



4

I am not a racist but...

Image and stereotyping about minorities

THEME: Images and stereotyping about different minorities. Prejudices and the limits of tolerance of each person. How we form our opinions about other people and social groups.

DURATION: 2 hours (up to 2 1/2 hours)

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: up to 40

STAFF REQUIRED: 1 leader plus 2 assistants to help with the organisation of small groups.

BACKGROUND

In Workshops 4 and 5, we are going to look at the problem of "majority-minority" from two different angles: here, at national level, and in Workshop No. 5, at international level.

First, a brief overview of the subject, which is, by definition, complex and multifaceted.

What is a minority group?

Contrary to superficial appearances, a minority group is not necessarily numerically smaller than the majority group, even though this is quite often the case. It is the relationship of power and status that determines the two categories. The majority group is the dominant segment of society while the minority group is the victim of economic disadvantage or social inequality.

Why does this situation exist?

It is impossible to answer this question without referring to the historical circumstances of each society. Indeed, the relationship existing at a given time between a particular dominant group and a particular minority group is dictated by historical factors (war, colonisation, immigration, wealth, etc.), by the evolution of

those factors during a certain period of time (it may be years, decades or even centuries), and by the particular stance that each group takes towards the other.

What is the basis for prejudice and discrimination?

Any characteristic can serve as a basis, depending on the country and its particular circumstances: race (physical appearance, colour of skin, etc.), ethnic group, geographical origin, culture and traditions, language, religion, caste, etc. It is important to stress that in most of the cases those concepts are vague and have no scientific foundation at all. However, their impact is very real.





Why is such an impact so important?

Because of its very nature, prejudice is a negative emotional bias against a group of people. It applies to the whole category, without distinction, and it is highly resistant to change. In fact, it becomes part of the culture and is transmitted from generation to generation. For that reason, it is frequently found deeply rooted in an individual's attitudes and behaviour.

What are the consequences for the minority group?

They are negative from many points of view:

- People can be labelled, called names, be the subject of pejorative jokes – all this has an impact on their self-esteem.
- They can be ignored or isolated, confined to certain quarters in a city or a region.
- They can be given the worst jobs, or no jobs at all.
- They can be made into criminals, if there are laws that make their way of life illegal.
- Finally, as has happened in extreme cases, they can be tortured, killed or massacred, individually or as a group.

What can be done to fight prejudice and discrimination?

First of all, it is important not to refer to prejudice as an abstract definition. It is important to identify it in concrete terms in a given society. The more clearly it is defined, the better people will be able to discuss it openly and to overcome it.

Secondly, it is important to identify it in our own attitude and behaviour, to see it in ourselves, before looking for it in others, to see it in our own society before looking at other societies.

Thirdly, as prejudice is quite often a very irrational attitude, it is important to discover the roots or origins in each concrete case, to explore its historical evolution, to detect the mechanisms. The more seriously and honestly this is done, the more one looks for truth, the better people are able to face prejudice with a positive attitude and free themselves from it. (ref. 1)





CROSS-REFERENCE:

The following three workshops concur with the objectives of the eight “peace treasures”, particularly that of “tolerance and solidarity”, by broaching the problem of the increasing discrepancy between the rich and the poor, the mighty and the underprivileged, the North and the South. This workshop broaches the problem of minorities, while No. 5 tackles the North-South issue and No. 6 the refugee problem.

KEY MESSAGES

- Contrary to a widespread opinion, you do not have to be a “hard-core racist” to have prejudices against certain categories of people.
- The best way to fight these tendencies is to identify them in concrete terms in our own attitudes and behaviour.
- To free ourselves from prejudice is not a one-off action but a process which requires sustained effort and perseverance.

PURPOSE/AIMS/OBJECTIVES

The main purposes of this workshop are:

- To challenge participants’ stereotypes and prejudices about other people, and about minorities in particular.
- To reflect on the perceptions different participants have on minorities.
- To raise self-awareness about the limits of tolerance.
- To confront the different values and stereotypes of the participants.
- To explore briefly the main sources of knowledge/information on which we sometimes base our judgement on people and events.



METHOD AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVITY

Preparation

Required material:

- Big world map to be displayed in the plenary session room.
- Copies of the activity sheet "EURO-RAIL A LA CARTE", one per participant.
- A pencil for each participant.
- Blackboard or flipchart for plenary sessions.
- Markers.

Implementation

Plenary session

1. Introduction

The leader welcomes the participants and draws their attention to the big world map that is being displayed on the blackboard or on one of the walls. It is a visual way to introduce the participants to the subject of "minorities".

The leader might mention briefly some of them, for instance: young immigrant workers in Europe, a Mexican trying to cross the River Bravo between Mexico and the United States (wetbacks), an Indian living in a remote rural area in South America, a Tibetan oppressed by the Chinese regime in his own country, etc.

Some participants may add a few situations to the list, but no discussion is expected at this stage.

Duration: 10 minutes

2. Presentation of scenario

The leader then refers to the heart of the matter, stressing that the participants are going to examine their thoughts, their prejudices, the way they form their opinions, and that this requires a reasonable degree of openness from each of them. The leader distributes a copy of the activity sheet to each participant, briefly describes the scenario and asks the participants to read the paper.

Duration: 10-15 minutes



The scenario
EURO-RAIL A LA CARTE

You are boarding the “Deer Valley Express” train for a week-long ride from Lisbon to Moscow. You are travelling in a couchette compartment which you have to share with three other people.

- With which of the following passengers would you prefer to share?*
1. *A Serbian soldier from Bosnia.*
 2. *An overweight Swiss financial broker.*
 3. *An Italian disk-jockey who seems to have plenty of dollars.*
 4. *An African woman selling leather products.*
 5. *A young artist who is HIV positive.*
 6. *A gypsy or traveller from Hungary who has just been released from jail.*
 7. *A Basque nationalist who travels regularly to Russia.*
 8. *A German rapper living a very alternative life-style.*
 9. *A blind accordionist from Austria.*
 10. *A Ukrainian student who doesn't want to go home.*
 11. *A middle-aged Romanian woman who has no visa and a one-year-old child in her arms.*
 12. *A Dutch hard-line and aggressive feminist.*
 13. *A skinhead from Sweden ostensibly under the influence of alcohol.*
 14. *A wrestler from Belfast apparently going to a football match.*
 15. *A Polish prostitute from Berlin.*
 16. *A French farmer who speaks only French and has a basket full of strong cheese.*
 17. *A Kurdish refugee living in Germany who is on his way back from Libya.*



Individual activity

3. Likes and dislikes: personal decision

Participants read the description of the people travelling on the train and choose – without consulting anyone else:

- the three people they would most like to travel with, and
- the three people they would least like to travel with.

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Small-group activity

4. Likes and dislikes: collective decision

Once everybody has made their individual choices, participants form groups of 4 or 5 in order to:

- Share their individual choices and the reasons for them.
- Compare their choices and reasons, and see where there are similarities.
- Come up with a common list (the three most liked and the three least liked) by consensus.

Duration: 40 minutes



Plenary session

5. Reports

Each group is requested to present their conclusions, including the reasons for their common choices. They should also say in which cases there was most disagreement within the group.

Duration: 15 minutes

6. Debriefing

This will be based on the groups' reports. Comparing the different results is a good way to introduce the discussion. The leader may continue by asking questions such as:

- How realistic are the situations presented?
- Has anyone in the group experienced a similar situation in real life?
- What were the major factors that determined your individual decisions?
- If the groups did not manage to reach common conclusions, why not?
- What was most difficult?
- What factors prevented your group from coming to a consensus?

Particular attention should be given to the following questions:

- Which stereotypes does the list of passengers evoke?
- Are the stereotypes in the descriptions accepted or in our minds and imagination?
- Where do we get these images from?
- How would it feel to be in a situation in which nobody wanted to share a train compartment with you?

Duration: 30-45 minutes

REMARKS TO LEADERS

The list of passengers presented here has been taken from the original exercise (see Sources below). However, it should be adapted to suit the national situation. It is important that some of the passengers' descriptions correspond to minorities which are familiar to the group attending the workshop.

In many cases the groups will not manage to come up with a common list. Do not emphasise this aspect, as it may lead to a "false consensus". It is equally interesting to examine why it is difficult to reach consensus on a matter like this.

It is important for everyone to respect each other's opinions and not attack people for their personal views. It is more relevant to discuss the reasons which lead to a particular choice rather than to question personal decisions. In no case should the workshop turn into a "condemnation session"!

It is also important to discuss and explore the fact that the description of the passengers is very brief; we know little about the personality or background of the people. But isn't that the way we normally react to information in newspapers and television, and in conversations, or when meeting people for the first time?

Many of the remarks and some of the definitions used in Workshop No.2, "Peace through Inter-cultural Understanding", may be applicable here. Do not hesitate to consult it before preparing this workshop.



SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP

It is extremely important to have direct experience, if even for a very limited period of time, of what it is to be alienated, discriminated against, disadvantaged or victimised by prejudice. Simulation games have proved to be particularly useful in conveying concepts such as prejudice and inequality, and helping young people discover their irrational character. At the same time, they help participants to *live* the feelings of frustration and alienation that victims of *prejudice* and *inequality* experience in their daily lives.

Game No.5, "Snobs and Scum", in "15 Development Education Games for Scouts", (published by the World Scout Bureau, Geneva, 1988) is particularly appropriate for that purpose.

The "All Different, All Equal education pack" (see below) contains many activities and exercises which are also very useful. It can be ordered in English and French from the

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SOURCES

This workshop has been taken from "Euro-rail à la carte", included in the "All Different, All Equal education pack" published by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe as a contribution to the "European Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Intolerance", European Youth Centre, 1st edition, September 1995, pp.78-80. It has been slightly adapted to suit the format of this publication.

REFERENCES

1. Game "Snobs And Scum", in "15 Development Education Games For Scouts", World Scout Bureau, Geneva, 1988.

