

Week Four Report

Main Activities and Group Dynamics:

During the 4th week of the Connect Program, groups began with an activity to explore stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings, which allowed students to share their perspectives on common stereotypes and how they felt about them. Most groups then moved on to discuss the required readings on Intercultural Communication. In many groups, this led to broader discussions on culture, and extended to various angles such as the definition of culture, or the origin of language and how language impacts culture and identity. From here, groups continued free-flowing discussions in which students engaged around a number of topics, including the US elections, immigration / integration, and pollution and energy alternatives. Some groups took a deeper look at topics more personal to students, such as marriage traditions, gender roles in different societies, and different foods and cultural rituals in their communities. Groups also made time to discuss the Final Project, and students had the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on the interviews they've conducted so far. Then, they broke out into smaller groups and worked in pairs / trios to come up with the second interview question, which they will use for their second set of interviews conducted during week 5 of the Program.

The majority of facilitators have reported that the group dynamics this week have been "Good" or "Excellent", and that students are becoming more open in their discussions, taking an active interest by listening closely and asking good questions. Some described how students are becoming more aware of other people's cultures, and others are reporting that there are instances in which specific students are still relatively quiet or shy, but that they are using various dialogue tools to engage these shy participants in the conversation.

Attendance & Technology:

While we have had good levels of attendance in the first 3 weeks of the Program, this week the number of students absent from their sessions was high, with a number of students also coming late to their sessions or leaving early. We understand that some students are busy preparing and taking mid-term exams, but we would highly appreciate your support in **reminding your students that their attendance and participation remain crucial to the group's dynamic and to making the most out of their Soliya experience.**

On the technological front, things are moving more smoothly, with the exception of a brief server glitch in the last set of groups on Monday, which resulted in participants not being able to access the Exchange Portal for a short period of time. Our tech team was able to address it effectively, and students were able to login to their sessions for the last block on Monday, and throughout the rest of the week without any trouble.

Next Week:

Next week, participants will focus on their personal stories through the Life Stories activity, in which they discuss the 3 key influences or moments that have shaped their perspective, and engage each other on a more personal level. The objective is to encourage participants to understand other perspectives and to recognize how different personal experiences can lead to different views. Additionally, groups that were not able to complete the Final Project group discussions this week will be completing them next week, to ensure students remain on-track with their project timelines.