

INTEGRATE IN SCHOOL

A Cultural Awareness Programme for Pre-University and Tertiary Students by Migrant Voices

INTRODUCTION

Integrate is a series of programmes and events organized by Migrant Voices to bring people from different cultures together to foster social cohesion through the arts. The first Integrate was held at The Substation and Timbre Bistro & Bar in September 2006 and was co-organized with CrashOut!. It featured static and installation artworks as well as performances by bands made up of both Singaporeans and migrant workers. In May 2008, the second Integrate was held at the Post-Museum showroom and was a 2-day exhibition to commemorate Labour Day, featuring performances by migrant workers and Singaporeans.

Integrate in School is a similar programme targeted at Pre-University and Tertiary students to set them thinking about co-existing with different cultures, while at the same time exploring their own stereotypes and conventions. It is a workshop-style programme and during each session, the participants will be introduced to the work of Migrant Voices and get a taste of what we do.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To create personal awareness about each participant's social values and stereotypes
- 2) To create awareness about other cultures, Migrant Workers and the migration issue
- 3) To encourage dialogue amongst the participants about social issues
- 4) To encourage students to get involved in community work
- 5) To gather information and content for future works by Migrant Voices

PROGRAMME**1) Self-Introduction & Participant Warm Ups**

This is an introduction to theatre games and activities conducted during theatre workshops by Migrant Voices. The objective is to give an idea on how we get our audience and participants to warm up and start interacting with each other.

The intention is to create a warm, cordial environment for discussion to take place. It is only when people warm up to each other can we have a better, more interactive discussion.

Blind Bus

Objective: Get participants to lower their inhibitions as well as to make everyone more comfortable with each other.

- Line participants up in a single file with their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them
- Everyone except the first person will have to close their eyes
- The first person will start moving around the room and everyone is to follow
- The participants are to feel the features of the person in front of them for 1 minute
- The chain is to break up and participants will have to walk around the room, wrapping their arms around themselves for safety.
- The participants are to find the person in front of them and get back into the chain

2) Stereotypes Workshop**Purpose**

The basic function of this exercise is to explore existing ideas and stereotypes the participants have about people of other cultures and nationalities. The intention of this is to make the participants more aware about themselves and encourage them to be less judgmental. At the end of the day, nobody is 100% objective, but we can promote social integration and harmony by taking the effort to understand other people's cultures and habits, while at the same time making sure we judge people for who they really are instead of basing it on their race, religion or nationality.

Setup

Regardless of the number of people, the participants are to split up into 10 groups. Ideally, they should be seated on the floor and/or in circles. Each group will be given a workshop kit.

Each workshop kit will contain:

- An A4 sheet with the flag of the country they are to represent.
This is to be displayed somewhere visible in the centre of the circle
- 8 A5 worksheets
Preferably, each member should be given one worksheet, but the group has to complete all 8 worksheets.

Execution

PART 1: Description

Each group is given a set of 8 worksheets, each with a different nationality to describe. The participants in each group can discuss among themselves first.

On the worksheet, they are to list down the first two things that come to their mind about people from that specified country. The categories are:

- Physical Appearance
This is especially easy for homogeneous societies but when it comes to multicultural ones, it may be slightly tougher. However, the participants can also mention things such as clothes, fashion and accessories.
- Occupation
The participants are to list down the occupation that people from that particular country usually take up when they are here in Singapore.
- Social Habit
This refers to the customs, social interaction and behavior people from that particular country typically show or express. It can also refer to norms and generic observations of people from that particular country.
- Living Environment
The living environment refers to not only to the living conditions but also things such as social spaces.
- Miscellaneous
For this category, the participants can fill in anything that comes to their mind. Some good pointers would be the places they frequent or even the food they eat. But the idea of this is to capture any other opinions. The facilitators should try as hard as possible not to give clues.

The 10 groups are

- India / Bangladesh
- Philippines / Indonesia
- Germany / Japan
- China / Thailand
- Vietnam / Malaysia

This part of the exercise should not take too long. The time limit placed on this is **10 minutes** as the participants are not supposed to think through and validate. They are to write down **the first thing that comes to their mind**.

PART 2: Collating

The worksheets will have to be collated after they have been filled. The participants will go around to find the group that is representing that country and pass the worksheet to them.

The group now has to collate the 2 most common responses from each category and list it down on the whiteboard (or excel spreadsheet).

This should not take longer than **10 minutes**.

PART 3: Discussion

Now the group starts to role-play, by assuming they are people from the specified country. They are to evaluate and analyze the response. The 5 main questions they should ask themselves are:

1. Are these stereotypes valid? If yes, what are the reasons behind the practices? If no, what are the misconceptions?
2. Are they offended by these remarks?
3. Why do they think Singaporeans make such remarks?
4. Why are they here in Singapore?
5. What made them leave their home country?
6. How do they want Singaporeans to think of them?

A participant from the group will be picked out to share the responses and another 2 more participants will be asked 2 out of the 6 questions on top of some random introductory questions like:

- What is your name?
- Which part of your country are you from?
- What is your religion?
- What are you working as here in Singapore?
- What is your highest qualification?

NOTE: The participants are supposed to be role-playing, so the responses need to be in character.

During the course of the discussion, only the facilitators can break out of the role-play to clarify information and facts.

This discussion should take about **30 minutes**.

PART 4: Round Up

The main facilitator will round up with a message like something like:

There are many preconceived ideas we have about people from other countries and cultures. Stereotypes do have certain factual roots, but it should not be the way for us to judge an individual, or a community for that matter. In fact, it should be a way for us to learn and accommodate people from other cultures. The priority here is to build mutual understanding and respect, to avoid miscommunication and improve interaction. Constant interaction is important and we should not form judgment of people before we interact with them.

From a cultural awareness and intelligence perspective, having a good understanding and knowledge of other cultures will definitely be beneficial. But in practicality, the best way to build our cultural quotient is to listen, observe and comprehend. One way is to make sure that all judgment is made only when enough information and facts are provided.

Unlike EQ or IQ, CQ can be developed quite easily. The better we understand people, the easier for us to work together and live harmoniously with one another. This is especially important for an ever increasingly globalized society like Singapore.

3) Screening of Film

The participants will be shown a short film. This is to give them an idea of what Migrant Voices does as well as to start thinking about the issues that domestic workers in Singapore face. This will act as a transition to a dialogue on improving social integration between the migrant and local community.

The dialogue and “Forum” section will not be screened.

This will take approximately **15 minutes** and is also doubles up as a ‘break’.

4) Discussion on Integration

Facilitating questions:

1. Given that foreign workers are usually here on contract periods, is it really necessary to integrate them into our society?
 - a. What are the consequences for not integrating?
 - b. How can we integrate them?
 - c. Does everything need to be decreed from a policy level?
 - d. What about as an individual?

2. In Singapore, we have approximately 250,000 domestic workers and 500,000 construction workers. We have a residential population of 4.8 million. This means they make up almost 63% of the non-resident population and 16% of our entire population.

With 1.2 million non-residents and 478,000 Permanent Residents, the total foreign population in Singapore is about 1.7 million, making up 35% of our population.

The numbers are really stark, and puts to question the new benchmark for discrimination. No longer are people discriminating just based on skin colour, race or religion, what is more prevalent today is that people, even our own government, are discriminating people of different classes.

Taking Serangoon Gardens as an example. Do we really think the main issue is the security and congestion? It actually all boils down to one issue. What do you think it may be?

- a. Why are Singaporeans reacting this way?
- b. Do you think the government itself is discriminating?
- c. What do you think is the Singapore culture and does it form a basis for this issue?

This should **last to the last 20 minutes** of the event.

5) Conclusion & Event Promotion

Promotion of upcoming projects, events, volunteer recruitment & purchase of merchandise.