

# Think Tanks & Retreats

From its beginning, the Midwest Symposium for Leadership in Behavior Disorders has attempted to live up to the word “leadership” in its name. The organizers did not simply want to present a conference which offered good strategies for educators, although that would be a part of its goal. They also wanted a conference which stimulated thinking and offered opportunities for creating involvement and discussion of emerging research and ideas. They wanted also to bridge disciplinary boundaries across education, psychiatry, psychology, human development, and other related fields. In addition, conferences would also be focused on identifying and considering the controversies in our field, and then considering multiple perspectives on those controversies.

The Planning Committee wanted to brainstorm potential topics, new research, and potential speakers for future conferences, and needed to brainstorm creative formats for presenting information in interesting and interactive ways. And eventually, the planning committee wanted to entertain other activities or initiatives which it could undertake to support its mission. There was often not adequate time in typical Planning Committee meetings to accomplish these goals.

Moreover, as the Planning Committee grew and expended it was important to allow time for the members to get to know each other and socialize, which was difficult to accomplish in the scheduled Planning Committee meetings.



## Potential Audiences for MSLBD activities

- Special education EBD and Resource teachers working in:
  - public schools
  - residential treatment,
  - correctional settings,
  - psychiatric hospitals
  - mental health centers
- Administrators/supervisors
- School psychologists
- School social workers
- Behavior consultants
- Mental health service providers
- Researchers in higher education
- Teacher trainers in small to large Universities
- State Department of Education staff
- And more...



By 1986, the Planning Committee had grown, and with the success of the early MSLBD conferences, the Committee wanted to explore other fields, and decided to hold a “Think Tank Conference” to broaden disciplinary horizons, and scout for possible topics and presenters for future Symposiums. A mix of relatively local and distant experts was assembled to address current thinking and research on topics such as families, effects of divorce and child abuse, and related intervention and policy issues. The purpose was to give Planning committee members opportunities to respond and interact with the experts in a small and intimate setting that would encourage discussion.

The first MSLBD Think Tank Retreat meeting was held in October of 1986, at the Morton Arbor Lodge in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Over the course of two days five “outside” experts presented on their research and thinking about these topics. Thirty-one Planning Committee members participated along with six invited participants including Kay Cessna, Tim Landrum, Jim Kauffman, Bill Morse, Frank Wood and Richard Whelan.

Although this first Think Tank focused on the expert presentations, a second Think Tank meeting was held in Kansas City in a hotel in the Country Club Plaza in 2000. It had two outside speakers, Camilla Lehr and a colleague from the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration who presented and discussed attendance and school dropouts

The third Think Tank & Retreat was held January 8-10, 2004, at The Elms Hotel and Spa in Excelsior Springs, Missouri. While it had an outside facilitator for part of the meeting, it did not include other outside speakers. Instead, several of the planning committee members made brief presentations

**Presentations at the First MSLBD Think Tank Conference, Held at the Arbor Lodge Conference Center, Nebraska City, NE. October of 1996:**

- **School and Family in the Post-Modern World**, by David Elkind, Tufts University
- **Trends in Child And Family Policy**, by Brian Wilcox, Center on Children, Families and the Law, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- **Child Abuse and Neglect**, by Ross Thompson, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska
- **Effects of Divorce on Children**, by Paul Amato, Department of Sociology, University of Nebraska
- **Diagnosing America’s Changing Families: The Danger of Over-the-Counter Political Formulas**, by Stephanie Coontz, Evergreen College, Olympia WA

Each of these talks was followed by discussion lead by two MSLBD planning committee members.





updating research on several topics. These were followed by discussion and brainstorming among the Planning Committee. One result of that brainstorming during this retreat meeting was the idea for the Conference for Administrators on Behavior Issues. After a year of preparation, the first “Administrators’ Conference” was held in Overland Park, KS in fall of 2007.

The next three retreats were held also at the Elms Hotel and Spa in January 2008, January 2011, and most recently in January 2017. As with the 2004 Think Tank, these meetings were mostly a chance to take stock of the MSLBD activities, evaluate strengths and weaknesses,

refocus on goals and priorities, and identify new potential initiatives for the organization.

There has always been a strong effort for the Planning Committee to provide opportunities to get to know one another better, personally, and professionally. Activities are typically scheduled to allow participants to get to know each other better. Numerous activities have been developed to meet this goal.



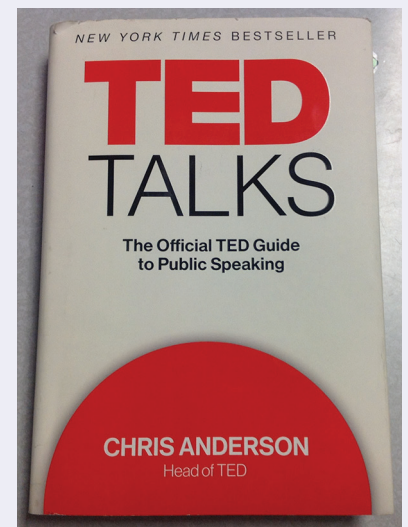
One frequently discussed topic is whether there might be innovative formats (as well as topics) for MSLBD conferences. Over the years, a wide variety of formats for keynotes have been suggested and employed. One idea which emerged after the latest retreat was the idea of having four short TED-talk like keynote presentations on a designated topic. That format was first implemented in the February 2017 conference.



Also at the 2017 retreat, decisions made to end the Conference for School Leaders. Plans were approved to undertake what became the Simpson Autism Conference. That meeting also resulted in plans for the create a new magazine which became *Rethinking Behavior* magazine. Other ideas were discussed, but none of those have yet been implemented.

To be able to brainstorm and be creative, the members of the Planning Committee believe that it’s important to know, trust and respect

each other. In the process of brainstorming many ideas are discussed; some are adopted, and others are shelved. Sometimes the decisions about implementing creative ideas are determined by available financial resources and/or the volunteer time and energy needed to implement



them. While it is not always clear where, when and how MSLBD ideas and programs have arisen, and evolved through time, the Think Tank retreats have contributed to this process by encouraging engagement, and mutual trust. The MSLBD think tank retreats contribute to this process and build consensus decision making.

