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Brainstorming

(includes Concept Map, Cluster Map, and Semantic Map)

Purpose

Brainstorming (or semantic mapping) helps learners visualize the content they are learning and remember the “schema”—the organization of information and the relationships among concepts and terms. This strategy improves oral communication, comprehension, problem-solving skills, and memory. Teachers can use it to introduce or review a topic. Learners can use it as a note-taking strategy or a prewriting strategy. (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Armbruster, Anderson, & Meyer, 1992)

Target learning strategies

- Selective attention
- Using background knowledge
- Using images
- Taking notes

Procedure

1. Select a main idea or topic. Write it in a circle on the center of the board or on a transparency. An example is shown. Ask students for terms related to the main idea. Offer your own input as well. Write these ideas off to the side.
2. Ask students to help you sort the words into clusters of related terms. Choose a key word or phrase from each cluster.
3. Write these key words around your main idea. Draw one line from the main topic to each subtopic.
4. Write the words related to the key words around those key words and connect them with lines. Usually, the general ideas are in the center and the more specific ones are at the edges. Continue until all relevant ideas have been categorized.
5. Encourage students to make statements about the relationships between the subtopics and the main topic. For the example below, such a statement might be, “Monet’s paintings used bright colors to show the impression of a moment.”

Example

