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TE 846
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TE 846 Final Project= Thinking Map

1. Alternative ways to present information

One of the most valued alternative ways to present information to students is the use of thinking maps. The theory behind thinking maps is that they allow all students to maximize their abilities through the use of graphic organizers. Nancy Cook Smith describes them saying, "Thinking Maps is based on a long tradition of instruction in graphic organizers as used in various disciplines to facilitate students' comprehension of text and their ability to construct explicit structures that promote higher levels of learning, including analysis and synthesis." In essence, thinking maps help students to organize thoughts without having to do a lot of writing. Thinking maps provide an excellent resource to look at a great deal of information in a short amount of time.

Thinking map theorists have shown that these tools are helpful to all students. English Language Learners (ELL) can use thinking maps because they can be made in any language. An ELL could construct a thinking map in their native language and then convert it to English. Thinking maps are not done in sentence form and instead are normally constructed by only one word or a few words. Thinking maps allow Learning Disabled (LD) students to be able to visually organize all that they have learned. They can visually see the concepts they have learned and pull that information from the thinking map as they need it. Thinking maps theorists argue that these educational tools are an effective and valuable way for all students (not just ELL and LD students) to maximize their learning by organizing what is learned into one condensed document.

In practice, most studies have show that thinking maps have been effective. There are eight different thinking maps that can be used and they can be used for any subject area at any level from Kindergarten on up.

Roosevelt Elementary School in Long Beach, California has had documented success using thinking maps. Their principal Stefanie R. Holzman believes that, "Thinking Maps are an important strategy for student success. They help all children, whether their primary learning style is kinesthetic, auditory, or verbal. It's a very good strategy for English Language Learners because it takes away the necessity to speak and write English." A student from Edwards Junior High School explained his/her feelings on thinking maps by stating, "The more we use the thinking maps, the more I understand, and the easier the work becomes to do."

In my own school district, Central Montcalm Public Schools, we implemented thinking maps in the fall of 2008, thanks to an initiative led by Mr. Rick Heitmeyer, current superintendant at Buckley Public Schools in Michigan. Our district has used these maps to help student learning and I have even used them in my own classroom. Even though Mr.

Heitmeyer has moved to a different district, thinking maps are still a valued teaching aid used at Central Montcalm. I have personally seen the positive impact that thinking maps can have with all students. Students in our district are now familiar with thinking maps, since they are used district-wide. Thinking maps have become a common visual learning aid that many students and teachers find to be beneficial.

I decided to use a double bubble thinking map with one of my case study students because he struggles with trying to retain pertinent information that he reads and has some difficulty organizing his thoughts. His mother has shared with me that he has told her that he thrives in school when he is most organized. I believe organizing his thoughts for this assignment will help him to more effectively do his writing assignment.

2. Lesson Design

The lesson that I taught was about the similarities between two United States Presidents, Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. To help my student compare and contrast the two Presidents I decided to use a thinking map (concept map). The thinking map that I used was the double bubble map, which is used specifically for comparing and contrasting.

I introduced the assignment to the student by showing him the thinking map (partially laid out) and explaining that they are used for organizing information. I explained that there were many similarities between President Lincoln and President Kennedy and that the student's task was to first read the material (a sheet containing information about Lincoln and Kennedy that I typed up), then organize it with the thinking map, and then using **only** his thinking map write two paragraphs about the similarities between the two Presidents, including four total similarities. The use of the thinking map provided a tool for him to stay organized and focused.

One accommodation I would make for ELL or LD students is to have the information sheet read aloud to them. Depending on the student's IEP, I may have more of the thinking map filled out for the student (partially completed), or I may provide a copy of the completed thinking map. I would consult the student's special education teacher to determine the best course of action.

3. Grading Rubric

1. Two full paragraphs (1 point for each full paragraph)

*Goals for a full paragraph= correct spelling, correct grammar, correct capitalization/punctuation

0 1 2

2. Inclusion of 4 similarities between the 2 Presidents (2 points for each similarity, 1 point for citing a similarity and 1 point for having the correct details)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Total points earned _____/10 possible

4. Teaching the lesson

After teaching this lesson to one of my case study students there were many positive aspects for both the teacher and the student. For the student, one benefit is that he produced a condensed and simplified version of the material that was covered. In addition, the material was more organized and the relationship between the concepts was easier for the student to identify. A benefit for me, as the teacher, is that I could look at the student's thinking map and quickly see whether he was understanding the assignment or not. Although this summer I did not have an entire class to teach this particular lesson to, this fall I will easily be able to circulate the room in a traditional classroom setting and be able to see quickly if a student was understanding the material or not. Thinking maps are simplified and less wordy versions of the original material. Students do not have to write in complete sentences with thinking maps, so it takes less time for the teacher to check the students' work. Also, in this instance, the thinking map was not graded, so I did not have to fully evaluate the thinking map, but instead simply check for understanding.

There are also a few drawbacks to using a thinking map. Students sometimes need to produce assignments from the thinking maps and although this can be made easier with thinking maps, it does, in the students mind, create "additional work." The creation of thinking maps takes time for both students and teachers. Although this method can be an effective tool, teachers and students are only allotted a certain amount of time for classes. Homework is an alternative solution to this problem, but it places a great deal of responsibility back on the student.

5. Reflection

The thinking map was very helpful for the lesson as it allowed the student to better organize the material. Although the text I had the student read was very short, thinking maps are even more effective for longer texts. The use of the thinking map allowed the student to condense the reading material into only the most crucial aspects that need to be remembered.

The student did a terrific job filling out the thinking map. He used it to help construct a writing assignment. The student did a perfect job on the part of his writing assignment that was graded on his grasp of the information. The student even said after using the thinking map that it helped him to organize the material better and more effectively create his writing.

6. Thinking Map References

<http://www.thinkingmaps.com/>

https://sunsetridge.dvusd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=79

<http://www.aisd.net/aisd/ThinkingMaps/tabid/8781/Default.aspx>

http://www.thinkingfoundation.org/research/case_studies/roosevelt/roosevelt_cs.html

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Note: Mr. Heitmeyer started the Thinking Map initiative at my school district (Central Montcalm) in 2008

Thinking Maps® & Write From the Beginning Theory & Empirical Evidence
Nancy Cook Smith, Ph.D. TRIERE Research Manchester, New Hampshire
Prepared for Thinking Maps, Inc. (formerly Innovative Learning Group, Inc.)
October 16, 2003

7. Self-evaluation

After this project I have further cemented my beliefs in the effectiveness of graphic organizers such as thinking maps. In the school district where I teach I was educated in the use of thinking maps during my first year of teaching. Our entire district sees the value in helping students to visually see and organize material through the implementation of thinking maps. The use of graphic organizers is a familiar concept for me, and the benefits seen with my case study student help provide evidence for why this resource can be so effective.

I have used graphic organizers in my classroom before, and I intend to do so in the future. It is not a requirement in my district to use thinking maps, but it is somewhat of an expectation. The results from this project coincide with the results in my district where most teachers and administrators believe in the effectiveness of graphic organizers, such as thinking maps.

I believe this teaching/learning strategy would be extremely valuable for any teacher to learn. The benefits can be seen for all learners. This method is proven to be effective for ELL/LD students as well as students who are at the top of their class. Anyone can benefit from the organization and simplicity provided by thinking maps. I use this strategy in my classroom and would encourage any teacher, from a student-teacher to a 30-year-veteran to examine this instructional strategy and consider implementing it with his/her students.