

# Teacher Takeaways: Practical ideas for classroom teaching

A British Council series of online events in partnership with the  
China English Teacher Professional Teachers Association (ETA)

16th September to 14th October 2021

## **Teacher Takeaways:**

### **Practical ideas for classroom teaching**

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**Adapting and experimenting with tasks to encourage thinking skills in classroom tasks**

**Fraser Bewick**

**September 16<sup>th</sup> 2021**

English for Education Systems (EES)

# Welcome to Teacher Takeaways

## Session #1

Adapting and experimenting with tasks to encourage thinking skills in classroom tasks

### Housekeeping:

- No microphones or video
- Please leave comments in the chat and questions in the Q and A box.
- We will try and leave 10 – 15 minutes at the end to cover questions



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**3 words that help us assess our ideas and materials**

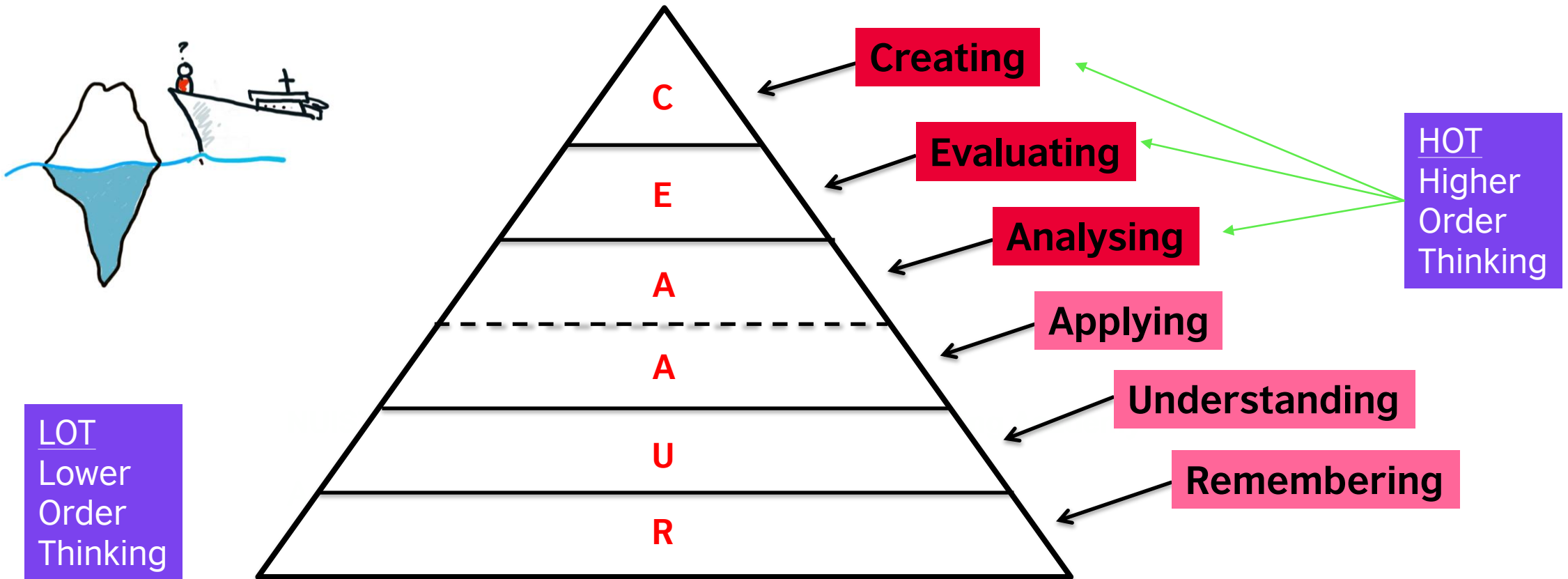
Adapt, Adopt, Reject

KWL

<u>Know</u> about thinking skills	<u>Want</u> to Know	<u>Learn</u> ed
Fill in this column	...and this column	

# Bloom's Taxonomy – Thinking Skills

Rise **U**p and **A**lways **A**sk at **E**very **C**hance

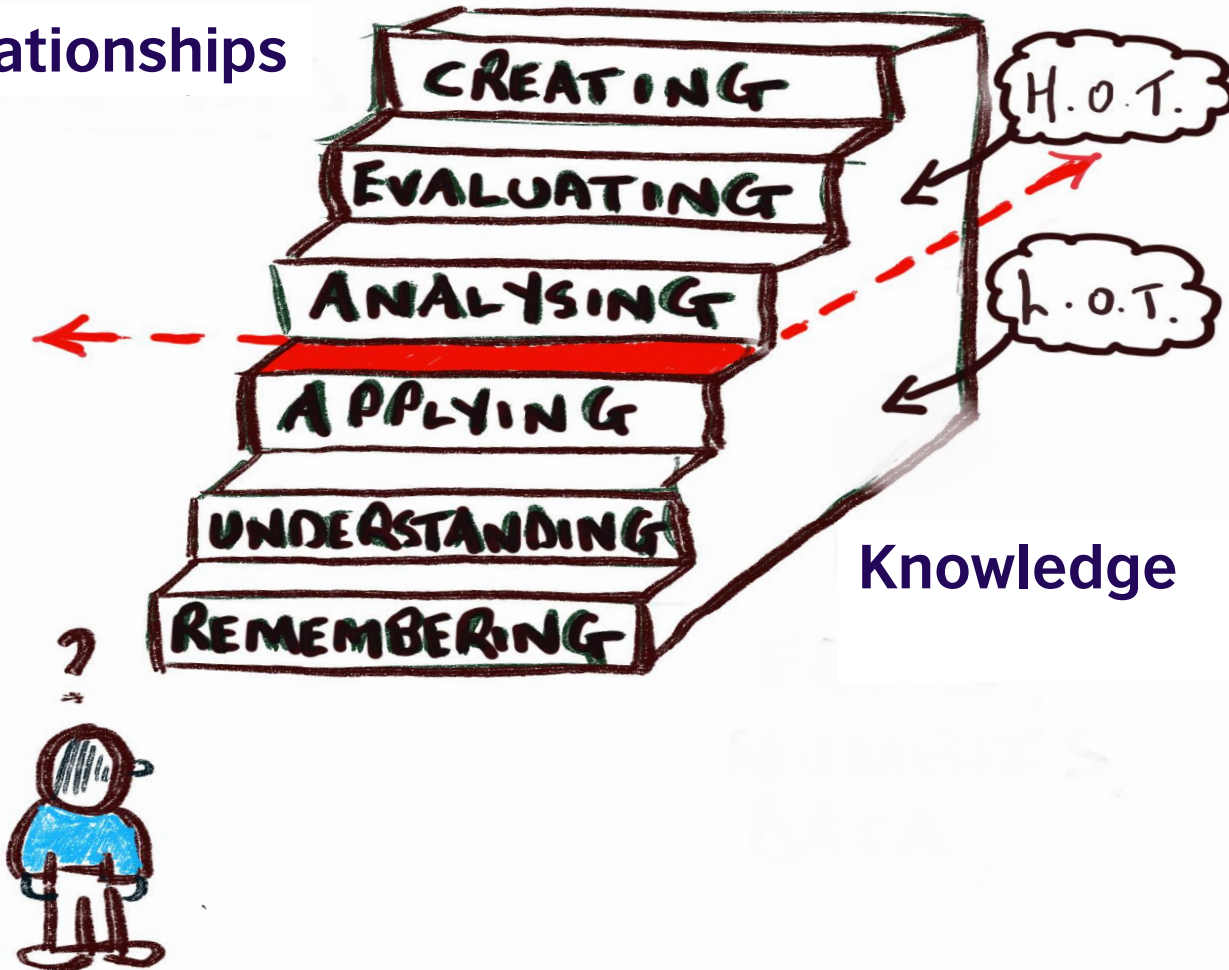




# Moving up to go deeper?

## Deeper Learning

Relationships



Knowledge

Not simply accepting facts, knowledge or information in isolation. Going deeper into the relationships between the knowledge, the veracity of claims, the hidden meaning or agenda of a text, etc

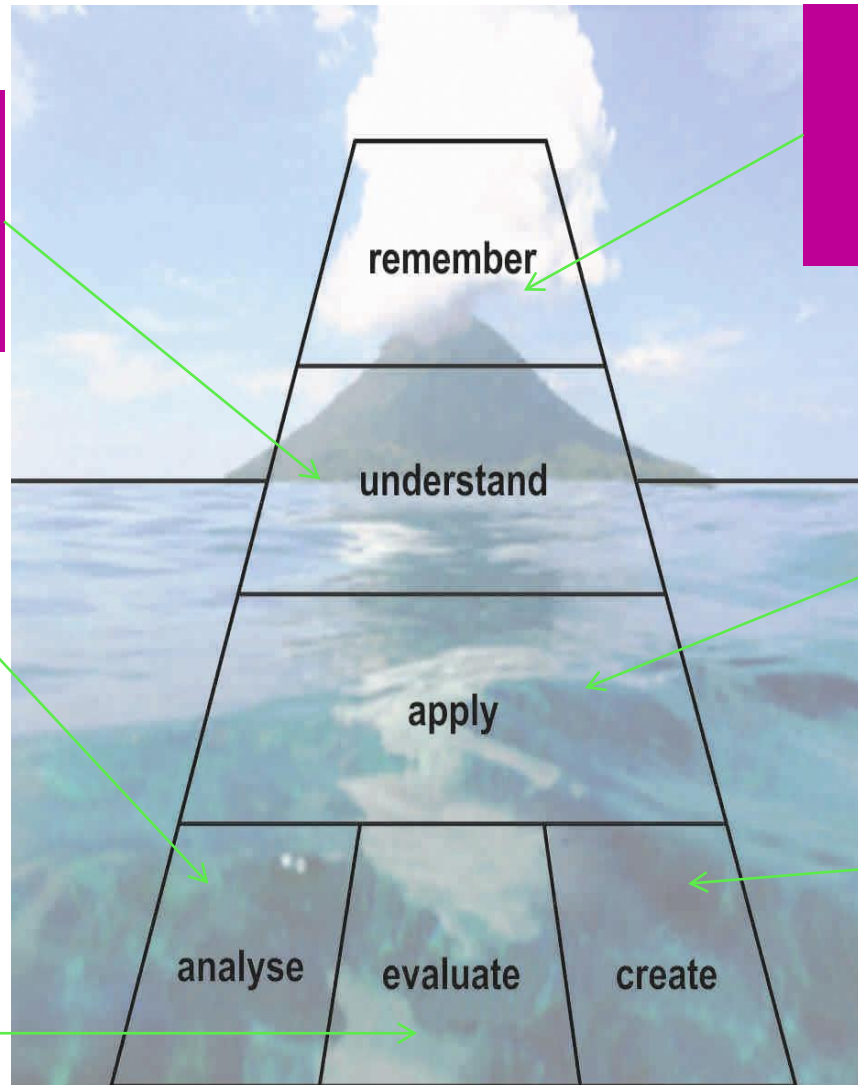
Learned knowledge, facts, memorised pieces of information, etc

# Common related words & activity types

**Interpret, summarise,  
explain, infer,  
discuss, paraphrase**

**categorise,  
examine,  
compare,  
contrast**

**judge, test, critique,  
defend, criticise, give  
Adv' & disadv', rank**



**find, list, identify,  
describe,  
memorise, define**

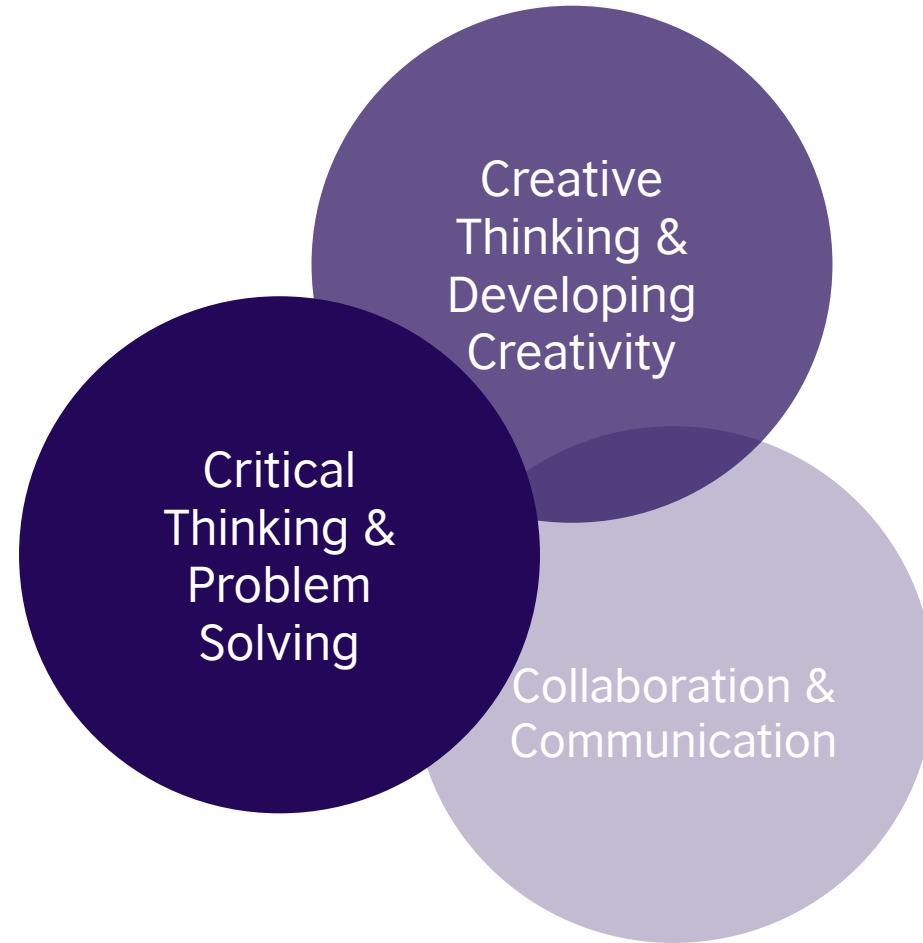
**make diagrams,  
charts, solve,  
calculate, survey,  
instruct**

**design, plan,  
produce, invent**

**Individual tasks or working with others?**



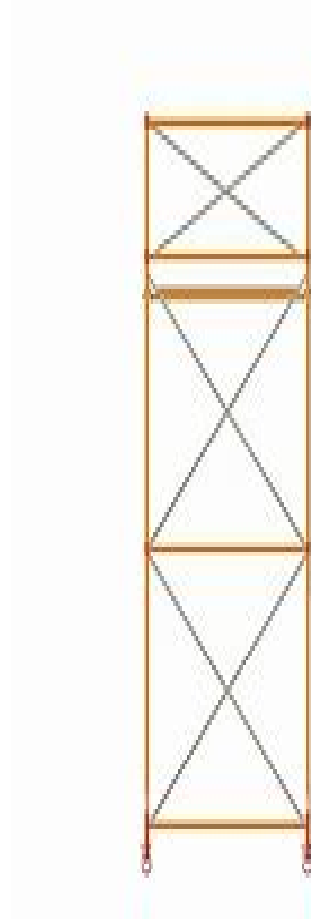
## Some key areas the utilise these thinking skills:



# Creativity comes from good critical thinking – some key points

## Creative thinking (Divergent)

- Develops best within activities that require answers that are non-standard or fixed
- There may be more than one possible answer; or no right and wrong answer
- Encourages imagination or innovative solutions! (Requires creativity)
- Still requires task boundaries for creativity to flourish in the classroom



## Critical Thinking (Convergent)

- Develops best within clear boundaries; with information and data to apply (e.g., clues, images, text, parameters)
- There may be more than one solution based on the facts presented – but often there is one justifiable best answer based on available facts! (Requires analysis/evaluation)
- Often builds on knowledge and (meta-cognitive) strategies already learned
- From the information available assumptions, ‘educated guesses’, correlations may be made

# Working together

Generating many possibilities is not enough by itself to help you solve a problem. Similarly, if you rely on focusing alone, you may have too few possibilities from which to choose. Effective problem solvers must think both creatively and critically, generating options and focusing their thinking.

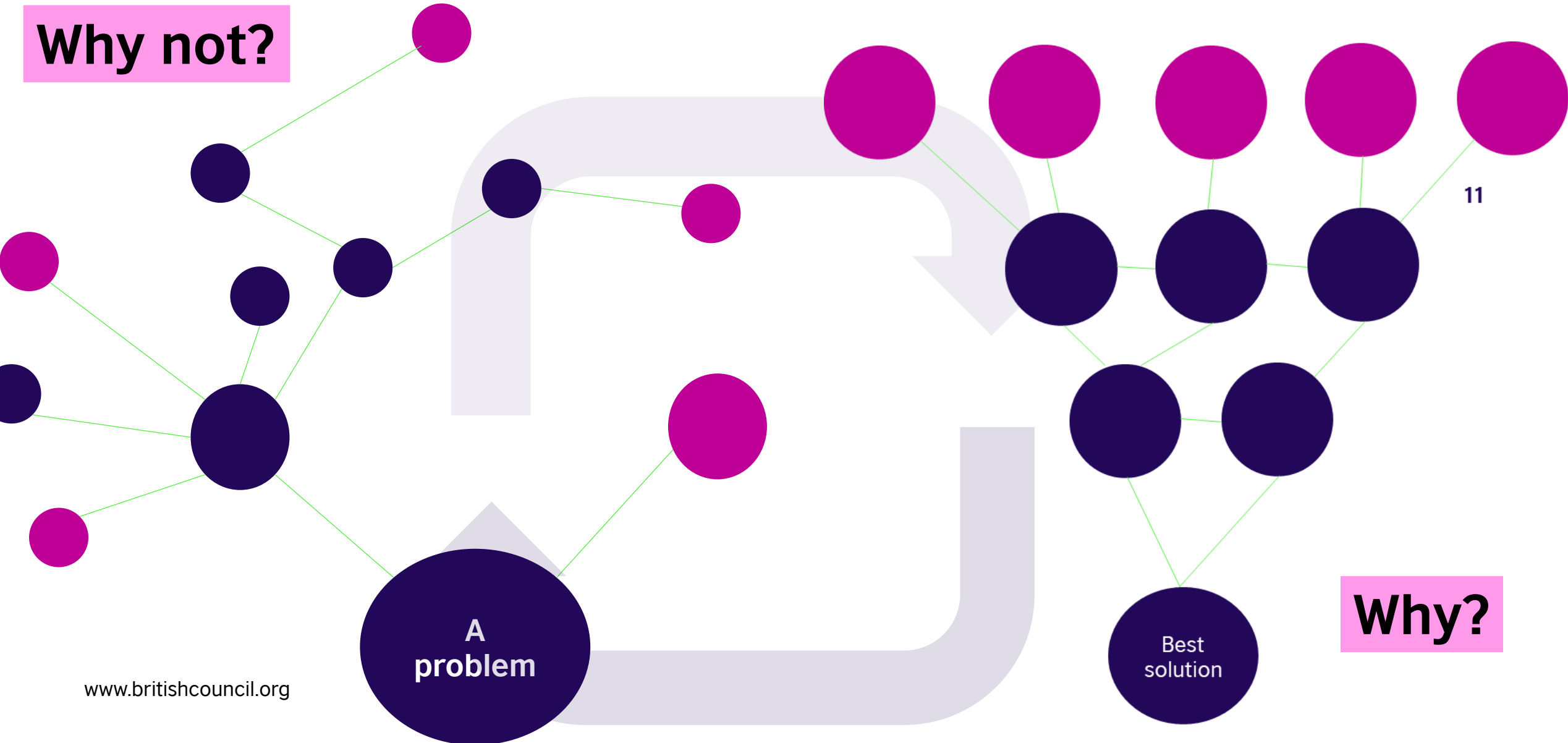
**Preparing Creative and Critical Thinkers**

**Donald J. Treffinger**

<https://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/cc.htm>

# Convergent Vs divergent thinking

Why not?



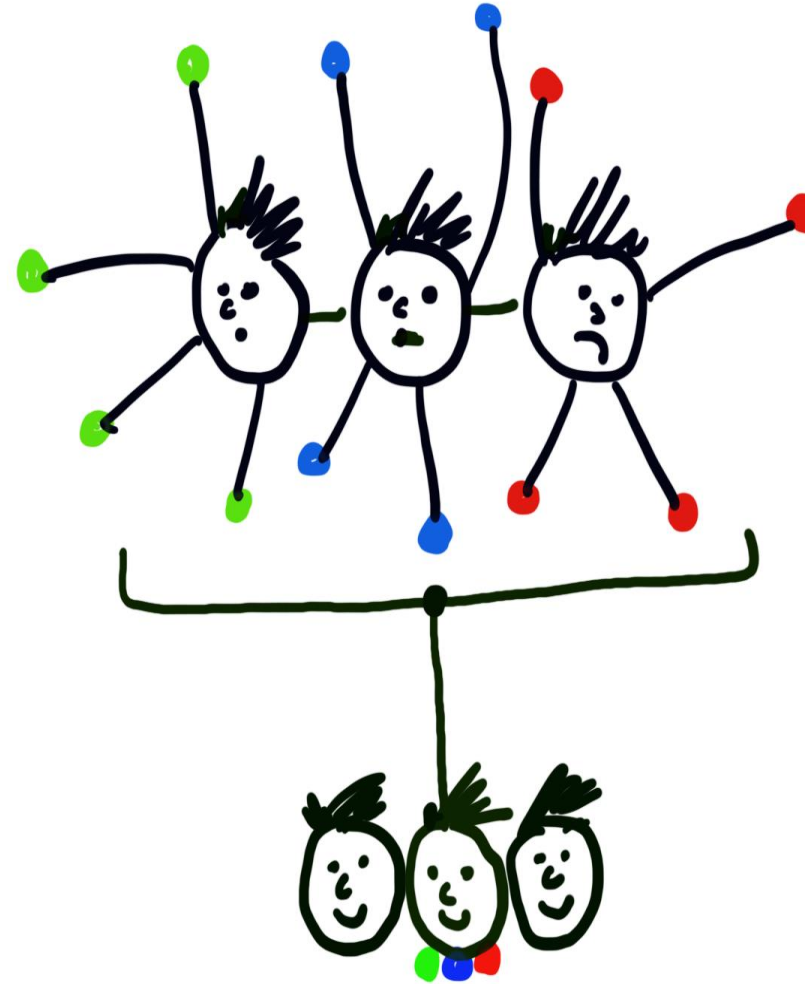
# Divergent to convergent

Often we can start with divergent thinking and use this to generate possible ideas

We then use convergent thinking to come up with the best solution

E.g., we might begin with an open activity and then from the many possible answers have students reason and justify their choices.

This cycle can be repeated through feedback or extension of the activity.





# Activities that promote critical or creative thinking

## Creative Thinking (Activities)

- ❑ Brainstorming
- ❑ Questions/tasks that have no single correct answer or solution
- ❑ Activities that require spontaneity E.g. freer practice activities; use of drawing, games e.g., **Backs to the board**
- ❑ Productive practice activities e.g., role plays (not printed dialogues – although these could be ‘adapted’); games and competitive activities that are not focused purely on memorisation.

## Critical Thinking (Activities)

- ❑ Analysis – E.g. ranking, sorting or ordering; categorising...
- ❑ Activities that build on the work of others E.g., **pyramid discussion**
- ❑ Working within set parameters to support analysis and evaluation
- ❑ Activities where explicit meta-cognitive strategies can often be used (e.g., receptive skills such as reading and listening)

# Pyramid discussion

## Key points:

1. Students must make choices (that could be different), and where reaching consensus can be achieved.
2. Encourages communication and collaboration as there is a reason to discuss (as opposed to being told to do so) #motivation



## Example:

You are on a ship that is sinking. A desert island is nearby and you can swim to it. There are items on the ship you can take that will help you survive, but you can only take 3. Which would you take? Work in pairs to decide.

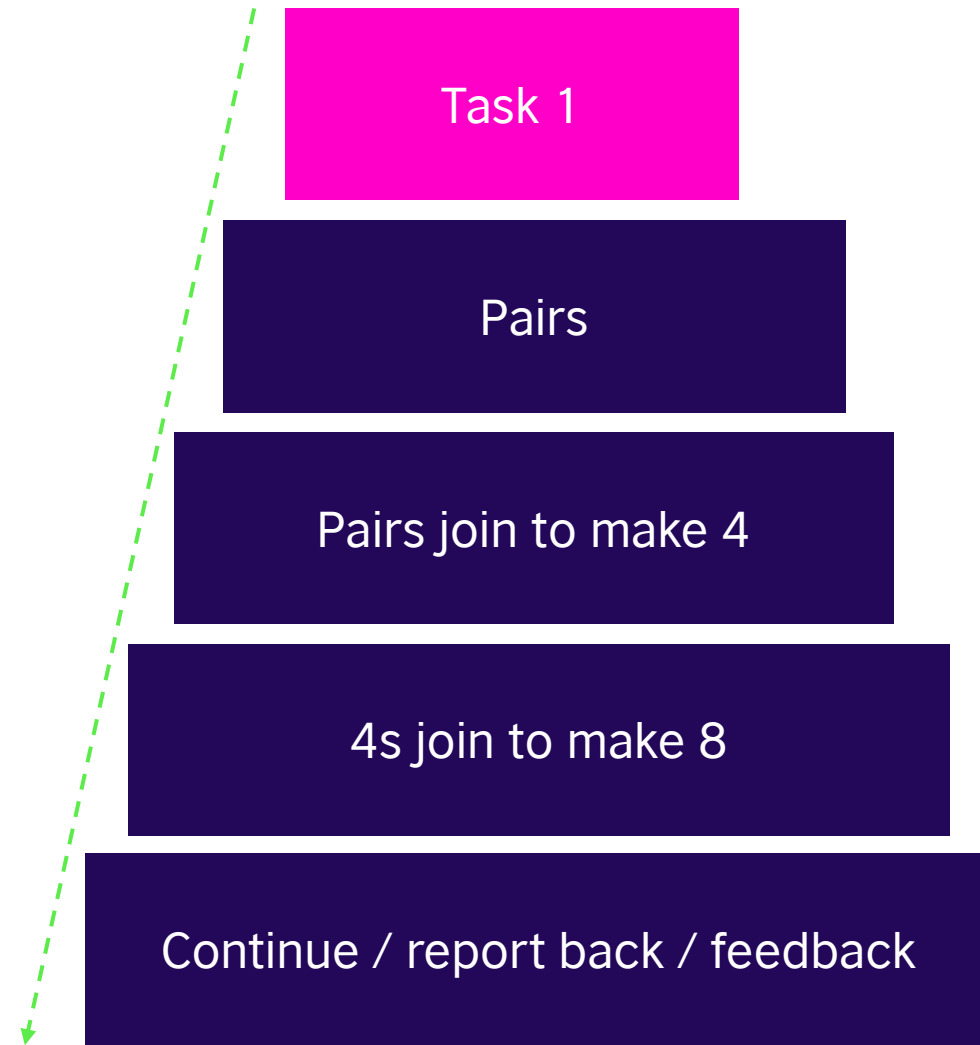
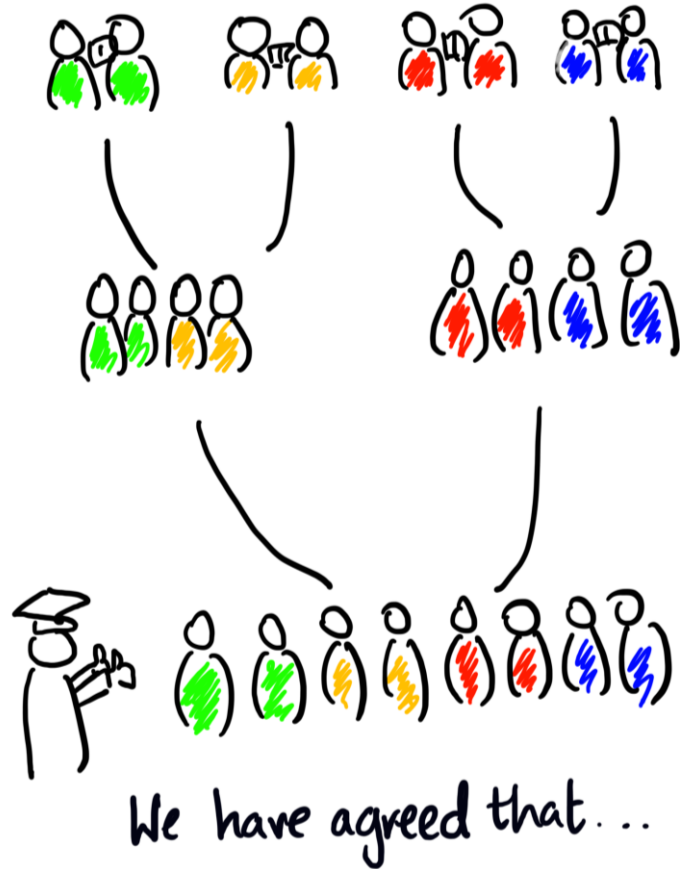
knife   radio   batteries   life vest

water bottle   mobile phone   matches

shovel   torch   gasoline   chopsticks

sun hat   nautical map   sun cream

# Pyramid discussion



# A little checklist for our adaptations when designing new tasks

## Creative thinking tasks

- ✓ **Original** - 'Creative' ideas encouraged should be innovative, not copied from elsewhere
- ✓ **Imaginative** - Creative thinking tasks should encourage use of the imagination, not following a set formula ( e.g., be non-routine)
- ✓ **Purposeful** - There should be parameters; a clear task objective for creative thinking to thrive
- ✓ **Value** - The results of creative thinking should have some value

## Critical thinking tasks

- ✓ **effective**– tasks encourage students to avoid common mistakes such as: seeing only one side of an issue, rejecting evidence that doesn't suit your own view, reasoning from emotion rather than logic, failing to support statements with evidence E.g., "etc."
- ✓ **novel**– students don't simply remember a fixed solution; you apply and adapt strategies, come up with new ideas and find a solution that best applies to the problem.
- ✓ **self-directed** – the student thinks independently and can work with limited support. Helped by the "*invisible teacher*"

## **Teacher Takeaways:**

### **Practical ideas for classroom teaching**

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**Using questions to supplement or adapt tasks to help develop critical thinking or creative thinking**

English for Education Systems (EES)



# Some aspects of critical thinking

One of the key tools teachers have is questions.

Perspective

Assessing evidence

Solving non-routine problems

Deeper Structure

E.g., **understanding what others think**, why others may think a certain way, where ‘they are coming from’?, looking at problems from different angles

E.g., **separating fact from opinion**; balancing facts, context and learned knowledge

E.g., **finding justifiable solutions to problems that have more than one possible answer** and where formulaic responses, rote, or direct strategies may be applied

E.g., **understanding meaning, moral and metaphor** beyond the surface of the words, texts or other mediums.

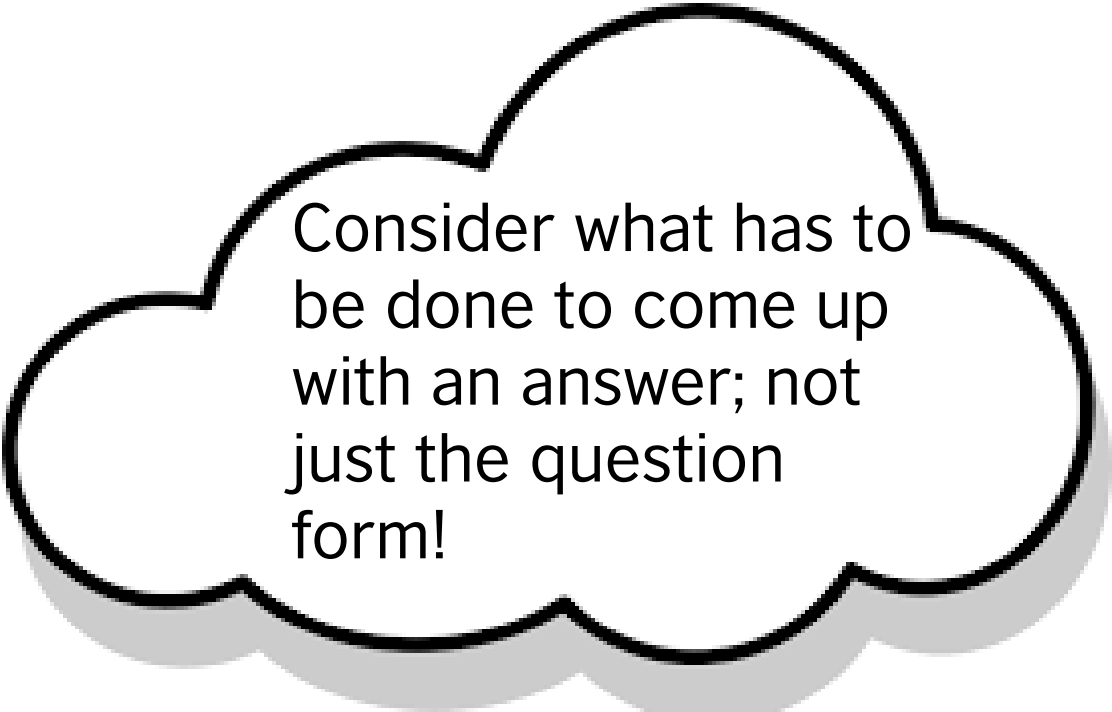
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# Review: closed and open questions – balance and purpose

**Closed questions** often only require simple short answers, with a strong focus on giving a correct answer.

**Open questions** will have a variety of answers depending on the depth of the students' thinking. They require more detailed and considered answers.

**The form of question doesn't necessarily define whether we develop or encourage the use of thinking skills.**



Consider what has to be done to come up with an answer; not just the question form!

# Moving from closed to open questions

It is useful to scaffold learners understanding and participation by moving from closed to open or deeper questions.

Here are some examples of closed questions (generally LOT):

- Do you think meat is bad for you?
- Do you believe that exercise is good for you?
- Would you say that young children watch too much TV?
- Are celebrities important in our lives?
- Is the world a more dangerous place than fifty years ago?
- Should most people recycle more than they do?
- Is traditional family life disappearing?

# Following up & opening up through H.O.T

We can expand on this by asking ‘why?’ ...

Or by more focused, expansive questions; e.g.,

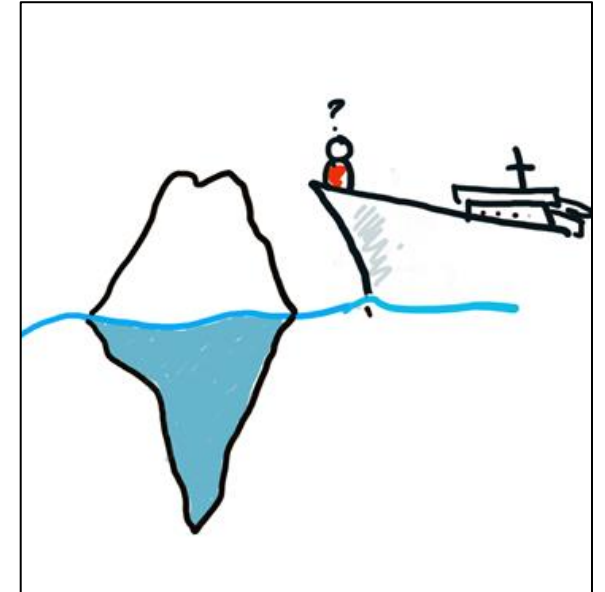
- What evidence is there that...?
- Why do you think that...?
- How do you know that...?
- When did people start believing that...?
- Where did you read/find out about that...?
- What evidence do you have of this?

It is important to keep in mind the language opportunities you are providing. Moving from closed to open questions can:

- Build confidence of learners to speak out
- Scaffold a question and make it easier to answer
- Support introduction of new language

# Going deeper – helping students find relationships

Initial Closed Questions	Follow Up	Second Follow Up
<p>Do you like spending time in the city or the country?</p> <p>[city / country]</p>	<p>Why?</p>	<p>What do you think made you come to this decision?</p> <p>What if...?</p>



A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPT & LANGUAGE RELATIONSHIPS



# What questions might help Ss explore perspective?

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is special for my people. Every leaf, every sandy shore, every shadow in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is special in the memory experience of my people. The juice which runs through the trees carries the memories of the red man.

The white man's dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horses, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocks, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the young horses, and man – they all belong to the same family.

So when the Great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land, he asks us to do a difficult thing. The Great Chief sends word he will reserve us a place so that we can live comfortably. He will be our father and we will be his children. So we will consider your offer to buy our land. But it will not be easy. Because this land is special for us. This shining water that moves in the streams and the rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must remember that it is special and holy, and you must teach your children that it is special and that each reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's music is the voice of my father's father.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One piece of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes what he needs from the land. The earth is not his brother but his enemy, and when he has taken what he needs from it, he moves on. He treats his mother the earth and his brother the sky as things to be bought, stolen, sold like sheep or bright jewellery. He will destroy the earth and leave behind only a desert.

**Explore the Chief's perspective more deeply in his letter.**

Is the letter objective? Why do you think this?

Do you think the Chief is making his statement based on experience, evidence, or second-hand information? Why?

Do the two cultures have the same perspective? Is either wrong? Give reasons.

Did the Chief have the chance to seek different opinions? How? From Whom?

Do we have more opportunity to access different opinions now? Do we take those opportunities?

## Non-routine or assessing evidence? – PEP Primary textbook 4年级下 P59

### Complete and say



This seems like a fairly simple activity, and fairly 'routine.'

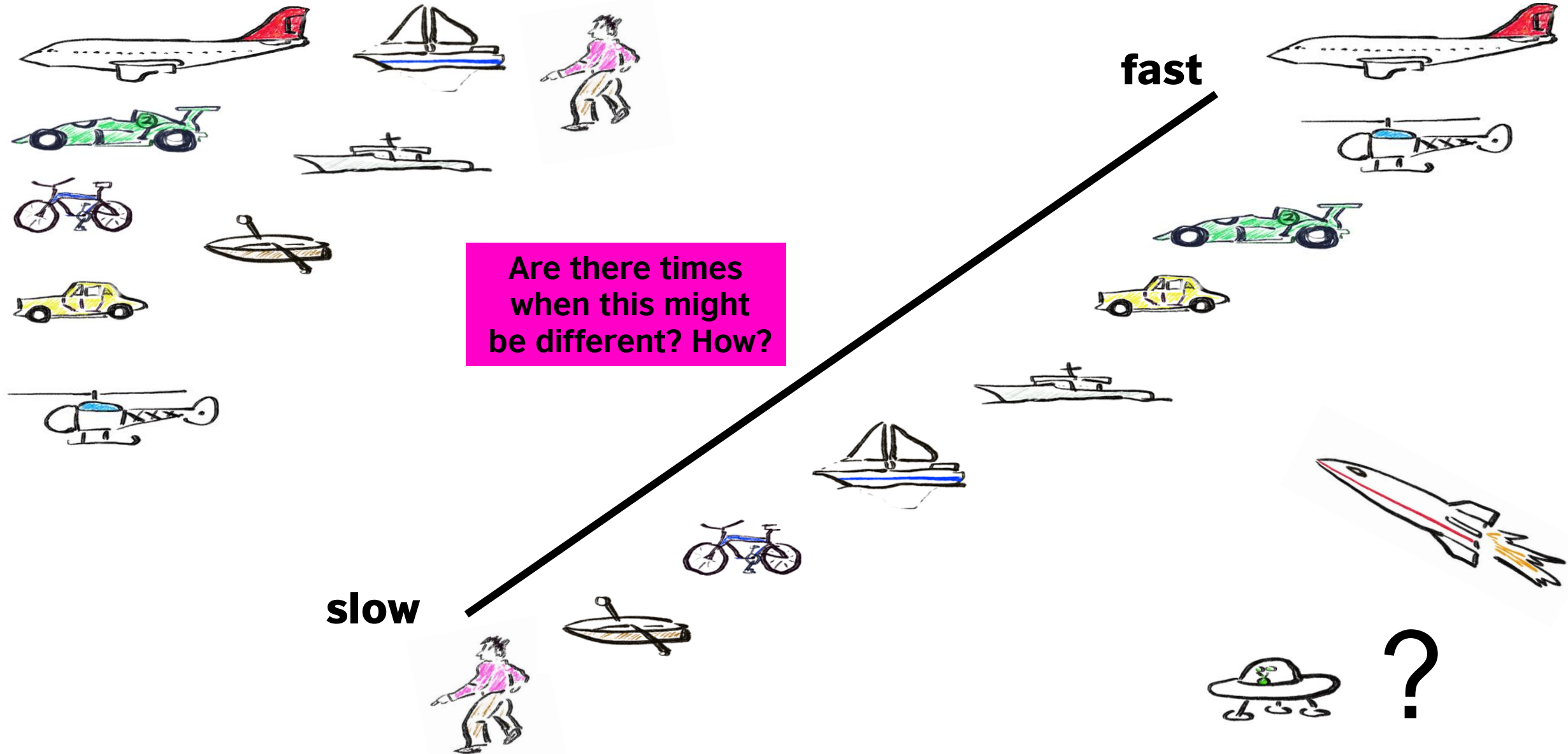
Ss are reasoning and should be able to justify their decisions. But the teacher can add layers of challenge...

E.g.,  
Why is the T-shirt only in column 1?  
Do you wear T-shirts when it is cold?  
Which items could go in both?  
Which items are more common? (Rank them.)

We teach the words – and this is necessary.

But do we encourage Ss to think more deeply about the relationships between the words (or text, or context...?)

# Making a task more non-routine – transport words





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**Using tools to extend or supplement activities and encourage greater application of thinking skills**

English for Education Systems (EES)

# Tools

## Avoiding the intelligence trap – sometimes students need help.

It is assumed that intelligence goes hand in hand with thinking. Too often however, intelligent people are in danger of becoming poor thinkers. They are in effect, trapped by their own intelligence. That is, **they use their intelligence to entrench themselves in support of one point of view**, and because they *are* genuinely intelligent they can mount some very convincing arguments for their position.

**“You cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper.”**

**Edward De Bono**



# What did you think of that last ranking activity?

PLUS (A good point)

MINUS (a negative point)

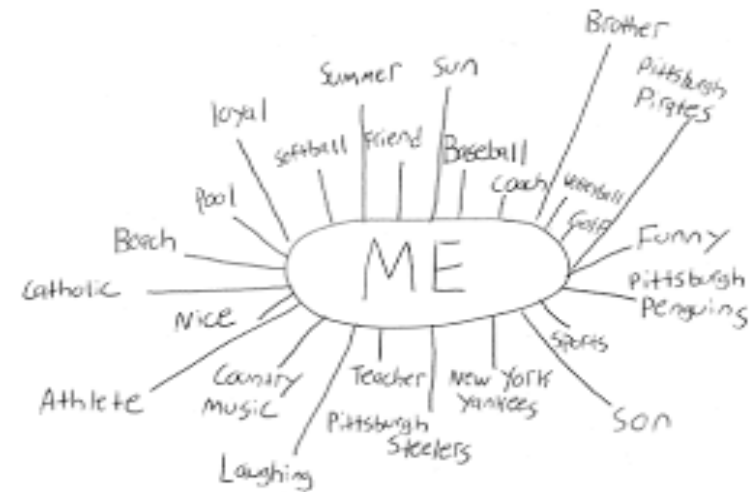
INTERESTING (an interesting observation)

Great! You have just considered different perspectives, through this simple tool.

# Putting the strategies in action

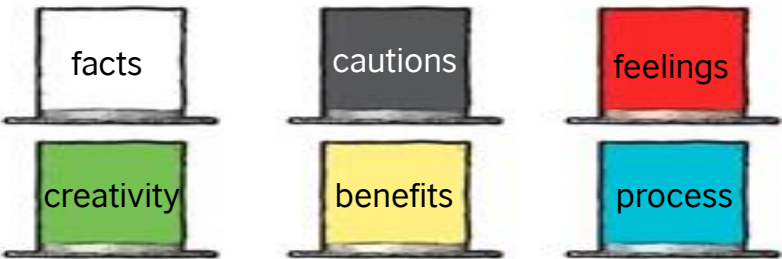
Other tools or activities we might use to develop perspective (and other thinking skills:)

- ❑ Well-prepped role plays that allow Ss to explore different feelings.
- ❑ Think, Pair, Share
- ❑ Debating or arguing for/against controversial topics
- ❑ Creating identity charts
- ❑ Pyramid discussions
- ❑ KWL Charts



# A Treasure Hunter

...was going to explore a cave up on a hill near a beach. He suspected there might be many paths inside the cave so he was afraid he might get lost. Obviously, he did not have a map of the cave; all he had with him were some common items such as a flashlight and a bag. What could he do to make sure he did not get lost trying to get back out of the cave later?



Why did you make that decision?  
Why was that the best choice?

What are the facts (not assumptions)?	What is the task/target?	What are the options you have?
What are the benefits of each option?	How do you feel about this problem?	What are the problems with this option?
1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

# Learning strategies and going below the surface



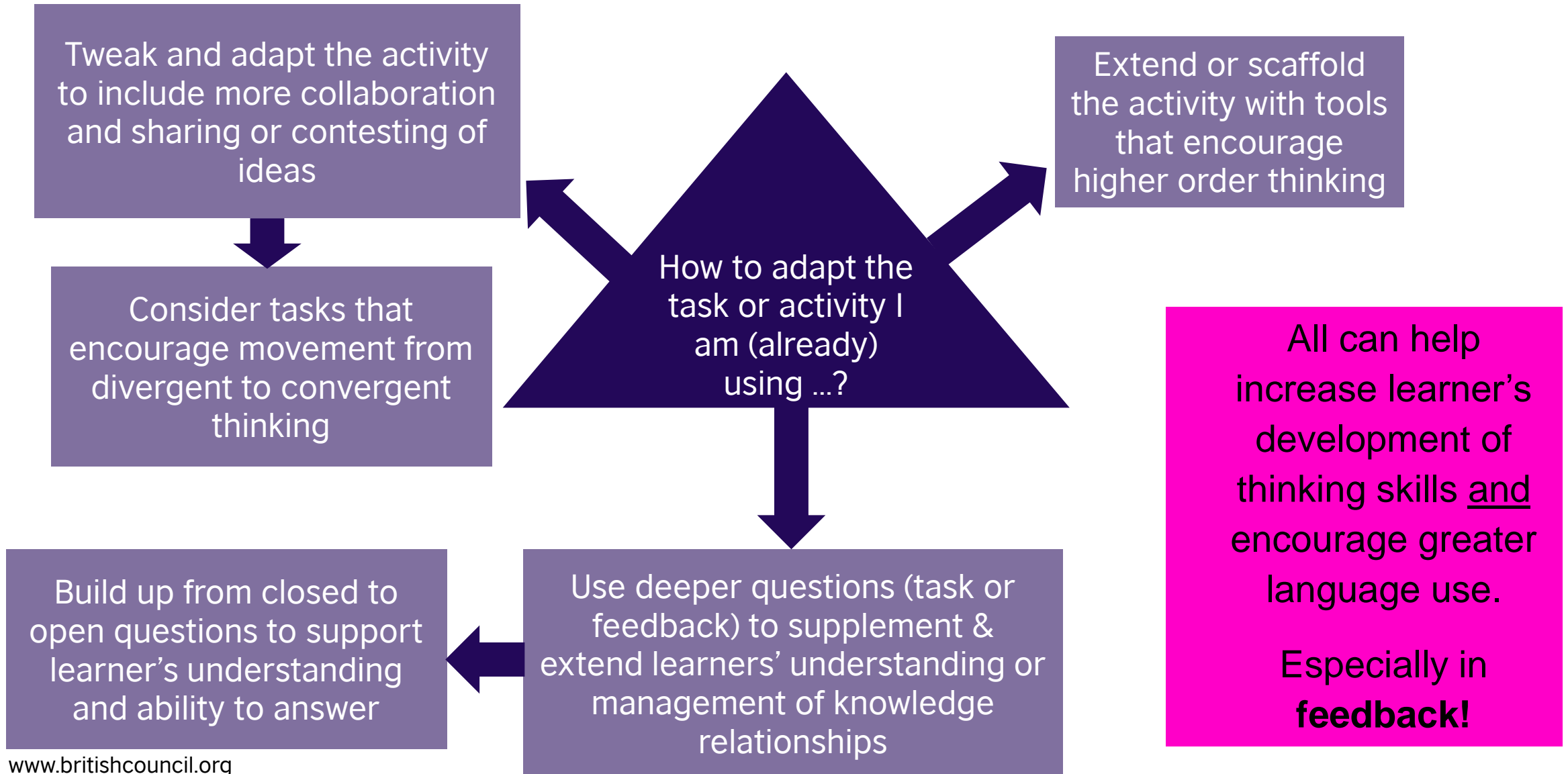
Strategies can be re-usable

Often we can build on those we learn and improve them

By helping learners think about and see the messages behind the 'surface' words we are encouraging Ss to understand deeper structure

Overlap again between creative and critical thinking.

# Recap: How can I adapt to develop thinking skills?



# KWL - Takeaway

Know about thinking skills	Want to Know	Learned
		...now fill in this column.

Consider the difference between column 2 and Column 3.

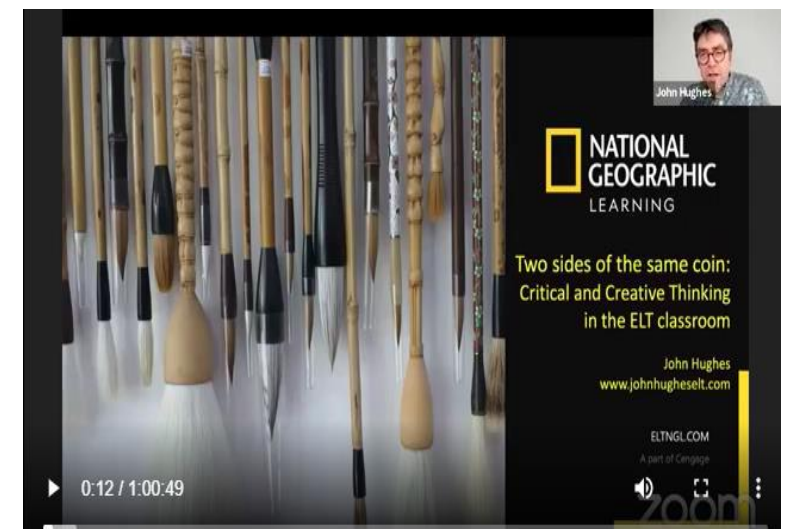


## Thinking Skills are Life Skills Carol Higo

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)



## Creating Creative Teachers Maria Constantinides



## Two sides of the same coin: Critical and Creative Thinking John Hughes

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# Thank you!

Any questions?

Also, find out more about the next events (and register) here:

The certificate, recording and downloads will also be made available here [shortly!](#)

