

## What is a concept? (Jill Kerper Mora, San Diego State University)

CONCEPTS are (1) categories into which experiences are organized and (2) the larger network of intellectual relationships brought about through categorization. Understanding a concept requires some level of critical thinking in order to make associations between words and ideas according to certain criteria.

Objects or events are sorted into concept categories according to their basic characteristics or *critical attributes*.

The critical attributes must be present in a particular sequence, relationship or patterns to qualify for category placement. These represent the concept *criteria*.

The specific ordering of attributes is known as the concept definition or *rule*.

### **Planning inventory for teaching a concept**

1. What name is commonly applied to the concept? Ex. Lake
2. What is the concept's rule or definition? Ex. A body of water surrounded by land.
3. What are the essential characteristics or *critical attributes* of the concept? Ex. land, water, surrounding
4. What are the non-critical attributes typically associated with the concept? Ex. size, location, depth
5. What are some interesting and learner-relevant *examples* or cases of the concept, which you can use in its explanation? Ex. local lakes, mountain lakes, desert lakes
6. What are some contrasting *non-examples* of the concept that will help clarify or illustrate the concept? Ex. ocean, stream
7. What are some *cues, questions or directions* that can be employed to call attention to critical and non-critical attributes in the concept examples? Ex: "Look at all the points where the water meets the land."
8. What is the most efficient, interesting and thought-provoking *medium* (or media) by which to present examples and non-examples? Ex. slides, aerial photographs
9. What level of *concept mastery* do you expect of students and how will you measure it? Ex. Be able to define "lake" and state the similarities and differences this body of water has with other major bodies of water through a project.