Report:

Mind Mapping in the Classroom -- and Beyond…

In the Spring of ’06 I taught a Senior Thesis Preparation course in the Digital Media Dept. As a research exercise I required the students to create a “MindMap” of their proposed Senior Thesis topic based on the process and theory described in Tony Buzan’s 1993 classic, *The Mind Map Book* ([link](http://opac.otis.edu/lib/item?id=chamo:118508&theme=otis)). The results were so engaging and useful that we decided to expand the use of this process and create a series of maps that would chart not only the basics of the project’s content but also the details of character development, environmental history and narrative structure.

The basic tenet behind the Mind Mapping process is that the mind works in a more efficient manner if its structure is reflected in the product of its work. In other words, in order to tap into the extraordinary power of the mind to create and organize thoughts, it is crucial to utilize a methodology that is non-linear and flexible. That said, a stacked list such as that used in shopping for groceries might not be the best approach to brainstorming a complex project such as a senior thesis, a book outline or even a trip abroad.

Buzan’s method not only uses non-linear forms but also blends in color and image to complete the mapping metaphor. And while there are certainly many approaches to brainstorming including cluster mapping, Ven diagramming and flow-charting, in working with students of art and design this multi-disciplinary approach to project planning is particularly apt. As one student in this class stated:

> "The mind mapping method taught to me by Marcie Begleiter is not only helpful in organizing ideas, but in expanding them as well. Even outside of the context of school work, I’ve used it extensively for not only brainstorming, but also organizing ideas. It helps me organize my thoughts in a non-linear manner while still being a concise organizing system."

--MC Griffin (Senior Thesis 2 terms, Thesis Prep, 1 term)

And this:
"My thesis concept was developed and driven by mind map exploration. I started off with the idea of transitions and explored more personally, which then developed into the transition of my adoption. It helped to start using the traditional hand drawn mind map development vs. the digital. I found it distracting to use the computer, because everything typed seemed final. Using the mind map as if it were rough sketching my ideas was definitely a much more effective way for me to brainstorm. I would say mind mapping my idea enabled me to have a backbone to my piece."

--Andersan Saakvitne (Senior Thesis, 1 term and Senior Thesis Prep 1 Term)

These students went on to not only use traditional mindmapping in developing his senior thesis, but also worked with Mind Mapping software in scheduling the project in Senior Year. I purchased Matchware’s "OpenMind" software to use in the classroom because of it’s adherence to Buzan’s method. Another student wrote of her experience in the classroom:

"The mind mapping software is a great program. I used it for my senior thesis. The thesis is a one minute animation of a much larger story. I drew mind maps by hand at first and it is a messy business to write out all the possible characters, locations, plots and relationships. I used this software and the process is so much cleaner and better organized. I also used it to figure out what I need to do to execute the thesis. I broke down shots and the animation. I separated tasks to get a bigger picture of the work and time needed to complete the thesis. Glad to have it at hand."

--Diana Huang (Senior Thesis 2 terms, Thesis Prep, 1 term)

One additional note on the "OpenMind" software: the mind maps can be instantly converted into word docs, html files or a number of other useful formats. In addition the software comes complete with hundreds of spot illustrations and it is easy to import images of your own choosing. It also has many study templates including one for basic essay construction that believe may be a valuable asset for some liberal studies courses.

I am a convert – and available for spreading the liturgy.

--Marcie Begleiter
Digital Media