

Justice and Injustice

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Theme

Gaining insight into the issue of justice and injustice

Context

Words such as justice and injustice are often thrown around without people having a clear concept of what the terms mean, or agreeing on a common definition. There are no agreed upon definitions of the terms in law, but they are often used when discussing legal issues. Nevertheless, these terms can often have connotations that lead to emotional responses and calls for action.

The following activity offers a manner to engage in a discussion of these terms.

Goals

- Raising awareness of the different ways the terms justice and injustice can be viewed
- Building critical thinking about the concepts of justice and injustice
- Promoting multiperspectivity
- Encouraging discussion about concepts that are critical with respect to issues such as persecution, fairness, punishment, oppression and human rights.
- Insight into historical occurrences

Methodology

- Small group work and presentations
- Brainstorm

Learning Outcomes

- Students are able to identify different ways of perceiving the concepts of justice and injustice
- Students improve brainstorming, making mind maps, listening and discussion skills

Material & Equipment Needed

Flipchart, paper and markers.

Each subgroup will need 4 pieces of flipchart paper (or 2 pieces if cut in half).

Duration: 2 x 45 minutes

Overview of lesson activities (process)

PART 1: 45 minutes

Introduction & Exercise: 10 minutes

The educator briefly explains what is expected of the students and places them in groups of 4-6 persons. Each group chooses or is assigned a facilitator. Also, the group identifies somebody who will write the responses on the flipchart papers, and a person who will be responsible for presenting to the larger group. Three different persons ideally take these roles.

Working in small sub-groups: 45 minutes

Once everybody is seated and roles have been assigned, the educator gives the following instruction:

Please write 4 words in the middle of a piece of flipchart paper and circle these words.

On the first piece of paper, write the word 'JUSTICE';

on the second piece of paper the word 'INJUSTICE';

on the third piece of paper the word ' INJUSTICE IN HISTORY";

on the fourth 'JUSTICE IN HISTORY' (as a mind map)

Once completed:

Now, in a brainstorm, write as many elements that you think make up a definition of 'JUSTICE'.

There are no right or wrong answers to this. The idea is to collect as many ideas as possible.

There is no need for discussion at this point. Please take 5 minutes for this.

SIMILAR INSTRUCTION FOR 'INJUSTICE'. Again ten minutes unless learners are done more quickly.

Next, please write down as many examples of injustice you think have taken place in history.

Focus on real life examples. Take 10 minutes for this.

Finally, please write down as many examples of justice you think have taken place in history after major injustices took place. Focus on real life examples. Take 10 minutes for this as well.

Wrap up:

The educator takes the remaining time to debrief the activity and prepare the students for part 2

PART 2: 45 minutes

Introduction and settling in: 5 minutes

The students receive a short summary of what they did last session and what is expected of them during this one. The flip chart sheets are displayed somewhere (e.g. on a wall) for all to see.

Returning to small groups and last reflection on own work: 10 minutes

The students return to their small groups and have one more look at their (own) sheets.

They can still add one or more things if they wish, especially to the last sheet (where justice took place).

Presentations: 20 minutes

Each group presents their sheets for 3-4 minutes, with a special focus on the last sheet (when justice took place in their view). Students are encouraged to focus on where there might have been disagreement in the group.

The educator allows students to ask brief questions of clarification after each presentation.

Compare and Contrast: 10 minutes

The educator spends the last 10 minutes pointing out similarities and differences between the groups. Other issues to focus on here are to ask for instance: 'justice for whom – does justice for some mean injustice for others', 'how would we measure justice', 'who should decide how to deal with acts of injustice', 'what is the most 'just' way to deal with injustice', 'how is social injustice/justice connected to criminal justice'?

The teacher summarizes the results of the activity at the end.

Additional Information

Though dictionaries contain definitions of justice and injustice, this is much less the case in the legal realm. There continues to be moral and legal ambiguity about the terms justice and injustice.

The following site can be instructive to see how issues of justice, injustice and crime have been codified in international law, but the concepts of justice and injustice are not defined.

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/international-law-and-justice/>

A useful discussion for the classroom (if students are ready for this) can focus on how transgressions are dealt with in the school. This can lead into a discussion with students about retributive versus restorative justice (e.g. in schools and the community). See e.g.:

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/restorative-justice-tips-for-schools-fania-davis>

Homework Ideas

Especially after the first class, the students can research (on-line especially) a few of the examples of justice they have identified. They should try as much as possible to research how the injustice was dealt with (e.g. tribunal, usurping land, removal or addition of certain rights, penalties, forgiveness, truth commissions, etc.) and how the different parties in the conflict/injustice perceived the way the conflict/injustice was resolved (or not resolved). Students should also reflect on whether they agree with this type of resolution.

Adaptation Alternatives

This exercise deals with the past, but an extra dimension can include expanding the exercise to focus on justice/injustice in the context of present day society, at the local (even in the school), national and international level.



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