

Client/Product: TAG
 Media: TES Online
 Circ/Audience: 95,547
 Publication Date: 18th June 2004 Double Page Spread – Page1 (reduced in size)

Mind-mapping

Drawing models of the way we think has given a major boost to teachers and pupils. **Jack Kenny** explores how technology has taken the process a step further

verdicts

It's totally mental

"The Swiss army knife of the brain," is one description of mind-mapping in education. I'm not sure whether Maureen Cain would agree with that. Maureen was responsible for an interesting survey of the use of mind-mapping that took place a couple of years ago in Newchurch Community primary school, Culcheth, Warrington.

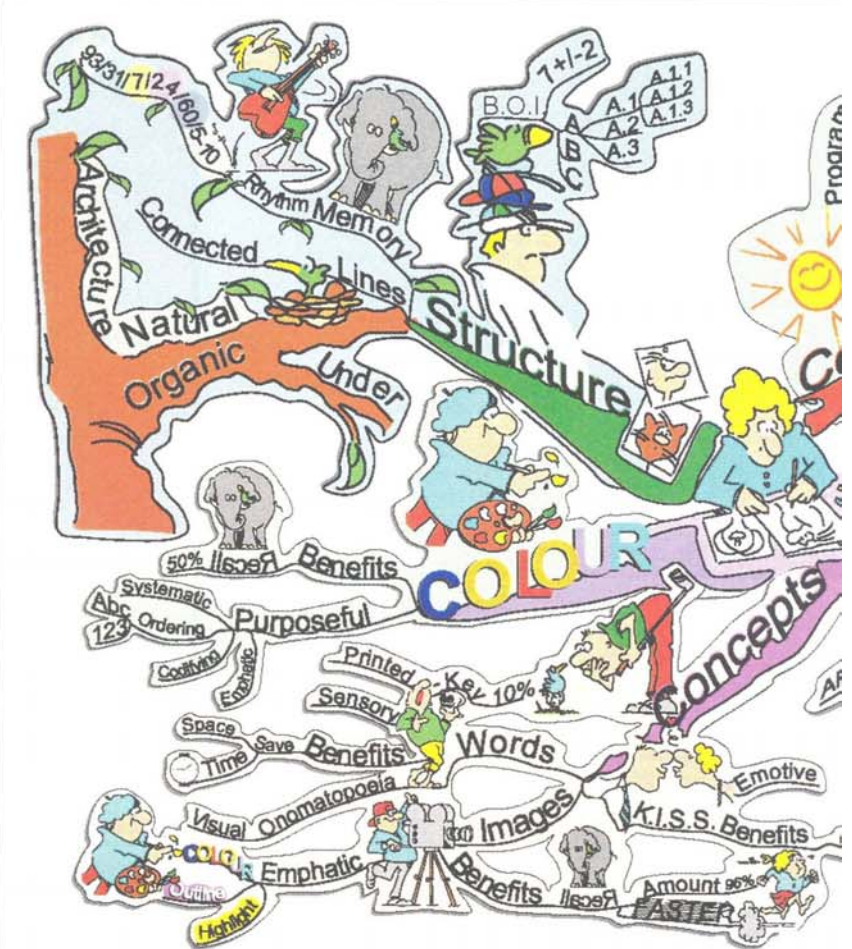
Maureen, the headteacher, became convinced that mind-mapping could yield substantial benefits. After a meticulously planned course, the research seemed to indicate that pupils benefited in the following areas: improved concentration; the ability to stay on task for longer periods of time; improved questioning and answering during class discussions; increased self-reliance on their own resources. Their independence as learners improved, as did their self-esteem.

The initial aims were to raise standards in literacy, improve pupils' confidence and encourage positive attitudes towards learning. Another important dimension was to develop a visual and kinaesthetic approach to teaching and learning.

Now Maureen is even more enthusiastic. "It is so good to have the communication and interaction," she says. "Teachers use mind-mapping by brainstorming everything that children know about a certain topic. This emphasises the kinaesthetic, auditory and visual aspects of learning. The children are communicating and negotiating. You will hear them arguing about where to place things on the map. It is a vehicle that encompasses a lot of good learning practice."

"Children with low self-esteem will say: 'I know nothing about that,' but then, when they start mind-mapping, they can come up with all sorts of ideas. It shows them they can do it and then they become optimistic about their own ability. One boy a couple of weeks ago did, on his own at home, a mind-map on gases. There was no way he would have done a piece of writing. He came in the next day proud of what he had done. He was thrilled."

All the children at Newchurch primary use mind-maps and are comfortable with them. Often mind-mapping is a social occasion, an opportunity for sharing. The teachers have to model the process the first time round, and then they have to facilitate the children's learning. After that the children have ownership of the mind map.



"The message from the teacher has to be, 'This is your mind map – you put down what you remember,' she says.

So what happened to the children – they were not chosen for their submissiveness – who did the original project?

"They have gone to secondary school," says Maureen. "They are all in top sets. Before they started the project they were demotivated – they were just not responding to the traditional ways of recording. It changed them. It did make a difference."

In secondary education, mind-mapping can assist with Critical Thinking, an increasingly popular AS subject that concerns itself with reasoning evaluation and presentation of argument and the construction and deconstruction of linear text, dialogue and debate.

Mind-mapping can also help in detecting flawed arguments, irrelevance, inadequacy and circular argument because of the clarity of the visual representation. The structure on the screen has to make sense and the arguments add up.

On routes and branches

"The Mind Map has four essential characteristics. The subject of attention is crystallised in a central image. The main themes of the subject radiate from the central image as branches.

Branches comprise a key image or key word printed on an associated line. Topics of lesser importance are also represented as branches attached to higher-level branches. The branches form a connected nodal structure." Tony Buzan, *The Mind Map Book*, BBC Books 1995, p59

Resources

- Birmingham Mind Maps www.bgfl.org/services/mindmaps/default.htm
- Thinking Skills www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/thinkingskills/guidance/567257?view=get
- Mind-mapping Overview www.lancsngfl.ac.uk/nationalstrategy/ks3/ict/files/MindMappingsoftware.doc

● Suggested reading:

- Tony Buzan *How to Mind Map* (Thorsons 2002)
- Lex McKee *The Accelerated Trainer* (Gower 2004) www.learnfast.co.uk
- Richard Marsden's Museum Mind Map www.walsallgfl.org.uk/Avoncroft/

Pupil feedback

- "You can remember what you did just by looking at it."
- "It helped me to remember more."
- "If you put stuff in the wrong place you can easily rub it out."
- "All you have to do is look at the branches and you learn more."
- "It looks good and I have written a lot."
- "You can read it and remember stuff."
- "I close my eyes and had the thoughts I wanted to write."
- "You get to see all the stuff you did."
- "It was good because sometimes I get mixed up when I do stories – it would take ages to do a story."
- "When we didn't write about it for ages, I could see this and it all came back to me."