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The Educator's Role in Creating a Classroom Culture of Belonging: Reimagining Diversity, Equity, Inclusion for the Multi-diverse Classroom

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> That teaching life carries with it the potential to create deep structures of belonging. And we are in desperate need of a pedagogy of belonging, one that is able to invite diverse people from every walk of life. . . into a shared project of lifelong learning together." This should be an alternative vision to how education has been imagined in the West . . . primarily for white men and even when imagined for others it was yet in the approximation of white male subjectivity. It was and is yet education that presents women, minority students, and even minority faculty as guests in a house not made for them.
>
> Jennings (2017, p. 59).

Introduction

This chapter is written for educators in higher education, and is informed by our shared experiences of living and raising families around the world while being adult educators in educational institutions and beyond. We are women in the world, with inter-

sectionalities and differences across, race, gender, culture, language, religion, etc. Being «othered» has been part of our lived experience, so we know that discriminatory experiences because of one's race, ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, ability, sexual orientation or otherwise is not only psychologically damaging; it is also a disempowering practice that impairs one's ability to learn. To inform and facilitate a shift in classroom dynamics, this chapter develops a 'culture of belonging' as a practice for educators to model.

We begin with a narrative study where we provide examples of lived experiences from each of our lives that influenced our thinking and proposals here for replacing *othering* with Cultures of Belonging in educational settings.

Debbie

«I am unable to purchase friends for your child.» Exasperated, the teacher sighed, absolving herself of responsibility for the ongoing bullying my child faced in the classroom following a move from Sweden to Germany. My children were the school's sole immigrants, and the bullying began almost immediately. I became aware that something was wrong when I saw my child after a bus ride home from school and noticed the front of their coat was unusually damp. When I inquired as to what had occurred, I was told, «The other kids spit on me and referred to me as "shit-American", yet I am not American. I grew up in Sweden».

While growing up in a culture other than one's own can be an enriching educational experience, being the «other» renders one an attractive target for bullying and ostracism. Bullying is often a horizontal issue as it transpires among peers, nevertheless the educator's role can play the critical factor in curbing bullying while also fostering feelings of safety and belonging for all learners in the class. Unfortunately, this teacher did not understand that

belonging was under their purview. By neglecting this, my child's acceptance in the class was severely impacted.

A few months later, I showed up two minutes late to an all-school meeting at the same school. Normally not a big deal, but in the land of punctuality, a disaster. As I walked in, I noticed that all the students and the parents were in attendance and was embarrassed that I had missed this part of the invitation and had left my children at home. The teacher leading the meeting paused as I walked in and then tersely remarked,

> *Schade dass Sie jetzt gekommen sind, Frau Kramlich. Wegen Ihr, müssen wir aber jetzt Hochdeutsch reden und nicht mehr Alemannisch*. (It is unfortunate that you are now here, Mrs. Kramlich. We can no longer speak our dialect but now we need to speak in high German).

I responded in my near-fluent high German that I could mostly follow the dialect and to continue on in Alemannisch. Inwardly, I was seething. It was not the fact of being called out in front of the entire school population; it was the underlying meaning about what the teacher insinuated, "You are different. You do not belong here. Your kids do not fit in here and you make more work for us." Her treatment of me empowered all the children present to continue to bully my children. The teacher had publicly implied that our family did not belong and we were a burden. My kids continued to be called *Scheiss-Ami* (shit-American)[1] regularly and it was never addressed by any teacher.

1 German slur, considered offensive, typically used during the former half of the 20th century. Derived from two words:**scheiße**, meaning «shit» in German, and the slang term «**ami**» for Americans, which is similar to «brit» for Britons, etc. **Ami** itself is not considered derogatory in Germany. ("Scheißami", 2009).

Yabome

In the fall of 2017, I was at a conference focused on Organization Development and Social Justice. We were contending especially with how to facilitate adult learning and development surrounding issues of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in workplaces and communities. Our speaker, a developmental psychologist, had just talked about an experience of being called into a school environment to support the administration in "dealing with a problem child." This child, a Black boy, had been labeled a problem, because he was "acting out," becoming increasingly aggressive in seemingly normal interactions with his peers. On deeper inquiry, our speaker found out this boy had recently moved from a multicultural city in the United States to the Pacific Northwest where the Black population is typically 10% or less. He was the only Black child in his class and at entrance to the school, he was an A student. His grades were now plummeting. Our speaker asked to shadow the class instead of starting her work in 1:1 counseling with the boy. Within hours, she reported seeing clearly what she, as a Latinx woman, could see that the school administration had missed. She observed how this boy was systematically excluded throughout the school day, leading inevitably to his outbursts. One example she gave was that he was never chosen for pair-share or partnered work by other students, in the classroom or in activities like gym class, and none of the teachers seemed to notice.

Immediately after the session, I turned on my phone to check messages from home and found this note waiting for me from my then 10-year old daughter, a regular kid, who happens to be a Black girl growing up on the Canadian side of the Pacific Northwest where the Black population hovers between 2 and 3%.

> Umm you do not need to talk to [my teacher] but.... I realized that I have never picked my own partner (U know like when we can pick a partner; other times the teacher picks which I'm fine with)!!! And when someone

> has somethin' cool they let everyone touch it and look at it; but with me they don't let me touch or look at it!! And we had p.e. today and both grade fives were together and when we need a partner and I was the only girl without one!! Nobody would be my partner. And when I say somethin' no one believes me!! Mom.....Can you help me figure out what to do??? Love u!! (waiting)

I had to pinch myself and re-read this note several times to make sure my mind was not playing tricks on me.

I have subsequently found out, through my praxis, speaking and community engagement that this experience of systemic exclusion in educational institutions is commonplace for Black peoples in the diaspora as well as indigeneous and people of colour globally in colonial contexts and predominantly White spaces (Gilpin-Jackson, 2016, 2018; M rage, 2021). All too often, it starts in elementary school, running through higher education and work life. Indeed, one of the realizations for me as our family uncovered even worse issues, including issues that teachers and administration had been alerted to but left unaddressed, was the fact that my daughter was being inculcated into a culture of oppression and exclusion. I had been insulated from this culture until young adulthood because while I had been born in Germany and lived my first few years in Germany and Belgium, I had returned to Sierra Leone where my parents were from as a child. My daughter would not be shocked into a sudden revelation and painful sense-making of disorienting experiences I had had but could not understand when I returned to the West (Canada and America) for university. It was in Sociology 101 in university that the penny dropped. During the class on race relations, I would look up at the projected screen to see my social identity classified as an 'oppressed minority' and experienced, even there and then, the impact of visible-invisibility (Kamaloni, 2019). I, the only Black student in the class, was talked about in the third person for the rest of the class and no safe space was made for me to enter the conversation.

What is Belonging and Why is it Important?

Today, we are living in a pandemic of polarization. Fear has suffocated and poisoned us into believing that we need to withdraw and band together with others who are like-minded. We are deluded into thinking that these echo chambers provide us with a healthy community, instead, they enhance our fears often resulting in us dehumanizing the 'other' to substantiate our deeply held beliefs as correct. This act of retreat results in us building taller walls and deeper entrenchments. In doing so, our world becomes less humane and feels less safe. By seeking connection and offering belonging to others, regardless of our differences, we can shift our focus from fear to care and kindness. Moving from othering to overtly seeking connection from those different than us will begin to restore belonging and our connection to humanity.

What does the term belonging mean? Goodenow and Grady (1993) describe belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 61). Academic accomplishment and motivation, as well as self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, including behavioural, cognitive, and agentic involvement, are all positively correlated with belonging. (Korpershoek et al., 2020). Yet, belonging is not merely joining an established community with its own structure and standards; it goes beyond this. Brown (2017) recalls being frustrated by a quotation from Maya Angelou in her quest to identify belonging.

> You are only free when you realize you belong no place—
> you belong every place—no place at all. The price is high.
> The reward is great (Moyers & Company, 2015).

This quote irritated Brown for many years until she began to recognize that ultimately belonging began with self-acceptance and authenticity.

> Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it. Because **true belonging** only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance (Brown, 2012, p.145).

After several years, Brown expanded her definition,

> **True belonging** is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world . . . True belonging doesn't require you to *change* who you are; it requires you to *be* who you are (Brown, 2017, p. 40).

According to The Othering and Belonging Institute (2021), belonging happens when students in their true authentic selves are accepted as full co-creators in the classroom. One evidence for this is the level of agentic engagement, which refers to students' supportive input to the instruction they receive. Reeve & Shin (2020) define this as, "a purposeful, proactive, and reciprocal style of engagement that is critical for fostering critical student outcomes (e.g., learning, achievement), but its primary objective is to recruit the teacher's increased autonomous support".

The starting point for creating a culture of belonging within the classroom is with the educators. Brown (2017) elaborates, "If leaders really want people to show up, speak out, take chances, and innovate, we have to create cultures where people feel safe—where their belonging is not threatened by speaking out and they are supported" (p. 107). Since belonging is a personal act, it cannot be imposed, rather, it begins with the person of the educator to first find belonging in their authentic selves, and then to actively embody practices for belonging to grow and flourish in the

classroom. In considering creating this culture, there are misconceptions regarding belonging to be considered.

Misconceptions About Belonging

1. Belonging is not created nor guaranteed by diversity. While it is crucial to have representations of other ethnicities, genders, and cultures, there is a risk that these individuals may be exploited as tokens to appear diverse and thus inclusive (Walker, 2015). Often, little effort is made to leverage the group's diversity as an asset or to invite each member to participate fully in the community with their own distinctive whole self. Too frequently, diversity is utilized as a visual prop to deflect attention away from the difficult job of fostering belonging.
2. Inclusion is not the same as belonging. Inclusion often is presented as an invitation to join an established group with its own set of rules and regulations. Belonging is more than just membership; it also encompasses influence, power, and the ability to modify and change the group's structure and purpose.
3. Belonging entails more than merely providing equity and promoting fairness. It must also recognise prior structural power imbalances that have impacted marginalized students since before they were born. In the classroom, belonging can be diminished by using course content rooted in a particular slant of history where the educator has not considered the wider story and intercultural contexts (Walker, 2015).
4. Belonging is significantly more than positive peer relationships. Defining and quantifying belonging is challenging and it is often associated with peer connections and comfort levels in peer relationships (Malone et al., 2012). Creating a culture of belonging requires intentional action on the part of the educator both in person and in practice.

5. Language and research around belonging is not consistent. Libbey (2004) undertook an exhaustive examination of the literature on belonging in schools and found over 21 different measurements. The concept of belonging is highly elusive and difficult to quantify, and ensuring that it occurs might be more difficult. The ongoing research focuses on the students' perceptions of belonging with peers and relationship to the educator (Whiting et al., 2018) and does not specifically address student's autonomy and contribution to the classroom.
6. Belonging is not only for the K-12 classroom. Belonging for all students in higher education is a critical element to the learning process and especially for the non-traditional student (Strayhorn, 2018). For a professor to create belonging, it is also important that the university models a culture of belonging starting with the administration to both faculty and staff. These relationships impact school culture in subtle and powerful ways. When the values of the university are not its practices, this dissonance and confusion break down trust and authenticity.

   In short, recognizing diversity, equity and inclusion as important and supporting peer-to-peer relationships do not themselves guarantee that belonging will result. For belonging to flourish, the space for each unique person to be fully present must be created and power freely shared, ensuring that all are able to co-create together. All must have freedom to be their authentic selves; all must have power to shape, influence and create the space in which they are situated (Othering & Belonging, 2021).

In addition, there are also parts of belonging that are overlooked that demand our attention. Safety and trust are prerequisites for belonging. Students must feel safe in order to fully devote their energy and attention to learning in class. If students are distracted because they do not feel safe or cannot trust that the educator cares for them and is fully invested in their success, the

learning process will be impeded. Too often students are seen only in terms of their physiological needs according to the first level of Maslow's (1962) Hierarchy of Needs[2] that is the first level. To this end, many K-12 schools address needs of food security, and too often, it stops there. The additional levels including safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization often do not get equal attention and resources. Fortunately, this is starting to shift in K-12 schools with the increased focus on social and emotional learning. The CASEL study showed students' achievement increased by 11 percent when social-emotional needs of students were attended to (Durlak et al., 2011). In 2019, 90 percent of schools in the US invested in some aspect of social-emotional learning (*Record High Demand*, 2019). This same shift and focus is also important in the higher education classroom.

The Critical Role of the Educator in Creating a Culture of Belonging.

If belonging in the classroom is often viewed in terms of peer-to-peer relationships on a horizontal plane, yet the relationship to the educator is a vertical one, what is the educator's role in creating belonging? The educator's position, presence, influence, and function as a leader and role model for students offer opportunities in facilitating belonging. This chapter provides educators with a framework to follow to assist them as they model and enact a classroom culture conducive to belonging. In addition, this chapter seeks to increase the educator's awareness of the crucial role they play in creating a culture of belonging to increase the educator's intentionality in facilitating the growth and acceptance of a belonging culture in their schools.

2 It is imperative to mention that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs originated with the Blackfoot people and nation and is often not properly attributed to them (Bridgman et al., 2019).

A growing challenge for today's classroom is the great diversity and inequality that exist. Globalization has contributed to more diversified student bodies. This extends beyond nationality to include race, ethnicity, culture, gender, and so on. Creating a culture of belonging is crucial in the presence of this diversity (powell & Tippen, 2021). Often, the dominant culture is blind to injustice as a result of their power and privilege. When confronted with their advantage, many do not see or understand how others have it worse or have faced greater obstacles, and can unconsciously continue working to maintain the status quo and frustrate attempts by the marginalized to right past and present injustice.The backlash against *Black Lives Matter* in the United States and attempts to ban critical race theory (CRT) are examples of the dominant culture not understanding the challenges or barriers that slavery and racism have inflicted for over 400 years. Another approach is needed.

A Proposed Model of Belonging

Belonging encompasses empowerment for all members to fully engage and address structural issues that create barriers to full participation. Students who actively and fully belong are invited to collaborate in the classroom as co-creators by participating extensively in the democratic process (Othering & Belonging, 2021). Additionally, belonging is demonstrated for marginalized students as they are recognized for the unique experiences and knowledge they have and given the opportunity to share them with the class as appropriate. Freire (2005) warned about the hazards of the banking model where educators decide the content and structure of instruction and deposit it into their passive students as one would deposit money in a bank. Instead, he proposed a model in which the educators would be co-learners along with their students and both would learn from each other. How might this model be further developed and integrated into a theory of be-

longing? If an educator is going to develop a culture of belonging in the classroom, the educator's attitude and understanding are critical. The development of this culture entails more than a mere cognitive shift in perspective; it must also encompass an attitudinal shift, a metamorphosis or transformation (Mezirow, 2009). How is this possible?

The following framework illustrates a pathway for educators in developing a culture of belonging. It is a cyclical journey of self-reflection, humility, curiosity, recognition and acceptance in which each practice, when well done, leads into the next. This cycle can, and should, be repeated continuously. This model is explained below and supported with relevant literature. This chapter orients itself to the educator's perspective and what they may offer the student. While this model is designed for the higher-ed classroom, its application extends beyond the classroom to engagement with others who may think or act differently than us. The five practices in this model involve

- inward reflection
- adopting the right posture
- asking the right questions to seek connection
- showing recognition
- and acceptance regardless of the differences between both parties.

This chapter then concludes with practical measures to inform the educator's practice as they apply the framework to their classroom in order to build a culture of belonging.

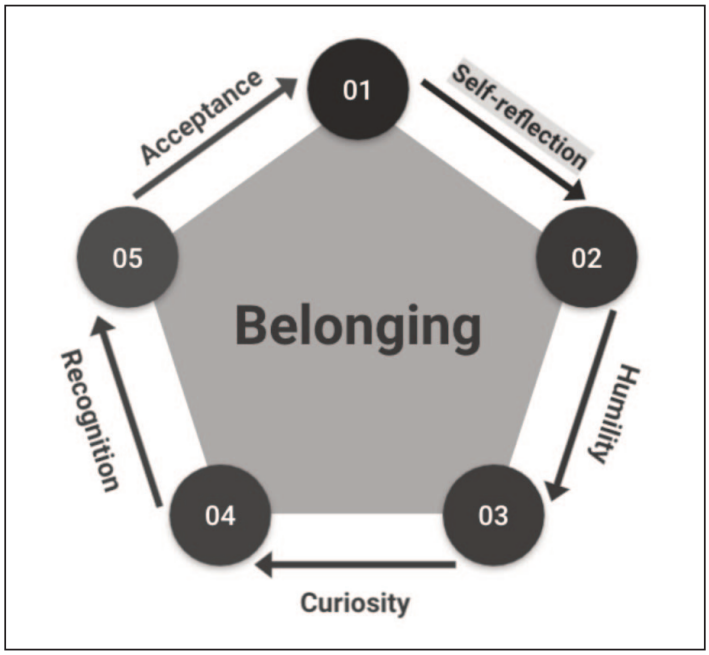

Figure 1
A Model of Belonging for the Educator

These proposed five practices assist the educator in creating a culture of belonging while also enhancing trust and safety between the educator and the student that is particularly important in multicultural and multiethnic classrooms.

Practice One—Self-Reflection

> *Educators bring their entire autobiographies with them; their experiences, identities, values, beliefs, attitudes, hang-ups, biases, wishes, dreams, and hopes. It is useless for them to deny this; the most they can do is acknowledge how these may either get in the way of or enhance their work with students.*
>
> Nieto (2003, p. 24)
>
> *Educators need to speak belonging not only by their words but also by their lives.*
>
> Jennings (2017, p. 58)

This model begins with self-reflection, the only inward-focused practice in this model.

Definition

For the educator, self-reflection is the deliberate act of considering how the past influences current behavior, how current teaching strategies are working and where they can be improved, how relationships with students are developing, how their learning is progressing, and how all of this information should inform and guide the ongoing learning, presence, and practice in the classroom. Most crucially, self-reflection is the act of looking back and reflecting, which leads to self-awareness, which is a present understanding of one's self—including both flaws and virtues.

Self-reflection for the educator requires:

- Ongoing feedback and input from students
- Scheduled time and target activities such as journaling to prompt self-reflection
- Willingness to look for bias in one's approaches and acknowledge limitations in one's knowledge

Self-reflection done well produces:

- Affirmations of what is going well
- Adjustments of what needs to change or improve
- Awareness (deepened) of one's self and one's limitations
- Compassion for oneself in light of one's limitations. From this self-compassion, empathy and compassion can be extended to the students.
- Acceptance of oneself and one's limitations while staying committed to life-long learning.

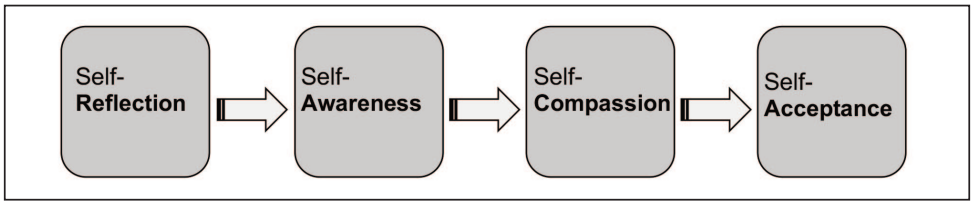

Figure 2
The Progression of Self-Reflection

Importance

However, educators must recognize how their own ethnicity, cultural beliefs, and behaviors influence their pedagogies and their understanding of their pupils. Self- and other-knowledge are mutually constitutive, since each is constructed on the other and is reliant on the other to make sense (Habashy & Cruz, 2021).

In an ideal world, teacher training would include bias training where educators would learn to recognize the particular views and understanding of culture and history in order to see how these impact their instruction. The magnitude of the educator's power in the classroom coupled with their biases (often unknown) can easily impede a culture of belonging. All students need to realize their intrinsic value both personally and that of their community especially those that are highly devalued by society. This is essential for belonging to flourish (Bissell, 2019). The connection between belonging to a group and belonging to oneself cannot be underestimated. Educators will model this value in how they speak of and to students who are marginalized.

Application

A reflective educator is one who seeks regular and truthful feedback in order to optimize learning. Well-constructed feedback from students can help educators to see their blind spots and biases. One standard instrument is the course evaluation, but this

is not ideal as changes can only be made going forward to the next course. Regular ongoing feedback during a course is preferable. The Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) from Brookfield (1995, p.115) is one regular practice that can be used. It consists of five questions to ask students at the end of a lecture or week of lectures. Another option is team-teaching where both professors are preparing and lecturing together and are engaging in consistent communication and connection throughout the course which provides regular peer feedback. Lastly, a professor can gather personal feedback by personally checking-in with themselves both before and during a class.

- How do I feel as I enter the classroom?
- What are my reactions and/or feelings toward my students?
- Can I engage each student with respect?
- Am I giving preferential treatment to one or more students? Upon what is this based?
- Am I neglecting other students?
- Do I believe that each student is capable of great things? Do I continue to see their potential or have I already categorized and dismissed them?
- Am I aware of my internal bias? How am I actively working to change this?
- What emotions did I feel during the lecture? What was the underlying reason for this emotion?
- Reflective journaling can be used to answer these questions.

With the busyness that surrounds each educator, having time built in for reflection is critical. This can happen during a walk, on a commute, by recording verbal reflections, or through journaling. As the educator engages in the process and progress of self-reflection leading to self-acceptance, their honest assessment will hopefully conclude with deeper understanding and acknowledgment of their shortcomings. This is a critical preceding act to allow educators to begin to release their pride and move into a

posture of humility. The shift in this model now moves from the internal person of the educator to their outward practice.

Practice Two—Cultural Humility

> *Dialogue cannot exist without humility.*
>
> Freire (2005, p.88)
>
> *In a multicultural world where power imbalances exist, cultural humility is a process of openness, self-awareness, being egoless, and incorporating self-reflection and critique after willingly interacting with diverse individuals. The results of achieving cultural humility are mutual empowerment, respect, partnerships, optimal care, and lifelong learning.*
>
> Foronda (2016, p. 213)

Definition

As this paper is written for a multicultural setting within the higher education classroom, the term cultural humility was chosen for this context and is defined as the "ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person]" (Hook et al., 2013, p. 2). Cultural safety, a natural outcome following cultural humility. is characterized by "an environment that is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need" (Williams, 1999, p. 213).

Importance

Culturally-humble educators are often very knowledgeable about their content matter, but they are also self-aware of their limita-

tions of knowledge and expertise. This humility keeps their arrogance in check and reduces the power differential between them and their students.

These educators were,

> "No longer high priests, selfishly guarding the doors to the kingdom of knowledge to make themselves look more important, also fellow students—no fellow human beings, struggling with the mysteries of the universe, human society, historical development . . . They found affinity with their students in their own ignorance and curiosity, in their love of life and beauty, in their mixture of respect and fear. . . Most important, that humility, that fear, that veneration of the unknown spawned a kind of quiet conviction on the part of the best educators that they and their students could do great things together. . . They believed that their own achievements stemmed from perseverance rather than from any special talent, but they also marveled at human accomplishments—including that of their students" (Bain, 2004, pp. 144-5).

Making cultural humility a priority can have great impact outside the classroom including more regard for others, continual curiosity about others and the world, deeper global awareness and meaningful intercultural friendships. As the world grows closer together through globalization, cultural humility offers a posture through which to engage others in a way that will build belonging and enhance relationships (Habashy & Cruz, 2021).

The Danger of Cultural Competency

Yet, far too many approach cultural engagement as a competency that can be learned and checked off. This attitude keeps individuals divorced from curiosity as well as easily shifts into superior stances. Researchers have compared cultural competency with

cultural humility and found deficits (Abe, 2020; Curtis et al., 2019). The danger with competencies is that they often dampen curiosity once competency is assumed. Yet, culture is not static and it is far too nuanced to be understood fully. Cultural humility keeps the educator in a learning posture which holds abuse of power in the classroom in check. It is this very position that ensures cultural safety—that one's culture and identity will be kept safe and respected. Unfortunately, humility is not often practiced in higher education. "The trouble with most of us, is that we teach like we were god. There is no sense of the contingency of our knowledge." (Bain, 2004, p. 142). He also referenced students who said that often their worst instructors were those that communicated their superiority in order to look better than their students.

Application

Cultural humility flows from an accurate self-assessment along with a willingness to admit mistakes or errors. The educator engages students humbly from the posture of a learner. Bain (2004)'s research on best qualities of college professors proposed humility as a key attribute that includes both the educator's accurate assessment of themselves as well as maintaining a "frequent and unabashed sense of awe and curiosity about life" (p.142) and their subject matter. Humility is a natural result from an educator's realistic self-awareness that they are not without fault. This humility shapes how educators engage with both their subject matter and with their students and keeps them curious.

Questions to ask:

- Am I willing to admit errors to my students?
- Am I willing to say, "I don't know" to my students?
- Do I actively seek opportunities to co-create together with my students?

- What ways do I elevate my students in class?
- Where have I actively allowed my students to teach me in the classroom?
- Where have I given my students the role of teacher/educator in the classroom?
- Where is it challenging for me to be humble in the classroom?

Practice Three—Curiosity

> *"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence."*
> Einstein (qtd. in Miller, 1955, p. 64)
> *"You have to be confused before you can reach a new level of understanding."*
> Dudley Herschbach (qtd. in Bain, 2004, p. 143)

Definition

Why is curiosity relevant for the educator in creating a culture of belonging? A study of the brain discovered that curiosity is just as important as intelligence in predicting academic success for two reasons. One reason is that it primes the brain for learning (Gruber et al., 2014) and it also rewards it with success when answers are discovered (Von Stumm et al., 2011). Curiosity was identified as a critical character quality that predicts future learning. In the Center for Curriculum Redesign (CCR) framework, it was defined as "open-mindedness, exploration, passion, self-direction, motivation, initiative, innovation, enthusiasm, wonder, appreciation, spontaneity, etc." (Bialik et al., 2015, p. 10). Curiosity keeps the learner engaged in the process of learning, which is a primary characteristic of the lifelong learner. Disequilibration, a precondition necessary for transformative learning, can be a catalyst for curiosity as people try to make sense of what is happening.

Importance

The educator who has stopped learning not only becomes stagnant but is also a poor model of a learner in the classroom. An effective educator is curious about their subject matter and always exploring new questions. In addition, they are hopefully curious about the act of teaching, pedagogy, and learning. While the field of cognitive science is relatively new, its research and findings around the learning process have revolutionized what is known about teaching and learning. Yet, for educators it is often easier to rely on antiquated and comfortable teaching methods than to be curious about innovation in teaching and its application for the classroom. One particular challenge for those in higher education is that many who teach have no training or background in pedagogy or androgyny. The underlying assumption is that being an expert on content is the key qualification to teach on that same subject. Yet, often this is not the case. One professor in a medical school prided himself on delivering top quality lectures while showing no concern for students who were not able to understand or follow along (Bain, 2004). Skilled educators understand that teaching is about learning. Their curiosity drives them to learn more about their content, about the art of both teaching and learning, and equally important, about their students.

Application

How can curiosity be practiced in the classroom? Simply put, it is in the art of continually questioning in order to grow in knowledge and understanding to be a better citizen of the world. Proficient educators know how to ask good questions of both themselves (this is linked to the self-reflective practice) and also of their subject matter and of their students. Asking effective questions and taking the time to wait for answers is a valuable

teaching practice. This curiosity can be practiced both in learning about the students and well as learning with the students.

First, the more that educators know about their students, the better they can tailor lessons to students' needs, be flexible as specific needs arise, and show value to their students. Respectful curiosity asks questions to build relationships and connection to the students. As educators both solicit and read their student's biographies, they give worth and value to both the person and experience of each individual student. The students become more than a grade or a number and this exercise humanizes and personalizes each individual person in the class. This curiosity also keeps teachers from labeling students and categorizing students and helps to build connections to students. How can educators create space for students to share who they are? Here are some examples of activities.

- Write a general questionnaire to use during the first day of class to learn background information about your students. Use empathy mapping to connect with students and learn more about their needs, backgrounds, and interests (Lammers, 2021).
- Show the YouTube video *All That We Share* (2017) and role play it with the class. Where is the connection found among students? Rather than let differences define everyone, let connections be a unifying factor as cross-group friendships can reduce prejudice (Turner et al., 2007).
- Student's situated knowledge is often overlooked but this knowledge can be used to start to build cultural understanding and competence as it can disrupt commonly held prejudices among majority culture students (Edgeworth & Santoro, 2015). What can you learn about your student's backgrounds that could be useful or relevant for your course content?

Secondly, educators also model life-long learning through their curiosity in the classroom. Here are some ways:

- Practice using these three sentences were appropriate. "I do not know. Let's look for the answer together. I was wrong about this."
- What are ways I can learn together with my students?
- When and how can I learn from my students?
- Am I learning about cognitive science and implementing what I learn into my classroom?
- Am I engaging in new approaches to teaching ?
- How am I revising content based on what I am learning?
- How am I using questions effectively in my teaching?
- How am I modeling curiosity in my teaching?

Practicing curiosity is an important skill in order to learn about your students. In addition, staying curious is an essential part of teaching and life-long learning. This is modeled by the educator who is continually seeking more knowledge and understanding about teaching and their subject matter. A crucial distinction to the type of curiosity proposed is that the educator puts relationship before curiosity in order to ensure that questioning occurs authentically and in a spirit that fosters learning instead of an alienating interrogation experience. This has been called the requirement for Relational Connection which creates the context for a Culture of Belonging over Identity Interrogation and other alienting experiences (Gilpin-Jackson, 2018). The answers gathered during curious respectful questioning result in two additional practices: recognition and acceptance.

Practice Four—Recognition

> *I am because we are: Ubuntu—A person is a person through relationships with other people. This means one's humanity depends on recognition of the other in his or her uniqueness and difference. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation.*
>
> Eze (2006, pp. 190-191)

Definition

Curiosity leads to exploration about one's subject matter and about one's students. As educators develop relationships with the students, the students become known as individuals in the classroom. This extends beyond the typical labels such as that of troublemaker or model student. Rather, the educator may know the underlying reasons why a student is consistently late to class (lazy or caring for a sick parent); or why they are a bad test-taker (anxiety or a new baby at home). Practicing curiosity leads to increased knowledge which in turn provides understanding. For this to happen, it is important to ask the right questions and focus on getting to know students as individuals. Once students are known, recognition, according to Honneth, will follow naturally which occurs in three venues: family, civil society, and the state (Fleming, 2011). Yet, the classroom could also become one of these venues if belonging is being created. Noble & Poynting (2010, p. 49) define belonging as "mutual recognition of the other." What a safe and trusting place the classroom would become if all students were both known and recognized.

Importance

The classroom is a critical palace for the marginalized to be recognized and to be known. Hopefully the educator is modeling this by letting themselves be known both on a personal level, while keeping appropriate boundaries. Educators show transparency as they admit the limits of their knowledge and acknowledge mistakes or miscommunications in the classroom. States of belonging and unbelonging are created in discourses about "who-we-are and who we are not" (Arber, 2008). Wise (2005) proposes that school communities can be a place where recognition can create a mutual opening up to the other, and there is the possibility of recognizing the stranger and in doing so welcoming them (p. 182).

Application

Recognition includes valuing the students' experiences and asking them for their knowledge and input around topics where they may have greater knowledge or expertise. Many immigrant students are overlooked due to weaker English skills, but some have already completed a college degree or are proficient in a vocation. Recognition involves acting on this background information to elevate the students in the multicultural classroom by asking for their input or allowing them to teach the class about their matters of expertise. It includes greeting them personally and asking questions to show that they are known to you as an individual while also respecting their privacy.

- What effort do I make to recognize and give value to the student's cultural background?
- Where do I include the students' knowledge and background experience during class?
- Where and how do I regularly show my students individual recognition?
- What activities do I use to actively integrate my student's experiences and background and skills?
- How do I recognize my student's linguistic abilities if they are doing school in a second language?
- Do I honor their hard work by calling them an emerging bilingual?

As the educator knows their students, empathy grows when learning their backgrounds or underlying circumstances. This empathy results in greater acceptance allowing students to be fully authentic without fear.

Practice Five: Acceptance and Love

> *"Everyone has a story that will break your heart. And, if you're really paying attention, most people have a story that will bring you to your knees."*
>
> Brown (2008)
>
> *"When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do."*
>
> Remen (1999, p. 34)

Definition

Within the culture of belonging, acceptance ensures both trust and safety in the classroom so that students are authentic, autonomous, and have agency to change things. The educator shows each student that they are valued for who they are and have a unique contribution to give to the classroom. True belonging is a product of acceptance and love which provides the necessary foundation for belonging to flourish.

Importance

Acceptance is evidenced by facilitating and fostering students' full agentic engagement. Students are free to use the power of their voice and have agency to make necessary changes. Too often today, diversity, equity and inclusion include inviting everyone to the table, but not ensuring that everyone has an equal voice and or equal input at the table. With this definition, belonging goes far beyond inclusion, and gives agency for activism to all participants.

Application

Practicing acceptance in the classroom can be unsettling to educators who have not gone through the initial four steps of this

model. Inviting a student to make changes, to speak up where they feel dismissed, will diminish the power of an educator. The practice of cultural humility and curiosity are essential to offset the emotional disruption that an educator could feel. Ongoing humbleness and curiosity allow the educator to respond from the posture of a learner and not from a defensive position. While there are standards that educators are responsible to follow and maintain in their classroom, here are some ways the educator can model acceptance and love.

- I ask for student's backgrounds and particular challenges they are facing. When I can, I offer grace on assignments based on individual needs.
- I see my students as unique individuals with their own biography. I resist the temptation to treat all students the same but where I can I make adjustments to care best for my students.
- I regularly meet with my students. I gather where my students gather. I attend social events, sports evenings, meals, community activities so they see me outside of the classroom. In this way, I engage with them separate from my role (and inherent power) as their professor.
- Through my acceptance, I relinquish my power in the classroom and offer my students to be co-creators with me.
- When I tell my students, I accept them fully, I give them permission to be fully themselves, to be a part of the work with me, to be open and authentic.
- I make it a high priority that all students feel safe, respected, and valued by me.
- I also accept the background, personhood, culture, and identity of all my students.

Trust and openness produce an interactive atmosphere in which students can ask questions without reproach or embarrassment. Everyone can contribute and each contribution is unique. Educators should want each of their students to understand that

no one else in the world will bring his or her particular set of experiences and body chemistry to the class. Everybody has something unique to offer, an original perspective (Bain, 2004).

These five practices provide the setting for a culture of belonging to flourish in the classroom. Rooted in the four inward or self-practices of reflection, awareness, compassion, and acceptance, the educator teaches from humility, empowered by curiosity to offer recognition and acceptance to all students in their fully authentic selves. Things do not end here.

Conclusion—The Ripple Effect

This cyclical iterative process is not an individual one but it has exponential impact. As the educator practices belonging personally by embodying self-reflection leading to self-acceptance, they can teach from their true authentic selves and model this practice for the classroom. Belonging in the classroom is realized when students are fully authentic and equally contributing and co-creating. This process of belonging will expand and disseminate from the students to their families, places of work, and so on. The culture of belonging is not meant to stay in the incubator of a classroom but is meant to be practiced and used to build bridges in today's polarized world.

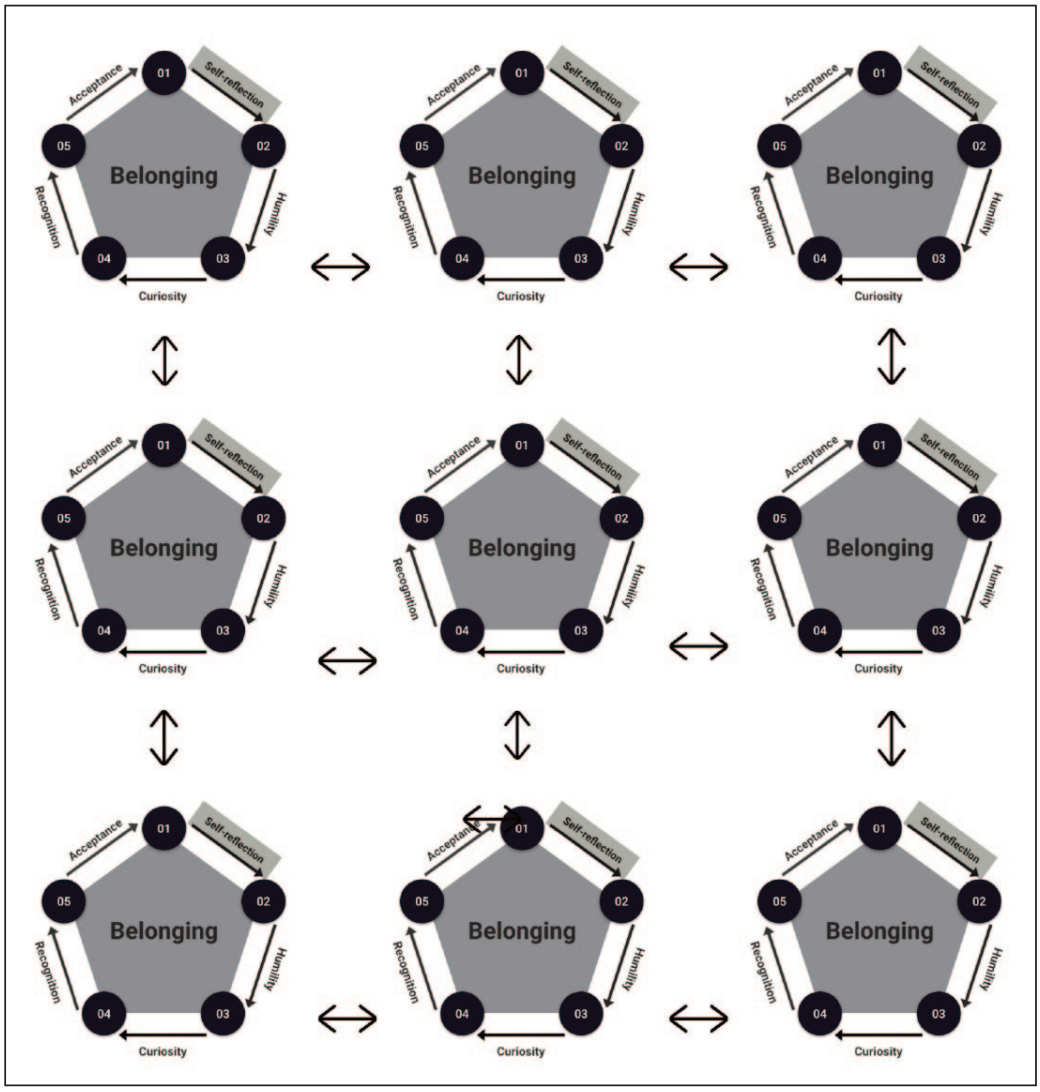

Figure 3
Belonging begets belonging

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