FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

(Developed by Zygouris-Coe V., 2004)

Rationale:
Research shows that there is a strong relationship between understanding vocabulary and comprehension (Beck & McKewown, 1991). Word maps and charts help students expand word meanings and discover relationships. They also help children develop elaborated definitions of words rather than simple one or two word definitions. In addition, they provide students with a way to learn vocabulary independently.

Vocabulary instruction must include elaboration of definitions, discussion, and writing (Beck & McKewown, 1991). A logical place to begin vocabulary instruction is to teach students the qualities of a definition. However, there are several challenges in teaching vocabulary. How many words does a teacher teach? And, how important it is to remember to teach essential words well? Do not elaborate on ambiguous or unnecessary words. Teachers do not need to teach every unknown word. Teach the words important to the understanding of the text or words students are likely to encounter again or they absolutely need to know as part of a unit of study. This is in contrast to the popular grade level word list method that treats all words as if they are integral to the understanding of the text (Nagy, 1988). Schwartz (1988) suggests that for some situations, it is helpful to include comparisons on the map to help students come up with and evaluate their categories, properties, and illustrations. Hence, the reason why Concept Definition Map illustrates a valuable tool for vocabulary development. It requires the student to not only provide what the word is, but it also requires the student to provide descriptive words and examples.

Steps:
The Concept Definition Map graphic organizer is rather straightforward in its approach.

The teacher will choose a word or concept, which relates to the topic being studied and write it in the center of the graphic. Keep in mind a few questions:

1. What is the central word, concept, research question, or problem around which to build the map? For example:
   o Square

2. What are the concepts? The items, descriptive words, or telling questions that you can associate with the concept, topic, research question or problem? For example:
   o All four sides are congruent
   o Contains 4 angles that are congruent and right (90 degrees)
   o Diagonals: congruent, bisect each other, and perpendicular

3. Explain to the students that to understand new vocabulary, they need to know what makes up a definition of a word.

According to the "Concept of Definition" strategy, there are 3 relationships essential to a rich definition:

1. What is it? (Category)
2. What is it like? (Properties)
3. What are some examples?

Some helpful hints:

- Before students read, list key vocabulary on the board. As part of the pre-reading discussion, brainstorm

what students already know about the topic using the vocabulary map. After students read, have them fill in additional information. Have students present their maps for discussion.

- Students can use their map for a guide to note taking, both from discussion and content texts.
- Students also use blank maps to evaluate one another's written definitions, using a "backwards" approach.
- Modify concept maps for taking notes on biographies. For example, high school students reading biographies on World War II heroes developed maps defining the unique qualities of a specific hero. Their maps served as a pre-writing material for brief reports.

How to Use the Strategy:

The Concept Definition Map could be used during or after reading of a passage. It can be used with expository and narrative text. Word maps help students expand word meanings and discover relationships. After the students fill out those categories, model how these components can be interwoven into a definition. The definition includes the category, properties, and examples. Together, draft a definition.

The choice is up to the instructor on when he/she best feels it would be appropriate to use this strategy. Make sure you first **model how to use the strategy** to your students and **explain why** you chose the Concept Definition Map.

Ideas for Assessment:

One of our goals in reading is to maximize students' interaction with text—the more students get involved with text, the higher the probability of them constructing meaning from text. If a concept definition map reflects the current state of knowledge of someone about a specific word, there is reasonable doubt to state that a concept definition map **by itself** is neither right nor wrong. Each student might produce a different map that reflects his or her own previous knowledge. The concept definition map not only reflects previous knowledge, but also the cultural background of the author. Unless we refer to exact sciences, a specific word to define may represent very (or somehow) different things.

If the cardinal concept map elements are concepts and relations, then the basic assessment elements would be:

- Concepts--are the more important concepts in the map?
- Relations--do relations connect concepts correctly?
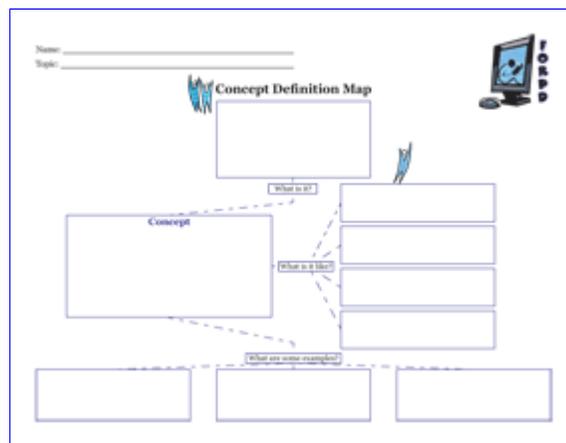
(Click on the graphic above to go to a pdf file of the Column
Notes worksheet or go to the html file.)

Samples of Concept Definition Maps:

- Penguins - primary grades (PDF: 244k)
- Settlers - upper elementary (PDF: 244k)
- Triangles - middle grades (PDF: 244k)
- Genocide - high school grades (PDF: 248k)

For more informative links on the Concept Definition Map reading strategy:
http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/cdmap.html
This link goes directly to ReadingQuest.com example of the Concept Definition Map with a downloadable copy.

http://www.tshs.pinellas.k12.fl.us/criss/cdm2.htm
This link provides a student example on the word "Polygon" on a high school level math class assignment.

http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/vocabulary/pdf/concept.pdf
This link provides a specific lesson plans (for grades 3-5) through Scholastic.com.

References

Beck, Isabel and Margaret McKewown. "Conditions of Vocabulary Acquisition." *Handbook of Reading Research Volume II.* (1991): 789-814.

Nagy, William. *Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Comprehension.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1988.

Schwartz, Robert. "Learning to Learn Vocabulary in Content Area Textbooks." *Journal of Reading.* (November 1988):108-118.

◀◯◯ ARCHIVE / STRATEGIES ◯◯▶

Go to Adobe PDF instruction page.