

17. Mind Maps

Introduction

Mind Maps are a powerful graphic technique that can be applied to all aspects of life where improved learning and clearer thinking will enhance performance and effectiveness. It is a non-linear way of organising information and a technique that allows capture of the natural flow of ideas. It can be applied by individuals or by groups, to improve simple tasks, such as writing a memo, and to more complex tasks, such as getting a shared perspective of a complex project.

Detailed description of the process

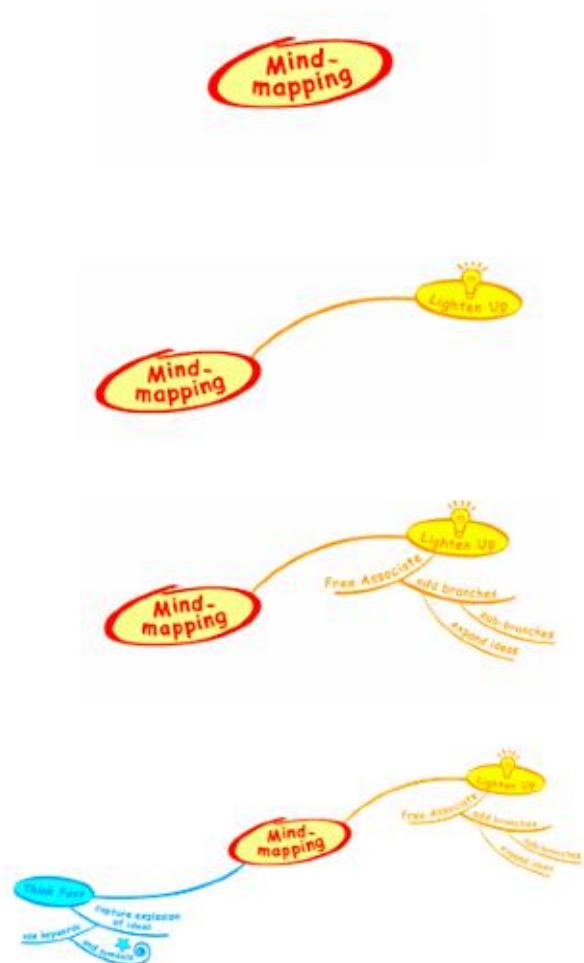
Figure 13: Mind mapping process:

Step 1: Centre first. Our linear, left-brain education system has taught us to start in the upper left-hand corner of a page. However, our mind focuses on the centre ... so mind mapping begins with a word or image that symbolises what you want to think about placed in the middle of the page.

Step 2: Lighten up! Let go of the idea of hunger, solving the entire problem, or writing a report that everyone will love. This is simply a brain dumping process that helps stimulate new ideas and connection. Start with an open, creative attitude

Step 3: Free associate. As ideas emerge, print one or two word descriptions of the ideas on lines branching from the central focus. Allow the ideas to expand outward into branches and sub-branches. Put down all ideas without judgment or evaluation.

Step 4: Think fast. Your brain works best in five to seven minute bursts, so capture that explosion of ideas as rapidly as possible. Key words, symbols and images provide a mental shorthand to help you record ideas as quickly as possible.



Step 5: Break boundaries. Break through the mentality that says you have to write on white paper with black ink or pencil. The bigger the paper, the more ideas you'll have. Use different colours and styles.



Step 6: Judge not. Put everything down that comes to mind even if it is completely unrelated. If you are brainstorming ideas for a report on the status of agriculture in Zambia and you suddenly remember you need to pick up your cleaning, put down 'cleaning'. Otherwise your mind will get stuck like a record in that 'cleaning' groove and you will never generate those great ideas.



Step 7: Keep moving. Keep your hand moving. If ideas slow down, draw empty lines, and watch your brain automatically find ideas to put on them. Stand up and mind map on a flip chart to generate even more energy.

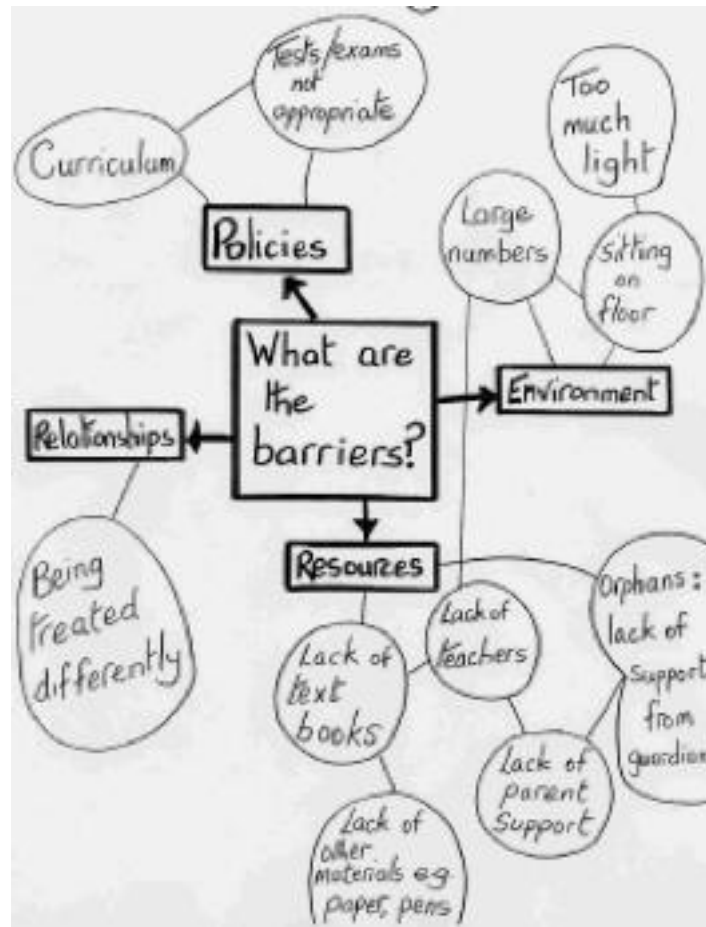


Step 8: Allow organisation. Sometimes, you see relationships and connections immediately and you can add sub-branches to a main idea. Sometimes you don't, so you just connect the ideas to the central focus. Organisation can always come later; the first requirement is to get the ideas out of your head and onto the paper.



Example: Access to education in Tanzania

As part of a DFID-funded action-learning project, 'Understanding Community Initiatives to Improve Access to Education', a workshop was held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. One of the key questions was 'What are the barriers to children's participation and learning?' Working in groups, participants were asked to 'map' out the barriers they faced in their schools. This was a group brainstorming activity where the barriers identified were organised into a diagram, or mind map. Some maps were organised into themes, such as resources or environment. Others were more random, and the connections between the barriers were marked on later with arrows, or different coloured pens. The main issues arising could be picked out from the resulting visualisations.



Sources and further reading

- Buzan, T. (1995) The Mind Map Book, London: BBC Books.
- For more information, visit www.mindtools.com and check out the free mind mapping software called Freemind-it is easy to use and can provide invaluable when organizing complex projects