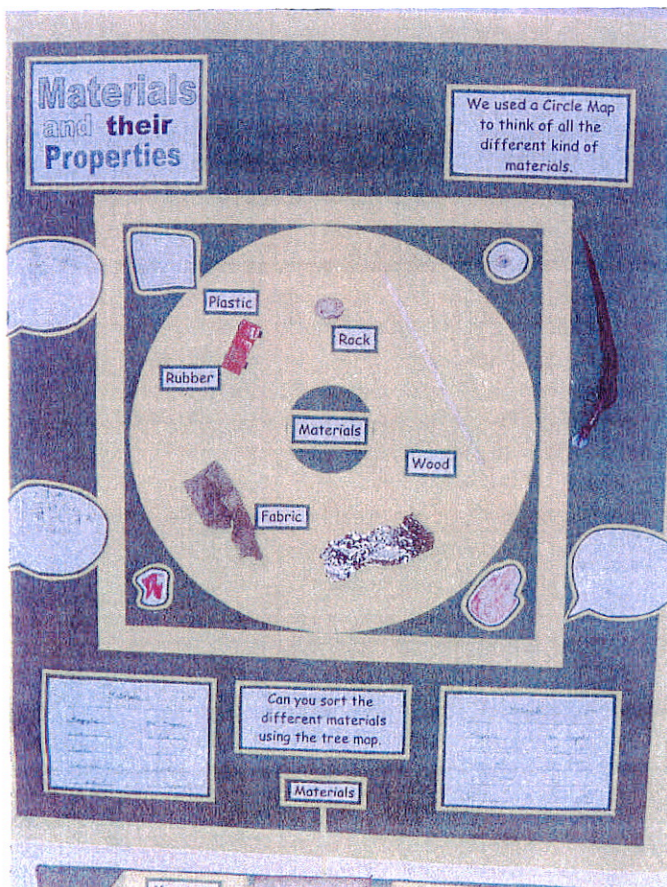


Thinking maps in action

Bob Burden and Judy Silver visit a primary school in Hampshire that has taken on Thinking Maps in a big way



Thinking Foundation. www.thinkingfoundation.org

If you were given the task of running a tough primary school set in the middle of an urban housing estate with a high proportion of socially disadvantaged families, how would you set about it? For Simon Cooper-Hind the answer was obvious, if somewhat unconventional. Relishing the challenge he had been set, Simon was convinced from the start that the school's pupils were capable of achieving far more than might normally be expected of them. He therefore set about raising expectations of both the children and their teachers and began to put into operation his firm belief that children can best be helped to become effective learners through being taught, by stimulating teachers, how to learn. Modelling the kind of creative-teaching approach to which he was committed, Simon encouraged his teaching staff to trust their own instincts and break out from the National Curriculum and Literacy Hour.

At first the going was tough, as the staff at Nightingale School searched for different ideas and approaches to encourage their pupils to become active learners and thinkers. It was not until a visit to the school by trainer Gill Hubble, however, that Simon fully began to recognise the need to work towards becoming a 'thinking school' – a school in which staff and pupils value and practise effective thinking across the curriculum. Inspired by Gill's description of her school in New Zealand, Simon realised that only by developing a whole-school approach to thinking could Nightingale School move on to a whole new level.

When the opportunity arose to use Nightingale as the base for an INSET day for local schools, run by David Hyerle, the creator of *Thinking Maps*, Simon was able to put in place one of the most important missing pieces of his particular jigsaw. Hyerle's *Thinking Maps* have been constructed on the foundation of years of research and extensive piloting

As well as providing an valuable set of tools with which to guide the pupils' thinking and problem-solving, the *Thinking Maps* also made possible the construction of a framework within which the children's National Curriculum work could be guided in creative ways.

The *Thinking Maps* and some of their possible applications were taught by Simon to all of his staff following a more intensive training course organised by *Kestrel Consulting*. Some teachers were highly sceptical at first but all agreed to explore ways in which the Maps could be introduced to every Year Group of pupils from the early years upwards. By making this whole-school commitment, the different uses of the Maps became the focus of hours of sharing and discussion between the teachers – and then their learning support assistants. In this way, the use of *Thinking Maps* became established as a key element in teacher's work with children and in the the children's independent learning.

Observing the outcomes

We visited Nightingale School on a wet and dreary December day of the kind guaranteed to have a negative effect on many children's behaviour. The school community was also in the process of preparing to move from its temporary portacabins into a new building. It was not the best day to expect the best.

Nevertheless, we were greeted politely by a group of youngsters who chatted away pleasantly to us as they led us through the labyrinth of old and new buildings. The paper chains on the floor and glitter in the sand boxes in several of the classrooms gave the impression of a school not too dissimilar to many others up and down the country but it soon became apparent that around the walls of every room were examples of David Hyerle's *Thinking Maps*, which had been applied in a variety of different ways – from reception through to key stages 1 and 2. As well as providing examples of the children's work, the Maps have become a tool for teachers to display such diverse material as spelling patterns (in tree maps), topic vocabulary (in circle and bubble maps), and even, we discover, the structure for the headteacher's report to school governors on the year's activities. Thus, it might be argued with some justification that everyone is involved in the culture of using these maps to structure thought and enrich communication throughout the school.

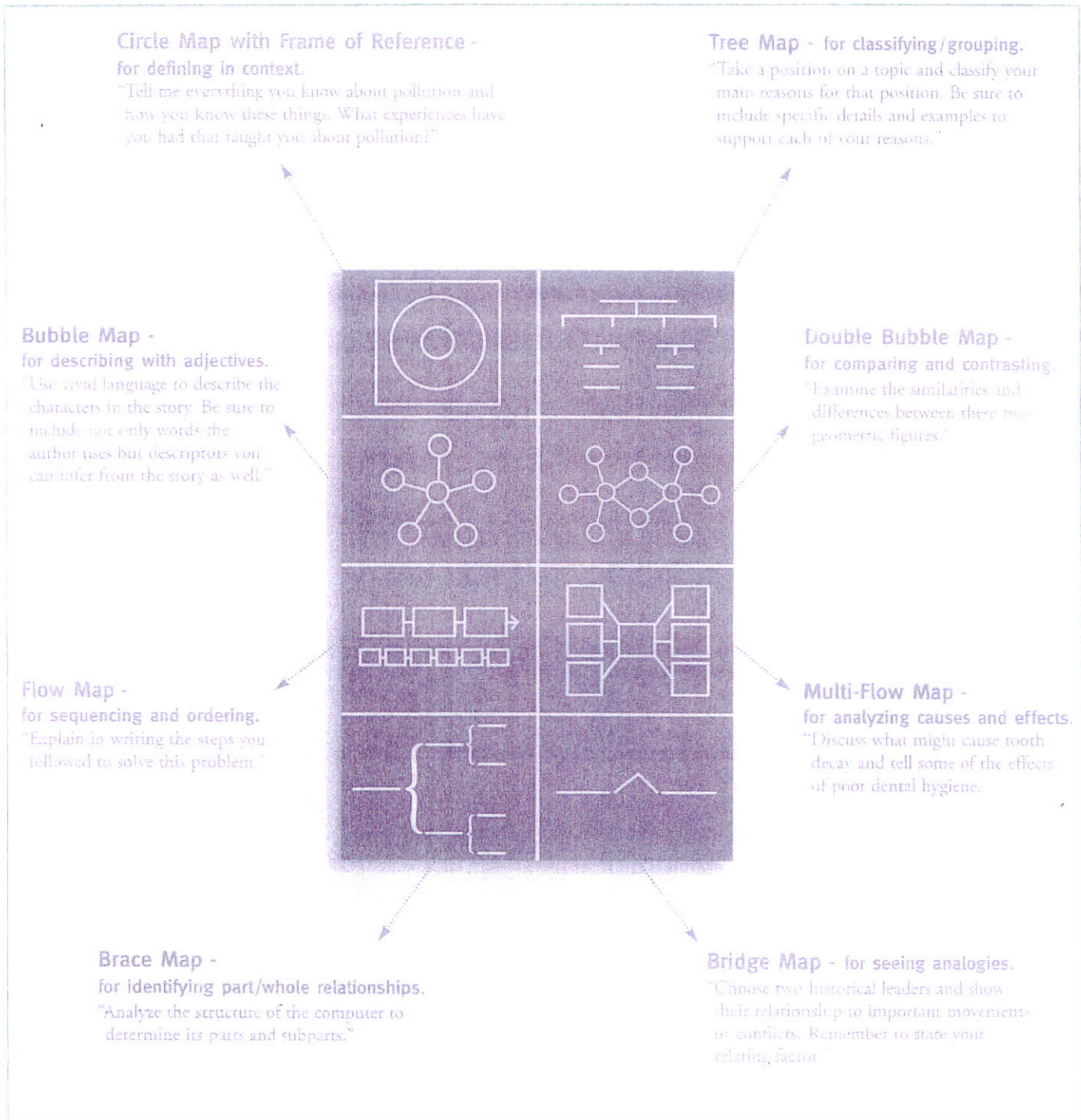


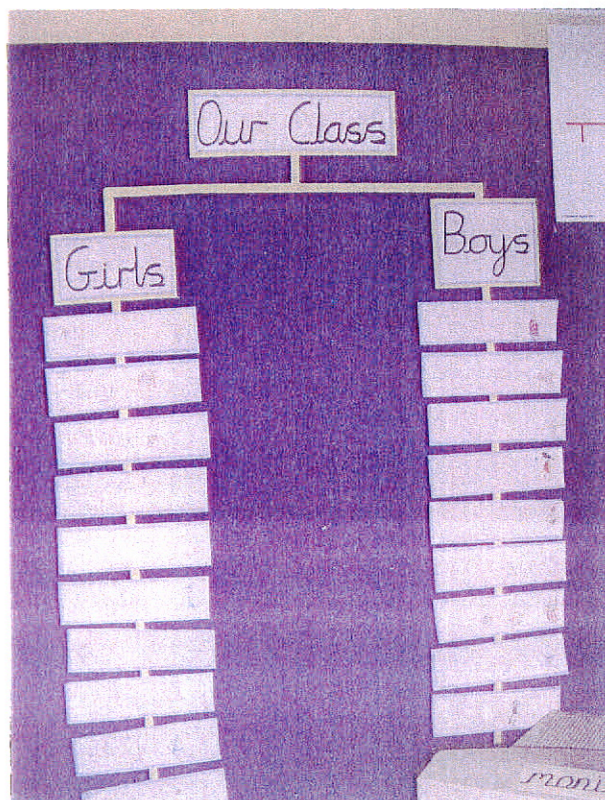
As we toured this school in the midst of the excitement of Christmas preparations, we were impressed by the calm, on-task behaviour of the vast majority of the children and with the friendly, confident manner with which they were able to talk about their work and how they had used *Thinking Maps* to structure their thoughts. It was evident that the process was already in operation in year 1 and had become firmly internalised by years 5 and 6 so that pupils were able to use *Thinking Maps* without instruction from the teacher. Here we could see clear examples of the Vygotskian process of moving from social interaction to the development of independent learners.

What are thinking Maps?

Thinking Maps, developed by Dr. David Hyerle, are visual thinking tools. The eight *Thinking Maps* correspond to eight important thinking processes (see Figure 1). *Thinking Maps* are based the insight that the one common thread that binds all teachers from nursery through to postgraduate is that they all teach the same thought processes. In nursery they may call one of these processes grouping or sorting. Later, they may refer to it as categorising: main idea, supporting ideas and details. But whatever the label, it is the thought process of classification – one of the eight distinct *Thinking Maps*. The aim of *Thinking Maps* is to develop a common visual language for the eight thinking processes. Teachers and students can use the Maps individually or in various combinations at all levels and in all subjects. For more information on thinking maps, see the Kestrel Consulting website at: www.thinking.co.uk

The Eight Thinking Maps®





The clarity of thought in one boy's articulation of how and why he would select one or another of the *Thinking Maps* to help him with his work was extremely impressive. The boy was in year 3 randomly and chosen at random by us to provide an explanation for what he was doing. Whilst informing us that the *bubble map* and *circle map* were his favourites, he also made it clear that he still needed to do a flow map before writing up a topic. He told us that this made his task both easier and more complicated, but that he liked hard work. He was keen to discuss with us the merits of de Bono's *Thinking Hats*, another tool in the school's thinking skills repertoire, and told us that his favourite was the yellow hat because it made him think happy thoughts! This boy was thinking and talking about his thinking – clearly something he was used to doing. Furthermore, he was able, with very little prompting, to discuss enthusiastically the relative merits and disadvantages of using one tool over another. Such meta-cognitive behaviour, it would seem, has been adopted by children as well as staff.

We were given the opportunity to interview four members of the teaching team with differing responsibilities across the school. They all told us, in their different ways, how effective they considered the thinking-skills approach to have been in structuring their own teaching and fostering independent learning and pro-social behaviour in the children. Simon told us that the last time he had excluded a child from the school had been more than two-and-a-half years ago. The ethos of the school now made it 'OK

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to be a boffin'. Alongside the improvement in general behaviour and courtesy has been an increased emphasis on creativity. All these aspects of the school culture are promoted and supported by the teachers.

Where do they go from here?

Helen and Amanda are two teachers who have been given the responsibility of leading a sustained development project. Building upon the children's developing skills in using the Hyerle and de Bono thinking tools, the aim is now to move towards independent learning and creativity which moves beyond the explicit use of tools. However, these processes need monitoring and evaluating. How can anyone tell whether the observed qualitative changes in the children are internalised, permanent, transferable? These issues and challenges were discussed with Jane Molton, assistant head and SENCO, who has been given the responsibility of evaluating the effects of becoming a thinking school. We were able to share with her some ways of developing an action-research approach to monitor the children's progress in a number of dimensions as they moved up through the school. These dimensions were:

- creativity
- feelings about the learning environment in their class
- attitudes towards the thinking maps

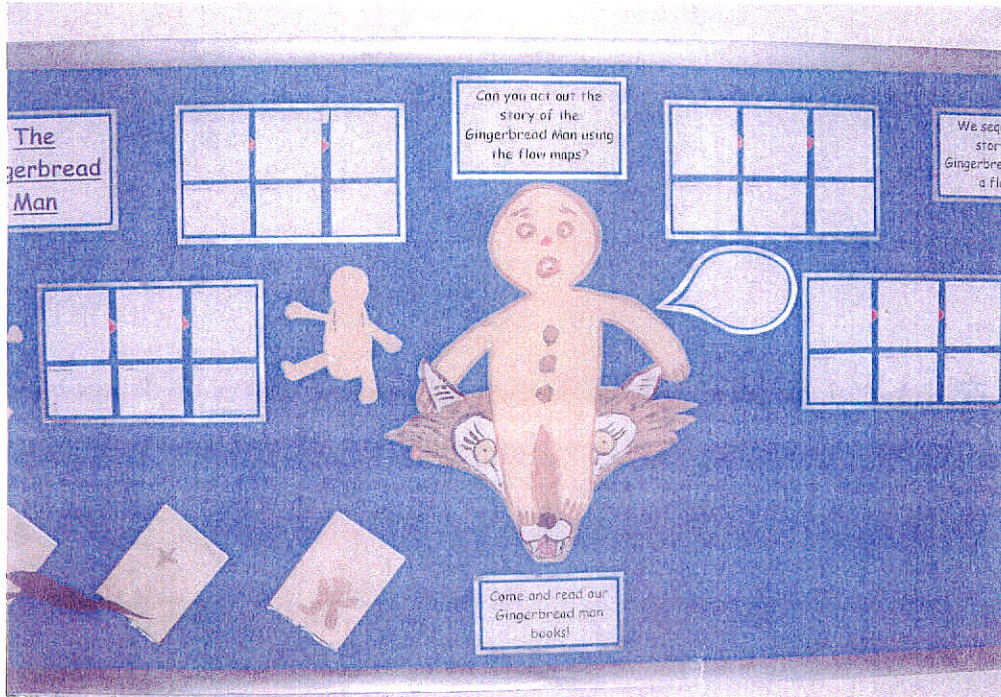
The possible advantages of focusing on the differential progress of small, selected groups of 'exceptional' children at both ends of the ability range were also considered. A portfolio of recorded 'critical incidents' was felt to be a potentially valuable tool here. At the sharp end of the wedge, the overall improvements in KS1 and 2 SATs scores over the past four years (with one strange and inexplicable 'blip') provide hard evidence that something very positive has been happening at Nightingale School. How far this has carried over into the secondary school stage is as yet unrecorded but is surely an area worth investigating further.

At the end of this school year Simon Cooper-Hind has decided to move on from Nightingale in another professional direction. This is the point at which yet more questions will come to the fore. There is no doubt that school improvement and effectiveness is predicated on strong and creative leadership - qualities which all of his staff would be likely to attribute to Simon. But whether the qualities of the thinking school are able to be maintained with a completely new leader, only time will tell.

Judy Silver is an educational consultant and director of The Independent Centre for Mediated Learning (ICML). Bob Burden is professor emeritus of education at Exeter University.

Thinking Maps Gallery

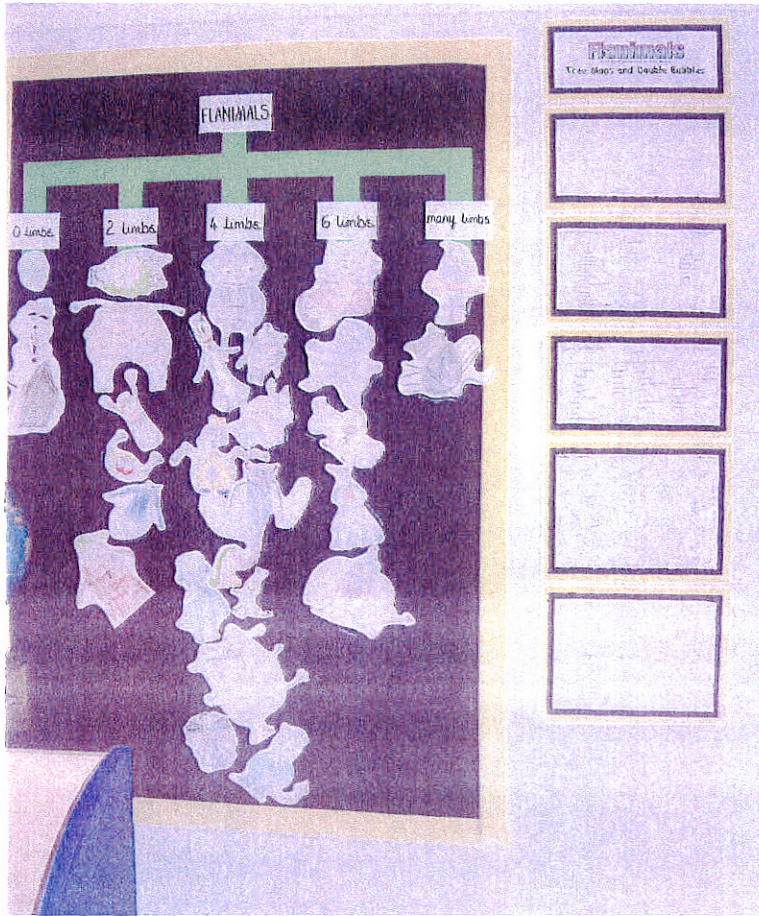
Example of Thinking Maps taken from a variety of schools



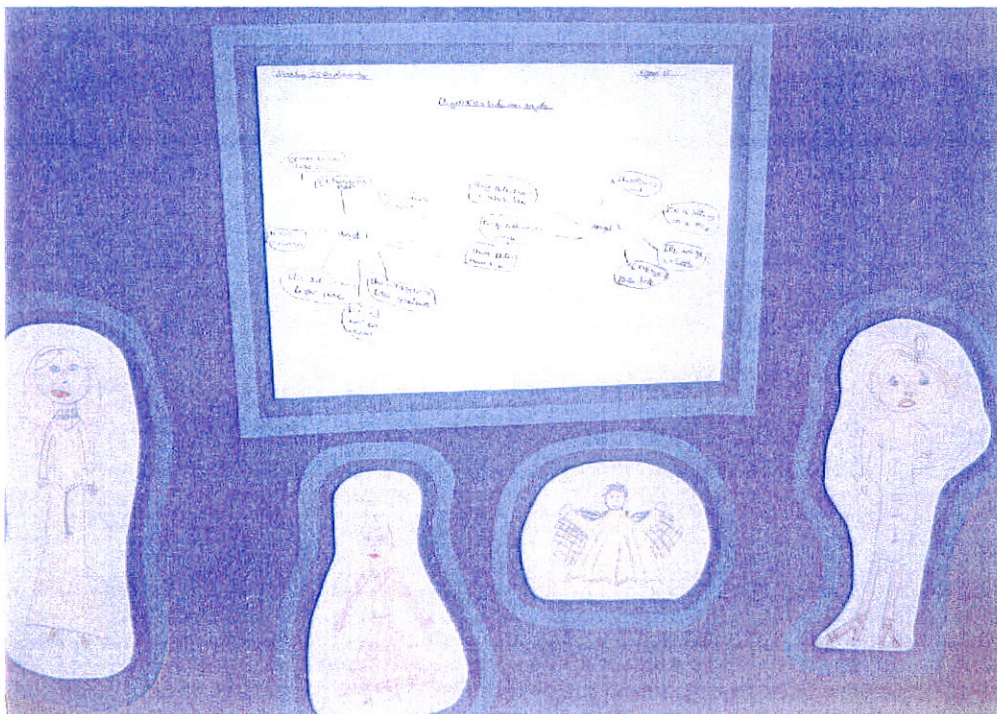
Flow Map



Circle Map



Tree Map



Double Bubble Map