

# Mind mapping for dyslexics

Computers offer all sorts of respite for dyslexic learners – they have spelling and grammar check and there are no handwriting worries. Mind mapping software is another useful tool – it allows anyone to express their ideas freely, says **Wendy Keay-Bright**, who has done extensive research with dyslexic children.

**A** tried and tested method, mind mapping has been used extensively for centuries. Used by both schoolchildren and adult professionals, it can help people formulate, plan and develop concepts and organise ideas. Mind mapping can help

the brain to form new ideas, which can be triggered from existing ones, and also helps people to recall existing memories. Problem solving, decision making and organisation are just some of the areas that can be supported with the method. Since ideas can

be drawn in a non-linear format, quick fire and non-restricted brainstorming can be accomplished.

Visual learning techniques such as mind mapping are increasingly becoming recognised as a valuable learning tool to support various ages and abilities. Some scientists believing that the mind is divided into left and right-hand sides. Others say it is a less organised structure, and that mapping encourages the use of a larger part of the brain. Visual or kinaesthetic (doing) learners particularly benefit from mind mapping.



## SEN learners flourish with visual learning

For SEN teachers, mind mapping is a particularly useful technique – because it gives them the chance to see the different way their pupils think.

For example, Debbie Farnfield of the British Dyslexia Association states that dyslexic learners tend to be good conceptual thinkers and are often very creative –but that they are less able to carry out analytical and logical tasks. Dyslexic pupils in particular find mind mapping software an extremely useful too because it allows them to fully formulate their thoughts, according to the Becta report 'Assessing the provision of ICT for Inclusion: Communication and interaction difficulties'.

## A teacher's perspective

I wanted to find out how SEN learners assimilate with mobile learning and if and what they are able to gain from this. I organised and ran a speculative discovery-led workshop with nine-year-old pupils of mixed ability, all of whom have communication and coordination problems like dyslexia and dyspraxia. I wanted to



and were enthusiastic at seeing their ideas mapped out so quickly. In the space of about ten minutes we, as designers, were able to capture a very broad picture of experience from the rapid fire question and answer session. As a "think aloud" protocol, it worked brilliantly.

resources, because as recognised in Becta's report, they provide a successful channel of learning on which pupils are able to focus without distraction. As ICT increasingly becomes acknowledged as a valuable tool for supporting SEN learners, it is apparent that mind mapping software plays an important role in this.

This project was immensely encouraging as it acted as a positive way to enable learners to present and value their own input. ICT and mind mapping software both play an important and significant role in the development of SEN learners – something which I experienced first-hand. The great thing about using this resource is that it is so user-friendly – it does not presume a level of expertise that could so easily exclude learners who may have low confidence or self-esteem. The potential to document feedback and ideas in a direct and spontaneous manner ensures that the creative process can be captured, shared and evidenced for others. Mind mapping opens infinite doors for SEN learners.

***"It allowed learners to quickly and naturally fire out their ideas without any restrictions"***

give the children the freedom to express themselves, so I chose to use Inspiration 8 – a mind mapping software produced by visual learning software company, Inspiration Software. Designed for secondary pupils and adults, Inspiration 8 is suitable for all learning styles and abilities and helps students to develop critical thinking, planning and organisational skills.

For the workshop, I made templates and tree maps to act as prompts for idea generation around different themes. Using the templates as an organisational tool produced positive results – however, the spontaneity of the children's feedback was not structured in accordance with the shape of the maps. I therefore decided to abandon the maps in favour of an 'anything counts' approach, which proved far more useful.

The children who participated in the workshop found it challenging to communicate ideas orally. But using the software, they responded very positively

## A designer resides in us all!

I was impressed with the outcome. It was incredibly inspiring as it allowed learners to quickly and naturally fire out their ideas without any restrictions – we all became both designers and pupils together, which was wonderful.

We created a map which we called 'What we like'. This method has since been used in other stakeholder workshops as a technique for making the children's input visible to others. In terms of taking concepts forward, the 'Inspiration Map' created by children provided vital clues on which more focused design specifications were built. In addition, the clinical practitioners were able to use the map to identify certain aspects of the child's experiences that may have been missed had we relied on linear processes.

## The future of mind mapping as an SEN support tool

There is huge value in SEN learners having access to both a computer and software

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