



Poverty game: poverty and social inequality

Target group(s):	Pupils from 7th school grade upwards
Objective:	Examination of poverty and other forms of social inequality
Method:	Change of perspective
Time:	One teaching unit
Materials:	One role description per pupil and enough room to be able to move forward without difficulty
Note:	<p>This exercise has been put at our disposition by Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel. Source: <i>polis aktuell: Armut in Österreich</i>. Nr. 3, 2006, pages 13-15, published by.: <i>Zentrum polis – Politik Lernen in der Schule</i>, Hessgasse 1, 1010 Vienna, Tel. 01/42 77-274 44, service @politik-lernen.at, www.politik-lernen.at</p> <p>The exercise has been adapted from the Council of Europe journal "Compass. A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People (Council of Europe Publishing, 2. edition, 2003): The complete English, French, Russian and Arabic version of "Compass" is available online on the homepage of the Council of Europe: www.coe.int/hre</p>

Description:

The activity can also be carried out in a quiet outdoor space.

There ought to be a calm atmosphere in the class at the start of the exercise. You can perhaps help out with some soft background music.

Hand out the role cards at random, one to each pupil. Tell them to keep the content of the card to themselves and not to show it to anyone else. Ask them to sit down (preferably on the floor), read their role card, and get into their role. To help, read out some of the following questions. Pause after each question, to give the pupils time to reflect and build up a picture of their role and the life of the person they are playing.

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- What was your childhood like? What did your home look like? What kind of games did you play? What did your parents do for a living?
- What is your everyday life like now? With whom do you socialise? What do you do in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening?
- What sort of lifestyle do you have? Where do you live? How much money do you have at your disposal each month? How do you spend your leisure time? What you do in your holidays?
- What do you enjoy doing? What are you afraid of?

Now ask the pupils to line up beside each other (like on a starting line). It's important that they remain absolutely silent so that they do not lose touch with their role.

Tell the pupils that you are going to read out a list of situations or events. Every time that they can answer "yes" to the statement, they should take a step forward. Otherwise, they should stay where they are.

Read out the situations one at a time. Pause for a while between each statement to allow the pupils time to step forward and to look around to take note of the positions of the others.

At the end, invite everyone to take note of their final positions: how far have they come and where are they in relationship to the others? Starting with the person who came furthest, they all read out their roles one after the other. Then have them sit down together in plenary – if possible in a circle. Give the pupils a couple of minutes to come out of role before continuing with a mutual discussion.

Discussion

Start with a short icebreaker: in turn, every pupil has the opportunity to briefly describe what happened to him/her, and how he/she felt about the activity. A discussion should not take place yet, every statement passes without comment. (It is particularly important that you do not criticise statements either - also not with gestures or muttering.) Whoever does not want to make a statement simply says "move on".

Now you can discuss the following questions with the pupils:

- How did it feel being able to step forward - or having to stay where you are?
- For those who stepped forward often, at what point did they begin to notice that others were not moving as fast as they were?
- Did anyone sometimes have the feeling that his/her role was not being given their basic human rights? What are some examples?
- How easy or difficult was it to play the different roles? Did anyone play a role that was similar to a real person he/she knows?
- Which roles were hit hardest by poverty? Which roles were less affected? What were the respective reasons for poverty or wealth?
- Does the activity reflect our real society? In which way?



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Follow-up

Address the issue of poverty in more detail. What is poverty? Is the meaning of the term different according to the social framework? (Is there a difference between the meaning of the term poverty for example in Austria and in Niger?) What are the forms of poverty in Austria? What are the causes? Which sections of the population are particularly affected? How is it possible that people live in poverty in a country as wealthy as Austria? What can be done to fight poverty in Austria? Is financial support alone the solution to the problem in all cases? Which of the affected groups can be most easily helped, which are most difficult? Who can help? What can the pupils do to help?

The pupils might be given the assignment to continue research of the subject on their own. For example, they can look for reports in mass media that are related to the topic of poverty, or get in touch with various organisations that work with the issue of poverty.

Note

It is not unlikely that one or two of the pupils are personally affected by poverty. Take this into consideration during the activity, for example by avoiding the use of a role description that comes too close to the reality of the person affected. As a rule, we recommend that the roles and the "situations" are adapted to the level of knowledge and experiences of the pupils.

**The situations and events**

- You have never encountered any serious financial difficulty.
- You have decent housing with a telephone, Internet and cable television.
- You feel your language, religion and culture are respected in Austria.
- You feel that your opinion on social and political issues matters and your views are listened to.
- Other people consult you about different issues.
- You are not afraid of being stopped by the police.
- You know where to turn for advice and help if you need it.
- You have never felt discriminated against because of your origin.
- You are well protected should you become ill or have an accident.
- You can go away on holiday in a foreign country once a year.
- You can always invite friends home for dinner.
- You are happy with the life that you lead.
- You feel you can study and follow the profession of your choice.
- You are not afraid of being harassed or attacked in the streets.
- If you want, you have a good opportunity of holding an important political position one day.
- You can participate in international seminars abroad.
- You can afford to go to the cinema at least once a week.
- You are not afraid for the future of your children.
- You can buy new clothes at least once every three months.
- You feel that your knowledge and skills are respected in the society where you live.
- You can vote in national and local elections.
- You can use the Internet when necessary.
- You are positive when you think about your future.

The role cards

1. You are 15 and live with your parents and seven brothers and sisters in a small flat in Linz. Your mother works as a cashier in a supermarket, your father is unemployed.
2. You are a 17 year-old girl of Somalian origin. You are a refugee and recently arrived in Austria; you can hardly read or write.
3. You are a well-trained engineer from Iraq and have been granted asylum in Austria. You hardly speak German and earn your living as a newspaper vendor.
4. You are a single mother with three children. You work in a laundry.



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5. You are a 24-year-old refugee from Chechnya and live in a refugee camp in a small town in the Alps.
6. You are chairman of a regional group of the youth ÖVP. Your parents own a medium-sized textile factory.
7. You are the daughter of the Iranian ambassador in Vienna.
8. You are retired. You used to work in a shoe factory.
9. You are 83 years old, and live on a minimum pension.
10. You are a 27-year-old homeless man.
11. You are a disabled young man and are wheel-chair bound.
12. You are 16 and a car mechanic apprentice.
13. You are 20 and a student. You finance your studies by working as a waiter and other part-time jobs.
14. You are the daughter of a bank director. You are studying at the University of Economics in Vienna.
15. You are an illegal immigrant from Moldavia.
16. You are the son of a Chinese immigrant, who owns a successful fast-food chain.
17. You are 53. You and your wife owned a small carpenter's workshop that has just gone bankrupt.
18. You are the partner of a young artist addicted to heroin.
19. You have just completed your training in a college of hotel management and are looking for a job.
20. You are the 19-year-old son of a mountain farmer.