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THE USE OF *"MIND MAPS"* IN THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
by *Mady Casco*

ABSTRACT

Since British psychologist Tony Buzan first introduced "*Mind Maps"* in the late Sixties, the graphic tool has proved to be an excellent resource for teachers of foreign languages who face the challenge of enabling learners to communicate ideas in the target language naturally, meaningfully and assertively.This paper examines the applications and benefits of Buzan's tool and illustrates how "*Mind Maps"* can be adapted and implemented in the teaching of foreign languages with two classroom examples.

INTRODUCTION

Enabling learners of a foreign language to understand the target language and communicate ideas naturally, meaningfully and assertively is one of the main challenges teachers face in their profession. In tackling this challenge, teachers on many occasions are required to implement strategies and resources from other fields such as psychology.

One of the tools that can be implemented and adapted in the teaching of foreign languages is a *"Mind Map".* Learners can use *"Mind Maps"* to brainstorm and learn vocabulary. Foreign language teachers can design and use *"Mind Maps"* in their classes to scaffold listening and reading comprehension, develop the learner's oral fluency, empower the learner, foster a sense of self-efficacy and consequently maximize the learner's autonomy.

DEFINITION OF *"MIND MAPS"*

A *"Mind Map"* is a graphic tool which contains a central key word or image and secondary ideas that radiate from the central idea as branches. The key idea crystallises the subject of attention while the branches represent the connections established with the central idea, forming a connected nodal structure. (See graph 1).

"Mind Maps" were developed by the British psychologist Tony Buzan in the late 60´s in an attempt to help students take notes effectively. According to Buzan, a *"Mind Map"* is an associative network of images and words which *"harnesses the full range of cortical skills: word, image, number, logic, rhythm, colour and spatial awareness in a single, uniquely powerful technique".*(Buzan & Buzan 1996:81). He claims that a *"Mind Map"* can unleash the mind´s potential because it mirrors the associative functioning of the brain which is radiant and holistic.

Buzan (1996) advocated a particular procedure to design a "*Mind Map."* One should start with a picture and a word in the centre of the paper and and then add key words related to the central topic. The keywords that branch out from the centre must be printed on curved lines which should be the length of the word. The use of pictures, colours, symbols and dimension is highly recommended to convey emphasis and facilitate recall.

Among the many advocates of this tool, Michael Gelb (1998) states that *"Mind Maps"* facilitate and foster the association of ideas enabling the organization and clarity of thoughts. Furthermore, the shape a map adopts disrupts linearity and the prioritizing of concepts. *"Mind Maps"* have also proved very effective as a learning aid by helping learners retrieve information from their memory. Students apply maps in note taking, essay writing and exam preparation to summarise, revise and recall key concepts. Businessmen implement maps to write their companies´ mission statements, for project planning, organization of meetings and presentations.

Graph 1:

Graph 1
Mind Map on "Mind Maps"
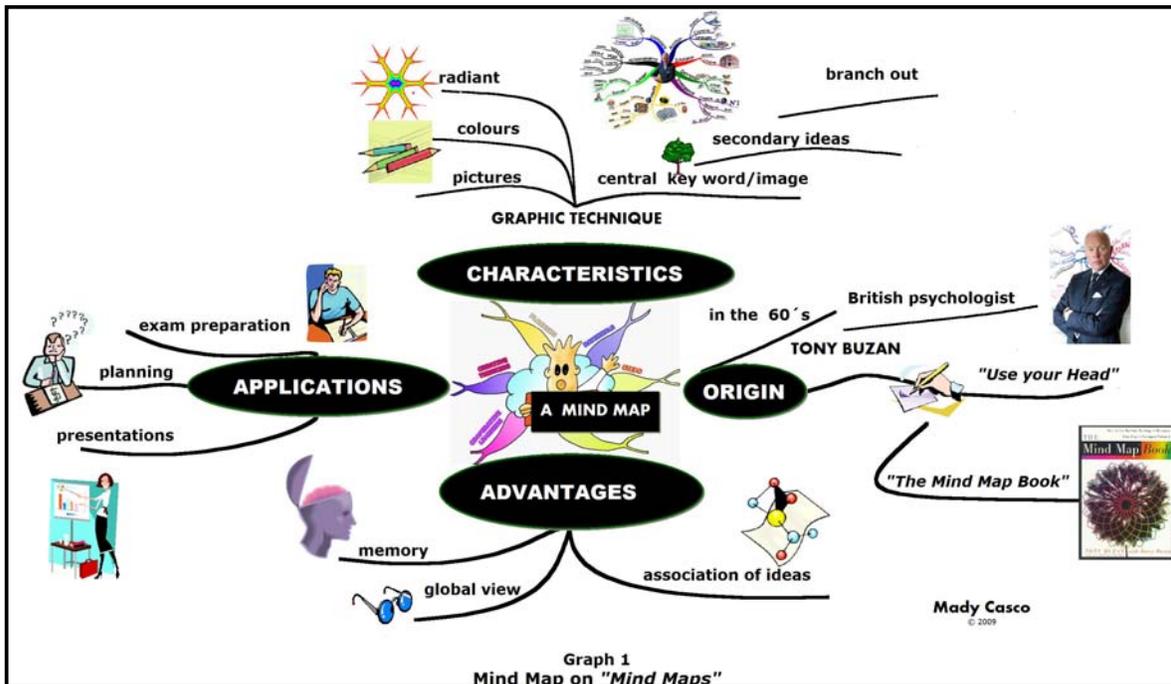
"MIND MAPS" IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

"Mind Maps" were first applied to foreign language teaching in the 90´s as an aid to activate prior knowledge on a certain topic and help learners to organize and recall items of vocabulary. When used to activate prior knowledge, a teacher asks learners what they know about a certain topic and the learners brainstorm associations which the teacher writes on the board creating a a collective map. When used for vocabulary acquisition, teachers first ask learners to brainstorm items of vocabulary associated with a certain topic and then learners are asked to create their own maps instead of the more traditional approach of creating glossaries with new vocabulary.

A different approach to working with maps in foreign language teaching is when the teacher designs a map for the learner to use and expand upon rather than the learner being the one who creates the map initially. In the examples below you will see how a teacher designed and implemented "Mind Maps" in two different teaching contexts: teaching English as a foreign language to teenagers and adults and teaching Spanish as a second language to adults.

EXAMPLES:

Example 1:

Learner: Teenager/adult learning English as a foreign language in one to one lessons.
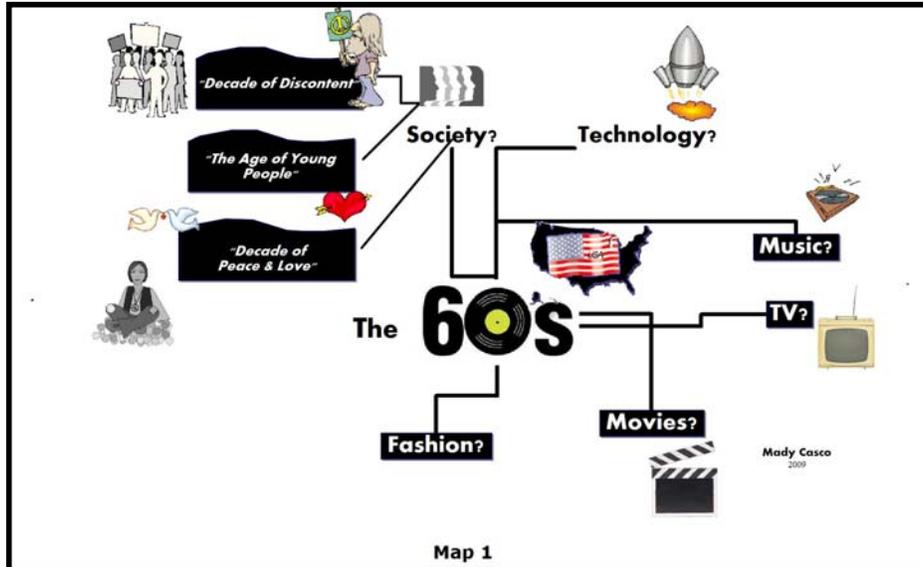**Level:** Intermediate
Content-based project: "The 60´s"

Class 1:
Task 1: The teacher plays the songs "Sugar", "Twist and Shout" and "Mrs Robinson" to lead the learner to predict what the topic of the next project will be.

Task 2: The teacher shows the learner **Map 1** and asks the following:
"What do you know about The 60´s?"

Map 1

First, the teacher allows time for the learner to look at the map, establish connections and choose a keyword to start speaking. If, after an alloted time, the learner cannot say much, the teacher makes reference to the key concepts displayed on the map and asks the learner the following questions:

1. What was society like in The 60´s in the United States?
2. What do you know about technology in the 60´s?
3. What was fashion like in The 60´s?
4. What TV programmes were popular in the 60´s in the United States?
5. What songs were played on the radio?
6. Why were The 60´s called the *"Decade of Discontent"*?

Task 3: The learner listens to someone reading aloud an article on *The 60´s* and adds secondary ideas to the keywords provided on the map.

The 60´s

The 60´s were an exciting, revolutionary and turbulent time of great social and technological change. It was a time of assassinations, unforgettable fashion, new musical styles, civil rights, women's liberation, a controversial war in Vietnam, the first man on the moon, peace marches, flower power, drugs, great TV & film and sexual freedom.

Some people called it the "decade of discontent". There were many demonstrations against the war and race riots in cities such as Detroit and Los Angeles. Other people called it the decade of "peace, love and harmony" because of the peace movement and the emergence of the "flower children". To some, it was acid trips and mind expansion. For teenagers, it was the decade of rock and roll from Elvis to the Beatles.

The 60´s were the age of young people. Seventy million children from the post-war baby boomers became teenagers and young adults.These young people wanted change. The changes affected education, values, lifestyles, laws, and entertainment. Many of the revolutionary ideas introduced in The 60´s continue to evolve today.

Article written by Mady Casco
adapted from
http://www.sixties.net/sixties.htm

Task 4: The learner reads the article on *The 60´s* he listened to previously in Task 3 and adds to the keywords provided on the map.
Task 5: The learner reads the statements below and decides if the information is TRUE, FALSE or NOT GIVEN.

1. According to the writer of the article, everybody was in favour of the War in Vietnam.
2. The writer mentions who was assassinated in the 60´s.
3. The writer states clearly why people protested.
4. The writer makes a clear reference to the use of drugs in the 60´s.
5. After reading the article, you have a clear idea of who "flower children" were.
6. According to the writer, there were many female young adults and teenagers.

Article: Casco. M. (2009)The Use of "Mind Maps" in the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Task 6: The learner uses **Map 1** as a guide to explain what he has learnt about *The 60´s.*

Class 2:
Task 1: The learner uses **Map 1** to summarise what he remembers about the decade.
Task 2: The learner watches two video clips on *The 60´s* containing information about music, movies and TV programmes and makes additional connections on the map.

Class 3:
Task: The learner uses **Map 1** to prepare a speech on the decade.

Class 4:
Task: The learner uses **Map 1** to write a paragraph on the decade.

Example 2:
Learner: Adult learning Spanish as a second language in one to one lessons.
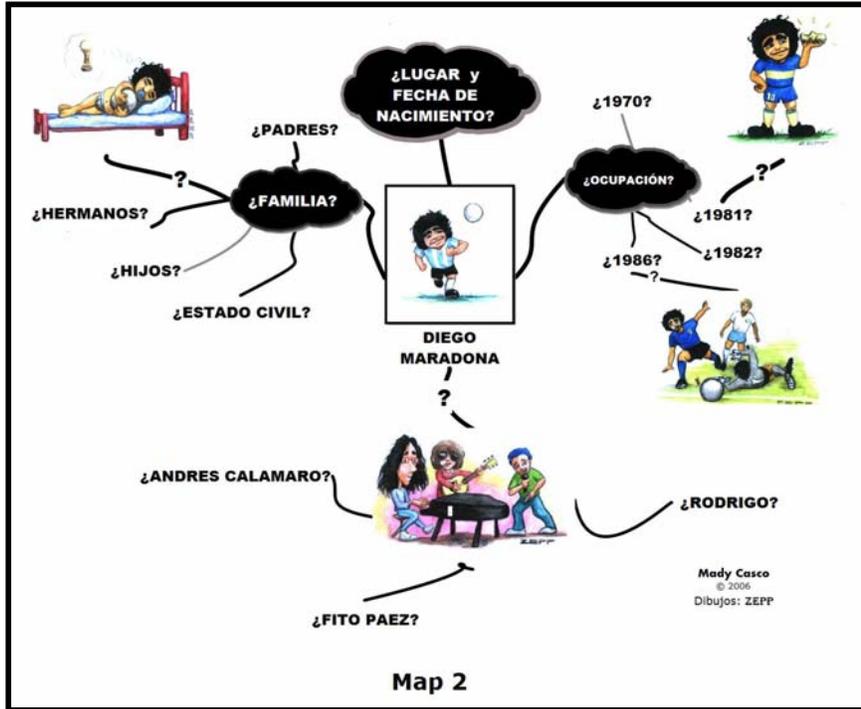**Level:** Pre intermediate
Content-based project: *"Mitos Argentinos: Diego Maradona"*

Class 1:
Task 1: The teacher introduces the topic of the new project: "*Mitos Argentinos".*

Task 2: The teacher shows the learner **Map 2** and asks the following:
"What do you know about Diego Maradona?" (the questions are asked in Spanish)

Map 2

Task 3: The learner listens to someone reading aloud an article on *Diego Maradona* and adds secondary ideas to the keywords provided on the map.

Mitos Argentinos: Diego Maradona

Diego Maradona es argentino. Nació el 30 de octubre de 1960 en Lanús en un barrio muy pobre. Lanús queda en las afueras de la Capital Federal. Sus padres eran muy humildes. En un reportaje dijo: "El mejor regalo que tuve fue la primera pelota de fútbol. Tenía tres años y dormí abrazado a ella toda la noche".

Su madre se llama Dalma y su padre se llama Diego. Diego Maradona tiene 7 hermanos: 5 mujeres y 2 varones. En la actualidad, Maradona está divorciado. Su ex esposa se llama Claudia. Maradona tiene 2 hijas: Dalma y Gianina.

Diego empezó a jugar al futbol en 1970. Su primer equipo fue Cebollitas. En Cebollitas jugó 136 partidos sin perder ninguno. Cuando tenía 14 años declaró a un periodista: "Mis sueños son dos: mi primer sueño es jugar en el mundial y el segundo es salir campeón."

Luego Diego jugó en Argentino Juniors. A los 17 años debutó en la selección argentina y a los 21 años debutó en Boca Juniors. Ese mismo año Boca ganó el Torneo Metropolitano y Maradona se convirtió en el goleador del campeonato. En 1982 Maradona fue a jugar al Barcelona de España y luego al Nápoles de Italia. En 1986 Maradona recibió la copa de la FIFA por el campeonato mundial. En este mundial Maradona hizo su gol más famoso. Maradona esquivó a seis jugadores antes de hacer el gol.

Maradona es el argentino más famoso y es considerado el mejor jugador en la historia del fútbol argentino. Muchos artistas le dedicaron temas a Maradona. Uno de ellos es Andrés Calamaro quien escribió el tema: "Maradona". Fito Paez, un músico de Rosario, compuso "Dale Alegría a mi Corazón" y Rodrigo, un cantante cordobés quien murió en el 2001, le dedicó el tema "La Mano de Dios".

Text written by Mady Casco

Task 4: The learner reads the article on *Diego Maradona* he has listened to in Task 3 and adds to the keywords provided on the map.

Task 5: The learner reads the statements below and decides if the information is TRUE, FALSE or NOT GIVEN.

1. Diego Maradona nació en un barrio rico.
2. Los padres de Diego Maradona son italianos.
3. Diego es hijo único.
4. Diego tuvo su primera pelota de futbol cuando cumplió 10 años.
5. En la actualidad, Maradona está casado y tiene dos hijas.
6. Maradona empezó a jugar al futbol cuando tenía 15 años.
7. *Cebollitas* es el nombre de su mejor amigo.
8. Maradona nunca jugó en River Plate.
9. Andrés Calamaro es amigo de Maradona.
10. El cantante Rodrigo escribió la canción *"La mano de Dios"*.

Task 6: The learner uses the M**ap 2** as a guide to explain what he has learnt about *Diego Maradona*.

Class 2:
Task: The learner uses **Map 2** to summarise what he remembers about *Diego Maradona*.

Class 3:
Task: The learner uses **Map 2** to prepare a speech on *Diego Maradona*.

Class 4:
Task: The learner uses **Map 2** to write a paragraph on *Diego Maradona*.

ANALYSIS OF EXAMPLES

Theoretical Background

In the two abovementioned teaching situations, the teacher has implemented a content-based approach to teaching foreign languages. According to Richards & Rogers (2001), learners learn a foreign language more successfully when they are presented with target language material which is meaningful and contextualized and is seen as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself. A content-based lesson starts with the teacher activating the learner´s prior knowledge. As stated by David Ausubel (cited in Brown 1980: 70) prior knowledge activates meaningful learning. Meaningful learning brings about meaningful language. As Brinton, Snow & Wesche (1989) argue, what is done in the language class is geared to stimulate the learners to think through the target language.

In both cases, the roles adopted by the teacher are those of a mediator, facilitator, enabler and motivator. The teacher scaffolds knowledge and learning. The term *"Scaffolding"* was developed as a metaphor by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) to refer to the assistance a teacher or peer offers learners. In the process of scaffolding, the teacher helps the learners to master a task or concept which they are unable to grasp independently. The support provided by the teacher is given through the use of simplified language, teacher modelling and visuals. As is true with the scaffolding on a building, once the learners have mastered the task or concept, the teacher should slowly withdraw allowing the learners to become autonomous.

In the role of a motivator, the teacher can identify with Alan McLean´s framework of motivation. According to McLean (2003), teachers use four motivational drivers: engagement, relevant and meaningful curriculum, structure and autonomy. The teacher starts by engaging the learner by choosing a relevant and meaningful curriculum. Then, the teacher provides clarity by stating clear goals and revealing a structure which gives the learner a sense of security. Lastly, by constantly being shown their progress, the learners build a sense of self-efficacy and self-determination which empowers them and contributes to them developing autonomy.

Characteristics of the Maps used above:
Although the maps designed and used in the classes on *The 60´s* and *Diego Maradona* share several characteristics with Buzan's maps they differ from Buzan's maps in several aspects.

As in Buzan´s maps, the maps used in the examples abovementioned have a key central image or idea and keywords that branch out from the topic. They also contain pictures to faciltate recall. However, these maps do not respect Buzan´s principle of writing on the lines. Furthermore, in the above examples the lines connecting the central idea to the secondary ideas are not necessarily curved.

Interrogation marks have been added to create a cognitive conflict and foster the formulation of questions. Another innovation lies in the fact that the maps above used have been constructed by both the teacher and the learner. The teacher provides an initial version of a map which is then expanded upon by the learner.

Uses for Mind Maps:
The maps provided in the two examples have the following applications:

Engage the learner:
The map acts as a playbill announcing what comes next and draws the learner's attention to the topic. Furthermore, the map provides a structure to reduce the learner's anxiety when receiving input through listening and reading and when speaking.

Activate prior knowledge:
The use of images and keywords foster recollection of what the learner knows about the topic.

Encourage the learner to ask questions:
The map displays clearly what a learner knows and what he does not know about the topic. Images and interrogation marks widen the information gap and incite the need in the learner to find out what he does not know.

Scaffold reading and listening comprehension:
The map is a powerful tool to facilitate comprehension because if offers the learner a global view of what he is going to listen or read. Furthermore, the embedded cues contained in the map prompt the learner to form inferences that in turn act as an aid to understanding.

Scaffold speaking:
The map serves as a tool for the learner to organize his thoughts and speech. The different elements of the map can be easily linked and cross-referenced allowing the learner to create a different discourse each time the learner uses the map.

Assess oral production:
The same map implemented at other stages of the language course, can be used to get a new sample of the learner's production. By explaining the connections on the map, the learner will show if he has acquired new structures and lexical items. The production obtained with the aid of the map will reveal errors providing an information source for the teacher to reflect upon in her future practice.

Scaffold written production:
The map originally designed by the teacher and expanded upon by the learner may become the starting point to write a paragraph or an essay on the topic explored.

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Advantages & Benefits:

The maps used in the examples are multifunctional. They can be used for different purposes: prediction, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking and writing. Also, they can be applied with learners with different levels of proficiency in the target language.

The maps can be used to scaffold different sources of input. For example in the project *The 60´s*, **map 1** was used when reading the article in class 1 and when watching the video clips in class 2.

Using maps empowers the learner because it allows him to decide where to start and what to leave out. The possibility of making decisions develops a sense of self-efficacy and fosters autonomy.

Maps stimulate creativity. The learner says something different each time he uses the map.

CONCLUSION:

Tony Buzan's *"Mind Maps"* have proved to be an excellent resource for teachers and learners of foreign languages. His contribution has stimulated teachers to construct a tool that facilitates putting the concept of *"Scaffolding"* into action to empower learners.

As stated and illustrated above, *"Mind Maps"* can be designed and applied by teachers to face one of the most important challenges in the teaching of foreign languages: enabling learners to understand the target language and communicate ideas naturally, meaningfully and assertively.

Mady Casco
madycasco@gmail.com

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