

Global Issues Network Conference (GIN) at the Gems American Academy, Abu Dhabi

By: Justine Faith Melgar

Date(s): February 18-20, 2016

GINspired and GINergized was how I came out of the conference. It had been such an amazing experience, and I sure am glad that I attended. At the beginning of the conference, to be honest, I came for CAS. I came because I wanted to finish my CAS hours as soon as possible. I came because I felt that I had to. I was scared of going at first. I was scared the people wouldn't be nice. I was afraid that I'd stick out like a sore thumb. But that wasn't it. I actually enjoyed all three days of the conference. I met some great people. I got to listen to inspiring stories. And most importantly, I was given hope that humanity still has hope. And that hope is being brought about by the likes of me, teenagers such as I. It's inspiring to be around so many people who are passionate about making a change. And their passion really got to me. Their passion provided the fire inside of me with more oxygen; oxygen that fuels the fire within my soul, that deep longing to make a change.

In the conference, the main topic was human rights. And the premise of the conference was to pick young minds like ours to think of practical and sustainable ways to help the Earth and other people. There were GANGS, which were basically what the different groups were called at GIN. And each GANG has a main focus they want to change. All the GANGS are listed as follows: Digital Divide, Education, Poverty, Health and Safety, and Environment. I was in Education. Actually at registration, when I was picking which GANG to sign up for, I thought about it deeply. All GANGS seem equally important, but which one should I join? Then I thought that maybe I should pick the one closest to home. And that is Poverty and Education. I have cousins, aunties, and uncles in the Philippines who aren't exactly well-off. And since I was down to two, I had to choose one. I thought about it hard again, and then I came up with an answer. In today's world the path to those lives that we dream off is often good and proper education. And those people who

don't get to have that end up in poverty. No education leads to poverty. So that must mean that we should fix the problem of education, in order to lessen poverty. And that's how I chose which GANG to be on. While in our GANGS, there actually had been a debate that ensued that focused on happiness. A side argued that happiness comes in different forms while another argued the modern, capitalistic view of happiness which is the belief that we cannot be happy without money. It was pretty interesting, and I tried to pitch in my opinions but two of them were really into it.

In attending the conference, I was able to address Learning Outcomes 2, 6, and 7. LO2 is about undertaking challenges and developing new skills in the process. LO6 is engaging with issues of global significance. And finally, LO7 is recognizing and considering the ethics of choices and actions. The conference also addressed all three areas of CAS which are Creativity, Action, and Service. First of all, the whole premise of the GIN conference is to push attendees to come up with practical and sustainable ways of initiating change in their schools, communities, and even the world. That premise alone addresses all the learning outcomes and the area Creativity. As for Action, there were lots of activities and workshops. We didn't just sit through the three days. We actually did things. There was a workshop called Ana=Nahnu, which means Me=We in Arabic, where we had to do trust and peer activities as well as being empowered that WE can change the world but only if you start with ME. Then there were the excursions. There had been an excursion at the Mangroves and another at a labour camp, both of which I'll be talking about with more depth in two separate reflections as I reckoned that the excursions should also be given focus as they were not just mere parts of the conference.

My goal in attending the conference was to make friends, learn from others, and share my ideas no matter how nerve-wracking it may be for someone like me who has social anxiety. And I am happy that I was able to achieve all of those. I even got to meet two other people who liked the same music that I do. I got to listen to amazing stories from the guest speakers. I tried to speak out and be heard. I wasn't the loudest or the most outspoken person in there, but I'm proud that I'm making progress in my constant battle against my own fears of public speaking. Sometimes to stay alive, you have to kill your mind. After the conference, I feel heavy with responsibility that I have

to serve the world. And that's probably a good thing. But before doing that, I want to start with myself first; I want to change my mindset and believe that I can make change happen. And then I want to start with the people who are in close proximity, from there then outwards. But for now, I plan to do it one step at a time.