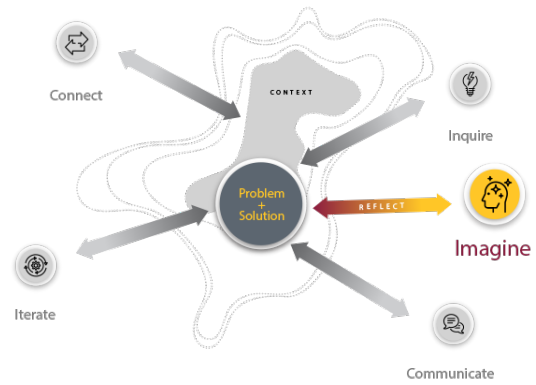


Imagining through Metaphors



What is it?

To generate ideas and creative thinking toward possibilities, it sometimes helps to see the familiar as strange, or to see the strange as familiar. This metaphor protocol is a relatively short activity that can help us more easily see relationships between different things and generate ideas to reframe how we think about the things that are familiar to us. By using metaphors and analogous settings to generate ideas, we can use these new insights to find opportunities for design.

Why use it?

Sometimes when we are familiar with a profession or a practice such as creating resources for students and families with different needs, we can make assumptions about what is possible and miss the opportunities that a fresh perspective might uncover. Exploring things that are familiar to us and the relationship they may have to another thing as a metaphor can help us to see how seemingly unrelated things may share similarity when we describe their attributes. When we can more easily see relationships between different concepts, we can more easily generate novel design solutions to our problems that we may have previously overlooked or did not think were possible.

What you need

 **20 – 45 minutes**

- This can be done with any number of people – it usually works best in groups of 4-6 if you have a large audience
- Your challenge or problem of practice (an existing challenge, a process that needs to be improved, a planning scenario, etc.)
- A list of metaphors or analogous contexts (listed on next page)
- A space to document and capture ideas. For in-person and analog purposes, this could be done on large wall posters with sticky notes, or on poster paper distributed to each team/ group. Digitally, this could be done via a digital whiteboard or shared work space like Google Slides, MURAL, or Padlet.

How to generate ideas using the metaphor activity

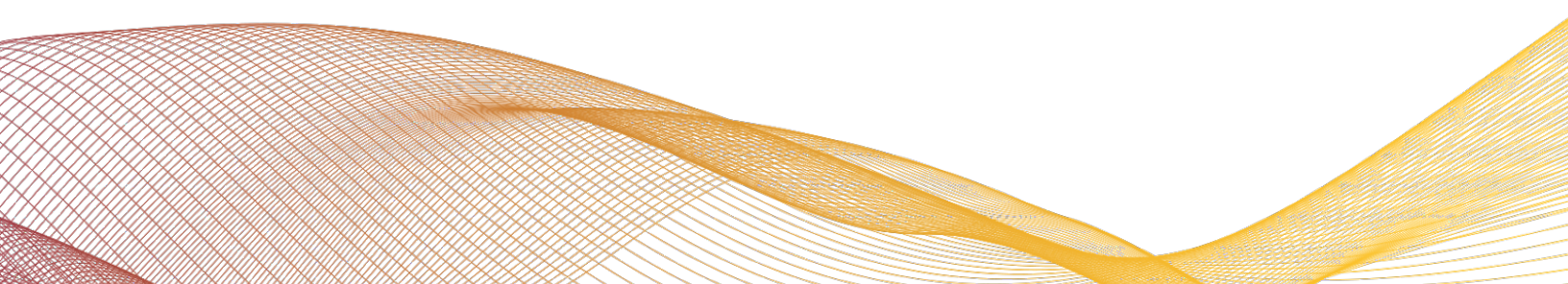
Activity Stage (Stage 1)

Explore different ways that seemingly unrelated concepts may have similarities or application to your challenge/ problem of practice.

1. Set a number of rounds to do this activity – we recommend 3-5.
2. Provide the space where people will document their ideas. If you are doing this in-person or physically, people will need sticky notes to write individual ideas, as well as a large documentation space (like a wall pad or table poster). If you are doing this digitally/ remotely, teams will need a digital collaboration space like Google Slides, MURAL, or Padlet.
3. Choose the metaphor or analogy to be used as inspiration. This can be done at random or in a predetermined order, depending on your preference. Share the metaphor with the group, and start the timer.
4. As each metaphor is presented, ask each person to take 2 minutes and brainstorm as many ideas as they can around the question(s) below. It can help to ask participants to consider and list the features or attributes of the concept.
 - *What if [insert your challenge/problem of practice] **was like** [chosen metaphor]?*
 - *What if [insert your challenge/problem of practice] **had the features of** [chosen metaphor]?*
5. Ask participants to attach/ affix their ideas from the brainstorm session in the documenting space, where the chosen metaphor has been written in a prominent place.
6. Repeat steps 3-5 for the duration of your brainstorming rounds.

Processing Stage (Stage 2)

1. In groups, review the metaphor connections that seem to “work” in terms of structural similarity.
2. Discuss and identify the metaphor that generated the most interesting ideas, insights or possibilities to the group. Have the group discuss how the current challenge or problem of practice could embrace the metaphor to create new possible solutions.
 - As a facilitator, it may help to ask the group to consider how the metaphor’s structure or processes might solve a similar problem metaphorically to the challenge.
3. Share with the whole group/ team (if divided into smaller groups of 4-6), and document/ articulate needed next steps, if applicable.



Tips



Don't be afraid to come up with some unusual comparisons. These comparisons are meant to stretch your thinking around a familiar idea.



Focus on and explore the structural similarities in these comparisons and their processes or attributes.

More resources:

- <http://newmetaphors.com/>
- <https://www.designkit.org/methods/analogous-inspiration>