eTools: Using Coggle in the Classroom

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Introduction

We all know it can be challenging to help students retain information, let alone develop critical thinking skills and the ability to make connections for deeper learning. It can also be difficult to assess these skills. Mindmaps and concepts maps can be useful tools for student learning, instruction, collaboration, and assessment. One online tool, Coggle, is visually appealing and provides an enjoyable space for individual and collaborative learning.

What is "Coggle"?

Coggle is an online tool for creating and sharing mindmaps. This tool is aimed at helping individuals take notes, brainstorm ideas, visualize connections across concepts, and collaborate with others. Mindmap tools help individuals connect ideas, synthesize a large volume of information, explore relationships between concepts, think creatively, and retain information. Coggle provides a collaborative workspace where users can share ideas, solve problems, and communicate complex information. Uses range from education to business to personal creativity.

How can I get Coggle for use in the classroom?

Visit https://coggle.it to access Coggle online. Coggle also has a Google Chrome extension. Coggle requires a Google account log-on. There are three pricing plans: Free, Awesome, and Organization. All three plans offer unlimited public diagrams, access to images and icons, export options (pdf, jpg, text, .mm), and embeddable diagrams. The Free plan offers an unlimited number of public diagrams but only 3 private diagrams. The Awesome plan ($5/month) offers unlimited private diagrams and adds several functionalities. These include joining branches, multiple start points, collaboration by link, additional visual elements, and the use of high resolution images. All three plans connect to Google Drive and allow users to save maps, share maps, and collaborate on maps using the Google Drive app connection. There are also Organization and Enterprise plans for departments and colleges. I recommend starting with the free plan but if you are making regular use of the tool, the Awesome plan is a solid upgrade.

How can I use Coggle in the classroom?

Our brains are not like a file cabinet from which we retrieve information we need. Instead, our brains create networks of information, embedded in contexts and

perceptions; the stronger the network the more likely we are to retain and retrieve information. Mindmaps are visual tools to help you and students strengthen those networks. Here are several ways Coggle can be useful:

1. *Note-taking during class.* Laptops in the classroom, ostensibly for notetaking, become a distraction with more visually exciting applications vying for the student's attention. Even when students are taking notes, they often type the instructor's words verbatim. Students can use Coggle to create visually memorable notes and focus on making connections between ideas.
2. *Reading comprehension.* Though reading quizzes are useful, they often rely on rote memorization. Have students create a mindmap before class, based on their reading. Coggle also has a presentation mode; in a technology enabled classroom students can pull up their maps and share them with the class. Alternatively, make the Coggle map an assignment after several weeks of readings. Ask students to form connections across readings and ideas.
3. *Instruction.* Coggle can help instructors synthesize complex ideas for students. Using Coggle as part of the lecture can help model for students the kinds of thinking we are asking of them. It can also help model the use of mindmaps. It can be especially interesting to build the map actively during class, soliciting input and ideas from students. The map can be made available after class.
4. *Programmatic Assessment.* Many assessment programs and rubrics ask for evidence of student decision making and critical thinking processes. For example, one such rubric asks for evidence of an emerging awareness of perspectives. It can be hard to track such thinking or awareness and it can certainly be hard to tease out that thinking from what students articulate. A Coggle map can help visualize the decisions and connections students make.
5. *Presentations.* Rather than a traditional powerpoint presentation, Coggle can be used as a visual aid for student presentations.
6. *Group collaboration.* Students working on group projects often rely on document sharing and text messages to coordinate the work. Some assignments require more developmental and continuous collaboration. Ask students to use Coggle to brainstorm topic ideas or to map out the various readings they have split up amongst them. Students writing a paper can use Coggle to develop the process they intend to use for completing the work. Students can use Coggle as a collaborative tool and even assess their own group work skills.
7. *Start and end of class.* Make use of the beginning and ending minutes of class. Ask students to map what they have learned to this point or what they read

before class. At the end of class, ask students to map their learning from the day. This can help instructors identify places of confusion and understanding.

8. *Beyond the class.* Ask students to create Coggle maps connecting their learning in this course to others courses they've taken (within or outside the major). This can be especially helpful for general education programs aimed at exposing students to different perspectives. A mindmap can help them make connections across disciplinary ways of knowing. Students can also use Coggle to connect theoretical learning to applications outside the classroom. For example, in a Community Engagement course students can visualize their learning from the course (or their major) to help them better serve the community partner.

Conclusion

Coggle provides an intuitive and visually appealing online tool for mindmapping. The tool can support instructors and students in a variety of purposes. From instruction to assessment to application, students can benefit from an active process of visualization, brainstorming, and collaboration.