Mind Maps: an Effective Tool for Teaching

Mind maps and digital mind maps are powerful and flexible tools that can prove to be useful in many contexts, from language learning to more general lecture-style classes. Not to be confused with concept maps, mind maps are radial diagrams used to visualize information, crafted around an image or key word that represents the addressed topic. The ideas or concepts that are related to the central image stem out in branches, from bigger to progressively smaller; they should be colored and, along with words, should also make use of images and symbols. Mind Maps' use of branches promotes both associations and the use of colors, important aspects known to boost learning and recall (Driscoll, 200). The final result should be on a single page, and therefore be concise and graphically captivating.

Mind maps are a visual tool that represents ideas and concepts along with their relations, thus emphasizing concepts' hierarchy and connections. They can be used by both professors and students to brainstorm and scaffold new knowledge and previously acquired notions, to establish connections, to review material and to take notes. Thanks to their popularity, it is now possible to create mind maps online through the use of free applications like MindMup, Coggle or Bubbl.us. The use of mind maps and digital mind maps has many advantages. It allows the professor to review topics without recurring to "chalk and talk," while giving students leadership of the activity and the chance to establish their own connections and categories. In this way, the professor is also a "facilitator," rather than only an instructor.

Additionally, digital mind mapping allows for the creation of maps with ideas, concepts and definitions neatly written and ordered. The branches of the map can be collapsed and expanded as needed, while keeping everything on a single document. This proves useful, as it offers a view of the whole subject, but also provides the option to review and focus on specific branches and topics of the map. Digital mind maps can include images, clips or web links, and are thus well suited for visual learners.

Additionally, mind maps can be created in class, can be saved for further review at home and can be edited over and over again once back in class. In this way, digital mind maps allow students to review topics together in class, individually at home and then again together in class. The need for synthesis of mind maps makes them an ideal tool for students to review and collaborate together. To further enhance learning cooperation, it is possible to use a hybrid approach, with maps created digitally for the whole class and individually recreated on paper by the students, who can share or even exchange their maps. These maps will be similar in content, but different in their layout and connections, thus giving the students the possibility not only to collaborate, but also to look at the same topic from different perspectives and through different connections (Budd, 42). This practice boosts interaction, but also learning, recall and recognition in a self-managed active context.

To conclude, mind maps allow the professor to facilitate, motivate and model knowledge for students, while still giving the class leadership of learning. Additionally, they help to move from a professor-

centered context to a student-centered learning environment, while covering at least four of the "Seven Principles of Good Teaching Practices" created by Chickering and Gamson, namely: 1) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students; 2) encouraging active learning; 3) giving prompt feedback; 4) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

Resources

Budd, John. "Mind maps as classroom exercises." *Journal of Economic Education* 35 (Winter 2004): 35-49.

Chickering, Arthur, and Zelda Gamson. "Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education." *AAHE Bulletin* 39 (March 1987): 3-7.

Driscoll, Marcy. *Psychology of learning for instruction*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

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