

DOES THE USE OF THINKING MAPS IN THE TEACHING OF CREATIVE WRITING IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF MY PUPILS WRITING AND PROMOTE INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM IN MY PUPILS?

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Summary:

This research looks at the use of thinking maps for the development of writing in a Year 1 class. It traces the process of using maps and the effect on children's' attitudes.

Context and Purpose

Tongwynlais Primary School is part of the international network of 'Thinking Schools' and in November 2011 was recognised as a Thinking School by Exeter University. Pupils are taught to use the eight Thinking Maps in all areas of learning, with them being introduced from the beginning of their school life in Nursery through to Year 6.

'Thinking maps are a set of eight maps that people can use to organise their thoughts. The maps are designed to help generate thoughts and increase higher level thinking (Hyerle, 1995).

My year 1 class consists of pupils of wide ranging ability from pupils who are using 'pictures, symbols, letters in sequence and familiar words to communicate meaning' (outcome 3) to pupils who 'can write out and develop their ideas, often in a sequence of connected sentences' (outcome 5).

With this in mind, and in line with the aim of the SIGlet partnership of schools to focus on writing and MAT pupils, I wanted to find out to what extent the use of 'Thinking Maps' in the teaching of creative writing in my classroom improved the quality and structure of pupils writing, but also the impact their use had on pupils confidence and self-esteem when writing independently. I felt that equipping my MAT pupils with the skills to use Thinking Maps would allow them greater independence in writing to allow me to direct much needed time to supporting those less able pupils.

Influences:

Tongwynlais is a school involved in SIG 26 (Super SIGlet), my action research question was set up to focus on creative writing and MAT pupils. It was agreed through SIG 26 (Super SIGlet) that we would baseline the top 20% of our year

group taught in line with accepted definitions of 'most able' [Welsh Government, NACE Cymru]. It was agreed that the baseline piece of work would involve little or no teacher input so as to provide a picture of what children could produce independently.

Three types of evidence were gathered to ensure findings were triangulated:

- a baseline piece of written work
- pupils' work following explicit teaching and modelling of Thinking Maps
- an attitudinal questionnaire

Being a 'Thinking School' influenced my decision to undertake research into the role and benefits of Thinking Maps in my classroom. My question was shared, discussed and refined with the support of SIGlet colleagues who acted as a focus group and Dr Jude Brigley who took the role of a critical friend. Action Research was validated by colleagues in the SIGlet Group.

Methods/Outcomes:

In order to answer my question, pupils targeted were asked to write a recount of something they did during the Easter holidays. No additional information was provided. The piece of writing was unsupported. This piece of work formed my baseline. Writing 'cold' is a difficult task as others including Buckley [1981] have pointed out have pointed out that:

'Writing is the most difficult language process, whether you are an elementary student or a college student. It is hard to just start writing.

An Attitudinal Questionnaire was undertaken to provide qualitative data pre and post explicit teaching of the Thinking Maps related to the task set. The Attitudinal Questionnaire sought to establish several things, including:

- feelings about writing (set tasks and 'free' writing)
- Thoughts about whether they have good ideas for writing tasks
- Knowledge of maps best to use for writing tasks (assessed before and after explicit teaching of maps related to the task)
- Whether they felt maps helped them to write better
- What they find hard about writing

Following the unsupported writing, the task entitled 'During my Easter holidays I....' was delivered to pupils and the use of a **Circle Map** to 'thought shower'

what pupils did during the Easter holidays was introduced. Hyerle [1995] has made it clear that:

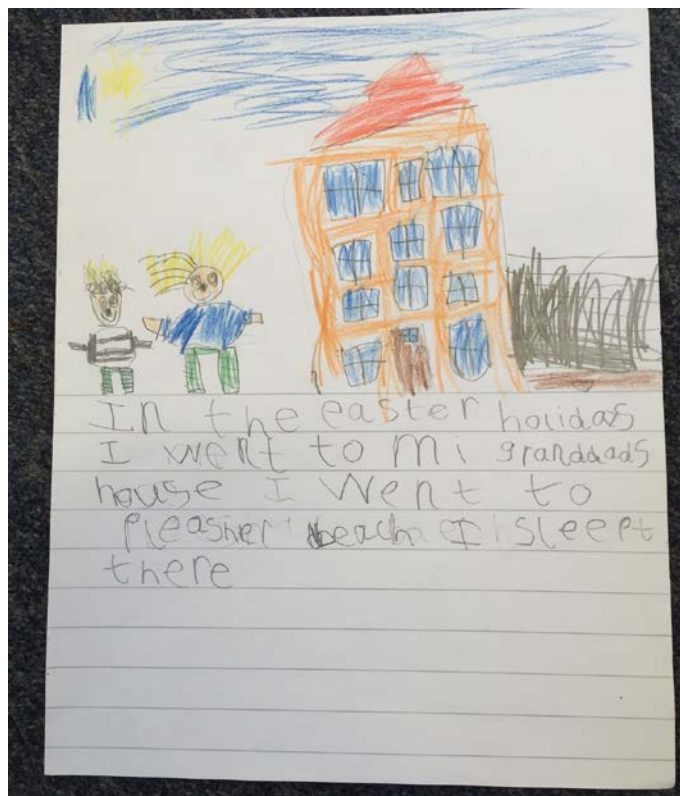
'A Circle Map helps define words or things in context and presents points of view.'

Pupils were encouraged to choose one specific occasion over the Easter break to focus on and asked again to use a Circle Map to record the things that they did on that occasion thus expanding their ideas yet channeling their thinking. Pupils were introduced to a Flee Map to sequence and plan their recount. This was taught and modeled explicitly for pupils beforehand and pupils had previously experienced using a Flee map in order to sequence a retell of the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

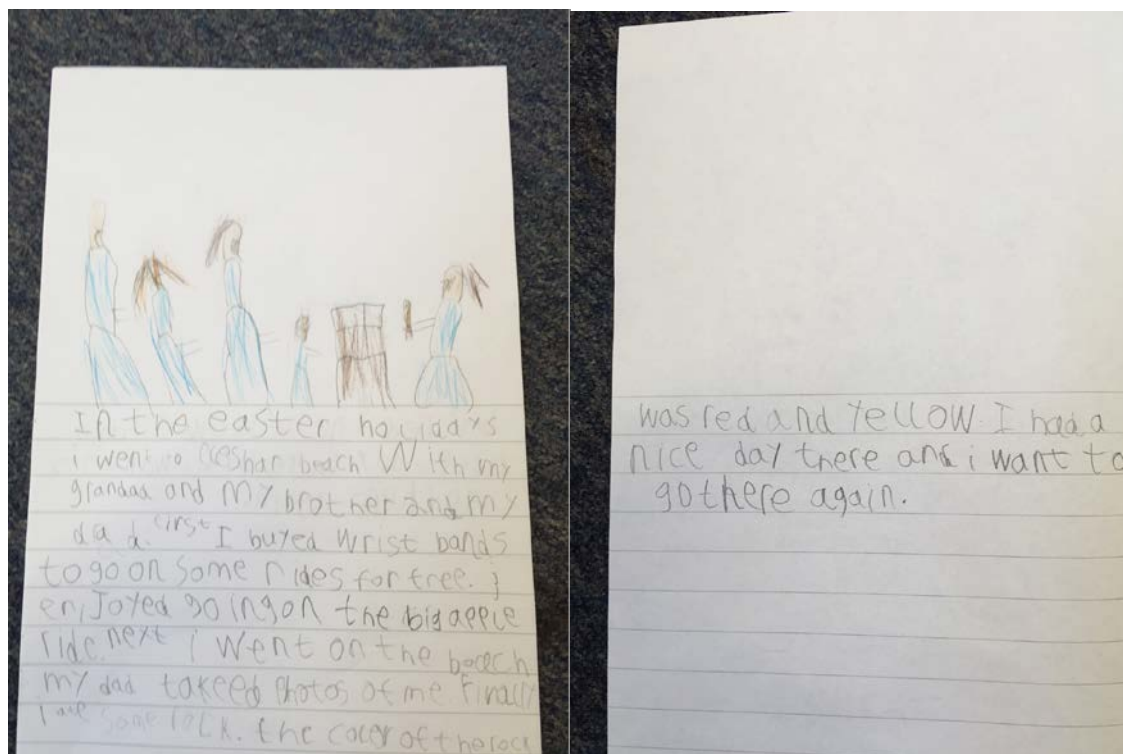
Pupils were encouraged to write the beginning of their recount on a **Flee map** beginning with 'During the Easter holidays....' and then to structure their writing into three sections; beginning, middle and end. Having maps to structure thought and sequence was intended to help planning.

Results and Conclusions

The example below was typical of work done in the baseline test.

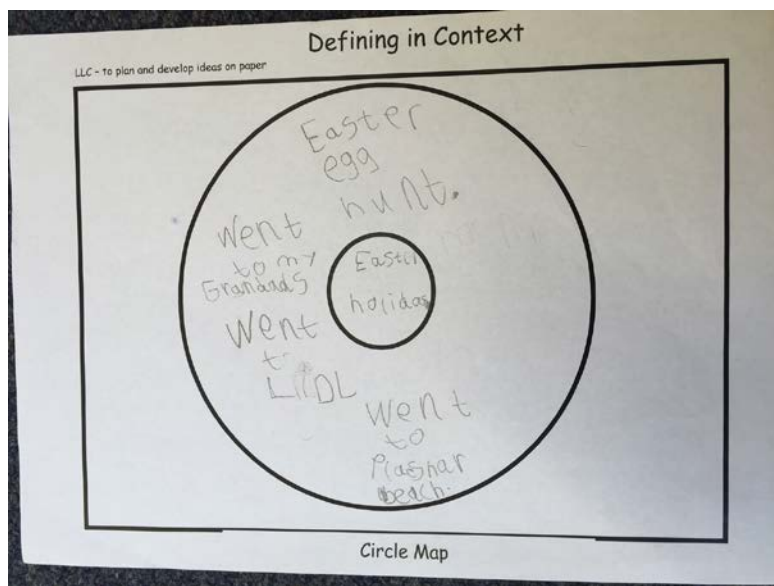


The writing is brief and more care has been given to the detailed drawing. The facts have been written but without elaboration. However, after using thinking maps we have a different effect:



This time more details have been picked out as planning has enabled the writer to list more incident and to use more vivid detail such as colour and emotional response [*enjoyed, nice day*]. The writer has become more engaged and given us the sense of the day with mention of relatives and picking up of finer detail such as his father taking photographs. If we compare typical planning of bubble and flee maps we can see how the children have been encouraged to use recall and sequencing of events to structure writing,

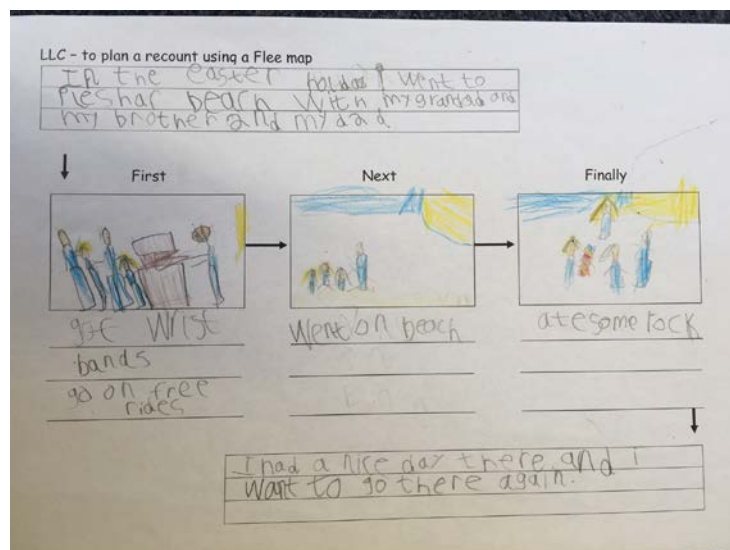
The study has demonstrated that using Thinking Maps to support creative writing not only improves the quality of written work content but gives pupils a structure to follow. This also gives pupils the confidence to work with greater independence during tasks. As a class teacher I have witnessed my MAT pupils are becoming increasingly independent during writing activities, Thinking Maps channel thinking and enable them to structure their writing through planning different stages.



Circle maps are a simple device for gathering material but the flee map allows for deeper thinking through sequencing and recall as below:

There is scope to continue to measure the quality of pupils' writing using 'Thinking Maps' by modelling and suggesting that pupils use a Bubble Map to come up with interesting describing words to enhance their writing further. The planning stage of the writing process is the perfect opportunity for students to use thinking maps to enhance their writing. Thinking maps allow students to plan their writing by organising their ideas before starting the

process. The flow map enabled pupils to expand on the events and the tree map allowed for more in-depth ideas and a clarity with sequencing.



The drawings help with the construction of the narrative by isolating key elements. This visualisation and choosing key moments supports Buckley's [1981] view that:

'Students spend so much time trying to come up with ideas to write about, without having much luck, that they end up hating writing. Using mapping as a strategy gives students a simple and quick way to organize their thoughts.'

The next day I modelled how to take the ideas from the Flee map in order to create a block of text. This study contributes to the body of expertise who contend that explicit teaching of thinking maps has a positive effect on year 1 pupil's creative writing. Using mapping to organize thoughts is useful as Hyerle points out.

Questionnaires

- All of the pupils questioned indicated that they enjoyed 'free writing' and responses of what they enjoyed writing included 'I enjoy writing cards' 'I enjoy writing questions' 'I like writing lists'

- When asked where they get their writing ideas from responses included ' I get my ideas from movies' I get my ideas from books' 'I find it hard to think of ideas'
- 50% of the sample indicated that they find it hard to think of ideas for their writing
- 50% of the sample indicated that they weren't clear which maps were suited to creative writing tasks.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Thinking maps are useful tools in sequencing narrative and picking out key moments in the narrative.
- Several children have consciously acknowledged the importance of visualizing and isolating events in order to construct a story
- Modelling processes is an important tool for teachers
- More exploration needs to be done matching tasks to maps.

Bibliography

Judebrigley.co.uk/blog

Buckley, Boyle, [1981] *Mapping the writing journey*, California: California University,

