Concept Maps as Learning Tools for Students and Instructors

David W. Hart
English Department, UW-L

The Concept Map Project: ENG 469 Postcolonial Literature

Abstract
Students created ungraded Concept Maps about colonialism three times during the semester. We analyzed the students' progress during the semester, and together reviewed the CMs at the end of the term. The tasks were meant to enable students' metacognitive abilities to follow and note their progress during the semester, and serve as an end-of-semester review. The CMs provided the instructor with evidence to gauge student knowledge informally during the semester without the labor of grading.

Introduction
- The CM Project supports the assessment of the following SLO: "Students will understand the basic terminology of Postcolonial Studies.
- Students were asked to create three Concepts Maps (CM1, CM2, CM3), during Week 2, Week 8, and Week 13. The students were asked to create two maps each time: "Colonialism leads to . . ." and "Colonialism stems from . . ."
- Students were limited to a maximum of fifteen minutes of class time to complete each CM.
- After creating CM3, the students reviewed all of their CMs and analyzed them for what the maps illustrated about each student's learning process. After the individual reviews, students gathered in two large groups to come to conclusions about what we called "The Concept Map Project."

Student Sample
I had numerous students offer their sample CMs to use here. One student's work (below) with CM1, CM2, and CM3 fully illustrates the CM Project.

Objectives & Hypothesis
- The main objective of the Concept Map Project is twofold: 1) to enable students to obtain metacognitive understanding of their learning process, and 2) to enable the instructor to see the students' progress during the semester.
- One goal for the course is for the students to obtain a firm grounding of basic key concepts relating to Postcolonial Studies.
- The hypothesis is that The Concept Map Project should illustrate the accomplishment (or lack thereof) of these goals for assessment purposes.

Results
- Based on the submitted CMs, I viewed the abilities of the students at various points during the semester, and made adjustments to class discussions accordingly.
- Students began to incorporate more rigorous academic terminology in CM2 and CM3.
- One of the unforeseen and impressive results was that students began to visualize, on their own, the intersectionality of key concepts within Postcolonial Studies (See the web-like design of the Sample CM 3 below).
- In CM2 and CM3, students were able to include examples to illustrate the key concepts.
- As suggested by their Concept Maps alone, 12 of 14 students demonstrated significant improvement during the semester and general mastery of understanding major course concepts related to Postcolonial Studies by the end of the semester.

Conclusions
- Upon reviewing their CMs, students conclude that reading and discussing literature enhances their understanding of critical real world postcolonial issues, such as hybridity, diaspora, orientalism, and nationalism. They understand the concepts better because they can envision them as a lived reality through the characters and plot of the chosen literature. It helped that various concepts relative to Postcolonial Studies were extensively embedded in the novels, poetry, and drama chosen for review.
- Students noted one limitation: concept maps request students to generalize using labels, thus limiting some students' development of thought.
- Another limitation is that some students illustrate their knowledge better through other forms such as projects or, not surprisingly, textual exam answers. The CM should be used in conjunction with other assessment tools.

References
- I thank the students of ENG 469 Postcolonial Literature (Fall 2013) for helping me to gather the data for this poster presentation.
- The initial ideas for the concept map are not original. They come from various sources. See for instance, Susan Ambrose, et al. How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Acknowledgements
CaTL "Learning By Design" Program Team, Summer 2013, UW-L. Thank you! Bill Cerbin, Brian Uderman, Deb Hoskins, Bryan Kopp, Kristin Keopke, Patrick Barlow, and Jen Snoon.

I had numerous students offer their sample CMs to use here. One student's work (below) with CM1, CM2, and CM3 fully illustrates the CM Project.

Concept Map 1

Concept Map 2, continued

Concept Map 3, continued

Concept Map 3, continued

Concept Map 3, continued

Concept Map 3, continued

Concept Map 3, continued

Concept Map 3, continued