

Rose Korst and Mary Norris Research Summary
St. Louis Park Senior High School, St. Louis Park, Minnesota

Topic and Description:

Educational researcher Dr. Stanley Pogrow asserts that students, especially those he terms school dependent students, come to a point in their learning journey where they hit the “cognitive wall” (that is, to have extreme difficulty understanding) inhibiting their grasp of the more complicated learning processes demanded in the classroom, particularly upper level classes (Pogrow). Pogrow maintains these students “do not understand understanding” and while they possess academic aptitude, they cannot negotiate the cognitive skills necessary for higher level classes. This “cognitive wall” also impedes student achievement on tests requiring higher level thinking skill use. We believe this wall can be breached through intentional instruction of and coaching in Thinking Maps© and cognitive processes required across the curriculum, e.g. reading, writing, and math. We will develop, write and implement a class to accelerate the learning of students overrepresented in the achievement gap.

Name and Qualifications of Principal Investigator:

Rosalyn S. Korst, Language Arts Instructor/Chair, Thinking Map© Trainer of Trainers
Mary N. Norris, Language Arts Instructor, and Thinking Map© Trainer of Trainers

Summary, Method(s) of Research, and Anticipated Results

We propose to build a curriculum centered on explicit instruction in higher level thinking skills, e.g.: evaluation, interpretation, and synthesis and how these skills play out in all areas of learning regardless of content area class. Once the curriculum is written, we will team-teach the class to be called Theory of Cognition. By building and developing students’ ability to shift cognition, we do not wish to negate the student’s own cultural frame of reference. Rather, we wish to broaden students’ cultural fluency allowing them to know and choose when to implement appropriate thinking processes based on the academic challenges they face. Students will be selected on the basis of academic potential not reflected by academic performance. Data includes: pre-testing, mid-testing, and post-testing, attendance, socio-economic status, schools attended, Choice Is Yours Program (out of district placement), former grades, date of admission to district, special education, and classes taken. We anticipate 45-50% of our class will demonstrate a one-quartile improvement from their pre-test to their post-test measurement. A possible implication to the larger concerns of education would be the ability to mitigate perceived deficits in light of a greater understanding of cognitive process and teaching students how to manage their own thinking. In addition, this curriculum will be able to be delivered at all grade levels providing reinforcement of acquired cognitive skills.