

Teacher's Notes

USING EDWARD DE BONO'S SIX THINKING HATS IN SOCIOLOGICAL DISCUSSION, JILL SWALE, KENDRICK SCHOOL, READING.

Recent training with the Holst Group has persuaded me that the Six Thinking Hats Technique is a useful way of engaging all students in lively sociological discussion. It involves tackling a topic using six different modes of thinking, each associated with a different colour by de Bono. The specific approach described below, in which every student wears each 'hat' in turn, is an improvement in my opinion on the approach I recently described in *The Sociology Thinking Kit*, in which each student only adopted one or two 'hats'.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ☐ Choose a controversial topic. The labelling theory of deviance is used as an example, but Marxist or New Right theories would be equally effective.
- ☐ Photocopy the cards about the six hat roles for every student and divide the class into groups of up to six. Ask each group to appoint a Blue Hat and scribe as described, then to go on to the White Hat activity, setting an appropriate brief time limit.
- ☐ Have a quick whole class discussion to ensure that every group has essential facts before they move on, such as an understanding of the labelling theory, and a recognition that the term 'deviance' covers more than just crime.
- ☐ Then give all the groups five minutes to be Yellow Hats and then, without spoiling the momentum by asking for results, five minutes to be Black Hats.
- ☐ Now ask all the groups to be Green Hats. Avoid making many suggestions to them if possible, encouraging them to be as imaginative, wacky and funny as possible. Again set a five-minute time limit, so that discussion is fast and lively.
- ☐ Finally tell the students to be Red Hats. Ask each Blue Hat as chairperson to collect a quick 'red' reaction from every group member in turn, to an appropriate question central to the topic, as suggested on the sheet. Allow three minutes.

PLENARY

- ☐ Ask students to begin by reporting back their Yellow Hat ideas, inviting the scribe of one group to read out their ideas, and instructing the other scribes to tick off their similar ones to avoid too much repetition when you ask them to add extra points. Elicit the correspondence between positive 'yellow hat' views

of the labelling theory and the views of left wing sociologists.

- ☐ Then ask to hear Black Hat ideas, beginning with a different group. Ensure that black hats make the connection between negative aspects of the labelling theory and sociologists who stress individual responsibility, such as the New Right.
- ☐ Ask a third group to start off the discussion of Green Hat ideas. Some of these may be linked with social policy and result in philosophical debate about free will versus determinism, the influence of structural factors versus agency. Alternatively if some of the green hat ideas are funny or deliberately outrageous, this might be an opportunity to let students take the floor and amuse the class without intervention from you.
- ☐ In the unlikely event of this 'hat' falling rather flat, contribute some intriguing information and questions of your own. You might, for example, mention controversial schemes to send young offenders away for outward-bound courses to provide them with new interests and break the link from primary to secondary deviance. Mention Rosenhan's experiment in which sane volunteers sent to mental hospitals were labelled as schizophrenic by the staff.
- ☐ Then as a whole class encourage metacognition, asking whether they feel parallel thinking using 'hats' has generated a wider range of views than previous discussions. From now on they should be familiar enough with the technique to do a quick 'yellow hat' or 'black hat' on any concept you want them to examine.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Ask students to produce a mind map of the discussion. Some of the hat colours can be reproduced, for example by yellow representing positive evaluation points and examples of convincing labelling studies by Jock Young, Stan Cohen and others, while black stands for criticisms from the New Right and others. Direct groups to find out more about labelling studies in different areas of deviance such as drug taking, mental illness, stuttering and homosexuality, including on their maps researchers, concepts, methods and evaluation points. If this is done on OHTs, students can show the class the portion of the mind map they have developed fully. Provide each individual with a sheet of A3 paper to copy everything onto a large mind map for personal revision.



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BLUE HAT: CHAIR

- ☐ Each group needs to appoint a chairperson whose role it is to ensure that the discussion stays focussed on the prescribed type of thinking to which the teacher directs you. This person with the overview is known as the Blue Hat, though if the Blue Hat allows the conversation to drift into the wrong type of thinking, any member can bring the group back on task.
- ☐ The Blue Hat may sometimes need to summarise the ideas the group has come up with so far and suggest a new focus for the discussion.
- ☐ The group also needs a scribe who concentrates well and can jot down all their ideas. This could be the same person as the Blue hat or someone else.

WHITE HAT: FACTUAL INFORMATION

- ☐ White Hats focus on recalling and searching for factual information. For example if thinking about labelling and deviance you would need Becker's definition of deviance, his description of the labelling process, how he relates it to primary and secondary deviance and definitions of the specialist vocabulary he uses.
- ☐ You will be set a short time limit, so you need to work fast and stay focused. You need to amass all the relevant facts you already know, identify any important information you lack and work out how to get it, using reference materials as efficiently as possible.
- ☐ Do not discuss evaluation points or express your own opinion on the topic at this point. Jot down key information.

YELLOW HAT: STRENGTHS

- ☐ Yellow Hats must think of as many possible strengths of the view or benefits of the concept or topic under discussion as they can. For example if discussing labelling, this could include different types of deviance and situations in which Becker's theory fits well.
- ☐ These do not have to be views you fully believe in, simply positive comments that could be made.
- ☐ Remember not to mention disadvantages of the perspective or disagree with anyone else's positive points at this stage.
- ☐ The opportunity to express opposite views will come in the next round. Again you will have a time limit so everyone needs to fire quick comments for the scribe to jot down.



BLACK HAT: WEAKNESSES

- ☐ As Black Hats you should look for every possible problem or negative aspect of the theory or concept under discussion.
- ☐ For example think of all the criticisms that might be made of the labelling theory, situations in which it might not apply and practical problems of trying to prove it or act upon it.
- ☐ Feel free to express the extreme views some people might hold, regardless of your own beliefs.
- ☐ Everyone in the group must focus and work fast to make an exhaustive list.

GREEN HAT: CREATIVITY

- ☐ Green Hats are creative thinkers who seek entirely new angles. Think of whatever completely original approaches you can to the topic you are discussing.
- ☐ You might modify the theory to remove weaknesses, consider how it might apply in bizarre situations, in the future, in other cultures, how society might change if it was taken to extremes, whatever springs to mind or even what appeals to your sense of humour.
- ☐ Try to be imaginative, perhaps even making up a theory of your own with a new name. Feel free to be as wacky or funny as you like, and call out your ideas fast because of the time limit.

RED HAT: FEELINGS AND INTUITIONS

- ☐ This hat represents feelings and intuitions. Using it means giving a quick and honest reaction to the theory or topic being discussed, without having to state reasons or enter into debate. The Red Hat is an emotional rather than a rational response.
- ☐ Ask the Blue Hat as chairperson to collect a quick 'red' reaction from every group member. The teacher or chairperson might phrase this in the form of a question for each person to answer within a brief time limit. For example if the labelling theory has been discussed, each member might be asked one of the following questions:
 - ☐ What is your 'gut feeling' about the labelling theory of deviance?
 - ☐ Do you feel society would be better or worse if more people believed it?