Supporting Student Thinking and Learning — Merging Thinking Maps® and Project GLAD® for a Powerful Union

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There is something about these maps that makes them different, powerful, and I can’t get them out of my head—my mind thinks in Thinking Maps®! Somewhere along the way, my brain began to form patterns around eight graphics. Unconsciously, my brain continuously interprets information, seeks out the pattern, and creates a Thinking Map in my mind. It happens everywhere and at any time. While I read an article about the pledged promises of presidential candidates—Multi-Flow Map. While I create a timeline for an upcoming work project—Flow Map. While I stand in line at the coffee shop deciding which drink to purchase—Double Bubble Map. Thinking Maps® are more than graphic organizers; they are road maps to processing skills and higher-order thinking. If my adult brain repatterned itself in this way, imagine the power Thinking Maps® hold for our students’ developing brains.

Thinking Maps® are a set of eight visual patterns, with each representing a thinking process. These include the Circle Map (defining), Bubble Map (describing), Double Bubble Map (comparing and contrasting), Flow Map (sequencing), Tree Map (categorizing), Multi-Flow Map (evaluating cause and effect), Brace Map (examining part-to-whole relationships), and Bridge Map (finding analogous relationships). These thought processes are engaged in every content area in school, and we utilize them in our daily lives. In the classroom, they can be used in every subject in any grade. I relied on Thinking Maps® throughout my own master’s program. I will add that professors and peers, impressed by my visual representations of dense content, often sought me out to learn how to make such wonderful visual supports.

I was first introduced to Thinking Maps® in 2008, when the staff at my school was ready to try something new to improve student learning. I immediately saw the shifts of learning with my students and decided that I wanted to go deeper with Thinking Maps®; this led me to commit to the professional development required to become a Thinking Maps® trainer.

Over the course of our school’s Thinking Maps® implementation, a few colleagues attended a professional development training for OCDE Project GLAD® (Guided Language Acquisition Design), an instructional framework that fosters academic language and literacy while making grade-level content accessible to students. Excited and deeply impressed by what they learned, a grass-roots movement began at our school—we all wanted to be Project GLAD® teachers! From that moment on, our school became a Thinking Maps® and Project GLAD® school. Having implemented Thinking Maps® for a few years, I immediately saw the connections between them and the Project GLAD® strategies. They are both highly effective stand-alone protocols; but for me, merging them in my daily instruction amplified their benefits to the students and to me, as teacher. The two formed a powerful union in my classroom.

Using Thinking Maps® as Project GLAD® Visuals

The merger of the two models grew in complexity as my students and I worked with both Thinking Maps® and Project GLAD® in our classroom. My first step was the obvious—simply using Thinking Maps® as Project GLAD® visuals, such as the following:

- Using a Circle Map to define the social skill in the T-Graph for Social Skills,
- Using a Tree Map for categorizing key facts during the Input component and Reading and Writing, or
- Using a Flow Map as the format for sequencing the events of a story on a Story Map.

—continued on page 3—
The power of Thinking Maps® really became apparent when I moved into student production of the maps during Team Tasks, a Project GLAD® strategy. A common concern for teachers is that independent group tasks are often not rigorous enough. We want to engage our students in higher-order thinking tasks, but still provide them unguided practice in a low-risk environment—all while allowing time for the teacher to work with individuals or small groups. I found that Thinking Maps® themselves lower students' affective filter, so they can engage in deeper thought using a less intimidating format.

One of the most successful Team Tasks we've tried is combining readers' response journaling with Project GLAD®'s Narrative Input Chart and Thinking Maps®' Response to Text program. During the Project GLAD® unit Cultures and Communities, we read several myths from various cultures. I used the Narrative Input Chart to present the story and then moved to Team Tasks. To support the Common Core State Standards we were targeting, each team was given a copy of the narrative text and then analyzed the text using a Bubble Map and a Multi-Flow Map (see sample on this page). This pushed students to examine both character development through point of view and cause and effect.

As with Project GLAD® strategies, Thinking Maps® themselves are not intended to be a final product; instead, the maps help students decipher new information to produce a final product which displays their learning—supporting the move from team practice of skills and language to individual portfolio work. As our classroom use of Thinking Maps® developed, I saw students expanding from the typical Thinking Map template to using maps within maps and eventually merging them to create their own meaning and representation. Thinking Maps® became their language of learning as they gathered research, worked on portfolio tasks, and finally produced a variety of Personal Explorations, such as writing their own myths, ABC books, and Big Books. It was wonderful to see students so engaged and to observe them being successful, independent learners.

Thinking Maps® with Personal Explorations and Portfolios

Project GLAD® strategies are designed to scaffold students' academic language, including reading and writing. With the structure of the Project GLAD® Expert Groups, students are able to make sense of new textual information, determine important key details, and categorize information into topics. The Thinking Maps® writing program, Write from the Beginning ... and Beyond, serves as an additional tool for students to become independent writers. Students use the knowledge gained from their research and compile that into structured informational or narrative writing.

During the Animal Adaptations unit, students took their own research to independently write informational text about their animal. First, they used...
In the group, 19 students solved the problem by partitioning the numbers into their tens and ones values (20 and 8; 10 and 1). Next, students took 2 tens plus 1 ten to get 3 tens (30), then took 8 ones plus 1 one to get 9 ones. They then had the number composed of 3 tens and 9 ones equaling 39. Nine of those students had a second strategy, taking 11 and partitioning it into 1 ten and 1 one. They kept 28 and added 1 ten, understanding that they were not affecting the ones value. They added the 2 tens and 1 ten to get 3 tens with the 8 ones remaining. They then took the remaining 1 one and added it to the 38. As 1 more than 8 is 9, students had 3 tens and 9 ones equaling 39. Four students used the standard algorithm to solve the problem. Two of the four were able to verbally explain their understanding of the algorithm to a partner while the other two were not.

We pressed on and continued our work with numbers and mathematical understanding. Feeling proud and exhilarated, I watched as my students became more confident and comfortable discussing and working through problems by reasoning abstractly and looking for patterns and similarities.

My first year teaching third grade was an invaluable learning experience. Number Talks had a huge impact on my teaching, as well as on my students’ mathematical understanding and practice. Students benefited from engaging in a purposeful conversation about strategies and understanding, challenging themselves to be efficient, accurate, and articulate—as well as gaining a reserve of strategies. I thoroughly enjoyed the in-depth discussions about numbers with the students, and I was always happy to see that some of the strategies students employed had never occurred to me at all! While all of my students will not be proficient as they enter fourth grade, I know that they will continue to build on their understanding, flexibility, and application to be life-long learners.

Reference