Planes and Links Game

This is an activity that can be used early on in the course to introduce the idea of scarce resources. It is a group activity designed for 8–10 students at a time. With larger numbers two groups may be more appropriate and with fewer students remove one pair of scissors.

It might be an idea (if this is to be used in the first lesson) to get students to watch the link below in advance.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS_9A_EA30M

Equipment:

2 pairs of scissors, 1 roll of sellotape and a big wedge of A4 paper.

Preparation:

Show the class how to make 'links' (cut a strip of paper from an A4 sheet, curl into a circle and sellotape the ends together. Repeat but this time the second 'link' should be curled around the first before being taped, thereby creating a longer chain of 'links' – we are talking paper chains here).

Then show the class how to make aeroplanes from the sheets of paper.

Stage 1:

(1) Tell the class to make as many 'links' in 1 minute as possible and record the result.

However many they produce, tell them that it was not good enough and now they should set themselves up more effectively and try again. This is important because it will allow you to talk about PARETO INEFFICIENCY later on (not efficiently utilising labour).

(2) Record the result of the second production round.

Stage 2:

(1) With the same resources, tell them to make as many aeroplanes in 1 minute as possible. Record the result.

Stage 3:

(1) Now split the class in half. Half of the class will make aeroplanes, half will make chains. Give them 1 minute again to make as many as possible. Record the result.

Stage 4:

Plot the data on a whiteboard at the front. The results should allow you to draw the PPF of a theoretical economy that only produces links and aeroplanes. The PPF should allow you to ask a number of interesting questions about this economy and its production capability. For example:

What would have changed, if you had had more scissors, what about more sellotape, more people, more paper?

How many aeroplanes did I forgo making by shifting resources to make chains?

How many 'links' did I forgo making by making those aeroplanes?

Had the economy only produced the lower number of paper chains in the first stage, where would that point be? What does that suggest about the economy?

Why is it not possible to produce everything that you want?

Where next?

From this game you have introduced the idea of scarce resources and inefficiency. Next you can move on to the idea of resource allocation – how are resources to be allocated in practice? Next you could use the Market and Command Economies resource as an introduction to how resources should be allocated.