LEARNING TO UNLEARN: SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE EXPERIMENTS TO DECOLONIZE LEARNING

Between September 2018 and January 2019 a group of people based in either Cairo, Egypt or Bern, Switzerland took part in a collaborative learning experiment. Below is a collection of ideas, suggestions and guidelines for future similar experiences. These emerged based on collective reflections and discussions amongst all participants about what worked well and what needs to be changed.

Collaboratively establish Community Values and Agreements (between all groups and within all groups). Ideas include:
- **Call in**: If someone says something problematic, hurtful or oppressive, let them know. Do so in a compassionate, respectful and patient way, assuming best intentions within this space. Sometimes people don't know the correct language to use or they are on another stage of their journey of (un)learning. That doesn't mean we shouldn't speak up and let them know, but do so with the belief that they want to learn.
- **Respond to opinion, not person**: If you disagree with something someone says, or someone says something problematic, respond. But don't attack the person, rather respond to what they said.
- **Use "I" statements**: Speak from a place of your own experiences rather than making generalizations.
- **Sit with discomfort**: Sometimes what we talk about can be challenging and uncomfortable. If it's uncomfortable because it is problematic and oppressive, then it's important to speak up. But if the discomfort comes from unlearning certain prejudices or noticing something about your privilege, then it is important to accept the discomfort and take the time to understand it.
- **Take a step outside if you need to**: If you are overwhelmed by the discussion in some way and need some space, please feel free to step outside at any point.
- **It's okay to make mistakes.**

Discuss ideas together of how to acknowledge, engage with and subvert existing hierarchies and politics in the classroom, rather than deny them or completely withdraw.
- Be aware that responsibilities (facilitation, logistical tasks, communication etc.) come with power. The distribution of these roles should therefore be transparent and ideally be done with everyone's consent. Roles should be exchangeable as much as possible.
- Be aware that perceptions don't always reflect intentions and both are equally important to be discussed. For example, bearing the key for a space could be a burden for the key holder, but perceived as a power by someone else.

Find a class location that promotes more personal discussions, challenges hierarchy and feels more comfortable. Preferably a space without desks, sitting in a circle, with the facilitator seated just as everyone else in the class.

Use the tools that are at your disposal, if they lead to the goals (Community Mastery Board, Kanban, Game Shifting Board).

Reflect on the role of language within the sessions and think of ways to challenge certain hierarchies (languages of available material, availability of an ongoing glossary to translate centralized terms, alternative non-text-based material, etc.).
- Acknowledge the work of translators in the group.
- Find a balance between practical solutions and the decolonizing goal. For example, it may be easier to use English in communication, but using Arabic may be closer to the values of the project.

Have a **different facilitator each session**. If that isn't possible, then have regular feedback mechanisms in place for facilitators. - Suggestions for facilitators/organizers:
- Communicate openly and clearly, be aware of how much space you take up.
- Be vulnerable about thoughts, anxieties, insecurities and hopes (invite others to share theirs, too), thus creating more equal footing as everyone embarks on this experiment.
- Give the possibility to use different ways of group settings and decision taking processes (possibility to use the Community Mastery Board for this).
- Address the concerns/awarenesses.
- Invite flexibility.
- The facilitators should see it as their task to hold the space for learning and sharing.
- Be explicit about how to address each other in these roles (names and formal addressing).

Collaboratively develop a syllabus/curriculum and common structure for all participants
- For the syllabus: Include not just written or academic text, but other mediums. Some material may not be available in Arabic but also some valuable material isn't available in English (don't assume that all the material worth engaging with/interesting to students emerges from English-speaking contexts - translation of material into Arabic is important, but it is also important to explore and utilize existing material in Arabic (and finding/doing translations of those into other languages)
- Allow for changes in the syllabus as the project evolves.

Be transparent about financial resources and budget so that everyone can know how much or how little resources are at the disposal of the project and its different purposes.
- Use the available resources in a way that stays true to the values of the project (transfer resources).

Create space in the beginning acknowledging the emotional process in this type of experiment involves and center the importance of caring for one another and ourselves throughout.

Have regular check-ins each session, as well as more general check-ins throughout the course both within individual groups and across groups to address any remaining tensions or frustrations or ideas that have come up. Participants should be encouraged to feel free to express their discomfort during sessions, if needed.

Collaboratively **determine assessment criteria** across groups.

Common purpose - acknowledge individual intentions but also create common goals.

Determine certain overarching questions driving the experiment, and return to them regularly. Examples include:
- What does decolonization mean? Have common discussion of this with all participants.
- What strategies have we developed and applied in an attempt to decolonize? How are those working?
- In the case of an Area Studies course: How have we been addressing and challenging the subject/object dynamic?
- How has our individual positionality been playing into the course and the discussions?
- Have we been able to create a safe space? And related to this: What is a safe space for us? What violates a safe space for us?

Center the importance of relationship- and community-building. Develop, together, strategies and ideas to build relationships (such as a common workshop before the class begins). Establish a communication tool early enough to allow for community building.
- Between participants in same class
- Between participants in different classes
- Between participants based in Cairo and Bern
- Between participants and facilitators/organizing team

Create a written document with the purpose, organisational setting and underlying values of the project for everyone to refer to. Also regularly address the common understanding of the framework within the sessions.

Ideally **organise two common workshops**, at the beginning and at the end to allow for community building and a constructive closure.