TEACHING AND LEARNING

Jamming Together: Concept Mapping in the Pandemic Classroom

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At the University of New Hampshire (UNH), the pandemic brought a shift from on-campus, face-to-face instruction to hybrid instruction, where students and faculty engaged in teaching models ranging from remote asynchronous and synchronous, to rotational attendance in-person, to fully in-person learning. With rotational attendance, some classes were partially in-person and partially remote. Because of this, I had to develop strategies to engage students in hands-on activities in new ways.

In previous semesters, I worked with the senior honors cohort of the Peter T. Paul College of Business & Economics for two sessions, as the students began to work on their honors theses. The first session focused on developing a thesis topic and search strategies for a literature review. Students used poster-sized paper and markers to create a concept map of their thesis topics, with the goal of thinking about subtopics and identifying keywords related to their research questions. This exercise helped students visualize their topics, see relationships and themes between the subtopics, and recognize questions they needed to answer or explore in their research (See Figure 1). The second classroom session focused on applying the strategies learned in the first session to searching library databases and other relevant resources. This was done via a hands-on research workshop, with individual time for students to apply the skills they learned to their topic, and with a librarian present to answer questions and offer guidance.

Figure 1. Librarian example for honors cohort mind map exercise.

While the second session was easily adapted to hybrid instruction, the first session, and more specifically the concept mapping exercise, was much more difficult to adjust. But this hands-on activity was important to keep because it allowed students to share and learn from each other, while also developing their thesis topic and research at an early stage in the writing process. Reporting back to the class and sharing their work also helped students think through their research ideas, discuss different approaches to topics, and communicate with each other about the research process.

To adapt the concept mapping exercise and address the learning objectives for the session, I turned to Google Jamboard (<https://edu.google.com/products/jamboard/>) as a solution for two reasons: first, because of student familiarity with using Google products, and second, because no account registration is required for students to use the tool, making the barrier to access very low. The software layout also replicated the in-person session's use of blank paper.

Google Jamboard is designed as an online whiteboard tool that offers the functionality to create multiple white boards in one session. Using Jamboard was very intuitive to the students; I barely needed to explain the steps before each student had claimed a board and began working. Each student in the class, no matter their location, could join the shared Jamboard and claim a "whiteboard" slide to make a concept map. Jamboard also offers a variety of tools for marking up each slide, including adding images, markers and highlighters, and sticky notes.

After making their maps, students could easily see their classmates' work and talk through the examples by scrolling across the boards. The Business Librarian broadcast Jamboard via Zoom and in the classroom so that all students could view the work as follow-up discussions took place. One of the best aspects of this tool was students' ability to "take home" their concept map after class because they only needed the shared link to view or download their map after the session.