Virtual thinking

It's hard to motivate oneself to take part in online discussion, even though there may be great potential benefits. Nevertheless, I will try to persuade you that contributing to the *Teaching Thinking* online forums, and sticking with them, will be worth your efforts.

Visiting the forums gives you an opportunity to question the opinions that appear in the magazine. *Teaching Thinking* aims to find a balance between enthusiasm for new ideas and a healthy scepticism. But the best way to test any claim is to submit it to a forum for discussion and questioning. For example, you might ask what the differences and similarities are between an approach you have read about in the magazine and one you are already familiar with. You could tell us what happened when you tried out some ideas in your own classroom. You might ask a question about some things that weren't clear to you or you might disagree with a point of view expressed in the magazine.

The forums also enable you to ask for help and advice. Initially the advice will come from just a few people, but as the forum community grows, there will be a wider range of experience to draw upon. In the early days of a forum people may visit and have a look – perhaps for a couple of times. If not much is there, they will assume that not much will ever be there in the future and their visits will end. If you visit, and I hope you will, it would be better to write a question or comment and a little about yourself beforehand using a word-processor. Find a place within the forums to paste your question and post the piece about yourself in the introductions section. If you register as a member of the forum, you can even tick a box to say you would like to be notified by email when someone answers your message. In this way, the forums will start to draw people in and the community will grow. Online forums need some momentum to get going.

To start things off, I've just set up a forum called 'Your experiences of teaching thinking.' The aim is for as many people as possible to write about what they have done, what they have found useful and what they are planning for the future. You can start off a new topic if you think others may follow with messages on a similar theme. For instance, if you have used CASE (Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education) you could start a new topic entitled 'CASE'. Instructions about how to do this are contained in the 'Quick Start' forum. In this way, a very useful reference area could be built up for other subscribers, particularly those who are confused about the differences and similarities between approaches. In fact, we could start a forum to discuss some of those differences.

In every future edition of *Teaching Thinking,* I will suggest a new forum topic to encourage discussion. If you have any suggestions, please email me.

If the forums are well used, and there is a 'critical mass' of readers and writers, then we could try organising some online events complete with invited forum hosts, background reading and resources to try out in the classroom. They would run for a limited period of time and compliment the regional face to face events organised by the *Teaching Thinking* Network.

There are some great possibilities for online dialogue, but first we need you to help us get the forums going. I look forward to hearing about your experiences of teaching thinking. You can visit the forums via the *Teaching Thinking* website at: *www.teachthinking.com.*

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