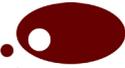




THE MINDS OF MISSISSIPPI

The Story of the
Pass Christian School District

*A film on whole school change and the
accompanying handbook to initiate change
with your whole school community.*


*Thinking*Foundation

Minds of Mississippi - The Film

The Pass Christian Public Schools received a grant from Thinking Foundation to document their incredible story. The story of 'The Pass' captured on film traces the efforts of the educators and community there to improve the achievement levels of their students through a focus on thinking, something they accomplished by becoming the top performing school district in the state of Mississippi and continue to sustain today at the highest level long after the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina.

www.thinkingfoundation.org/mom/

Thinking Foundation

The mission of the non-profit Thinking Foundation is to support high quality research on cognitive skills development, creativity, and critical reflection—at pre-school, K-12 and college levels in order to transform learning, literacy, teaching and leadership around the world for those with the greatest need.

www.thinkingfoundation.org

Thinking Maps®

Visualizing our thinking allows us to have a concrete image of our abstract thoughts. Visual representations enhance the brain's natural ability to detect and construct meaningful patterns. Thinking Maps® reduce anxiety by providing familiar visual patterns for thinking and working with complex ideas and situations.

www.thinkingmaps.com

Thinking Schools International

Thinking Schools International is for teachers, whole schools, educational communities and countries who want to develop 21st Century learning and thinking environments using thinking skills models for teaching for, of and about thinking with demonstrated impact across the globe. Adopting different pathways for thinking is a unique, sustainable, whole school approach to learning, with student centered thinking at its heart.

www.thinkingschoolsinternational.com

Minds of Mississippi - The Handbook

The handbook was developed and written by Robert Price and Larry Alper.

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"We need to hold ourselves accountable and hold our education system accountable"

— Marian Wright Edelman
 Founder Children's Defense Fund

"I am here because I want to talk with you about your education."

— Barack Obama
 President of the United States

All film stills in the guide are from the film *Minds of Mississippi*

Objectives

This handbook accompanies the film, *Minds of Mississippi*, a film about resilience, dedication, and whole district change, before and after adversity strikes. This handbook supports the process to initiate and guide your school through a process of transformational change—a process that begins with meaningful dialogue, leads to the articulation of a clear and compelling vision and, finally, moves towards the formulation of a focussed plan of action. You can also use this handbook to begin a conversation with your colleagues about a deeply moving story and the lessons learned from that extraordinary experience.

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film, guide, paper and markers

"True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking... thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than a static entity--thinking which does not separate itself from action."

— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, 2000

Pre-Viewing Activities for the film *Minds of Mississippi*

The greatest impact on student learning and achievement occurs not simply in a moment in time but through the integrity of the learner's experience over time. Learner-focused schools and school leaders recognize the importance of creating a coherent experience for their students whereby learning deepens and becomes consolidated across many years. However, coherence and continuity can be a challenge for schools to sustain when faced with a constant stream of internal and external changes.

"Systemic communities have established mechanisms for responding to internal or external changes in ways that allow the community to maintain its viability... In a sustainable learning community, the community is more resilient than any of its members, possessing the history, culture, and legacy that enable new and old members to carry its mission and work."

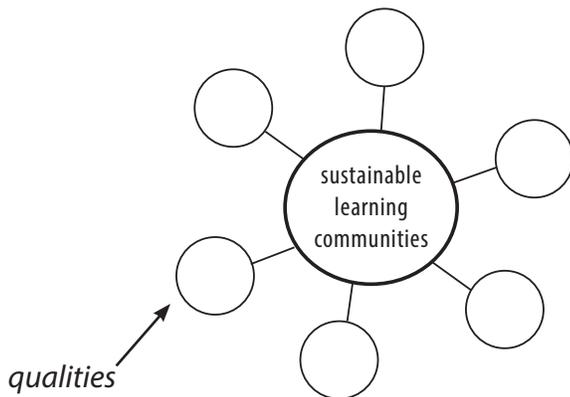
Giselle O. Martin-Kniep, Communities That Learn, Lead and Last (Jossey-Bass, 2008)

For Discussion Prior to Viewing the film *Minds of Mississippi*

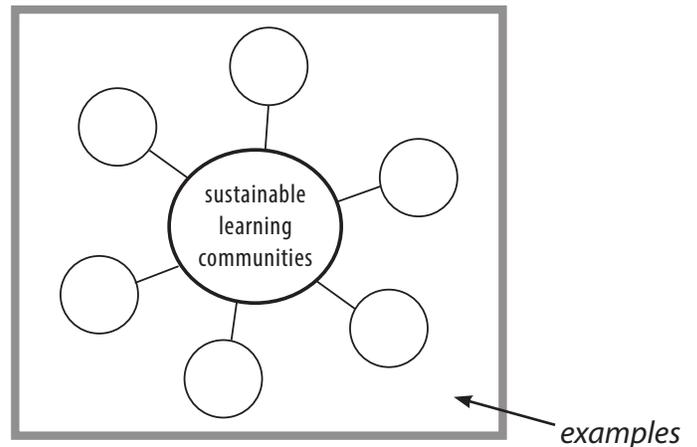
Process: Each group can be assigned a different question to discuss and then share with the whole group; or each group can be assigned each question, one at a time, with the responses then shared with each other. The latter approach would require more time. (40-60 minutes)

Question 1: Resilience, as identified by Martin-Kniep, is a key disposition associated with sustainable learning communities. What other qualities would you ascribe to such communities and what examples can you surface to illustrate these qualities? (Bubble Map, Frame)

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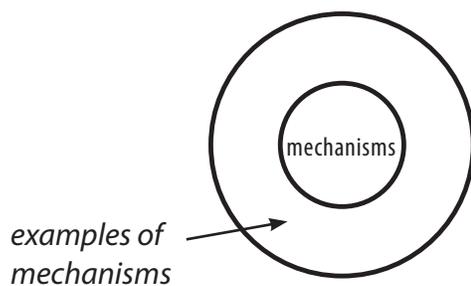


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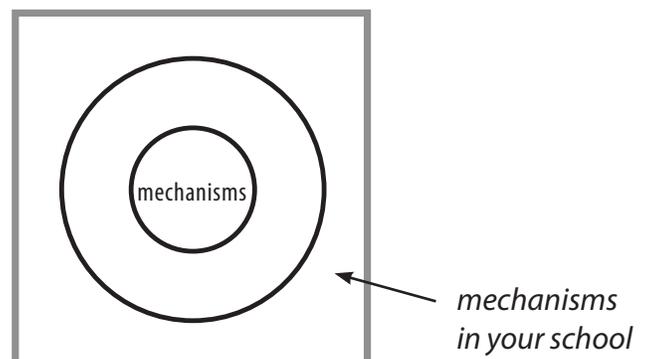


Question 2: What might be examples of "mechanisms" school communities develop that can support and guide them through periods of change? Which of these mechanisms exist in your school or others with which you are familiar? (Circle Map, Frame)

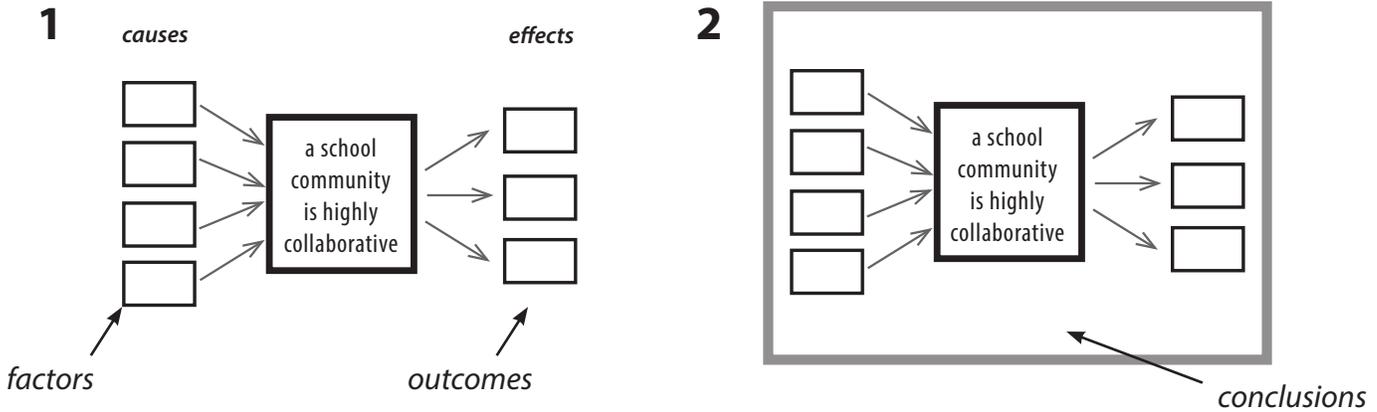
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Question 3: What factors contribute to school communities working in highly collaborative ways and what might the expected outcomes be when they do? What conclusions can you draw from the factors you identified and the outcomes they create? (Multi-Flow Map, Frame)



As you view the film Minds of Mississippi:

- think about the various dispositions that were demonstrated by members of this learning community that supported them individually and collectively through this experience,
- identify the mechanisms they had established that helped to sustain their vitality,
- and surface the factors that contributed to their collaborative efforts.

After viewing the film discuss your observations with your group members and compare them to the ideas you surfaced in the pre-viewing activities.



Current State Of Education

The Minds of Mississippi film opens with a sequence on multiple views on the current state of education in the United States. As educators we are subject to many opinions about education.

"We need to hold ourselves accountable and hold our education system accountable because our schools are not performing — a majority of all children in 4th, 8th and 12th grade of all races are not able to read or compute at grade level. What are going to do in this globalizing if you can't read and compute at grade level?"
Marian Wright Edelman, President and Founder Children's Defense Fund

We are challenged to sort through the many opinions that are expressed and the motivations behind them.

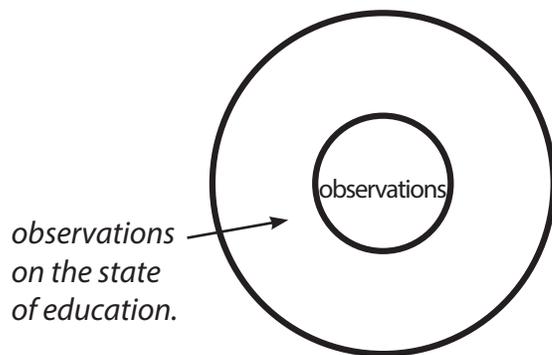
For Discussion After Viewing Minds of Mississippi

Process: Each group can be assigned a different question to discuss and then share with the whole group; or each group can be assigned each question, one at a time, with the responses then shared with each other. The latter approach would require more time. (40-60 minutes)

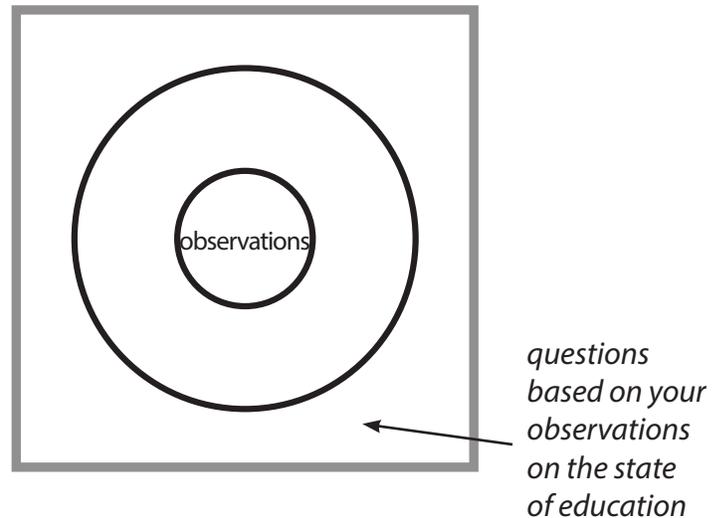
Question 1: From the opening sequence of Minds of Mississippi, what observations from the statements made resonated with you? (Circle Map)

From these observations, what questions do you have in regards to change with the state of education? (Frame)

1

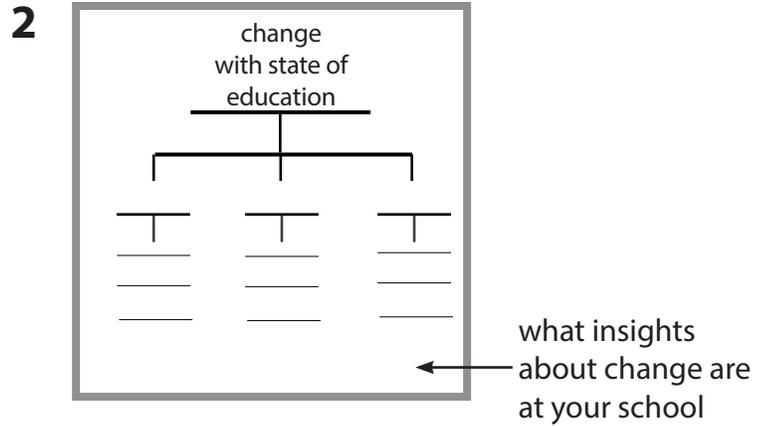
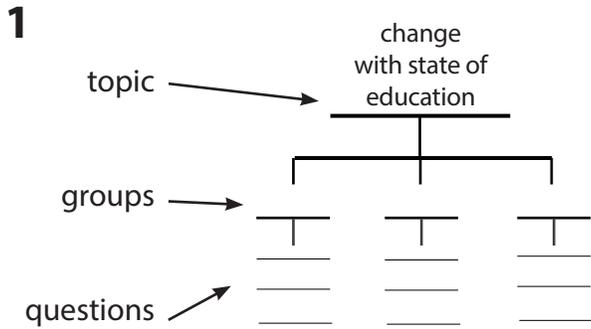


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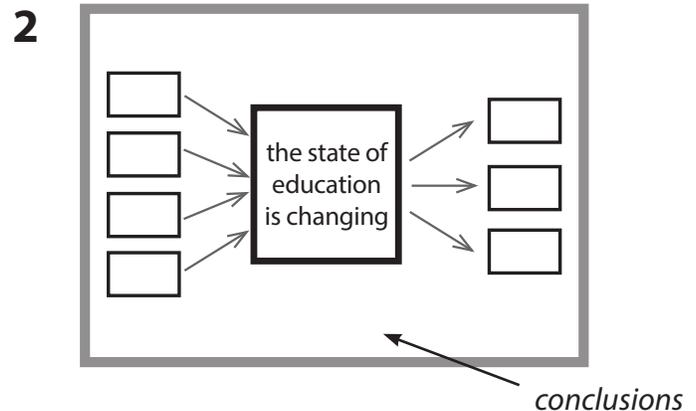
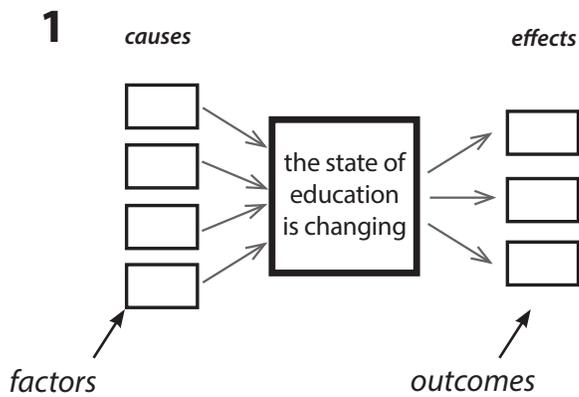
Question 2: What are the key guiding questions in regards to change with the state of education? To facilitate specific questions, sort and group similar questions from the questions on the Circle Map. Then give a name to each of the groupings. (Tree Map)

In the Frame develop ideas what you might do at your school and/or school district to act upon a key grouping. (Frame)



Question 3: What factors contribute to change with the state of education and what might the expected outcomes be when they do? (Multi-Flow Map)

What conclusions can you draw from the factors you identified and the outcomes they create?. (Frame)



Self Perception

How we see ourselves personally and as a community affects how we collaborate and are, or are not, effective as a whole group. Emergencies can bring communities together in the moment, and dissolve them or they can fracture.

"I think the perception of us is that time old perception... I think the stereotypes continue because they are easy sound-bites... the biggest challenge we have is the stereotype hasn't been debunked..."

Pass Christian Educators from Minds of Mississippi

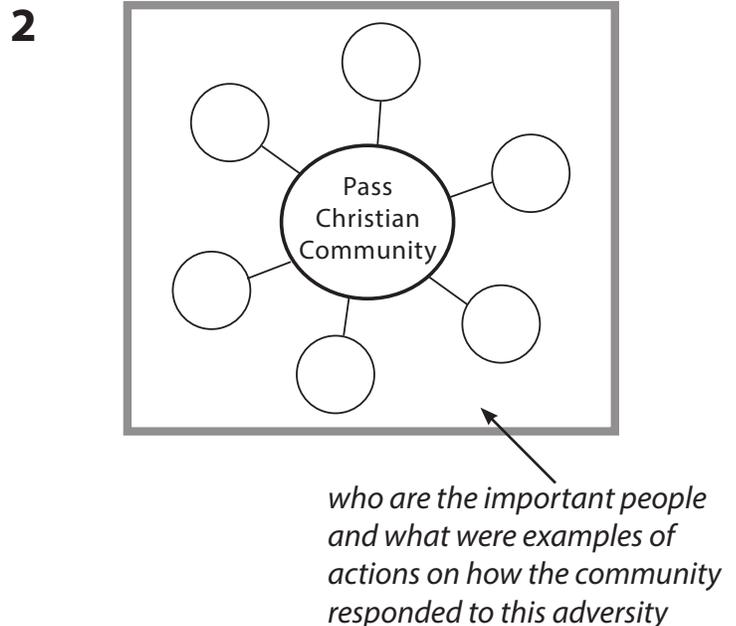
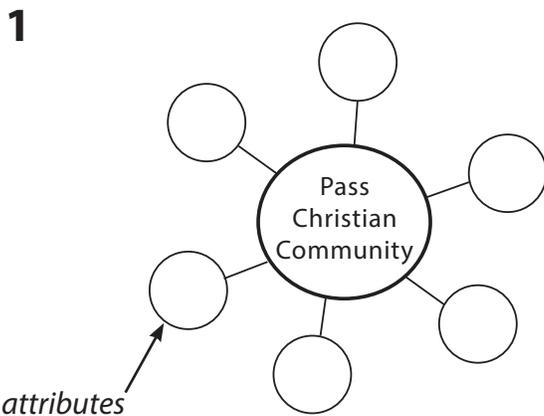
In moments of adversity, we are challenged to rise above the status quo.

For Discussion After Viewing Minds of Mississippi

Process: Each group can be assigned a different question to discuss and then share with the whole group; or each group can be assigned each question, one at a time, with the responses then shared with each other. The latter approach would require more time. (40-60 minutes)

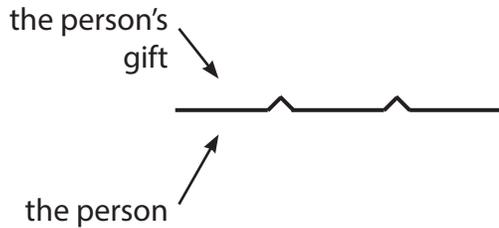
Question 1: What are some of the key attributes of the Pass Christian community? (Bubble Map)

Who are the important people, what are the key events, and where are the important places that have influenced the Pass Christian schools and community? (Frame)

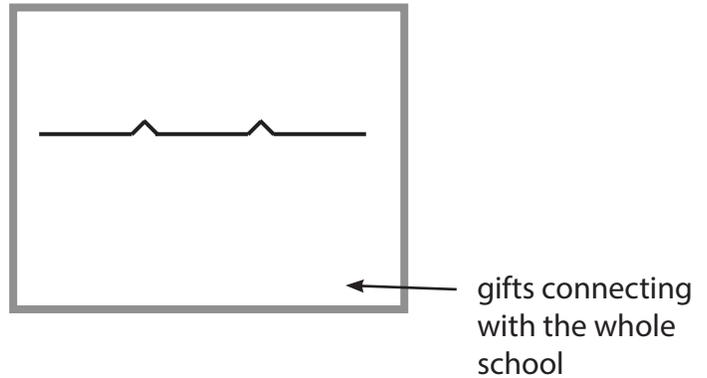


Question 2: Who are the people and/or stakeholders collaborating in the Pass Christian community? What is a 'gift' that they each bring to the group? How do these 'gifts' connect with each other and the whole school? (Bridge Map, Frame)

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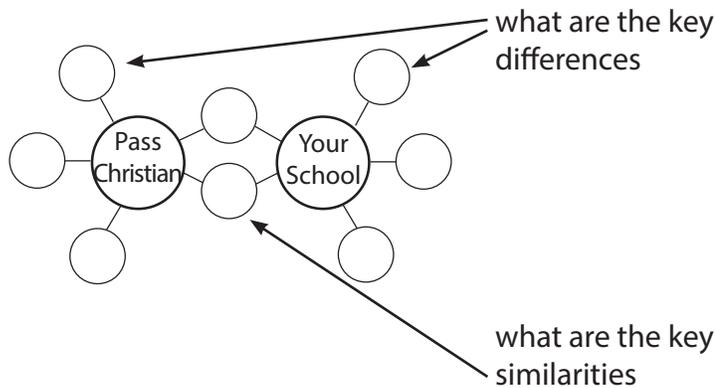


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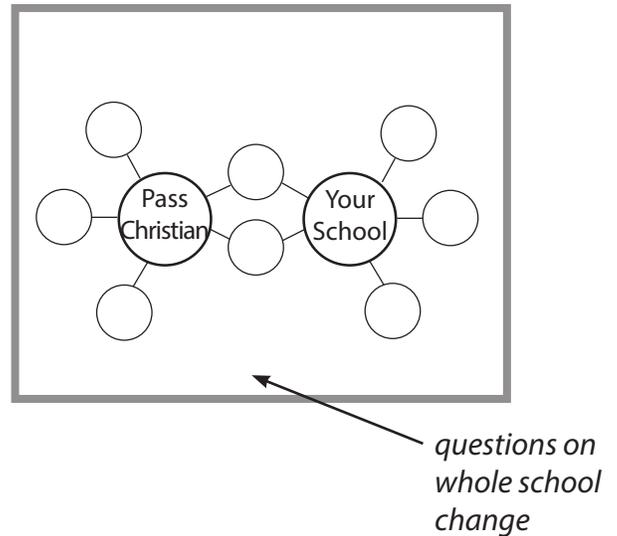


Question 3: What can we learn from another whole district by comparing and contrasting our experiences? What key attributes are different? What attributes are similar? What questions do you have about whole school change in reflecting upon the differences and similarities? (Tree Map, Frame)

1



2



Student Centered Learning

A Pass Christian principal's reflection about the impact of Hurricane Katrina on their community captures the power of students being the center of learning:

*"We lost everything. We lost our homes, we lost our schools, we lost our town.
But our children did not lose the ability to think."*

Learning that is meaningful and lasting, they discovered, is not about bricks and mortar or even books and computers, it's about the capacity of people to conduct their lives thoughtfully, constructively and compassionately—in school and with life.

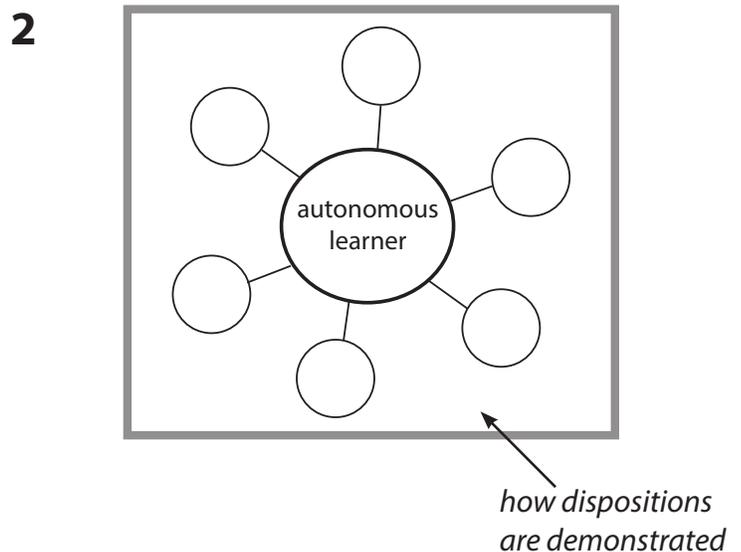
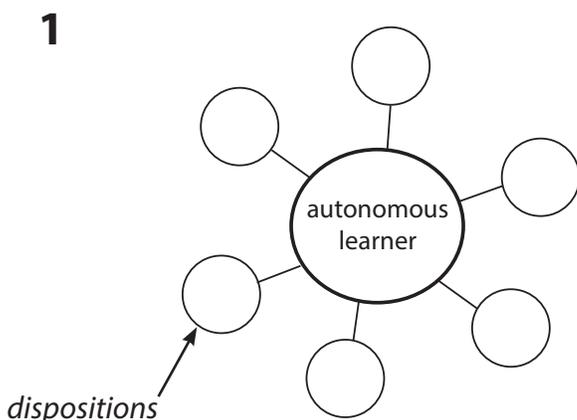
"First, a key goal of schools should be to develop autonomous learners—that is, young people who are confident and competent in identifying goals or purposes for learning; finding and using resources and experiences that can help them achieve the goals; monitoring their progress toward those goals; and adjusting the learning process as necessary to revise or accomplish the goals; and verifying the degree to which the goals are met or exceeded."

Carol Ann Tomlinson and Tonya R. Moon (ASCD,2013)

For Discussion After Viewing Minds of Mississippi

Process: Each group can be assigned a different question to discuss and then share with the whole group; or each group can be assigned each question, one at a time, with the responses then shared with each other. The latter approach would require more time. (40-60 minutes)

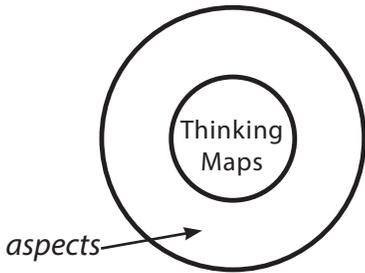
Question 1: What might be some of the key dispositions of an autonomous learner that would support meaningful and effective learning throughout a person's life? (Bubble Map)
How might those dispositions be demonstrated in school and beyond? (Frame)



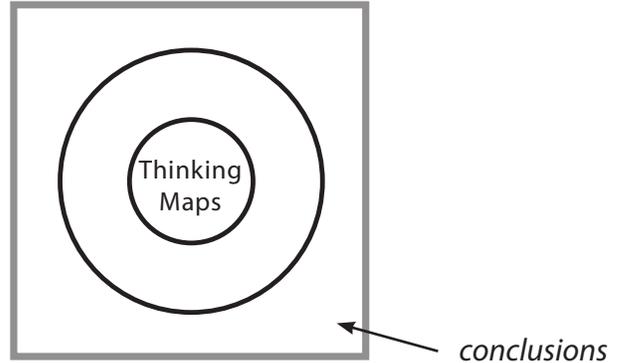
Question 2: What aspects of Thinking Maps contributed to the principal's observation that, "...our children did not lose the ability to think"? (Circle Map)

What conclusions can you draw about Thinking Maps from this? (Frame)

1



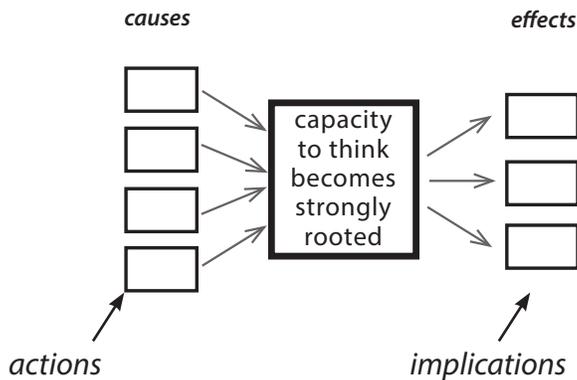
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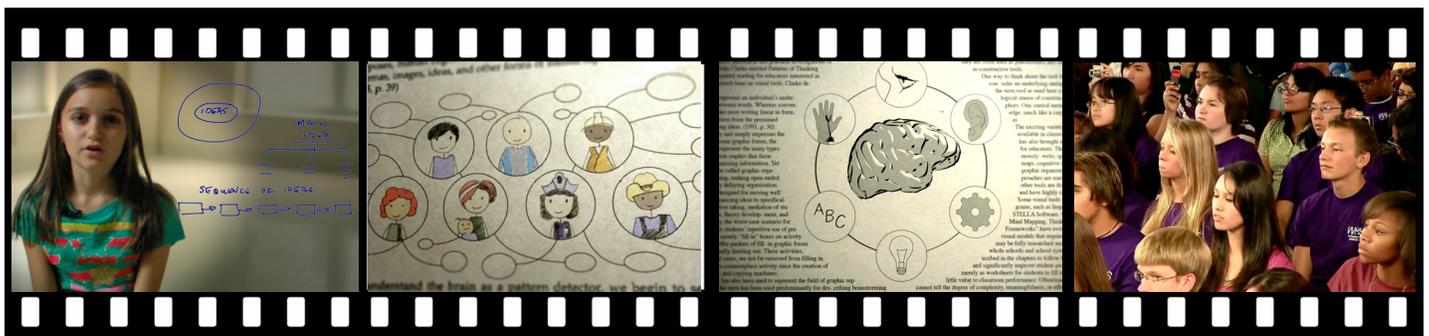
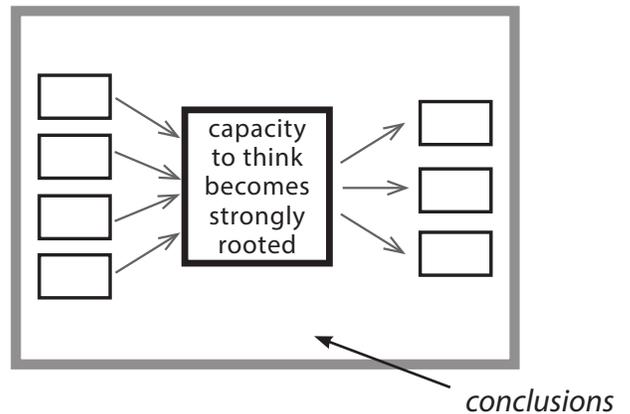
Question 3: What might be some of the actions that would cause the capacity to think to become so strongly rooted in learners? (Multi-Flow Map)

What implications might this have for education, in general, and for the practices in your school, specifically? (Frame)

1



2



Making Change

Education organizations tend to be conserving—that is, they endeavor to tackle what might be called “technical problems” but rarely do they attempt to look more deeply into the challenges they face in order to make more comprehensive changes for which the answers may not be immediately known or available. It is equally rare that educators in a setting come together often enough to discuss the challenges they face, scrutinize their practices, explore new approaches and solve problems together. As Tony Wagner, Robert Kegan and their colleagues observed (Jossey-Bass, 2006), the honing of the craft of teaching is more often done in isolation, within a structure that does not promote or seek to develop a public, collective knowledge base of professional practice.

The school leaders in Pass Christian appear to have chosen a different path, however. They recognized a problem and decided on a systemic path to change:

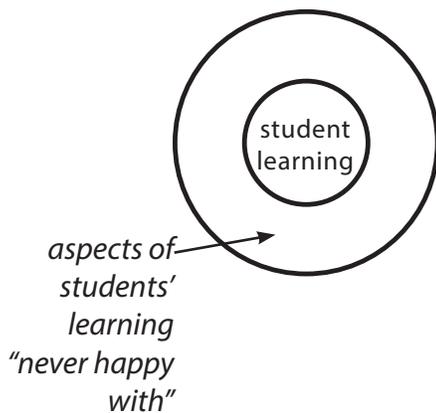
“...our school district was not known to be very good in academics...we had done pretty well on over the years but we were never happy with the bell curve that we had...most of our students scoring in the middle, getting a two out of a four...we knew we could do better...so we worked very hard over the years to try to turn our district around...”

School Leaders, Pass Christian, Minds of Mississippi

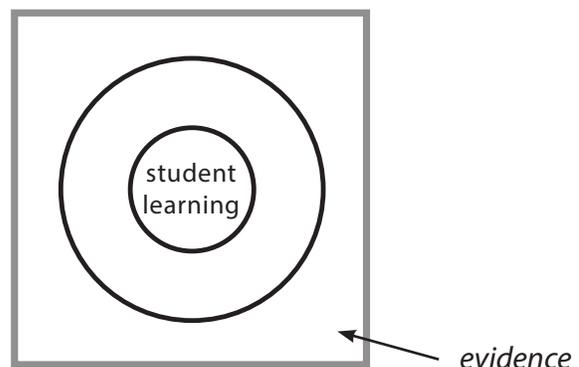
Process: Each group can be assigned a different question to discuss and then share with the whole group; or each group can be assigned each question, one at a time, with the responses then shared with each other. The latter approach would require more time. (40-60 minutes)

Question 1: If you were to identify those aspects of your students’ learning that you might qualify as being “never happy with”, what might they be? What evidence of this do you see? (Circle Map, Frame)

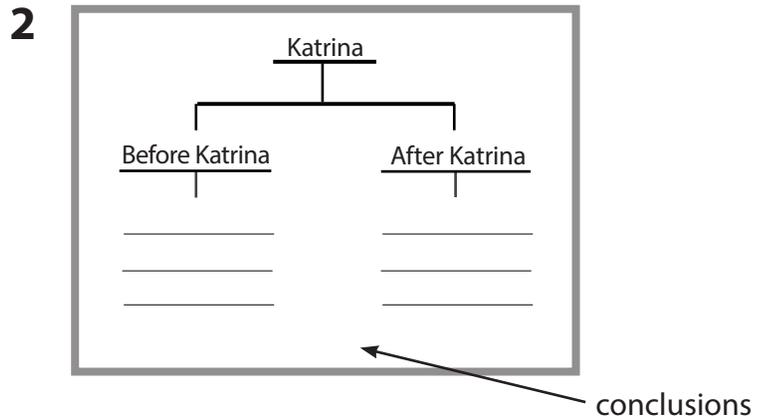
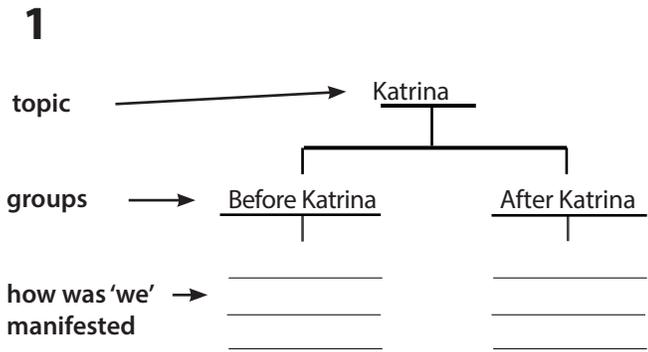
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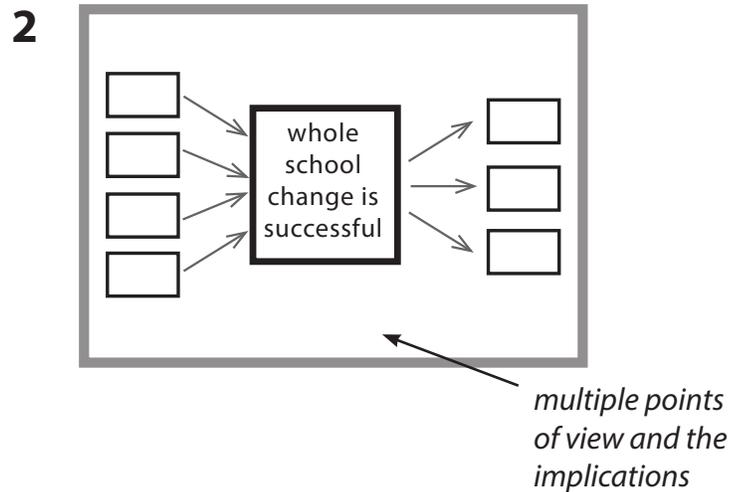
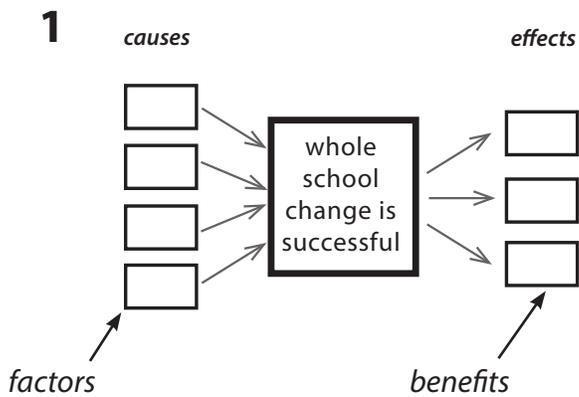
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Question 2: The pronoun 'we' is used almost exclusively throughout the documentary by those associated with the Pass Christian School District. How was this manifested in the way they approached the challenges they identified and faced before and after Hurricane Katrina struck their community? (Tree Map)
 What are the broader implications of this mindset to how they solved their challenges? (Frame)



Question 3: What are some of the factors (causes) that contribute to successful whole-school change, or, in the case of Pass Christian, whole-system change, and what are the benefits (effects) that result from it? How might this be viewed from multiple points of view? (Multi-Flow Map)
 What implications might this have for your setting? (Frame)



Challenges

The true measure of a learning community's effectiveness and vitality is not the presence or absence of challenges, but how these challenges are addressed when they arise and the proactive stance the organization takes to change. As Art Costa has observed,

"One of the distinguishing characteristics of humans is our inclination and ability to find problems to solve. Effective problem solvers know how to ask questions to fill in the gaps between what they know and what they don't know." (ASCD, 2000)

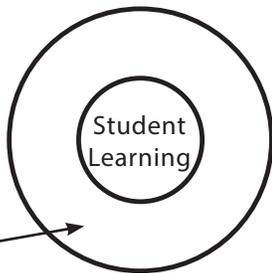
And, in the final analysis, what ultimately determines what we know, according to Eleanor Duckworth, is what we do when we don't know.

Process: Each group can be assigned a different challenge to discuss and then share with the whole group the thinking they developed related to this challenge as they went through each step in the process. (40-60 minutes)

Question 1: In your group, select one of the aspects of student learning that was previously identified as something you were "never happy with". What questions can you think of that would help you develop a comprehensive understanding of this challenge? (Circle Map)

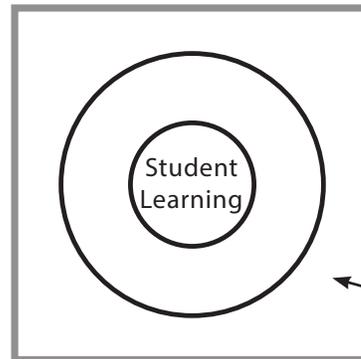
What additional points of view can help you look at this challenge from a broader perspective? (Frame)

1



questions on something 'never happy with'

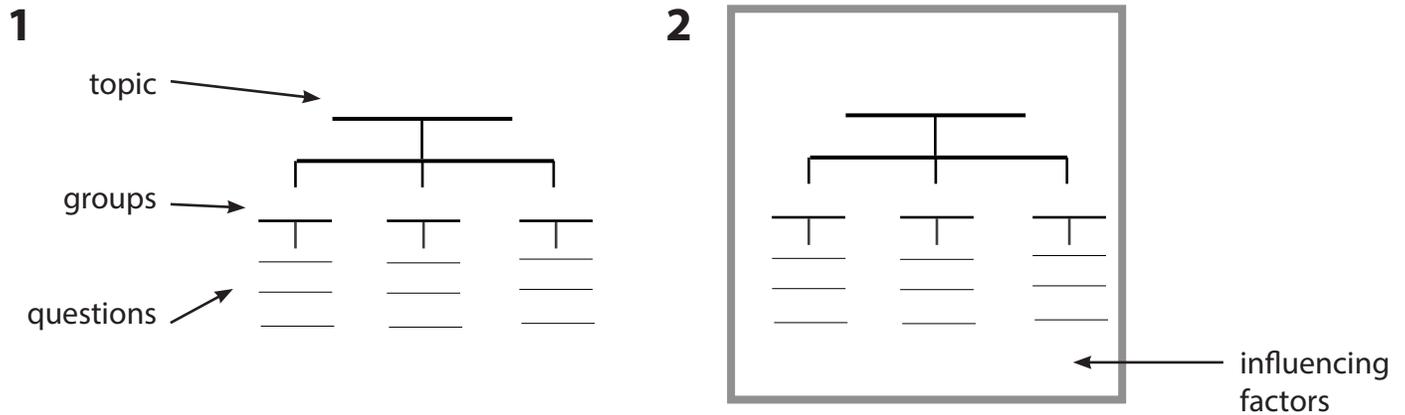
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additional points of view

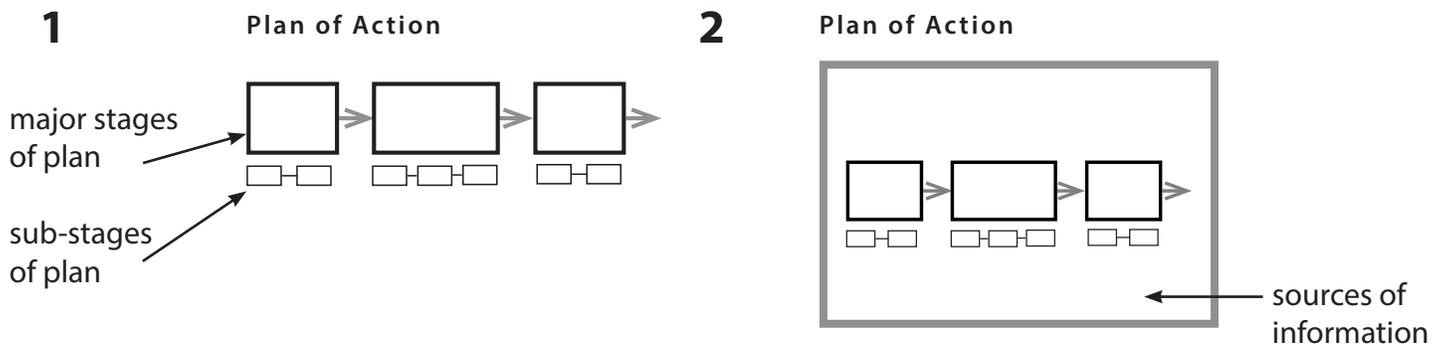
Question 2: How might you organize these questions? (Tree Map)

What other influencing factors need to be considered as you group the questions and consider what might be missing? (Frame)



Question 3: What plan of action could you develop from these questions? (Flow Map)

What might be sources of information that you could access to assist you in thinking about these questions? (Frame)



Sustainability

Sustainability is demonstrated in the ways in which a learning organization not merely keeps going or continues with an idea, but in how the organization thrives and how ideas continue to grow and develop, even in uncertain and demanding times. Sustainability also reflects the nature of the ideas themselves, the degree to which they are grounded in careful study and the extent to which people have had the opportunity to develop competency and confidence in their application of them.

Sustainable: adjective (Oxford Dictionary)

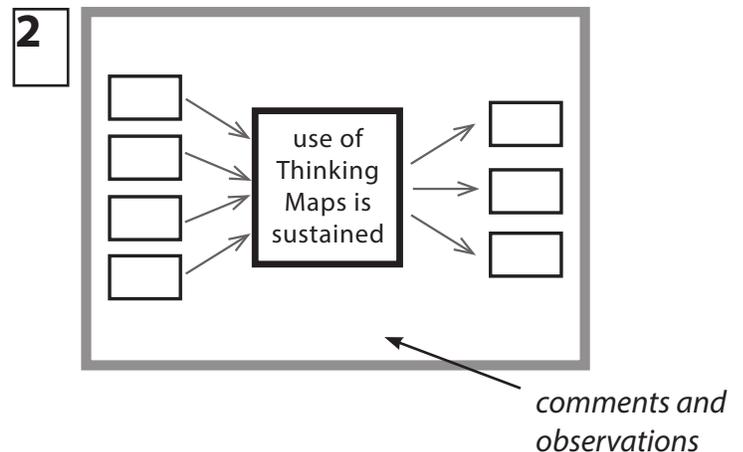
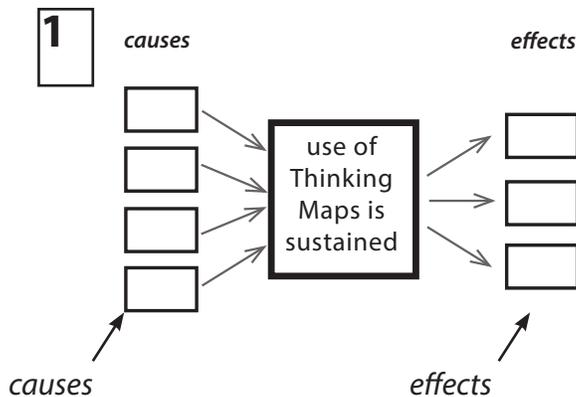
- 1. able to be maintained at a certain rate or level:
 - 2. able to be upheld or defended:
- sustainable definitions of good educational practice*

"Now it's [Thinking Maps] our culture, it's part of our district. It's something that year after year we bring back training for so that the new people are involved in that also. And so it just continues, year after year. It's a commitment we have to something that really works for our children...When you see our teachers together, our administrators together...their conversations naturally flow to conversations about children...I thought it was like that everywhere, but it's not... It's what sets us apart and enables us to keep on target when times are hard, when tragedy happens, and new initiatives come down. It's just that commitment to our children."
Beth John, Superintendent, Pass Christian School District (Interview, 2013)

Process: Each group can be assigned a different question to discuss and then share with the whole group; or each group can be assigned each question, one at a time, with the responses then shared with each other. The latter approach would require more time. (40-60 minutes)

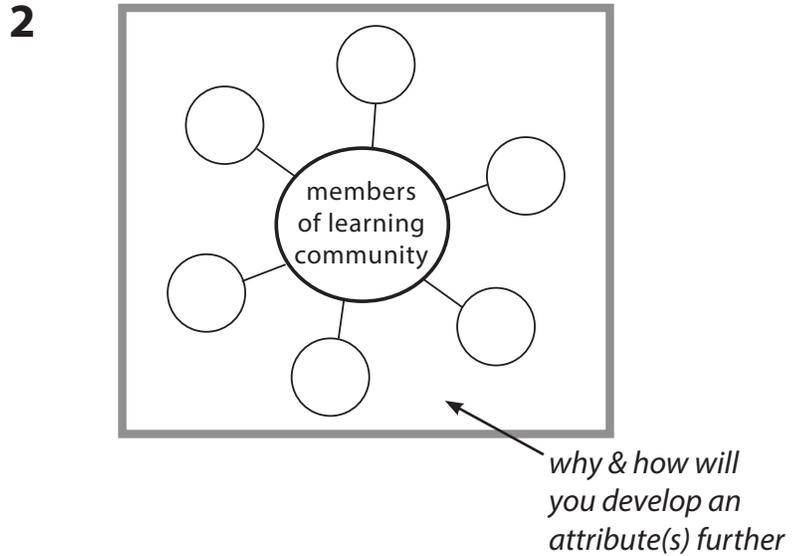
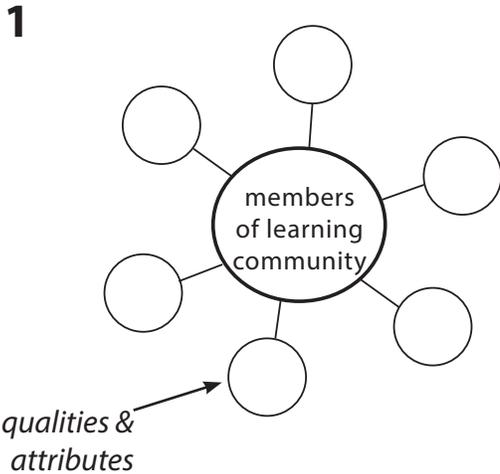
Question 1: What factors have contributed to the fact that the use of Thinking Maps has been sustained in Pass Christian for many years, before Katrina struck and after as well? (Multi-Flow Map)

What specific comments or observations from the documentary support your views? (Frame)



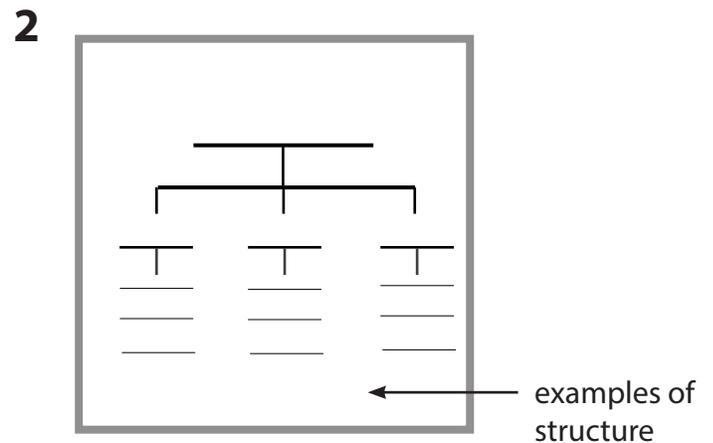
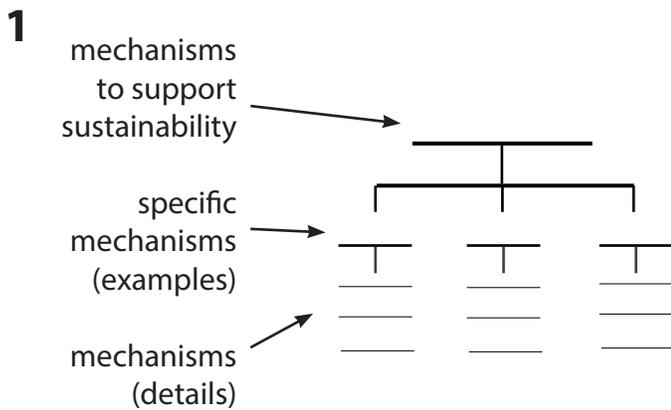
Question 2: What are the qualities and attributes needed of members of a learning community for the people and practices to thrive and continue to grow and be sustained even in times of extreme adversity?
(Bubble Map)

On your own, consider which of these attributes are your strengths and which ones you would like to develop further. (Frame)



Question 3: What structures/mechanisms exist within your learning community to support sustainability?
What would you consider adding? (Tree Map)

What are some examples of structures from other settings you think would be worth exploring? (Frame)



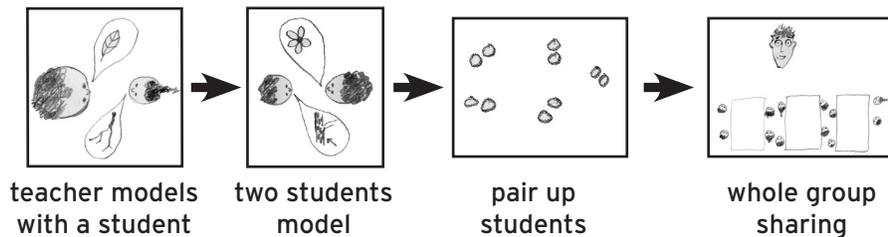
Appendix: Collaborative Learning Methods

Collaborative Learning is a relationship among learners that requires positive inter-dependence (a sense of sink or swim together), individual accountability (each of us has to contribute and learn), interpersonal skills (communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution), face-to-face promotive interaction, and processing (reflecting on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better).

Think-Pair-Share

1. The instructor poses a question or topic, preferable one demanding analysis, evaluation, or synthesis, and gives students about a minute to think through an appropriate response. This “think-time” can also be spent writing.
2. Students then turn to a partner and share their responses.
3. During the third step, student responses can be shared within a four-person learning team, within a larger group, or with an entire class during a follow-up discussion. The caliber of discussion is enhanced by this technique, and all students have an opportunity to learn by reflection and by verbalization.

Think-Pair-Share in the classroom



Carousel Brainstorming

Carousel Brainstorming actively engages groups in brainstorming multiple ideas. In addition, the structure includes movement which helps stimulate the mind and meets the needs of kinesthetic learners.

- Place learners in groups of 3 and ask each group to select an initial recorder (this role rotates between group members during the activity).
- Post several sheets of chart paper in the room with different subtopics or questions.
- Ask each group to select a different sheet of chart paper as a starting point.
- Provide 30-60 seconds for groups to brainstorm ideas for the chart in front of them while the recorder writes group responses on the chart paper.
- When time is called, groups move to the next chart and select a new recorder.
- Provide 30-90 seconds for groups to review ideas that have been recorded on the chart and add new ideas.
- Repeat the process as desired.

Variation: groups remain seated, but pass papers amongst them.

Appendix: Collaborative Learning Methods

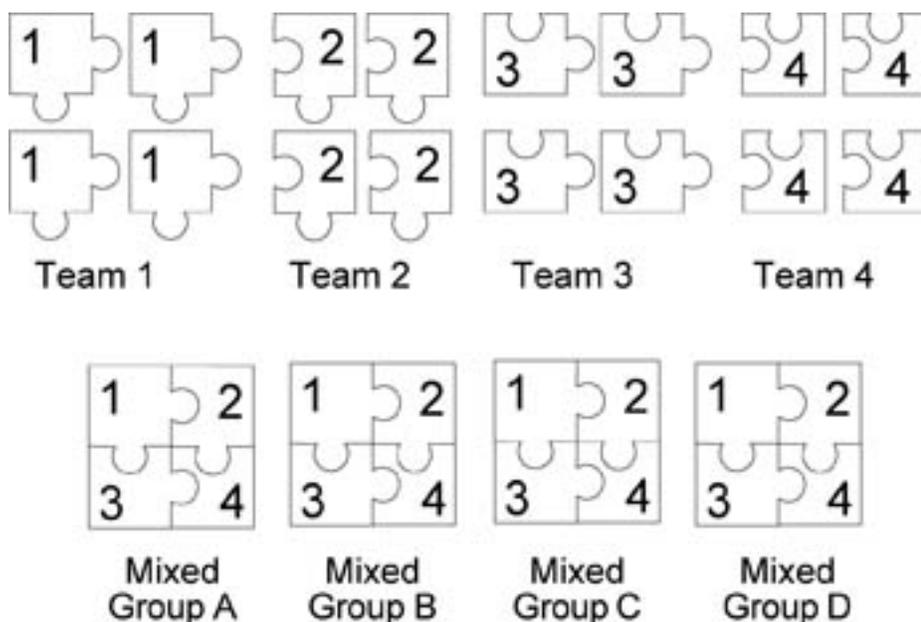
Jigsaw Process

Here are the steps for the Jigsaw Process:

1. Organize into HOME GROUPS with 3 people in each group.
2. Select one person to become responsible for finding out about only one of the three parts..
3. Hew STUDY GROUPS are formed based on the three parts.
(If there are large groups, just split into 2 groups or 3 groups, etc.)
4. Each STUDY GROUP reviews the film and does the accompanying map they are finding out about.
5. Finally, each person returns to their initial HOME GROUP and tells the group about their discoveries and insights.

When you form your study group, here are the simple guidelines:

1. Quietly review the Thinking Map of your study.
2. Then discuss the information that you believe is important to take back to your HOME GROUP.
3. Have a conversation about what you find interesting or intriguing about this part of the film.
4. Use a visual map to show and share your information.



Gallery Walk

A Gallery Walk is a visit to each small groups work. Each group gets approximately five to 10 minutes to work visit each of the other groups work developed with a Thinking Map. The visiting groups will post observations and questions they have from viewing the work. Once every group has visited each of the other groups work, the Gallery Walk phase is over.

Variation: the last group at each 'location' summarizes what is on the Thinking Map and the observations and questions from all the participating groups.