

Exploring mutually beneficial relationships between Online Community and Face-to-Face Seminar work with School Leaders

The experience of the Thinking Skills Online Conference with Dr Edward de Bono: June 22nd - 28th 2002
Thinking Skills Leading Edge Seminar Sept 23rd 2002 with Prof. R. Fisher

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The Thinking Skills Conference

The online conference emerged from discussions about how to bring high profile world-renowned figures in education, management and leadership into direct contact with busy head teachers. The challenge was to engage head teachers with world-class thinkers despite the constraints placed upon them by their heavy workload and geographical location. The proposed solution was that this could be accomplished through the creation of a conference strategy for the community space of the National College for School Leadership.

“Thinking Skills” as a conference focus was proposed as the conference topic by an Ultralab Facilitator and made possible by the agreement of Dr Edward de Bono to be the keynote online guest. Detailed conference planning suggested that the conference could benefit from having several online guests exploring aspects of the creation of thinking schools. Subsequently Prof. Robert Fisher and Dr Vivienne Baumfield agreed to post papers and answer questions on different aspects of the conference subject.

The main objective of the conference was to explore the use of the community tools in engendering high quality debate between head teachers and high profile figures but it became apparent quickly that other college objectives could also be addressed in parallel with the main aim. The event provided an exceptional focus for cohesive co-operative action across the newly emerging NCSL departments and partners. It engendered opportunities for raising the

profile of the college in the wider educational world through showcasing the college’s innovative approach to online activities.

The conference was advertised to all 13,000 registered users and 1200 applied online to attend. The conference ran for seven day with 63 users asking detailed questions and receiving equally detailed answers. The 11,685 hits on content from June 18th to June

**National College for School Leadership
Online Event Community**

Welcome to the NCSL Online Conference on Promoting Thinking Skills in Schools. Please use this map to navigate your way around the conference. You will also find a Navigation Bar at the top and bottom of each page. This will take you to the items on the page OR back to this map

Dr Edward de Bono
'Promoting Thinking Skills in Schools'

starter paper
hotseat discussion
breakout debate

Dr. Viv Baumfield
'Creating a Thinking School'
Practical Case Studies

starter paper
hotseat discussion
breakout debate

Prof. Robert Fisher
'Creating a Thinking School'
Leadership Issues

starter paper
hotseat discussion
breakout debate

whats next ?
links & resources page

Important Notes

- Anyone may ask a question and **EVERYONE** may answer any question asked
- Each guest speaker will reply to questions asked but others may reply as well - Please feel free to **POST A CONTRIBUTION** to any debate or hotseat.
- Starter papers have been kept **BRIEF** purposely. This focuses on practitioners' discussion of the way forward.
- Online guests will try to answer questions from Monday 24th but you may post question before that if you wish.
- Each page has **BREAKOUT DEBATES** on points raised in the Hotseat. Please feel free to make your comments here as well

30th and 2200 hits in July seem to indicate that more users read the content than asked questions. Since the conference finished there has been a steady stream of enquires to join and read the content

and the conference area has become an on-going community, the latest phase of which has been the mounting of a face-to-face seminar (see below).

Lessons Learnt from the Conference

- The opportunity to engage with high profile guests in a conference format straight to busy school leaders' desktops excited great interest.
- High profile people are willing to give of their time and energy.
- The strategy of launching a community of practice from a conference format may have some advantages, building as it does on participants' existing interest.
- Conference papers do not need to be weighty. The benefits to participants emerge from the conference contributions.
- Many conference participants seemed to want advice and straightforward answers to immediate practical issues of implementation.
- Many conference participants shared openly and willingly their experience and resources for the benefit of others.
- The conference items received contributions from 63 different individuals, many contributing more than once, making a total of 131 contributions from members.
- The ratio of contributors (63) to registrations (1200) was approximately 5%, yet the hits on content, 11,685 in 13 days, suggests a high proportion of observers in the conference.
- The 63 contributors came almost equally from Talking Heads and Virtual Heads
- There is clear evidence in the conference contributions that school leaders valued the conference as a sounding board that offered the opportunity to share in everyone else's experiences. Moreover, the access to a wealth of knowledge and approaches that they could never have gathered individually was also valued.
- One hotseat guest in the online conference did not attract the

expected interest. Further research is needed to determine the reasons for this.

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Br 1: Session 1: The Thinking School - Creating the Vision : Feedback.

By  [Robert Fisher](#)
 Ends October 31, 2002 12:00 AM
 These are the major questions that need to be addressed following the session "The Thinking School - Creating the Vision ". Please click on the Q to make YOUR contribution.

- Personal reflections
- What are the significant things we have done already that have had an impact on learning and thinking in our schools?
- What is our / my vision of a thinking school?

 [Bey Noble](#) says, "As teachers how do we assess children's thinking skills?"

Br 1: Session 1: Report Back

By  [Robert Fisher](#)
 Ends October 31, 2002 12:00 AM
 After our group discussions we liked to capture the things you think are important.

Please record here one or two things from our discussions that you think are **ESSENTIAL**.
 The latest entry is, " *Combining understanding and perceptions of 'success' ie, a 'learning environment' and maintaining SATs results. We have to believe that you can.*"

Br 1: Session 2: The Thinking School: Policy into Practice : Feedback

By  [Robert Fisher](#)
 Ends October 31, 2002 12:00 AM
 After our group discussions we liked to capture the things you think are important.

Br 1: Session 2: Report Back

By  [Robert Fisher](#)
 Ends October 31, 2002 12:00 AM
 After our group discussions we liked to capture the things you think are important.

The Thinking Skills Leading Edge Seminar

The seminar arose from discussions within the conference planning team. The model proposed was that once the Thinking Skills Online Community had been established through the online conference then one possible extension activity would be a Face-to-Face event during which community members could plan a program of work that they could continue online. The possibility of a cyclical model of online and face-to-face activity sustaining the momentum of change in schools was outlined. The model proposed web-broadcasting of a live event while simultaneously running online discussion items in the community that would allow remote community members to interact with the main seminar presenter and seminar attendees. The model proposed linking all onsite attendees through laptops and wireless technology to the community discussion items.

The seminar was planned as part of the NCSL Leading Edge Programme, was advertised extensively and took place on Sept 23rd 2002. Some changes had to be made to the model due to financial and organizational constraints but the day went sufficiently to plan to be deemed successful and to allow recommendations for modifications to the model for future events. Unfortunately, the planned the web-broadcast that would have given community members access to the conference did not take place but the availability of wireless laptops did allow for the usefulness of the community software to be tested in this arena.

Lessons Learnt from the Seminar

Technical Issues

- Technical problems with the servers point to the need for close technical support at such events
- The event demonstrated technical support issues regarding online work that can now be addressed

Community Environment

- The Online community structure and navigation worked well and there was little evidence of attendees having difficulties in finding their contributory items.
- The community hotseat format is useful to collate thoughts on given ideas and to capture practitioners' experience.
- The brainstorm tool is a useful electronic flip chart
- The online element proved to be useful in spreading the discussion around a greater number than is normal. More voices were heard and opinions recorded than is usual in group work, which is frequently dominated by a few individuals.
- The use of computers, wireless technology and community software in the seminar format supported attendees but its use raised equally strong pro and anti feelings
- It would have been useful to ask every attendee to have logged into the online community and posted some of their

thoughts before attending the seminar. Although the conference had been running not all seminar attendees had been on the online conference.

- Think login clearance should be part of the seminar registration procedure and not part of the seminar proceedings
- It was an error to drop the hotseat item from the afternoon session. It has left the session, which was very rich in discussion, looking fairly stark. These missed contributions could be important for any future online debate.

Organizational Issues

- Perhaps too much time, in total two hours, was allocated to formal lecture. This could have been structured more towards shorter formal input with more emphasis on discussion and capturing practitioners' opinions.
- More time needed to be allocated to discussion, reflection and contribution to the online forum

Team Training

- The NCSL research team, who facilitated the seminar sessions, would have benefited from prior training on the Think tools and earlier information on community layout and the contributory items.

General

- The Online communities are a valuable source of active, informed, committed head teachers who can be directed towards the college research facilities
- The Online conference format is a valuable way of integrating college registered personnel and providing a cross-fertilization platform across the major communities
- This innovative use of online community software as a seminar tool was a departure for seminar attendees. Alienation and elation were equally evident among attendees. Perhaps greater attention to explanation of the medium would have alleviated some attendees' fears.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- The Online Conference format be extended to school leaders beyond national boundaries.
- The college should aim to run two conferences each year using this model
- Conference guests should be highly prominent in their field to engender sufficient interest and momentum to the activity
- The college continues to engage in further research in order to explore and hone the effective use of computers, wireless technology and community software to enhance both the traditional seminar format as well as explore innovative means of delivering online seminars.
- The college continues to extend its research into the innovative use of the online technologies e.g. web broadcast technology, thereby ensuring that it builds a reputation for leading edge activity.
- Future planned seminars apply these techniques in order to further hone the model.

Conclusion

Leading edge and innovative online work inevitably involves risk taking. We thank the college for its excellent support for this work in researching the innovative use of online activities to enhance the face-to-face seminar experience. This has the benefit of allowing the seminar attendees' rich experience to be captured more fully, and potentially extends access to this knowledge exponentially.

The last word comes from an online conference contribution:
"I've had such fun this week exploring think.com and the conference. Lots to think, say and do. Thank you."

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Seminar Announcement

Wednesday October 2nd 2002

Welcome. You are now on the Thinking Skills LEADING EDGE SEMINAR Page.

The Leading Edge Seminar on Thinking Skills with Professor Fisher took place on Sept 23rd. Everyone is free to read these discussions and those community members who could not attend on the day are encouraged to join in. We have kept the Hotseats of the day open in case seminar attendees wish to add contributions.

The seminar now moves to a **remote phase**. We need to try and continue the work we have started. Below you will find a new item suggested by a seminar attendee. Over the next two weeks we are trying to compile a list of the AIMS and OBJECTIVES for a Thinking School. The finished document will be posted for ALL to use as they wish. Look out for similar activities in the future.

You can :- [Read Previous Seminar Announcements HERE](#).

[Aims and Objectives for a Thinking School](#)


By  [Martin Doherty](#)

Ends **October 16, 2002 01:00 AM**

In the seminar feedback one person said that attendees' "thoughts and inspirations could have been utilised to draw up a skeleton of aims and objectives for a thinking school.."

So let's see if we can compile a list of AIMS and OBJECTIVES.

This is how it works. There are only two questions in this hotseat. Just CLICK ON THE Q beside the question to post your suggestion. The Hotseat will be closed at the end of 2 weeks (Oct 16th).....

 [Martin Doherty](#) says, "The OBJECTIVE I suggest is:"

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