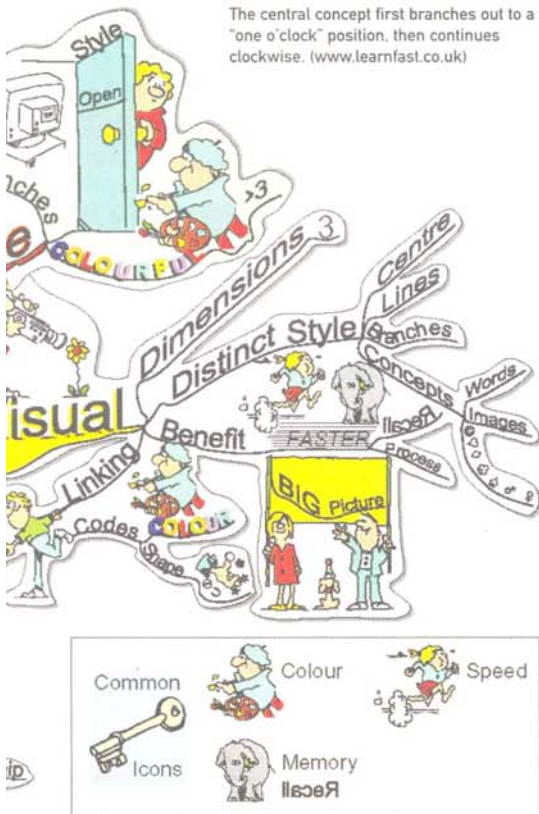


Client/Product: TAG  
 Media: TES Online  
 Circ/Audience: 95,547  
 Publication Date: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2004 Double Page Spread – Page 2 (reduced in size)

verdict

Into the charts: the core principles of mind-mapping, as depicted by Lex McKee in his book 'The Accelerated Trainer'. The central concept first branches out to a "one o'clock" position, then continues clockwise. (www.learnfast.co.uk)



# Cortical clobber

The hype says that mind-mapping "harnesses the full range of cortical skills – word, image, number, logic, rhythm, colour and spatial awareness – in a single, uniquely powerful manner. In so doing, it gives you the freedom to roam the infinite expanses of your brain." Wow! Tony Buzan, who devised the concept, describes mind maps as consisting "of a central word or concept. Around the central word you draw the 5 to 10 main ideas (child words) that relate to that word. You then take each of those child words and again draw the 5 to 10 main ideas that relate to each of those words".

In theory, this helps students to learn, organise and store as much information as they want, and to classify it in natural ways that will give them fast access when they need it. The supporters of the technique say that it uses all of the ways the brain manages information, so that users are using more brain power.

Buzan wrote: "All mind maps have some things in common. They all use colour. They all have a natural structure that radiates from the centre. And they all use lines, symbols, words and images according to a set of simple, basic, natural and brain-friendly rules. With a mind map, a long list of boring information can be turned into a colourful, memorable, highly organised diagram that works in line with your brain's natural way of doing things."

When Buzan originally developed the concept, the computer was not a consideration and he worked with diagrams. Some of them can look beautiful and undoubtedly appeal to visual thinkers. Since then, the idea has moved to the computer and, depending on which software you use, there can be other benefits, even if the hand-tooled beauty is lost to a certain extent.

Mind-mapping, or concept-mapping, programs make you think about learning across all curriculum areas. Left to ourselves we can start to run on the mental equivalents of tramlines. How do you write? Do you open a new file and just blaze away and then build a structure afterwards, or do you work out the structure first, and explore possibilities?

TAG Learning offers two programs, *Inspiration* and

*Kidspiration*. Both work with visual ideas so that students can see how ideas fit together. Both programs are based on the same idea of co-operative brainstorming. Both would work well with a whole class on a whiteboard. Teacher and class could develop a structure and then it could be given to the students so that they could develop that construction in their own ways.

Based on a spider chart, but with the flexibility and fluidity of the screen, both programs can make ideas flow and jolt minds into new pathways. *Inspiration*, like all mind maps, focuses on the essence of the information, giving a good overview of a topic.

Scotland has realised the potency of this approach – every school can have a specified number of centrally funded licences for *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration* software.

*MindManager*, from M-Urge and *Mindjet*, is approved by Buzan. It aims to organise ideas and structures and to communicate them. From notes and ideas, a document or a website can rapidly be developed, refined and integrated with other information.

A project using *MindManager* has been run in schools in Birmingham and the West Midlands. Schools received the software free. Steve Horsfield, programme manager of the West Midlands Regional Broadband Consortium, says the software in the areas and schools where it has been taken up has stimulated thinking about learning and teaching styles. He notes that it does make children more aware of their own thought processes.

*OpenMind* is very similar to *MindManager* and is approved by Buzan, who is said to use it. It includes wizards to help you save to HTML and into another of the firm's programs, *Mediator*. It also includes methods of saving to *PowerPoint* and *Word*. The manual is lucid and gives a great many indicators for use, not just in business but also in education.

*OpenMind*, *MindManager* and *Inspiration* all answer the often-repeated criticism that it is just as good to do a mind map by hand. See what you can attach to a *MindManager* mind map – graphs, web pages, URLs, videos, documents. You can also represent the mind map as a *Word* document, a *PowerPoint* presentation or a website for the internet or your intranet.

Should you try mind-mapping? Yes. Which is best? You decide according to your needs. There are demos of the programs featured (and other similar programs) available on websites for free downloads (see right). Try them.

Jack Kenn

## Downloads

- **Inspiration**  
[www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com)  
 Single user: £59.95  
 30-day trial from  
[www.taglearning.com](http://www.taglearning.com)
- **Kidspiration**  
 Single user: £59.95  
 30-day trial from  
[www.taglearning.com/index.asp](http://www.taglearning.com/index.asp)
- **Mind Manager**  
 Single user: £59  
 5-user licence: £166  
 10-user licence: £233  
 25-user licence: £579  
[www.m-urge.com](http://www.m-urge.com)  
 (education reseller)  
[www.mindmanager.co.uk](http://www.mindmanager.co.uk)
- **OpenMind**  
 20-users: £379  
 Site licence: £995  
 Trial version: projects can be used for seven days.  
[www.matchware.net/en/products/openmind/default.htm](http://www.matchware.net/en/products/openmind/default.htm)
- **MindMapper Pro**  
 Single user: £36  
 MindMapper Junior (€12)  
 Trial versions from  
<http://www.mindmapperusa.com/download.htm>
- **Visual Mind**  
 Single user: £77  
 Site license: £415  
 Trial version from  
[www.visual-mind.com/MindMapdownload.htm](http://www.visual-mind.com/MindMapdownload.htm)
- **Ygnius**  
 Single user: £112  
 20-hit trial version from  
[www.ygnius.com/site/2\\_download/?lang=en](http://www.ygnius.com/site/2_download/?lang=en)
- **SMART Ideas 3.1**  
 Concept-mapping software (no SMART board required)  
 Single user: £49  
[www.smartboard.co.uk/education@smartboard.co.uk](http://www.smartboard.co.uk/education@smartboard.co.uk)
- **Buzan Centers**  
[www.mind-map.com/index.htm](http://www.mind-map.com/index.htm)
- **How to make a mind map in eight easy steps**  
 Some basic instructions  
[www.mappyourmind.com/howto.htm](http://www.mappyourmind.com/howto.htm)
- **Free mind-mapping**  
<http://freemind.sourceforge.net>

Rob Clarke is an independent learning co-ordinator at Holland Park school in London. He has been using TAG Learning's *Inspiration* (see right) for five or six years, initially to structure his own planning. "I use it for brainstorming and for developing students' understanding of abstract concepts," he says. "How do you structure an argument? You can see the structure clearly. It is used in D&T, in IT and in English. You can use it anywhere. I use it for planning strategy and for website planning. Breaking down tasks is one of the major uses. That also aids understanding.

"The software is motivating, user-friendly, fun and easy. You start with a central idea and then radiate from that to the main categories, then the sub-categories, and it is particularly powerful when you use it on a big screen."

Rob argues that mind-mapping with a software program has much more to offer than simply drawing the map.

"The software brings the ability to tie in with other technologies," he says. "You can save it for later. It

can go into other programs such as *Word* or *PowerPoint*. You can even use it to make your own websites if you want. You can make the links between different ideas. You can have sound, pictures and words. In analogue, you cannot do that. The software is quicker, easier and more powerful."

Finally, the software has proved its worth in university education. Arthur McKeown at Ulster University has found that you can also use mind-mapping to think more creatively. To structure and absorb information more easily, see key relationships which might not otherwise be apparent, analyse complex problems and break them down into logical components, make better decisions, see the "bigger picture" more clearly and the relationships between contributing factors. It also helps to focus your attention and aid concentration on the main issues, improve your memory and retention of critical facts, plan and manage your time, work successfully and productively in teams, manage meetings effectively, create drafts of business reports and drafts of websites.