



Buy Your Opportunity Workshop (Jonathan Kodet and Dia Mason)

The present consciousness-raising workshop was developed to elevate self-awareness and critical consciousness of privilege and oppression on a personal and systemic level. The workshop was designed especially with developmental considerations in mind for (a) individuals from advantaged/dominant social locations and (b) individuals reflecting pre-encounter and encounter levels of personal/social identity development (Worrell & Remer, 2003). The goals of the workshop are to increase empathy, raise critical consciousness of privilege and oppression and social dominance, and expose the myth of meritocracy. Additionally, the intended affective outcome is for participants to identify and process difficult emotions (e.g., guilt, anxiety, envy, anger) about their experiences in the simulation. Participants are given the opportunity to process difficult emotions and perspectives associated with privileged and subordinated stations in life, and potentially learn how inequity is harmful to everyone involved. Participants are also encouraged to discuss how their feelings and insights generated from the workshop simulation are similar or different to their real lives.

Three activities make up the Buy Your Opportunity workshop. The first two activities are in preparation for the climactic simulation and debrief. We will first briefly describe these two activities.

Concentric Circles. The first activity is a common “ice-breaker” activity, commonly known as *Concentric Circles*. While standing and facing each other in two concentric circles, participants take turns quickly meeting each other and answering questions asked by workshop facilitators (see Table 1). The intention of this activity is to rapidly build group cohesion and help participants connect to their values.

Table 1: Concentric Circles Topics of Discussion

If tonight was your last meal to enjoy, what would you choose?
My dream holiday destination and why
A person I really respect, and why
A way that I take care of myself or am good to myself when I need taking care of
Something I've learned in my life that has been important to me
A time I did the right thing even though I felt some fear
A goal I have and some things I'm doing to accomplish it

Empathy Exchange. The second activity, we call *Empathy Exchange*, was adapted from an experiential exercise developed by critical educator Paulo Freire (Mattingly, 2009). Participants are divided into small groups of four or five and asked to “write about one way you have been treated unfairly in your life.” Response cards are shuffled anonymously and distributed so no one receives his or her own response card. The facilitators participate and speak first, modeling personal sharing. Participants read the descriptions, express how they would have felt being “in their shoes,” and talk about what else they would want to know about the situation. A debriefing session immediately follows the activity whereby participants are encouraged to discuss their reactions to the experience of entering someone else’s life and struggles. The intended outcomes of this activity are to (a) enlarge understanding of others’ problems, (b) experience giving and receiving empathic responses to real stories of mistreatment or injustice, and (c) become aware of common threads in diverse experiences of mistreatment.

Buy Your Opportunity simulation. The third activity, *Buy Your Opportunity*, is the main simulation and was adapted from a critical race theory-based simulation entitled *Other People's Power* (McKinney, 2012) also combines experiential and critical pedagogies. We designed the Buy Your Opportunity simulation to create a microcosm of socio-economic inequality combined with the American culturally hegemonic messages of equal opportunity and individual merit. Finding themselves with power (privileged) or without power (oppressed) to better their lives or fulfill their needs, participants are challenged cognitively and emotionally as they assume their designated social identities. Since this simulation is the main activity with several components, we will explain it in detail.

The full exercise with instructions and game board materials is available online in the journal article.

References:

- Kodet, J. & Mason, D.A. (2017). Buy your opportunity: An experiential consciousness-raising workshop addressing economic inequality and meritocracy. *Radical Pedagogy*, 14(1), 89-103.