Currently, pedagogical literature in French explores how to teach critical thinking (la pensée critique) as visual thinking (la pensée visuelle) and education at all levels of instruction are encouraged to use different mapping strategies such as mind-mapping, concept maps, or argument maps, to help today’s students hone their critical thinking skills, organize their knowledge, and structure their various types of presentations (oral, written, or mixed-media). As the 2016-2017 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows, I conducted a research project examining advantages of teaching critical thinking through visual thinking in a French upper-division seminar on French Literature in Fall 2016.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In “Visual Mapping to Enhance Learning and Critical Thinking Skills” (2011), Héctor C. Santiago points out that in our time there are multiple “picturing the thinking process (mind mapping), exploring the structure of instance, instructors may use these tools for the following functions: for and conclusions around a contention (argument maps), exploring the structure of knowledge construction and sharing” (2006), also confirms that “the different visualization formats can be used in complementary ways to enhance motivation, attention, understanding and recall.”

To evaluate the effectiveness of mapping techniques in a French seminar on literature, the following learning activities were implemented: 2-class oral debates, 2 written concept/mind maps and 1 argument map used for the debates, 2 written essays produced based on the maps, 1 map (of choice) to structure the final research project; and 1 student feedback survey (SFS). The data collected was assessed with several rubrics: In-Class Debate Rubric, Basic Argument Construction & Mapping Rubric, Oral Communication and Written Communication Rubrics.

**SAMPLES OF STUDENT WORK**

First Class Debate based on Molière’s play Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Two Concept Maps – “Happiness prevails over fortune” & “Money buys everything”

Second Class Debate on Françoise Sagan’s novel Bonjour Tristesse: One Argument Map – “We are always responsible for our actions”

Final Research Project on the Future of Reading: Students had a choice of visual mapping types/tools to use

**RESULTS**

**Basic Argument Construction & Mapping Rubrics**

**INTRODUCTION**

At first, mind mapping seemed to be a more effective tool because students found it less intimidating. This type of mapping is more aligned with their previous work such as simple brainstorming activities or outline generation. This type of visualization of information builds on generalized knowledge. Lacking in depth and logical rigor, this generalized-knowledge exercise was still knowledge-producing because students came prepared for the class debate – furnished with multiple arguments that they could contribute for the class discussion. The argument mapping – more structured and higher-order thinking exercise – was met with some frustration and reluctance. Students had less success generating enough of counter-claims and evidence-supported claims to fortify their positions.

- Mind maps were easier to complete and were met with greater enthusiasm by students than argument maps.
- 56% of students used mind maps for their final research project over 46% who used argument maps.
- Proper concept maps were not produced by students.
- Only 11% of maps were concept maps over 89% of mind maps.
- Associative flow of mind maps lacks rigor and logical connections.

- In concept/ mind maps, 7% used logical connectors
- In argument maps, 43% used logical connectors.
- Clarity of argumentation is mostly achieved in argument maps.

**Conclusion**

Based on the assessment of student performance and feedback, it was confirmed that visual thinking enables students to further develop their critical thinking skills while also improving their oral and written communication skills. After having created mind, concept, and argument maps to prepare for class debates and written assignments, students became more aware of a variety of arguments they could use to defend their point of view in the target language. While working on the maps, they had to consider not only the subject matter but also the clarity of exposition, argument structure and logic, as well as the applicability and reliability of supporting evidence. As one student reported in the feedback survey: “[t]he classes where there is too much data & too many arguments to consider, I already find myself referencing back to the theories we learnt here.”

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