(§) Topic: The Nature of Economic Systems

Simulation: Unequal Resources Game
(Source: Mary Ruth Marshall (1972), Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators.)

Purpose:

This game is designed to help players understand the feelings and actions of individuals and groups when resources are distributed unequally. It highlights behaviour when the job to be done becomes more important than the people involved, and gives an opportunity to observe the bargaining process. An appropriate teaching strategy when starting a unit on economic systems or what is economics about.

You will need:

1. Four copies of the Unequal Resources Task Sheet, one for each team.

Unequal Resources Task Sheet
Each team is to complete the following tasks:
1. Make a 7 cm by 7 cm square of white paper.
2. Make a 10 cm by 5 cm rectangle of red paper
3. Make a four-link paper chain, each link in a different colour.
4. Make a T-shaped piece 7 cm by 10 cm in green and white paper.
5. Make a 10 cm by 10 cm flag, in any three colours.
The first team to complete all tasks is the winner. Bring your completed tasks to the Game Director, who will check them for accuracy.

2. Four large mailing envelopes or paper bags, each one labelled with a team’s number.

3. Resources for each team:

   Team 1:

   1 pair scissors, 1 ruler, 10 straight pins, 3 pencils, a stapler **but no staples**, 1 A4 sheet white paper.

   Team 2:

   1 pair scissors, 1 bottle glue, three 13 cm by 13 cm squares of coloured paper (1 red, 1 green, 1 blue).

   Team 3:

   6 felt pens (one each red, green, blue, purple, orange, black) and two 13 cm by 13 cm squares of coloured paper (1 orange, 1 purple).

   Team 4:

   1 box staples to fit Team 1’s stapler and 6 x 13 cm by 13 cm squares of coloured paper (2 red, 1 orange, 1 blue, 1 green, 1 purple).

**Do not exceed these allotments.** Other colours may be substituted, but in the same proportions. The Task Sheet must be changed if other colours are substituted.
Place each team’s resources into the appropriate envelope or bag. Add a copy of the Unequal Resources Task Sheet. Seal or shut the envelope carefully so that the teams do not see one another’s resources.

4. Chairs for each team. Place these as far apart as possible.
Playing the game
1. Divide the group into four teams and have them take their places.
2. Distribute the envelopes of resources, one to each team. Tell them not to open the envelopes until you give the signal.
3. Read aloud the following: ‘Each team has different materials and tools but each team must complete the same tasks. The tasks are listed on the Unequal Resources Task Sheet, one of which is in each envelope of resources. The first group to complete the tasks is the winner. Open your envelopes now and begin’.
4. As the game goes on, observe as much group and bargaining behaviour as you can. Make notes of comments or suggestions overheard which will be useful in the debriefing session.
5. When a team declares its task completed and brings the items to you, check each one for conformity to standards. Reject any which are not precisely the size requested. Teams which fail to meet standards may return to work.
6. Declare as winners the first team to complete all five tasks exactly as described.

Debriefing
(use these questions first to help people express their emotions).
1. What happened in the game?
2. How did you feel about your team’s resources?
3. How did you feel about the other team’s resources?
4. Was there violence or conflict?
5. Between which teams was there conflict and how did it start?
6. How was the conflict resolved?
7. What helpful offers or bargains were made?
8. Who took the initiative in planning strategy?
9. Was there any individual or team you did not trust? Why?
10. Did anyone feel ignored or treated with lack of consideration?
11. In the game, did you do anything contrary to your own values? How did you feel about this?

Discussion (use these questions after everyone has had a chance to talk about feelings and experiences)
1. What were the factors which helped the winning team to win?
2. What were the factors which helped the losing team to lose?
3. How was this game like life? How was it unlike life?
4. What nations are like Team 1? Team 2? Team 3? Team 4?
5. Which team is your nation most like? Why?
6. What groups in your society are like Team 1? Team 2? Team 3? Team 4?
7. What did you learn about economic power in this game?