**Descriptive Title: Exploring Wealth Inequality and the Construct of Equal Opportunity**

**Overview: Several exercises to explore in-depth the idea of equal opportunity in America**

**Duration: 2 class periods of 75 minute each**

**Learning Objectives:**

* As a result of this exercise, students will have the opportunity to explore competing principles around the idea of “equal opportunity.”
* As a result of this exercise, students will compare relevant data with media images and critically analyze differences.
* As a result of this exercise, students examine how a “game” based on this constructs plays out with real-life data.
* As a result of this exercise, students will consider the extent to which the construct of equal opportunity is accurate and what that means for them.

**Target Social Work Course: Univ 103 Perspectives on Poverty in America**

The course is an introductory course for freshman social work majors, Perspectives on Poverty in America. In this course, we examine contending discourses of American poverty, as well as their origins and the programs and policies designed to address poverty.

**Detailed Description of the Activities:**

As part of the course, we utilize social media and various innovative and experiential activities to provide the students with hands on experience to help them understand and make sense of challenging concepts.

The intent of this exercise is to “play out” the construct of “equal opportunity” for the students in this freshman seminar. I have found that many students enter the course with a firm belief in the notion that in America equal opportunity is possible; it is part of the American dream.

**Movie—popular culture/images/poverty narrative**

First, we watch part of the movie *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, a popular 1971 children’s film based on Roald Dahl’s book. In the book, Charlie beats incredible odds to find one of only five golden tickets to the chocolate factory. Charlie, a child in extreme poverty, lacks all of the financial resources that the other children had at this disposal in order to achieve a ticket. In the movie it is noted that he has the same chance as everyone else. We use that as a springboard for a discussion about whether and to what extent that sentiment is true? How does having this in a movie, where all works out well for that little boy, perpetuate this idea?

**Data**

We then watch this video that helps to shed light on the actual dispersion of wealth in America. The ability to visualize this data in a graph helps students to see a picture of what inequality actually looks like and how that compares with what even people think it looks like or should be.

You Tube Video: <https://youtu.be/QPKKQnijnsM>

**Exercise**

To press upon this theme, we play “Wealth Inequality Monopoly.” As per the regular instructions in the box, where everyone begins the game with the same amount of $1500 each, students are provided a starting salary proportionate to the various quintiles of actual levels of wealth inequality in America. This exercise assists in visualizing the data in a tangible way. With $1500 per person, we assume that there is a total of $7500 in “circulation” at the start of the game. *(Please note: This is simply an estimate, as it cannot be assumed that within each quintile the distribution of wealth is even.)*

Based on 2013 data, the quintiles are roughly as follows:

Player 1 (43%): $3225 top 1%= 1 individual =$3225

Player 2 (29%): $2175 top 4%= 4 individuals=$543.75

Player 3 (11%): $825 top 5%= 5 individuals= $165

Player 4 (12%): $900 top 10%= 10 individuals= $90

Player 5 (7%): $525 remaining 80%= 80 individuals=$6.56

**Student Debriefing/Assessment:**

I use the attached worksheet to help the students process the information and the experience.

**Other Helpful Websites**

<http://inequality.org/income-inequality/> and <http://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Which segment of the population did you represent? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How much money did you start with?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What property did you buy? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What property did you lose? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What was your net worth at the end of the game? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How do you think this relates to the cultural ideal of “equal opportunity”? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What are your thoughts on this experience?

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