

Using process drama in a thinking maps school

An action research project in a primary school in West London.

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I became aware of thinking maps when I started teaching in a new school last year. I was drawn to the school as it has a strong focus on the development of higher order thinking skills. Throughout the school you can see references to Bloom's Taxonomy, especially in the planning; and all classes have a display of De Bono Hats utilised for many areas including development of individual pupil's reflection on their learning.

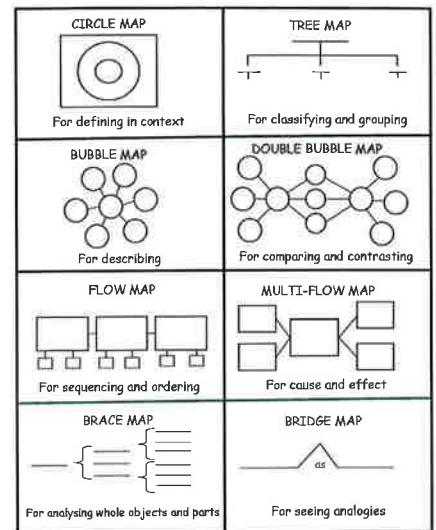
Each classroom also has a display of thinking maps and they have become an intrinsic part of the classroom. When pupils are asked by the teacher to consider a learning point in, for example, a flow map, the children are keen to start and clear on the task. The pupils themselves select thinking maps to respond to classroom tasks. I was impressed that, with thinking

maps, the school had a specific language for thinking: a form of common communication that not only expressed the thought process clearly but acted as a tool to support the thinking process.

The eight visual maps are a language of non-linguistic representations for fundamental cognitive patterns. (Hyerle 2009:121.)

Developing creative and critical thinking skills had been an important part of my teaching from my early training many years ago when I originally worked in an influential language teaching centre in Paraguay in South America. There I learned the importance of considering the development of the whole child in education and how drama, integrated in the classroom, could support the development of higher order thinking. Since those days I have often used mind

maps to organise my own and my students' thinking but up to this time I had never come across the thinking maps system as developed by David Hyerle. I was very interested in the system and was supported by the senior staff of my new school, who



Thinking Maps are eight specific visual patterns that are intended to correspond with eight different fundamental thinking processes. They provide a common visual language to inform the structure of thinking skills and may be applied in all content areas and all educational levels.

provided me with information and guidelines for the use of thinking maps in the classroom. I became intrigued by the work of David Hyerle and clearly saw the potential for thinking maps in the process drama lesson.

My academic background and past research has been based around the impact of process drama as a pedagogy in the primary classroom. I had become aware, through the work of such practitioners as Heathcote and O'Neill, that in-depth thinking has to be an important part of the drama classroom:

These are demanding activities, requiring the use of perception, imagination, speculation and interpretation, as well as exercising dramatic, cognitive and social capacities (O'Neill 1995:1)

and I was intrigued as to how a common thinking language could support the exploration of the drama taking place.

As a reflective practitioner, I believe that an ongoing examination of my teaching practice is vital to my personal development and working

PROCESS		Blue Hat - Process Thinking about thinking What thinking is needed? Organizing the thinking Planning for action.	CREATIVITY		Green Hat - Creativity Ideas, alternatives, possibilities. Solutions to black hat problems.
FACTS		White Hat - Facts Information and data. Neutral and objective. What do I know? What do I need to find out? How will I get the information I need?	BENEFITS		Yellow Hat - Benefits Positives, plus points. Why an idea is useful. Logical reasons are given.
FEELINGS		Red Hat - Feelings Intuition, hunches, gut instinct. My feelings right now. Feelings can change. No reasons are given.	CAUTIONS		Black Hat - Cautions Difficulties, weaknesses, dangers. Spotting the risks. Logical reasons are given.

De Bono Hats

with the school opened up the possibility of an action research project to examine the use of thinking maps in a process drama lesson.

The school was again very supportive and accepted my proposal of an action research project as part of their work with the Kestrel Thinking Schools Project <http://www.thinkingschool.co.uk/> managed in partnership with Exeter University.

As a first stage, I identified the question that was to form the starting point of my research:

What is the impact of using thinking maps in a process drama lesson on both the development of the learning targets and the opportunity for the child to develop their thinking map skills?

I then examined the process I would follow in my research. As I wanted thinking maps to be an integral part of the project, I used two of them to clarify my approach to the research.

My past research projects have shown me the importance of a pilot study in order to clarify all aspects of the project. From the development of the question itself to the testing and identifying the data gathering process, it is important to establish whether the direction of the study will offer the insights that I am looking for.

The following pilot study was run over three literacy lessons with a class of year 6 students. The group was made up of lower ability literacy students, with a range of special needs including several EAL students.

The three lessons were based on the theme of Roald Dahl's book *The*

BFG, since the whole school were developing programmes to celebrate Roald Dahl Day.

The first lesson welcomed the pupils in role as members of a secret governmental organization – D.U.N.O. (Department of Unusual and New Occurrences), an organisation designed to protect people from mythical beasts and creatures. The pupils are informed that the group leader, the teacher in role, has collected evidence for a giant creature abducting children from children's homes.

The pieces of evidence supplied are dream jars found dropped at the scene, an eyewitness statement saying

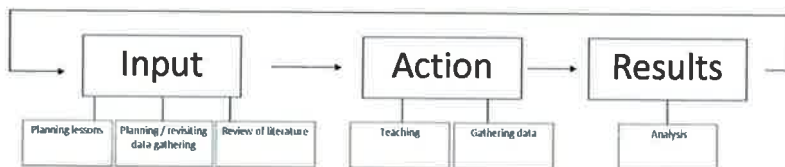


Figure 2: Flow Map showing action research pattern to follow in the study

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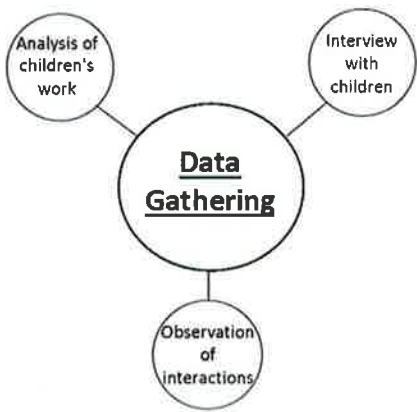


Figure 3: Bubble Map showing aspects of data gathering to follow in the study

they saw Sophie being taken out of her bedroom window by a giant hand and a photograph of some graffiti saying 'BFG woz ere'. The leader of the group suggests this stands for 'Big Frightening Giant'. The pupils, in groups, classify the beast that is at large in the town from the evidence. Out of role, the pupils are invited to be creative and invent new evidence to share with D.U.N.O. The groups collate and share evidence in role and come to a conclusion that an evil giant is at large in the village.

In the second lesson, pupils in role as members of the secret organization plan how they are to capture the giant in groups. The pupils then physically present the capture using a series of still frame pictures with captions to the class.

In the third lesson, pupils perform a short teacher-scripted scene showing the prosecution case against the BFG. They then discuss their own knowledge of the story of the BFG and how the court is not giving the other side of the story. Back in groups, the pupils discuss

the story of the BFG and talk about how they would write the next scene representing the case for the defence.

As I explore the working relationship between thinking maps and drama activities, I have become aware of how they can be utilised as both an aid for the teacher or a tool used in the lesson by the participants. I would like to present a few ideas on how I have utilised thinking maps in the pilot study, other similar drama lessons and ideas that I have had for my future practice. This is not, by any means, a definitive list. I have found that as one idea of a drama use for thinking maps comes to me it spawns several more approaches for the future.

Early on in my study, I identified the impact of what Hyerle refers to as the frame on drama:

frames of reference, whether belief systems, primary discourses in language, or the wealth of culture directly and deeply influence how each of us as human beings see and think about the world.

(Hyerle 2009:118)

Manipulation of the frame accesses multiple directions in which the participants can consider the drama. The frame details the perspective that the maps explore. For example, if we take the **Circle Map** being used as a role on the wall device, we can examine the character from their own perspective, how another character in the drama sees them or indeed the participant out of role examining the drama at a distance sees the character.

I have found that the **Bubble Map** can offer a wide range of opportunity for drama exploration. In one lesson

I used the bubble map to explore the motivation for an action by a character. We were looking at *Jack and the Beanstalk* as part of a lesson on fairytale parodies and we were going to hot seat Jack's mother. The pupils, armed with several reasons as to why she threw out the beans rather than just 'she was angry', presented incredibly detailed hot seat interactions. Pupils responded in detail to her problems, her environment, her poverty and the lack of education for Jack.

In the pilot study I used the **Tree Map** to classify the information gathered in a Mantle of the Expert based lesson. The pupils put together the evidence to show the giant was evil, an example of this can be seen in Figure 4. Using the tree map was also an excellent tool for the planning. I have used it to identify themes for a drama and then link the dramatic conventions / techniques I will use to explore those themes.

The **Flow Map** was an excellent tool to organise plot order for pupils. In the pilot study the pupils storyboarded the process they would use to capture the giant. Using the **Flow Map**, pupils were able to plan and present their plan for the capture in a series of still frames with appropriate captions. Having the process organised, the quality of the pupils' performance work improved in comparison to similar tasks in the past. They were clear on the images they had to show and the jobs each would do to follow the process.

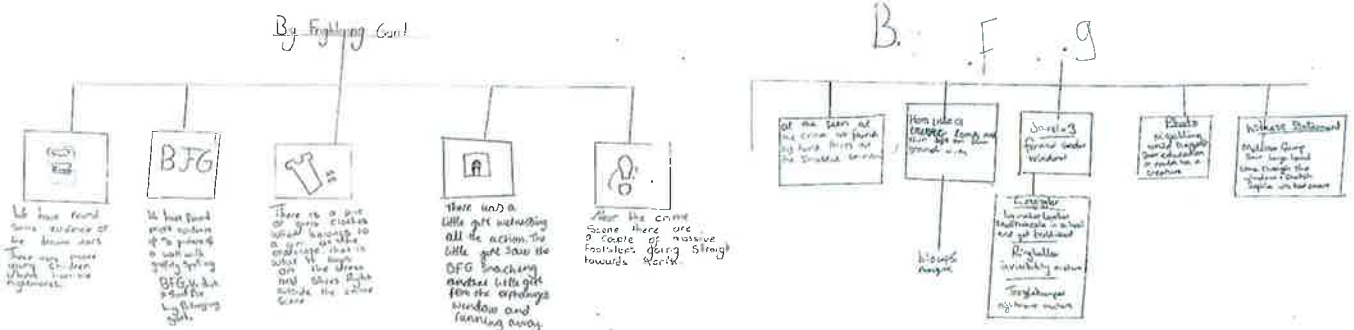


Figure 4: Examples of pupils Tree Maps showing classifying the 'Big Frightening Giant'

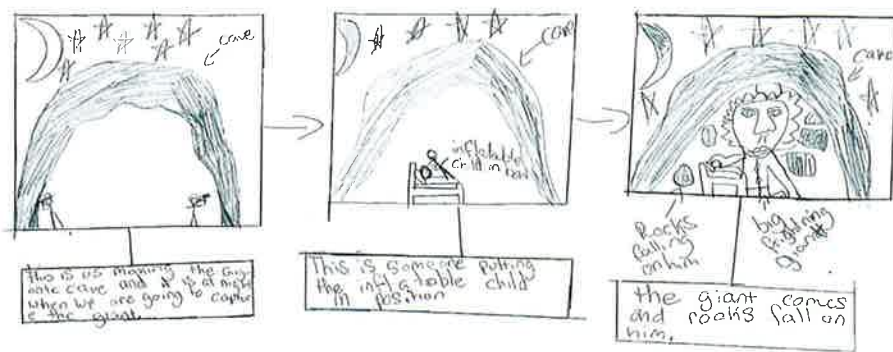


Figure 5: Examples of pupils' Flow Map and still images showing how to capture the 'Big Frightening Giant'

Figure 5 is an example of pupils' planning and performance.

The **Brace Map** was used in the BFG drama lesson as a teaching tool to organise the roles in the court scene. As a teacher I wrote, 'people in a court room,' on the board and then as a class we used the **Brace Map** form to list all the roles the pupils would take in the drama. The organisational nature of the brace map could be used in many ways in a drama lesson including identifying themes that a drama explores.

I have found that, occasionally in a cooperative drama experience, the working group struggle to agree or find a direction for moving the story on. The **Multi-flow Map** organises the thought process into focusing on the previous events and their effects on the situation or specific character. In the BFG story this cause and effect could be what would happen if the defence team does not produce a solid case. What would happen to Sophie? What would happen if there was no one to stop the evil giants?

The **Double Bubble Map** forms a tool that could provide an opportunity to examine the differences and similarities between two characters in a drama. It is also useful as a tool to think about the development of a character over the course of the drama. I am considering using it for the culmination of a series of drama lessons based on Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*. As a group, we will explore the changing nature of the main character from the start to the end of the story. What parts of his personality/ feelings / view of himself and the world around

him has stayed the same and in what way has he changed?

The **Analogy Map** could act as an excellent tool to evaluate how the areas considered in a drama apply to real life. In a classroom drama pupils deal with complex human issues, within the safety of a role. Asking pupils to think about the drama in which they have participated in terms of their own lives is an integral part of the drama experience. If the analogy map is part of a common language for the thinking process, this offers a key to unlocking what can sometimes be a sensitive part of this reflection.

The pilot study lessons were a great hit with all taking part. The children entered into the drama with gusto; and the feedback, in the plenary sessions, was very positive. The support staff and other observing teachers were also taken with the commitment to the process that the children demonstrated and were impressed with the interesting use of the thinking maps.

The initial examination of the pilot study suggests that there is a potential for a more detailed study of the use of thinking maps in a process drama lesson. The pupils used the suggested forms of thinking maps to explore their thinking and organise presentations throughout the drama lessons. Indeed, without the need for teacher intervention, one group started using a circle map to brainstorm ideas for the final task of writing a defence argument for the BFG. It was a natural process and did not feel like I was imposing or restricting their responses into one



Photos: Author

form but it allowed them a way of communicating their own thinking processes. The children shared a language that provided them with a basis to develop the thinking inspired by the drama activity.

The detailed impact on their learning on specific targets and improvement in thinking skills will need to be identified and considered in more detail through the ongoing action research project. However, I do believe there is a very interesting future for process drama in a thinking maps school.

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Peter Short has been working in education for over 20 years. Currently working as a year 6 teacher, he has in the past worked as an arts advisor in a London borough and taught Drama in both secondary and primary schools. He holds an MPhil. from Exeter University in Drama Education.