

Tony Buzan's mind mapping has certainly stood the test of time. The interview below was done in 1987 and this Christmas (2001) I treated myself to an updated, large colour plate version of one of his more up to date best-selling books on the same subject!

**Interview with Tony Buzan,
contributor to Seal Conference in Hertfordshire,
April, 1987**

My interest in Tony Buzan's work started when I read "Use Your Head" in the 1970's. I've been happily "mind-mapping" ever since. (See "The Teacher Trainer" Issue No. 0 for an example of mind-map on the subject of teacher training), and so I was delighted to be able to interview Tony at the SEAL conference in April. TW: How did you get interested in memory and learning, speed-reading and brain-storming? TB: My main focus in the beginning was myself as a lecturer at University and a trouble-shooter at schools, because I realised that I expected students to listen to what I saying, take notes, organise, retain, recall, understand and then re-communicate it all in talk or exams or essays and then to create from it but I wasn't teaching any of them these processes! I was teaching them information. So there were three things: I hadn't been taught these processes myself, the students hadn't and I hadn't been taught how to teach in such a way as to facilitate the processes. So then I investigated the way I learnt and looked at the techniques that worked for me whether they were from maths, spelling, teacher training or "Improve-Yourself" courses. Then I did a survey of teacher training colleges in 1974-75. I asked students, mainly in their final year, how many hours on their course had been spent on learning about the nature of learning and how to apply that to teaching. The average was 0! Of course it's not fair to blame the colleges because they haven't been taught it either! But I believe the prime thing to teach a teacher is how to learn and how to learn how to learn! If a teacher can pass that on to students, then every student will walk into every learning situation as a self-generating intelligence within any intellectual domain. If students know how to learn you can give them "Physics" and they'll say "Wonderful! I can listen to it, integrate it, note it, analyse it, juggle with it, create from it, retain it.....!" Instead of the word "Physics" you could substitute "Dance" or "Astronomy" or "Teaching". TW: If you had a group of, say, 15 people on an initial, pre-service, teacher training course for four weeks, how much time would you spend at the start of the course on teaching them how to get the best out of the course? TB: I would devote most of the course to it! Because, if, for example, you have a gardener on the course,.....if he knows that he already knows how to select and organise and create and present etc..... you can say "teach!" and he'll go and teach. You don't need to give so much of the information. If you have a group and you teach them how to study, you can say, "Here are the top books on the subject" and each person can read one in 2 hours, mind map it, then all the maps go up all over the walls, they lecture to each other on "their books" and in one week each person has been exposed to say 25 new books and you haven't taught them "about the subject". You have taught them how to organise and note and present and they have taught each other, and you, about the rest. TW: That's fine for books but on an initial teacher training course physical skills are really important..... how to move around a classroom, what's right to do with your gaze and your gestures so you don't intimidate students and so on. TB: You can tell people to have a good eye contact but if they are afraid they'll just look at you and agree and then look away again! Or they'll look and hold themselves rigid thinking "I can't think! I can't do this!" You're just plastering techniques for physical skills on top of an uncertain person. Now if they become confident, their gestures, posture, eye contact, colour awareness will change! Bam! You know I was a student in a group of about 250 people once and we had to freely associate with "What do you think of your own brain?" and people's first reactions were to say words like "swamp", "three pounds of slush!", "forgetting", "failure", "exams", "medicine". Nobody thought of words like "clarity", "vision", "creativity". It was tragic!. People's greatest fear is incapability. But if you ask people, "If there was a room where you wanted people, just like you, to be comfy and warm and learn, what would you have in it?" They all say "Colour, flowers, fresh air, structure, music....." they all create their perfect individual environment.....a paradise. TW: But what if a teacher says....."I can't move the

seats in my classroom and my head teacher doesn't allow music and the cleaner throws my flowers away.....!"?TB: You have a choice. Either get out of the profession and teach privately or take control! If you moan "Oh but my colleagues won't and my head won't....." and so on and you don't try, then you have to take responsibility too. It's no good whining about how terrible it all is!TW: So you think the first thing in teacher training is to "think positive" and teach study skills?TB: Well, there's no one "first thing". There are a swathe of firsts: Believe you can. Commit to do it. Have a vision of what you want. Teach people how to create, remember, organise and communicate the nature of themselves including their physicality. They then can guide their own ship. They'll come to you and ask "Have you got some more books on.....?" or "Do you know anyone who can help me with.....?" Don't tell me. Guide me and believe I can. And when I fall down, help me up". That's what comes first. And then let them go and follow them! I love that! Then I can jump off the podium and say "It's your turn!".TW: But you like it.....being up there on the podium, don't you?TB: Oh yes I love it! Everyone does. Everyone loves to teach. Ask someone who loves soccer to teach you the rules. They love to! Even coffee.....after dinner, someone says "I've found this amazing blend of coffee that comes from the North side of Jamaica.....!" People love to teach and yet the biggest fear is to stand up in the spotlight. The greatest fear is the greatest want! But if you just help people to see what geniuses they are, how amazing they already are, they won't need information from you. With those processes they can get it themselves.