

Six Thinking Hats

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: It can vary from a couple of minutes to about 30 min/an hour, depending on the focus of the lesson

Social form(s): Mostly group work but you can also use it individually

Number of people: It can vary, 6 participants or more. You can also use the method with a class and make each of them individually use the thinking hats when writing/arguing on a certain topic.

Short summary: De Bono's Six Thinking Hats is a method that can be used as a brainstorming technique or when discussing a theme or a problem from different points of view. Participants are divided into groups and can discuss a topic. You can either decide who in the group “has which hat on” or you can tell the group to discuss the topic from the different perspective that each hat has.

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

Six Thinking Hats is used to encourage different perspectives or ways of thinking based on the pre-concepts of the participants. The advantage of Six Thinking Hats is also to encourage participants to take different roles, “put on different hats” and go outside their comfort zone. Another benefit is that it can ease the structure in a discussion.

Each hat symbolises different ways of thinking:

- White Hat: focus on the available data and information
- Red Hat: focus on feelings and gut reaction
- Black Hat: focus on risks or threats
- Yellow Hat: focus on positive thinking
- Green Hat: focus on creativity
- Blue Hat: this hat represents process control and summarising.

To explain the method, you may use a poster with a short description of each hat with pictures of the different coloured hats for support.

At the beginning the focus/theme needs to be chosen. After that divide the groups. You can either give each person one hat or you can make the whole group discuss the theme from the different perspectives of each hat.

The participants can contribute their knowledge by using the method to help to structure the thinking into six different parts. Each hat gives one way of thinking, which divide what’s feelings, facts or creativity. The hats provide a set of rules when discussing/thinking out loud.

The method can encourage participants to say and think what they perhaps would not usually do, it can help them go outside their comfort zone. When using the hats, they should always be referred to as a color, not function. Since it can create blockages if participants are encouraged to think more positively, the lecturer should instead say to the participants to put the yellow hat on.

The method has the following aims:

- challenges one’s own ideas
- understanding different opinions
- practise to express oneself
- supports diversity, different perspectives, reasoning, arguing
- can be a means to get more participants active in discussions
- can be used to structure discussions
- the method can be used for problem solving.

In the phase “Evaluation and Pre-Concepts” of the learning series the method Six Thinking Hats can be used to activate opinions on a topic, no matter if they are the own ones represented through the hat or imagined opinions within the societal discourse on the topic.

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?

By putting on a hat, the participants are informed about their position as well as the perspective of the others. When taking in the role given by the hat, culturalising statements may be made. However, this does not have to correspond to the opinion of the participants. After the roles have been adopted, it can then be discussed how it felt to take on the respective perspective. In this way, the affects that arise when one or another person takes a perspective on a topic can be discussed together. The possibility of distancing oneself from the role given by the hat offers the opportunity to deconstruct underlying stereotypes and prejudices that might have been used by adopting the role given by the hat.

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

It is very important to clear that the hat represents “a role”, discuss communication rules before starting, reflection time afterwards together in group. Furthermore, it is important to make sure everybody is included. In order to avoid one-sided viewpoints, participants should occasionally switch hats to change perspectives and ways of thinking.

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

Everyone can play their role according to their individual language level. To include multilingualism, everyone could also speak in other languages than the dominant language in course. In this case, however, the lecturer has to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to understand the different perspectives given by the hats, e.g. by translation. To prepare the perspectives, groups on specific languages could be

formed. Afterwards there the participants translate the statements into the language shared by everybody.

How to use this method in a participatory way?

One possible adjustment is to give a group of participants one hat to enable everyone to contribute their opinion on a particular perspective and discuss it together in advance. Another way to be more participatory is to let the participants organise the method and let the teacher be observer. Furthermore, the observers could be provided with guidelines for systematic monitoring in order to be able to become more involved in the evaluation afterwards.

Possible variations of the method

Variations of the method could be:

- group of hats, group of people have to prepare arguments, and pick a person who wants to present
- Discuss the same topic, change hats = change of perspective
- Different topics, recurring method = students know the method, can exercise expressing their opinion.

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

The Six Thinking Hats can be used by a person or in a group, at school, at a company or at leisure.

Examples/possible topics

Basically, with this method every socially discussed topic can be discussed from several perspectives. This includes several topics that have to do with heterogeneity like language, ethnicity, gender, health status/disability and sexual orientation. Here, Six Thinking Hats can use inspiration and themes from books, films, articles and current social issues that are related to the topic of heterogeneity.

To give a more concrete example, it could be discussed whether gender segregated sports and swimming lessons should be established in schools or not. It could also be discussed whether and to what extent all languages may be spoken in the classroom, whether or at what level each teacher should be able to speak the language of the country of the school and how to realise an inclusive education concept in schools.

d) Further information

The de Bono Group: Six Thinking Hats. Available at:

http://www.debonogroup.com/six_thinking_hats.htm [29.02.2020]

Learning video ‘What Is Six Thinking Hats?’. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ8vF8HRWE4> [29.02.2020]



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