

Six Thinking Hats

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You can use the Six Thinking Hats in almost any problem solving activity that you might encounter in the classroom (or in life in general!) Here is an example of a problem solving exercise that I went through with my students two years ago. It's a problem that many teachers will be able to relate to. What I've written below actually came out of the Six Hats problem solving process. The problem that we examined was:

Students Talking While Others Are Talking Or When Teacher is Teaching

Using the Six Hats allowed my class to look at the problem from different angles. Use 6 pieces of chart paper (and/or the 6 different colors of felt pens) as you apply each hat.

1. White Hat: state the facts
 - students are talking when Mrs Dyck is talking
 - there is noise so that others are distracted or can't hear
 - students don't know what to do after Mrs Dyck has given directions
 - many students get silly or off task
2. Red Hat: states the emotions
 - Mrs Dyck feels offended
 - Students are frustrated because they can't hear directions
 - Those talking enjoy joking around and being heard
3. Black Hat: negative aspects
 - time is wasted
 - learning is compromised
 - those who legitimately have the floor feel that listeners don't care about what they are saying
 - chaos in the classroom
4. Yellow Hat: positives of the situation are examined
 - everyone gets to say what is on their mind
 - it can be fun
 - you don't have to wait until you speak and therefore don't forget what you what to say
 - not just the "smart" kids get to speak
5. Green Hat: creative ideas that come with seeing the problem in a new light
 - Mrs Dyck will be more aware of the amount of time that she "talks"
 - Mrs Dyck will try to include interaction from many different students, not just the "smart" kids
 - students will work on resisting the need to say everything that comes into their mind. They will ask themselves if this is "on topic" and" if this needs to be shared at this time. There needed to be further discussion on "how" students would work on this problem.
 - students will think about whether their comment will interfere with other people's learning
 - we will keep these charts up so that we can refer back to the learning of this moment and reassess how we are doing.
6. Blue Hat: Sum up what is learned
 - Mrs Dyck learned that she needs to limit the amount of time she uses "Talking" as a form of teaching
 - Mrs Dyck needs to involve all students in discussion. She needs to look for the one who rarely offers comments or is quietly waiting to be picked to answer.
 - Mrs Dyck needs to realize that some students need "think time" before they are ready to contribute to a discussion. Allowing time for these students to think is important part of class discussion so they do not tune out.
 - students now realize that when they talk when others are talking it makes the person talking feel like a fool or unappreciated.
 - students realize that just to "get the laugh" of the moment, they are jeopardizing other people's learning
 - students learned that speaking whenever you want show a lack of self-discipline and that not everything

that goes through our minds is worth sharing.

- teacher/student needs to revisit this topic and check how we are doing

When I did this exercise with my students, I fully expected the process to show that "they" were at fault in this situation. It was humbling to hear them share that they sometimes called out because I did not choose them to share their ideas or that I moved so fast they did not get a chance to think. Students were blown away when I shared what I felt like when I had planned a long time for a particular lesson and then one silly comment "threw water" on my lesson- ruined it because the class got silly. They never viewed it as offending me and because we had a good relationship they were anxious to work on this problem. Because I cared about them I was willing to take some responsibility for the problem as well. Student/Teacher ownership added to the power of this exercise.

Some teachers may say this process takes too long. It would be better to "read the riot act" and move on. I have to say that it saved me piles of time in the long run. My class and I went through this process in November. Not only did their behavior improve but during the times they slipped, I would say, "Remember the Six Hats...." and they go "Oh, yah..." and they would click into the strategies that we established during the "Green/Blue" hat time. You have to realize that doing this exercise with students isn't stopping students from learning- it IS the learning.

My staff has used the Six Hats in staff meetings to problem solve. Really all it is getting all viewpoints out on the table. I hope this explanation gives teachers a glimpse of how they might use it in their classroom.

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