

January 2022

PERSPECTIVES

Happy New Year!! This edition of the Parent Perspectives newsletter contains submissions from our Malaysian affiliate. Affiliate Director, Lalitha Nair, shares her thoughts on diversity in our global organization. Also included are some interesting facts about some of the national holidays and cultural events in Malaysia. Please enjoy!



Recognizing and Appreciating our Diversity for a Better Future

“Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Belonging” (DEIB) – are they just words? Or, do they have more meaning and impact on all of us? That is the question.

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, believes **“Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome.”** In FPSPI, diversity is ever present by the sheer appearance of the international affiliates from Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the USA.

Vernā Myers, a speaker on diversity from the US, points out, **“Diversity is being at the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”** Yes, so all of us from different affiliates are at the International Conference (IC = the party) but are we dancing together or have we been invited to dance (inclusion)? I guess the answer is yes, yet no. We need to address this theme of inclusivity with more passion, commitment, and will.

Much effort is afoot to deal with these issues. As an educational organization, we can enable and empower the young “how to think, not what to think” and be the prime movers for change. Fortunately, for us at FPSPI, we do have and have had some exciting IC activities/ events that have the elements to initiate, promote and sustain the features of DEIB.

Homestays topped the list for creating relationships – be it for students, parents, coaches and communities at large. It opened up opportunities for exposing, understanding pre-conceptions, misgivings and sharing. Total strangers shared homes, their food, their cultures and more. FPSPI Malaysia has always looked forward to these homestays. Our students still have such fond memories of “their families.” They actually lived with typical American families and learnt more about their lifestyles and value systems which they found to be different yet similar in many ways to theirs. It was a far cry from all the portrayals of Americans in programs and movies that we have an overload of on television. The Americans in turn learnt that we didn’t live in “trees” or in squalor and that we spoke the “Queen’s English” and were very conversant in English and most times trilingual at the least. We also had the opportunities to showcase our food at the many cookouts we had while being very kindly hosted.

Our students had such exciting times sharing and exchanging ideas and information with friends and community of the host family, along with other FPSers. There is no tradeoff for this. Our three years of homestays in Iowa led to the implementation of the first multi-national CmPS team project RADICAL between FPSP Malaysia and Decorah High School. We, FPSPI, need to work to bring Homestays back to the pre-IC activities. They were such eye openers and hopefully can continue to be an integral part of the inclusion and belonging process.

The other equally great activities are the **variety show**, the **memento exchange**, the **social**, and the **“buddy-up”** events. The **variety show** is such a fun platform to showcase the variety of cultures and talents. The best part of this is the invitation to other affiliates to be included and be part of the other affiliate’s act. The comradeship and bonding created is beyond words. As the AD for FPSP Malaysia, I have cherished these experiences with my teams for more than 12 years until we had to go virtual. Every year the teams look forward to presenting their acts and participating in the various cultural presentations from affiliates all over the world.

The **memento exchange** is a splendid pathway to breaking ice and communicating with each other. The excitement of receiving mementos, unique to each affiliate, may start conversations. While the **social** and **buddy-up** system are invaluable in their objectives, more needs to be done to make them relevant and feasible.

As a program that encourages and envisions a more positive future for the young, let us have the will to innovate and find ways to enable and empower the young through some of these existing platforms, as well as to become ambassadors of and for DEIB..



Students enjoying the memento exchange at the International Conference!



Cultural Corner—Malaysia

Multi-cultural and religious festivities in the month of January in Malaysia

Thaipusam

Thaipusam is a key annual Hindu festival which is a national holiday in Malaysia as over a million Hindus and many others gather every year at various temples across Malaysia to celebrate. This year, the festival was celebrated on 18 January. Along with us, Thaipusam is observed in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Mauritius.

Thaipusam is a day of prayers and penance and is dedicated to Lord Murugan. It is also celebrated as a thanksgiving ceremony to Lord Murugan as the universal granter of wishes. Devotees seek repentance by praying to him this day to wash away their sins and to avert all their problems. This day also signifies the victory of good over evil. Devotees prepare for the celebration by cleansing themselves through prayer, celibacy, and fasting for 48 days before the festival.



Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is also called “Spring Festival” and “Lunar New Year” as it comes in spring. The date is based on the Chinese lunar calendar, so the date changes on the western calendar, but is in either January or February.

Each Chinese New Year is named after one of the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac. This year, 2022, is the year of the Tiger and falls on 1st and 2nd February. It has been celebrated for over 1,000 years, also as a religious day with prayers and offerings.

In Malaysia, Chinese New Year is a great national celebration with two days as national holidays. The Chinese prepare very well in advance by cleaning out their houses to “sweep out any bad luck,” but brooms are kept out of sight on New Year’s Day for fear of “sweeping away the good luck” that the New Year brings.

New clothes and large quantities of food for New Year’s Eve dinner are purchased in advance. The shopping frenzy starts almost immediately after that of Christmas and New Year. Sometimes it runs concurrently. The Chinese New Year celebration runs for 15 consecutive days with the first three days being the most important. On the day before the New Year, family reunion dinners are held. The Malaysian “open house” starts from the first day, when homes welcome friends and community members to join together to share food and joy. The 15th and final Day, Chap Goh Mei, is also a big event, where houses are decorated with bright lights.

Other Chinese New Year traditions include: “Yee Sang,” a vegetable medley dish eaten by throwing its pieces high in the air with chopsticks for good luck, health and prosperity. Lion and dragon dances, card games, handing out money in small red ang-pao packages, fireworks displays, and burning of fire crackers are other typical traditions observed during these celebrations.



Scenes from Chinese New Year in Malaysia!

