

Yates Mill Elementary School Research Summary Raleigh, North Carolina

Topic and Description:

It is the intent of this study to look at the use of Thinking Maps in a professional learning community as a tool that can simplify the understanding of abstract concepts.

Name and Qualifications of Principal Investigator:

Dr. Lynn C. Williams is the Principal at Yates Mill Elementary School in Raleigh, N.C. During her 22 years as a principal in Wake County, she has been at an inner-city magnet school where she conducted research with Dr. Robert Sternberg on his Triarchic Intelligence Theory. She is a certified trainer for Thinking Maps & opened Yates Mill in 2000 as a Thinking Maps school.

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

Summary:

1. Thinking Maps enable PLC Staff teams to look at data in an objective manner, removing inferencing and the emotional storytelling that can block progression towards academic improvement. We believe:
 - Thinking Maps support a more objective analysis of data, a more hospitable team environment, and clearer communication among PLC teams. Thinking Maps clarify the emotional thinking that can be created in dialogue, turning it into an objective visual reality.
 - Using Thinking Maps in PLC discussions will provide opportunities for personal and organizational transformation.
 - Thinking Maps allow a person to get out of the emotion and remain in a factual, data based discussion, encouraging data driven decision making.
 - One implication is that Thinking Maps provide tools to help support an effective look at the truth about data. *Organizations only improve “where the truth is told and the brutal facts confronted.”* *Jim Collins, Good to Great*
2. At Yates Mill Elementary we believe in active, engaged thinking that honors individual learning styles and promotes life long learning. Our purpose is for each student to develop deep meaning of the standard course of study. We believe Thinking Maps is one of the primary tools to achieve this vision.

Methods of Research: A research team will work together to collect, analyze and interpret data. This team is comprised of members of the schools leadership team (grade chairs, instructional leadership/administration.) Thus far the school has worked to refine their roles as described in DuFour’s understanding of professional learning community. Schmoker suggests the time spent in a PLC must be “focused... talking in concrete, precise terms about instruction with a concentration on thoughtful explicit examination of practices and their consequences.” We believe that increasing the use of Thinking Maps during grade level data days will enable the teams to meet, discuss, plan and deliver the curriculum in a more objective manner.

- How have Thinking Maps supported a more objective analysis of data, a more cohesive team environment, and clearer communication among our PLC teams?
- Does using Thinking Maps as an instructional tool impact student learning?

Qualitative Data: leadership team interviews, video tapes, data day work samples, data notebooks, team member surveys, lesson plans, student work samples

Anticipated Results: We anticipate that the research will show that our PLCs are enhanced by the use of Thinking Maps as an objective tool for teams to use as they discuss formative data, which will positively impact classroom instruction and student achievement.