LEUPHANA
UNIVERSITÄT LÜNEBURG

Methodological profile: Silent debate/Silent discussion

Description

The silent debate is a method to activate and involve participants. Participants engage in a written silent dialogue. They reflect on their own thoughts, knowledge and experiences and at the same time are inspired, complemented, challenged, encouraged, etc. by the thoughts of others. The method can be used in many ways. For example, it can be used to introduce content-related topics, to encourage exchange and to test knowledge levels. It is suitable for small groups as well as for events with many participants. It can be carried out in an analogue way with poster boards, but also in a digital way by using digital software. This is particularly suitable for events with large numbers of participants, as participants can stay in their seats, make entries using their mobile devices and the results can be displayed directly to all participants.
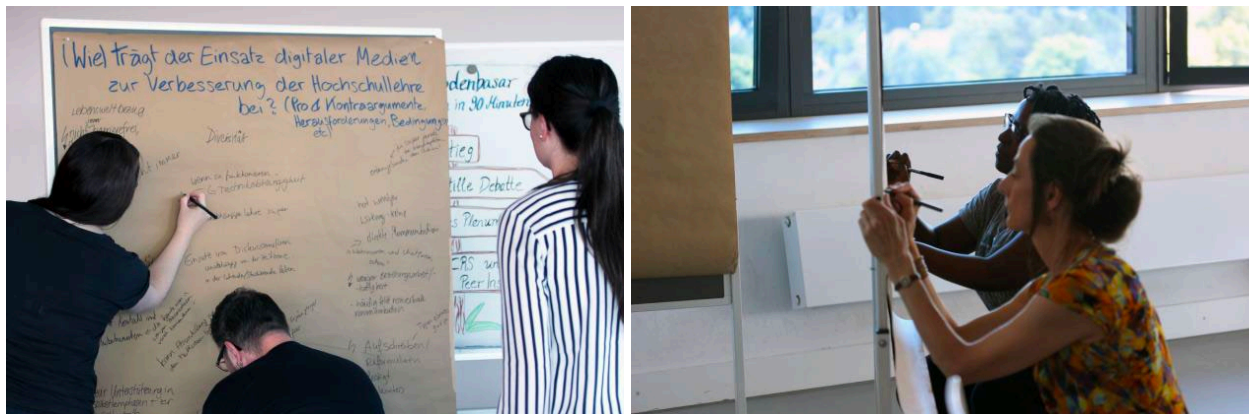

Figure 1 & 2: © Katharina Trostorff

Objectives

The method can be used for a variety of purposes, such as:

- Brainstorming
- Generating ideas
- Testing the state of knowledge
- Introducing a topic
- Exchange content
- Evaluating or concluding a seminar, lecture, meeting
- Evaluation and feedback
- Capturing the mood

Participants

- Small groups of 8 or more participants
- Larger groups, e.g. in lectures

Role of the teacher

- Preparation of questions, theses and materials
- Presentation of the method
- Moderation of the process and evaluation

Requirements and material

- Theses or questions on a topic
- **For the implementation as an analogue variant:**
    - A room with the possibility to put up posters or metaplan boards
    - Depending on the number of participants, different posters with questions/theses
    - Moderator pens for all participants
- **For the implementation as a digital variant:**
    - Software for digital brainstorming, mind mapping, text writing, e.g. Cryptpad
    - Internet access/availability
    - Digital presentation facilities – projector, PC
    - Participants will need to bring internet enabled mobile devices (smartphone, tablet, laptop) and have access to the internet
- **Optional:** Countdown/stopwatch to keep track of time.

Preparation of a silent debate

- **For the implementation as an analogue variant:**
    - One or more posters: theses or questions are written on them as headings
    - The posters are placed on tables or hung on walls, blackboards, metaplan boards or flipchart stands. Pencils are provided for all participants
- **For the implementation as a digital variant:**
    - One or more theses or questions are prepared and integrated into the corresponding software as headings
    - Participants should be informed in advance that they must bring their own mobile devices
    - All participants receive the link to the software and, if necessary, a short introduction on how to use the software

Methodology – Procedure of a silent debate

- **Introduction:**
    - First, the teacher explains the method. The participants are asked to share their thoughts, knowledge, reflections, experiences, etc. on a topic/issue/question by writing them on the posters or in the corresponding software.
    - The method consists of two phases: 1. A silent debate/silent discussion (= writing phase) and 2. An evaluation phase.

- **Implementation: Writing phase – the silent discussion**
    - In the analogue version, the participants gather around the posters. In the digital version, they access the software.
    - The participants are given 5 to 10 minutes to answer the respective question or to respond to the thesis and to write their experiences, knowledge, assessments, and reflections on the poster. They can comment on each other's contributions in written form (the analogy to slogans on public toilets, which are commented on little by little, is helpful here).
    - After 5 to 10 minutes, the participants move to the next poster to read the written debate of the previous group, react to it in writing and add to it.
    - The **most important rule** is that the participants do not talk to each other during the writing phase, but only exchange their thoughts in writing, add to them, correct them, etc.
    - **Variations:** For the writing phase, the number of posters/metaplan boards does not need to be limited to two. If there are many participants, more posters/questions may be useful to ensure that all participants can work well on the posters. It is also possible to structure the writing phase less strictly – for example, participants can move individually between the different posters and work on the posters/metaplans throughout the writing phase.

- **Implementation: Evaluation – the silent discussion becomes loud**
    - The posters are hung up in the room for all to see or, in the digital version, projected on the wall for all to see. In smaller groups, the moderator can read out all the thoughts written down, initially without commentary or evaluation. In larger groups, a selection of aspects is usually necessary. Afterwards, the facilitator as well as the participants can ask questions and relate and discuss aspects.
    - **Variation:** Especially in events with many participants, it can be challenging for the teacher to grasp, classify, address, etc. the many contents noted on the posters. In this case, it would be possible to follow the writing phase with a group work phase, i.e. groups could be given the task of summarising, clustering, etc. the contents of a poster before continuing the discussion and overall evaluation in plenary.

Time requirement

- Writing phase: 5-10 minutes per poster
- Evaluation phase: about 15-30 minutes

The development was carried out by employees of the Leuphana Teaching Service: Caroline Kärger (2018) | updated by Sigrun Lehnert (2023).