

**Socio-Economic Status Simulation Card Game:
An Adaptation of *Barnga* (Thiagarajan & Steinwachs, 1990)**

-Adaptation by Dennis Denow & John L. Hoffman, 2000

Guiding Question(s):

What is the role of culture and cultural norms in social mobility?

Learning Outcomes:

1. SWiBAT...articulate the role that cultural rules or norms play in social class mobility.
2. SWiBAT...provide examples of hidden cultural norms.
3. SWiBAT...demonstrate how society tends to privileges certain cultural norms at the expense of others.

Overview:

The activity is set up as a competition between teams of participants with the goals of collecting chips and moving as many teammates as possible to the upper and middle classes. The play of the game is a basic card game. However, similar to *Barnga* (Thiagarajan & Steinwachs, 1990), the players from each of the teams have slightly different sets of rules for the card game. These different sets of card game rules simulate diverse cultural norms that come into play in social class mobility.

Assessment Strategy:

As is often the case, the debriefing section of this program is vital to its success. When possible, at least two individuals (preferably representing both majority and minority cultural groups) should facilitate the debriefing. One individual will assume the role of questioner, while the other will take notes identifying examples student quotes that fit with the stated learning outcomes.

Assessment Rubric:

Outcome	Poor	Basic	Competent	Accomplished
1	Participants insisted that cultural rules should be standardized (e.g. melting pot) to lessen conflict and/or echo universal values.	Participants demonstrated openness to diverse sets of cultural rules, primarily insisting on a pure relativism that places all cultural rules on a singular plane.	Participants discussed the importance of & sensitivity to diverse sets of cultural rules, but also acknowledged the potential for flaws in cultural norms. Participants did not identify strategies to address this.	Participants demonstrated openness to diverse cultural norms, and to potential flaws in cultural rules. Participants articulated the importance of social justice efforts to address resulting inequities.

2	Participants were unable to identify hidden cultural rules/ norms.	Participants were able to identify latent cultural norms, but only for others and/or for minority cultures.	Participants were able to identify latent cultural norms for their own culture and for other cultures; for majority and minority cultures.	Participants discussed latent cultural norms for a variety of cultures, noting resulting tension and conflict between unstated/ unseen cultural norms.
3	Participants either failed to see that some cultural norms are privileged over others, or insisted that privilege simply reflects higher order cultural values (we privilege this norm because it is better than the others).	Participants noted that certain latent cultural norms may have benefits, but were unclear as to how society privileges one norm over another (pure relativism should prevail).	Participants discussed how dominant cultures privilege their latent values by failing to acknowledge them as such or by oppressing diverse latent culture. Participants were frustrated, but unable to effectively discuss how social justice efforts might address these inequities.	Participants discussed in depth how dominant cultures privilege certain latent cultural values over others, and then discussed means to use social activism to address specific instances of inequity whether on or off campus.

Participants:

- This activity works best with 12-35 participants. For larger groups, select approximately 20-25 participants for the activity and have the rest function as observers. Consider the following when forming groups:
 - When using 3-5 groups of 4-5 participants each, send one winner from the breakout groups to the upper class, one loser to the lower class, and the rest to the middle class.
 - When using 3-5 groups of 6-7 participants each, send one winner from the breakout groups to the upper class, two losers to the lower class, and the rest to the middle class.
 - When using 3-5 groups of 8 participants each, send two winners from the breakout groups to the upper class, two losers to the lower class, and the rest to the middle class.
 - Groups of more than 8 are not recommended.

- This activity works the best when there are at least as many facilitators as there are play groups, though 1-2 individuals can facilitate multiple groups with some finesse.
- This activity is not ideal for participants with visual impairments or handicaps since a significant portion of the activity involves the use of hand signals during the silent play of the game.

Necessary Materials:

- One copy of the game rules (See Appendix) for each group (3-5 groups of 4-8 participants each)
- Colored stickers - one for each participant. The sets of colored stickers used will identify the various groups during the play of the game. (e.g. five blue stickers for the blue team participants, five red stickers for the red team participants, etc.)
- Between three and five decks of cards, depending on the number of groups.
- Chips (or pennies) - the total number of chips should be at least five times the total number of participants.
- Beverages, cups, potato chips, cookies, plates, etc. for the "upper class" table.

Set Up:

Before Participants Arrive

- You will need three playing spaces (upper class, middle class, and lower class) and breakout spaces for each of the teams (e.g. four break-out spaces if playing with four teams). The breakout spaces need to be reasonably confidential so that teams can plan their strategies without being overheard.
- Set up the "lower class" space on the floor with no chairs. Participants in this group will sit on the floor.
- Set up the "middle class" as a ring of chairs with no table or amenities. This group should be located between the lower and upper classes.
- Set up the "upper class" with a table and chairs, beverages, and snacks. Ideally, participants in this group will not be able to see participants in the lower class.

As Participants Arrive

- Assign participants to groups with the colored stickers - one color per group (e.g. three colors for three groups, four colors for four groups, five colors for five groups). If the participants come in existing groups that would naturally compete with one another, use these groups. However, randomly assigning participants to groups will work fine.

Learning Activities/Teaching Strategies:

Time

- How long you let teams strategize in breakout groups and then play the game will depend on the length of your session. Do not short-change the debriefing time. In a 75 minute section, target 15 minutes for the breakout groups, 30 minutes for the play of the game, and 30 minutes for debriefing.

Opening

- *“Thank you for joining us today. We will be engaging in an activity that simulates socioeconomic classes and class mobility. As with any simulation activity, the more you put into the activity, the more you will get out of it. You see before you that there will be three social classes for this activity - the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class [point to the three game play spaces]. Your purpose as teams will be to collect as many chips as possible and to get as many of your teammates to the upper and middle classes. With that brief introduction, please move now to the various breakout spaces where your team can develop strategies to win the game. You will have a facilitator who will explain the play of the game to you in your various breakout spaces.”*

In the Break-Out Spaces

- Facilitators (ideally, one per group) will bring to their breakout group one deck of cards, one chip for each team member, and a single copy of the rules. While the facilitator may share the rule sheet* with participants, it is vital that the facilitator collect the rule sheet before the final play of the game - this should be done in as inconspicuous a manner as possible.
- *“Our activity is a card game - the means by which you will move to the upper class is by winning each hand of the game. While we are here in this breakout space, we can talk and plan our strategy. Once we leave, the competition between teams will occur in complete silence - if you speak, a facilitator will penalize you and may take away chips and/or move you down a class. You will be able to use hand signals to communicate with your team members. I will review the rules of the game with you quickly, and then we will play a practice round. Whoever loses this practice round will give your chip to the winner. The loser will leave here and go to the lower class, the winner will go to the upper class, and the rest of you will go to the middle class[†]. During the practice round, I'll help you to develop hand signals and a strategy to win.”*
- While walking the group through the rules and the practice hand, suggest possible hand signals (e.g. rubbing one's Hair signifies having high cards; licking one's Lips signifies having low cards; putting scratching one's Chin signifies having Clubs; etc.). Discuss strategies of how someone might help others to win as many tricks as possible (see the Appendix for the Rules).

During the Play of the Game

- As participants leave the breakout spaces and go to the upper, middle, and lower class spaces, remind them to remain silent.
- Once the play of the game commences, participants will quickly notice a discrepancy in the rules. Many will likely appeal to the facilitators to clarify the rules. At this point, simply remind participants to remain silent and continue with the game. If anyone speaks, you may collect their penny and move them down one class. Use penalty with care - you want participants to know that you are serious, but you do not want to unite participants against the facilitators.

* Use Barnaga card game rules

† For groups of eight, two winners will go to the upper class and two losers will go to the lower class.

- As the play progresses, some participants may figure that, since everyone has different rules, any rules can work. She/he may make up rules to win additional tricks. Do not intervene if this happens.
- At the end of the first hand, losers in each class will give a penny to the winners. Winners will move up one class (unless they are already at the upper class table, in which case they simply collect more chips), and losers will move down one class (unless they are already in the lower class). Since the winner in the lower class will not be able to collect a chip from the loser, the facilitator will provide this participant with a chip as she/he welcomes that participant to the middle class.
- At the end of each round, the person with the most chips moves up and the person with the fewest chips moves down. Note that as some participants in the upper class collect more and more chips, they may “lose” a hand and give up a chip, but not have to go back down to the middle class since they still have more chips than a winner who just arrived from the middle class.
- As the game progresses to the second or third round, facilitators should begin to make some rewarding comments to participants in the upper class, noting how they have earned their way to the top. Likewise, facilitators can remind those in the lower class of the simulation dynamic by telling them to “get a job” or to “pull themselves up by the bootstraps and get themselves out of poverty.” The facilitator, as she/he continually gives chips to the winner from the lower class, may eventually note how “these welfare cases had better make good use of the handouts they receive.”
- As the game progresses to the third or fourth round, a facilitator may announce a tax break or tax refund. Since poor people do not pay taxes, they do not receive refunds (chips). Those in the middle class receive a small refund (one chip each), but those in the upper class may receive several chips each as a part of the refund.
- Some participants, especially those in the lower class, might choose to “revolt” at some point. Use care in handling such a situation, but do not let this work. The message behind such a revolt would be that if the poor in society worked harder or worked together, they, too, might be able to change their position in society.

Debriefing Questions:

Note: Several of the following questions will work best if targeted first to members of the lower class, then the middle class, and finally the upper class - this is especially true for larger groups.

1. How did you feel during the activity?
2. Did your team stick together throughout the activity? Why do you think this was so?
3. At the beginning of this activity, we told you that the purpose of the activity was to simulate social class dynamics. That was not the entire truth - what do you think the real purpose of this activity was? [A: Explore the role of cultural norms in social mobility.]
4. What were the cultural norms in the game? In the end, whose “rules” won the games?
5. What are some examples of cultural norms in society? Whose rules (norms) win in the game of social mobility? How does this relate to the concept of privilege?
6. What did you learn from this activity? How will you change the way you live as a result of what you learned?