

The following ideas were discussed among students during an *International Youth Think Tank* held at Ingrid Segerstedts Gymnasium 30th of November 2020.

The authors of this document, on behalf of all students that participated, would like to extend our gratitude to the Organizers, Moderators, Teachers, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and all participants of this conference for allowing us to be an active part in democracy.

The text submitted is only an excerpt from everything that the groups discussed.

Human Rights as a Subject:

In today's society, discussions about human rights and democracy are more important than ever. Even though human rights have come a long way since the 1900's we are yet to reach our full potential. We believe that the most efficient way to advance the knowledge of human rights is to start with the younger generations, more specifically, to start incorporating these kinds of subjects into the school curriculum.

Currently the school curriculum for high school students is obligated to cover an aspect of human rights in each class, but this is something that a lot of students find is poorly executed. In most schools this matter is only grazed upon and not well elaborated. This is why our proposal is to create a mandatory class in school, that teaches solely Human Rights and Democracy. For this class to have the best possible outcome for its students, and ultimately our society, it should be implemented into our national curriculum. We want to avoid the class becoming boring or repetitive, this is why we propose having it once every two weeks, or even once a month. We would also like to have it take an entire school day so that fun activities will be able to be thoroughly planned and executed without a tight time limit.

Out of personal experience, students tend to remember classes that are more 'active' and engaging, rather than classes where the only form of teaching is through presentations and taking notes. This is why we believe that if we teach human rights through a more practical way rather than theoretical, students will remember what they've been taught for a longer period of time. The "practical ways" that i keep mentioning reference for example to interactive role plays & engaging seminars. It is thus important that the class would allow for an open discussion about recent events or news without being held back by a tight schedule.

This class will not only go in depth on past historical events, how they affect us today and how they influence the future, but also current events - such as discussing violations of human rights that are happening today. Students that attend this class will not only learn about what events that have been beneficial and detrimental to our human rights, but also how we as individuals can do our best to help in today's society. Another matter we want to stress is the importance of source criticism and how it is used. This is something that will be heavily emphasized in this class.

Source criticism is the backbone of a working democracy - without knowledge on how to differ a reliable source from one that is not, a person loses the ability to gain an unbiased perspective of the world, the media, and politics. As we have been noticing, primarily in the USA, source criticism has lost its virtue. This is not only a sign of a deteriorating democratic process; but also a pandemic in its own right. The shrinking trust in state,- and private media, along with the massive spread of false information, can lead to a great distrust in state institutions and in society as a whole. This contributes to the already staggering political polarisation in countries such as The United States and here in Sweden, aswell. Source criticism is also a matter of socioeconomic class and upbringing - what you learn, from a young age, to be trustworthy is a direct product of what your parents or caretakers consider to be reliable. There are a number of factors to take into consideration; political affiliations, access to unbiased media, the opportunity to obtain political material and discussions, but first and foremost; education on the matter.

Therefore, to eliminate the class-division regarding spread of misinformation and distrust in our media, we have brought forward the solution that source criticisms should be taught from a young age in school. This would offer pupils an opportunity to gain their own perspective on the matter, one that is not affiliated with the views of their parents or caretakers. What we, as pupils of the Swedish school system, have seen is that source credibility is seldom to be taught unless it is in a scientific manner; concerning primarily how to correctly value the credibility of a scientific paper or article. This is, as the former Principal of the University of Gothenburg, Pam Fredman was anxious to mention, tremendously important.

However, we consider this to be but a mere part of the grander scheme of source credibility; the more prevalent of the factors being how to correctly value information that you have encountered on your own, and how to adapt critical thinking outside of the scientific and academic field. We consider this to be a key pillar in creating a long lasting trust in our institutions, media, politicians and society as a whole. Source credibility would, if our preposition were to be implemented, gain curricular status within the Swedish educational system. The matter would be taught during the previously mentioned Human Rights class. It is important that source criticism becomes an active part in day to day life (e.g when watching TV, listening to radio, reading the news), not only something done at school.

In many cases the pressure of grades and academic achievements can dull down the fun and enjoyment of a subject. This is why we have decided to remove this obstacle by making it a pass or fail class. If a student were to attend the class and engage in the activities provided, they would pass. However, if a student were to exceed a set percentage of invalid absence, they would fail the class. We believe that this way of grading will bring forth an impressive product that's beneficial for both students and

teachers. Students will not get the feeling that they have to fulfill certain criteria, thus eliminating stress about having another class. In conclusion, both teachers and students can now focus more on what's being taught rather than what has to be memorized for a test or examination.

Apart from implementing the human rights class into the national curriculum, we would also want to propose that every high school student has an opportunity to participate in a "Democracy Day" once a year. This would be an amazing opportunity for students to learn more about democracy and human rights while at the same time creating a more diverse environment. If multiple schools across the country can meet and participate in this, we are actively reducing the negative side effects of a homogenic learning environment. This day would be filled with seminars, interactive workshops and games to engage students. We want to strive for this to become an enjoyable and memorable experience for all students that participate.

We believe that an increased knowledge of human rights and democracy will produce more sympathetic and empathetic students. If the education regarding our history is taught through a more humanistic approach, students might be able to more easily understand the actual suffering that people went through; thus leading to a more empathetic and sympathetic point of view.

We also consider this class to be important and beneficial in the perspective of **past, present and future generations**. One of the greatest failures of the human race, our most prevalent Achilles' heel, is allowing for history to repeat itself.

"Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Subsequent the Holocaust, world leaders gathered to cry out "Never Again" and to condemn the horrible actions of the Nazi Regime, alas, as we saw the corpses pile on the streets of Rwanda in 1994, the United Nations ordered their troops not to intervene. Genocide is the greatest monstrosity we, as humans, could face, alas we are swift to denounce the actions of massmurderers as that of an entire group; not individuals. We fail to recognise the humanity in the people who participated in such a disgusting and crude event as genocide. We gather them to be psychologically flawed, or less than a full person, however this is not the case. What we fail to discuss in school, is the importance of not dehumanising the perpetrators, but learning from them. How can one person manipulate an entire nation into antagonism, fear, resentment or even hatred? How could the German people volunteer to murder Jewish, Romani, LGBTQ+ and other people in cold blood?

These questions are to be problematized around, this to make pupils and students understand how their role in society is prevalent **in creating a peaceful world, free from war and conflict**.

Including Civil Society in Schools:

Civil society such as political organisations, NGOs and other organisations has a vital role in society as a whole.

Ingrid Segerstedts have had something called *Föreningstimma*. (Due to the current pandemic this has been halted this year). This was an hour when all students were encouraged to participate in an organisation or create their own organisation. This led to students becoming more interested in society as a whole and how students can engage themselves in different civil society organisations. Some students created their own debate and coffee organisation, some created an EU-association and some joined a local Amnesty Group. Including Civil society is also a great way to create knowledge among students on how to engage themselves and be an active part of the democratic process. Having conferences like this (IYTT conference) is another way to allow students and young people to express their thoughts and beliefs freely in front of people of power.

School is a place that should allow students to form their own opinions on different issues. Allowing civil society to be a part of this plays an important role of forming the society of tomorrow.

While the *Human rights* as a subject could be used as a way to learn about democracy and human rights in *theory*, including civil society is a way to participate in democracy and promote human rights in *practice*.

Foreign Policy and European Values:

European values are a key part of creating a global and inclusive democracy. Even though being European is different in different countries we can all agree on the basic human rights and the value of a healthy democracy. We should use that common idea of a democratic society to help other countries form a sustainable democracy. There are many ways that the European Union can influence other countries towards a more sustainable society. One of them is to include demands on human rights when forming new trade agreements, with the importance of it being just a demand, not something optionally. Another way to influence is by providing a carrot toward the countries that are going in the right direction and removing aid for governments that move in the opposite direction.

First of all, we would like to say how important it is for these types of topics to be included to everyone in a working society, starting at an early age. Experience consists of; practising democracy, seeing that things do change, understanding the bigger picture, understanding how much work goes into it, which is exactly what we are practicing during today's discussions.

What are European values? Of course, Being European is different in different countries. Although it remains basic demands when joining the European Union (EU).

Sweden can be set as an example, where the population do not fear oppressions and are able to voice their opinions.

Democracy and human rights are universal values that should be incorporated into every government country's norms. and The EU is a way to influence other countries. For example, remove aid for governments that move in an opposite direction. Yet, sanctions affect the people at times, which has been proven several times in our history. Therefore the EU needs to ensure that aid goes to the people and not to corruption. We want to actually make change instead of just a symbolic gesture. Perhaps subsidies as well. By collaboration, for example Trade policies can a mutually beneficial situation occur that therefore will create a maintained well being. In this case Sweden needs to provide a carrot for being more democratic.

We believe the EU opened up to countries a little bit too early *not ready* to join the EU. We can advocate democracy in these countries by strengthening institutions, for instance NGOs; doctors without borders, international cooperation and the United Nations (UN). **Change comes from the inside, comes from the people.** By just pushing the European Union values into the less democratic countries we will only show ourselves as superior, which we believe will backfire and only create further opposition. An example that illustrates just this is Russia after the fall of Soviet Union, a situation like that occurred (among other reasons) by the west inadequate liability. Democracies work and maintain the best, when the population makes the changes themselves, of course help can be included, but the most important thing is that the people feel like they have a voice to be heard.

However, economic policy often clashes with european values. The majority of countries prioritise their economic growth over decisions that could increase democratic values, which is no news, we all strive for our best interest. But we believe that the EU should incorporate human rights and democracy in all of the union's work, in a binding way.

The Importance of Trusting Society:

Why is it prominent to be able to trust society, one may wonder. This is important on so many different levels due to the fact that if there is a lack of trust against the institutions that are supposed to take care of you when you are the most vulnerable, a new culture will develop in society where everyone is just caring about themselves and are doing whatever it takes to keep themselves afloat.

There are many different solutions on how to increase the trust. We believe that a major one is by decreasing corruption. By reducing corruption a society with more equal opportunities is created. When the power balance has changed the trust will henceforth increase. One could try to decrease corruption by increasing the

transparency in politics as well as criminalize and aggravate the possibilities of using bribery.

It is really crucial to have access to objectively neutral media that examines the government because then the inhabitants will get a better view of how fair the society actually is and henceforth the trust for society will be more evidence based.

Communication as a Key Inclusion and the Importance of Understanding the Democratic Process:

Being able to communicate and to express one's opinions is one, if not *the* most fundamental value to a free democracy. In order to be able to have an opinion and freely express it is vital that we understand the topic that is being discussed.

Sweden is a diverse society with many different cultures and languages being spoken, the main language being Swedish, however a lot of people who would love to involve themselves more in the democratic process can no do such because they; Do not understand the Swedish language well enough, government papers/documents are not posted in their language or simply do not get the opportunity to participate.

This is also relevant for younger people who may feel like the democratic process is boring or too hard to understand, partly because the language used is too complicated or uses jargon that is difficult to understand for the common man.

Social Media and Democracy:

The youth of our society are to some extent influenced by social media everyday therefore consistently provided with new information, in addition to this the lack of source knowledge being taught is clear.

The development of social media has increased the spread of fake news and one sided information leading to simplified political questions in favor of populists. It is easy to get stuck in a bubble, with algorithms constantly feeding this bubble to an extent many become very isolated from the society that exists outside the internet. The content of social media containing images, stories and theories out of context could create a feeling of fear among society with the power of controlling our decision making, equalizing in a dismantling of our democracy along with a polarized society caused by the information communicated through different social media.

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