Lesson Category

**Media and News Literacy**

Title

## Complex Questions

Area(s)

**Global picture, Social Media, Points of View, Agendas behind the news**

Objectives

**Students will:**

1. **become more aware of complex questions around them and the affluence of "experts" on social media that offer simple solutions;**
2. **come to appreciate the importance of looking at different points of view and of understanding that complex questions do not necessarily have solutions; and**
3. **gain a better understanding of agendas or person complexes that drive behaviour on social media when it comes to complex questions.**

Time needed

**4 teaching periods + research (homework) or more if turned into a more extended exercise**

Materials needed

**social media content, internet**

Age level(s)

**14-18**

Number of participants per group

**Any number as long as the classroom can be divided into groups should number of students be more than 10.**

**Complex Questions**

Originally designed by **VisMedNet Association** as a part of the EuroVoters project

https://eurovoters.eu

## Step-by-step description of activity

1. The teacher starts with three or four words on the board that represent topics that are in themselves complex questions. Examples can be "Migration", "COVID-19 strategies", "public transport" etc. and invite students to write or stick yellow notes with phrases under each one so that they can brainstorm random phrases that come to their mind when they hear or read the words on the board. Students are invited not to feel obliged to contribute to a phrase cloud under each one…letting them know that it is ok not to have anything to say or not to have any reaction to / opinion about something.

1. The teacher and the students look at the clouds formed around each of the words on the board and after each cloud the class can label each phrase that the students posted. For example "opinion", "general statement", "anger or disappointment", "enthusiasm", "flippant comment", "simple solution" and the teacher can in this process help them peg key words like emotions, thinking, analysis that may be seen in the phrase cloud.

1. Next small step is to help students analyse their own reactions and phrases as to whether these were internal to themselves (ie. the result of their own thinking) or whether they are the result of their thinking. It is important that in this process the teacher also asks where the students get their information about the subject from and how much they do (or not) stop to think.

4. The teacher and the students can choose the one or two topics that garnered most phrases and reactions from the students so that the choice of topics for deeper discussion is democratically chosen. It is useful for the teacher to help students understand that these are words (and issues they represent) that create many different reactions because we are all different, we all have our own backgrounds, and most importantly, because they are complex questions.

4. The class can now divide into groups according to the number of words chosen for more in depth debate. The topic is not assigned to the group but students choose which one to debate with some discipline or direction to ensure balanced numbers in groups size. it is also an option to choose one topic for the whole class or to debate more than one topic in different rounds of discussion.

4. The class is introduced to the seven drivers of change also known as STEEPV usually used in Foresight Techniques. STEEPV stands for Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political and Values drivers of change. There is no need to delve into the Foresight background to the acronym however they can be adopted into the 6 Thinking Hats method. The students speak of the topic (example Migration, COVID-19 etc.) from all or some of these 6 drivers as thinking hats or aspects. The debate can be done in rounds for each of the drivers chosen or else, if the teacher this is viable, students can be assigned (or they can choose a hat for themselves) a driver as a thinking hat.

7. Homework (and research) will be to prepare for a debate of the topic chosen from the thinking hat/s. In order to discipline this work it is recommended for the teacher to suggest or assign a template for the work so that debate is later structured and interesting. The preparation for the debate could for example be required to start with a question etc. however it is recommended that the template should end with a question or two that the student/s feel they should ask. This will positively condition the work of the students to (1) understand that there is no answer for the general topic but more likely many questions to consider and (2) to work with questions in mind when they read on the topic with the chosen thinking hat/s

7. Example: a student needs to read about what the media and social media say about migration from the Environment point of view such as environmental refugees, electronics dumping groups, global warming causing drought in other continents causing people to move. The student reads with a question in mind so that the student first asks the question to him/self, reads with this question in mind, puts materials together and puts the question in the end. The mental process can be as follows (a.) I have asked the question, (b.) I have read what the media and social media say and (c.) I am still asking the same question or I have new questions.

8. The teacher may choose to do rounds of discussion for all the thinking hats of STEEPV chosen or else when one is speaking from one hat (example the environment) and other hats are mentioned (example values, politics etc.) there can be links and make the debate more complex (example values of not polluting and values more up close and personal as in understanding where and what migrants are also running away from ie. not only away from war etc.) The mission is to make students more aware of the topic, the elements at play and that it is a complex issue with no simple answers.

9. Conclusion and closure are achieved by allowing students time to discuss the topic if possible in an informal even unstructured manner as a cooling down time. One good method is that another teacher (it would be gold if it is a teacher of a relevant subject such as media) / head of department for some reason and asks what the class is up to so that the students have an alien audience and they can inform the "alien" about the debate. The debate NEEDS to close without any simple solutions and with the consciousness in the minds of all the students that:
    o there are many complex questions that do not have simplistic answers as we are many times made to believe by the media, political discourse and social media,
    o it is not a waste of time to discuss complex questions without aiming to find answers (because there are no conclusive answers or solutions) because discussion helps one understand one's own perspective,
    o complex questions need to have broad vision and this is acquired through asking questions and
    o open ended questions on complex topics is a way to keep one's mind open to understand more what is said and why it is said in what way and why it is said now and not then.

**PROS4 DEMOCRACY**

## Strategies of teaching and learning

Problem-based learning; Discussion Groups; Research;
Role play and simulations; Critical-incident analysis.

## Evaluation

Students are given the opportunity to report / narrate what they have learnt about the topic and about the concept of complex questions also identifying other complex questions without simple answers that were not discussed in their group or class.

## Notes to the educator

- The template for the homework or group work is key to ensuring the unanswered questions strategy.

## Notes to the students

- The debate may lead to disappointment if the topic is discussed at home or outside of class / homework because the student is thinking about a topic with a restrictive discipline of a thinking hat and most debate going around is flippant and haphazard.

## Suggestions for follow-up activities

A school can make this a practice including other media such as video making about the topic called "asking questions", scriptwriting (language classroom) for video making, meeting stakeholders (brought into the classroom) where experts on the topic can be asked the questions students have come up with. This can also be an intermediate step inserted to make the debate even more three dimensional.