



# Bringing Coherence to Knowledge Building Discussions

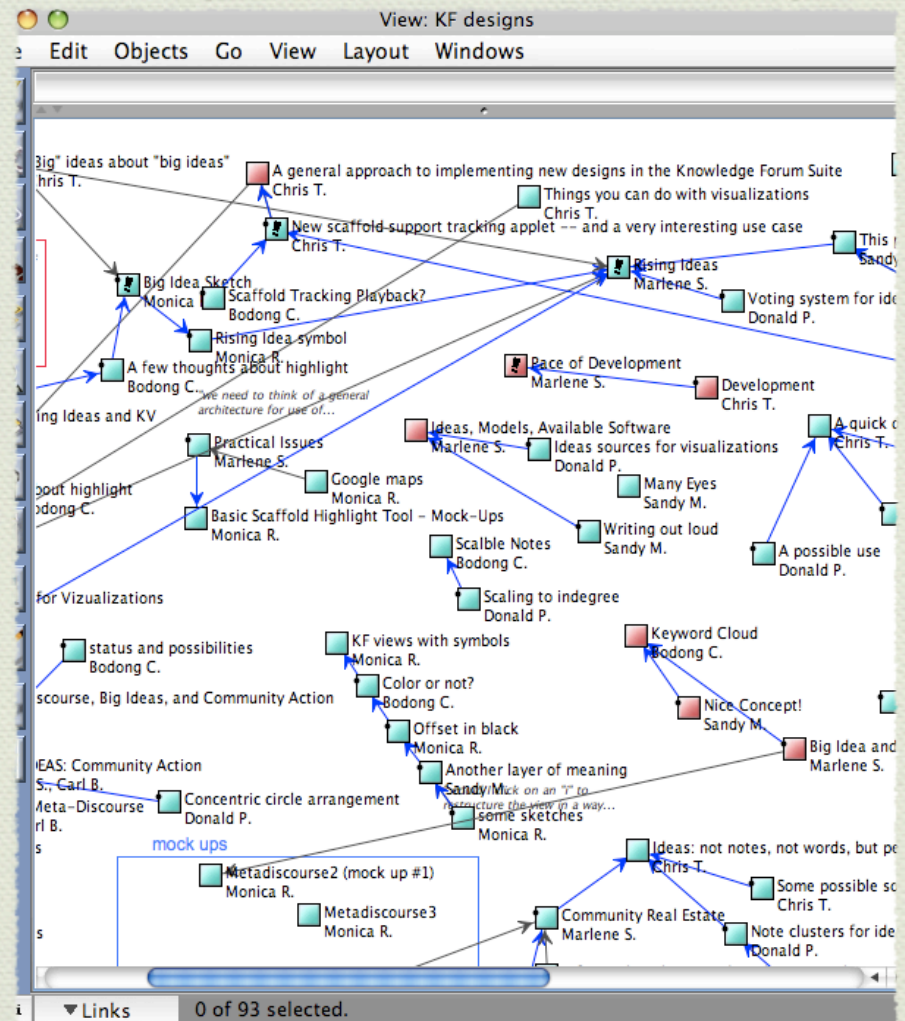
*Jim Herwitt and Earl Woodruff, IKIT Summer Institute 2010.*

# Problem

- ◆ Online threaded discussions lack coherence (Herring, 1999; Hewitt, 2003; Thomas, 2002).
- ◆ Branching, divergent nature of threaded discourse makes it difficult for students to remain focused on particular ideas;
- ◆ Difficult to ascertain group progress and identify the most promising areas for future inquiry.

# Can Meta-Level Notes Help?

- ◆ Meta-level notes may be a solution.
- ◆ In practice, such notes are often lost or forgotten in large webs of notes. Usually only one or two people contribute to them.



Challenge: Explore the design of more effective meta-level objects.

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## Discussion about Readings

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- ☆ [Our Emerging Understanding](#) (class editable) by CTL1602 Students, #1556, Today, 11:10 AM
- ☆ [Minds on Fire - Brown/Adler](#) by Heather Hedges, #1580, Thu November 12, 2009, 7:23 AM
- ☆ [Sort of an answer to Question 2](#) by Laura Oswin, #1615, Fri November 13, 2009, 5:12 PM
  - ☆ [good points](#) by Debra Moy, #1643, Sat November 14, 2009, 5:27 PM
  - ☆ [helping communities move forward](#) by Zarine Billimoria, #1678, Sun November 15, 2009, 7:00 PM
  - ☆ [Degree as commodity](#) by Craig Pinches, #1722, Tue November 17, 2009, 8:46 PM
  - ☆ [interesting...](#) by Debra Moy, #1734, Wed November 18, 2009, 12:19 PM
- ☆ [Question 3](#) by Sarah Morrison, #1636, Sat November 14, 2009, 3:26 PM
- ☆ [assumptions](#) by Teresa Telford, #1653, Sun November 15, 2009, 10:23 AM
- ☆ [funding](#) by Debra Moy, #1658, Sun November 15, 2009, 12:28 PM
- ☆ [Universal Funding](#) by Heather Hedges, #1665, Sun November 15, 2009, 12:28 PM

## Our Emerging Understanding ☆



by CTL1602 Students (class editable)

Last saved: Today, 11:10 AM, Note #1556

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Revision 28 of 28 (current) by Jim Hewitt, Today, 11:10 AM

Older Revision | Newer Revision Show Changes: On | Off

**Summary of this week's discussions about Open Education: What are the advantages, disadvantages and key issues associated with Open Education?**

### Advantages of Open Education:

- learning options can be personalized & personal learning environments can be created
- learning environments can be linked to assessment via digital learning portfolios
- non-linear learning and assessment is possible: subject areas can integrate
- informal learning can become formalized and legitimate
- lifelong learning is promoted
- education is available to more people esp. those at social disadvantages
- communication and collaboration can increase
- people pool their knowledge to drive their collective understandings
- diverse groups of people can work and think together
- information that was once considered "higher education" can be accessed by the public
- people teaching "higher education" can open up to outside opinions and ideas
- more information can be made available to the public

# Design Components

- ◆ When entering the view, the Meta-Level object (“Our Emerging Understanding”) is automatically displayed.
- ◆ Meta-Level objects are class editable. Anyone can make changes to them.
- ◆ Accountability: ALL students are RESPONSIBLE for monitoring and updating the meta-level object.
- ◆ Revision histories are made available for inspection.

# Our Emerging Understanding: Scaffolds

- ◆ Our Emerging Understanding
- ◆ New questions requiring investigation
- ◆ Key Ideas

# Data Source

- ◆ Two graduate-level OISE courses co-taught by the Principal Investigators.
- ◆ We create a “Our Emerging Understanding” note to 6 different views in the first course and 10 views in the second course.
- ◆ Student interviews;
- ◆ Tracking data
- ◆ “Our Emerging Understanding” notes



# Findings

- ◆ Students in both courses co-constructed and co-maintained the “Our Emerging Understanding” note in each of the views;
- ◆ All students contributed to the “Our Emerging Understanding” notes (although some contributions were trivial).
- ◆ The contents of the “Our Emerging Understanding” notes served as a reasonable summary of the discourse (in the opinion on the PIs)

# Findings Continued

- ◆ Students responded positively to the addition of the new feature;
- ◆ Students also felt that it helped them keep better track of progress in the discussion.
- ◆ They felt this was a better strategy than appointing “moderators” to write summaries etc.
- ◆ Effective Design Components: High visibility, class editable, , collective responsibility, accountability, & revision histories.

# Problems / Limitations

- ◆ 1. The flow of activity appeared to be unidirectional (from discussion to the “Our Emerging Understanding” Note) rather than bidirectional.
- ◆ 2. Students treated the activity as a process of maintaining a shared summary rather than using “Our Emerging Understanding” as a meta-level organizer for making progress on problems of understanding;
- ◆ 3. Students were reluctant to edit text / delete text that others had written in the “Our Emerging Understanding” note.

# Next Steps

- ◆ We plan to explore the use of the Meta-Level notes in more of a Knowledge Building (rather than computer conferencing) capacity.
- ◆ In particular, we hope to explore how “Meta-Level” notes can be more tightly tied to particular Problems of Understanding and the emergence of Ideas related to those problems.