

Reviews

ZAN-TEC'S GAME: Teaching Responsibility to Future Generations. Powers, R. B. (1988). Oceanside, OR: Educational Simulations (P.O. Box 307, Oceanside, OR 97134, USA).

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Basic data:

Objective: Awareness of impact of actions on future generations.

Target audience: A wide audience, probably eighth grade and up.

Playing time: 3 hours per generation.

Number of players: 12 to 24.

Materials included: Operator's manual, assistant's manual, payoff matrices, player's manual, resource indicator.

Other equipment needed: Building materials, calculator, Zan-Tec "bucks" (optional).

Price: \$65 (plus shipping and handling).

Designed by Richard Powers in an attempt to raise consciousness about the impact of our actions on future generations, this game is a superb vehicle for education. This game took the NASAGA annual conference by storm each of the past 2 years, dominating conversation throughout the week. It is an extremely playable game, as well as being fairly simple to run.

The basic idea is that an alien, named Zan-Tec, has come to Earth to observe our culture. In an effort to impart some of his culture to Earthlings, he developed this game. People are encouraged to play this game and learn if they can.

There are a number of interesting features to this game, including intergenerational and intercultural exchanges of information and learning. The basic play of the game uses the simple mechanism of rolling a die or dice in order to obtain either points or money, depending on your inclination. The trick is that there are three distinct cultures starting the game with a different

number of dice. The rumor is that more dice increase potential for resources, and a quick review of the payoff matrices reveals that the rumor might very well be true. This money can be used for a number of purposes, one of the most important of which is staying alive. It can also be used for purchasing additional dice, building materials, or health insurance, as well as investment in banks, trust funds, and resources. All teams get their resource points from the same source: the pool of resources established at the beginning of the game.

The best way of using this game is to play it with different groups representing successive generations of each of the three cultures on consecutive days. The game is designed to encompass several generations. If there is a clear beginning and the participants are informed that the results of their play will establish the foundations for the next generation, participants are often more directed toward responsibility, both cultural and global. Each of the original three cultural teams is given a description of its culture and goals. The three cultures have differing goals, sometimes in conflict with other cultures. The objectives all have some connection to physical structures, hence the building materials. There comes an inevitable conflict when one group is erecting massive structures, while other cultures are struggling to stay alive.

The real motivator in the game is the state of resource indicator. As structures start to go up and bank accounts get fat, the resource pool starts to decline. As the pool declines, points get harder and harder to get. There is an obvious lesson here about the state of our world's resources. The only way to stop the decline is to reduce consumption and reinvest in resources. Of course, some cultures refuse to engage in these activities, believing that it is someone else's responsibility.

There is some mistrust because communication is limited between groups. It is handled by one member of each team, known as the negotiator. The game operator should pay careful attention to the negotiations, as they are extremely useful and interesting sessions. Through these negotiations, cultures try to accomplish their goals with respect to the other cultures.

Throughout the game, one member of each team also keeps a record, a history of what the team is doing and why. This history is passed along to the next generation of their culture, producing an intergenerational effect. It is also useful to have someone from preceding generations counsel new players through the first round of each successive generation. In theory, this is very useful, but in practice, it is difficult to arrange.

Although the game plays well when only one generation is used, some of its power is lost. It works best when run on consecutive days, preferably in a location where game artifacts can be left in place. While keeping track of the funds and histories is simple enough to do over time, maintaining structures is not. Although this may seem to be a drawback, it can be an advantage, since the intergenerational play allows many interesting experiments, such as reversal of cultural status in different generations, and parents and children playing successive runs.

Running the game requires three or four helpers, who can be trained in a short time. When I ran it for a Boy Scout group, a 13-year-old was able to handle the job of banker with only 10 minutes of instruction. The manuals are all clearly written and easily understandable.

Required materials not included with the kit are all simple, easily acquired objects, depending on materials used for construction: tape, scissors, markers, and so on. Dick Powers suggests Construct-O-Straws, made by Galt toys, which I found excellent for construction, especially when supplemented with bendable straws and swizzle sticks.

In the six sessions that I either directed, participated in, or observed, the debriefing never failed to bring out most of the key environmental and cultural issues that the game is intended to address. Boy Scouts, a Hebrew day school, and even college professors clearly got the message. This is an exceptional game, imparting a powerful message in a fairly brief period of time, while remaining interesting for participants and operators alike. I recommend it strongly.

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