

Facilitating and judging a community of inquiry

What is a community of inquiry and how do you facilitate one? If you understand the practice of doing philosophy, the answer is not as difficult as you might. *But* (and there is always one of those) the process of facilitation is not as simple as you might think.

Firstly, a community of inquiry is a phrase that describes the practice of doing philosophy. Secondly, it is a concept that describes a type of pedagogy for teachers. People have also used the term 'Socratic circle'. Either way, the description is meant to capture what it means to do philosophy naturally in a group.

Community of inquiry formalises a set of protocols that pushes students to think philosophically. These protocols are different from (but complementary to) the skills of critical reasoning, and students must be conversant with them. The protocols are as follows:

- treat all persons and their ideas in the community with dignity and respect
- clarify your ideas and assumptions with regard to the stimulus material
- endeavour to see alternatives and possibilities
- give reasons for your views and seek clarification from others
- correct your thinking in light of the process of inquiry
- do not monopolise the inquiry
- ask open rather than closed questions
- ask substantive and procedural questions rather than ordinary and rhetorical questions.

Most dot points are self-explanatory. Common sense will inform you that when students do not adhere to these protocols no rational or sensible discussion in a group would be possible. Some explanation is required with the last two dot points. An open question is a question which prompts an answer rather than an affirmation or negation of the question. The latter is a closed question because no opportunity or avenue for inquiry is opened up. A substantive question demands engagement with concepts and their elements which are central to the topic of inquiry. This involves 'out loud' analysis, clarification and evaluation. Procedural questions are complex questions about the protocols of doing philosophy, and are mostly not raised by most students. The student who is capable of asking procedural questions is effectively facilitating an inquiry.

Obviously the better students will be proficient in the protocols of doing philosophy and the skills of critical reasoning. The basic skills of critical reasoning that matter most are as follows:

- defining terms/concepts
- analysing, clarifying, evaluating and explaining terms/concepts
- analysing, clarifying and evaluating the strength of an inference
- using examples and counter-examples

- test other's ideas
- build on other's ideas

If you examine the full marking key (Appendix 1), you will see that both the protocols and the skills of critical reasoning are interwoven. Judges use the abridged marking key (Appendix 2) because it is more user-friendly than the full key in a competition. However, there is always an inherent tension between the community of inquiry model and the competitive nature of an event such as the Philosothon. As experienced practitioners of philosophy, you are expected to reconcile this tension to the best of your ability in the challenges of a competition. Some useful points to help you are as follows:

- Study the judging criteria, so that you have an idea of the skills and protocols the judges are looking for.
- A hands-off approach generally gets the most useful philosophical dialogue from students. Your job is to ensure that the discussion is on track and productive.
- You will receive a list of questions posed by the students about the topic or main question. Start with the most relevant question in response to the main question. Leave the less relevant questions for moments when a natural opportunity to clarify them arises. If and when this occurs, you can ask the student to explain why he or she asked that question. This should push students to consider alternative views and see the main question or topic in greater depth.
- Ask a student to start with some definitions and an assertion, and ask others to respond.
- Lines of reasoning need to emerge from the discussion and engagement with others. As a facilitator, refrain from teaching or making directive comments about the substance of the inquiry. Do steer participants back to the question or topic of inquiry if it becomes irrelevant.
- Discussion may develop in interesting and different ways from the original question or topic of inquiry. Although it is good to allow these lines of inquiry, the parameters of competition dictate that when they are not relevant, your job is to bring the group back to the original question or topic of inquiry. Please avoid unclear guidance or red herrings.
- Take the time to impress upon students that they should try to respond directly to one another's points, and only raise new points when each line of enquiry is fully exhausted. This is something that the facilitator should make clear from the outset.
- Most students are very respectful of each other's ideas. They are keen to have their turn and are prepared to wait if necessary. Some students are hesitant to participate and need be encouraged to speak. Ask them to contribute, but be aware that getting the balance right by encouraging shy students to participate and letting the conversation run freely is difficult.
- Confident students tend to dominate. As a facilitator, give preference to the more timid so that everyone has a chance to speak.
- Do not direct students towards certain conclusions.

Appendix 1

Performance assessment—community of inquiry marking key

Marks	Performance criteria
23—25	<p>Assists in the facilitation of procedural inquiry e.g. students contribute to the smooth running of the inquiry with a clear understanding of the importance of rules, procedures, dignity and respect.</p> <p>Develops a substantive dialogue with peers about stimulus materials e.g. students engage in a detailed way with ideas and assumptions about stimulus materials put forward by peers.</p>
20—22	<p>Articulates with some clarity conceptual difficulties held by self / peers e.g. students make an honest attempt to make clear difficult ideas and assumptions put forward by peers.</p> <p>Prepares a conceptually sound explanation in relation to key views / issues e.g. students offer the best explanation based on reason and evidence.</p>
17—19	<p>Adjusts responses as new arguments arise; students correct thinking in light of evidence from the inquiry.</p> <p>Tests ideas held by peers against one another for their validity e.g. students weigh reasons offered by peers against one another to come up with the best reasons.</p> <p>Questions peers about views on core issues and concepts in stimulus materials e.g. students endeavour to see alternative ideas and assumptions.</p>
13—16	<p>Formulates open questions which employ reasoning e.g. students ask questions to gain information and clarify difficulties.</p> <p>Shares observations about core issues in the stimulus materials e.g. students are willing to share ideas with peers in a dignified manner.</p> <p>Responds to open questions generated by stimulus materials e.g. students explain to peers in a respectful manner.</p>
10—12	<p>Exchanges ideas and builds on the ideas of others e.g. students use ordinary questions to help build examples and counter-examples in an argument.</p> <p>Identifies some core issues and concepts in the stimulus materials e.g. students focus on a concept and an issue and make an attempt to explain it to peers.</p> <p>Identifies the consequences of an action in a given context e.g. students explain the relationship of cause and effect between two or more ideas.</p>
5—9	<p>Simplistic / limited engagement with questions / peers in light of the stimulus materials, e.g. students need to make ideas and assumptions clear to peers.</p> <p>Limited interpretation and explanation of the stimulus materials e.g. students need to explain the concepts and issues in the stimulus material fully and clearly.</p>
1—4	<p>Asks rhetorical questions and/or disjointed questions/answers to stimulus material/issues/peer questioning e.g. students provide unclear questions and/or answers to peers.</p> <p>Mere assertions about stimulus materials / issues / peer questioning e.g. students make claims with no reasons and no evidence.</p>
0	<p>Dominates / monopolises the inquiry e.g. students need to treat peers properly and need to contribute to the running of the inquiry.</p>

Appendix 2

Performance assessment—community of inquiry marking key (abridged)

Marks	Performance criteria	Student name and score (e.g., Billy Famous, 17)
23—25	<p>Assists in the facilitation.</p> <p>Develops a substantive dialogue.</p>	
20—22	<p>Articulates with clarity conceptual difficulties.</p> <p>Prepares a conceptually sound explanation.</p>	
17—19	<p>Adjusts responses.</p> <p>Tests ideas.</p> <p>Questions peers.</p>	
13—16	<p>Formulates open/reasoned questions.</p> <p>Shares observations/ideas.</p> <p>Responds respectfully to open questions.</p>	
10—12	<p>Exchanges/builds on the ideas of others.</p> <p>Identifies some core issues/concepts in the stimulus materials.</p> <p>Identifies the consequences of an action in a given context.</p>	
5—9	<p>Simplistic / limited engagement with questions / peers.</p> <p>Limited interpretation and explanation of the stimulus.</p>	
1—4	<p>Asks rhetorical questions and/or disjointed questions/answers.</p> <p>Mere assertions about stimulus materials / issues / peer questioning.</p>	
0	<p>Dominates / monopolises the inquiry.</p>	