

SCAFFOLDING

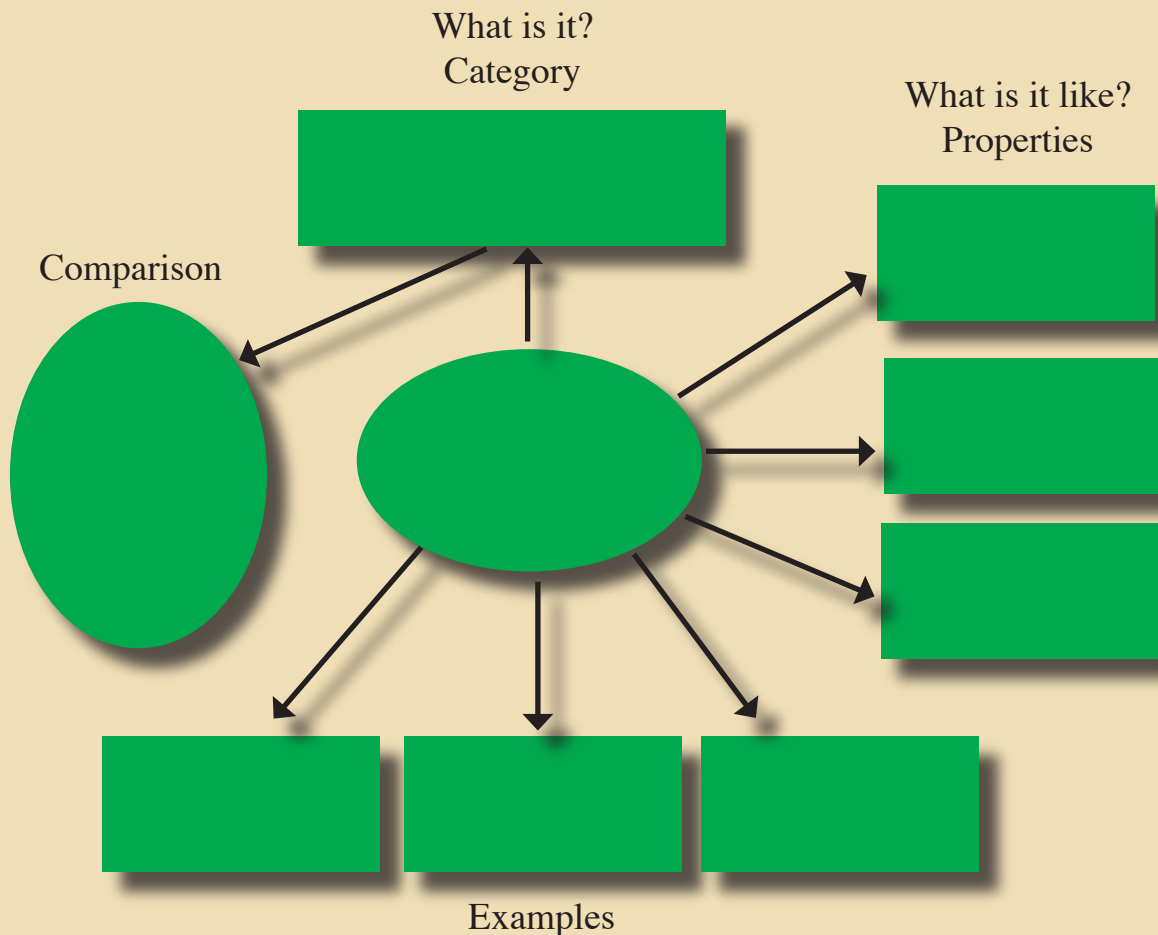
the *Concept of Definition* Strategy for Students

By Don Meints

The Concept of Definition (C of D) Map strategy is an excellent and effective way to help students get their “minds around words,” rather than simply memorizing definitions and parroting them back. If we want to help students understand vocabulary words and not merely recognize them, this is a strategy that gets to a deeper meaning of important content area words. We know that identifying the interrelationships of words and concepts is an important aspect in arriving at that deep understanding so necessary for complete comprehension of text. This mapping organizer is a great way to do just that!

Chris Mazur, an excellent reading teacher and CRISS-certified District Trainer at Downers Grove South High School in Downers Grove, Illinois, has provided scaffolding for the Concept of Definition strategy to help his teachers understand its importance and value. Teachers who learn C of D through his creative method are caught up in an active learning situation that helps them comprehend more completely how to define a word or concept.

Mazur begins the strategy by showing a blank C of D slide on his Power Point presentation. (CRISS manual, p. 197) After telling participants they are to “discover” the vocabulary word that belongs in the middle circle, he proceeds to give clues one by one in the “Properties” and “Examples” boxes of the form (subsequent slides in his presentation). He instructs the participants to take a sticky note and as soon as they are able to identify the vocabulary word that belongs in the middle circle, they write it on the note and show it to him. This, of course, becomes a contest of sorts, but more importantly, it is a lively thinking activity.



While this is an effective way to present the C of D strategy to teachers in a Level I training, the question arose, “Could this idea be used to present the strategy to students in the classroom?” We believe it would be most effective in helping students think about vocabulary words in a much more meaningful way.

Let’s assume we select an easy vocabulary word such as “exercise” and model the strategy using a [PowerPoint® presentation](#). [Note: This link will take you to a copy of the PowerPoint® presentation Chris Mazur uses with teachers and students. Feel free to use or adapt it for your students. If the link opens in your Internet browser rather than PowerPoint®, you will have to save the document to your hard drive, then reopen it in PowerPoint®.] We start out with a blank C of D Map and in one slide after another, we present the properties such as “improves circulation,” “increases lung capacity,” and “builds muscles.” After introducing the properties, we present examples such as “jumping jacks,” “push-ups,” and “running.” The comparison bubble could be filled in with “body building,” and the category space with “health improvement.” By revealing more and more words and phrases, students start building and refining relationships to concepts already in their background knowledge, and they struggle to determine the correct vocabulary word. During any time in this process, students may write down the answer and present it to the teacher.

The teacher checks the words students present, but does not reveal the correct answer. After all students have had an opportunity to present their sticky notes, they discuss their various answers and support why each would fit into the center of the map. Then the teacher reveals the word, perhaps giving extra credit to those who arrived at the correct response first.

The exercise is not only an active learning, interesting one, but it is engaging and helps students learn the relationship between a concept and the various components of its definition. Students enjoy the strategy and have fun while engaging in a valuable thinking experience.

As an extension, think about having students create C of D maps using your content vocabulary*. They can then challenge the other students to determine the correct center term. This would be a great way to review vocabulary concepts before a test.

*Technology note: To have students create their own C of D Map challenge, open Chris Mazur’s presentation to Slide 7 (a blank C of D Map). From the Edit button choose “Select All.” Then “Copy” the information to a clipboard. From the File button, open a “New,” “Blank” PPT presentation and select a blank slide format. Now, “Paste” in the C of D slide and you are set. Let a student type in all the information, including the answer, then complete the following process until you have an empty C of D Map. (1) From the Insert button, select “Duplicate Slide.” (2) Go to the previous slide and delete one piece of information. (You will want to delete the center circle first!) (3) Go to step one and repeat.

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