

Learning Activities for Use with Young People To Explore the Issue of Discrimination

Past and present experience shows that many violations of human rights take place because one group of people feels superior to another. This often results in discrimination - the decision to exclude, restrict, marginalize or humiliate people because of their race, colour, religious beliefs, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, or other characteristics. Such discrimination is a denial of human dignity and of equal rights for those who are discriminated against.

Freedom from discrimination is the theme of this year's AI Week activities. Discrimination undermines the key concept on which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is founded: that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Combatting discrimination is therefore a fitting way of promoting the UDHR during its 50th anniversary year.

To coincide with AI Week, and in order to encourage the integration of human rights education with campaigning, the Human Rights Education Team at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International has put together and adapted some educational activities which can be used with young people to examine the issue of discrimination.

Methodology

The activities suggested below are learner-centred and use participatory methodology. This methodology is particularly appropriate when exploring the nature of discrimination in society since it allows the learners to relate the issue to their personal experience and environment. It involves young people fully in their learning so that they become active explorers of the world around them, rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The activities can be used in the classroom, or alternatively in non-formal educational settings such as in youth clubs or community groups.

A variety of methods are contained in the activities. The first activity suggests the use of cartoons, such as those produced for AI Week. Cartoons and comics are powerful influences on young people. They can entertain and inform, or more negatively can encourage prejudices and stereotypes. In an educational setting, cartoons drawn by young people themselves can be used to develop observation skills, imagination, and feelings of empathy. When put on display in a classroom or on a community noticeboard, drawings and cartoons can also be used as a way to communicate messages about human rights to other people.

Other methods proposed include simulation games, creative writing and project work. Simulation games aim to bring to life circumstances which are unfamiliar to the students. They can be useful for improving analysis and understanding of a situation, helping to develop participation skills and for encouraging empathy. Creative writing - for example, of short stories, poems and plays - helps develop communication skills and encourages the imagination. Projects are also useful for teaching about human rights because they allow learners to take control of their own learning and create opportunities for young people to interact with each other and with diverse people in the community.

All the activities below aim to make young people more aware of the discrimination that occurs in society. They aim to help them understand that discrimination is wrong and that it denies people their fundamental rights. They also highlight the need for action to prevent discrimination.

PICTURING DISCRIMINATION

For this activity you might like to use the Freedom from Discrimination cartoon strip written by Enrique Rodriguez Sanchez which has been produced as part of the AI Week materials. Alternatively you may wish to select an appropriate cartoon yourself. The activity is divided into three parts.

Purpose: This activity aims to draw attention to discrimination, as well as issues to do with diversity, equality and universality. It also encourages empathy with victims as well as the need for young people to take action to prevent discrimination.

Age: 14 and upwards

Time Needed: Part 1 Discussion 45 minutes

Part 2 Group Exercise Approx 45 minutes (Time needed will vary according to the number of participants)

Part 3 Project work or homework

How to Do It: Distribute the cartoon to the participants and allow 5 minutes for them to read it.

Part 1 - Questions for Group Discussion

- How did you feel as you read the cartoon?
- How do you think the children in the cartoon are feeling?
- In what ways do you think the children in the cartoon live a very different life from you? Have different values? hopes? needs? expectations of life?
- What human rights do you think are the most important to the characters in the cartoon? Are these rights also important for you? Why?
- Do you think the children in the cartoon enjoy the same human rights as you? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the message of the cartoon?
- What is discrimination?
- Name some groups in your society whom you believe are frequently victims of discrimination.
- What do you think can be done to prevent this kind of discrimination from happening? What can you personally do?

Part 2 - Group Exercise

Divide participants into small groups of three to four. Ask each group to carry out the following exercise:

- Make a list of all the human rights you can associate with the cartoon. Include both rights being exercised and rights denied or violated.
- Match the rights you have listed with specific articles of the UDHR or the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (For younger children, you might choose to give them copies of simplified versions of the UDHR or the Convention).
- Allow each group 5 minutes to report back.

Part 3 - Project Work

Suggest that the learners create their own cartoons focusing on the issue of discrimination. They might select a real life example on which to base the cartoon for example using AI appeal cases or an article from a newspaper. Alternatively, they might invent a situation involving a group in their country that experiences discrimination. Ask them to try to present the topic in the most powerful way, so that the pictures will make people think about the issues. Display the results on the classroom wall or on a noticeboard - for example outside a place of worship or community centre, or perhaps arrange for the cartoons to be printed in a school magazine or community newsletter.

ADVERTISING OUR DIFFERENCES

Purpose: This activity encourages empathy with others who face discrimination. It also encourages creativity and the development of communication and teamwork skills.

Age: 12 and upwards

Time Needed: 2 hours

How to Do It:

- Ask participants to name some groups who are discriminated against in their society. List these on a board or flipchart so that everyone can see them.
- Discuss and list the ways in which each of these groups faces discrimination.
- Working in pairs, ask participants to name the rights which are being violated in each case with reference to the UDHR.
- Allow 5 or 10 minutes for report back to the whole group.
- Divide into small groups of 3 or 4. Give each group the instructions below asking them to prepare an advertising campaign for a group that frequently experiences discrimination. They may choose a group from the list they put together (see above) or a different group. Alternatively, the facilitator could make some suggestions: for example, street children, women, refugees, the elderly, religious groups.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GROUP WORK

- Each group advertising which be presenting a the group. this? Your group is an advertising agency which has been hired by a group that is frequently discriminated against in your society. You have 45 minutes to design an advertising campaign that will persuade the public of : presents their campaign. Discuss campaigns would successful in positive image of How did they do

- the positive aspects of that group and their way of life
- that group's claim for equal rights

Your campaign can involve any of the following:
*** A POSTER * A TV AD * A RADIO AD ***
A SLOGAN *

'Advertising Different All Equal,
 - a joint publication of Education for Youth, International Ireland,

Adapted from
 Difference' Ireland All
 DEFY/NYCI 1994
 The Rights Stuff 1998
 DEFY (Development
 Dublin), Amnesty
 Trocaire

LET'S CHALLENGE DISCRIMINATION !

Purpose: This activity aims to encourage young people to think of ways of confronting and challenging discrimination.

Age: 14 and upwards

Time Needed: Approx 1 hour 30 minutes, depending on the number of participants.

How to Do It:

- Ask participants to name two or three groups who are discriminated against in society, for example, gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities, refugees, women, disabled people, or a religious minority.
- Divide participants into small groups of 3 to 4 people. Each group chooses to represent a different institution in society. The facilitator could make some suggestions: for example Family, Education, Media, Politicians, Police, Church, Unions, Youth Clubs.
- Ask each "institution" to list ways in which they could discriminate against the groups named, thus violating their rights.
- Ask them to identify and note the rights that are being violated with reference to the UDHR.
- Allow 5 minutes for each group to report back.
- Working again in small groups or in pairs, ask participants to take each example of discrimination and suggest a way of resolving that type of discrimination.
- Allow 5 minutes for each group/pair to report back.

Additional Suggestions

- We are often unaware of our own prejudices and how we can sometimes make people feel excluded without realizing. Ask the group to think of and discuss ways where their own practices/actions might exclude others from full participation.
- Invite a member of a group which is discriminated against to speak to the participants about their own experience, and how things could be changed.

Adapted from 'Let's Discriminate Discretely' Ireland All Different All Equal, DEFY/NYCI 1994.
The Rights Stuff 1998 - a joint publication of DEFY (Development Education for Youth, Dublin), Amnesty International Ireland, Trocaire

YOU AND ME

Purpose: This activity explores issues of diversity, equality and discrimination and at the same time encourages cooperation and participation.

Age: 12 and upwards

Time Needed: 1 hour

How to Do It:

- Working individually, ask participants to draw a circle and write their name inside. They should pretend that this is the centre of a flower and draw petals around this centre. In each petal they should write the name of a group with which they identify. Examples might include their nationality, religion or gender.
- Working in pairs, participants must find out how many petals they have in common and place each others initials in the petals they share. Then combine with another pair and discuss the common features everyone has listed.
- Together as a large group, construct a web that starts with a circle that says “us” in the centre and includes all of the groups named. Place those groups to which many people belong towards the outer edge of the circle. Place those to which few belong close to the centre. What are the major areas everyone has in common? What are the major differences?
- Ask participants to look back at the petals they drew for themselves. Ask them to put an “x” across any of their groups that they think could cause someone to discriminate against them.
- Again working in pairs, ask participants to make a list of all the ways they could discriminate against someone or treat someone as inferior.
- Allow 3 minutes for each pair to report back.

Suggestions for further discussion

- What factors enable you to discriminate against others?
- To what extent are these factors embedded in society? To what extent are these within your control?
- What would you have to do to change society and/or yourself in order to change discriminatory behaviour?

Adapted from Amnesty International USA Human Rights Education Resource Notebook on Religion, Race and Ethnicity (1997). Source: Nancy Flowers, Curriculum Coordinator, AIUSA Human Rights Educators' Network/

Emily J. Style, “In Our Own Hands: Diversity Literacy”, The New Jersey Project Journal, Fall, 1995

STORIES ABOUT DISCRIMINATION

Purpose: This activity encourages creativity, communication, observation skills and imagination, as well as empathy with victims of discrimination.

Age: 10 and upwards

Time Needed: 1 hour plus

How to Do It:

Explain to the group that you would like them to write about the topic, "How It Feels to Be Discriminated Against". Perhaps they might feel that, as a member of a particular group in society that has experienced discrimination, they can write from their own experience. Otherwise, participants should be asked to use their imagination and try to write from the viewpoint of a person of a different race or culture, or a person with a disability.

Participants could write a story or a poem. Alternatively, working together, they could write and perform a drama, or stage an impromptu role play using discrimination as the theme.

Points to note

- Give participants the opportunity to read their stories and poems aloud to the group if they wish, but do not force them to do so if they don't want to.
- Alternatively with the author's permission they can be published in local newspapers or newsletters, or perhaps displayed on a public noticeboard.
- Always allow time for analysis and group discussion of the issues raised following a role play or the performance of a play.

KEYWORDS: HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION1 / ADVERSE DISCRIMINATION1 / AI WEEK / OUTREACH