



**3:258 ) 2005-09-10 04:06 PT [Mary Caroline Parker](#)  
([mcparker](#)) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

...this "bigmindcatalyst" system is absolutely incredible! I love it. It makes taking notes, finding notes (mine and others'), reviewing thoughts, and developing ideas so easy. I wish I had had a system like this for research and writing in law school and as a lawyer. Who is the genius who came up with this, and how long have you been using it at TIES?

**3:260 ) 2005-09-10 13:23 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)  
([mmorgan](#)) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

...  
TIES was first with Caucus and when they underwent a change of focus we switched to Catalyst, a very similar type of campus software. There are constant improvements.

Phil found Big Mind/New Stories/Catalyst through a man named Bob Stilger at California Institute of Integral Studies where Phil taught in the PhD program. As with all good stories there are many interesting twists and turns over the years.

I posted a link to Gabriel Shirley's, the man behind the scenes. The words on the blog indicate why we feel that New Stories is such an important part of our ability to communicate with one another.

**3:261 ) 2005-09-11 00:26 PT [Philip Snow Gang](#)  
([pgang](#)) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

In 1994 we were using AOL while I was on faculty at CIIS. We needed something more robust. I could not "get it" in my phone calls with people in Washington DC who tried to explain how their system worked. So I flew down for a weekend visit. There I met Lisa Kimball, Peter Tuddenham and others.

They were part of the MetaNet team that created Caucus software in the early 90s. Their founder was among the developers of the "Internet" as part of the military in the 70's.

From the start MetaNet's goal was social advocacy as opposed to the "flat" bulletin board approach -- that is still in use today by "distance learning" universities.

They were bought out and many of them split - one of them went to Seattle and created BigMindMedia and Catalyst.

I've been trying to pinpoint for myself some of the reasons why this 'BigMindCatalyst' system feels so intellectually exciting, and satisfying at the same time.

In some ways it is much like a face-to-face human community, in that there are different areas where different groups form. When I first joined LC14, I thought the various conference rooms were going to be confusing, but now I feel very comfortable browsing around from place to place. You can follow different topics and conversations with different combinations of people who are interested in the same topics/conversations.

As in physical life with groups, not everyone is everywhere, and you're not expected to be. But everyone is invited to participate in any forum, if the interest is there. Conversations and ideas can also be carried from one group to another -- even whole lines of thought reproduced, if you want.

But it's different from communities in the physical world in that you don't have to be present physically to be a part of the group. This makes the experience quite rich and diverse, because people from different parts of the world can participate. Conversations can be carried on across continents and time zones -- and it can also be instant in that sometimes conversations are carried on by people who are on-line at the same time.

Academically, it's very efficient. You can keep notes, readily access notes, and quote sources effortlessly (by copying and pasting). And, just as you can access your own notes to reflect on your ideas, you can access others' written notes and ideas, too, and observe how their thinking is evolving. Whole segments of thought can be transported instantly from notes (annotations), to the classroom (integrative seminars), and to written papers.

The group element enters in here too. You can "hear" the ideas and thoughts of other students on a more expanded scale than if we were actually sitting in a physical classroom, because we are free of the constraints of time. Each person has plenty of time to think about what others have written, and each person has all the time that may be needed to respond, elaborate on a thought, contribute a new idea, or develop an "aha" moment. There's no pressure to contribute ideas that aren't yet fully fledged, and no competition to be heard within limited class or seminar time. You can think, do additional research, formulate and develop ideas, and discuss them any time you want.

In my experience, this tends to encourage a deeper analysis and development of ideas. You can write your thoughts, reflect on them, and change or elaborate on them before presenting them,

yet you still experience the feedback and immediacy of the spoken exchange.

I love how writing (and reading) is presented in the Montessori primary classroom as "silent communication." We can learn the thoughts of someone else without talking to them! And we can even learn what someone thought who lived in another time and place. That's what my experience of working in the "BigMindCatalyst" system is like – with the added dimension that here we can also respond, and enrich the learning experience through ongoing exchange.

This medium of communication has been a totally new experience for me -- I'd like to hear how others are experiencing it, too.

**3:263 ) 2005-09-11 21:57 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)**  
**[\(mmorgan\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

In our years of experience with this on-line community/communication I don't remember anyone describing their experience in such detail, Mary Caroline.

We are wanting to document the process and I have a feeling that when that time comes you will be asked if we can incorporate your words. Better yet, you can do the research and write the paper yourself!

**3:264 ) 2005-09-12 12:04 PT [Philip Snow Gang](#)**  
**[\(pgang\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

I echo Marsha's sentiments. You have captivated the essence of the experience.

However, I am not sure if all BigMind-Catalyst conference experiences would be the same. Part of it is the way we establish different spaces; and part of it is the way we "prepare the atmosphere." (Montessori used the word *ambienté*, which I believe was mistranslated into "environment" rather than "atmosphere.")

Thank you for taking the time, Mary Caroline, to pursue your thoughts. I would like permission to share them with our colleagues at BigMind.

**3:265 ) 2005-09-12 13:06 PT [Terri Domitrovich](#)**  
**[\(tdomit\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

Mary Caroline, I would love to share my experiences...yet you have covered the medium so well!...another beautiful aspect of this environment...the energy which is conveyed and the power with which we can be motivated, supported, challenged,

empathized with, and a hundred other descriptors...thanks again, as Phil said, for taking the time to witness to the entire spectrum of "Big Mind!"...

**3:266 ) 2005-09-12 15:59 PT [Mary Caroline Parker](#)**  
**[\(mcparker\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

Phil and Marsha, of course you have permission to share my thoughts. And, the spaces are a big part of the experience! I did not realize, although probably I should have, that the particular design of the Big Mind experience here is unique to TIES. But, please know that I feel that my thoughts are really just scratching the surface of the potential of this medium of communication.

Something I didn't mention at all, for example, and which Terri just touched on, is the human dimension of the creation of a sense of community and caring that the process permits. I feel so close in mind and thought to the members of this community that, if I had a need or sudden traumatic event, this is where I would turn for support! I think we've already seen examples of the support that we feel for each other here, so it's more than just a "sense" of community and caring.

I'd also like to revisit this topic after more time has passed -- especially, from the academic point of view, after we have actually WRITTEN papers. I feel certain that this would result in a deeper understanding and appreciation of the possibilities of the medium.

**3:267 ) 2005-09-12 21:37 PT [Terri Domitrovich](#)**  
**[\(tdomit\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

Yes Mary Caroline, the synthesis of the paper writing projects is truly transformative, individually and community wide...the absolute hardest part for me has been, actually finishing a CP, celebrating with the community, and then pretty much our HMC community has been on hold...LC 14 is a godsend in terms of being able to continue processing the ongoing impact of this program...

While we (HMC-ers) still have a space to communicate within BigMind, I think for most the Master's was a project with a beginning, middle, and end...and the final acceptance of the CP is SUCH a relief...

HMC (by the way, that's for Houston Montessori Center in TX)...has a yahoo! group similar to the general TIES community space, yet there is not much personal interaction there...mostly it's used as a support network for questions which arise during the teaching year...

My first group in TIES was basically all secondary trained, with some already having Primary and/or Elementary certification...some, like me, have only the secondary, and I found a great need to be more studied at the younger spectrum...what a study group this is!...

I'd be curious to know what distinctions might be experienced between the Montessori Integrative folks, and the non-Montessorians...I have a feeling that a sense of community is alive for both...I wonder if the same principles of human development and worldview change much between the two types...my guess is no, just perhaps different language leading to similar paths of discovery...

**3:268 ) 2005-09-13 00:12 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)**  
**[\(mmorgan\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

Each group is different and yet the same. People are open to new possibilities to various degrees and participate accordingly. There have been amazing people in each group and in each case a community has formed.

In the first years there was a great variety of backgrounds and occupations. That in itself was a wonderful adventure.

The Montessori groups have their work in common. In all groups there have been Integrative Learners who have added greatly added their talents and perspectives.

**3:269 ) 2005-09-13 05:50 PT [Lu \(Lawana\) Tunnell](#)**  
**[\(ltunnell\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

Terri & Marsha, our combined MIL & IL communities are more than helpful--they are empowering. My mind rarely rests, integrating & synthesizing what we learn here and what our dialogue leads me to investigate & learn on my own.

As you say, we seem to be very much on the same paths. All of you in MIL are helping me to experience Montessori through you. Then, I have my experiences as a musician and music educator. It seems to me that the Arts & Montessori could be thoroughly integrated into an amazing learning experience!  
[Andrew, artist friend, what say you?]

TIES has already proven to be the richest soil imaginable, and I'm beginning to feel I'm only limited by my own limitations!

But if my mind and spirit are up to the task, something extraordinary could happen here . . . And I suspect this will be so with all of us.

**3:270 ) 2005-09-13 09:38 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)**

**[\(mmorgan\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

From my view I think that this group brought something very special from the first interaction. Thank you.

And for the arts being key to life, and thus teaching/learning too, they cannot be separated from the Montessori approach anymore than any other aspect of our educational adventure.

I look forward to all contributions in that area, Lu.

**3:271 ) 2005-09-13 10:38 PT [Debbie Poole \(dpoole\)](#)**

**[\[Print\]](#)[\[Email\]](#)[\[Mark as New\]](#)**

[Edit](#)

Mary Caroline said <I feel so close in mind and thought to the members of this community that, if I had a need or sudden traumatic event, this is where I would turn for support! I think we've already seen examples of the support that we feel for each other here, so it's more than just a "sense" of community and caring.> I could not have worded this better myself. As we continue to struggle with my husband's situation, I am so aware of what this community offers: friendship, hope, strength, faith, understanding, positive energy (and the list could go on and on). I am just amazed!

When we first started this program, I too found all of the different sections we could communicate in to be a bit overwhelming and confusing. After a few days of being in the program, it is obvious that while there are different sections to post in, they are all tied together in a logical manner and you can easily search and find whatever it is you are looking for. The search feature is one of my favorites! I agree that "bigmindcatalyst" is a wonderful tool, and I too look forward to seeing how useful this system will be when we write our papers.

**3:272 ) 2005-09-14 00:58 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)**

**[\(mmorgan\)](#) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

Debbie, for certain you and yours are never far from our concern and we look forward to good news as more is known.

Glad that you are getting comfortable with both the community and the virtual campus.

**3:273 ) 2005-09-14 18:48 PT [Cindee Karns \(ckarns\)](#)**

**[\[Print\]](#)[\[Email\]](#)[\[Mark as New\]](#)**

[Edit](#)

Wow! Phil, I hope you have saved this conversation somewhere. It's interesting how clearly you guys can SAY what

we are trying to do. It's such a pleasure to work with every unique group, but you guys have said it the best so far. Thanks.

**3:274 ) 2005-09-14 20:59 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)**

**[\(mmorgan\)](#)** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]

[Edit](#)

You bet! It is very early in the process to have noticed what is happening. This group became cohesive sooner than others so maybe it is a mixture of creating the community easily and then the community becomes a reality that can be described. I add my thanks.

**3:275 ) 2005-09-14 21:09 PT [Philip Snow Gang](#)**

**[\(pgang\)](#)** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]

[Edit](#)

We invited Gabriel to visit and respond.

**3:276 ) 2005-09-14 23:53 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)**

**[\(mmorgan\)](#)** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]

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**3:277 ) 2005-09-15 05:18 PT [Lu \(Lawana\) Tunnell](#)**

**[\(ltunnell\)](#)** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]

[Edit](#)

Marsha, may technology never reduce you. :-)

**3:278 ) 2005-09-16 10:30 PT [Gabriel Shirley](#)**

**[\(gabriel\)](#)** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]

[Edit](#)

Now that we've restored Marsha's wholeness...

Hello! I'm Gabriel, one of the designers of BigMInd Catalyst. It's wonderful to hear your comments so clearly articulating some of the goals we have when creating online environments like this one.

I agree with Phil that there are several ingredients required to make all this work -- it's like creating a tasty gumbo. Some ingredients are "standard fare" (like the roux) and others are "tossed in because they're in the kitchen." With patience and care, something yummy can emerge.

So we have some standard elements, like Conferences and Topics and People in the Directory. Then we have the compelling purpose that brings you together -- without that, it will turn out to be a bland soup. And then there's the initial structure -- what I think of as part of the Social Architecture -- that creates a



common framework for the purpose at hand. It generally needs to be structured enough to provide guidance and loose enough to allow for creativity and emergence.

Then there's the care and feeding. The ways we patiently stir the pot, mixing and re-mixing the ingredients so the flavors have a chance to blend. When the element of time kicks in, we get to know the real secret: as good as gumbo is when you make it, it's even better the next day.

**3:279 ) 2005-09-16 16:54 PT [Marsha Morgan](#)  
([mmorgan](#)) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

The image fits so very well. I see clearly your analogy to a social form of delicious soup.

Not only is the gumbo better the next day, it is usually unrepeatable exactly. Just as it is in artistic cuisine each group is a unique blend of ingredients.

We consciously seek to provide clarity, concision, and a dash of ambiguity so that the unique creativity of each person is free to be expressed. Thus each new iteration of the learning community is a new creation.

**3:280 ) 2005-09-16 17:06 PT [Philip Snow Gang](#)  
([pgang](#)) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)]**

[Edit](#)

This "soup" is not an overnight special. It takes years of preparation and it takes an awareness on the part of the dinner guests to step back and acknowledge the underlying ingredients that combine to create a whole.

After twelve years of this on-line work, I think we can take these last postings and provide a window for the uninitiated to understand what we are doing.

For people to recognize this is like the "third period" of the three period lesson.

**5:321 ) 2005-09-17 04:19 PT [Michelle Muggridge](#)  
([mmugg](#)) [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)] **NEW****

[Edit](#)

Wow, LC14! I really found that your comments echoed for me as well. I would just add two comments to the mix. As I have almost completed my program, I have been able to look back and realize that the readings played a huge part in the comfort level and growth of our LC. Each reading was just rightly sequenced so that we could each follow our own path to evolving ourselves. I think that if I had read one of the readings ahead of



the others, I would have been resistant to the intended messages and would not have become as empowered, enthused, awake.

The second part, for me, is the feeling of warmth, and welcoming that is a huge component which is missing on many other internet medium. There is no coldness and sterility here! While there is certainly support on an emotional level which expands our support base. I wanted to also bring up the support on an educational level that is provided by this program.

Now, towards the end of the program, I'm starting to get a knot in my stomach. It's like there was a safety line when I am in the program...to ask questions (often silly ones: ) , to hear comments, to see things through the eyes of others, to become a better teacher/facilitator. When the program is over, my safety line is gone (at least to the extent that it is now) and I'm on my own.

That sense of support and understanding cannot be underestimated in importance. It is the reason that I encourage anyone looking for a great Masters program to check TIES out.

**3:282 ) 2005-09-16 21:22 PT [Susan Hamilton](#) ([shamilton](#))** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)] **NEW**

[Edit](#)

It's midnight and I have just arrived home from Florida on business--now I'm hungry! What a fine metaphor for this interactive experience. I was thinking that just as my own mother used to add a unique ingredient(okra)to gumbo, so each of us brings a certain wisdom and voice to the various conversation centers.

The whole idea of 'integration' continues to unfold for me. In the past, much of my life and learning have been segmented and the gestalt of this learning forum and community is bringing something new to life for me.

**3:283 ) 2005-09-17 04:10 PT [Lu \(Lawana\) Tunnell](#) ([ltunnell](#))** [[Print](#)][[Email](#)][[Mark as New](#)] **NEW**

[Edit](#)

Ph.D.? Yes, I'm ab-so-*lutely* interested!

Gabriel, gumbo is a metaphor this Louisiana girl can savor with gusto . . . Phil, Catalyst functions so well that it *appears* simple—strong evidence of the years of planning, design, preparation, discovery, and focused, purposeful growth behind TIES & Catalyst that have brought it to the place we are in now.

It speaks volumes about the pioneering vision and the love you all have--not just for the work, but for *people*--that Catalyst &

TIES have become what they are and are becoming what they can be.

Think about how deeply committed we are just *two months* into TIES! How absolutely astonishing this is in our age of "hurry up and get it over with yesterday" and that [violent] "cooperate & graduate" mentality that pervades our institutions of higher education.

We actually *care*: We are actively engaged—in the moment—not just with our own learning process but with each other's—and with *each other* . . .

And all of this from distance education, the delivery method that can be even more sterile and isolating than on-sight university programming. (The only thing more painful than listening to a dry lecture on campus is watching a DVD of a professor squirming into a camcorder, recorded for distance students.) This program is as unlimited as others are limited.

Graduation from TIES will be both exhilarating and poignant . . .