

Equalising Education

Lesson One: Why do girls and young women have unequal access to education?

Starter Activities:

Students can be shown Presentation: Female literacy statistics. From this they can attempt in pairs to match the correct country with the correct data – this can be done in the students' notes or via the Handout: World Map (this could lead into a task on how to effectively present data in a GIS fashion time permitting). Once they have decided they should attempt to justify their choices which can create a discussion about how level of development, in general, can be the precursor to the level of female literacy a country can achieve. The correct answers are displayed on a map on a subsequent slide.

More able students may recognise that wealth is not the only factor to influence female literacy: cultural history and religious or political freedoms also play a role in the number of girls who attend school. This can open the discussion up further to whether wealth of culture has the bigger influence or whether it is in fact a combination of the two in most countries.

Main Teaching:

Handout: Educational Factors can be printed and cut to be made into card sorting pieces. Students can first sort the cards (individually, in pairs or in groups depending on the strength of the class) into those that are associated with low levels of female literacy and those associated with improved levels of female literacy. For some stronger sets this will be relatively straight forward but for others this can lead to an entire discussion. Teachers should let the students decide the depth to which they want to discuss this (for example they may argue that some cards could fit in both sets).

Using the set of cards they have identified as associated with low levels of female literacy, they should arrange the cards on a piece of flipchart paper to show how each of the factors is related to female literacy. This might form the shape of a ladder, a web or a spiral. Teachers should link this to any previous work the class might have done on the spirals of deprivation or poverty cycles. The flipchart paper can be drawn on to show connecting arrows or indeed extra notes if they feel the cards do not show enough information. Groups or individuals can move around the room and inspect others' diagrams, highlighting on the diagram itself any area or idea with which they disagree. This can then be used as a discussion point.

If time permits, students can link some of the factors to particular countries, case studies or examples of which they may be aware. They can also look at each of the factors and say which player or which set of players is responsible for that particular problem. The end result of this exercise should be that students recognise the complex nature of female illiteracy – no one factor or person can be blamed for its occurrence but rather students should appreciate how the combination of various factors leads to an increased intensity and prolonging of the situation beyond most people's individual controls.

Plenary Activities:

Teachers can pose the following question to students: *'Is there an educational divide in the UK?'* Show the students Presentation: UK Educational Divides and ask if any of the same factors are at play with white boys from poor socio-economic backgrounds as those which they identified in their 'spiral of poverty' style diagram for African girls. More able students will note that this is too simplistic a connection to make as the UK provides free education for all, while the situation is quite different in developing countries.

Teachers can also question their students on whether the connection between socio-economic grouping and literacy is strong enough that female literacy in Africa will overtake male literacy in the future as the continent becomes more developed. Those classes that have studied Rostow's Stages of Growth Model will recognise the problems inherent in modelling the pattern of development for one country based on a developed nation that has gone before it.

Extension / Homework Activities:

With additional research, students can develop a time line of female education with at least six points on it that recognise the 'firsts' of something. How many of these firsts happened in the developed world and have not yet occurred in the developing world? To what extent does the timeline reflect other public services?

Students can examine how educational inequality does not stop as a woman leaves school. Making a list of jobs undertaken by the various male and female members of their families, a class can compose a picture of the kind of work men and women find themselves in despite having equal access to education. They can also examine the pay gap and link the idea that education is only one facet to equality, with other ideas such as family structure, maternity pay, and indeed societal norms also playing an equally important role.
