

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE by David Shiman

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ACTIVITY 2 ECONOMIC JUSTICE: THE SCRAMBLE FOR WEALTH AND POWER

Select an Activity From Section II

OVERVIEW

The distribution of wealth and power within society usually affects a person's opportunities to achieve full human rights and live a life with dignity. This activity involves the distribution of wealth. It challenges participants to examine the concepts of "fairness" and "responsibility" and reflect on their own actions.

Time: 1 hour **Materials:** 100 pennies (or 100 peanuts or wrapped candies for younger participants)

Setting: Elementary school ð Adult groups (See suggestions for adaptation for young children at end of activity,)

PROCEDURE

Note: Keep in mind the socioeconomic composition of your participant population. Guard against having this activity confirm the existing inequalities in wealth and power.

PART A: The Scramble

1. Explain to participants that in this activity they will distribute the wealth and power of the world among themselves. This wealth is represented by the 100 pennies. There is only one rule: no participant may touch another member of the group at any time.
2. Arrange the room so that participants have a fairly large area to play the game. Have participants stand or sit in a circle and scatter the pennies evenly in the middle of the circle. Withhold three participants from this part of the activity. Distribute mittens for some participants to wear but postpone discussion of reasons for this until debriefing. **Note:** To emphasize that some start off with more than others, consider giving three or four participants five extra pennies to begin with as well as providing them with special scooping shovels.

At the order of GO, have participants (except the three withheld) gather as many pennies as possible without touching one another. **Note:** Penalties for violations of this rule may be needed,

such as removal from the game or payment to the person touched.

3. After all the pennies have been collected, have participants report their wealth to the class. Record participants' names and number of pennies on a board or chart paper under three categories:

1) GREAT WEALTH AND POWER

(those with six or more pennies—the smallest group);

2) SOME WEALTH AND POWER” (those with three to five pennies—the middle group); and

3) LITTLE WEALTH AND POWER” (those with two or fewer pennies—the largest group).

4. Remind the group that these pennies represent their wealth and power in the world. The amount they possess will affect their capacity to satisfy their needs (e.g., basic education, adequate food and nutrition, good health care, adequate housing) and wants (e.g. higher education, cars, computers, toys, television and other luxury items). Those participants with six or more pennies will have their basic “needs” and most of their “wants” met; those with three to five pennies will have their basic needs met, and those with two or fewer pennies will have difficulty surviving due to disease, lack of education, malnutrition, and inadequate shelter.

5. Tell participants that they may, if they wish, give pennies to others; however, they are not required to do so. Tell them that those who do share will be honored as “DONORS,” with their names placed on the board. Allow a few minutes for participants to redistribute the pennies if they wish. Then ask for the names of those who gave away pennies and the amount each gave. List them on the board or chart entitled “DONORS.” Ask if anyone changed category as a result of giving or receiving pennies and record these shifts on the chart.

6. Explain that some people in their country (and perhaps in their community) and in every country around the globe lack adequate necessities, such as food, education, health care, and shelter. Point out that others, often in the same community or country, are able to acquire almost everything they need and want.

PART B: Creating Economic “Fairness”

1. Divide participants into groups according to the number of pennies they have. Distribute those three participants withheld from the original "scramble" randomly among the different groups. Make note of their reactions to being placed in one group rather than another but save discussion of their placement until the debriefing session.

2. Give each group the task of creating a plan for the fair distribution of the pennies (the world's wealth). Each group should prepare to: a) show why their plan is fair, b) explain what needs to be done (if anything), and c) describe what the group plans to do and why. Give the groups ten minutes to devise their plans.

3. Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to explain their plan to the others and answer questions. After the plans have been presented and discussed, announce that a vote will now be held on which plan to adopt.

4. When participants are ready to vote, announce the following: Participants with six or more pennies have five votes, those with three to five pennies have two votes, and those with two or fewer pennies have one-half vote. This strategy reinforces the fact that the distribution of power often reflects that of wealth.

Have participants vote and tabulate the results. Announce which plan is to be implemented. Carry out this plan, redistributing the wealth if necessary.

PART C: Debriefing the Activity

Note: Debriefing is an essential step in this process.

Draw on the following questions to promote a productive discussion. Be sure to devote time to a discussion of changes needed and changes undertaken.

- How did you feel about the way in which the pennies were acquired and distributed?
- Were you treated fairly?
- Did some people give pennies away? Did you give away or receive pennies? Why or why not? How did this feel?
- What determined whether or not people gave away pennies? Knowing what the pennies represented? Having one's name displayed? Feeling guilty? Something else?
- What aspects of this game represented how the world's wealth and power are distributed?
- What about the three participants assigned to groups? Were they fairly treated? Is what happened to them similar to what happens to people around the globe? What sorts of people? Is it just chance where we end up?
- What about the participants with mittens (and scooping shovels)? What kinds of people do the mittens (and scooping shovels) represent? What group did they end up in?
- How did the members of the different groups feel about their situation? Did the recommended plan for fair distribution reflect whether the group had more or fewer pennies?
- After playing this game do you have a better understanding of the situation or attitude of poor people/nations? Of the situation or attitude of wealthy people/nations?
- Why were some people given more votes than others? Was this an accurate representation of those with more or less power in the world?
- Who are the "haves" and the "have nots" in the world today? Which countries are the "haves" and the "have nots"? Who are the "haves" and "have nots" in our country today? In our state or community? Why?
- Should the "haves" be concerned about the situation of the "have nots?" For what reasons? economic? moral/religious? political? Why might the "haves" give money or resources to the "have nots"? Is this a way to solve the problems of poverty?
- What might the "have-nots" do to improve their situation? What are some actions that "have-nots" have taken around the globe and at home to address the inequalities of wealth and power?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power throughout the world? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power in this country? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?

GOING FURTHER

1. **Media.** Ask participants to find magazine and newspaper articles about the global and/or national distribution of goods and resources and of wealth and poverty.

2. **Research.**

- a. Ask participants to find data about the distribution of wealth in the world, in the USA, and in their state or community. Have them create charts and diagrams to illustrate the distribution of wealth. Then ask them to generate questions that emerge for them from these data.
 - b. Ask participants to research and write an essay on how the inequalities of distribution relate to another current issue (e.g., AIDS, health in general, the space program, crime, and environmental destruction).
3. **Films.** Show films about this topic. (See the Appendix for suggested titles.)
4. **Writing.** Immediately after debriefing the activity, ask participants to write on topics like these:
- How do wealth and power affect one’s ability to enjoy human rights and human dignity?
 - Can poor people really achieve human rights?
 - Describe how you felt about the relative position you achieved in the activity?
 - Are there responsibilities associated with having wealth and power?

ADAPTATIONS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

1. Younger children may need more concrete items to work for. Instead of using pennies to represent another reward, try using shelled peanuts or small wrapped candies, and tell children that they will be allowed to eat the treats when the activity has been completed. The rewards attached should be designed to be meaningful to the participants playing the game. For example, each penny could signify a certain amount of extra recess or free time in class or a special treat from the teacher. Design the rewards to be valuable enough to make authentic distinctions between the “wealthy and powerful” and the “poor and weak.
2. When debriefing with young children, focus on their views of “fair” and “unfair” and their proposals for making matters more fair. The discussion questions need to be modified for the appropriate developmental level.

Source: Written by Sherry Kempf and David Shiman, Center for World Education, University of Vermont. Adapted from S. Lamy, et al, *Teaching Global Awareness with Simulations and Games*, (Denver: Center for Teaching International Relations, University of Denver, 1994).

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