

A Thinking Strategy for Tomorrow's Gifted Leaders: Six Thinking Hats¹

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"PUT ON YOUR THINKING HAT!" conveys the idea that thinking improves when a THINKING HAT is worn. While Dr. Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy has been the mainstay in higher level thinking, Dr. Edward de Bono reinvented the traditional cap in Six Thinking Hats. He combines the hat metaphor with six colors to create a powerful thinking strategy. Paul Chance in *Psychology Today* (July 1986) commented on Six Hats saying, "...we owe de Bono a debt for constantly reminding us that thinking is a skill and can be improved. . . ." When we put on our thinking hats, we have not one but six. Thinking is the foundation for listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers have developed classrooms that are alive with critical and creative thinking depicted by the image of Six Hats.

Six Thinking Hats

Six Thinking Hats is an internationally recognized tool to teach thinking in all content areas. SIX HATS enables us to SEE OUR THINKING, focus, change, and improve it. Each colored hat represents a different mode of thinking. When teachers and administrators analyze questioning strategies in the classroom, many recognize that few require wait time. Six Hats questions demand wait time and present opportunities for wonder and thought. A community of dynamic, sophisticated thinkers emerges as the HATS integrate content, transforming classrooms as they did in this school.

"The teachers and students were captivated and involved with the Six Hats. The students were eager and focused, something the students and teachers will remember and use throughout their educational years." Teresa Davis, Coordinator of Gifted Services, Peoria Unified School District, Phoenix, AZ

The impact of Six Hats and stories from teachers and educational leaders who use them will be the focus of this article.

THE THINKING BEHIND THE SIX HATS WITH CONNECTIONS TO BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

The Six Hats are described in this section and provide a basis for learning and applying them to your gifted curriculum. As you read the descriptors, think of questions and student tasks connecting your content with the HATS processes. To add depth, the HATS are applied on four dimensions, the: (1) text, (2) student's life, (3) community, and (4) world.



The **WHITE HAT** **FACTS, INFORMATION, DATA, RESEARCH NEEDED.** (Bloom's **KNOWLEDGE**)

What are the facts about ___? What do you need or want to know about ___?



The **RED HAT** **FEELINGS, HUNCHES, EMOTIONS, INTUITION.** (Bloom's **EVALUATION**)

What are your feelings about ___? What prejudices exist? What is your gut feeling about ___? What does your intuition tell you?



The **BLACK HAT** **CAUTION, RISKS, JUDGMENT.** (Bloom's **ANALYSIS and EVALUATION**)

What should you be cautious of ___? What are the consequences of ___? What words of wisdom might come from this? What were the difficulties of ___? What did you dislike about ___? What are the risks of ___?



The **YELLOW HAT** **BENEFITS, GOOD, VALUE, STRENGTHS.** (Bloom's **ANALYSIS and EVALUATION**)

What are the benefits of ___? What is good about ___? What is the value of ___? What did you like about ___?



The **GREEN HAT** **CREATIVITY, NEW IDEAS, BRAINSTORMING, PREDICTING,** (Bloom's **SYNTHESIS**)

What if ___? Can you create other ways? How would you solve the problem? What other possibilities are there for ___?



The **BLUE HAT** **THINKING ABOUT THINKING, METACOGNITION, SUMMARIZING,** (Bloom's **COMPREHENSION AND APPLICATION**)

Explain how you got your answer. Tell the order of events in your reading. Paraphrase. Conclusions. Summarize. What is the big idea, main idea? You will be learning ___?

QUESTIONING AND SIX HATS

With these key words and questioning stems in mind, application to a content area is crucial. Six Hats increases reading comprehension by providing a schema that gifted students can apply across disciplines. As an example, let's consider a few HATS questions based on the fable, The Hare and the Tortoise. They apply to the: (1) text, (2) student's life, (3) community, and (4) world. Add your own questions to these.

1. White Hat - Who were the main characters? Who was the judge? Where did the story take place?
2. Red Hat - How do you feel at the beginning of the race? How do you feel at the end of the race?
3. Black Hat - What might the hare have been cautious of during the race? What might the tortoise have been cautious of during the race? What should you be careful of when you are in a competitive situation?
4. Yellow Hat - What were the benefits of the hare losing the race? What were the benefits of the tortoise winning the race? What are some benefits of being in a competitive situation?
5. Blue Hat - Develop a one sentence summary of your thoughts about the race. Which character in the fable you are most like and why? What is the moral of the fable? How does the moral relate to your life?
6. Green Hat - What new titles could you create for the fable? What if the race were run in other places? What if another character joined in the race? What other endings could you create for the fable? What if you were in a competition? Invent a scenario with you as the main character. What slogan could you write to impact the global community to learn from this fable?

SIX HATS — BENEFITS, CAUTION

Benefits—

1. The colors and hats provide a visual image that is easy to learn, remember and use.
2. Thinking is visible, focused, in depth, and at higher levels of critical and creative thinking.
3. The strategy can be used on a simple, concrete level or abstract, sophisticated level.
4. Listening, speaking, reading and writing improve with a strategy for focus.
5. Interdisciplinary connections integrate the curriculum.
6. Problem solving, decision making, leadership and independence are developed.
7. Students ask quality questions.
8. Student led discussions and projects are focused and in depth.
9. Self-evaluation is systematic.
10. Students develop confidence.
11. Cooperative groups and teamwork are effective and organized.

Caution —

12. The Six Hats is one approach to teaching thinking, and teachers should be cautious of excluding others.

READING AND METACOGNITION

A reader's awareness of the thought processes used in reading is metacognition. The blue hat ensures that the reader is making sense of the text. In his keynote to the Western Pennsylvania Association for Curriculum and Supervision in April, 2000, Dr. Roger C. Farr, Senior Author of Harcourt Language emphasized the importance of metacognition in improving reading comprehension. He challenged teachers to ask students to read a paragraph or two, cover the text, and paraphrase what they have read. This blue hat task is simple and produces results.

LITERACY AND SIX HATS

The process of becoming literate reflects both family and school values. It is rooted in schema theory. Children use what they already know to give meaning to new experiences by activating prior knowledge and making connections to construct meaning. Once a schema for questioning or thinking is learned, readers are able to elaborate on the material they read. This process engages the reader in a cognitive activity involving critical and creative thinking, judgment, evaluation, prediction, and metacognition.

Six Hats provides a literacy tool that helps everyone become independent, life long learners. In all stages of literacy development gifted children use Six Hats when comprehending and composing. The Commission on Adolescent Literacy (1999) emphasized the differences between the needs of beginning and adolescent readers. It presented the importance of thinking in adolescent literacy. Adolescents require advanced literacy levels and need to learn to use higher level thinking. They need to learn strategies to help them question themselves about what they read. Explicit instruction moves the reader from literal understandings to higher order thinking that promotes reading comprehension.

READING COMPREHENSION

The Six Hats improves reading comprehension and provides gifted readers with a tool to interact with the author, thereby promoting a conversation between the reader and the author. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies promote the conversation, so the reader can question the author.

Nolte and Singer's "phase-in, phase-out" strategy shifts the responsibility for asking questions from the teacher to the students. Teachers show students how to generate questions for a story (Vacca, 2006). Six Hats supports this shift of questioning responsibility. A high school teacher reports:

"My Applied Communications class LOVED them. We have had nothing but success with the HATS. With the HATS the Journalism class is attacking the school magazine. The Applied class designed an independent novel unit. My Honors Speech and Debate class implemented a new peer comment format. My Honors III class is exploring The Red Badge of Courage. After one day, my Applied students were refocusing a discussion with a green hat.." *Renee Sorensen, Teacher at Tunkhannock High School.*

Increased comprehension and responsiveness is reported by two teachers:

"I found Six Hats easy to simplify and adapt to the proficiency levels of my ESL students, and they responded with enthusiasm to the visual and tactile presentation of the hats. Six Hats provides a multisensory learning environment, giving students a greater chance for success." *Karen Lau, ESL Teacher, Luzerne Intermediate Unit, PA*

A teacher of autistic students reported, "My students ask to use the Hats everyday." *Nicole Gamrat, Woodland Hills School District, PA*

PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMIC STANDARD (1.1), LEARNING TO READ INDEPENDENTLY

Pennsylvania Academic Standard 1.1, "Learning to Read Independently," states that students need to, "read text using self-monitoring comprehension strategies." Teachers attest to the effectiveness of Six Hats as an independent reading tool. The blue hat of metacognition particularly connects with this standard. In reading, metacognition refers to "self-monitoring – the ability of students to monitor reading by keeping track of how well they are comprehending" (Vacca, 2006). The reader actively interacts with the text to make sense of it, setting up a purpose for reading, planning for reading and evaluating the understandings. A teacher who used the Six Hats as a self-monitoring comprehension strategy states:

"I am using the SIX HATS daily. I refer to them to get the children thinking in a certain direction. It gives the students a direction to think towards by the questions on the hats. In the primary grades especially, the students need to develop specific thinking areas. This is the first program I have used that starts students in the direction of thinking critically. They loved the activities especially the green hat. I use this with PSSA (state assessment) preparation." *Debbie Miller, Wilkes Barre School District, PA*

PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMIC STANDARD (1.4), TYPES OF WRITING

The Pennsylvania Academic writing standards and Six Hats were the motivation for a research project conducted by Jacque Goodburn, a seventh grade English teacher in Burgettstown Area School District in Pennsylvania. She enjoyed using the Six Hats but wanted to determine the effect on the writing achievement of her students. Her research project included three heterogeneous classes, 60 students, 10 of whom needed learning support. The comparison group was comprised of three heterogeneous classes, 63 students, 10 of whom needed learning support. The prompts were PSSA writing assessment released prompts—informational, narrative, and persuasive. Microsoft Word was used in

conjunction with the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Scale to determine writing quality. Although readability formulas cannot capture all aspects of quality writing, they can be used to evaluate the length of sentences and the number of syllables in the words used. These data in combination with teacher observations have given us an objective baseline for the research.

For the informational and the narrative prompts, the students using the Six Hats were writing an average of a half-year ahead of the comparison group students. For the persuasive prompt, the students using the Six Hats were writing almost a year ahead of the comparison group. Jacque concluded that the benefits are:

Benefits for the teacher

1. Writing process discussions and workshops are consistent.
2. Grading is objective.
3. Students organize their ideas and see what they are thinking before writing.
4. Students see what is missing and correct their omissions independently.
5. The teacher is an effective facilitator.

Benefits to students

6. Students understand what is a well-developed piece.
7. Students revise drafts with less teacher intervention.
8. Students prewrite and see where detail is needed.
9. Students value this life long learning and communication tool.

Benefits to both

10. The writing process is focused.
11. It is specific and less confrontational.
12. Constructive criticism focuses on the Hats rather than addressing the writer.

LEADERSHIP AND SIX HATS

Six Hats provides a leadership tool for gifted students that many can use in corporate careers. As a communication tool, the mental wearing and switching of hats separates thinking into six modes for analyzing matters objectively and comprehensively. When individuals and teams separate emotion from fact, the benefits from the possible problems, the critical from creative thinking, the results include shorter meetings, thorough assessment of alternatives before making decisions, better communication and easier problem resolution. All sides of a topic/issue are addressed. Individuals and teams work together to think clearly, objectively, systematically and creatively! As gifted students move from school into careers, Six Hats provides them with a leadership, thinking edge over those who have not used this strategy.

THE IMPACT OF DISTRICT-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Berwick Area School District's professional staff was introduced

to Six Hats several years ago, providing them with a specific way to approach thinking and decision making for themselves and with their students. Thinking is an act that can be somewhat overwhelming because we try to make decisions with various elements pulling at us. Our creative side argues with our practical side, our pros argue with our cons, and our emotions argue with our brains.

"The toolbox of the Six Thinking Hats provides our staff and students with a concrete way to approach decision making in the classroom. One student claims that this technique broadened her way of thinking; she now approaches her assignments in a whole new light, especially with cooperative learning activities and group projects. This thinking technique works both in the boardroom and in the classroom." *Holly Morrison, Director of Curriculum, K-12, Berwick School District, PA*

DECISION MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Decision making and problem solving are essential skills for adults and children. HATS IN SEQUENCES provide a colorful seven step structure to solve problems and make decisions. In a physics classroom, problem solving is facilitated by Six Hats:

"The HATS were introduced in a unit on the use of petroleum in the United States and alternate energy forms. The students became familiar with what I expect for each HAT process. We now use the HATS for problem solving. They answer questions using the HATS in greater depth without me prompting them to go deeper." *Dean Brewer, Physics Teacher, Southern Columbia High School, PA*

Six Hats problem solving has benefited students in Odyssey of the Mind, Destination Imagination, and Invent America. It promotes communication among team members, improves creative production, provides the next steps, and resolves team problems effectively:

"My students revel in the metacognitive strategies. They love thinking about thinking! Students purposefully examine all approaches to solving a problem. Plus it's just plain FUN!" *Judy Micheletti, Odyssey of the Mind Coordinator, Berwick School District, PA*

MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY HATS TRAINING CREATES A SAFER SCHOOL

As a conflict resolution tool, Six Hats has been helping to create

a safer school climate in Berwick High School. A multicultural diversity group uses Six Hats as their leadership and problem solving tool in handling conflict and change. Scenarios related to diversity challenge the students and the Hats. Role playing with problems being analyzed and resolved connects problem solving to their lives, which is shown in this paraphrased statement:

The Six Hats helps multiculturally diverse students SEE how they react in difficult situations. The concreteness of the Hats helps them identify their reactions to situations, analyze them, and create real life change, the primary goal of diversity groups. Conflict resolution and a more positive school climate result from student problem solving with Six Hats. Paraphrased - Sally Meyer, Teacher and Diversity Group Coordinator, Berwick HS, PA

TEACH, LEARN, LEAD

In summary, Six Hats is a tool that can promote quality thinking and communication for gifted students, teachers, and educational and corporate leaders. As the HATS activate the brain with color, they create a delightful and meaningful experience for those using them to teach, learn and lead. Testimonials from around the globe applaud the Six Hats for their power to focus thinking and communication, provide a self-monitoring strategy, enhance reading comprehension, offer a process for problem solving and decision making, and foster independence, leadership, and teamwork.

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~~Gifted Students Left Behind: A Student's Perspective~~

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~~Because the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) focuses on proficiency levels as opposed to excellence, it unfairly leaves behind more talented students by shifting the primary focus onto~~

~~those students who are performing poorly in school. The No Child Left Behind Act does not develop and nurture the abilities of more intelligent students who can perform on levels much~~