<u>Positive Thinking For The Voluntary Sector</u>
from an interview with Nancy Kline, July 2007
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- **Please could you tell us how did the Thinking Environment evolve?**

I began to piece together the Thinking Environment as early as 1973 when Peter Kline and I started a Quaker school near Washington DC. We were interested in how to help teenagers, and our faculty, think for themselves at their best. We believed that education needed to be an experience of thinking, not just of regurgitating answers to teachers' questions. We observed over a period of 12 years that the most important factor in whether people can think for themselves with rigour, imagination, courage and grace is *how they are being treated by the people with them while they are thinking*. We saw repeated evidence that the way we behave around each other has a crucial impact on the quality of our thinking. We noticed ten behaviours in particular that seemed to have the most impact on independent thinking. By the mid 1980's they became known as the Ten Components of a Thinking Environment. And since that time many different applications of those ten behaviours have evolved. But it remains true that a Thinking Environment is not an invention; it is a discovery of the behaviours, some simple, some intricate, that help people to think well and that we surmise we would all be doing as a matter of course had we not been systematically taught to do otherwise.

- **Please could you take us through the 10 principles and explain why each one is vital in the process?**

I think the best way in writing for you to see the importance of each Component is to take whatever you need of the text from the attached pdf (that is the text from our website (timetothink.com) in the section called: What is a Thinking Environment?) And when we have our phone conversation, I will be more than happy to enhance those descriptions or take an angle on each one that would be particularly relevant or interesting to your readers. Is that all right?

- **Does the Thinking Environment work best in group situations or is it also beneficial on a one-to-one basis?**

The Thinking Environment works beautifully in both group and one-to-one situations. The most immediate and very effective application of the process is in meetings through a design we call Transforming Meetings. (The results of this process for organisations are also on our website and are very impressive). Decisions improve, people are engaged, the value of equality and inclusiveness are activated, meetings gain energy, debate is more intelligent and inclusive, and the meetings and are shorter. The Thinking Environment is an amazing and highly respectful process for meetings.

It is also considered to be 'one of the most effective Coaching and personal development processes in the field of human development today.' The most popular and powerful one-to-one process is the Thinking Partnership Session which is also the basis of Thinking Environment Coaching and Mentoring process. The Session brings into active interaction all of the Ten Components and presents in all its beauty the construction of what we call The Incisive Question, a particularly exquisite natural process the mind has developed for breaking through blocks in human thinking.

We are finding excellent concrete results also from the use of the Thinking Environment in daily responsibilities of management — in all interactions including Supervision, problem-solving, motivation and strategic thinking.

- **Why do you feel the Thinking Environment has been so effective?**

I think the Thinking Environment is effective because it generates the best thinking from <u>each</u> person and therefore allows the best outcomes to emerge from groups. It also is a wholly dignifying process and is a catalyst for the finest performance from every person and thus a source of true and whoilehearted engagement by everyone. The values of equality. authenticity, creativity, people, diversity and communication are also 'operationalised' in a Thinking Environment culture. And a Thinking Environment is an energising way to be with each other. It also saves time, which is nothing short of a blessing in these over-worked and exigent times.

- **How do you feel the Thinking Environment could help the voluntary and community sector?**

Because a Thinking Environment is inherently focused on authenticity and independent thinking, on the values of people and diversity, and therefore on the building of high-quality groups and communities, it is inherently the Voluntary sector's natural way of operating. If every voluntary and community organisation were to develop its culture into a Thinking Environment, the strategic aims and operational goals of the sector would be met more readily and with greater integrity, and its values would be more consistently lived. I think that a Thinking Environment is one way to manifest the vision and to realise the very purpose of the community and voluntary sector. It allows this sector to be what it espouses.

- **What have been the highlights and challenges for you in taking the Thinking Environment to others and helping them implement it?**

I think that nothing comes close to the thrill it is to be present when the human mind runs to the edge and rises on the currents of its own autonomy. To help bring about the trillions of firey connections the mind makes as it takes in the listener's extraordinary and wholly easeful Attention is one of life's unforgettable experiences. And to help a group be with each other in these ten ways, to help it return to what I think is our inherent, human way of being with each other, is also an inspiring experience. I also agree with Helen Ellis who said that 'inside the Incisive Question lies the liberation of the human mind', 'inside the Incisive Question lies the liberation of the human mind', and to help people construct the perfectly, individually-crafted question consisting of their words, their liberating assumption, and their goal (containing no words of the Coach at all, no paraphrasing, no intrusive 'doing-for') is just about as joyful a time as life can produce.

The challenges I also enjoy. I think the most rewarding challenge each day is to offer through words and practice to each group or person our research and theory in such a way that they can comfortably consider the value of the Thinking Environment and let go of less effective, but highly entrenched and rewarded, ways of being with each other. There are people, often in leadership and management, who say they value equality and respect but resist the process of Rounds that give everyone a turn to think and speak, and who also cannot give people relaxed, open Attention nor speak words of appreciation to them without cynicism. Helping people to see that equality and respect are trampled by their usual interruptive, critical habits and that, therefore, good thinking is also trampled, is a particularly exhilarating challenge of this work.

**What advice would you give to anyone thinking of applying the Thinking Environment to their lives (work, volunteering or personal)?**

I would resist giving advice; it seems to keep the mind from thinking for itself. But if asked, I would suggest these principles: everything we want to achieve in life, both externally and within ourselves, depends on the quality of the thinking we do first. And our thinking depends on the way people treat each other, and ourselves. Our thinking, and therefore, our actions and feelings, are also driven by the assumptions we make second to second. And so, to become de-victimized by the untrue limiting assumptions we carry, we can turn our work and our relationships into places replete with the Ten Components of a Thinking Environment. We need to be willing to treat each other this well everywhere all of the time. We want to create them authentically, in our own language, from our hearts.

But the world has been artificially set up to require (with appalling results) the antithesis of these Components. And so, once we see the value of Thinking Environments, we also want to notice the strong undertow of habit, the pull to stop being interested in the other person's thinking and instead to interrupt them in the name of our own importance. Habits build from socially-endorsed assumptions. It takes rigorous, grown-up vigilance and commitment to replace them. But that is made easier by noticing also the very positive, concrete results that come from gradually letting a Thinking Environment become 'just the way life is.'

I try to remember everyday the words of Shirley Edwards: 'A Thinking Environment is not a set of techniques. It is a way of being in the world.'