These students are also allowed plenty of time for class discussion and for review of the vocabulary and major ideas. They are given the opportunity to work in cooperative groups where they share their entries on the grids and review each vocabulary word, noting the pattern of numbers (0, 1, 2).

We recommend semantic-feature analysis for three reasons: (1) It is supported by solid theory and research (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991; Bos, Anders, Filip, & Jaffe, 1989; Johnson, Toms-Bronowski, & Pittelman, 1981), (2) it is relatively easy for classroom teachers to implement and for students to use, and (3) it enables students to learn the relationships between and among the key vocabulary and major concepts in the text, thus enhancing both vocabulary development and reading comprehension (Anders & Bos, 1986).

WORD MAPS

Students will become more independent in their vocabulary learning if we provide instruction that gradually shifts the responsibility for generating meanings for new words from us to them. One effective way of encouraging this transition is with word maps. Schwartz and Raphael (1985) developed this strategy for helping students establish a concept of definition for content area words. The strategy stresses the importance of teaching students how to use context clues independently, how to determine if they know what a word means, and how to use prior knowledge to enhance their understanding of words.

To build a word map, students write the concept being studied, or the word they would like to define, in the center box of a map, such as quark in Figure 6.6. Next, in the top box they write a brief answer to the question “What is it?” This question seeks a name for the class or category that includes the concept. In defining quark, the category is a “subatomic particle.” In responding to the question to the right, “What is it like?” students write critical attributes, characteristics, or properties of the concept or word. In the example, three critical properties of quarks are listed. The question along the bottom, “What are some examples?”, can be answered by supplying examples of different kinds of quarks, such as top and charmed.

Teaching students how to create word maps not only gives them a strategy for generating word meanings independently but also, because of the checking process they go through in asking questions about the context, fosters self-monitoring and metacognitive thinking (Schwartz, 1988). The goal, therefore, is to help students internalize this test-questioning process for all of the important words they must learn. All of us ask similar questions when we encounter unfamiliar words in context, though we rarely, if ever, draw (as in the form of a word map) the information we are seeking about the words. Think of the word map as a visual representation of students’ thought processes while trying to figure out word meanings in context. Eventually, after they have demonstrated an understanding of the process by creating appropriate word maps, students should be shown that they do not have to create a map for every word they do not know. Instead, they should go through the questioning process in their heads, as mature readers do.