

Lesson 3

In what ways are people different? How different are people's needs?

Learning objectives	The students are able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – identify reasons why some people may have unequal access to education; – consider barriers to equality in the wider community; – consider who shares responsibility for overcoming barriers to equality.
Student tasks	The students critically analyse a hypothetical situation dealing with the key concepts. The students apply key principles to their own social situations. The students discuss key issues raised by the lesson. The students perform a written task.
Resources	Copies of the story.
Methods	Critical thinking. Discussion. Development of written argument.

Conceptual learning

Diversity: Diversity exists not only in relation to ethnicity or nationality. There are many other kinds of differences which divide people from each other and which can be the causes of serious social differences, especially if those in the majority or those with power and influence do nothing, due to a lack of understanding or compassion.

Equality: There are two main types of equality – equality of opportunity or equality of outcome. It is possible to give everyone an equal opportunity (to go to school, for example) but if certain barriers (such as disability) are not overcome, this opportunity could be denied to some. Equality of outcome would aim to allow every child to be educated, whatever his or her disability.

Discrimination: To treat someone unfairly on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, age, belief, etc.

The lesson

The teacher reads the story to the class (student handout 3.2). This story addresses a range of complex issues, which may escape the students' attention unless they study the story more closely. To help them, the teacher gives them student handout 3.3 and explains the following task.

The students work in pairs to identify as many of the problems facing the staff of Hope College as they can. They enter these in note form in the first column of the handout ("Problems"). Then they suggest ways in which the problems could be tackled ("Solutions") and add who they think should be responsible for carrying out these solutions under column three ("Responsibilities"). The last column can be left empty until a later stage.

The students then present, compare and discuss their results. To support the students' presentation, some students should prepare a flip chart with the same layout as the handout. If an overhead projector is available, the handout can be copied onto an overhead transparency that a pair of students can fill in.

Discussion in class

The students may raise some of the following questions, or the teacher can start the discussion by asking them:

- Do you think the principal achieved her aim to treat every student the same?
- Do you think the principal should respect the values of the refugee parents and educate the boys and girls separately? Think of arguments on both sides.
- Would it be better if the refugee children were taught separately from the rest of the students? List the advantages and the disadvantages of each approach, first for students and second for the wider community.

Rather than discussing all questions, the students should have time to explore one question in detail. It is important for them to understand that, in a pluralist society, people have different needs and that this may lead to conflict. It is therefore important to resolve these conflicts fairly by paying due attention to all individuals and groups (see Unit 4 for more details on conflict resolution). In this case study, school can be viewed as a micro-society in which young citizens encounter the same type of problems as exist in society as a whole.

The following issues show how rich this case study is, and that the issues are well worth studying. For more extensive study, an additional lesson will be necessary. The teacher must decide whether to select certain aspects, depending on the time available and the students' level of interest.

How different are children's educational needs?

The key questions which the students must answer are, of course, how these problems can be dealt with and if any of these problems should be ignored by the school (and if so, why).

These questions can be answered in two ways: first, by considering whose needs would be affected by solving or ignoring a certain problem, and second, by identifying those problems that could be solved by the school community.

In following the first path, the students will understand the specific needs of refugee (and local) students better if they consider the following question: "What human rights – or children's rights – have the refugee children been denied?"

Here are some categories of educational needs. The students should find examples of these in the story, and enter them in the fourth column of the handout:

- emotional;
- learning;

- religious;
- cultural;
- language;
- physical.

For each category, the students have to provide examples of their own.

Responsibility and its limits

The specific issues raised in the story should lead on to a more generalised discussion about equal rights and education.

How easy is it to provide the best education for every child, according to his or her own needs? What can a school do, and which problems require support from outside, for example, additional funding by the local council?

Here, the students follow the second path, and this analysis leads to an important insight – typically, complex problems cannot be solved by taking one big step, which in this case means, for example, expanding the school, employing specially trained staff, etc. Such measures of educational reform would be highly desirable, but they may never happen because they depend on political decisions (how to assign tax money, for example) that are decided by others (such as the local town council or the ministry of education). People who only think of taking such seemingly radical steps may, in fact, end up doing nothing at all, except placing the blame on others. On the other hand, things can also be improved by taking small steps, which in this case study means looking at those parts of the problem that the principal, the teacher, the students or the parents could change tomorrow – if they wanted to, or if they could agree.

This is where the third column on the handout is important. Who is responsible, that is, in whose power is it to change something? The students can discuss whether the small steps – the improvements within the school community’s reach – are sufficient, and where they have limitations. They may also consider a combination of small, short-term steps and bigger steps that need time.

Here again, “school is life”, a micro-society. The discussion of strategies for school development introduces students to thinking in terms of political decision making and strategic planning.

School is life

The students can compare Hope College with the situation in their own school using the following idea.

“In your own school, what obstacles to education do some pupils encounter? Whose responsibility do you think it is to address these needs (for example, the government, the principal, the staff or the students)?”

Different methods are possible for dealing with this question. It can be the subject of a plenary discussion, an interview project with other students, or it can be linked to the project of a school newspaper (see Unit 5).

Written task

In organising processes of teaching and learning, it is important to make sure that the students have understood and can apply what they have learnt. One way of doing this is to link a plenary discussion with a written task. This gives all students the opportunity to think about the issues that have been discussed in the plenary and it may be particularly useful for the slow and thorough thinkers, who often tend to stay silent in a discussion although they actually have a lot to say.

The teacher must decide which topic best suits the students’ level of reflection and understanding. It may be sufficient for the students to repeat the discussion and give their own judgment. In a

more demanding exercise, the students can refer to human rights and/or to issues of inequality in society, for example:

“The European Convention on Human Rights and the Children’s Rights Convention state that it is the duty of governments to provide every child with an education.

- Explain whether you think the school fulfilled this obligation.
- What is needed to give children the education they deserve?
- Who do you think is responsible for making this happen?
- What other areas of life are affected as a result of inequalities in society?
- Discuss.”

Suggested result of plenary discussion (flip chart, completed handout)

Help for Hope College

Problems	Solutions	Responsible	Educational needs
(1) Refugee children			
Language problems	Special courses	Principal Local council	Language
Boy does not speak	Therapy, special tuition	Advice: principal, teacher	Language, emotional
Girl cannot walk	Medical treatment Special tuition Advice for parents		Physical
(2) Refugee and local students			
Bullying, teasing Gang Threats Fight, boy injured	Discussion in class Rules of conduct Students as monitors	Teachers Students Parents	Emotional Social Attitudes and values
(3) Teachers			
Cannot care for refugee and local students	Smaller classes Classes in shifts More teachers	Local council	Learning Language Cultural Religious
(4) Parents			
Want separate classes for boys and girls	“No”? “OK”?	?	Cultural Religious