

# Think Thoughtfully

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Critical thinking. Creativity. Collaboration. Communication. How can educators integrate these 21st century skills in classrooms? An authority in the field of thinking, Edward de Bono, authored a self-help book titled *Six Thinking Hats*. This hat concept serves as a unique strategy for administrators to use when leading teachers to solve problematic situations or issues. In turn, teachers can model this strategy in their classrooms to enable all students to utilize this valuable tool when engaging in whole- and small-group discussions about the real world.

The color of the hat signals the type thinking required by the students before speaking. A poster representing the six colors of hats or an actual hat arrangement may be displayed in the classroom with descriptions that explain the thinking required when a particular hat is called upon to 'speak.'

- **White Hat** – information, facts
- **Red Hat** – emotions, feelings
- **Yellow Hat** – benefits, advantages, pluses
- **Black Hat** – critical viewpoints, disadvantages, minuses
- **Green Hat** – new ideas, creativity, innovation
- **Blue Hat** – overview, summarization, process organizer

During a discussion, the six hats may be repeatedly used in any sequence. White Hat thinkers present objective facts or the information they know about the topic; Red Hat thinkers share their emotions and feelings about the topic; Yellow Hat thinkers are optimistic and share positive or good points; Black Hat thinkers tell why an idea might not work or what obstacles might arise; Green Hat thinkers generate solutions, possibilities, or creative ideas; Blue Hat thinkers are active listeners and move the discussion forward. The (teacher or) facilitator from the blue group may ask certain thinking hats to contribute again, before the Blue Hat thinkers summarize what has been shared by each of the groups and form a conclusion.

The hat strategy maintains productivity during a discussion while also serving as a classroom management tool to prevent students from venturing off topic. Discussion topics or issues might relate to content areas of study, or are relevant to today's world inside and outside the classroom. An example might be: Should students be allowed to bring cell phones to school?

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- All students may participate in either a whole-group or small-group discussion about the topic, communicating only the thoughts associated with the designated thinking hat. The teacher may call for the thinking (e.g., *Let's begin our discussion with White Hat thinking. I want to hear your Red Hat thoughts, but this is not the appropriate time. Next, I would like to hear Yellow Hat thinking.*) Once students understand the thinking process, a Blue Hat thinker may facilitate discussions.
- A second option requires students to be divided into six groups, with each group assigned a different color of the six thinking hats. After the teacher selects a topic, each group will collaborate using the assigned hat to focus their thoughts. Then, each group member shares an individual perspective or the group's designee may present the collective ideas that emerge from the discussion. The Blue Hat thinkers offer an overview, orchestrate the thinking process, and conclude the discussion.



de Bono, Edward. (1985). *Six thinking hats*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.