Overview:

Mental Blocks is a board game that presents puzzling perspectives. Players are expected to try and complete a puzzle using oversized foam blocks. However, each player has only one perspective of the design. The goal is for everyone to co-operate and complete the puzzle as a team. Obstacles that are faced include a time limit and players are given a card that presents them with a unique rule only they must follow such as not being able to talk or to touch certain color blocks.

Defining Privilege:

Professor Lori Desautels defines perspective as a “bundle of beliefs, a mindset that we each embrace determining how we see one another, our experiences, and possibilities or lack thereof.” Whereas, privilege is the systemic or structural advantages that impact people based on identity factors such as race, gender, sex, religion, nationality, disability, sexuality, class, and body type. Level of education and economic factors can also fall under the category of privilege.

VALUE Rubric: Openness and Self-Awareness

This assignment will follow the guidelines of Self-awareness and Openness on the AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE rubric. For individuals to be proficient in self-awareness one must articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g. seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description). In Openness, a proficient individual initiates and develops interactions with culturally different others. One can suspend their judgement in valuing their interactions with culturally different others.

This activity will challenge students to work together and communicate the position that they are in (in regard to the game). Self-reflection and awareness will be tested as students need to suspend their own judgement in valuing their interactions with others and the ways that they communicate. Individuals need to be aware of their experiences and how this has shaped rules of culture (and even the rules of the game). This activity would best be suited for anyone in polarization and minimization.

Background and Information:

This activity was developed by Margaret L. Sheble, CILMAR, based on Pandasaurus Games’ Mental Blocks (see citation).

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Understand different perspectives, build empathy, and become aware of privilege and how it affects power dynamics.
2. Learn why privilege matters and how it impacts their lives.
3. Develop skills in communication, self-management, self-awareness, and building relationships with others.

Time:

50 minutes
MENTAL BLOCKS LESSON PLAN

Group Size:
Small group

Materials:
Mental Blocks board game (for purchase in Links) and Mental Blocks instructions (in Downloads).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:
Openness:
- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Other Skills:
Teamwork, Diversity & Inclusion

Activity instructions:
Reading/Watching before activity:
_A Short comic gives the simplest most perfect explanation of privilege I’ve ever seen_ posted by Laura Willard.

_Sometimes You’re a Caterpillar_ YouTube video

Discussion:
After reading and watching the following materials (can do in or outside the classroom) have students reflect/discuss/write the following questions

- How would you define privilege after reading/watching these materials? Is this how you would have originally defined privilege?
- What personal privileges are you aware of? What are ways that others are more privileged than yourself?
- What are ways one can discuss privilege with others without any hard feelings? What are good strategies to change one’s perspective?

The purpose of the game Mental Blocks is to help students understand the importance of shifting perspectives—not just being aware of one’s own perspective or privilege. Within the game students will have certain cards that will make the game easier or harder for them to complete.
One of the keys of success in this game is to learn when to listen and to know when to speak up. Consider someone who traditionally has lesser privilege than perhaps a rich white man. When someone speaks about their experiences of oppression, it is crucial for the listener to not dominate the conversation or question the validity of those experiences. If someone is in a better seat of privilege they should share the work and perspectives of those who are often silenced to those who might not often be willing to listen or pause to find the true source of information. If you find yourself privileged, you should see yourself as an ally and use your privilege as a tool to help educate others on their own relationship to privilege.

However, someone who is privileged should not expect those with less privilege to take the lead on speaking out against racism, sexism, classism, etc. Although you want to find answers, that can also mean educating yourself on your own privilege through reading, reflection, conversation, and more. Additionally, you should be attentive to potentially problematic remarks among your usual social or work group.

The Activity:

*To emphasize the privilege aspect of the game you might need to give some students the black card and not the whole group. Some of the cards are easier than others but if you shuffle the deck there is no guarantee that there will be a balance of cards (They might all be hard to-do and thus privilege is perhaps harder to discuss)
Debrief & Reflection:

Once the game is complete have students read the following questions silently for about 5 minutes and then come together to answer these questions with their group on their experience. Once complete, answer these questions with the larger class.

• How did you feel during the activity? How did your situation compare to your peers’?
• What challenges did you face within the group in regard to communication? How can this relate to communicating across culture difference?
• What sort of perspective did you have during the game—how did the group perhaps change your perspective?
• What could you have done differently during the activity?
• What did you discover about privilege?
• How would you explain this activity to a peer?

When working or communicating with individuals from a different culture or social background it is important to remember the things you can see and control versus those items that are outside your scope (invisible culture, cultural restrictions imposed on individuals, etc). Communication is key as well as spending a moment to suspend judgement of others and “the cards they have in hand.”

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

• Building a House for Diversity
• Ice Sculpture (per antea Meteorite)
• Iceberg
• Keep It Real Diverse RX2 Game