

Activity 2.7 Expanding Thinking with Metaphors

Submitted by Lori Britt¹

Last Updated 08/31/2023



Description

Metaphors are unusual comparisons that can help us see things in new ways. This activity stimulates creative discussion by encouraging the group to challenge their assumptions and default thinking.

Learning Goal

- Practice using metaphors as a strategy to expand thinking and generate new ideas.

Instructions (40 minutes)

Set Up	Prepare for the Activity Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl). Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.	
Step One	Introduce a Problem Select a problem facing your community. Share this problem on the board, screen, or chat. Without adding much detail, ask each participant to take 5 minutes to write down their thoughts. Prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down whatever comes to mind as it relates to this topic. 	5 min

¹ **Citation for this activity:** Lori Britt (2023). Expanding Thinking with Metaphors. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-2>

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

	<p>Tip: If the group is working on projects or studying a particular issue, participants can use these topics instead of a campus or community problem to think metaphorically about.</p>	
Step Two	<p>Use Metaphors to Expand Thinking</p> <p>Invite each participant to describe the problem using metaphoric language. For example, the cost of tuition is a sparrow caught in a tornado.</p> <p>If participants need additional help, share some of the following examples:</p> <p>How is this problem like (insert any metaphor you prefer)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... a vegetable garden? • ... rush hour traffic in a large metropolitan area? • ... learning to use a computer? • ... a computer virus? • ... an adolescent going through puberty? <p>Facilitator Tip: It is ok if participants generate similes instead of metaphors. Encourage participants to not overthink their metaphors. Try to generate a list of metaphors or similes quickly.</p>	5 min
Step Three	<p>Discuss Metaphors in Small Groups</p> <p>Invite participants to share their metaphors. Discuss how the metaphor applies to the topic. Invite participants to build on what they hear and craft new metaphors together.</p>	10 min
Step Four	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <p>Invite each small group to share one to two of their favorite metaphors. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look back on your notes from the beginning of this session. How has the use of metaphors helped you to see the issue in new or expanded ways? • How did you feel when you were asked to generate metaphors quickly? How did this compare to generating metaphors as a group? What insights, if any, does this spark for you? 	20 min

Reflection Journal

- How did approaching this topic from a creative angle feel different from approaching it from a logical or analytical one? What do you see as the potential of exploring topics from both angles?
- Did your group laugh when thinking metaphorically? How does humor help aid creativity? How might humor offer a creative interruption and opportunity to see an issue with new eyes? Did humor interfere in some ways?

Practice Journal

This week, practice using metaphors in your daily thinking. Each day think about a puzzle or problem that you need to address. Instead of rushing to a solution, go through the metaphor activity. Think about it through various metaphors. How did this activity change the outcome? How did your process change from the first to the last time you tried it this week?

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Metaphors and Creativity](#): Byrd, Jack. "Metaphorically Speaking." *Interactivity Foundation*, 28 July 2021, www.interactivityfoundation.org/metaphorically-speaking/. Accessed 25 Aug. 2023.
- [Metaphors and Creative Thinking](#): de Mink, Frank. "Metaphors as Keys to Creative Thinking." *European Journal of High Ability*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1995, pp. 176-180. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0937445940060208>. Accessed 26 Aug. 2023.

Activity Cluster

2.7 Expanding Thinking with
Metaphors

[3.5 Seeking Divergent Thinking
\(Surround the Topic\)](#)