

Genderbread

From Phase 2: Evaluation of pre-concepts

Phase 2 methods are suitable for activating and questioning the existing ideas of the participants based on an introduction to the subject of heterogeneity in schools. Thus, the aim is to activate the participants' so-called pre-concepts.

a) General information

Time frame: Part of the lesson

Social form(s): Group work, 3-5 participants in one group

Number of people: maximum of 30 people, 6 groups

Short summary: The method is intended to first evaluate dualistic gender stereotypes in order to subsequently deconstruct and differentiate them in joint reflections. The teacher prepares a paper with the shape of a human (rather the shape of a gingerbread person: so not anatomically correct and without any indicator related to gender). The class is building groups from three to five people max. Each group gets a gingerbread shape. Some group get the information that they have a gingerbread person in front of them, that identifies as a man and some get the information that they have a gingerbread person in front of them, that identifies as a woman. The groups are asked to write or draw on the gingerbread person, what makes them male/female. This method introduces gender as a complex topic, that can be seen as a spectrum of individual variations as well as the idea of two poles between men and women can be questionable because of simultaneity and intersection of these concepts. After that, each group presents their gingerbread person. After the presentation a discussion takes place in the full group.

b) Description of the method

This method is used to make inherent stereotypes of gender visible, can be used to introduce the concept of gender, to explore the difference between the concepts of gender and sex (as well as the associated criticism of this dualistic distinction, as it suggests a biological essentialism, see Butler 1990), to getting in touch with stereotypical ideas on gender and, therefore, provides a stage for discussion. The finished Genderbread men and women are the basis of discussion afterwards.

It is a beginner's method for the topic "gender", but can also be used with advanced learners of the topic, although then there will be a difference in shaping the men/women. Gender can be understood more as a complex spectrum in which there are many individual variations. In addition, it can be reflected at a higher level of abstraction that even the image of a spectrum between the two poles of 'female' and 'male' is questionable, since an individual can describe himself or herself as very feminine and very masculine at the same time, and it is more a question of a simultaneity and intersection of these concepts. Finally, the conception of 'feminine' and 'masculine' as a pair of terms and their attribution to certain human characteristics can be critically reflected and deconstructed.

Step-by-step implementation of the method:

Preparation;

1. Preparation: Preparing the gingerbread shapes on paper.

In class:

2. Handing out Genderbread shapes and explaining task
3. Working phase (30 minutes): „What makes your gingerbread person a man/woman?“
4. Presentation and explanation of Genderbread persons
5. Discussion.

Working phase: How the groups define their person should stay very open and not be influenced by the teacher’s instructions, so that the participants’ perspectives and definitions stay in focus.

Discussion: Following the phase of presentation, the results should be explained and discussed in the whole group, so that gender constructs can be made visible and dismantled.

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?

The main focus is dismantling gender stereotypes, but of course connected cultural stereotypes can come forth as well. It is the lecturer’s job to explain a non-culturalising way of bringing an argument/experience: “I experienced it this way in Austria...” instead of: “Opposite to my culture,..” or “All Austrians think ..” or “Everyone in this country is..”

In this specific task, culturalisations – if they occur – should not be banned, as they should be included in the discussion as well. In case of generalisations, the lecturer has to ask back for counter-examples (“But do you know a woman not wearing lipstick? Having facial hair?” etc. → “Would you still say, that she is a woman?”)

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

This method aims to bring up a lot of stereotype. In a way the stereotypes get reproduced with this method, to dismantle and work and reflect on them afterwards. Therefore, the discussion afterwards is crucial (enough time and guiding of teacher) to reflect on them.

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

Written words on the Genderbread person can also be written in other languages (additionally to the teaching language so that everyone can understand). Furthermore, drawing is a good and effective way to express the own ideas in a non-verbal way.

How to use this method in a participatory way?

The groupwork per se is rather participatory and needs the participation of all group members. By drawing and discussing, participants are involved in the task.

Possible variations of the method

Creating ones Genderbread person could also be homework as individual work: Then, eventually, it is given even more thought and there would be more time to fulfil the task in a more creative (not just linguistic/written) way. As in the homework the help of the internet can be used, the results might be filtered through gained pre-knowledge.

One variation might be that some or all groups get a gingerbread person divided in the middle from head to feet - one side is female; the other side is male.

- Step 1: Thinking of a man/woman = task of shaping the gingerbread man/woman;
- Step 2: Think of a man/woman you know. What is different to the man/woman you described in Step 1? What do you like about the man you described in Step 2?

The steps belong together. The second step aims to reflect on whether and to what extent the perspective on the described topic has changed. As already described, these two steps only provide a starting point for a reflection that is increasingly multifaceted and challenges dualistic categories.

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

The method can be used in Higher Education and in school, without any difference in preparation or implementation.

Tips

- Crucial for this method especially is to calculate time to reflect on positioning after the groupwork and, also, the overall use of method.
- Discussing power asymmetries are not planned to be part of this method per se, but could be part of the discussion afterwards, when working on the gender topic more deeply.
- Making clear to the group, that stereotypes exist in everyone and need to be not suppressed but reflected.
- It is important for the facilitator to reflect on composition of group and potential particularities associated before commencing this work. This will lead to a richer experience for all involved. There might be the fear of the students of expressing themselves, feeling embarrassed, as gender is a sensitive topic. The role of the lecturer is to create a productive working atmosphere and also be sensitive that this method does not reveal too much of a person so that she or he is also emotionally save after the class in the absence of the teacher (see also general guideline for implementing the methods).

d) Further information

Genderbread Person v4.0 - A teaching tool for breaking the big concept of gender down into bite-sized, digestible pieces. Available at: <https://www.genderbread.org/> [29.02.2020].

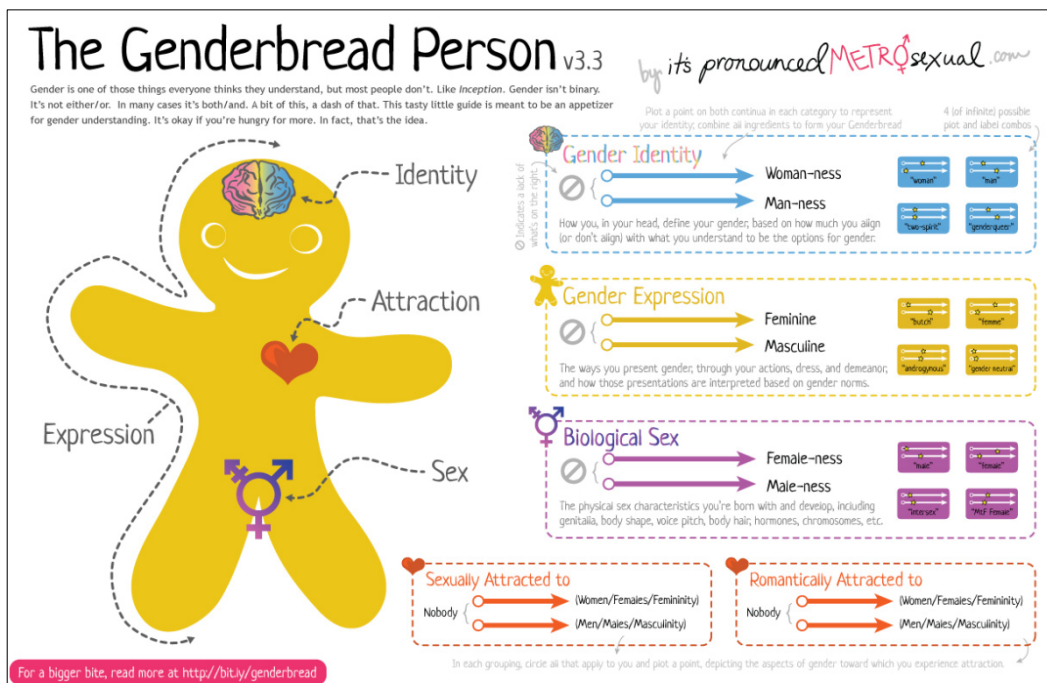


Illustration 5: Visualisation of: © Genderbread.

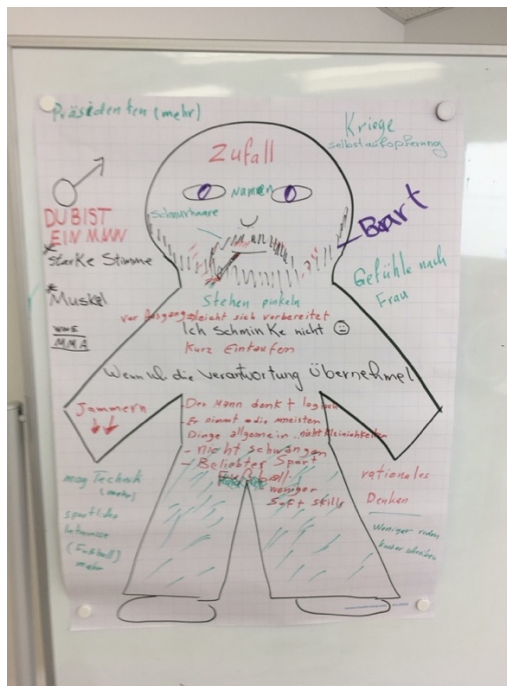
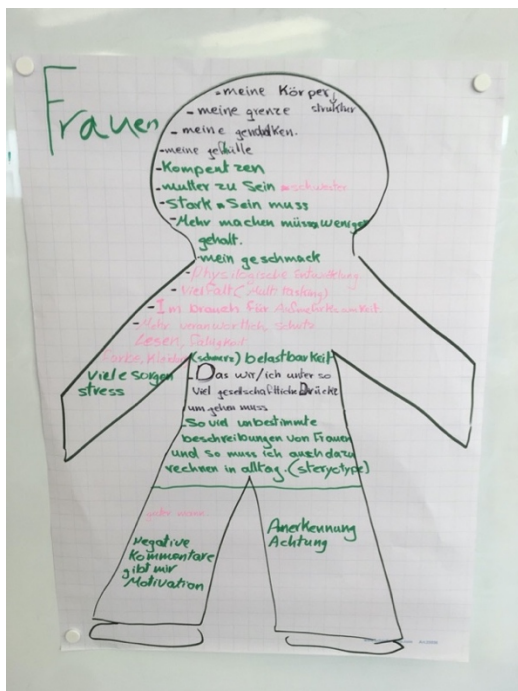


Illustration 6: Example of a shaped Genderbread figures.

