

Professor Camacho – CSI: Power and Inequality

Privilege experiment: Homework

Kites Activity Fall 2011

Directions: Please type your responses to the following items and email me, as well as bring a hard copy, to class on Wednesday. Write abundantly and freely; it should be a minimum of 1,000 words.

Part one: Supplies and Group dynamic -- the exercise itself

1. Describe your group. What supplies were you given and what were you missing? Explain how your supply kit affected your ability to complete this exercise.
2. Describe how your supply kit affected you personally and your group dynamic. At what point did you notice that students received differential treatment and supplies?
3. Give examples of what you noticed about the differences in group work when groups were asked to present in the front of the room. What were your initial impressions about the differences?

Part two:

4. What did this exercise illustrate about how resources affect issues of power, privilege, academic success, and social mobility?
5. What surprised you about the outcomes of the experiment?
6. What impact did this exercise have on your thinking about issues of power and privilege?

Sample responses:

- “This exercise taught me the unfairness of adversity and privilege. We did not have to work to earn extra materials, and the higher numbered groups did nothing to deserve fewer resources. In many cases, people are born into privilege and do not even realize how fortunate they are to have all the resources they need to succeed in life. On the other hand, many people are born into disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, and they have no control over this. These people face adversity and often do not receive the help they need to succeed in life. I thought the kite activity was a very creative way of teaching about disadvantage and privilege, and it was also a good way to meet classmates and work on team building.”
- “When the class was discussing the activity, it made me feel so guilty. I was just asking myself why I did not notice other groups, and why I did not offer to share what I had, or even just the extras that we did not use. One of my group members mentioned that from her vantage point she noticed we had more, but had not thought to share either. She also commented that if they asked she was not sure that she would give them any supplies, just because it might not make ours as good. I am not an incredibly competitive person so I could have cared less if ours was the best, but someone from another group connected this scenario to real life saying that some people are willing to help the less fortunate, as long as it does not affect what they have. This was a little easier to relate to. It made me reflect on community service that I had done in the past and whether or not I had to make any sacrifices. Overall it was a great class. I am leaning towards majoring in Sociology and this class definitely strengthened that conviction.”
- “I could honestly say I felt the same way as I looked at other group's kites and looked down on them as being worse even though they did the best with the resources provided to them and I didn't even have to obtain my resources on my own.”

- “In the end, the groups that were less privileged had to come up with a product that could stand next to the groups that were privileged. This is the way society is and it was very interesting to see this come out in a simple activity like decorating a kite.”
- “The groups with less material were acutely aware of their lack of materials while the groups with more hardly noticed they had more items to work with than the others. I believe that this activity was an important experience as it opened my eyes different opinions and perspectives of daily life.”
- “I think the way that the materials for the kite represented the different social classes and resources available to different people made me think a lot deeper than I had before. When you are given many opportunities, you sometimes forget that not everyone had the same privileges as you do. My group discussed how poverty is often given a blind eye and we put a cover over the word on our kite to represent that. I enjoyed class today because I do better with hands on learning that explains concepts better than reading about them.”
- “Initially, like everyone else, we saw no difference between our resources and the resources of the other five groups. Instead of thinking about what we had been given, the four of us were too preoccupied stressing our failings at art projects and searching for the nonexistent artist within our four. We reluctantly began to step up and add words and designs to our specimen. I say “specimen” because I feel our sad and pathetic piece of recycled paper did not truly earn the word “kite”. We saw the pretty colors and nice appearances of the kites in the groups surrounding ours; however, we still attributed our misfortunate piece as inferior because of our own lack of creativity as opposed to our having less available to us. It was not until the first group presented that we realized something was amiss. Instead of anger or frustration over a shortcoming that was clearly due to an impoverished supply envelope, the grumbles from our group were that of embarrassment. We saw the eye catching and nice looking kites and still wondered why we could not adequately complete an assignment initially invented for young children to enjoy. We felt that we could not compete.... Right as we were beginning to see the blatant unfairness and dive into its deeper meanings, there were some defensive statements from the better stocked groups. There were arguments such as “Well, we didn’t know the other groups had less. We thought everyone started with the same envelope” and “They still made a kite whether or not it’s as pretty as ours! They still have a kite!” Naturally, they did not consider our feelings as we showed our obviously substandard project. Another person commented that we should have asked if we needed more items. ...Asking help is not an easy thing to do. We are wired to ensure that we do not come off as inferior. Finally, the deeper meaning is that we do not all start life on equal footing. This begs the question: “What do we owe those who have less than us?” as well as “Are we owed something from people in a superior position?” these questions are less easily answered.