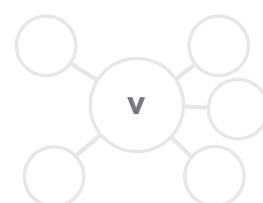


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# Chapter 1

## A Brief Overview of Thinking Maps

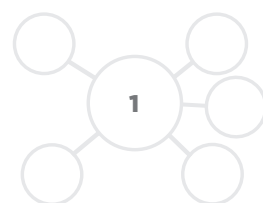
*What is compelling to me about the act of drawing is that you become aware, or conscious of, what you're looking at only through the mechanism of trying to draw it. When I look at something, I do not see it unless I make an internal decision to draw it. Drawing it in a state of humility provides a way for truth to emerge.*

—MILTON GLASER

To connect is one of our most fundamental human impulses—not just with others on a personal level, but with ideas as well. We are, as many brain researchers have noted, pattern seekers and meaning makers. In fact, in large part, it has been through the recognition of patterns that we have survived and flourished. To be a human being is to be connected to others, to be engaged with others in pairs, groups, families, and communities toward common goals, and ultimately to engage in the balancing act of improving the well-being of ourselves and others. As Margaret Wheatley (1999) observes, “Everything comes into form because of relationships. We are constantly called to be in a relationship—to information, people, events, ideas, life” (p. 145). In another context she adds, “The instinct of community is everywhere in life” (2005, p. 47).

Schools are institutions built on an assumed outcome of continuous positive growth for the betterment of students and society, much like medical institutions that constantly attend to the physical and emotional well-being of people. Yet too often when individual leaders and leadership groups engage in the process of thinking through problems, making decisions, and evaluating outcomes, we find ourselves *disconnected*. During many one-on-one conversations, small-group discussions, faculty meetings, and professional development sessions, the conversations may begin well, but then fall prey to people taking positions, rolling out their emotional states and logical arguments, and wielding power based in raw authority rather than in mindful, thoughtful judgments. People in these situations often feel embattled and separated from others—as if the face of a colleague across the table or across the hall is that of an adversary, rather than an ally on the same journey.

A challenge that leaders face, then, is how to dynamically surface thinking and identify actions in a way that allows ideas to be reformulated or reconstructed in a pluralistic environment. How do we bring discovery into the context of our interactions in a way that energizes and inspires



insight and innovation? How do we become consciously aware of knowing ourselves in patterns of relationships within challenging decision-making conflicts? After all, empathy starts within. Over many years of reflective practice in schools and through research in psychology and the cognitive neurosciences, we are now more aware of how we are unconsciously self-deceiving: our individual, ever-changing brain structures have been wired tight, frozen in some instances by our past experiences and the schemas that frame our thinking. Look into Daniel Goleman's (1985) first book, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception*, for a full analysis of how our emotions and cognitive states of mind deeply influence our capacities to see ourselves and others with an open mind. "Schemas are the ghost in the machine," Goleman (1985, p. 75) writes, for these connected patterns drawn from experience, substantiated and reinforced in our minds, drive our perceptions of the moment and prevent transformational thinking and actions.

For example, when we sit in or lead a faculty meeting, we already have a frame of reference for what a faculty meeting is about: a mixture of good, bad, and indifferent drawn from a career of faculty meetings. Faculty meetings may also bring up past experiences of family meetings. We bring to our concept of *faculty meeting* our own mindsets, relationships, and established mental and emotionally connected imprinted patterns that are the perceptual windows through which we see what is happening and what we expect to happen. Our brains actively seek to see what we already know. We are comforted by replaying the same recording even if the repeating story is negative. The capacity for each of us as individuals and then collectively to identify the existing *frames* that ground our perceptions and actions—and to consciously reframe and repattern our ways of thinking—is a key to creating participatory, connective leadership in one-on-one conversations, grade-level meetings, and large-group sessions such as faculty meetings.

*Connective leading* is about fostering the connections between and among people, between and among ideas within patterns of thinking, and across visual and virtual planes, which the diversity of those present and represented inform and enrich. To lead connectively means to invite possibilities into the process with the bold and confident view that, by design, the collective wisdom of the community of learners will emerge, and from this, effective and meaningful solutions will be determined. Connective leading requires skillful facilitation because it is about interconnecting people in the complex dance of both personal and professional conversations. This critical dimension of leadership is expressed in all aspects of the school community—classroom, meeting room, and boardroom. As the case studies in our research will demonstrate in later chapters, the culture of the school transforms as school leaders model the very same approaches and dispositions that they expect all learners, adults and students, to use.

Connective leading requires a significant leap of faith, a fearlessness, and a confidence in self and others in the face of emerging truths—perhaps even uncomfortable realities. The decision to become open to possibilities and to initiate the dynamic interaction between self

and others, mind and experience, can be as unsettling as it is exciting. The humility that Glaser proposes in the epigraph is key; the suspension of ego and attachment to particular points of view and interpretations forms the necessary ground from which the truth, so to speak, can emerge (Glaser, 2008).

But remaining open to our own perceptions—which means to consciously hold lightly our own point of view—while deeply listening to and reflecting on what our colleagues are saying and doing is *extremely* difficult. Just try listening closely to another person without your internal dialogue interrupting the other person's words even before you verbally interrupt the person speaking! We so deeply want to connect to what other people are saying in the moment, but often our own stories prevent or constrain a constructive openness to future possibilities. We have a tendency to listen for affirmation of our own ideas.

Presently, this concept of being connected surfaces in the field of the cognitive neurosciences and, interestingly, overlaps with the global media network of connections. Networks exist in the brain, in the mind, between people, and virtually around the globe. We now know that the brain is constantly and unconsciously making neural connections between the nodes: constructing, deconstructing, and reinforcing neural networks and making patterns from sensory information drawn in from outside the body. The human mind is also making *cognitive* connections and consciously (or unconsciously) seeking and creating cognitive patterns based on a synthesis of what the brain already has imprinted within its neural circuitry from a lifetime of experiences. Consider the idea of making connections as an umbrella synthesis of neural connections, patterns of mind, and digital web-based links. We are connected around the globe from a handheld device.

If we can learn anything from this new synthesis of the networking brain, mind, and world, it is that communication now depends on our capacity to seek, create, and make *connections*. Paradoxically, with greater understanding about how the brain works and the pathways for connecting and communicating, we may have a simultaneous sense of disconnection. This may be because we have no new pathways or languages for showing how we actively pattern ideas and represent connected thinking as meaningful knowledge. There are so many networks of connections, but so few ways to fully express the wholeness of our thinking. We have no language for connecting nonlinear bits of information that represent both our minds at work and the rich networking capacities of our brain and our web-based communication systems. We are, simply, framed by our existing representation systems of speaking and writing. True, we send each other more pictures and video downloads. However, almost all of our messages are oddly still linear strings of words—voice and text messages, tweets of 140 characters, quickly written blogs, email and text documents, and bulleted PowerPoint slides with visual eye candy—and while we sit in faculty meetings, we exchange spoken strings of words and pages upon pages of announcements. This is all good in many ways, but it also has brought about cognitive overload and distraction, overwhelming us with disconnected bits of information and disconnected knowledge.

# Chapter 2

## Thematic Strands in the Literature on Effective Leadership: The Roots of Connectivity

*The soul cannot think without a picture.*

—ARISTOTLE

*If you can't imagine it, you can never do it. In my experience, the image always precedes the reality.*

—MARILYN KING

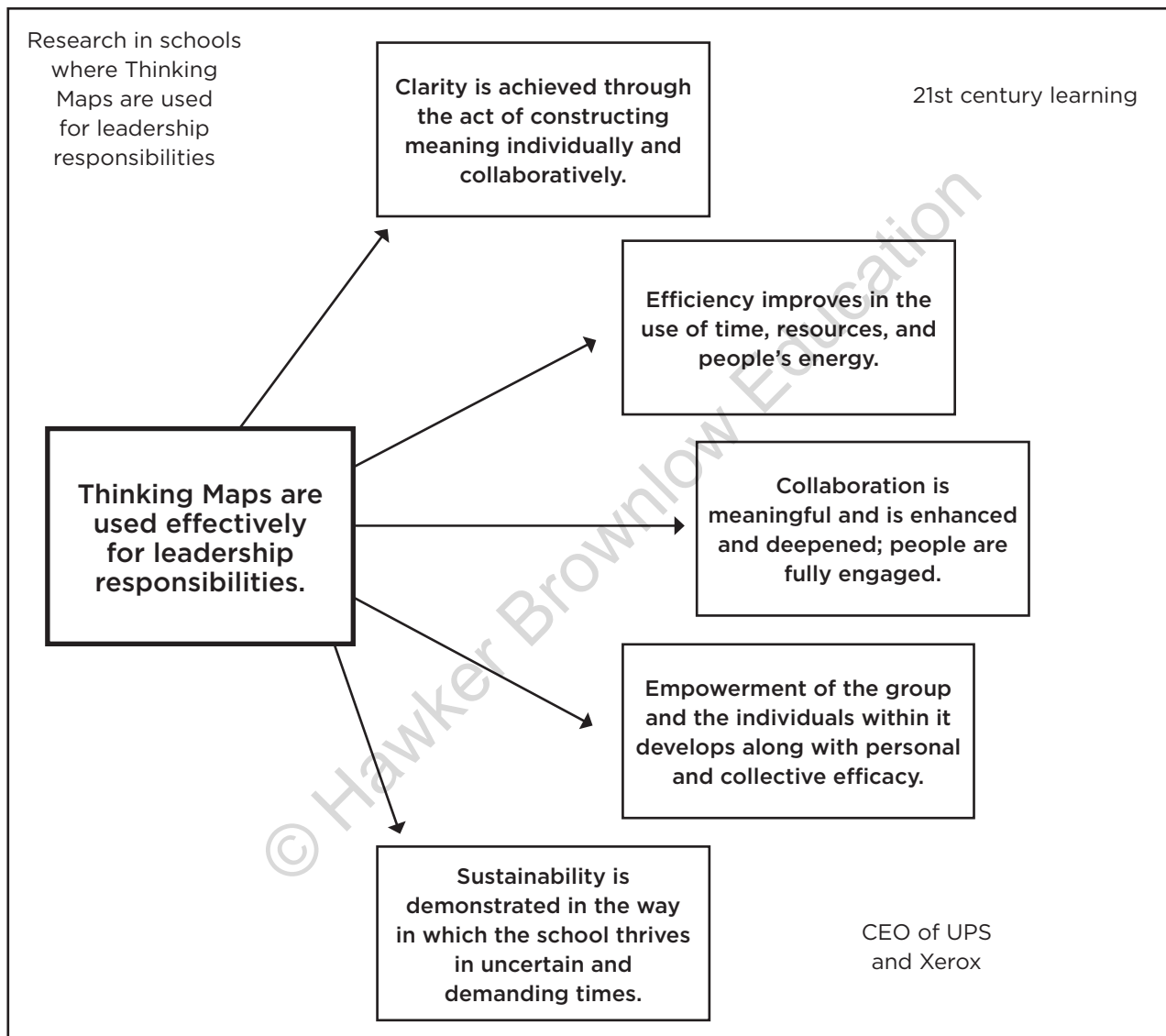
School leaders have tremendous influence over the degree to which their schools and the individuals within them act intelligently and effectively. Influential leaders understand the fundamental nature of learning not only as it relates to students but as an essential dimension of the dynamics of the school community itself. With a vision of what it means for a school to be a learning community, they work thoughtfully and skillfully to bring others into this vision and develop their capacities to contribute in positive and constructive ways.

It is imperative that effective school leaders create effective schools for students. Few, if any, poorly led schools have been able to achieve or sustain high levels of student performance. With ever-growing demands on school leaders—and a shrinking pool of well-prepared leaders, or individuals who are too inexperienced to effectively lead—preparing our future and current school leaders for the challenges that they will (and do) face is essential now more than ever. However, what makes effective school leaders, and how do we best prepare them for the complexity they face? How do they develop as civil engineers capable of designing the infrastructures—the pathways, bridges, and networks—necessary to ensure meaningful and productive interactions among people and universal access to information and ideas?

These questions have challenged educators and researchers for decades. Recent research presented in this chapter—including wide-scale studies, meta-analyses of thousands of studies conducted over decades, and intensive case studies of effective leaders—has shed some light on these questions.

## Emergent Leadership Themes

The five themes that our research shows are associated with the effective use of Thinking Maps for leadership—(1) clarity, (2) efficiency, (3) collaboration, (4) empowerment, and (5) sustainability (see the Multi-Flow Map in figure 2.1)—are also evident throughout the literature on leadership and expressed in a variety of ways. However, leaders in our study reported that using Thinking Maps gave these themes added meaning.



**Figure 2.1: Sample Multi-Flow Map for the five themes of leadership with sources and several influencing elements cited in the Frame of Reference.**

*Clarity*, as we came to understand it through the comments of the leaders we interviewed, is not the presumptive certainty of one’s opinions but something that develops from a satisfying process of constructing meaning alone and in concert with others; from suspending judgment