Reflection/Commentary on a Past Article: “Using Concept Mapping to Enhance the Research Interview”

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How Did It Fit Into Your Career Path?
At the point in my career, when this article was published, I was developing methodologies to support the investigation of teaching in higher education and the professional development of university teachers. The article took the transcripts of interviews and translated them into concept maps. This made the analysis of the interviews easier, as the volume of data was greatly reduced, but rather than losing information in this visual transformation, it actually added to the interpretation of the data by allowing the interviewer to gain a different and enhanced perspective of what it was that the interviewees were saying. As such, the development of this method opened up new avenues of exploration, where previously the collection of interview transcripts (and the time and cost of analyzing them) would have been prohibitive.

How Did It Impact Your Work?
The study gave me the impetus to explore the application of concept mapping as an interview tool and led to the development of map-mediated interviews—where the mapping took place within the interview rather than after the interview. Again, this enhanced the interview process and helped the interviewees to evaluate what it was that they were saying to me. It meant that the interviews became much more of a dialogue, and I was able to see interviewees more as partners in research than as data points to be plotted. Within the area of faculty development, it is important that colleagues feel part of the research rather than being "used" by researchers. This enables research and professional development to be mutually reinforcing.

How Did It Impact the Field?
While concept maps were originally developed by Joe Novak to summarize interviews, the literature had seemed to lose sight of this. The application of concept maps as an interview tool was, perhaps, reinvigorated as a result of this article. It is also clear that the ideas presented within the maps from the varying perspectives of different stakeholders show that there is not necessarily a single best answer.

Where There Any Surprises That Came From This Publication?
The value that can be gained from observing difference was something that came out of this article. Much of the literature on concept maps has the underpinning assumption that there may be a “target map” that represents the best answer. This really shows that much of the published work was concerned with the mapping of “agreed knowledge” or “curriculum knowledge.” This article was looking at the mapping of “the-yet-to-be-known,” and as such the value of concept mapping as an exploratory research tool is emphasized rather than mapping as a revision tool or study aid.

What Is the One Thing That You Think Has Changed the Most in This Area Since You Published This Manuscript?
Since publication of this manuscript, there is now much greater consideration of the quality of concept maps that feature in research. The old scoring rubrics that have been used to evaluate concept maps always gave more weight to larger maps. Recent research has shown that actually it is the editing and refining of maps (a process in which maps typically get smaller) that is part of the process that stimulates higher order thinking skills and can be taken as an indicator of expertise in the field. Typically, expert maps are smaller than competent maps. In the literature on concept mapping, the description “excellent map” is now being used to refer to maps that are clear, succinct, and have high explanatory power.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
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