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BRAINWRITING

MAIN FEATURES

Reinforced skills (TASC Cluster)	AIM, CONSTRUCT
Suitable for	Teachers, Students
Difficulty level	Middle
Setting	Group
Number of participants	from 6 to 500
Average time length	30 minutes
Special Equipment	No
Online version	Yes

1. DESCRIPTION

Brainwriting is a creativity technique similar to Brainstorming. It can be used as an alternative or to complement brainstorming, and often yields more ideas in less time than traditional group brainstorming.

The idea of brainwriting is based on the belief that the success of an idea generation process is determined by the degree of contribution and integration to participants' suggestions. It may help to overcome the possible creativity barriers caused by interpersonal conflicts or different cultural backgrounds of the participants.

There are many varieties of Brainwriting. 6-3-5 Brainwriting (or 635 Method, Method 635) is a group structured brainstorming technique aimed at aiding innovation processes by stimulating creativity. The name Brainwriting 6-3-5 comes from the process of having 6 people write 3 ideas in 5 minutes.

2. AIM / BENEFITS

One of the main advantages of using 6-3-5 brainwriting is that it is a very simple method and therefore is easy and quick to learn. No particular training for the supervisor is required. Brainwriting can be used instead of brainstorming in the following situations:

- When some participants are shy, and you don't want the loud or more powerful ones to intimidate others;
- When you want to give more time for the participants to formulate their thoughts;
- When expressing bold ideas, different from those of the majority or from the leadership of the group, is not well accepted;
- When the issue to be discussed is sensitive, e.g. related to bullying at school;
- When you have limited time - brainwriting allows generating ideas faster than brainstorming;
- When you don't have an experienced moderator - which is essential for good brainstorming but less important in brainwriting;
- When the group is too large for effective brainstorming. Brainwriting can be implemented at a conference of 500 people simply by leaving a large card on each seat, asking a question, and then having each audience member pass a card to someone else, and then repeat three times for a minute of writing.

Brainwriting can be used to understand how different groups view an issue. You may conduct separate brainwriting sessions with different internal groups. For example, if you asked groups to brainwrite about "What are the most important problems faced by our school?" you might find that different stakeholders have very different perspectives.

Brainwriting encourages sharing and exchanging knowledge, so different perspectives can be well exploited. Differently from brainstorming, it assures participation from all members and at the same time avoids issues of domination over introverts that are also likely to feel more free about expressing their own ideas.

All ideas are recorded on the worksheet(s), which means that nobody has to be in charge of taking notes throughout the session.

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It is a very productive method that allows generating many ideas in a short time and it is possible to keep track of the author of a particular idea.

Brainwriting may not be suitable if the participants find it difficult to express ideas in writing or if more social interaction and/or teambuilding is desired.

3. RELATED COMPETENCIES CLUSTER(s)

CLUSTER: Construct

Why

In brainwriting, individual participants work in parallel and in silence, writing their own ideas or observations on pieces of paper which are put to one side or passed on to the next writer. This method produces more ideas and far more diversity than brainstorming, but develops less energy as it is more quiet and thoughtful. Use it when ideas are more complex, when diversity is key, to empower less extroverted participants, or where the group is too large for brainstorming to be practical. In brainwriting, however, everyone's on an equal footing. All participants get to contribute at the same time, and all suggestions are anonymous. People also have more time to think through their ideas and to develop them. This can help to boost creativity and understanding that every relationship is a process where all actors involved learn from each other.

4. HOW TO DO THE PRACTICE

Step 1 / Preparation

1. Consider how you will bring previous knowledge into the room (for example, as a research wall or as key insights).
2. Prepare your group with information and arrange them comfortably. Everyone will need identical ticklish pens and several sheets of identical paper or identical sticky notes.
3. Show the theme or key question on a poster or projector.

Step 2 / Warm up

In a brainwriting session, the moderator asks the participants to write down their ideas about a particular question or problem on sheets of paper in a set period of time (e.g. 5 minutes); then each participant passes their ideas on to someone else, who reads the ideas and adds new ideas. After the same period of time, the participants are asked to pass their papers to others, and the process repeats. After 10 to 15 minutes, you collect the sheets and post them for immediate discussion.

In the Brainwriting 6-3-5 session, each person has a blank 6-3-5 worksheet (below).

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Sample brainwriting worksheet

Problem Statement: How to...			
	Idea 1	**Idea 2**	**Idea 3**
1			
2			
3			

Everyone writes the problem statement at the top of their worksheet (word for word from an agreed problem definition). They then write 3 ideas on the top row of the worksheet in 5 minutes in a complete and concise sentence (6-10 words). The participants are invited to consider out-of-the-box ideas and to combine ideas with others. The ideas are written in silence to prevent the participants from influencing each other. At the end of 5 minutes, each participant passes their form to the student on their right, who then reviews the ideas and adds new ones. The process continues until the worksheet is completed.

Step 3 / Application

There will now be a total of 108 ideas on the 6 worksheets.

The moderator can write one idea (which can be read by one of the participants) on the board and invite the participants to add similar ideas from their sheets. Similar ideas should be sorted into groups to have a better overview, discussed and assessed for feasibility, how much they contribute to solving the problem/achieving the objective defined in the beginning of the exercise. Everybody should have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. In the end, all the sheets are collected to capture all the ideas.

Work can then be carried out on a step-by- step basis:

1. Time starts and each participant has 5 minutes to write down 1 to 3 ideas.
2. After these 5 minutes all forms are passed on to the person next to them.
3. The second round starts and everyone will have another 5 minutes to write down 1 to 3 ideas below those of their neighbour. Everyone is free to use the previous ideas for inspiration.
4. A third round follows after 5 minutes. This will continue until everyone has had their turn. It is also possible to have the sheet of paper completed by a maximum number of people.
5. In the last round everyone selects the most inspiring ideas from the paper. The participants then draw a circle around these ideas.

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6. The ideas that have been circled are shared with the group. The participants will have an opportunity to explain their ideas and the ideas that receive too little support are crossed out.
7. The facilitator then collects all sheets of paper with circled ideas.
8. The facilitator types out all circled ideas and sends them to all participants, so that there is a total overview of the best ideas.

Step 4 / Evaluation

- At the end, display all the ideas on the wall. When all ideas are on display you can group them under whatever criteria the group prefers, discuss them, and/or begin a selection technique.
- The instructor of the game should ask the participants to reflect on the results obtained. Participants share feelings about what it was like to participate in this activity.

5. DEBRIEF

15 minutes (approx.), the instructor asks the participants to share their experience in plenary.
Possible questions:

- Which of the solutions seems the most convincing?
- What did you feel, how could you express your emotions?
- What problems did you have during the game?
- Was the game realistic?
- Which parts of it could be applied in other situations? What situations?

6. SPECIFIC MATERIALS

- Paper and pens for all participants, enough space for them to stand or sit comfortably and perhaps move around a little, one long wall where all the output can be shown, and sticky tape;
- A thicker paper works best as this does not tear easily.

7. TIPS AND TRICKS

Brainwriting helps students that have less self-confidence to express their ideas in a safer way. If you have technical possibilities, try using a digital tool for the Brainwriting process, e.g. Padlet.

The method may be more difficult to use with students with learning difficulties or lack of cooperation skills. If some children are uncomfortable with this activity, they can be assigned the role of "paper passers". For students who are still working on their writing skills, ask questions that can be answered in one word or by drawing a sketch. The process can be adapted to include fewer ideas and over a shorter time. Usually some participants are deep thinkers, and some are introverts, this strategy levels the playing field for all.

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8. ON-LINE VERSION

The website www.spatial.chat can be an alternative online platform to be used in running this exercise.

9. WEB REFERENCES

- Brainwriting - Enabling Everyone to Share Their Creative Ideas: www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newct_86.html
- Brainwriting: www.toolshero.com/creativity/brainwriting/
- Brainwriting: www.thisisservicedesigndoing.com/methods/brainwriting