

Picture a Perfect School – for All

From Phase 4: Reflection, de-construction and further development of knowledge and concepts

Phase four includes methods that are mainly aimed at discussion and reflection in connection with dealing with heterogeneity in schools. The methods are intended to support participants and lecturers in the programmes in taking up and discussing not only the topics themselves, but also the social controversies concerning social differences and group constructions.

a) General information

Time frame: 60 min

Social form(s): Group work, joint discussion and reflection within the whole group

Number of people: 6-20

Short summary: The method consists of two phases. In the first phase, the participants should develop their ‘perfect’ school and describe it e.g. in the form of a poster. In the second phase, the participants adopt the perspective of a person who is learning or working at the school on the basis of role cards. Here fictitious people are described like a student with a physical disability, a student with partial learning difficulties, a student with high abilities, a music teacher, a caretaker or a parent. With the help of these role cards, the participants now have to check whether the perfect school they have conceived meets the different perspectives and needs of all these individuals.

b) Description of the method

The method consists of two phases, (1) a phase of designing a concept for a 'perfect school' and (2) a phase of systematically reviewing the school concept through different perspectives based on role cards to reflect on whether this is a 'perfect' school for everyone concerned. Finally, a presentation of all school designs and a reflection on the working process in the groups will take place.

1. During phase one, the participants are placed in the positions of school developers and design a concept for school on the basis of their own prior knowledge and previous teaching content, which they consider to be optimal for learning and living together. The participants design their schools in groups of three to five people and thus already integrate different perspectives and ideas.
2. In phase two, the groups receive the role cards to reflect on and refine their school designs. Now they are placed in the position of different people who are learning or working at their school. The cards describe different students, teachers, parents or other people involved in the school with different learning needs, physical abilities, languages, ages, and more. Each participant takes a card and reflects on whether the jointly designed school is also an optimal place to learn or work for this person. If missing prerequisites or barriers for the person described on the card, the concept should be modified and developed further in respect to different needs.
3. At the end of the lesson, the teams present their schools to the other groups. Here, for example, the following questions can be answered:
 - What were the challenges to make the school suitable for everyone?

- How have we solved these challenges? What creative ideas have been evolved to redesign teaching and learning?
- Which methods and principles of inclusive education could be applied? Which questions remained unanswered?

The remaining questions or unresolved challenges can be noted and used as a basis for various research activities on dealing with heterogeneity in education, which could be conducted by the participants until the next lesson.

Overall, this method brings the participants to think themselves into institutional, spatial and didactic structures. Through the change of perspective in the second part, they can critically review their own ideas and empathetically think of the situation of different school members. In this way they explore heterogeneity as well as processes of inclusion and exclusion through an interplay of structural and personal perspectives.

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 personal descriptions on the role cards are sometimes at risk of re-producing stereotypes. Various attributes such as age, need for support, migration background, etc. could provoke attributions that do not always do justice to the complexity of the persons concerned. Therefore, it is important to critically question the images, which may be produced by different role cards, during the reflection phase.

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

When preparing the cards, it should be carefully thought about how the respective persons are described. In addition, it must always be clear that the anticipated learning needs of the described persons always remain a construction of the participants, and in the actual situation can turn out to be much more complex and heterogeneous.

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

When designing the schools within the groups, the participants can use the language of their choice.

How to use this method in a participatory way?

The participants can contribute their own ideas well in this method. Surely the ideas cannot be implemented immediately in the school reality, but the joint reflection strengthens the participants' ability to get more involved in the school design in the future, to formulate their own ideas and to represent their own positions.

Possible variations of the method

The method can be performed to address various issues. For example, specific school designs could be developed to include multilingualism, different age groups or specific educational needs.

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

This method can also be used at school to let the students develop ideas. In this way the schoolchildren can acquire basic concepts of inclusion, gain an understanding of school structures and develop a responsibility for their own school life.

Examples/possible topics

The topic is particularly suitable for reflecting on the structure and design of schools in a heterogeneous society.

Possible Character Cards for the second phase of the Method ‘Imagine the perfect school’:

You are a student with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair.	You are a student with an outstanding talent for mathematics.
You are a single mother of a student who has little time due to work.	You are a teacher who loves music and can play three instruments.
You are a teacher on the verge of retirement who gets tired quickly.	You are a very sensitive and thoughtful student.
You are a young sports teacher and the trainer of the internationally successful girls’ basketball team of the school.	You are a student with a dyscalculia but who speaks three languages and is fluent in grammar and orthography.
You are a student who has been living in the country for a year and is still learning the official school language.	You are a teacher who is attending a programme for refugee teachers at university and is still learning the official school language.
You are a social worker at school who is very dedicated and supportive of the students, but you are often very stressed because of a parent with dementia that you are taking care of.	You are a father who had learning difficulties in your own school days. You want to support your child, but you cannot support homework and you are afraid to attend parent-teacher meetings.
You are a full-time working parent of a student who has a strong interest in science but has difficulty concentrating on learning.	You are the school principal and you try to present the school as best as possible to the public to get funding from the local businesses.

Illustration 8: Character Cards provided for phase 2 of the Method “Picture a perfect school – for all”.

d) Further information

As described, the method consists mainly of a first phase of drawing up a school for all and a second phase of testing through role cards.

The second phase is based on a well-known method from human rights education. See for examples: Nürnberger Menschenrechtszentrum: Übung “Ein Schritt nach vorne”. Available at: <http://www.diskriminierung.menschenrechte.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/schrittnachvorn.pdf> [29.02.20].

