

Using Mind Maps with Children

Contributed by Tony Buzan to the 5–14 Online Discussion Forum

Mind mapping and mathematics

Mathematics, like all subjects, can be enhanced by the use of image and colour. For example, important formulas or equations can be highlighted, and colour can be used to emphasise and link mathematical concepts. It is also useful to explain to students that mathematics is not a linear subject. It is extremely associative – look at any of the notebooks or blackboards of the great mathematicians. They are filled with arrows, boxes, doodles, pictures and all the ‘thinking tools’. Field studies of the great mathematicians show that a high proportion of them thought of numbers not as black and white digits but in colours and spatial forms.

Starting on the road to mind mapping

Start by taking central images of what the child is most interested in. For example, if the child’s main interest is dinosaurs, use large pictures of the animals and do a simple basic mini mind map using only big words, radiating from the central image. The young child’s brain is a natural mind mapper. New vocabulary is acquired by making radiating associations from the central images of those things in life that are most important to the child. For example, the mind map of ‘Mum’ radiates out the key main branches of love, milk, transportation, songs, security, learning, etc.

Using mind maps in the Primary school

At the beginning of the year it is extremely useful to preview the entire year by guiding the children through basic big mind maps of all the different subjects they will be studying during that year.

This gives the child a ‘Gestalt’ or ‘whole picture’ of what is to be covered. This gives confidence at the beginning of the year, and allows the child’s brain automatically to link and associate new incoming information into the context of the overall subject matter.

Mind maps can also be used for group project work, individual project work, planning events, games and parties, reviewing what has been learnt and, importantly, for the encouragement and development of individual self expression and creativity.

By using mind maps at an early age, the child will be using its ‘mind muscles’ and increasing the power of its ability to both imagine and link. Imagination and association are the keys to high-level memory and creative thinking.

Such an approach makes the teaching more enjoyable and effective, and the learning more successful and fun. It is an educational win–win situation that multiplies its benefits as time goes on.