PeerSphere
Professionally Hosted Peer Learning Communities

Session 1 Summary

NESSIC School Leaders

Date: 25 February 2025
Hosts: Adam McRoy & Greg Smith

Student Wellbeing is Foundational, Not an Afterthought

Wellbeing must be embedded in school culture, not treated as an optional add-on. Research from the University of Oxford emphasizes that student wellbeing directly impacts learning outcomes. Schools must integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) across curricula and ensure wellbeing policies are systematic rather than piecemeal to avoid unintended negative effects. Challenges such as mental health stigma, social isolation, digital pressures, and academic stress need proactive school-wide strategies.

Barriers to Effective Wellbeing Programs

Despite the importance of wellbeing, schools face barriers like limited resources, stakeholder resistance, and rigid educational structures. Funding constraints and a lack of buy-in from leadership often hinder implementation. Additionally, cultural and socioeconomic factors impact access to support services. Schools must advocate for policies that prioritize student mental health and design flexible wellbeing programs tailored to their specific contexts.

Creating a Sustainable Wellbeing Culture

To foster a culture of wellbeing, schools should implement explicit wellbeing lessons, encourage student-led initiatives, and create safe spaces such as wellbeing hubs or accessible counselling services. Supporting staff wellbeing is equally crucial, as research links teacher wellbeing to student success. Practical approaches include movement breaks, balanced timetables, and active engagement with parents and external wellbeing networks.
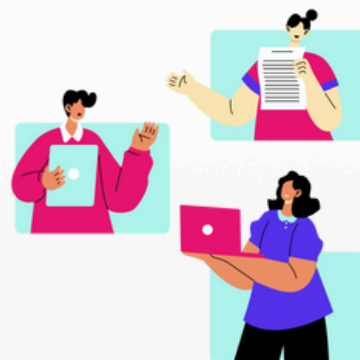
Additional Resources
- ✸ Session 1 Recording
- ✸ Session 1 Slide Deck

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Session 2 Summary

NESSIC School Leaders

Date: 11 March 2025
Hosts: Adam McRoy & Greg Smith

Student Wellbeing is Foundational, Not an Afterthought

Building a strong wellbeing culture requires more than standalone initiatives. In fact standalone initiatives can be counterproductive. Research shows that an employee's sense of purpose plays a crucial role in managing stress. A clear organizational vision and staff feeling their contribution to it is valued contributes significantly to a positive school environment.

Addressing Staff Wellbeing Through Structural Change

Wellbeing programs often fail to address systemic issues. Schools should focus on meaningful interventions — those which improve work-life balance, identify and monitor workload pressures, and foster trust and collaboration. Successful strategies include staff surveys, regular feedback loops, and shared leadership (grassroots up) in wellbeing initiatives.

Creating a Sustainable Wellbeing Culture

There appears to be increased fragility in parent communities. The wellbeing of teachers is directly influenced by their relationships with parents. A rise in parental stress is shown to lead to increased school conflicts. Transparent communication and community-building help foster positive interactions between schools and families, reducing unnecessary tensions.

Resources to Help Us Navigate the Topic

Getting good information from within our organizations so we can act appropriately is essential. Surveys and tools to get all voices heard are particularly useful in cross cultural settings like NESSIC schools. Empowering people within the organization is very effective in bottom up support for wellbeing. Don't underestimate the power of a leader's relationship building as a key to a positive environment. Check out the articles in the Community Resources for more.

Additional Resources
* Session 2 Recording
* Session 2 Slide Deck
* Community Resources - Check out some of these articles
* Britcham's Mindful March calendar of activities

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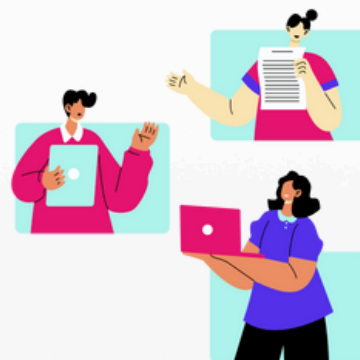
Session 3 Summary

NESSIC School Leaders

Date: 25 March 2025
Hosts: Adam McRoy & Greg Smith

The Importance of Thoughtful AI Use in Education

The session highlighted the growing prevalence of AI tools in education. Adam presented how AI is becoming the default tool for both students and teachers, but with the potential risk of reducing critical thinking. Participants discussed the importance of moving from AI as a shortcut to AI as a designed tool, encouraging educators to use it purposefully. The session emphasized that AI should not replace thinking but enhance it by being used thoughtfully and strategically.

AI's Impact on Learning

The session focused on how AI, especially generative tools like ChatGPT and Deepseek, is transforming learning experiences. Despite AI's capacity to support creativity and critical thinking, it has often been used for shortcuts, such as completing homework tasks without engaging deeply with the material. The term "Cognitive Offloading" describes the use of AI for simplification of tasks and highlights the appeal of AI for lower order outcomes rather than becoming integral to higher order thinking. The discussion stressed the need to design assignments that use AI purposefully – encouraging students to use AI for planning, brainstorming, or collaborating without over-relying on it. Educators were advised to embrace AI as a tool to enhance critical thinking, not to bypass it.

A Vision for the Future of AI in Education

The session concluded with a forward-looking perspective, recognizing the remarkable potential of AI to reshape education. The speakers expressed optimism about AI's role in education but also emphasized the need for targeted strategies and reflection on ethical implications. A central takeaway was that while AI can free up bandwidth and enhance learning processes, it is crucial for educators to model intentional AI use and guide students in developing responsible and critical attitudes toward its application. The session encouraged leaders to think about how AI can be integrated thoughtfully into school systems, balancing innovation with the preservation of essential skills.

Additional Resources
* [Session 3 Recording](#)
* [Session 3 Slide Deck](#)

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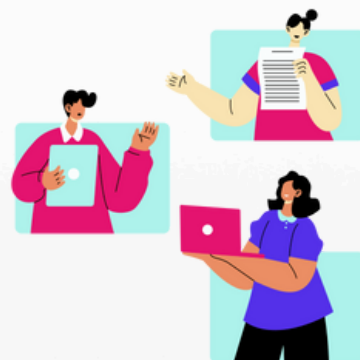
Session 4 Summary

NESSIC School Leaders

Date: 15 April 2025
Hosts: Adam McRoy & Greg Smith

AI in Education Today – More Default Than Design?

In this session, participants explored the importance of distinguishing between "AI by design" and "AI by default" in educational settings. When AI is used by default, it often replaces critical thinking and human engagement. The conversation emphasized the need to design AI applications intentionally, ensuring they complement, rather than replace, human cognitive processes. Discussions revealed how critical it is for educators to guide AI use to maintain student engagement and thoughtful interaction.

Assessing the Impact of AI Use

A major point raised during the session was how to structure assessments when AI tools are used by students. The group shared insights on where students actively engage with AI to enhance their learning. Tools such as the AI Assessment Scale were discussed, highlighting skills like critical thinking and problem-solving, which AI alone develops poorly. Monitoring more general and increasingly ubiquitous use of AI tools was seen as being important to make judgment on the impact of AI in our industry.

Gathering Insights on Impactful AI

A crucial discussion focused on better understanding how AI is used in schools now. A proposal to collect baseline data on AI usage, so as to help schools identify where AI is being used was made. Participants emphasized the importance of surveys that ask simple, clear questions, gather useful data and provide insights for informed decision-making. NESSIC is a unique context which would benefit from analysis of the fast-evolving environment. Surveying NESSIC schools and providing analysis was seen as a way to assist in integration of AI in both teaching and student learning.

Additional Resources

* Session 4 Recording
* Session 4 Slide Deck

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