Culturescope Resources: Equality and Difference

Notions of Equality
by Christine Preston, Nagle College Blacktown

1. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Access to important social institutions should be open to all regardless of age, gender, racial ethnic or religious affiliation.

2. EQUALITY OF CONDITION

Some people are disadvantaged from the outset because of the social class, racial, ethnic or other circumstances (e.g., handicap) into which they are born. These disadvantages should be compensated for, (hence Abstudy, Austudy, Affirmative Action etc).

3. EQUALITY OF OUTCOME

Whatever the circumstances contributing to inequality people end up unequal. That is there is insufficient compensation to remove the effects causing inequality in society. Equality of outcome means that everyone should end up equal regardless of their particular circumstances.

While equality of outcome has not been pursued by governments in capitalist countries, attempts have been made to achieve equality of opportunity and to a lesser extent equality of condition. Governments do not seek to achieve a result where there are no inequalities of wealth, income, power or status but only to try and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve success through equal access to resources such as health care, housing, education and employment.

Barriers (or structural features) limiting equal access to resources are:

- social class - wealth, power, status (or lack of)
- race or ethnicity
- gender
- age
- physical or mental disability.
POVERTY AND THE POVERTY CYCLE

Absolute poverty

People lack the income to purchase the basic necessities of life - food, clothing, and shelter. Absolute poverty is life threatening and is usually associated with less developed countries (‘third world’) however it can be seen in Sydney, e.g. amongst homeless children (20,000 - 25,000 cited in the 1989 Burdekin Report).

Relative Poverty

Individuals and families receive an income that is far below the average and hence, their standard of living is very low compared with most people.

The gap between rich and poor in Australia appears to be widening. Families in poverty can provide very limited opportunities for their children to develop any talents.
they may have or to acquire new skills, thus poverty is self perpetuating - THE POVERTY CYCLE

Relating the poverty cycle to the five fundamental concepts.

| The individual - his/her relationships with other persons, society, culture and environment through time | PERSONS | Individuals living in poverty, lack of educational opportunities & success, low skills, poor employment prospects, dysfunctional relationships |
| Patterned human relationships from small groups to large systems | SOCIETY | 'underclass' - unemployed low paid casual or part time work; family breakdown; government social security/social services, charitable organisations e.g. Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul; interaction with police/judiciary |
| Knowledge shared by members of these groups and systems reflected in their customs, values, laws, arts, technology and artifacts, their total way of life | CULTURE | Experience of failure resulting in low self esteem, frustration and anger, perhaps expressing itself in antisocial behaviour - crime, petty theft, vandalism, graffiti or alcohol abuse, wife abuse, child abuse. 'Culture of poverty' - dependence on social security - the 'welfare trap' |
| Settings where people live and work, interaction between people and their environment | ENVIRONMENT | Inner city, low cost housing, crisis centre or refuge, outer suburban areas, poor transportation, inadequate family support services, limited access to jobs, high unemployment, isolated or squalid environment often reflecting the culture of the disadvantaged high crime rate, damaged facilities, graffiti etc. |
| The continuous passage of | |

© Christine Preston 1996
existence, perceptions of the past, the present and the future.

TIME

the future are to further experience poverty. Generations can experience this cycle through time.

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION - DEFINITIONS

Prejudice (literally prejudicing, or forming an opinion without knowing all the facts) is an individual's or group's attitude, feeling and judgment of another individual or group, based on a stereotyped, generalised image. It is important to understand that prejudice is an attitude.

When the attitude is translated into action against another individual or group on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, religion or disability, it becomes discrimination. While prejudice is the attitude, discrimination is the action. Believing that all members of a particular racial or ethnic group are shiftless and lazy constitutes prejudice, translating that prejudice into the action of never hiring any members of that race or ethnic group constitutes discrimination.

Prejudice often arises from fear and ignorance. Myths arise and begin to perpetuate themselves. Stereotypes both create, and arise out of, the prejudice and are used to justify it. Prejudice is often self fulfilling and therefore is difficult to counter with rational argument.

Prejudice may also arise from economic competition, especially if the out-group is meeting with success. Prejudice may arise out of frustration and anger or personal maladjustment or it may be a kind of symbolism in which those things we hate, fear or envy become personified in an out-group.
**PREJUDICE** is an attitude

- derived from:
  - fear of perceived "differences" e.g. skin colour, eye shape, religious practices
  - ignorance e.g. "they follow barbaric customs", "they all live together like pigs", "they eat disgusting food"
  - feeling threatened e.g. "they come here and take our jobs", "they'll bring their gangs/crime/hostilities"

- which is emotionally satisfying

- because it creates:
  - feelings of superiority
  - a sense of belonging to the in-group (as distinct from out-group)
  - an outlet for tension and violent emotions

- rationalizations for failure

- and often leads to discrimination, the action the negative behaviour directed towards the out-group

- which may manifest itself in:
  - personal and/or cultural vilification, violence e.g. the desecration of Eddie Mabo's tomb, "gay-bashing"
  - denial of life chances that the majority take for granted e.g. adequate medical care, education, housing
  - economic exploitation using a minority group as cheap labour e.g. backyard sweatshops exploiting migrant women.

© Christine Preston 1996