Becoming Better Facilitators
April 03-29, 2021
on Clubhouse App with **AULA FUTURE**

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Aula introduction https://www.aulafuture.org/
Aula Future is a research and academic organization with the mission of growing the next generation of innovative creators. With our self-directed, project-based pedagogy, participants develop new technologies, experiences, and skills in art thinking and design. During our program, participants lead innovative research projects and construct demos based on their interests while collaborating with facilitators, external institutions, experts, and peers.

What's covered in this document?
These notes are a transcription of a series of discussions held on the Clubhouse app. In this series, we want to discuss how to become better facilitators for our students and participants. How can we support ideas and create environments suited for the innovators of the future? The chat rooms were not meant as a means of self-promotion, but to collectively discuss and debate methods, experiences, and ideas around the future of education. Our hope is that these conversations serve as an incubator for ideas that enact real change in the world.

Talk schedule overview:

April 3rd	April 8th	April 17th	April 24th	April 29th
Addressing mental health in education	Assessing assessments - Future of education	Facilitator "tips & tricks" - Let's get practical	Student-Teacher Q&A: Ask your burning questions!	Designing for Curiosity - Future of Education

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April 03 | Addressing mental health in education

Overview:

Both child and adult learners are suffering from mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders. This has been happening even before the transition to online learning formats due to COVID-19 and is now even more prevalent.

What can we as parents, teachers, and facilitators do to help? We want to share our experiences and brainstorm solutions.

Framing the conversation

- How can we reflect on and draw from our own experiences at school; how could we prevent our own bad experiences from happening again (not knowing that we could challenge teachers, feeling that we were alone in our experience, etc.)?

- How can we introduce emotional education into our curricula? Since we are at the front lines, it's up to us facilitators and teachers to address the issue (e.g. introducing life purpose, exploring passions & pain points).

Key Challenges/Questions:

1. **Availability and accessibility** to counselors and mental health professionals. How can we as facilitators step up even though we are not necessarily trained to do so?
2. The **environment** in which students are in due to the pandemic is affecting student learning; gun violence, sexual abuse, parental abuse, losing family members to COVID-19. Should we be reaching out to the parents anyway?
3. The **online platform** itself is presenting challenges that are in turn affecting mental health. Students have to be sent to work since parents have lost jobs. There is less social and emotional interaction as well, contributing to emotional stress.
4. Teachers and facilitators feel **uncomfortable addressing mental health issues**. An untrained teacher could make a mistake and damage the child even further.

Meeting Resources:

Deneen Day (US): Of "Be the One" mentor program. Partnering with mentors at hospitals and in the community (police officers, social workers, etc.) to meet the students where they are in their mental health journey. Students have mentor periods away from their regular teachers, where mentors help students with journaling and other techniques. The focus is to let the students be heard and to build relationships so that they can direct them to the right resources.

General Meeting Notes:

❖ Some students have abusive homes and school is sometimes a sanctuary. This has been lost during the pandemic. A solution could be sending periodical surveys to students to gauge how the curriculum is working for them; how is their mental state and is the workload too much?

❖ There is no playbook for educators on how to handle mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are all learning as we go. Could we brainstorm a **playbook** together? How could we reflect on our own experiences at school to help us do so?

➢ Starting with the **vocabulary**. Doing exercises that teach them how to label emotions on paper and in real-time. Making clear to our students that mental health is a thing in the first place and that they are NOT ALONE--giving space during the class to discuss it.
➢ Integrating **mindfulness**, yoga, and journaling into the lessons and including the teachers in those lessons as well.
➢ (For a biology class) Have a unit or cumulative project at the end of the year that focuses on the physiological effect of things like mindfulness on our brain, that ties together everything that was taught during the semester.
➢ Tying in students' **curiosities and "life purpose"** into the lessons, so that they feel as though they are not "wasting time" at school.
➢ Start a mentor group (police officers, doctors, social workers, etc.)

■ Have older students mentor younger students, and develop **student leaders**.

Overall takeaway:

Let's **collaborate** more and build a bigger **community** around this topic (students, coaches, mentors, mental health professionals) to **create our very own "playbook"** for educators which could help to tackle the issue of mental health in education.

April 08: Assessing Assessments

<u>Overview:</u>

It is important for students to demonstrate their understanding of a subject so that facilitators can evaluate whether our educational goals are being met. Educators must place the student in the right classes, understand instructional needs, and in some cases, acquiring funding.

These needs have been traditionally achieved through standardized assessments. Aula Future wants to explore ways to assess *for* learning, not of it.

<u>Framing the conversation</u>

- Why are assessments important? Do we still need them?
- How has moving online changed assessments?
- What are the alternatives to standardized assessment methods?

<u>Key Challenges/Questions:</u>

- ❖ **Testing and Assessments may offer things that more complex, project-based things can't do:** Project-based and collaborative pedagogies often look at group assessments and soft skills, while standardized assessments can target more specific knowledge and skills pertaining to the individual student. How do we address this?
- ❖ **Teachers and Facilitators must become learning designers.** This requires us to consider what we will assess and the evidence that students/participants have achieved learning goals, from the very beginning. How can we plan the best kinds of assessments ahead of time?
- ❖ **How can we assess project-based learning?** Although students are exploring their interests, and we know that they learn through project-creation, there is a danger of losing control as facilitators; how can we know what goals we are accomplishing with a PLB approach? How can we frame projects to show evidence of student learning?

<u>Meeting Resources</u>:

- Great interview with Grant Wiggins, a nationally recognized assessment expert: https://www.edutopia.org/grant-wiggins-assessment#graph1
- IDEO education model (design-thinking for educators), courtesy of Bushra Noureen
- (Books) the Discovery of the Child, the Absorbent Mind, courtesy of Anthea Davidson
- Montessori Method
- Battelle Memorial Institute: https://youtu.be/8PckHDH_6Ho, courtesy of Eric Ocelewski

General Notes/Takeaways:

❖ It is ok to face cheating online head on by **allowing open book assessments**. Since students are now able to find any answer online and have so much technology at their disposal, we have to change our learning goals and meet the students where they are.

❖ As teachers become more like facilitators, we can enable students to monitor their own progress (**self-assessments** combined with facilitator **feedback**).

❖ **"Backward design"**: designing lessons beginning with learning goals and how to assess those goals first.

❖ It may be beneficial to focus on developing **student-leaders** who can teach their peers.

❖ We can be more clear on *why* the state has certain learning goals sharing that with the students, and at the same time, **help students find their own reason** for learning that material (**Self-motivated** learning).

❖ How do we measure the quality of the *process* [of learning]?

❖ Could we create **adjacent models of assessments** instead of replacing them?

❖ We must develop **rubrics**, guides, and checkpoints that also **include mental health** and take **"human-ness"** into account; How can we become more like SELs in this way?

❖ **How do we assess collaborative/PBL work?** Without traditional assessments, will we loose sight of the individual needs of each student?

➢ Facilitators can **listen** in on group conversations and assess students in a way where we can redirect them as needed.

➢ Exploring the **collaboration/inquiry cycle**. Have students explain what happened in the process of project-building, and asking "how could we improve"?

❖ **Should we remove assessments altogether?** What would that world look like?

➢ Perhaps, we should re-think assessments and what it means. We should instead think about how we could *increase the richness* of our **feedback**, since humans learn by comprehending feedback from mistakes and successes. Failure is a natural way of learning, and perhaps we could assist students in "grading" the quality of their failures.

➢ **Art-thinking** and **design-thinking** are unique in that both offer the student an opportunity to exhibit/share their projects with the student's community and gain valuable, real feedback which they can learn from.

❖ We must consider the **systems** which are inhibiting us (teachers/facilitators) to move in the direction of more "**soft-skill assessments**", and discuss ways of removing those barriers. How can we make this type of assessment more accessible to our teachers and help them to use them effectively with students?

❖ The **Montessori Method** encourages self-assessment by way of **intrinsic motivation** and by using self-correcting learning materials. The child is encouraged to learn through exploration. This **wholistic** and **personalized learning** method is concerned about ensuring that "the natural unfolding of the child" is supported.

How can we create **a new type of rubric** that supports "human-ness", **mental health**, and **social-emotional learning**? Which instills a sense of **curiosity** and self-directed learning? Which takes the current learning climate into account and focuses on student mastery?

April 17: Facilitator "tips & tricks"

<u>Overview:</u>

As facilitators and educators, it's incredibly important to take time to reflect on our own teaching process, to understand what methods we are using and to give the chance to review our curriculum. This can be done in several different ways, in the form of discussion, journaling and sharing.

Inspired by Nei Pasricha's book *Two Minute Mornings*, participants were given the following prompts and asked to write a few sentences in reflection:

"As a teacher/facilitator:
I will let go of…
I am grateful for...
I will focus on…"

After personal reflection, we brainstormed as a group how to address each prompt.

<u>Framing the conversation</u>

- We want to share practical teaching tools, valuable lessons, philosophies, etc. from your experience as a facilitator
- We want to test a workshop format on ClubHouse

General Notes/Takeaways:

I will let go of…

- ❖ The way that we used to teach and the way that we used to reach out. Let's think out of the box to meet them (students) where they are.
- ❖ Preconceived thoughts about students and colleagues.
- ❖ We have to be more empathetic to the students and meet the student where they are through observation (student-led approach). Understand what sparks their curiosity and let that help you to decide what lessons are best for them.
  - ➢ Have a lesson/training for facilitators in **observation**! Keep a notepad or journal of observations during each class as a reflective practice.
  - ➢ Nurture students' "super powers" (gifted and "twice-gifted")
  - ➢ Have students journal and have them turn it in, so that we show that we honor their thoughts
- ❖ We shouldn't bring prejudices (don't say "they don't know anything")
- ❖ I will let go of homework
  - ➢ Think about what we want the students to look like on the graduation stage, and teaching more holistic courses

I am grateful for…

- ❖ For the ability to be present with students, thanks to more self-care
- ❖ Making a lasting impact
- ❖ Shared online resources (like Slideshare on LinkedIn)

I will focus on…

- ❖ Being present without any distractions and plans so that I can connect and engage more on an emotional level
- ❖ Can we create a school culture that emulates how we learn in real life?
- ❖ We should move into more structural changes, and if that is too difficult, could we help the parent to become more involved:
  - ➢ How can we foster community learning? *"It takes a village to raise a child"*
    - ■ This method can teach history, not just what the state wants them (students) to know. As a group and a neighborhood, we could visit monuments and see historical sites (Courtesy of Deneen Day).
    - ■ *"Parent's day in"* (Courtesy of Andy): Parents fill out a form of what they would like to offer (Making a presentation; sharing about their job, reading books, singing songs, cooking, what they do on a daily basis) Inviting the parents into the school increases engagement for the following week. Realise the power of parents in the community in educating the child.

April 24: Student/Teacher Q&A

Overview:

As educators, we know the value of reflection and feedback. In collaboration with actual students, we examine what works and what doesn't work in terms of engagement and learning. Our goal with this conversation is to have an open and honest discussion around how we as teachers and facilitators can help our students connect more with the learning content, and to share the challenges faced by the educators as well.

Framing the conversation

- What are your favorite **things to learn about** and why?
- What are your favorite **activities** and why?
- What do you find **most challenging** about school, and what are your suggestions for improvement?
- If you could learn anything in school, what would it be?

Key Challenges/Questions:

1. How do we address racism in the classroom?
2. School is about memory and getting good scores on tests, not about anything truly relevant (or practical) for students, especially students of color.
3. There has been a lot of violence and race issues already in place in the community, and teachers are often in response mode (no time to think about or plan the curriculum). How can mentors navigate this?
4. Teachers/mentors/Facilitators can do better by helping the student find opportunities relevant to their interests, offering more after school activities and programs that include practical life skills.

General Notes/Takeaways:

(Answers are from real students)

Addressing racism in the classroom:
- ❖ Racism hasn't affected learning necessarily, but it hurts the community and bullying
- ❖ It should be addressed in schools to stop bullying. It is a sensitive topic that should be handled with care.

Making school more relevant to student's real lives:
- ❖ More conversations and activities where students can dig deeper into a topic that is impact-driven would be better than memorization.

How can mentors address and navigate violence and race issues in the classroom?
- ❖ A student usually has a teacher that they feel comfortable with. So as long as you give that space, they will probably approach that person. Just be a real person (tell them when they're wrong and make them feel like family) who won't judge or tell others. Let them know that you're there.
- ❖ Develop relationships with their families as well.
- ❖ Be in tune with your students and be observant of a change of your behavior, because if they are in emotional or mental stress then their academics will suffer.

How can we (teachers) do better?
- ❖ Helping the student find opportunities that are relevant to their interests.
- ❖ After school activities that are more practical to life skills

(Answers from real teachers/mentors/facilitators)

- ❖ Race shouldn't just be discussed on MLK day or on black history month.
- ❖ Race shouldn't be simplified just because they are children.
- ❖ Be honest about conversations in the classroom.
- ❖ Share cultures
- ❖ We can start teaching about race earlier than we think. They could start at a younger age so that they know their identity, they know others' identities, and are comfortable and culturally aware of the world.
- ❖ Providing more activities instead of just reading and comprehension.
  - ➢ Creating **surveys** for the teachers and their identities, then the parents and their identities (family trees) and how they identify their children, going beyond race. You can create activities around this information based on who they are and where they come from, including the family (Courtesy of Aija).
- ❖ We should go deeper into Black history and not pick and choose facts. There are holes in the history and facts that are not as relevant (to Blacks).

April 29: Designing for curiosity

Overview:

We have found that *curiosity* is an intrinsic part of being human and is a central mechanism for motivating learning and sustaining engagement. How can we design learning experiences that allow our students and participants to follow their curiosities?

Framing the conversation

- Designing for curiosity requires a **paradigm shift**. When you design for teaching knowledge, you are forced to optimize past teaching methods. Designing learning experiences that stimulate curiosity, force you to become a facilitator who supports their vision. Teachers must change their mentality around teaching.
    - Often, students feel as if they need to come up with the right answers. How might we drive classes where a possible solution(s) is *explored* instead, and that empower investigation?
- What are the **best strategies** for promoting curiosity in learning?
    - Project-based/event-based learning
    - Socially dynamic learning experiences
- We should be reminded that developing curiosity is one of the key pillars of learning. Often, during school curiosity is looked at as something that takes you off-task whereas outside of school, learning is most often a result of curiosity.

Key Challenges/Questions:

1. **Scaling:** If the facilitator is responsible for understanding the curiosities and drivers of the student, how is this scalable?
    a. Could harnessing technology help? Teachers could become more like advisors with office hours
2. The sense of self-direction, curiosity and independence and intrinsic motivation must be taught early on. How can you understand what interests a younger person?
3. How could we turn curiosity into a learning experience?

Resources:

- Issac Newton quotes on simplicity
- http://www.7levelsdeep.com/
- micro.ooo

General Notes/Takeaways:

- ❖ Looking at objects from various perspectives (using the five senses) to help students to find their own questions and answers in those things. Playing with objects and materials adds data and information and experiences into their minds.
- ❖ Could curiosity have a different goal at a younger age? For example, using curiosity to build a data bank and foundation. At an older stage, curiosity becomes a driver to come up with more complex projects and learning. Teachers can give the students tools.
- ❖ Could we use gamification? Creating an experience which starts with asking a lot of questions. Asking "why?" more often.
- ❖ How can we build lessons around a curiosity that a student has and allow them to follow it?