Children. You can read about the distinction in Phil Cam's introduction (ICI, 30).

<sup>6</sup> NAACI, North American Association for the Community of Inquiry

<sup>7</sup> There are many others worthy of mentioning, such as Susan Gardner, Maria Teresa de la Garza (both contributors in the book) and Janette Poulton, who has been a personal and professional mentor.

<sup>8</sup> Zuidland, B. (2018). *Debate compared to Dialogue: A (moral) justification for the Community of Inquiry*. NAACI, Puebla.

<sup>9</sup> This is one pattern of inquiry, sometimes referred to as plain vanilla. And a suggestion bomb is where students generate as many suggestions (possible answers) to the question as possible, regardless of their own views.

<sup>10</sup> I have tried to show throughout this article how Sharp's work has connected with my own (both my practice and implementation of theory) as a means of modelling how I hope it can support others to make their own connections to their practice.

<sup>11</sup> Kohan, Walter. (2019). "In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp". *Educational Theory* 68(4-5): 555-560.

<sup>12</sup> Hypatia Reviews Online. Daniel, Marie-France. (2019). *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy!* "In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp". Accessed: 19/04/2019. <<https://www.hypatiareviews.org/reviews/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Gardner, Susan T. (2019). "In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp". *Teaching Philosophy!* 42 (1); 61-64.

<sup>14</sup> Gardner, Susan T. (1995). 'Inquiry Is No Mere Conversation (or Discussion or Dialogue). Facilitation of Inquiry Is Hard Work!' *Analytic Teaching* 16(2): 102-111.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Michael Burroughs has been doing philosophy in prisons with inmates, through the Kegley Institute of Ethics, Kegley Institute of Ethics. (2019). Accessed: 19/04/2019. <<https://www.cs.csubak.edu/~kie/>>.

<sup>16</sup> I have italicized and learning because once upon a time education was concerned only with teaching, not so much the learning.

<sup>17</sup> Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

<sup>18</sup> Any free school movement in the Australian context would still be required to follow government requirements and curriculums to be registered as an educational institute. Other practical complications also arise when considering the wages of teachers working such as school, to resolve this would be to create a 'class divide' given that parents would be required to pay, rather than the state.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Education. (2019). *The Victorian Curriculum. Ethical Capabilities Curriculum*. Accessed: 19/04/2019. <<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/ethical-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims>>.

<sup>20</sup> This is a gross misinterpretation. Many of the contributors to this curriculum come out of the P4C and CoI community in Australia and, as any careful reading of the curriculum will reveal, it is not indoctrination but the development of dispositions, hopefully ethical ones.

<sup>21</sup> It was also the best method for normalising philosophical issues, placing them in everyday contexts.

- <sup>22</sup> Youtube. (2015). *Ali Curang Community*. 'Where you going?'. *Barkley Desert Community*. Accessed: 19/04/2019. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1vCN-3Hd94>>.
- <sup>23</sup> Being 39 weeks pregnant and yet to put a face to my ethical responsibilities as a parent.
- <sup>24</sup> Indigenous children in Australia do not make eye contact with adults as it is a sign of respect.
- <sup>25</sup> Sharp's feminist philosophy draws upon the work of Simone Weil.
- <sup>26</sup> Goldman, Emma. (1911). *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mother Earth Publishing Association.
- <sup>27</sup> Though I do not want to essentialise this gender distinction, I recognise these as stereotypical features only. And it was only one point of distinction that I made between debate and dialogue culture.
- <sup>28</sup> Sharp's (and Gregory's) use of Weil's five criteria for a feminist philosophy do essentialise the feminine when they attempt to redefine 'women's personhood' (ICI, 145-158).
- <sup>29</sup> I would also say that recent historical events have pushed me, and many around me even further away from religion and religious practices, especially in the Australian context of the church's role in the gay marriage debate, and the George Pell affairs.
- <sup>30</sup> I teach in a public school in a community that has access to a number of religious private schools that are not financially inaccessible, though they still cost more than attending the local public school.
- <sup>31</sup> See my further discussion regarding indigenous identity, since indigenous spirituality and connection to land plays a role in Australian society it is hard to envisage what a shared spirituality would look like in the classroom.
- <sup>32</sup> I can't be certain of this point given that I haven't read their work, but given that I saw Chetty's presentation only a few years ago it is safe to say the CoI community has not yet sufficiently dealt with its own 'whiteness'.
- <sup>33</sup> In the Australian context it is not always obvious who is indigenous, nor are individuals expected to identify themselves as indigenous, except for bureaucratic purposes. In the educational setting this is optional. And given our historical and cultural context I completely empathise with those that decide not to openly identify as indigenous given the on-going stigma and racism that permeates Australian society.
- <sup>34</sup> Australian Council for Educational Leaders. (2017). *Curiosity and Powerful Learning Program*. Accessed: 19/04/2019. <[http://www.acef.org.au/ACEF/ACEFWEB/Programs/2018/Curiosity\\_and\\_Powerful\\_Learning/About.aspx](http://www.acef.org.au/ACEF/ACEFWEB/Programs/2018/Curiosity_and_Powerful_Learning/About.aspx)>.
- <sup>35</sup> If you are unaware of the CoI Concept Game model a starting place may be Clinton Golding's book *Connecting Concepts or Thinking with Rich Concepts*.
- <sup>36</sup> Hattie, John A. (2008). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge, Abingdon.
- <sup>37</sup> Visible Learning. (2019). *10 Questions for Professor John Hattie, asked by teachers and school leaders*. Accessed: 19/04/2019. <<https://visible-learning.org/2016/07/ask-professor-john-hattie-a-question/>>.
- <sup>38</sup> I speak here only for Australia and USA, having experiences in both, although I feel that many of my education colleagues from around the world may feel similarly to me.
- <sup>39</sup> It is sometimes said that Matthew Lipman was the main instigator of P4C but because I was introduced to it through Sharp this was never my impression. It is also my understanding that Sharp's work was less academic than Lipman's because she valued the practical aspects of CoI more, which also resonates with me.
- <sup>40</sup> Kohan, Walter. (2019). "In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp". *Educational Theory* 68(4-5): 555-560.

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