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Comparative Economies - Role Play

This one day lesson is designed to facilitate an understanding of what roles people have and how they interact in communist and capitalist economic systems. By accomplishing a set of time pressured tasks as a group, each person will have an arena to act out their prescribed role. I suggest that the instructor divide his/her class into four groups with two being communist and two capitalist. This provides an ideal setting for the debriefing activity, because students can compare and contrast their experiences.

The activity should start off with a brief class discussion on the students' preconceptions of communism and capitalism. Each student should then be given his/her role (Document A). The groups should then be constructed based upon the number next to their role assignment, and the boss and party officials should be given their income - I used Hershey's kisses - and the sheet of assigned tasks (Document B). I gave points for participating and for a half page quick write on their feelings about playing their role. Like any simulation, it is essential to debrief the activity in order to emphasize comprehension of the meaning of the activity. Some debriefing ideas are on Document C.

I suggest the following role assignment ratios:

Communist: 6 people - 2 Party officials
1 Workers / Party spies
2 Workers
1 Military

Capitalist: 6 people - 1 Boss
1 Middle Management
1 Foreman
2 Workers
1 Union Organizer

The materials needed for this activity are the following: 3 sheets of different colored construction paper for each group, paper clips to hold their work together, and some sort of income for each group.

Document A - Roles

Communist:

Party Official - 1: Your role is to just give orders, and decide how much people should get paid for their work. You don't have to work on the project. You should make sure everyone does the best they can, by watching their work and saying positive and negative comments. You are in charge! For example: "Good work there." "Work harder, your country needs you to do a good job." "Stop wasting materials and get back to work."

Communist:

Worker/Party Spy - 1: Your role is to work on the project, but you are also an informer to the party officials. If another worker isn't doing his/her job correctly, or well enough, it is your responsibility to secretly snitch on that worker to the party official. You can also be an informer on the military or you could snitch on one party official to another party official. You may only report your findings to a party official!

Communist:

Worker - 1: Your role is to take orders from the party officials, obey the military, and work with your comrades. Keep in mind that you are being paid almost nothing, but the government gives you free housing and food no matter how hard you work. What a deal comrade. In this workers' paradise, you are given everything and it is up to you to decide how much you want to help out your beloved country. Beware of the military; they can put you in jail for as long as they want to without telling you why you are in jail.

Communist:

Military - 1: Your role is to be an enforcer of what the party officials want. Keep in mind that there are spies among you, who may want your extra privilege of not actually working on the project. That's right, you don't have to work on the project, but you do have to obey the orders of the party officials.

Capitalist:

Boss - 2: Your role is to look for a profit. If there is any materials left over you earn more. You can only give orders to middle management. You can not talk to the workers or the foreman! If you do need to talk to any else besides middle management, it is up to you to decide how they should communicate with you - whether it be person to person, or in writing or any other option. Beware! There is a union organizer in your group! S/he is going to say that he or she wants more pay for the workers, but really the union organizer wants the workers to get more pay for less work. It is never o.k. for anyone to tell you how to spend your money. You decide how much the workers get paid. It has been known that bribing a union organizer with extra pay, will get them off of your back. Don't forget you can fire people, if you are dissatisfied with their work. It is your company, you can do anything you want!

Capitalist:

Middle Management - 2: Your role is to survive. The boss will give you orders, and you need to pass on those orders to the foreman. You can not talk with the workers, unless you get the boss' permission. Beware! There is a union organizer in your company. He or she will try to talk with you first. If the boss sees you talking with this person you could be fired!! Tell the union organizer to talk with the boss. Your job is only to pass on the orders from the boss to the foreman.

Capitalist:

Foreman - 2: Life is tough. You were a worker but you did such a great job, you were promoted to foreman. but now you take orders from middle management, And you need to pass on those orders to the workers. Keep in mind that if you order the workers around too much, they will get tired of you and they won't respect you as much. At the same time you need to do everything middle management says, or you may get fired! Beware of the union organizer, if you are seen talking to him/her you could get fired!

Capitalist:

Worker - 2: Your role is to work on the project and take orders from the foreman. The foreman used to be your friend, but recently s/he was promoted and now they have an attitude. You find that your previous, "friend" now doesn't want to be seen with you, because of his/her promotion. Come to think of it, you don't get paid enough for all the orders that are given to you on your job. You hear that a union is starting up at your company and you are interested. Explore your options. By the way middle management doesn't want to talk to you either because they are snobs. You may want to start a conversation with one of them to make him/her uncomfortable for the fun of it.

Capitalist:

Union Organizer - 2: Your job is to get higher pay for your workers. The boss may own the company, but the workers make the company run and they should get paid more! Talk to whoever you need to in order to uphold the fair and equal treatment of all workers everywhere!

Document B - Tasks

Your task is to accomplish all of the following projects in the next 20 minutes:

- 1) Make a book out of at least three different colors of construction paper. It must be 3 dimensional with a 4 famous sayings from your country written inside it.**
- 2) Construct 4 trees, all of which must be three dimensional.**
- 3) Build a house that has at least 3 windows and a front door and can stand on its own.**
- 4) Make a letter "E", which must be 5 and a half inches high and 4 and a quarter inches across.**

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Document C - Debriefing Questions

- 1) Which system did you belong to capitalist or communist?
How do you know what is the difference between them?
- 2) How much power did your character have in the role play?
How would you define power?
- 3) How did it feel?
- 4) What was a problem with your system?
What worked in your system?