(Press Release)

Community groups launch five "Conflict Reconciliation Campus" visions

Concerted civil society efforts for campuses to heal and address emotional needs of teachers and students

(20 August 2019) Social events over the past few months have triggered deep divisions with young people at the forefront of ongoing tensions. With the start of a new school year next week, a group of civil organisations with a shared interest in education, including **Ednovators, Teach for Hong Kong, Good Lab, Social Ventures Hong Kong (SVhk), Principal Chan Hung of Principal Chan Free Tutorial World**, and **Principal Chan Siu-cheuk of Christian Zheng Sheng College**, have jointly launched five visions for a "Conflict Reconciliation Campus". This initiative will focus on providing an action-orientated approach and programme ideas towards new narratives within the society and the education sector, in order to prepare as much as possible for the needs of a new school year.

As an immediate first step, the "Conflict Reconciliation Campus" initiative will draw on collective efforts from the civil society to convene an emotional support network, and a series of free wellness workshops, dialogue experiences and street stations will be hosted to address physical and spiritual needs of teachers and students. In this time of discord, the platform aspires to mend the rift in our society through healing and dialogue towards a journey of conflict reconciliation.

Survey shows that more than 70% of students felt emotionally impacted by the social events this summer

The summer of protests have undoubtedly taken an emotional and mental toll on students. According to the latest "Student Physical and Emotional Wellbeing Study" report*, 72% of the participating students claimed that they were mildly to highly affected physiologically as a result of ongoing events. Physiological responses observed included insomnia, sleep problems, nausea, loss of appetite and lingering exhaustion. Over 40% of the participants expressed that they were strongly affected after viewing violent scenes and related information on social media platforms. Their emotions were severely affected with responses including sadness, frustration, helplessness, fear about safety and a sense of added uncertainty for the future of Hong Kong. Signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were further observed amongst around 10% of the participants, who experienced symptoms including crying spells, flashbacks and hallucinations of violent scenes, insomnia, anxiety, muscle tension, avoidance of people and a sense of isolation.

A focus group discussion was hosted in early August by organisers of "Conflict Reconciliation Campus" to engage 30 students between the ages of 12 and 23 to understand their physical wellbeing and emotional needs

Five visions for a conflict-free campus

Every school campus should be a safe haven as a place of compassion, tolerance, trust, and inclusion within our society. Arnold Chan, founder of Teach for Hong Kong, says: "Considerations for the emotional needs of students and teachers alike should precede absolute judgement in the new school year. Schools should be prepared to handle special circumstances with a new mentality, and consider the five 'Conflict Reconciliation Campus' visions at the heart of a student-oriented approach"

The five visions of "Conflict Reconciliation Campus" include:

1. "Kindness First" – Taking care of the students' emotional needs
2. "Go Slowly" – Adjusting the pace of learning
3. "Trusted Network" – Establishing networks of trust and support

4. "Social Contract" – Setting up new conflict management mechanisms for the handling of controversial topics in the classrooms
5. "Reconciliation Hub" – Turning campuses and students as new forces of hope to reconnect our communities

Building the healing power of community collaborations

In the face of anger, frustration, and depression, teachers and students alike will need to identify an emotional outlet and channels to relieve stress. Organisers of "Conflict Reconciliation Campus" have taken the initiative to rally community support to create an emotional support network, including "Rest Stations" initiated by a group of yoga instructors providing free healing workshops across Hong Kong, "Hear for You" developed by students and social workers to lend an ear and offer 'free listening' to anyone who wanted to share at street stations, and local social enterprise "Dialogue Experience" offering a quiet space to rest and reflect as participants immerse themselves in complete darkness. Other organisations supporting this initiative include Just Feel, RunOurCity, Still Together, Heart-to-Heart Life Education Foundation, Playtao Education, and Hopeland Education, who are pledging a series of additional free workshops, talks and events as part of this community-driven platform to expand emotional support and counselling offers to teachers and students in need. For more information please visit: www.ednovators.org

We strongly believe that in upholding core principles of "compassion", "dialogue", and "trust" lie an opportunity for our community to come together and confront the current crisis. Rising through the social turmoil may yet be the most valuable positive education lesson for today's younger generation on their journeys to personal growth.

Related news images can be downloaded at the following link: http://bit.ly/2019CRCampusPR

The initiators of five visions for a "Conflict Reconciliation Campus" (front row, from left to right): Playtao and SVhk, Founder - Francis Ngai, HKCNC, Founder and Principal - Chan Hung, Ednovators, Director and Good Lab, Convenor - Ada Wong, Teach for Hong Kong, Founder - Arnold Chan and Zheng Seng College, Principal - Chan Siu Cheuk, together with representatives from supporting network.

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