

13th HC-APYLS Student Dialogue Sub-Theme and Strands Writeups

Our world is becoming increasingly divided by emerging socio-political and economic fault lines. Whether they are divisions by socio-economic status, race and religion, or the partisan political ideology, divisions between groups threaten to undermine social cohesion. With changing community demographics in our societies, racial and religious tensions are easily erupted and may be exploited by malicious actors. Racially charged rhetoric characterizing modern politics in some countries further highlight the need to ease racial and religious tensions. These are part of a larger backdrop of the pervasive inequality in many countries, with racial and religious contributing to the disparities between social groups. How can different stakeholders that affect or are affected by inequalities provide new concerted and multifaceted approaches to gradually reduce inequality in their communities and ameliorate people's welfare?

Education has been criticized by the populace as a reason for exacerbating inequalities. Hence, in recent years, education systems around the world have been scrutinized by global educators. Besides contributing to widening social gaps, huge problems with today's education systems include content, skills and pedagogy that are out of step with the needs of students and the challenges of the modern era. In our ever changing world, are our schools truly preparing students for the future?

In a world whereby adaptability and innovation are key determinants of one's ability, youths are facing pressure to keep up with global trends and continually improve themselves. Amidst dealing with changes in the environment, economy and society, many individuals fail to look within themselves and nurture their mental health. It is becoming increasingly apparent that issues of mental health and well-being are not concerns that affect a small fraction of society but instead all of us. As we observe a growing trend of youths facing depression as well as an increasing likelihood for adults to undergo midlife crises, along with the fundamental need in everyone to lead flourishing lives, we need to ask ourselves: how might we guard against threats to our mental health and leverage opportunities to thrive?

Besides exploring the fault lines in our human society, the climate crisis arising from the conflict between human and nature deserves our attention right now. From powerful tropical

cyclones, intense rainstorms, severe droughts and extreme heat waves, we are beginning to see what a warmer future has in store for us. Climate action, however, is stalled by political indifference and unfounded denial. As the young leaders of today, what can we then initiate to fight climate change?

In the grand scheme of things, we must recognise that the forces of globalization are also affecting the market economy, international relations, science and technology. In recent years, globalisation has expedited the Fourth Industrial Revolution with unprecedented levels of connectivity and knowledge sharing. However, it may be threatened by governments that are increasingly moving towards protectionist economic policies and challenging the established free trade norms. Apart from economic concerns, the anti-globalisation tide also find support in attempts to preserve the native cultures of communities and prevent their dilution.

In essence, the world is imperfect but quoting author Roald Dahl, “ Somewhere inside all of us is the power to change the world.” Ultimately, for every issue we need to ask ourselves: What can countries learn from one another to alleviate the common problems that plague us? What can we as youth leaders do in the face of such challenges and opportunities?

The Faces of Inequality

All countries face the effects of inequality to varied extents. When countries try to develop themselves economically, they often are required to concentrate development on several key areas, resulting in a core-periphery divide in their countries. As more people move towards the key economic hubs of their country, those left behind face increasingly disparate living conditions. One example is Brazil, where people living in regions outside their economic hubs may face dire living conditions and very low income.

This inequality is exacerbated when countries have systemic discrimination that reinforce the existing inequality. These systems actively exclude individuals based on arbitrary features: race, skin colour and/or ethnicity and restrict their ability to access avenues of social mobility like education. The apartheid in South Africa entrenched notions of inequality deep within the social

fabric of South Africa which is difficult to overcome even till today, preventing black individuals from attaining proper education and employment and restricting their rights as citizens. By scrutinizing the differences of individuals, institutions condemn people to a lifetime of menial labour and reinforce this inequality.

Even without institutionalised discrimination, subtle microaggressions and biases of individuals towards certain racial or ethnic groups in various countries and communities can foster this inequality as these underlying prejudices are especially difficult to address at a policy level. This makes inequality so pernicious because as these mindsets fester, they continue to subtly impede the ability of disenfranchised groups from gaining social mobility.

Countries generally have different approaches to solving inequality, some of these policies include minimum wages or expanding the earned income tax. However, one of the biggest factors that engenders inequality is the lack of awareness. Oftentimes social networks consist of people from similar socio-economic backgrounds, as such the chance for them to bridge the gap through understanding the struggles of those who are less fortunate is very low. Some structures even further entrench the lack of awareness - for example, when students of similar socio-economic background attend the same school, which is not uncommon, their immediate interactions would mostly consist of people from the same social class. This thus limits the chances they have to reach out to and empathise with those of a different background.

Delegates can thus use the following questions to guide their thinking about the issue:

- Where is the inequality in your country and why does it exist?
- What are some current policies that have been adopted by your country to address inequality and how can they be improved?
- What can youths do to enact change in such a situation?

Achieving Racial and Religious Harmony

Race and religion have been common flashpoints between social groups which can manifest in societies. In extreme situations, religious authorities have used religion as justification for the

condemnation of another group. This incites hostilities which can easily escalate into physical conflicts. This year, the tragic Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand in March and the deadly Easter Day attacks in Sri Lanka serve as poignant reminders of the importance of maintaining racial and religious harmony, and how fault lines may generate seismic shifts in the relationships between social groups.

In an increasingly globalised world, the influx of migrants into various countries have brought countless cultures, practices, and languages, to any one nation. This might lead to the exacerbation of xenophobia amongst citizens, driving a vicious cycle of animosity against people of dissimilar races and religions, even if these people are citizens of the same country.

Governments play an integral role in the achievement of racial and religious harmony. Through the political stances and the legislative action taken by authorities, a country's stance on such racial and religious harmony is revealed. Singapore is often highlighted as a paragon of racial and religious harmony, with its clear stance on the equality of races and imperativeness for respect for all religions. Even so, the question remains: has the nation been successful in pushing past mere tolerance, and promoting understanding and acceptance? Even as Indonesia officially recognises six faiths, all of which have been granted national holidays, there are apparent loopholes in the legislation that leave minority groups at a disadvantage, as well as the rise of attacks on minority religions in recent years. Is governmental action enough to curb religious dissonance?

It is imperative for us, as global citizens, to be at the forefront of building bridges of respect and equality between the different races and religions. These provide the foundation for people to accept differing cultures and ideologies, stamping out discrimination and intolerance to strengthen our social cohesion.

Delegates can thus consider the following guiding questions when thinking about how racial and religious harmony can be achieved in their country:

- What are your country's policies towards racial and religious harmony?
- Where do the largest racial and religious fault lines lie in your country? How might these be dealt with?
- How can the global community work together to embrace greater racial and religious diversity?

Coming Together for Climate Action

“I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic... and act as if your house is on fire.” said 16 year-old environmental activist Greta Thunberg at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting. On 15 March, over 1.4 million school children participated in the Climate Strike from 2083 places in 125 countries to call for change. Many young people of our century, have grown tired of denial and inaction, and are determined to put climate change on the political agenda.

Climate change is a reality and no country in the world is immune to its effects. While numerous governments have made concerted efforts in reducing its carbon output since signing on to the Paris Agreement, global emissions continue to increase, making clear the need for enhanced climate action by 2020. Authors of the landmark report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have continued to push countries to do their part and prevent the global temperature from rising more than two degrees celsius as there are only 12 years left to limit climate change catastrophe.

The biggest challenge that plagues almost every country is balancing between the country’s need for industrialisation and development, and climate action. This challenge can sometimes lead to governments being unwilling to commit to concrete climate actions, out of a fear of economic stagnation.

As student leaders and activists of our country, it is time for us to explore and initiate solutions to keep the global rise in temperature at safe levels and enhance our collective resilience when fighting climate change. Ultimately, only when we are able to come together despite differences to save our home, will we succeed.

Delegates can thus use the following questions to guide their thinking about the issue:

- What should climate policies in our countries address and act upon?
- How can the public and private sectors collaborate to reduce global emissions and pollution?

- How can we, as global youths, galvanise our communities to fight against climate change?
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The 22th Century Classroom: Rebuilding Our Education System

In a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, it is becoming increasingly clear that traditional rote-learning, content-centric education models are outmoded. The revolutionised economy demands a new kind of education system. Where once the mastery of facts was hailed as the hallmark trait of a successful student, the world today is in pursuit of individuals who possess the ability to think critically. This refers to one's capacity to discern, synthesise, apply, and manipulate complex information to solve issues. Besides critical thinking, the future workforce must be equipped with transferable soft skills to maintain their competitive edge. These skills include innovative thinking and the emotional and social intelligence to work with others.

As global educators review and evaluate education systems of different countries, the questions remain: how can every nation reshape its education system to best satisfy the needs of the economy and to fulfil the aspirations of its people? As times change and the global economy progresses, updating and in some cases, overhauling, content and pedagogy in teaching and learning becomes increasingly more urgent. No discussion about education is complete without a nod to Finland's unique education system such as its pioneering of a new pedagogy known as Phenomenon-Based Learning (PBL). Instead of teaching academic subjects, students study global issues and harness the relevant concepts from there in a radically interdisciplinary approach. Students also have the capacity to take ownership of their learning by initiating curriculum, with teachers taking a step back to facilitate the learning process.

The United States, is regarded as a leader in innovation and technology, which makes for a peculiar conundrum. While it has led the world in breakthroughs in business and science, results from assessments on its education system tell a different story. In the 2016 PISA, the United States ranked 35th for Mathematics, well below the average, and only slightly above it for Science. What then explains its stellar performance in innovation? To what extent are such global assessments effective yardsticks to gauge the competencies of a country's students?

As the economy transforms into one that is knowledge-based, the quality of a country's education has become a critical determinant of its performance. These pragmatic concerns have prompted educators to re-examine their education curricula in multitudinous ways. While the frenzy to construct the most economically ideal education system may direct one to perceive education as a utilitarian tool, delegates are challenged to explore the other schools of thought, which believe that education can serve higher purposes such as presenting students with a profound understanding of the philosophy of life, or to act as the great equaliser, and a catalyst for social mobility.

Delegates can thus use the following questions to guide their thinking about the issue:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your country's education system and how effectively does it prepare students for the future economy?
 - What can we learn from the education systems of the various countries? Given cultural differences, how can countries adapt the learning points from each other into their own system?
 - What education reforms do you hope to see or implement in the future?
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Globalization and Protectionism: The Future of the Global Economy

Today, the world is more interconnected and interdependent than it ever was before. Globalisation has brought about a smorgasbord of benefits for almost every country participating in the global economy. Economically, it has brought about foreign direct investment (FDI) that can help spur development of countries as well as increase international trade. Culturally, globalisation has spread different practices across the world, increasing the diversity in countries.

Due to this system, there is an increased dependency on the global economy as companies now operate across the globe and oftentimes champion the continuation of free market systems that allow them to have access to a variety of resources and markets from across the globe. While globalisation may be a boon for many countries, it also brings its share of drawbacks, leading to many people demanding a reversal from their governments. These protests originate from the fear of citizens losing out on employment opportunities and the gradual dilution of culture.

On the economic front, a common drawback is recognised as deindustrialization – when corporations outsource their production to developing countries, their local labour markets may face high unemployment. The workforce may also lack the proper skillset to transition to the new skill-based jobs created in the world. As free trade promotes buying goods from the cheapest source, which can originate from foreign markets, businesses now have to face international competition. Some governments have responded by implementing protectionist policies to maintain their domestic businesses' competitive edge.

On the cultural front, the discussion still remains: is globalisation diluting our local cultures, or giving us opportunities to adapt them domestically and promote them abroad? How can we as young leaders strengthen our understanding of cultures and our cultural and national identity in an ever-changing world; or does that diversity eventually become part of our identity?

In the face of globalisation it is crucial to understand the trade-offs involved in any decision. How are governments able to reap the rewards of globalisation while minimising the drawbacks?

Delegates can thus use the following questions to guide their thinking about the issue:

- How have governments made value judgements when deciding the type of policies that their country should follow?
- How should countries balance their national priorities with international responsibilities? Are our national goals better achieved when we engage in the global economy?
- Are there other ways for countries to adapt to the challenges of globalisation other than protectionism and should governments adopt such approaches?

An Automated Future: The Fourth Industrial Revolution

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has changed the way we live, work and connect to one another exponentially due to the adoption of cyber-physical systems, the Internet of Things and Internet of Systems. The emergence of smart technologies is expected to overhaul the traditional methods of decision-making, behavioral science and production, and transform all disciplines,

industries and economies at unprecedented speed. In his book, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Professor Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, discussed the enormous benefits for these technologies as well as the underlying challenges. Indeed, though benefits can be harnessed, we must ensure that we adequately assess how we adopt the innovations that will shape our future.

Advancements in technology open new markets and drive economic growth. However, not all people will be able to cope with such rapid shifts and make the move to the more skill-based jobs that the economy now calls for. In addition, massive data theft, anti-competitive practices and the proliferation of fake news continue to threaten the integrity of corporations and the social fabric of our society. Is artificial intelligence an algorithm for peace or the realisation of a dystopian future? Can advancements in biotechnology provide a beacon of hope for the agriculture industry vulnerable to environmental calamities or will they cause harmful mutations of wildlife? All of these are only the tip of the iceberg when we look at the challenges facing us.

As we explore the effects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we must also bear in mind how nations have attempted to keep abreast in the ever-changing world. Taking Japan as an example, its government has laid the foundations for its transformative plan known as Society 5.0. Society 5.0 aims to ensure Japan is technologically updated by going beyond the digitalization of its economy towards the digitization of its entire society. We also witness the collaboration of countries to innovate and offer solutions to interconnected global challenges. Examples would be France and Singapore in their Joint Declaration of Innovation, the development of ASEAN's nascent digital economy by its member countries and the viable ecosystem for fintech entrepreneurship established in the United Kingdom that welcomes the flow of talent and ideas across languages, cultures and geographies.

Delegates can thus use the following questions to guide their thinking about the issue:

- Is the emergence of new technology making the world increasingly uncertain despite the increase in our access to information and new technologies, and how can we manage the risks of such a future?
- How can our countries collaborate to provide solutions to complex and interconnected global challenges?
- How can we better prepare our future workforce for the Fourth Industrial Revolution?

New World Order: The Changing Nature of International Relations

In a post-WWII era, the current world order was put in place, setting rules for international cooperation and interaction to prevent the occurrence of a future war. The United Nations (UN), is an intergovernmental organization tasked to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, achieve international co-operation and be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations. It was created to facilitate the creation and enforcement of the rules of the international order. This international order has allowed democratic ideals such as freedom and human rights, as well as openness to free market capitalism, to flourish up to today.

This rules-based international system hence theoretically resulted in a mutually beneficial outcome, giving smaller nations an equal say on issues and protection from being coerced by larger countries, while larger and more powerful countries were hence able to develop at unprecedented rates due to international stability.

The United States' recent withdrawal from this international system, as well as its seemingly declining global influence coupled with China's rise, challenges the sustainability of the established global order. President Donald Trump's controversial withdrawal from the Human Rights Council clearly signaled the USA's reduced willingness to defend the system it had helped create. Additionally, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and rising economic dominance has been perceived by certain nations to have been used to achieve political concessions from numerous countries. Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, China has been observed adopting aggressive foreign policies, which has only been enhanced by Russia's continual arguments against many international norms, with the claim that they were not involved in their formation. The United Kingdom, which has also helped uphold the current international order, is now struggling with Brexit, while the rest of the European Union increasingly faces divisions on a plethora of issues. In South-east Asia, the Association of South-east Asian States (ASEAN) has also been struggling to strengthen its relevance on the global stage.

This situation is alarming to many countries. Small nations like Singapore that benefit greatly from the rules-based system are championing the protection of the world order. Others, especially

the Western countries, are finding it increasingly difficult to navigate and balance their intrinsic differences of ideology with China and the economic dependence on the world's largest market.

Such a complicated situation invites delegates to consider how their country is facing up to the new reality and challenges arising out of this shift in global politics:

- Has there been a shift in the international global order? If so, what kind of international system is being established? If not, should the current system be upheld or should there be a change?
- What kind of impacts does the global shifts have on your country?
- How can your country respond to the shifts in global trends?

Mental Health: Building a Supportive Community

When we mention mental health, many people think of isolated individuals who are weird, incoherent and unable to think logically. That is the underlying stigma that underpins mental health in many societies across the globe. The fact of the matter is that whilst serious cases do exist, issues of mental health exist on a spectrum and we can never be too sure at which point we may find ourselves on that spectrum. In the modern world, individuals are often stressed and anxious from the constant need to improve themselves and keep up with ever changing trends of the 21st Century. Speakers such as Time Urban and Bret Easton have discussed extensively the causes of such a phenomenon - many millennials having too high an expectation of themselves and eventually being unable to accept failure. Therefore, even if they do not have a mental health condition, their mental health is still not optimal. Such a situation highlights the importance of taking care of our mental health from the start and preventing exacerbation of the problem.

However, that is not to say that we neglect the fact that mental illness is a real concern. Oftentimes the biggest challenge that people with such conditions face is the lack of acceptance brought about by lack of understanding of mental ailments which leads to discrimination. Looking at the workplace, it is not unusual for people to hide their mental conditions out of a fear of jeopardising their job. This problem affects younger people too, whereby youths who face depression or other mental disorders deny their condition. Many choose not to explore the possibility that they may need time and space to recuperate mentally, even if only ephemerally,

because they are afraid of the associated labels. This stigma deters individuals from seeking help as they often fear the contempt of their counterparts. Therefore non-acceptance and ignorance are pertinent issues of mental health that need to be addressed in our current day and age. As a society we should be aiming towards building a more understanding and supportive community whereby mental illness is destigmatized and support groups exist to help these individuals.

On the other hand there is also very much a need to focus on the flourishing of the majority who are not struggling with mental illness, to help them to optimize their well-being. Proponents of Positive Psychology, have taken steps to do so. Martin Seligman's proposed PERMA framework on Positive Psychology helps individuals focus on what makes our lives fulfilling, whilst appreciating the small joys and satisfactions of each passing day. Values in Action Inventory of Strengths is a model proposed by Christopher Peterson which helps individuals discover their character strengths and enable them to better respond to adversity and setbacks. These models pave the way for future research and application of Positive Psychology and serve as guides for us to better understand the human mind and emotions, and safeguard ourselves from the threats to mental health, and live lives of authentic happiness.

- How then might we propagate a culture of Positive Psychology to safeguard and promote our mental health? What is the role of schools and the government in bringing about such change?
- How can we promote empathy and overcome the prejudice and discrimination against those with mental health conditions?
- How might we cultivate resilience and tenacity within youths to deal with setbacks and persevere through adversities of the future?