

Using the method of mind mapping in the Institute of Education and Communication of the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague

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The need to find a method of a logical and systematic arrangement of information arises from the long-term experience of the educational staff of the Institute of Education and Communication ("IEC"). A certain group of students, practice training teachers in particular, prepare for consultations by learning the whole passages of the respective textbooks or electronic support by heart. The knowledge acquired in this way is not very long-lasting and in practice it is almost inapplicable. There is no context with other topics, no systematic knowledge of basic concepts and in the subject matter learned in this way, the students are not able to trace for instance the hierarchy of the concepts used.

The method that may help solve this problem is mind mapping. Mind maps represent a specific way of taking notes allowing to capture clearly the structure of the problem to be solved both in terms of individual elements of the structure and their mutual links.

The author of the method of mind mapping is a Canadian psychologist Tony Buzan. In his statement: "A mind map is the most powerful organizational tool of our brain", he expresses the findings of his long-term study of the function of the brain. In his view, mind maps respect the natural qualities of our mind.

- Information is in our mind formulated simply and only through links with other details it may snowball;
- ideas, visions and feelings are for us much more motivating than simple words;
- thinking is not a linear process, but it forms a complex structure where a significant role is played by links between individual elementary details and their context.

In addition, mind maps can help eliminate certain marked drawbacks of a linear record which we usually use and which is characterized by:

- impossibility to add to notes in the text written from top to bottom;
- pages full of text that contain a lot of redundant information;
- lack of clarity of the record. Although it is possible to use numbers to make the structure more transparent, the orientation in the full text is still difficult;
- impossibility to trace the links between recorded details. The structure consists not only of individual elements, but particularly of their mutual links and a linear record simply does not allow adding links without loss of clarity; it is monotonous, uninspiring. Have you noticed that all documents or papers look almost the same? Expert opinion on a business plan is the same as the plan of a holiday trip abroad ...

These disadvantages are amplified when it is necessary to draw up a more complex project comprising many elements that are interlinked and interdependent, where the structure should be clear and comprehensible at first sight. This is a typical case when we can use mind maps. In this we must follow several very simple principles:

- The problem (motto, heading) is in the centre of the page allowing to develop the structure in all directions.

- The record runs around from the right upper corner downwards. This convention introduces a common beginning of the record – similarly as in case of a linear record, we start from the left upper corner.
- Individual ideas are arranged around the centre and further ramify to create branches that develop, enrich and specify the idea of the main branch or are linked to it.
- Write only what is most important, a plain fact.
- Write legibly in block letters using different colours.
- The links between the elements that are interrelated are shown by lines, symbols ...
- Use icons, drawings, symbols, because when returning to the map any such drawing or symbol will take you quickly back to the mood in which you were when creating the map and thus you will recall more things.

What are the advantages of using maps? As we think not only of what to write but also where to write it, we remember the information for a longer time. In addition, we work with icons, drawings and colours which fix the concepts and make them more long-lasting. The process of thinking and remembering involves both brain hemispheres. We can see the whole outline of the problem at the first sight (this is the problem and these are its individual components). Pictures inspire, we better recall details, imagination works better. If we get a new idea, it is not a problem to add a note in the map. The map allows to capture a lot of information and the respective relations in a clearly arranged way.

The method may be used by anybody who needs to make a quick decision, to resolve problems in a creative way or who wishes to capture different types of information in a clearly arranged way – by a businessmen in solving routine problems of their company, by creative workers in solving their tasks, by students in taking notes during lessons, by directors preparing for a meeting with their colleagues ... People who start to use this method gradually develop their own handwriting, their own symbols and marks that will make the work even quicker.

Mind maps are used also to identify and evaluate new ideas. They help to strictly map and define the problem, its arrangement, classification and evaluation and facilitate the work on new ideas.

Thanks to their efficiency, mind maps already have their electronic version and the respective software for their development is available. Although in this way they lost some of its originality, the computer version offers additional benefits: the possibility to interlink all data in the computer by means of maps, quick modification of the map, map sharing with others ...

The introduction and application of mind maps in the work with IEC students met with a positive response. The students have gradually became aware of the above mentioned advantages of this method and started creatively to identify suggestions how and where to use mind maps in teachers' work. Valuable were suggestions to design mind maps together with students.

References:

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