

Jacobs, G. M. (2013, April 1). Let your participants star in your Singapore trainings. *Singapore Business Review*. Retrieved from <http://sbr.com.sg/hr-education/commentary/let-your-participants-star-in-your-singapore-trainings>

Let Your Participants Star in Your Singapore Trainings

Trainings in Singapore and elsewhere often resemble pop concerts, with the trainers as stars, as sages on stages. The participants at these trainings play the role of audience. Such trainings follow the trainer as dynamic performer / participants as passive audience model.

Unfortunately, that's not how people learn. Cognitive science has for years been telling us that learning is necessarily an active process. Indeed, Singapore's Ministry of Education has adopted the slogan, 'Teach Less, Learn More'. In other words, students will learn more when their teachers let the students take their rightful place as the learning stars and the teachers act more as guides on the side.

Active learning is, cognitive scientists tell us, the way to go regardless of the learners' age or status. However, too many trainers continue to try to dazzle participants with their powerpoints and their jokes. All those are good. Don't throw them away. Yet, you also need ways to put the participants front and centre in your training sessions.

Group activities provide a research based method of active learning. Before you begin with groups, please understand that using groups involves much more than a seating arrangement. This article offers some tips on how to effectively include group activities as a significant component of your training repertoire.

1. Size of groups: Small is beautiful, because the smaller the group, the more active each group member is likely to be. In fact, two will often be the best size for your groups.
2. Seating: Groupmates need to sit close together, so they can easily hear each other and easily show each other what they are doing.
3. Ice breaking: If groupmates don't know each other yet, you might want to do a quick ice breaker activity, such as a tongue twister or sharing an interesting fact about themselves.
4. Opportunity to participate: Give everyone a chance to take part in their group. Ways to do that include:
 - a. Everyone has different information given by you or based on their own experiences.
 - b. The activity calls for turn taking, such as group members are each to take a turn to speak or write.
5. Responsibility to participate: Encourage everyone to do their fair share. For example,
 - a. Participants are called on at random to report on their group's discussion.
 - b. Everyone has a role.
6. Doable tasks: Think carefully whether you have provided enough support for everyone to be able to do the tasks that you give to the groups. If participants can't do the task in groups during the training, how can they ever do similar tasks alone afterwards?
7. Collaborative skills: Even though your participants are adults, and often parents and grandparents, doesn't mean that they will work together well. So, a quick reminder can be

useful. For example, here are two ways that participants can politely disagree with each other.

- a. Start by paraphrasing what the other person has said and then ask if the paraphrase is accurate before stating a contrasting view.
- b. Use gambits such as, “Thanks for stating your view” and “You may be right, but have you ever considered ...?”

Vibrant discussions, not monologues by trainers, are what make trainings enjoyable and memorable. Such discussions propel learning. Furthermore, such active learning activities fit with the kind of engaged workplaces that companies and organisations desire. You can promote this by using group activities and thereby letting your participants be the stars of your training sessions.

George Jacobs, PhD, teaches teachers of all ages how to use group activities to enliven their teaching. He has taught teachers at NUS, NTU, SMU, JCU, MOE schools and internationally. George has also written several books and many articles on why and how to use groups. He can be reached at george.jacobs@gmail.com.