

Sociometry

From Phase 1: Entry

Phase 1 contains methods that can be used in programmes for (recently) immigrated and refugee teachers in Higher Education to start with the topic of heterogeneity at schools. As an introduction to the topic, the methods are characterised by high openness with regard to the question of what heterogeneity actually means and what it can or should mean in the school context.

a) General information

Time frame: Part of a lesson

Social form(s): Group work of the whole group together

Number of people: 5-25

Short summary: The method 'Sociometry' is a tool of visualisation and reflection. In its most common form, it can be used either as a feedback tool or as a tool to get the group to know each other. As the participants need to move and get up from their chairs it can also be used after a theoretical input, when some sort of break is needed. The lecturer asks a question which needs the perception of the participants and asks them to place themselves on a spectrum of possible answers. It is best for visualising different opinions and parameters on a spectrum, which beginning and ending can be defined by the teacher or the group.

b) Description of the method (preparation, working steps, aim)

The lecturer asks a question and the participant's line up on an invisible line forming a spectrum. One intent of the method could be, for new groups to get to know each other better. So, there is a social dimension in this method as well. A question and task could be: "Who of you lives in Vienna? All participants, who live in Vienna gather around the desk and the further away you live, the more you are positioning yourself away from the desk. One can consider the time that is needed to get to the school as measurement tool." This way, the participants get to know each other better and can visualise their diversity: "Oh, there are other participants who also have a 30-minute walk to their internship school." Of course, the questions can be more focused on social dimensions (participants getting to know each other) and as well can get more in depth into a topic (e.g. "Who of you has already participated in a learning setting about gender?", "Who has worked in multilingual contexts and somehow integrated different languages?", "Who has been living in more than two countries?").

Another way of using the method could be for the lecturer to get feedback to a lesson, topic, new way of teaching. As this method uses a rather open and visible approach, the participants might not be that honest when it comes to giving feedback (e.g. will not stand at the end of the spectrum "did fit my expectations - didn't fit my expectations at all" in order not to be that exposed).

The method can be used as a warm-up/easy entrance game, as well as a reflection tool. This can be a particularly interesting method to make diversity visible

The method consists of four main steps:

1. Preparation: What is the aim of the method? Think of possible questions.
2. In class: Ask the question(s)
3. Participants finding their place on the spectrum
4. Reflection of the question(s) together, also the aim of the method (spectrum, diversity).

One of the benefits of this method is, that there is not necessarily a lot of preparation work needed. Also, participants often quite happily engage in finding more questions, once they know how this method works. This as well is one variation of how to make the method more participatory for the group.

c) Reflecting questions on how to implement the methods in programmes for (recently) immigrated and refugee teachers

How can the participants and lecturers contribute their knowledge in a way that does not culturalise?

This method is primarily a method about pre-concepts and perception and its visualisation. The visualisation may reveal culturalised attitudes. It is on the teacher to (1) ask sensible questions/questions, which reflect the intimacy of the group and (2) to reflect on the visualisation afterwards. Even though an opinion or sort of categorisation is needed, it shows, that there are not just two or a number of categories but a spectrum. An advanced version (see under adaptation) of the method would be using the same question (1) to different time (“How did you feel/How interested were you about the topic of “gender” at the beginning of the semester?” in comparison to now). It makes the change of perception visible and also shows the participants, that the positions of the spectrum are fluid.

What must be considered so that this method does not lead to stereotypes and/or discriminatory categorisations?

Nearly all the time when using this method some sort of problems of categorisation happen. When taking the example of the school way “How much time do you need to get to school/the course” there might be people, who have different homes and so different ways respective time to get there (e.g. participants who live at two places due to caregivers not living in the same home). This can be used as an example, that there are problems in categorisation (a possible solution might be to calculate the middle of the time needed from both homes to school). As this method wants to make diversity visible and socially more acceptable, there can appear dimensions, which might be sensitive for the participants. When the group is new to each other the questions might be picked in a way, that there are no sensitive topics revealed.

How to work with this method in a language sensitive way/how to include multilingualism?

One possible variation to make the method more language sensitive, could be to make languages a topic, e.g. “How many languages do you speak?” “I feel comfortable talking German (comfortable to insecure)”, etc.

Also, the way of asking, needs to be both, language sensitive and adapted to the groups feelings towards each other, age, content in which the method is used, alike.

The language demands are rather low in the beginning, as the participants only need to understand the questions, but one should not underestimate the reflection afterwards. One way to make it more multilingual (see for adaptation) is to ask a question in another language (1) to see who can understand the question (making diversity visible) and also (2) to create space for another language than the dominant teaching language.

How to use this method in a participatory way?

After some questions asked by the teacher to give the participants some idea for the type of question and shows them how the method works, the participants can get the chance to come up with their own questions (this gives insight in what aspects the participants are interested in).

Possible variations of the method

- Some questions might be fun to try finding the spectrum without talking/verbal communication or even harder without giving signs, e.g. questions on exterior characteristics or birthdays (when the participants know each other well).
- It might as well be interesting to build pairs (self-selected): first person A positions the person B, then person A positions him/herself, then discuss the difference in positioning and person B gets positions etc.

Possible application (for other contexts, e.g. schools)

As the questions need to be adapted for the teaching group anyway, there is a difference in preparing for participants of Higher Education or students in school, but not concerning preparation time. If the method is used for the group to get to know each other, some “basic questions” like birthday, way to course/school might be interesting for both target groups.

Tips

- Being careful with the selection of questions concerning privacy, group constellation, sensitive language should be used!
- Creating space for privacy: This could be done with a remark at the beginning that it is also “ok” if someone (1) does not want to participate (2) does not want to position him/herself to a specific question (free decision to participate after every question). It could be explained scientifically to gain justification among the group: When doing research with a questionnaire some people do not fill out every question.
- Calculating time to reflect on positioning and overall use of method.

Example/Possible topic

The method is suitable for addressing the complexity of differences in a group beyond the common difference categories and thus gaining an awareness of the arbitrariness of highlighting certain categories of difference over others. For example, differences in personal preferences (e.g. to professional focus, hobbies, taste in music) can be combined with other, more common categories of differences in order to discuss their social effects together later on. Some examples of possible questions are listed below:

- Who has lived in several countries? (two – several countries)
- Who is very interested in languages and linguistic subjects? (very interested – not very interested)
- Who has already participated in learning setting (e.g. workshop) about gender? (yes – no)
- Who has worked in multilingual contexts and somehow integrated different languages? (yes – no)
- Who is very good in natural science subjects and mathematics? (very good – not so good)
- Who has faced problems working as a teacher because of gender issues? (problems – not problems)
- Who has worked with a student with disability so far? (yes – no)
- Who has worked in a school with school fee so far? (yes – no)

d) Further information

Method selection of the University Oldenburg (Germany): Soziometrische Abfrage. Available at: https://www.methodenkartei.uni-oldenburg.de/uni_methode/soziometrische-abfrage/ [29.03.20].



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