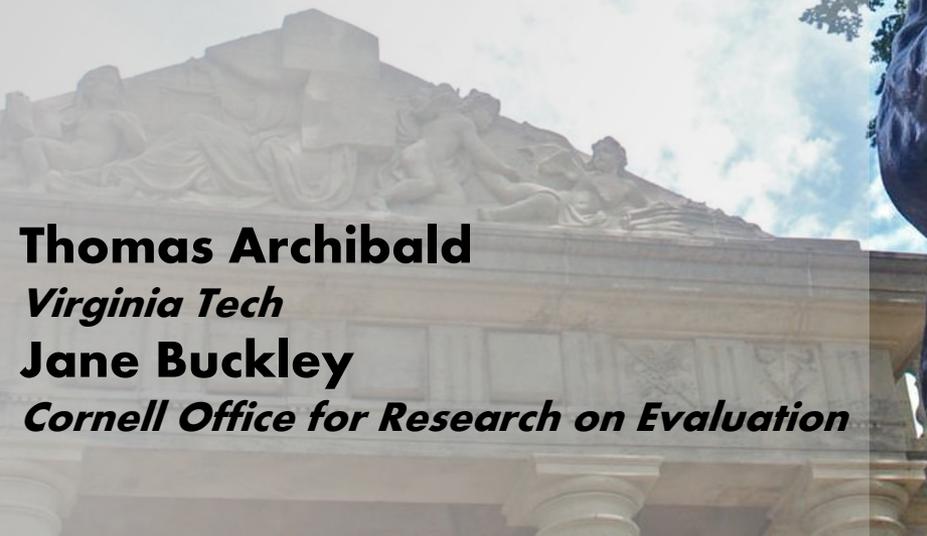


EVALUATIVE THINKING

AEA 2013
Saturday, 10/19/13

**principles & practices to enhance
evaluation capacity & quality**

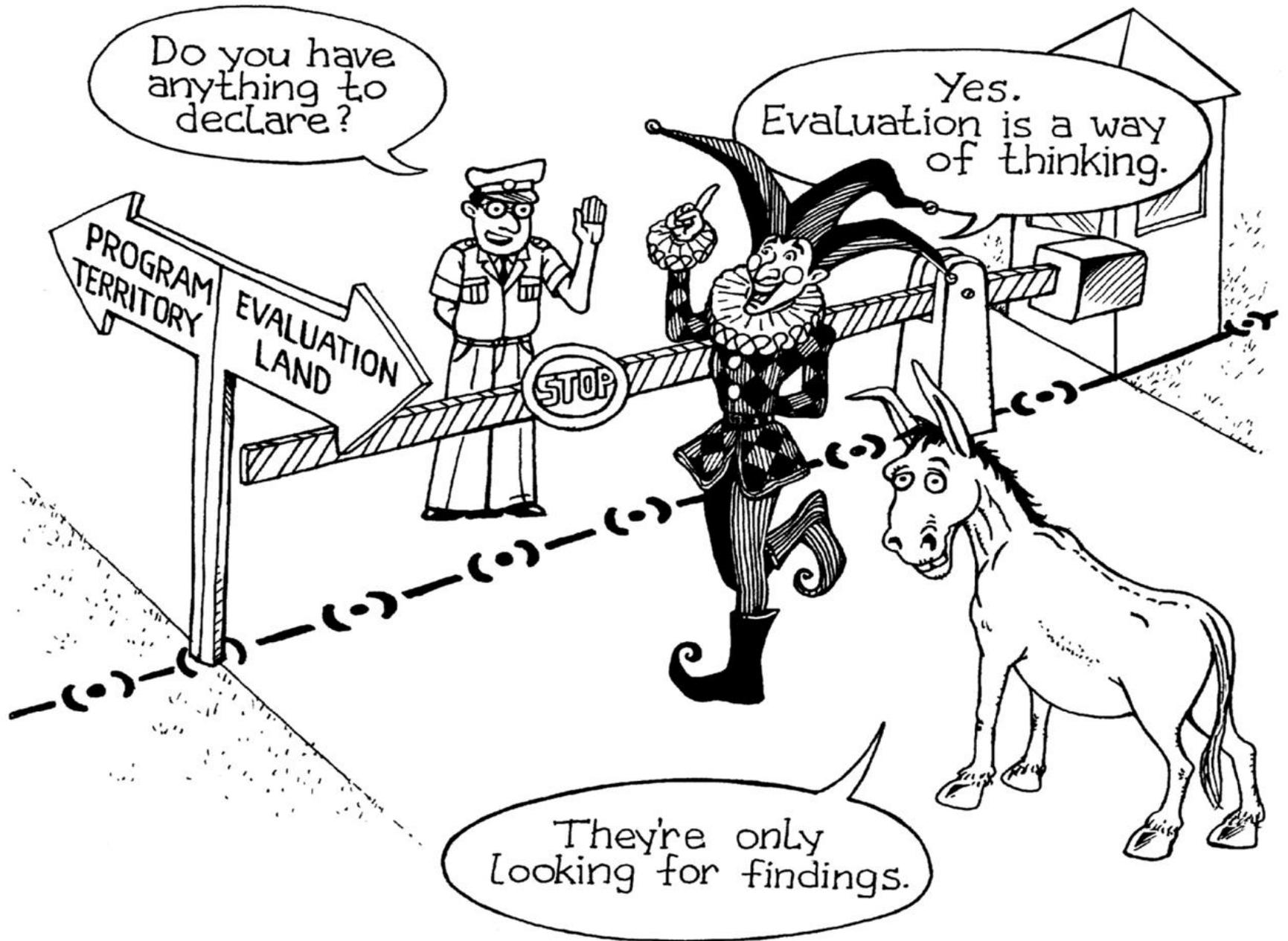


Thomas Archibald

Virginia Tech

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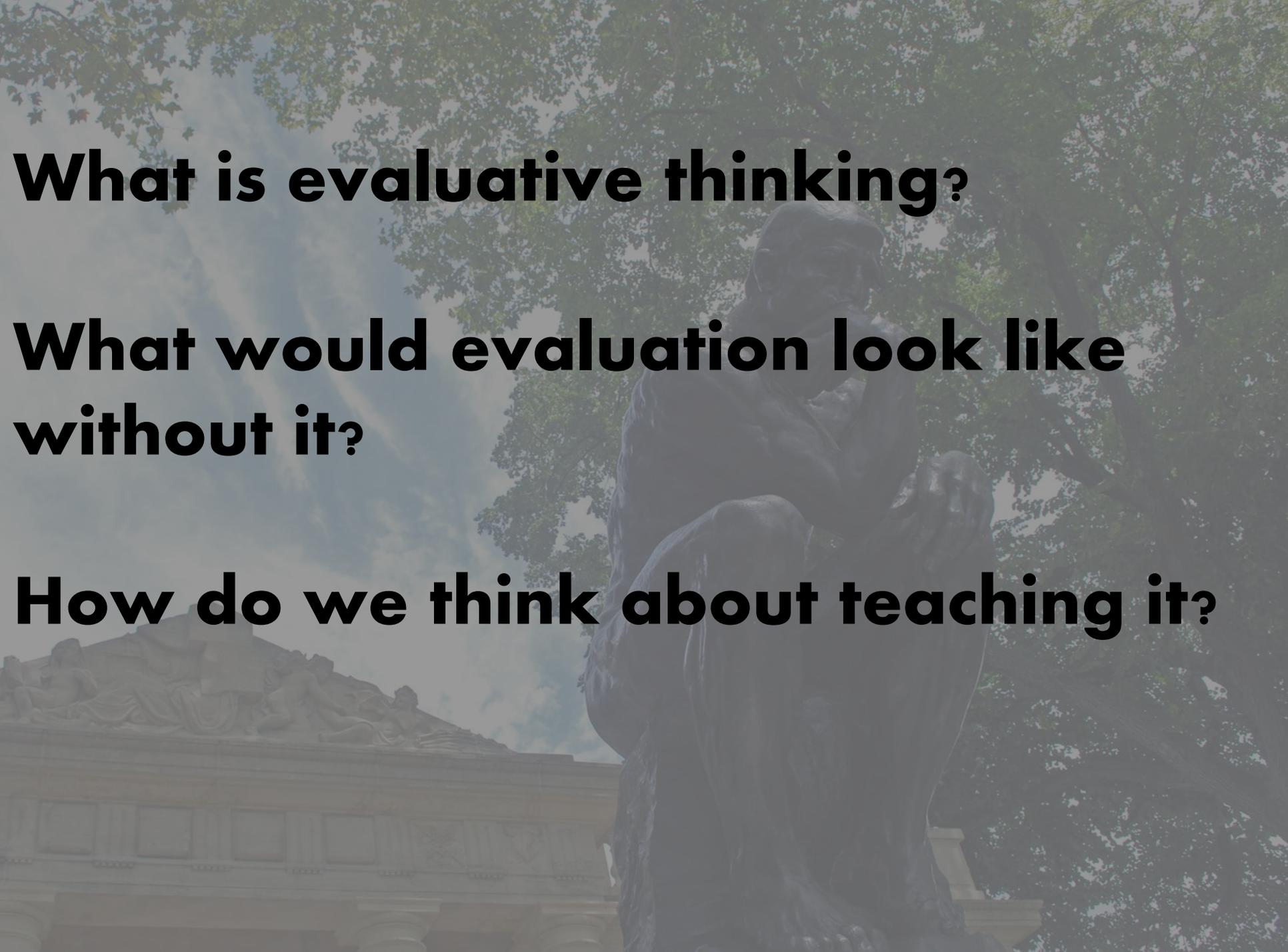
Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation



A photograph of a brown chicken with a red comb and wattle, standing in a grassy field. The chicken is the central focus, facing left. The background is slightly blurred, showing a stone wall and a building. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**free-range
evaluation:
evaluative
thinking that
lives unfettered in
an organization**

(King, 2007)



What is evaluative thinking?

What would evaluation look like without it?

How do we think about teaching it?



Evaluative Thinking is...

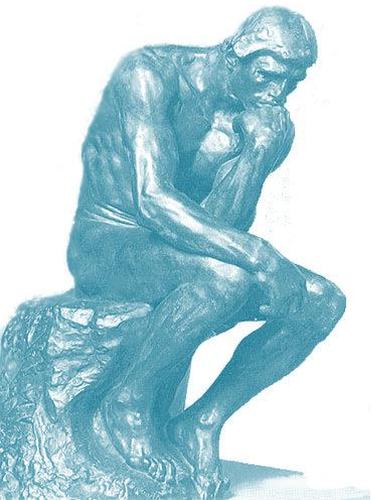


a cognitive **process**, in the context of evaluation, motivated by inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, which involves:

- (1) identifying assumptions,
- (2) posing thoughtful questions,
- (3) pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and
- (4) making informed decisions in preparation for action.



**facilitating
evaluative thinking:
*principles***



Four Guiding Principles:

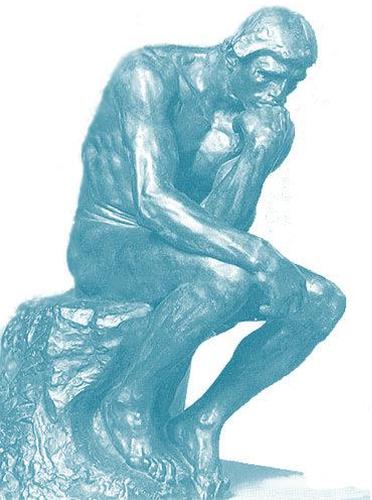
I. Evaluative thinking is not a born-in skill; it must be intentionally practiced, and does not depend on a certain educational background (Brookfield, 2012; Ericsson, 1994; Perkins, 1986)

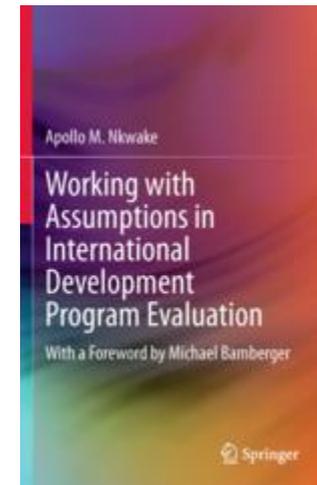
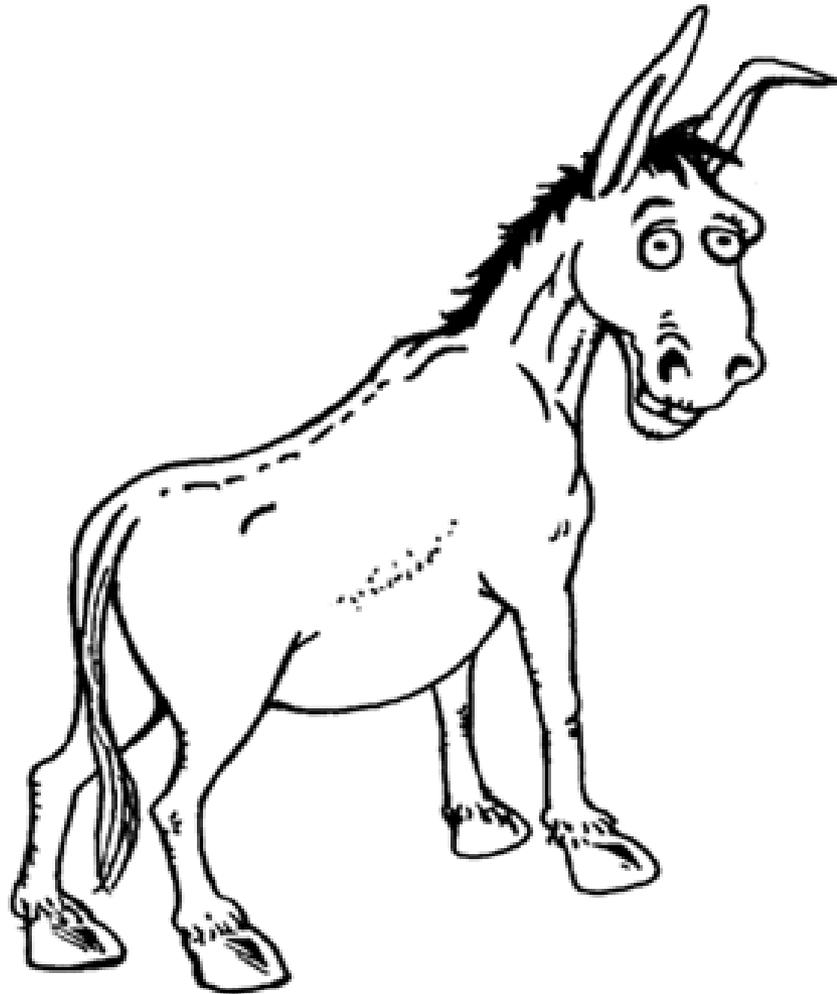
II. Evaluative thinking must be applied and practiced in multiple contexts alongside peers and colleagues (Bransford et. al., 1999; Brookfield, 2012; Halpern, 1998; Simon 1996)

III. Evaluative thinkers must be aware of—and work to overcome—assumptions and belief preservation (Brookfield, 2012; Lord et. al., 1979)

IV. Learning to think evaluatively (and practicing ET) must be intrinsically motivated and experienced incrementally (Bransford et.al., 1999; Brookfield, 2012; Piaget, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978)

**facilitating
evaluative thinking:
*practices***





(Nkwake, 2013)



**create an intentional evaluative
thinking learning environment**

- 1. Display logic models**
- 2. Create “parking lots” for questions and assumptions**
- 3. Post inspirational questions:**
 - “Is there an alternative explanation?”
 - “How do we know what we think we know?”

establish ET practice-focused discussions and/or meetings



1. “Mine” your model
2. Use opening questions (Brookfield, 2012)
 - a. What assumptions are we working under?
 - b. How can we check our assumptions for accuracy?
 - c. What alternative perspectives or explanations might we use?
3. Conduct a media critique (Powell, 2010)
4. Engage in critical debate (*neutral but relevant topic*)

A stage with red curtains and a wooden floor. The text is centered on the curtains. The stage is lit from below, with four spotlights visible on the floor.

**use role-play
when thinking
about
evaluation
strategies**

A stage with red curtains and spotlights. The stage is set with a wooden floor and four spotlights. The curtains are red and have tassels. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box in the center of the stage.

1. Scenario analysis

(Brookfield, 2012)

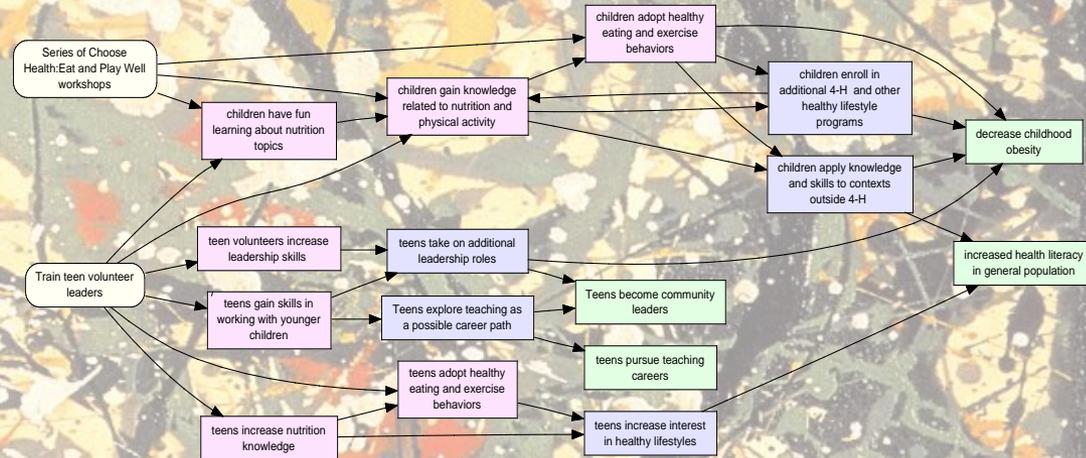
2. Thinking hats (De Bono, 1999)

3. Evaluation simulation

An abstract splatter painting background with a dense, chaotic pattern of black, white, yellow, orange, and red splatters and streaks. The colors are layered and mixed, creating a complex, textured visual field. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and complexity.

diagram or illustrate thinking when
communicating with colleagues

1. Build logic and pathway models



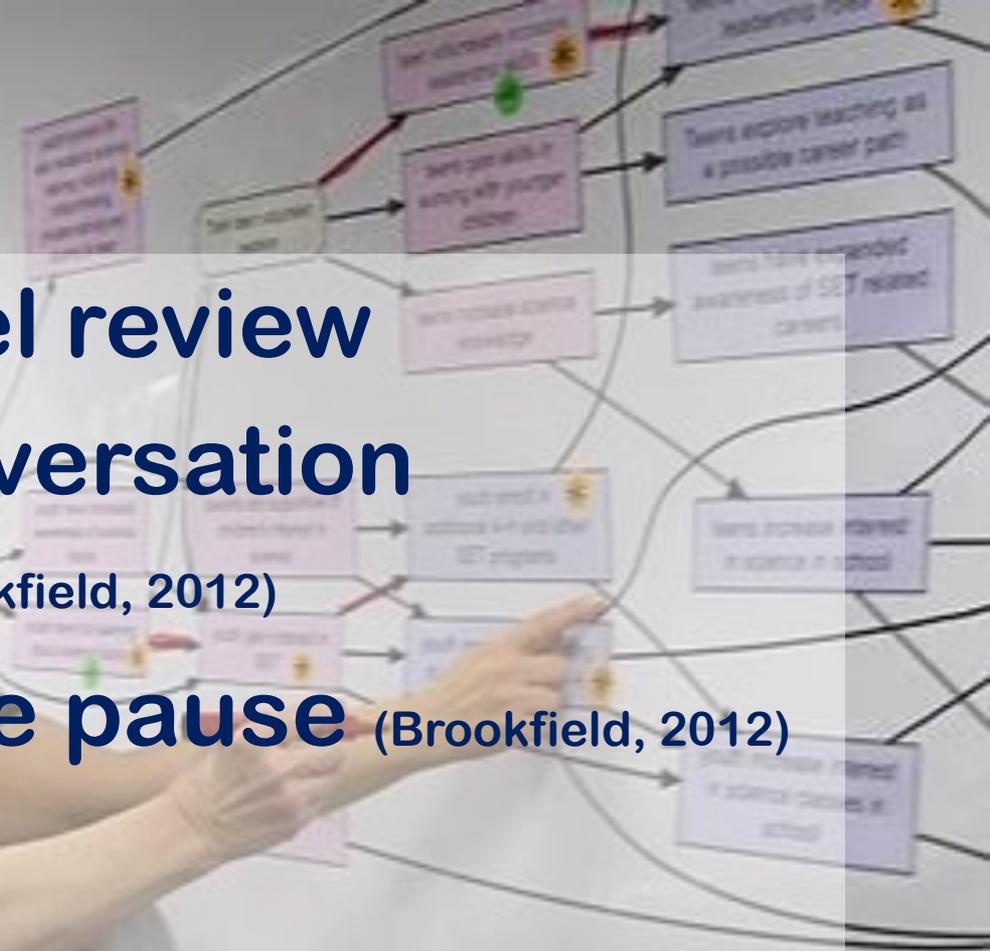
2. Diagram program history

3. Create a system, context or organization diagram



**engage in
supportive, critical
peer review**

1. **Logic model review**
2. **Critical conversation protocol** (Brookfield, 2012)
3. **Appreciative pause** (Brookfield, 2012)



**establish time and space to
explore intrinsically motivated
evaluation questions both
formally and informally**

**don't leave
evaluation
exclusively to the
evaluator(s)!**



Scenario Analysis

- 1. Write a scenario in which a fictional character is making a choice (between two paragraphs and a page long)**
- 2. Ask your learners to put themselves in the head of the character and try to identify the assumptions that character may be operating under**
- 3. Have them give suggestions of how the character might check those assumptions, and then offer another way of looking at the scenario that the character clearly does not share**
- 4. Use the following guiding questions:**
 - a. What assumptions—explicit and implicit—do you think the character is operating under? List as many as you can.***
 - b. Of the assumptions you've listed, which ones could the character check by simple inquiry? How could she do this?***
 - c. Give an alternative interpretation of this scenario—a version of what's happening that is consistent with the events described but that you think the character would disagree with or has not noticed.***

Scenario Analysis

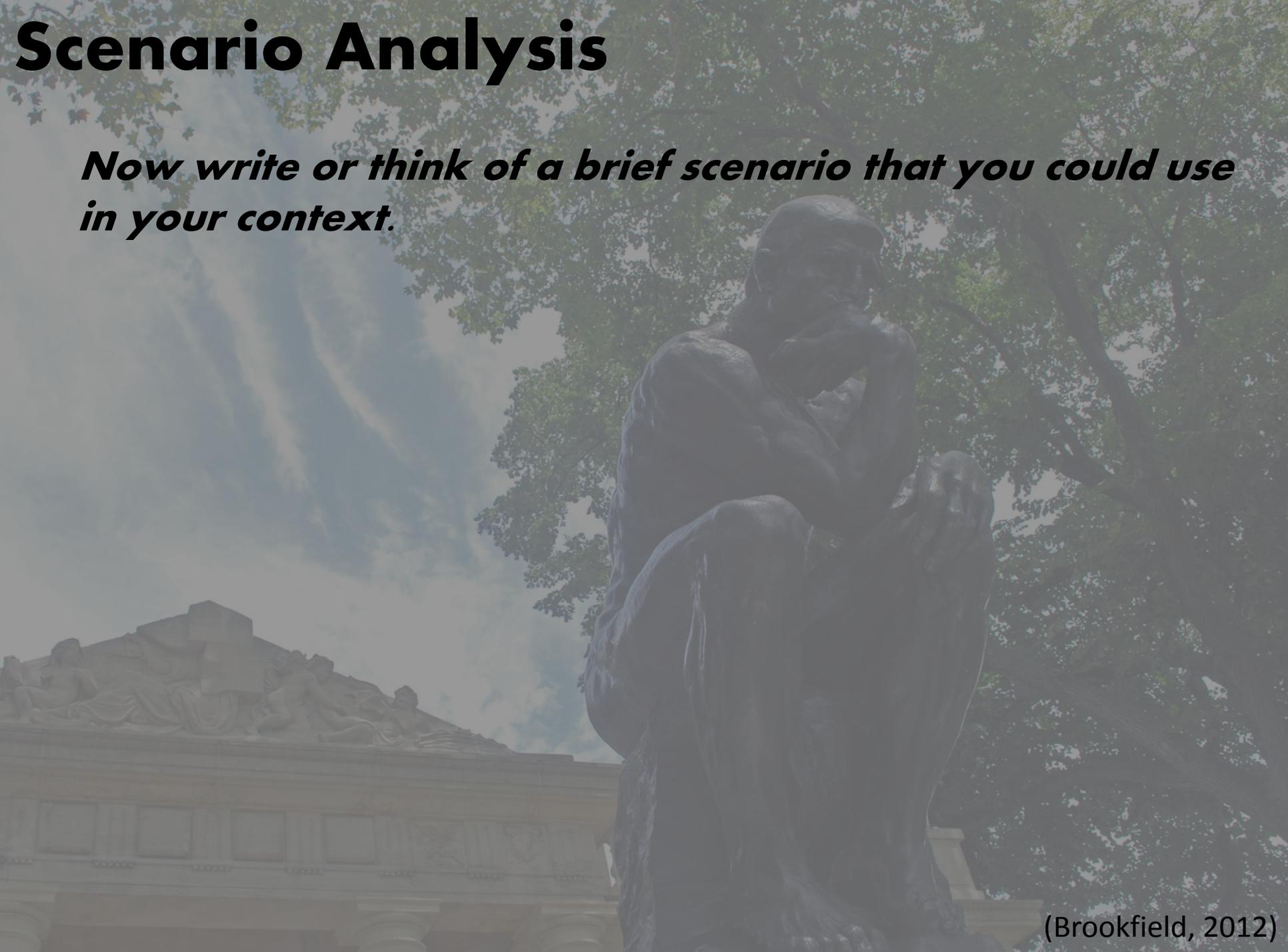
An internal evaluator in a non-profit organization has been recently hired and is beginning to develop an approach to both supporting the evaluation needs of the staff and leaders in the organization and building her colleagues' evaluation capacity. The staff are a mix of PhD level content specialists who do applied research on the issues the organization focuses on, plus front-line program implementers who work with the organization's beneficiaries. The evaluator's hire coincided with a change in leadership, where the organization's original founder had just retired and a new director had stepped in. The new director is increasing emphasis on evaluation, and decided to situate the evaluator in the administrative unit of the organization (right down the hall from the director). Some of the organization's funders have been calling for more "rigorous" evaluations in recent years, too.

Scenario Analysis

An internal evaluator in a non-profit organization has been recently hired and is beginning **to develop an approach to both supporting the evaluation needs of the staff and leaders in the organization and building her colleagues' evaluation capacity.** The staff are a mix of PhD level content specialists who do applied research on the issues the organization focuses on, plus front-line program implementers who work with the organization's beneficiaries. The evaluator's hire coincided with a change in leadership, where the organization's original founder had just retired and a new director had stepped in. The new director is increasing emphasis on evaluation, and decided to situate the evaluator in the administrative unit of the organization (right down the hall from the director). Some of the organization's funders have been calling for more "rigorous" evaluations in recent years, too.

Scenario Analysis

Now write or think of a brief scenario that you could use in your context.

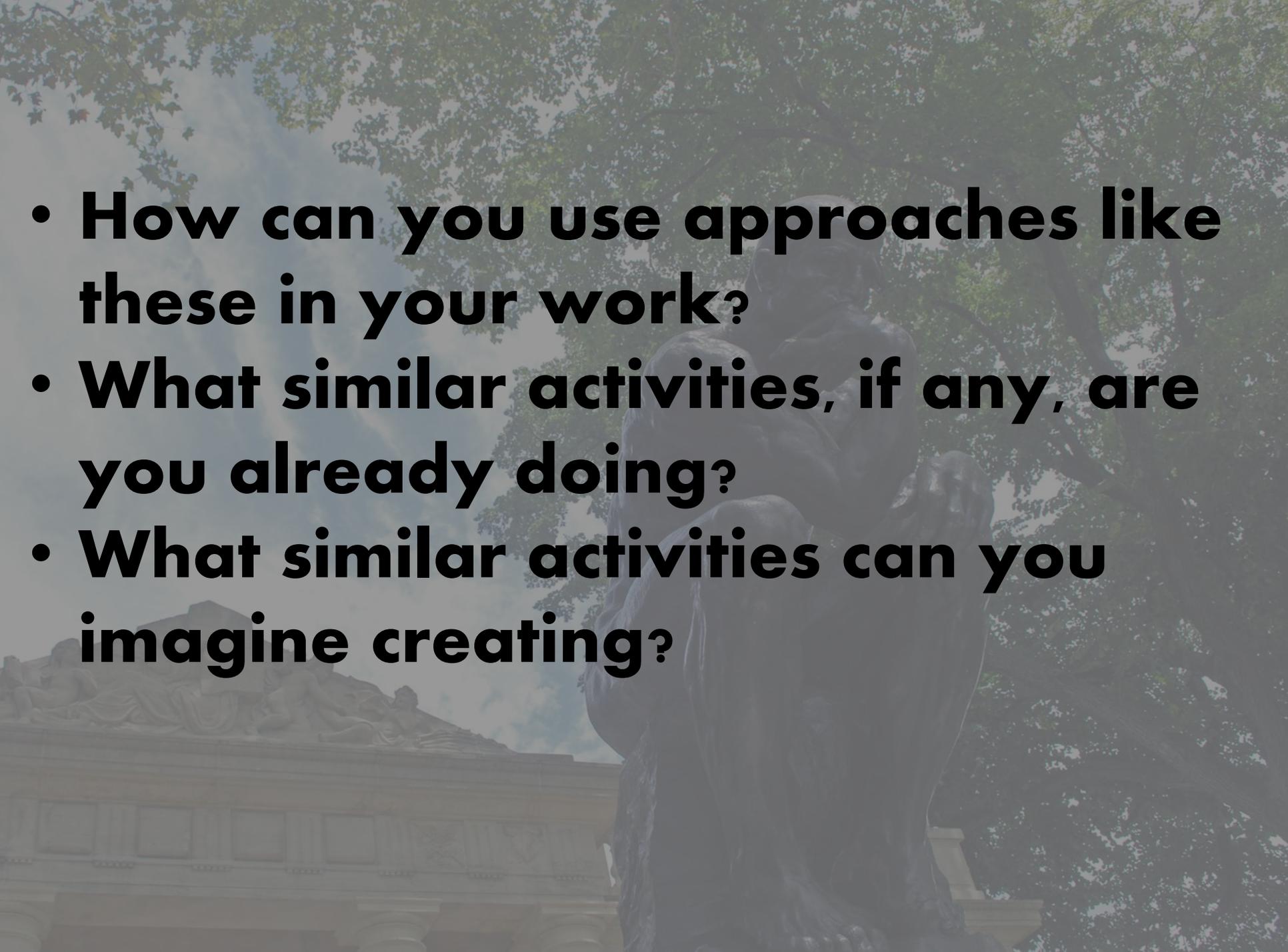


(Brookfield, 2012)

Appreciative Pause

Evaluative thinking can be intimidating, hard, and exhausting. It is also a social learning process. In light of both of these aspects of the work, this activity provides opportunities for peers to deliberately show how peer feedback contributed to their learning, helped them identify and check assumptions, and generate multiple perspectives. In every discussion, the facilitator calls for a brief pause, where participants can give appreciation for:

- A question that was asked that suggested a whole new way of thinking**
- A comment that clarified something that until then was confusing**
- A comment that opened up a whole new line of thinking**
- A comment that helped identify an assumption**
- A comment that provided helpful evidence**
- A comment that identified a gap in reasoning that needed to be addressed**
- A new idea that is intriguing and had not been considered before**
- A comment showing the connection between two other ideas or contributions when that connection hadn't been clear**
- An example that was provided that helped increase understanding of a difficult concept**

- 
- **How can you use approaches like these in your work?**
 - **What similar activities, if any, are you already doing?**
 - **What similar activities can you imagine creating?**

thank you

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