

Achievement Unlocked: Increasing Social Justice Awareness
in Middle School Students Through Board Games

by
Tiffany T. Nguyen-Van

A THESIS

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(Honors Scholar)

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Abstract approved:_____

Patricia Sakurai

“An undeniably vast portion of American history is attributed to people of color. But these stories of discoveries and researches, resilience and liberation all seemed like missing pieces to the puzzle that is America.” (Vo-Nguyen). This speaks to the experience of how the stories, lives, and contributions of their communities are left out when reviewing US history. One solution considered has been the addition of ethnic studies curriculums to K-12 schools. However, concerns include how to discuss difficult issues with students, particularly those who are younger. This thesis looks to answer that question of what age-appropriate approaches to discuss and educate on such complicated issues look like by

1. Considering the various characteristics of the target age-group of 11-13 years old
2. Develop a teaching tool that embodies both a suitable teaching approach and topics which are relevant to the student and challenges them with the complexities of the issues at hand.

Key Words: social justice, privilege, race/ethnicity, serious games, board games, educational tool

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon
State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my
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“An undeniably vast portion of American history is attributed to people of color. But these stories of discoveries and researches, resilience and liberation all seemed like missing pieces to the puzzle that is America.” (Vo-Nguyen) This is a statement from Stephanie Vo-Nguyen, a Portland Public School student and it voices a thought too often echoed by other students of color: the stories, lives, and contributions of their communities are often left untold when reviewing US history, thus the incomplete puzzle. One must ask why this is the case when certain factors would suggest otherwise, one being student demographics in public schools.

According to data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools between fall 2003 and fall 2013, the percentage of White students enrolled decreased from 59 to 50 percent with projections seeing a decrease to 46 percent by fall 2025. In contrast, the enrollment for Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, those identifying in two or more races is increasing from 19 to 25 percent; 4 to 5 percent; to 3 percent, and with projections seeing an increase again by fall 2025, respectively. Lastly, enrollment for Black students decreased from 17 to 16 percent with a projected decrease to 15 percent by fall 2025 and for American Indian/Alaska Native students it remains at 1 percent (NCES). What is more astonishing is that by fall 2025, approximately 55 percent of the student enrollment will be from the minority groups and that diversity will be witnessed in the classroom. And yet, we are unable to reflect that same diversity in the curriculum and so we must acknowledge the incomplete puzzle. However, what is being done to find these missing pieces?

The debate emerging more and more in the last couple of years has been the consideration of adding ethnic studies ¹curriculums to K-12 schools, and there are positive results supporting the incorporation of such programs. A recent study at Stanford Graduate School of Education by Penner and Dee have reported that these programs brought astonishing results for at-risk 9th grade high school students (“at-risk” meaning students who were at-risk of dropping out going into high school) seeing an increase in attendance by 21 percentage points, in cumulative GPA by 1.4 grade points, and in credits earned by 23 points (2016). In addition to the improvement of logistical components such as attendance and GPA, these programs help facilitate conversations about diversity, inclusivity, and the minority experience, just to name a few, which provide students of color a sense of belonging in a curriculum that often caters to their white counterparts.

Yet, concerns about the implementation of ethnic studies courses have been expressed including how to discuss the more difficult issues like privilege with students, particularly with the students who are younger. This is a valid concern and what this thesis hopes to accomplish is to answer that question of what age-appropriate approaches to discuss and educate on such complicated issues look like by carefully considering the various characteristics of the target age-group (which in this case is middle school students) to develop a teaching tool that embodies both a suitable teaching approach and topics which are relevant to the student and challenges them with the complexities of the issues at hand.

¹ Ethnic Studies is defined as: “units of study, courses, or programs that are centered on the knowledge and perspectives of an ethnic or racial group, reflecting narratives and points of view rooted in that group’s lived experiences and intellectual scholarship” (Sleeter)

Literature Review

The concern of finding age-appropriate approaches, particularly for the topics within ethnic studies, is not a new challenge when developing the program. However, while ethnic studies being acknowledged as its own entity in K-12 is a fairly new movement, attempts to incorporate it within the existing curriculum is not new and finding what could be expanded or improved to what has already been created was the challenge.

Ethnic Studies in Lower Grade Levels.

The common first step that most educators usually do to move their classrooms towards being more inclusive is in the literature that is available to students. In 2016, the statistics for children's books published by people of color with stories geared towards the experiences of people of color by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) reported that among the 3,400 books they received 8% were about African/African Americans, 6% were about Asian Pacifics/Asian Pacific Americans, 4% were about Latinos, and 1% were about American Indians/First Nations. So, in total, we see 19% or 646 books of the 3,400 are about POC and their experiences ("Publishing Statistics," 2017), yet as stated earlier, students of color are enrolling at a high rate and thus changing the audience for all teaching materials, including books. With that said, many educators are taking a stance to find and include more books that accurately reflect the diversity seen in the classroom and by doing so, it helps combat many of the issues that students of color go through. These include normalizing cultural/ethnic/racial experiences that

otherwise would be considered abnormal compared to the Eurocentric and cause these students to feel ostracized.

For example, something as simple as hair is a significant component of the African American experience, particularly for women, and while it should be celebrated, many young African American students develop a negative view of it due to societal standards which value straight hair more. However, through the increase of children's books with more diverse themes on topics such as hair, it serves to support the message of celebrating differences and challenge perspectives on what should be considered "normal" (Brooks & McNair, 2014).

Now, these outcomes are extremely important and yet, when it comes to the younger grade levels, topics regarding diversity often does not include the entire picture of the POC experience. Too often, teachers and schools focus on the cultural components like food, holidays, or music. Those are good things to learn about, but it ignores deeper and perhaps more important topics like values, behaviors, family structures, and even their struggles like dealing with racism, to name a few. These topics influence a student's life, just as much as their food or music does, but is not brought up as much or ignored completely. However, in a research review of the academic and social value to Ethnic Studies, Sleeter (2011) reports that the curriculum that makes the most impact on students' abilities to understand about race and individuals who are different from them "teach directly about racism...[in contrast to] curricula that portray diverse groups but ignore racism". Thus, it is important to start creating curricula and resources which speak to those issues, hence

this project creating a game which discusses a deeper topic with students which is the relationship between race/ethnicity and privilege.

The Emergence of Serious Games.

While the creation of a game in the form of a tabletop board which targets middle school students and educates them on issues such as race/ethnicity and privilege has not been created, it is not to say that games with the intention of teaching such issues have not been attempted in the past.

One example is Psychology Today, a magazine published in the United States, which created a game board called Blacks & Whites that was a variation on Monopoly. It looked at issues of race, privilege, and its effects on housing opportunities for African American and White-identifying individuals (Onion, 2016). It brought attention to the disparities that African Americans faced so the game was intentionally difficult for African American players to win. This was not the only game they created which attempted to invoke social change – there was also “The Cities Game”, a game designed to look at the “urban tension, corruption, and the undercurrents of city politics” and “Women & Man”, a game looking at the issue of gender equality.

More recently, digital games have become a popular medium to introduce players to the complexities that surround social issues like human rights, education, or climate change and the results are astounding. Players can run for president in Win the White House (Filament Games, 2016), learn what it means to be a refugee in Against All Odds (United Nations High Commission on Refugees, 2005), or understand what it means when you hear words like “deportation” in ICED – I Can

End Deportation (Breakthrough, 2008). These games are incredibly immersive with scenarios which do not shy away from reality and challenge its players to make decisions they otherwise would never make.

All of those games fall under the category of “Serious Games” and while there is no agreed upon definition for what constitutes requirements for a game to be considered a serious game (Ulicsak, 2010), there is one definition that speaks to the overall intent and mirrors what can be seen in the games mentioned above: serious games are “games which let players gain an experiential understanding of real world issues through play” (Swain, 2007). They are utilized in a number of fields from education to medicine and aim to expose participants to experiences outside their own as well as hone in their initial reactions to facilitate conversations around those particular topics. Now, the question is whether these games accomplish what it is they set out to do, and there have been many studies which speak to the effectiveness of these games to teach players new skills and help them gain new perspectives.

There have been games like *It's a Deal!* which taught students about intercultural communication between Spaniards and Britons in business settings and was reported, through the implementation of a pre-test and post-test questionnaire, to have a large learning effect on their development of intercultural communicative competence (thus, accomplishing the learning outcome of the game) (Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell, 2012). In addition to the study on *It's a Deal!*, a report was made on the game *ICED!* (“*I Can End Deportation*”) by the Education Development Center/Center for Children and Technology. It evaluated whether the game increased knowledge and influenced attitudes on U.S. immigration and deportation policies

through pre-and post questionnaires. Findings supported the game to be an effective social change tool when pre-and post-tests illustrated an increase in knowledge from an average score of 6 out of 12 correct in the pre-test from 99 participants versus an average score of 9 correct in the post-test and 56.5% of the participants said that their attitudes changed about the way immigrants were treated in the U.S. (Diamond & Brunner, 2008). And while these two are only a few examples of what serious games can achieve, it illustrates the effectiveness that serious games can have on learning new skills to the potential to ignite social change.

The games that I have interests in look at social justice issues as the themes, and upon further research as seen above, many different games have been created with this theme in mind over the last decade and it seems like the possibilities are endless as to where this genre can be taken. Therefore, for this thesis, I aim to create a non-digital serious game which looks at the real-world issue of how privilege or lack thereof and the advantages and disadvantages that come with it in different areas including socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, etc. are impacted by one's racial or ethnic identities as seen in the simulation of high school senior year.

Game Development

Within this section of the thesis, I will be explaining the rationale behind various decisions that were made in the development of this game including why I chose the game board medium that I did, what instructions were considered in creating the game, and my decision to cater the game towards middle school students, just to name a few.

Game Topic.

The first step in the development of this game was determining which social justice issues were to be reflected in this game about as there are a number of them which could be addressed. There are the issues of racism, sexism, ageism, etc which grapple with the unjust treatment of the individuals within these identities through actions of prejudices, stereotyping, and discrimination on an individual level like not hiring someone due to their race. Then, there are issues that are of a wider scope and deal with discrimination and prejudices on an institutional and systemic level. These can include privilege, school-to-prison pipeline, the glass ceiling, microaggressions, etc. And on top of that, there are issues like poverty, health, and homelessness.

Ultimately, the decision came down to reflecting on my own experience over these last few years with frustration in my lack of consciousness of the issues happening within communities of color, even with my own, so I knew I wanted the game to address social justice issues within the identities of race/ethnicity. Now, when it came to choosing privilege as the accompanying issue to discuss, it was due to the realization that it is a topic which **is** discussed at a young age, but needs to move beyond just looking at privilege from these views like getting reprimanded by your parents for being greedy when you hear “Money doesn’t grow on trees” or hearing “be grateful for having food when there are children starving in the world” for not eating all your food. Furthermore, we also need to create empathy in knowing our privilege from a racial/ethnic perspective, but unfortunately it is a hard discussion so that is where a need for the creation of this game emerged and inspired me to choose it as the theme.

Now, privilege is not seen just within the identities of race/ethnicity, but is also seen in one's socioeconomic status, whether one is disabled or not, or if one identifies in the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, we must also acknowledge the intersectionality of identities and how it creates different privileges (ie. identifying as white, male, and heterosexual will give you more privileges versus identifying as black, female, and transgender) and that is important to understand and to recognize. In this version of the game, it does not include other identity options like a more fluid spectrum of gender, sexuality, or disabilities to discuss the intersectionality of these as well, however, this was not done to exclude them from the discussion. Rather, due to the players being middle school students it was important to choose a topic which was complicated, but not so much so that it is beyond their capacity to learn and discuss in the most appropriate way. The game in this version is merely a blueprint and has the potential to be expanded in various ways which I hope to accomplish as I move forward with this game.

Learning Outcomes.

In determining what learning outcomes I would like the students to obtain after playing this game and through the teacher-facilitated discussions and various lessons that accompany it, I have narrowed it down to two learning outcomes:

1. Students will be introduced to the social justice issue of privilege and race/ethnicity
2. Students will develop their skills in empathy as they engage with the high school experience through the lens of a race/ethnicity other than their own

To accomplish the first outcome, the first stage students will go through is participating in the game and going through the senior year experience with the perspective of their character and how their race/ethnicity prevents/enables or makes easier/more difficult various experiences compared to their peers. This first stage will leave them with things to reflect on. However, the second stage, which will successfully introduce the concepts to the students, is in the debriefing or discussions to happen after where students will be able to connect the game experience to the concept of privilege, thus accomplishing the first learning outcome.

As for the second learning outcome, students will develop their skills in empathy by learning from the different perspectives they take on within the game and through the observation of their peers who have less privilege than they do within the game and what emotions those two perspectives provoked. In addition to the game, if the safe space has been created, some students may even feel compelled to share their own stories where they have seen privilege and/or disparity and through these discussions, students have another opportunity to work on their empathy when listening to their peers' experiences. The development of empathy was taken into consideration as a learning outcome because it plays an important role in creating social change. Social change occurs when a strong force can come together and fight for that change. However, this can only happen if one is able to empathize or make a conscience effort to understand the experiences that are different from their own to allow the individual sharing those experiences to feel heard and to let them know that you are making an effort to learn more to help create change (Collins, 1993).

Age Group.

The most significant aspect to the concern of introducing ethnic studies curricula to K-12 schools is in being able to talk about these issues in an age-appropriate manner. This is a valid concern and the criteria that is often thought of when one considers something age-appropriate is that it does not go beyond the mental abilities of the child. So, when it came time to determine which age group would be most appropriate for this game, the group needed to be at the appropriate cognitive level for the game and that required analyzing exactly what the game will be asking of the students cognitively. The following are the two cognitive abilities which these students should be able to engage in to understand the game:

- 1) Privilege is an abstract concept and require the chosen age group to be able to think abstractly as the concept comes up within the game.
- 2) The ways in which the game utilizes the topics of privilege and race/ethnicity may provoke emotional reactions out of the students and they should be able to analyze why those occurred and the significance behind it.

The age-group to meet these criteria is the early adolescents, middle school students or 11-13 year olds and this decision is supported by Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development theory and the abilities developed within the formal operations stage.

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development – Formal Operations Stage

A theory which has endured for the last 50 or so years, it was developed by Jean Piaget who was a developmental psychologist. He became fascinated by human

development and through this, he developed the theory acknowledged above. The stage of interest for this thesis is the formal operations stage. It includes children from the ages of 11-15 years old and it is during this stage which they are “capable of thinking logically and abstractly, capable of formulating hypotheses and testing them systematically; thinking is more complex, and [they] can think about thinking (metacognition) (Arnett, 2013)”. The two which stand out, in relevance to the game, include the ability to think abstractly and metacognition. The first cognitive ability to look at is abstract thinking.

As started earlier, the game topics are abstract concepts and they are considered as such because they have no physical attributes and can include multiple meanings depending on the context and individual. For example, which classes you get suggested to take by your advisor. The experience can be different depending on your race/ethnicity. Those who are Asian are more likely to be suggested more math or science classes than their other peers, even though it should be understood that not all Asians are good at math and science. While, African American students are more likely to be suggested sports or music classes, even though they are just as capable of handling math and science courses.

The focus here is being in a race/ethnicity which is associated with a positive stereotype and having more opportunities open because of it. It is a form of privilege for some races/ethnicities, but not for others, as illustrated in the example and it is a privilege since the perception often associated with someone taking more math or science classes is that they are very smart. One would not understand that unless they

are able to think abstractly about these class suggestions as something more than just suggestions from your advisor, but are being made with racial bias in them.

Secondly, the ability of metacognition or “think about thinking” is also an important ability to grasp for this game because in doing so, the student gains the understanding of how privilege can cause harm on an emotional level. Arnett (2013) had summarized that metacognition is adolescents being able to think through their own thought processes. So, as it applies to the game, what I mean by the student “thinking about thinking” is in analyzing the thought process they go through when they see disparities occur between individuals. For instance, many of these experiences will cause anger and frustration to emerge when the system unfairly gives more opportunities to those with one race/ethnicity while others lack in opportunities and so trying to understand why these feelings appeared is important to the process of understanding privilege since emotional frustration is a common reaction to this concept.

It is important to acknowledge though that students develop at different paces and some may not be able to understand the concepts as quickly as others. However, with engaging and observing their peers and the help of their teacher, the students can get there. Therefore, the next step to the game development after picking the age-group was researching learning pedagogies and implementing the ones which could help the student grasp the concepts and accomplish the learning outcomes.

Tabletop Board Game Medium.

While the advantages that come with digital games are immense, including graphics to accompany scenarios and a truly immersive experience, it does have its

disadvantages. An important component sought in the creation of this game is peer interactions when various game outcomes occur and observing how it affects other players. The real-time interactions are crucial to the learning experience since there will be disparities between each player's experience and without being able to observe each of these interactions and emotional reactions in unison and face-to-face, the game does not reach its potential to create social change when students are not able to experience the dissonance and empathy created seeing the difference between what a privileged individual versus the unprivileged individual got as a result, for example, to the same experience card about "being able to go to prom". This is easily achieved in the tabletop form since players are physically engaging. Digital games, in contrast, make it harder to accomplish this desired learning outcome since players are usually not interacting physically and rather through computer screens or a virtual environment which lessen the shock factor since it does not include seeing peers' emotional responses in that moment.

What the game board achieves is supported by Lev Vygotsky's social learning theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. Within this theory, Vygotsky proposes that the amount of learning an individual can obtain through their own problem-solving abilities is far less than what they could learn through adult guidance and peer collaboration (Herrera, 2015). So, while a digital game can mimic all aspects of the game and players can certainly learn about privilege, the face-to-face interaction of observing initial reactions from peers has players understanding privilege from an emotional perspective (which is necessary to learn about empathy) which is very powerful and cannot be replicated through sitting at a screen alone. Lastly, this form

of the game does not require the developer to learn new skills such as programming and design to create the game which, due to the time constraint of the thesis, it was necessary.

Board Design.

This next part of the game development was the board design and I had a difficult time trying to figure it out at first. In the first version, I was inspired by a satirical and political cartoon created by Swedish artist, Emanu, called “Equality Hurdles”. In the cartoon, a person of color and a white person are seen at the beginning of the racetrack. The line reads "What’s the matter? It's the same distance!" (Emanu) as said by the white person. However, what they fail to notice is that while their track only has a few hurdles, the person of color's track has walls, traps, and their leg has a ball and chain on it. This speaks to how many individuals only pay attention to the distance of the experience and focus on that struggle alone. However, while the distance is the same, they fail to notice that others have more hurdles to go through due to their circumstance as a person of color, compared to their circumstance as a white person.

Arguably, it may be more accurate to say that the person of color is in their own race and yet, the same expectations for success that the white person gets in their race is expected of the person of color without understanding that there may be visible and invisible forces which hinder their ability to accomplish those expectations at the same capacity. Lyndon Johnson (1965) said it best when he explains that “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free

to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.”

So, this message found in the political cartoon and in Johnson’s quote was one I wanted students to understand as they played the game which is that while there is a mutual struggle in getting through high school, there are students who face more challenges in addition to that one struggle and are still expected to achieve everything that encompasses a successful high school career. Understanding this huge picture is extremely important and is one small step towards a more compassionate and understanding society. So with this in mind, the first version was circular and had 6 individual paths leading from the outside of the circle inward. In this version, each player took a “track” or path and played the game only on that track and could observe what was happening to their peers as well. However, upon further consideration, I felt that the 6 individual paths were a little too complicated, busy, and moved away from the intended message with players in their own tracks so a second design was needed.

With this second design, it is as seen in appendix C and shows a single path which all players will travel on from beginning to end. The reason why the single path is more effective in dispelling the illusion of “same path, same experience” is because it mimics how high school feels. For most of a student’s educational career, they are moving forward with their class and go to school every day with them. They feel the pressure of classes and finals together and they feel the sadness and excitement of graduation together. However, there are students who fall behind or are forced to leave because of unforeseen circumstances and being in a single path

together to see some of their peers stop in the game while they move forward is a powerful message. So, the final board design is as seen below and contributes to the learning outcome of honing their empathy by forcing the player to take on multiple perspectives, even though they are only playing one character, with something as simple as the board's design.

Game Theme.

When deciding on the theme of the game, two issues needed to be addressed. The first issue is ensuring that the game is relevant to the young students. While the purpose of games in the classroom is to educate students on those particular topics, the issue of relevance is one which teachers face on the daily and needs to be considered if any learning is to occur. What this may look like in the classroom includes engagement with the topic through participation in discussions or working through the assignments; feeling like it is applicable outside of the classroom, or simply not feeling bored, thus choosing a relevant theme was a necessary accomplishment as the game was being developed.

The second issue was finding a topic which did not exceed a middle school student's grasp. Now, that is not to say that these students are not capable of understanding topics beyond their scope or this thesis would not be pursued otherwise, but when other variables are taken into consideration like how much time teachers can allocate in their curriculums to teach about these issues, the topic needs to be within what would be considered appropriate for what they are going through in life now and possibly a few years down the road. Further explanation of each theme considered will shed light on why this issue is important.

At the beginning of game development, the first theme that was considered had players go through life after their high school graduation and deciding whether they wanted to go to college or not. Then, players would live their lives with all the triumphs and downfalls that come with it until retirement where the winner was determined by their ability to accomplish the "American Dream" which in this case would mean to have a home, a successful family, no debt, etc. While the disparities between each players' experience of one life span can offer quite the learning experience, it had a few issues. The relevance of such an expansive theme to a group of 11-13 year olds is very unlikely in regards to themes such as taxes, debt, or even the end goal of retirement. In addition to that, the game would take a long time to go through and that is not conducive to the amount of time that can be allotted in a school year for various curricula.

The second theme was more specific compared to the first as it had players live through one period of life, more specifically their 30's where players have graduated college, are trying to find a steady job, and are working towards financial stability. The winner was the one able to accomplish the "American Dream" as defined in one's 30's which can include, again, having a steady job and a small or non-existent debt. While this made the game easier to understand and still illustrated the disparities between each player, it was very unlikely to be as relevant to the students since it dealt with issues that are not as closely related to their current experience like being in primary school and going through puberty.

The final theme considered for this game was the high school experience, more specifically their senior year experience. Players will start at their senior year,

end with graduation, and along the way survive the demands of high school from social/peer expectations, balancing family expectations, and applying to scholarships. However, in addition to that experience, there is the imminent threat that these players could be forced to drop out of high school which is dependent on the experiences they encounter throughout the game. This theme was ultimately chosen for the game because besides their own experience, the next stage of life that they are more likely to think about is what high school would be like and so this theme would be relevant to these students. Secondly, it eases students into the conversation about race/ethnicity and privilege by starting with high school and allowing the flexibility to continue the conversation beyond. This is different from the first theme which would have been extremely overwhelming and from the second in regards to relevance.

Characters, Game Cards, and Drop Out Meter.

Eureka High's Senior Class

In choosing the character pieces for the game, I knew that it had to be diverse and represent race and ethnicity as best as I possibly can. In trying to find the illustrations which would best represent these characters, I was able to find the work of Illumismart (Clip Art). As seen in the picture to the right, they included a variety of students to choose from who represented a number of ethnicity and races. It was also great that along with the character designs, Illumismart also had names for these characters which certainly made it easier for me during development. These images helped bring the game to life and I utilized them to imagine what the character game pieces would like as well as to create the student ID cards.

Another important aspect of this section in the game is that players are randomly assigned their race/ethnicity rather than being allowed to pick it and the reasoning behind that is to hopefully decrease emotional distress to students who have lived experiences with their game character counterpart. What I speak to echoes the analysis done by Carreiro & Kapitulik (2010) on the effects that games such as these have on what they defined as “non-traditional students” who have already experienced what the game is trying to mimic.

For example, simulation activities like ones about budgeting as someone on the poverty line while can be eye-opening for those who have never experienced this, “they certainly run the risk of being disconcerting and even offensive to some non-traditional students” (Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010) and while, it is hard to determine which students have gone through these experiences, the effect that it leaves on them is too much of a risk. Carreiro & Kapitulik (2010) speak to the feeling of being ostracized for being different from the normal experience. This is something that can happen to the students playing this game since the theme of the game is not abstract, but based on experiences which are very likely to happen and there is a perception created within the game that more privilege means better opportunities and almost a guarantee to graduate versus less opportunities and the looming fear of having to dropout for those who do not have as much privileged. So, to help minimize this from occurring and putting those students who have those lived experiences in a tough situation, the variable of race/ethnicity in the game was randomized.

Game Cards

Within the game, there are a total of 8 decks of cards and they all represent various experiences that each of the players will have the opportunity to go through to learn more about racial/ethnic privilege as seen in the high school experience. 3 of these decks are dedicated to the main experiences that a senior could expect to go through within each of the three terms of the school year: fall, winter, and spring. The fall would include taking the SAT/ACT, planning college visits, work on their FAFSA application, and participating in extracurricular activities like clubs, sports, etc. While in the winter, they need to consider whether to take AP exams and meet with their counselors to check whether the player is on track to graduate and then finally in the spring, they should be hearing back from colleges if they chose that route, can look forward to prom, and get their AP exam results back.

Now, as for the 5 other decks within the game, they range from being generic experiences like being late to school, studying for an exam or to go out with friends, and participating in a school event. Then, there are the cards which speak to more specific experiences like having to deal with family matters, social expectations, and even some money related issues². These cards are important to the game because, while the first 3 decks deal with events that are specific to a student's senior year, there are also decks of cards which deal with issues that are related to the year with the inclusion of what happens outside of school that have just as much power to affect students' abilities to graduate.

² For a full list of what these cards are and their descriptions, you can find the instructions to the game in appendix A.

Drop Out Meter

When it came to how I wanted the game to end and how a winner was determined, this was one of the hardest parts for me to develop because of the complexity of the topic. The first thought was to have each student complete a checklist titled “Things to Accomplish for the Best Senior Year!” by the end of the game with the winner being the individual who was able to accomplish the most tasks. It included objectives like senior skip day, going to prom, and getting a good score on your SAT, however, this felt too tedious and would hinder the ability to accomplish the learning outcomes of creating empathy and learning about the disparities created by one’s racial/ethnic privilege or lack thereof by distracting the players with trying to accomplish their list. Other endings that were considered included players getting accepted to a college³ and getting a good GPA. These were good, but did not feel like it spoke to what I wanted for the game.

Ultimately, what was decided to be the game’s ending was making it to the end of the game and graduating with the big kicker being the student avoids the threat of dropping out. The disparities between the various races/ethnicities and being able to successfully graduate from high school is astonishing and there are a number of factors based on one’s privilege which affect whether the likelihood of dropping out is higher or lower. For example, being of lower economic status or having a family structure with many younger siblings, a student may have to take on a job or do more babysitting, respectively, which can attribute to more absences from school which in

³ This speaks to the expectation that students need to go straight into college after high school and while that is a good option, it is not the only one and so I did not want to perpetuate that within the game. So students have the option, but it is certainly isn’t necessary.

turns affects their grades, learning, and ability to graduate from school. So, with the dropout meter, players will go through the school year beginning with a 100% graduation rate and as they go through various experiences, those outcomes will affect their dropout rate meter. Once a student reaches the red in their meter, they will be forced to drop out of high school and thus be unable to win the game. Lastly, for each student, the red zone was determined based on the statistics from the National Center of Education statistics on the dropout rates as seen in each race/ethnicity were used to ensure accuracy.

However, it is important to note that it should not be generalized that this means students of color are always dropping out compared to their white peers, but rather that, it is simply statistics and all students have the opportunity to prove otherwise. The game allows for that flexibility due to the various components of probability including rolling for one's outcome in the experience cards and the randomization of the path so the outcome of the game will be different each time. For some games, everyone may graduate and in others no one may graduate, but the statistics still echoes throughout the game to illustrate the disparities experienced as a result of racial/ethnic privilege.

Learning Pedagogy.

Throughout the development of the game, various learning pedagogies were examined to understand what would be the best way for students to learn about the concepts at hand and to obtain the learning outcome outlined earlier. When looking at the game in its entirety from the design of the board to how the game relies on

transparency of each player's experience, privileged or not, the game implements two specific learning pedagogies: social constructivism and experiential learning.

Social Constructivism.

Social Constructivism is defined as learning occurring through social encounters with peers, educators, or even one's parents. This moves away from the traditional model of learning which is learning only occurs from the teacher giving the information to the students. However, in social constructivism, it is understood that students have their own set of knowledge which can help bring forth more information and clarification to the topics at hand for the entire classroom (Herrera, 2015). This is an important part of the concept to acknowledge since at the end of the day, the game does draw from real-life and with that comes the understanding that there will be students who live these moments every day. They have knowledge of what is going on and to not let them express this knowledge on the matter is simply counterproductive to learning itself. So, one aspect of the game that embraces this is having teachers be in a more observational role, rather than an instructor, as the students play the game. It is encouraged that students deal with all that happens in the game and in discussions to happen later, they can draw from those experiences and provide their perspectives and interpretations of what privilege was in their eyes before getting the knowledge of their instructor.

Other areas of the game that include social constructivism is the design of the game board as mentioned earlier in that section above with the support of Vygotsky's theory of ZPD and this accomplishes the second learning outcome of developing more empathy. Lastly, there is the discussions that are meant to happen right after the

game ends. Based on their observation of the students' gameplay for the day, teachers can help facilitate conversations about what the students observed in the game and prompt questions to further the discussion on privilege. This ultimately does accomplish the first learning outcome, but again, not in the traditional learning method of one large lecture. Rather, it is done through the students' knowledge gained through the game, plus help from the instructor to fill in the gaps and clarify any misinterpretations.

Experiential Learning.

The second learning theory which I believe is implemented well throughout the game and helps the student learn about racial/ethnic privilege well is through experiential learning. The utilization of this learning theory to teach about issues of inequality is not a new approach. Carreiro & Kapitulik (2010) when analyzing what pedagogical approaches have been utilized since 1987-2007 found that most of them included some form of experiential learning by either simulating the real-world or bringing it into the classroom. The reason for the popularity in utilizing this learning theory is to have students go beyond simply reading about these topics, but to be able to **experience** it by taking on the perspective of a student of color or having a family who is living below the poverty line, for example. It gets the student thinking and engaging with the material in a completely different way – one which will hopefully stick with them for a long time. And so, the game has players engaging in experiential learning by having them be one of the 12 students in Eureka High's Senior class and as they navigate their senior year, they will encounter various experiences that make the year more difficult or easier and students/players must make decisions with or

without the limitations that privilege creates. It is certainly different from reading about privilege which would be a harder way to introduce the concept to students who are more likely to have never encountered it before and it keeps the students interested through the gaming format.

However, as discussed earlier, a large issue to these approaches in the past have been placing students who already experience inequality to “pretend” to be those individuals and ultimately create a very uncomfortable environment for them. I had taken these into consideration and included the necessary game rules to hopefully prevent it from happening, however, I cannot guarantee that it does not which is why within the teacher’s guide I will be providing helpful resources to help facilitate conversations if it goes there and helping teachers understand what the concept of a “safe space” is.

As one can see, these learning pedagogies are being implemented in the game and by moving it beyond the traditional model of learning, the hope is that students will be engaged with the material, will be able to remember it better, and will accomplish the learning outcomes.

Language of Instructions.

At first glance, players will not be able to detect any signs of privilege or disparities, unless they analyze their student IDs very closely, and are more likely to assume that the game is fair and that their likelihood of losing the game is up to chance. This was accomplished in how I chose to phrase the corresponding instructions to various parts of the game. For example, when explaining what happens when players land on any of the spaces, it does not invite any reason to suspect the

game is unfair since the perception around event spaces are that they are random. However, while the cards are shuffled and the spaces are random, how each event affects each player is different and players will not discover this until they start playing the game.

The reason why I had purposely written the instructions with this tone is because the game is intentionally unfair and difficult for the players who is a student of color and is a lot easier for players who are the white students in the game and it is important that the players connect the dots themselves as they navigate the game. So, on the surface, it is merely a game where our middle school students have an opportunity to experience being a high school senior and see what the future may hold. However, this type of set-up to the game allows for the most organic reactions from students.

Teacher's Guide.⁴

With any new teaching tool, it is important that teachers are provided guides and resources to help ensure that the learning outcomes are accomplished and that they are as knowledgeable as possible on the subject matter at hand. These are all important to the success of the game and so I would like to include a teacher's guide along with the instructions of game. This teacher's guide will include several components and these are the 2-3 sections I imagine would be in the guide.

There will be a section on vocabulary which will include the words and definitions that teachers should know themselves to be able to teach it and see it within the game. Another section is a list of sample discussions and lesson plans. The

⁴ A sample of the teacher's guide can be found in appendix D.

discussions can be had after the students have played the game to help expand on what was observed in the game and connect it to either other ethnic studies issues or serve to help clarify it. As for the lesson plans, it would include activities that students can engage in to help utilize what they have learned and apply it in some form. Lastly, there will be a section which breaks down all the components to the game, much like what this thesis is doing, and the teacher can use it to help address the frustration their students will be feeling from playing the game.

Resilience.

Finally, in addition to those various resources that will be provided to teachers as they help their students through the game, it is important to acknowledge an even larger role that teachers are playing here and that is in helping students combat the negative effects that may manifest due to the difficult racial/ethnic educational, socio-economic, family, social and many other challenges that are explicitly referenced within the game.

The negative effects that I am speaking of include, but are certainly not limited to, the ones I have discussed previously. There is the effect of causing the students to feel uncomfortable due to placing them in a situation where they may have to discuss those experiences or expose that they live them. In addition to that, there is the way in which the students could interpret the game, especially students of color, where the game seems to point to a definitive outcome for each race/ethnicity in the game (ie. Students of color are most likely to drop out and their white counterparts are most likely to graduate) as well as confirming any stereotypes/bias since some forms of privilege result from stereotypes/bias like the one about which classes you

get suggested. And while I tried to find some ways to help minimize those results, it is not preventative. Randomly assigning students to their racial/ethnic character is not a guarantee of avoiding those negative effects on the students since there is still a chance that the student might get their identifying character so the role of the instructor and how this curriculum will be built as well as introduced to students is crucial.

Presently, many educators and researchers have determined students' resilience as an important factor to helping minimize those negative effects. Student resilience in this context looks at "an ability to not overreact to stress, specific coping and problem-solving skills, a history of success in coping with race-related situations, a perception of being capable of manipulating the world and controlling one's destiny, and a healthy and well-integrated sense of self" (Moule, 2012). These are extremely important and the Stanford study previously mentioned in the thesis notes that ethnic studies programs are only successful due to the incorporation of such "buffering" strategies which help students combat the stress of stereotypes and discussing issues about race/ethnicity. (Penner & Dee, 2016).

Thus, what will happen through the inclusion of these strategies is that the students can handle the "less than ideal" outcomes of the game as well as the difficult discussions that are to come from what they experienced mentally and emotionally within the game, thus, helping students develop these abilities/skills to deal with the game are important to considered as teachers use this as a teaching tool for such difficult topics. Moule (2012) also notes that this is especially important for students who go through these as an everyday experience and I concur.

So, what should educators consider incorporating into their classrooms and ways of teaching? There are many things that can be done including being a culturally-responsive teacher who can create the safe space to have constructive discussions. They also make an effort to question the stereotypes/bias they have developed and see where those may be manifesting as they teach and engage with those students. The space is provided in the curriculum to have an open discussion about stereotypes the students see in the game and provide resources and opportunities to help change that fixed mindset. Ultimately, they are reaffirming a different perspective that these students do not hear often enough and that is one where discussion about their struggles and experiences are not frowned upon and that they are not defined by stereotypes/bias.

In addition to being a culturally-responsive teacher, they should observe the conversations being had between the students to understand where the class is with these topics in order to determine when a good time to bring the curriculum in is. Lastly, it is also important to note if there are students who start to feel uncomfortable and would rather opt-out of the game. Providing this option is important since you do not want to force students into anything they are not ready for and it can be its own learning opportunity to have the student reflect on why they are not ready.

These are just a few things that can be done and research points to a number of other ways to help build resilience, but the important thing to note about this particular section is that these students are coming in with a number of experiences which play a role in how they will respond to the game, and whether they get a

positive or negative game and curriculum experience is dependent on what precautions have been taken to provide them the tools to deal with all that is to come.

Discussion/Analysis

The POC experience, as previously stated, is often left out of the conversation when looking at school curricula. However, when it is told, only certain parts of the story are considered and often it is the differences seen in trivial matters like food, music, or holidays. The experience goes beyond differences in food and music. It includes struggles and inequalities like how privilege differs according to one's race/ethnicity. This is not discussed enough in the classroom and so this game takes on the challenge of doing so to help complete the incomplete puzzle. Additionally, through the research done with the game development and learning from what has been done in the past, this game has interpreted the following social justice topics to make it more age-appropriate for middle school students in all aspects from the game theme to the experience cards, yet it still tests the students by having multiple racial/ethnic perspectives and challenges the typical high school experience by factoring in racial/ethnic privilege. We look now to the concern raised earlier in the thesis about finding age-appropriate methods to discuss these issues and the truth of the matter is the fact that it can be done and done well. And if this is only the beta version of the game, what can be accomplished with more time and resources? The limitations found and areas for future research will point to the direction that this game can take in future versions.

Limitations.

One limitation that I need to acknowledge about the game is in its accessibility. For instance, the game is only in English since, as the creator of the game, that is my first language. However, I understand that not all middle schoolers speak English. Many schools have students who are ELL or English language learners and according to NCES's data on ELL students, in the school year 2014-2015, schools saw an increase to 9.4% (~4.6 million students) versus 9.1% in 2004-2005 and 9.3% in 2013-2014. Another important piece of data is that there were more ELL students in the lower grade levels than upper with 6.8 percent of them are 8th-graders compared to 4.1% in 12th-grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This reinforces the importance of making the game accessible by providing it in various languages and will require the help of other experts in those areas to make the game as accessible as possible.

Future Research.

The current version of the game does not include a full set of cards for any deck including the experience and space cards. This is due to the desire to ensure authenticity of the game and to avoid stereotypes/biases that I may place in the creation of these cards which are meant to represent the experiences of the various races/ethnicities, many of which I do not identify in and cannot speak to. Thus, for future research, I would like to conduct interviews with high school seniors who identify in these communities and to do a field study on their experience throughout the year. This information will help with the creation of the cards to understand which

areas, be it academics, social, family, etc., do these students have issues with and where they may see privilege manifest.

Another area for future research is in receiving feedback on the game from middle school educators on its ability to accomplish the learning outcomes sought, whether it has been designed well enough to be considered age-appropriate for the age-group, and if the game is readable. To accomplish this, a study should be conducted with the game once a final prototype has been created to gather data from a sample middle school classroom which will illustrate the effectiveness of the game. This will move the process from initial stages of development and vision to the final stages of implementation within the classrooms and various ethnic studies programs.

The last area of future research to consider is whether to make the game an OER or Open Educational Resource⁵. What began in 2002, the OER movement was developed with the goal of providing free high quality learning and teaching resources to all no matter the economic or social restraints and that these various resources can be edited, shared, or reused by the community through creative commons license (Matkin, 2010). The idea of the game being an OER means that it could 1) lessen the financial burden on the educator to obtain this resource and 2) through the collaboration of others, be it educators or experts in fields including, but not limited to, ethnic studies and education, the game can be improved upon where is seen fit from this beta version. This can include being translated into other languages, being adapted to fit the classroom's diversity and needs, and makes it open to the

⁵ Coined by UNESCO (2002), OER is defined as "The open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes."

development of extension components like game cards and characters which speak to other identities. These two components alone interest me to add the game to the movement so further research should go into understanding the benefits and downfalls to making the game an OER and if it is a viable option, learn what the next steps are in the process.

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High School Uncovered

Number of Players: 6

Age Range: 10-13 year olds

Playing Time: 45-60 mins

Objective

At this age, high school seems like it is a million years away, however, in “High School Uncovered” you will be able to experience the most important time of high school: senior year! Navigate this significant year as you face the challenges of graduating, applying to colleges, and taking the SAT/ACTs all the while balancing your social and personal life! No one said senior year was going to be easy, but your goal is simple: graduate and make the most of this moment!

Content

- 1 Game Board
- 6 stands
- 6 student character pieces
- 6 student ID cards
- 6 arrow clips
- 1 dice
- 3 decks of 10 cards for Fall, Winter, and Spring
- 1 deck of cards for
 - Family spaces
 - School spaces
 - Social spaces
 - Fees spaces
 - Job-related spaces

Game Assembly

Student Characters

There are 12 characters to choose from and each one has their corresponding student ID and token piece. Punch out the student IDs and corresponding student character pieces. Student ID cards are to be given to each player once their character has been chosen. The student character pieces should be placed on one of the 6 stands provided.

Cards

For the cards that have to do with the outer part of the board:

Separate the cards into their respective decks: Fall Experiences, Winter Experiences, and Spring Experiences and place each deck near the side of the board with the same name.

For the cards that have to do with the board spaces: separate cards into their piles and find a spot on the table where they are within reach of each player.

Arrow Clips

One arrow clip should be placed on the 1 space in the Fall section to indicate the start of the school year. The rest of the clips are to be placed on the student ID in the middle of the graduation gauge.

Game Setup

Game Board

The board and cards should be placed in the middle of the table where it is within reach for each player.

Who are You?

There are 12 student characters available in this game and the character that the player will be is determined randomly by dice roll. Each player will get a chance to roll the dice to determine their player with the oldest player going first. You will notice that each number has two characters assigned and while you do not get to pick the race/ethnicity that your character is, you may choose which gender you would like to be for the game. The characters assigned to each number on the dice is as follows:

1. **Liam**, male White high school student/**Angela**, female White high school student
2. **Lin**, female Asian high school student/**Vivaan**, male Asian high school student
3. **Brielle**, female African American high school student/**Jaiden**, male African American high school student
4. **Diego**, male Latino high school student/**Pilar**, female Latina high school student
5. **Leilani**, female Pacific Islander high school student/**Peyton**, male Pacific Islander high school student
6. **Teetonka**, male Native American high school student/**Meadow**, female Native American high school student

Once players have been assigned their student characters, student ID cards can be passed out and place your student character piece at the START space on the game board. **NOTE:** *There can only be one character of each race/ethnicity per game so if someone already rolled for Liam, you must roll again until you get a character who is not already assigned to a player.*

Game Play

To determine who goes first, all players take turns rolling the dice. The player with the highest roll gets to go first and so on. This determines the turn order for the rest of the game. The game consists of 30 rounds total (10 in each term) and each player gets 1 turn in each round.

On Your Turn

You will start your turn by rolling the dice to see how many spaces you will move. Once the dice has been rolled, move that many spaces. If you land on a space that is already occupied by another player, you may stay in that space. Next, follow the directions on the space you land on. (Ie. If you land on a space titled Family Event, pick up the corresponding card and follow the directions on that card.) ***All events should be read aloud so other players can know what is going on.*** Your turn ends when you finish what is required from that space and it is the next player's turn to move.

When all players have moved...

Once all players have made their turns for that round, the last player to move will draw a card from the term section they are in (ie. All players start in the Fall term so at the end of the round, the last player will draw a card from the Fall Experiences pile.) This card affects every player so the player who drew the card will read it aloud and then players will follow said directions after the card is read aloud. The round ends when all players have finished what was required of them and the last player of the game moves the arrow clip to the next square in the timeline to indicate the start of the next round. The next round begins with the first player starting their turn.

Special Conditions

Timeline – thankfully the school year doesn't last forever and you can keep track of it with the timeline which goes around the board! Remember to move the arrow clip to the next space every time a group turn ends to indicate that the next round begins. Also, remember to draw an experience card before moving onto the next round!

Board Spaces – be mindful of the space you land on! All you have to do is follow the instructions on the space or from the card you draw. There are seven categories of spaces:

1. **Blank Spaces:** Nothing occurs in these spaces, but depending on what is happening in the moment, this space may finally be a moment for you to catch your breath or you may find yourself itching to be anywhere else. High school is filled with moments like these and it's all in how you interpret it!
2. **Family Spaces:** You can't live with, can't live without – it's your family! In these spaces, you will juggle the demands that your family is asking of you!
3. **Random Action Spaces:** Like life, these spaces are a toss-up! You'll never know what can happen here, so watch out!
4. **Social Spaces:** Let's be honest – as much as we love school and homework, what makes our school experience great are our friends and our social lives! Take advantage of these moments and have fun!
5. **Fees Spaces:** High school comes with fees? You better believe it! From extracurriculars like sports and clubs to field trips, it makes your senior year that more special!
6. **Job-related Spaces:** Getting a job is a common high school experience, but will you be able to balance the demands of that job and school? These spaces will challenge you and allow you to earn some extra cash!
7. **School Spaces:** These are related to everything and anything to do with school from meeting your adviser to homework!

Special Cards – while you have your cards for the spaces on the board, there are a secondary set of cards specific to the section of the year you are in. Depending on the term you are in, each one has its own set of 10 cards with events that will affect each player.

Student ID Cards – each player will be given their student ID card and this card has details about the student including, their name, graduation year, student ID, class standing, and race/ethnic identity.

Drop Out Meter – Each student ID card includes a drop out meter found at the bottom of their card. Players place an arrow clip at the 100% mark and as they progress through the game, if they encounter experiences which affect their

ability to graduate, the meter goes down a certain percentage. If they get to the red before reaching the end of the game or graduation, the player will be forced to drop out of high school and wait until the game is over.

Winning/Scoring

A winner of the game is someone who reaches to the end of it and graduates from Eureka High School. If no one graduates from high school, the person who dropped out last is declared the winner.

Rev. 6/7/17

Appendix B: Examples of Game Pieces

Example of a Student ID



Character Pieces



Appendix C: Board Design



Appendix D: Sample of Teacher's Guide

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be introduced to the social justice issue of privilege and race/ethnicity
2. Students will develop their skills in empathy as they engage with the high school experience through the lens of an ethnicity/race other than their own

Lesson Plans

1. *“Through the Eyes of the Senior Class”*

- a. *Objective of the Lesson:* The lesson will cement what the students have learned from the game by finding real-life examples of those aspects in the game within their own high school.
- b. *What Students should do to prepare for lesson:*
 - i. They can be broken into teams according to the races/ethnicities that they were able to play in the game
 - ii. They will each be in charge of coming up with 10 questions to ask high school seniors about their experience in high school
 - I. Have the students reflect on what stood out to them in the game when they were in those shoes like parts of the game they felt was unfair or about various experiences they went through
 - iii. Each group will then bring back the information to report to the class what they have learned and if they saw any comparisons or differences between the life of the characters in the game to the real-life counterpart

Sample Discussions

1. *“What is in a Name?”*

- a. *Objective of the Discussion:* Students should learn about the importance of pronouncing a name correctly, no matter the difficulty.
- b. *Game Aspect to Look at:* The names of the characters in the game
- c. *Questions to Prompt Students with:*
 - i. “What do you notice about these names?”
 - ii. “Can we try saying some of these names?”
 - iii. “Which ones are more difficult to say and why do you think that is?”

- iv. “Who here has had to correct someone on the pronunciation of their name? How many times did it take for them to get it right?”
- v. “Were you ever told to change your name to make it easier to say? How did that make you feel?”
- vi. “Why is it important to pronounce someone’s name correctly or the way that they want it?”

Sample Vocabulary

Safe Spaces: According to the Webster Dictionary, it is “a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm”.

Privilege: “A group of unearned cultural, legal, social, and institutional rights extended to a group based on their social group membership. Individuals with privilege are considered to be the normative group, leaving those without access to this privilege invisible, unnatural, deviant, or just plain wrong. Most of the time, these privileges are automatic and most individuals in the privileged group are unaware of them (University, 2015)”

Intersectionality: “A feminist sociological model and/or lens for critical analysis that focuses on the intersections of multiple, mutually-reinforcing systems of oppression, power, and privilege. Intersectional theorists look at how the individual experience is impacted by multiple axes of oppression and privilege. Variables include, but are not limited to: race, gender, ethnicity, religion ability, education, sexual orientation, sexuality, gender identity, gender expression, class, first language, citizenship, and age (University, 2015).”

Stereotypes: “is a simplistic image or distorted truth about a person or group based on a prejudgment of habits, traits, abilities, or expectations (Moule, 2012).”

