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Students' Experience of Sense of Belonging in a Diversity Class: A Model and Practice Recommendations

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Students' Experience of Sense of Belonging in a Diversity Class: A Model and Practice Recommendations

Abstract

Sense of belonging has been associated with increases in perceived task importance, along with motivation and academic achievement. These factors indicate that sense of belonging may be an important and relevant concept to consider when preparing clinicians to practice cultural humility, which entails a commitment to lifelong learning. This study utilized qualitative data to examine 20 undergraduate students' experience of belonging in an undergraduate cultural and linguistic diversity course. Additionally, pedagogical practices and student identity-related factors that promote belonging were explored. Results revealed four interrelated themes that characterized how students experienced belonging in the course. Salient components of belonging as they relate to a diversity context are discussed. Additionally, practice recommendations to foster sense of belonging in the classroom are provided.

Keywords

sense of belonging, student experience, diversity equity inclusion, practice recommendations, teaching

Cover Page Footnote

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The fields of speech-language pathology and audiology have not traditionally attracted a diverse workforce. In 2022, only 8.9% of American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) members and affiliates self-identified as racially minoritized groups (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2023). Although increasing, minority student enrollment remains relatively low (Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders & American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2023). At the same time, the number of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home nearly tripled to almost 1 in 5 between 1980 and 2019 (US Census Bureau, 2022), and the United States will become “minority white’ in 2045 (Frey, 2018). While there are efforts underway to diversify the clinician workforce (Easton et al., 2022), the demographics of clinicians will change more slowly than the demographics of their clientele for the foreseeable future. As a result, an increased emphasis on educating and preparing culturally responsive clinicians has been placed on communication sciences and disorders (CSD) and speech-language pathology training programs (Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders [CAPCSD], 2017). Culturally responsive clinicians understand and respond to the full range of cultural variables and dimensions of diversity that clients bring to interactions. To support cultural responsiveness, one must practice cultural humility, which entails a lifelong commitment to sustained learning and self-reflection (ASHA, n.d.a.).

An undergraduate course focusing on aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity has the potential to set the stage for students’ journeys towards practicing cultural humility. A variable that may be critical to explore in terms of sparking interest, engagement, and learning is sense of belonging. The purpose of this study was to examine students’ experience of belonging in a cultural and linguistic diversity course. Reviewing existing literature, the course was designed to foster belonging. Filling an additional gap in the literature, students’ perceptions of course design and identity factors as they relate to belonging were also examined.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging has been defined in several ways in the literature. Kern and colleagues (2013, p. 132) describe the concept of belongingness as “...a fundamental human need associated with feelings, cognitions, and behaviors motivated by a desire for meaningful interaction and acceptance by valued others.” Hurtado and Carter (1997) discuss the cognitive and affective components of a sense of belonging, stating that an individual’s “...cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group results in an affective response” (p. 328). Individual’s feelings or perceptions are typically a component of the definition, such as perceptions of feeling respected, valued, accepted, and needed (Strayhorn, 2019), included (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), valued (Hausmann et al., 2007), or connected (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Specifications of factors that promote a sense of belonging include perceived peer support, perceived faculty support/comfort, perceived classroom comfort, perceived isolation, and empathetic faculty understanding (Hoffman et al., 2002). Regardless of the specific definition, sense of belonging illustrates the interplay between the individual and an environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and can be hindered or promoted by complex interactions between environmental and personal factors (Mahar et al., 2013). Sense of belonging in higher education has been studied at the institutional level (Ahn & Davis, 2020a, 2020b; Freeman et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hussain & Jones, 2021;

Johnson et al., 2007) and has been tied to academic achievement, retention, and persistence (Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007).

Fewer studies have examined sense of belonging at the classroom level. In these contexts, a sense of belonging has been linked with increased task value or perceived task importance, higher feelings of respect and value from peers and instructor, and increased motivational and academic achievement (Freeman et al., 2007; McKinney et al., 2006; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). These factors indicate that a sense of belonging may be an important and relevant concept to consider when preparing clinicians to practice cultural humility. For example, the perception that a topic area is important and meaningful (task value) may motivate individuals to remain engaged and curious beyond the walls of the classroom. Belonging has been shown to be an antecedent to academic motivational constructs and variables (Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

While belonging may be especially critical to foster in the context of a diversity class, there are potential barriers to belonging present in such a class. Belonging is also considered a "...contextually mediated experience..." (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009, p. 2872). Sense of belonging may take on increased significance in environments or situations that individuals experience as different or unfamiliar (Anderman & Freeman, 2004) or in contexts in which individuals are inclined to feel isolated, lonely, or invisible (Strayhorn, 2019). A class on aspects of diversity, in which students are likely asked to engage in unfamiliar self-reflections or participate in difficult conversations, may be such an environment. Student identity may also play an influential role in the manifestation of belonging. For example, many students in CSD programs identify as members of dominant social groups (i.e., not minority groups), and there is occasionally resistance to or ignorance of issues related to diversity education among these groups (Goodman, 2011). At the same time, many scholars argue that developing a sense of belonging is an especially necessary but challenging endeavor for students from historically marginalized social identity groups (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2019; Vaccaro et al., 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). As the field of CSD strives towards increased diversity, gaining an understanding of how belonging changes as a function of specific courses and identity factors is important.

An additional gap in the literature related to belonging in the classroom setting is that pedagogical practices that contribute to or detract from belonging have not been closely examined. Below, factors known to promote a sense of belonging are reviewed. Descriptions of how they were implemented in the cultural and linguistic diversity course that was examined for this study are included in the methods section.

Factors That Promote a Sense of Belonging

Positive Peer-to-Peer Relationships. There is evidence that students' sense of social acceptance from fellow students might be most important variable in relation to sense of belonging (Freeman et al., 2007). Knowing classmates can engender feelings of familiarity, comfort, and shared interests and experiences with peers (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). However, for peer relationships to contribute to a sense of belonging, interpersonal relations need to be perceived as positive; students need to feel valued and respected (Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

High Task Value. Task value is a motivational variable that represents the students' beliefs about potential importance, usefulness, and enjoyment associated with academic content/task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Related to course content, students who reported higher task value reported greater belonging (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Students who had a higher sense of belonging reported that reasons for participating in class reflected their personal interests, and they perceived class materials as important and useful (Freeman et al., 2007). Some specific pedagogical techniques, like choice in the classroom, have been linked to enhanced intrinsic motivation, a variable related to task value (Patall et al., 2008).

First-Person Knowledge and Learning. First-person knowledge is knowledge that is based on an awareness of the student's own life, either in the present moment or as a lived experience (Chapman, 2021). Bringing individual students' experiences into the classroom, especially in the context of learning about diversity, may be beneficial to engendering a sense of belonging. For example, in a mixed-method study examining nursing students' experience of belongingness when undertaking clinical placements, (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009) found that the experience of belonging depends on whether students "...professional and/or personal values are in harmony with those of the group." (p. 2872).

Supportive Instructors. Instructor support has been shown to directly influence sense of belonging. Students who reported that their instructors were supportive reported greater belonging (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Three instructional characteristics have been shown to be significant predictors of a sense of belonging: instructor warmth and openness, encouraging student participation, and instructor organization (Freeman et al., 2007). Of these factors, encouraging student participation appears to be the most important (Freeman et al., 2007; Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

Purpose and Research Questions

Fostering a sense of belonging in the context of a cultural and linguistic diversity class may bring about behaviors that promote cultural humility. However, little is known about how sense of belonging functions in the context of a diversity class, or how specific aspects of students' identity and pedagogical practices influence belonging. This study utilized qualitative data in the form of student reflections to explore how students experience a sense of belonging in two contexts: prior learning experiences, and a context-specific cultural and linguistic diversity class. Through these reflections, this research was designed to identify salient aspects of belonging related to a diversity context. Additionally, pedagogical practices and student identity-related factors that promote belonging are explored to aid in future course design considerations.

Methods

Participants. Participants for this study were 20 undergraduate students in a cultural and linguistic diversity course. This course was an elective available to students majoring or minoring in CSD; 11 students were CSD majors, other majors included psychology, child development, exercise science, nursing, and special education. One student was a freshman, 12 were juniors, and 7 were seniors. Data collected and analyzed for this study consisted of three required course assignments. While all students were required to complete the assignment for the course, they each had an

opportunity at the beginning of the semester to consent to the use of that assignment for this study per an approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) plan. To reduce student coercion to participate in the study, the consent process was carried out by the professor's graduate assistant; the professor did not know who had consented to participate in the study until after the final course grades were submitted. All students consented to participate.

Course Design. The cultural and linguistic diversity course was designed independently by the author, who also designed and completed all analyses for the current study. Identity characteristics of the author/researcher greatly influence the context of the course design and implementation, as well as the research design, data analysis, and interpretation of results. For an in-depth reflection on the author's identity and how it influenced the development of this course and research study see Chapman (in press). To increase transparency and model participation in the personal sharing and reflection required of students, the author shared personal details regarding demographics (white, cisgender, heterosexual), socioeconomic status (middle class, two-parent household, college-educated mother), and educational status with the students via the syllabus, and throughout the course.

Factors that enhanced sense of belonging were intentionally built into the course. For example, both assignments/projects and day-to-day class activities prioritized opportunities for peer connection while also providing knowledge and practice of skills to make those connections positive. Task value was maximized by including assignments that related directly to students' future careers. This author's experience of finding belonging in diversity context through self-reflection and self-study (Chapman, in press) led first-person learning to become an intentional and integral component of this course. See Table 1 below for specific examples of how the instructor demonstrated support throughout the course.

Specific activities and assignments and how they addressed components enhancing belonging are described in detail in Table 1 in the Appendix. See Table 2, below, for an abbreviated list and descriptions of the most commonly mentioned assignments from student reflections.

Data Collection. Throughout the course, qualitative data in the form of reflective journal assignments were collected from students regarding their sense of belonging. Students completed reflective journal assignments three times throughout the semester. The first reflection was due prior to the first day of class. The assignment was not discussed with students prior to submission, but the assignment guidelines did contain a definition of belonging. See the Appendix for the purpose statement in its entirety. The second reflection journal was due in the middle of the semester, and the last was due on the day of the final course gathering. Prompts for these assignments are listed in Table 3.

Table 1*Examples of Professor Actions to Communicate Factors that Promote Belonging*

Category	Example Actions
Warmth and Openness	<p>Included formal statements in the syllabus indicating care: mental health statement and resources on syllabus, holistic learning objectives.</p> <p>Instituted a flexible attendance policy where students were able to attend class virtually if needed.</p> <p>Utilized warm syllabus language (Harnish & Bridges, 2011) Who's in this Class? Distributed an optional survey at the beginning of class, inviting students to tell me about themselves, their histories, their goals, their fears.</p> <p>Intentionally learned and used student names.</p> <p>Greeted students by name when they walked in the door.</p> <p>Explicitly paid attention to and talked about student emotions during class, through polls at the beginning of some classes, pulling individual students aside before/after class, commenting on my own feelings as we discussed certain topics.</p> <p>Shared my own personal experiences when appropriate.</p>
Prioritize Student Participation	<p>Included opportunities for student participation in every class period, primarily through think-pair-share activities.</p> <p>Flexible attendance policy not only communicated care, but also prioritized student engagement by allowing multiple forms of participation.</p> <p>Included a collaborative component on most major course assignments, including a group presentation "final", and a sharing component of other assignments.</p>
Instructor Organization	<p>Utilized a semester schedule, with content and due dates for assignments, posted in advance.</p> <p>Utilized course management system to set up reminder emails prior to due dates, and to encourage work on semester-long projects.</p> <p>Prompt grading, within 2-3 days of assignment submission.</p> <p>Utilized the TILT framework (Winkelmes, 2023) to enhance transparency related to how assignments connected with course learning objectives.</p>

Table 2*Brief Descriptions of Commonly Mentioned Course Assignments that Promote a Sense of Belonging*

Assignment Title	Brief Description
Cultural Self Graphic	A one-page graphic depicting oneself as a cultural being.
<i>Perspectives</i> Assignment	An online learning program, including lessons and peer conversations, that explores the inner workings of the mind and psychological roots of ideological differences.
Cultural Profiles Group Presentations	End-of-the-semester project in which students applied course concepts to specific cultural groups.
Cultural Appreciation Gathering	End-of-semester presentation in which students presented revised Cultural Self graphics and shared a cultural artifact.

Table 3*Prompts for Journal Reflections Exploring a Sense of Belonging in Prior and/or Ideal Learning Contexts and in the Context of a Diversity Course*

Reflection #	Journal Prompts
1	Write about a time where you felt a sense of belonging as a learner. You might write about a specific class you took, or about a different kind of learning opportunity. What contributed to that sense of belonging? Did that sense of belonging contribute to your learning? Why or why not? What would your ideal sense of belonging look like in this class? How do you define your identity? Do you think that this will influence your sense of belonging in this class? How?
2	Reflect on your experiences in this class over the past few weeks – the content, assignments, activities, interactions with your classmates, etc. Reflect on the influence or impact of your experiences on your sense of belonging in this class.
3	Think back to what you described as your ideal sense of belonging in this class. Describe how your experience in this class did or did not match that ideal. Please describe what about this class had the greatest impact (positive or negative) on your sense of belonging. Think back to how you defined your identity. How did your identity influence your sense of belonging? Is there anything that you would like to share that hasn't been asked?

Data Analysis. Reflective journals were copied from the course management system into Google Docs for analysis. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identities. Guidelines for the analysis of qualitative data from Saldaña (2021) were followed, consisting of cycles of first- and second-cycle coding interspersed with analytic memo writing. Coding was completed manually, without the utilization of any coding software. Analysis began with a holistic read-through of all student responses, during which the researcher utilized preliminary coding techniques of pre-coding and preliminary jotting to identify initial “codable moments” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 31).

During first-cycle coding, elemental coding methods were utilized to “...review the corpus...” and “...build a foundation for future coding cycles.” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 129). First, In Vivo codes were assigned to gain first impressions of the data that honored the students’ “...voices and ground the analysis in their perspectives.” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 92). Then, recoding with a mixture of descriptive coding (to provide a detailed inventory of the content of students’ narratives) and sub-coding (a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry) were employed to answer broad questions like “What is going on here?” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 134) During this cycle, low-level categories were generated.

Second-cycle coding methods involve “...advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through first cycle methods.” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 296) to see how everything fits together. This began with visual thematic mapping (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to organize and explore evolving themes, subthemes, and thematic relationships. Code landscaping, which integrates textual and visual methods in a world-cloud-like manner, was utilized to visualize changes codes and themes between journal assignments (Saldaña, 2021). Two cycles of theme development, consisting of a list of descriptive themes followed by a reconfiguration and synthesis of descriptive themes into a more interpretive array, were conducted. Data were themed categorically, providing “...rich descriptive detail about the patterns observed and constructed by the analyst.” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 259) Themes applied to all, or to the vast majority of, student narratives. Throughout data analysis, analytic memo writing was conducted simultaneously with coding to serve “...as an additional code-, category-, theme- and concept-generating method...” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 71). Analytic memo writing entails writing about “...participants, phenomenon, processes under investigation by thinking and thus writing and this thinking even more about them...” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 58).

The author solely completed all analyses of the data. To mitigate, to the extent possible, unchecked bias, “shop talking” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 296) was engaged in throughout the study with a mentor who has expertise in qualitative data analysis. Peer debriefing was completed with the same mentor as final themes were reviewed for credibility and authenticity. Primary themes and subthemes are supported by verbatim quotes from participant journal assignments.

Results

Across all reflections, four interrelated themes emerged. Students experienced belonging when they were within a conducive environment (theme 1) that promoted connection within community (theme 2) and making meaning across contexts (theme 3). Students often found a sense of belonging despite a difficulty, barrier, or transition (theme 4). While students experienced and

described belonging differently, most reflections contained quotes related to each theme. See Table 4, below, for a description of each theme and representative student quotes.

Table 4

Descriptions of Themes and Representative Student Quotes That Represent a Sense of Belonging

Theme	Example Quote
<p>Theme 1: Conducive Environment Belonging is fostered within a comfortable, open, safe environment in which students feels accepted and not judged. This environment allows for actions indicative of engagement.</p>	<p>“My ideal sense of belonging in this class would make me feel a sense of acceptance. Acceptance would help me be able to engage and be confident in my learning. I could easily ask questions and seek help when needed.”</p>
<p>Theme 2: Connection Within Community Belonging is enhanced when students are connected to their classroom community, including both their peers and the professor.</p>	<p>“Everyone is different, but I feel as if my sense of belonging will come from identifying and connecting with those around me and the content from my personal experiences.”</p>
<p>Theme 3: Making Meaning Across Contexts Belonging is cultivated when students can make meaning and connections across multiple contexts.</p>	<p>“That sense of being around not only those peers, but the professors, and above all else the content made me feel like I could be successful and that I could actually do something with my life that I so deeply cared for.”</p>
<p>Theme 4: Belonging Despite... Belonging occurs despite of difficult or challenging life situations or course conditions.</p>	<p>“German was difficult for me at first because it’s very different from Spanish and that’s what I was used to.”</p>

To capture how students experienced a sense of belonging in prior and/or ideal learning contexts, analysis of data from reflection number one will be presented first. Then, to illuminate aspects of belonging that are salient in the context of a diversity course, data from the second and third reflections will be presented. When noted specifically by students, contributors to each theme (e.g., course design factors, professor actions, student identity factors) will be described.

Sense of Belonging in Prior Learning Contexts / Ideal Contexts.

Theme 1: Conducive Environment. The environment in which prior and ideal sense of belonging was described was a salient component of students' reflections. Two subthemes emerged from students' reflections that characterized the environment. Students wrote about the way they felt within the environment, or the way the environment felt. They also wrote about their actions within the environment.

Feelings. Overwhelmingly, students wrote about feeling "comfortable." Missy explained, "I think my ideal sense of belonging is really rooted in a feeling of comfort." A sense of "acceptance" was another important phrase that represented how students felt. Victor described sense of belonging as "...being accepted at face value, and not having to prove myself or any part of my identity to be respected."

Students also wrote about how the environment felt. Brianna wrote about "...a warm and safe environment...", while Lisa described a "...safe space..." "Open" was another common feeling to describe the class environment and the actions that took place within it. Lora, Zora, and Shannon wrote about an "...open mind...", Jared appreciated "...open discussions...", and Victor wrote about an environment being "...openly supportive..."

Actions. Along with feelings, students wrote about the actions they took when they felt as if they belonged. These actions were indicative of contribution and engagement, and commonly aligned with "...asking questions and participating...". Amelia shared that she could ask her professor "...questions and seek help from her outside of class with major related questions." Other contribution actions were noted as well, including "...speaking up in class..." and "...sharing individual experiences." Students described contributing not only to benefit their own learning, but the learning of others. For Eden, "Knowing I was able to help..." contributed greatly to sense of belonging.

Although the subthemes of feelings and actions are described separately, they were often inextricable when students wrote about them. Carine noted how feelings related to actions: "My ideal sense of belonging in this class would make me feel a sense of acceptance. Acceptance would help me be able to engage and be confident in my learning. I could easily ask questions and seek help when needed."

Several aspects of the course contributed to feelings and actions. Many descriptions of comfort were related to the opportunity to connect with peers. These are described in more detail below. Otherwise, the main contributor to the environment noted by students was the professor/teacher. Students wrote about specific professor actions, or general disposition or personality traits. Anna wrote about actions a professor took in a special education course that influenced comfort:

This professor did an especially good job at making every student feel included and like they mattered to her as more than a student. She accomplished this by at the beginning of every class, she would ask everyone a question like "what are you excited for?" "What is something on your mind?" "How are you feeling about your schooling?" These questions were followed up by her conversing with each student about their response and taking the time to make every student feel heard and comfortable.

Students described how aspects of their identity could facilitate feelings or actions related to belonging. Victor reflected on how privileged and oppressed aspects of his identity could influence how he felt in class:

I think that my identity will completely influence my sense of belonging, as well as others'. I notice that when I see others like me, or others who are openly supportive of those like me, I feel immediately better about being in that space.

Others wrote about how their beliefs and values would influence how they engaged in class. Lora wrote,

I am someone who believes that everyone should have equal rights, regardless of their background, race, gender, etc. "Treat people the way you want to be treated," it's the golden rule and my mother has said it to me since I was little. I think that my ability to have an open mind and listen to others will influence my sense of belonging in a positive way. I feel this way because when we have class discussions, I can put myself in other's shoes and try to understand their point of view on certain topics.

Others noted how aspects of their identity could possibly be barriers to feelings and actions related to belonging. Selma wrote, "I am a bit of a loner and I tend to do things independently. This could affect my sense of belonging because I would feel a little hesitant to speak up in class or join a team."

Theme 2: Connection Within Community. Another salient component of students' reflections was a sense of being connected in community. Two subthemes emerged that characterized relationships in community: connection to peers, and connection to the professor/teacher.

Connection to Peers. Connection to peers was an important aspect of belonging. Josefine summed up the importance and impact of connection to peers: "In other words, I would want the class to feel more like a community than a room full of strangers."

Contributors to peer connections included shared interests and identity aspects among students. Carine described, "...being a part of a group with people who had the same interests contributed to my sense of belonging." Shared experiences within the classroom were also a powerful connector for peers. Josefine described a bond forged by a common enemy – difficult class material: "I found that many of my classmates also struggled with history and doubted their ability to learn the subject. Connecting with my peers and relating to them made me feel more comfortable in class." Specific pedagogical choices by the professor also influenced connection to peers, and feelings and actions by extension. Selma wrote, "My ideal sense of belonging would be to work together. I would like to be a part of team. I feel like I belong when there is support and when I am included." Zora described how connection to peers influenced her feelings and actions in class:

Making new friends and seeing what they are passionate about will make me more involved and passionate about this major as well. This will influence my sense of belonging in this class because knowing your environment and being comfortable in it will allow me to speak up in class and ask more questions in class. I will not feel nervous and/or afraid to speak up in class and this is very important in becoming more engaged in class.

Connection to Professor. Connection to the professor/teacher was also a salient aspect of belonging for many students. Connection to the professor was primary context in which the feeling of “care” was mentioned. Anna explained how care for the whole person was important:

...knowing the teacher genuinely cares about what the students say and is not just teaching and lecturing because it is their job. I think students can tell when a teacher has their students’ best interest at heart, and when they are just teaching because they “have to.”

Connection to the professor was influenced by the same things that influenced connection to peers, including shared demographic traits or aspects of identity, or shared past life experiences. Most often, the sense of care engendered by a connection to the professor came from specific pedagogical decisions. Jared wrote about how a professor “...talked to you as an equal rather than an authority figure...” and used “...open discussion format...” to “...establish his viewpoint as a talking point that could be used as a diving platform rather than an established fact.” He described the outcomes of this pedagogical decision:

I think that for me it is most critical that a professor develop a connection with the student, just as [*professor*] and many of my other professors had because I believe it helps students like me learn better. When I know that a teacher cares about my learning and I feel that I belong there, then I am much more likely to succeed and participate in the class.

Theme 3: Making Meaning Across Contexts. Making meaning across contexts was an important component of a sense of belonging. Through students’ reflections, three subthemes (contexts) were identified through which students made meaning: the content, the self, and the big picture. Subthemes resonated differently across students. Some students wrote about being making meaning across contexts, while others focused on one area.

Connection to Content. Students often made meaning that enhanced belonging through connection with the content of a course. Victor expressed, “...I couldn’t stay away from the social sciences...” Many students talked about a feeling of “interest”. Zora wrote about being “...very intrigued with stuttering and speech impediments.” as she found her sense of belonging in her new major.

Connection to content was primarily fostered through student identity characteristics. Sometimes this interest stemmed from the students’ personal factors or past experiences. Eden wrote about connection to content in a Spanish class from the perspective of growing up in a Spanish-speaking household: “Even though I know a good bit I was still able to learn more about the language.” For others, connection with content looked like understanding the material. Kelly said, “I think my ideal sense of belonging in this class would honestly just look like understanding the materials the best I can.” Connection to content promoted engagement, as Amelia reflected: “When I genuinely find something interesting I think I am more open and approachable, and interested in taking part in conversation than if I dread going to class.”

Connection to Self. Students also made meaning through connection with themselves. Connection to self was about being able to bring your whole self into the classroom. “Feeling seen” was a common phrase that indicated a connection to self. Lora described when she felt “...seen and heard...” and Ahn felt “...seen and understood...”

Connection to self was primarily fostered through student identity characteristics. When students wrote about this area of connection, many wrote about experiencing belonging in a certain class because it connected them to their own lived experiences. Upon taking her first class in the CSD major, Zora recalled, “I have vivid memories of being in speech therapy and learning how to pronounce many sounds when I was a young kid.” Others described how the class connected them with their values. Ahn described a project in her dance class: “For my senior piece I had decided to do my dance about racism, because it was something very important to me and I wanted everyone to know that we are all one and equal.”

Being able to be fully yourself and have that seen in a class was important for belonging. Victor wrote about an activity in a social sciences class: “That of course made me feel like I belonged because I was able to talk about any aspect of my life and represent myself directly in the face of any assumptions made about me.” After performing in her dance recital, Ahn remarked that “...everyone was able to see who I was when I performed.”

Connection to the Big Picture. Students made meaning through a connection with a bigger picture. Connection to the big picture was often influenced by the students’ career goals. Zora *noted*, “The material she presented during class made me feel like I was in the right place, my future career.”

Theme 4: Belonging Despite... In their reflections, several students wrote about finding a sense of belonging despite some sort of challenge, transition, or difficulty. For example, Teresa described a time where she was changing majors:

My first 2 or 3 semesters, I really struggled both academically and personally. ... I spent the better part of my freshman and sophomore year just floundering, as I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but I knew that the path I was taking was not for me.

Missy described a similar period of “...hitting a wall repeatedly for two years...” during her transition of majors. Lisa wrote about experiencing belonging “In the midst of the worst few months of my life...” due to the death of a parent.

Many students ended up writing about sense of belonging in a course that they did not like in the beginning. For example, even once she enrolled in a course that would eventually become her major, Teresa recalled, “For the first few weeks of the course, I honestly strongly disliked both the course and the professor.” Victor described how he experienced belonging despite feeling uncomfortable, highlighting the important influence of such an experience:

This doesn’t mean that there shouldn’t be uncomfortable moments, though. I’ve found that outside of my comfort zone is when I am most aware of my position in the world (and in a classroom), and therefore I experience deeper learning.

Sense of Belonging in Diversity Context. Students described the experience of belonging in a fundamentally similar way in their second and third reflections; there was evidence for all themes noted above. To reduce redundancy, results below highlight additional or especially salient factors related to context-specific belonging. When noted specifically by students, contributors to each theme (e.g., course design factors, professor actions, specific assignments) will be described.

Theme 1: Conducive Environment.

Feelings: Nonjudgment. A feeling of “nonjudgment” was an important prerequisite for feeling comfortable and engaging in class. Brianna explained, “However, once I knew I could speak in class and not feel any judgment I felt as though I belonged there.”

Many aspects of the course contributed to the feeling of nonjudgment. Lisa described how the professor responded to “incorrect” statements: “I feel like when I speak up and get the answers incorrect I am not judged and just immediately told that I am wrong...” Josefine described the impact of the “Cultural Self” graphic: “It allowed me to learn about my classmates and relate to certain aspects of their lives. It made me feel like I belonged and wouldn’t be judged for anything.” The *Perspectives* program was also discussed as a contributor to nonjudgment. Lora wrote, “It was a refreshing experience to be able to say how I feel and not be judged or looked at differently.”

Feelings: Openness. While students wrote about the feeling of openness in the first reflection, it was mentioned much more frequently in the context-specific reflections, highlighting its importance in a diversity context. Sydney wrote, “I think the biggest contribution to my sense of belonging in this course is just how open and vulnerable everyone is.” Feelings of openness related to the feeling of nonjudgment, as Selma wrote: “My sense of belonging is feeling supported, not being judged, and having openness. This class gives me that and more.”

Components of the course were described as “eye opening.” Amelia and Virginia used that term while writing about the surveys and interactive web games, and Jared used it when describing the in-class privilege checking activity. The *Perspectives* program was also mentioned frequently. Anna explained that “Being able to talk with another student who differed from myself was beneficial to me to be able to practice having an open mindset.” For Ahn, openness was an important component of her contributions in class: “I feel like my impact of the sense of belonging is participating in the classroom discussions and acknowledging everyone’s voice and opinions with an open mind.”

Feelings: Enjoyment and Excitement. Students wrote about their “enjoyment” and “excitement” for the course. Shannon wrote that she was “...excited to come to class...” and Ahn “...looked forward to this class every Tuesday and Thursday.”

Many aspects of the course contributed to enjoyment. These feelings were often noted in the context of making peer connections, and assignments that fostered those connections. Selma wrote, “The assignments, the homework, and the discussions fuel a healthy dialogue that I enjoy listening to and participating in. I have never felt such a sense of belonging in a class and I can honestly say that I adore it. This class is an interactive experience.”

Many students wrote about the *Perspectives* program. Zora wrote about how she “...especially enjoyed the Perspectives” program...” Missy wrote, “I really enjoyed the different perspectives this class provided me with, and am really thankful for the experiences I now share with my classmates.”

Connection to the content of the course also contributed to enjoyment, often through the student’s values and priorities. Lisa wrote, noted “I really really enjoyed taking this class this semester. This

has been, not only my favorite class this semester, but what I think is the class that taught me the most important stuff.”

Actions: Opinions. Sharing of opinions was an important contribution students wrote about. Not only did students feel they had an opportunity to share opinions, but they also felt that when they did so it was consequential. Selma described, “I feel like my opinions matter in this class.”

Providing opinions was described in the context of feelings described above, including comfort, excitement, and nonjudgment. Lisa wrote:

In this class I’ve felt comfortable sharing my opinions on controversial topics that I typically would not like to share. I not only felt comfortable sharing my thoughts, but I was excited to do so because it typically led to further discussion and me learning more.”

Selma described the influence of nonjudgment on opinion sharing: “Everyone had a chance to express their opinions, and no one was judged.”

Many felt that sharing opinions helped to forged connections, even if those opinions revealed differences. Josefina wrote, “Learning about our differences and discussing our opinions on complex topics has connected us in a weird way.” Beyond general class interactions, sharing opinions was often linked to the *Perspectives* program, and specifically to the skills it provided. Zora wrote about how she learned to “...voice your opinions in a respectful manner.”

Theme 2: Connection Within Community.

Connection to Peers: Increased Depth. Students felt that connections made in this class were deeper than the classroom connections they had experienced previously. *Perspectives* enabled a depth of knowing that students appreciated. Missy described how *Perspectives* helped students forge deep connections through their differences:

The peer-to-peer conversations opened my eyes in a way that I never imagined to the rich depth of those around me. Victor was a fantastic partner, and we found a lot of similar ground with each other though we come from very different lifestyles and backgrounds. It was so interesting and enlightening to make connections on the same level even though our life journeys had brought us to that level in different ways.

Connection to Peers: Unexpected. Another aspect of connection mentioned in these reflections was that they were unexpected. Jared remarked, “...I was able to engage in dialogue with many of my classmates I would not have previously spoken to.” Some students noted specific aspects of the course that made these unexpected connections possible. Ahn wrote, “Doing group projects made me reach out to people I never would have on my own.” *Perspectives* also helped with this area of connection. Lisa noted: “The perspectives assignment gave me an opportunity to talk to someone I typically wouldn’t have about topics that I definitely normally wouldn’t have.”

Connection to Professor. Students appreciated the same types of things about the professor in this context as they did in their original reflections, including actions the professor took to facilitate perceived sense of care and comfort in the classroom.

Theme 3: Making Meaning Across Context.

Connection to Content. As in the first reflections, connection to content was an important way some students made meaning in the course. This continued to be influenced by relationship of the content to student identity characteristics, including interest, lived experienced, and values.

Connection to Self. One of the biggest changes from the first reflection to the second and third was an increase in the importance and impact of learning and knowing about themselves. Carine stated, “After this class, I learned more about myself than any other time before.” Students connected this learning to understanding their identities. Missy explained:

This class helped me to realize just how ignorant I was to the different parts that go into the forming of my identity. I’ve been on a journey of self-discovery, and this class has helped me gain perspective with the framework of who I am whereas before I saw my identity as shapeless. I find a new appreciation for how my life has gone delivering me to this moment in time.

As their self-awareness increased, students appreciated how they could bring their whole selves into the classroom, as described by Selma: “I do not just feel like another student. My thoughts, my experiences, and my background are taken into consideration.”

Unsurprisingly, students commented on the content from the first unit of the course that was geared towards first-person learning. Amelia wrote:

Before I defined my identity based on things that I enjoy and associate good feelings with; because I really only thought of my identity to the extent of being a white, American, female otherwise. While I still think this to be true, I know now that there is much more that makes up my identity than just those 3 things and how much other parts of my identity have really affected who I am today. I also became aware of how privileged I am in certain areas and where my shortcomings were as well.

Content related to the formation and types of cognitive biases was especially impactful. Jared described, “I was not aware previously of the different types of biases that there were and how these biases were influencing the way I responded and acted in certain situations.”

The “Cultural Self” graphic aided first-person learning and connection to self. Jared described, I had never characterized myself by recognizing the different factors that went into building my own cultural identity, but the Cultural Self assignment allowed me to visualize all of the factors that make me who I am. This assignment, as well as the idea of the cultural iceberg and drawing our cultural influences assignments fostered my sense of belonging by helping me recognize that there is more that goes into building my own culture than I would have originally expected.

Students also wrote about the impact of the *Perspective* program. Shannon appreciated that *Perspectives* gave her the opportunity to “...self-reflect on biases and opinions I might now have known that I had.”

Connection to the Big Picture. Students’ descriptions about connecting to the big picture got broader in their last reflections. Many still reflected on their “future careers,” but their

descriptions gained specificity, as described by Missy: “I feel better equipped to go into the professional world and be able to serve/interact with the different people, cultures, identities, and controversies I will eventually encounter.”

However, many used language evoking broader connections. Anna summed it up:

This class impacted my sense of belonging in a positive way, inside and outside of the classroom. Outside of the classroom I feel I have more of an open mind and understanding of other people’s cultures, and how I can ensure I am being the most respectful to others.

Students wrote about taking content they learned and applying it to broad contexts. Eden explained, “I have learned a lot about how life has changed. I think I will be able to take that with me after this class ends.” Advocacy was a common action related to an increased connection to a bigger picture. Jared wants to “...be an advocate and ally for marginalized groups in the US.” And Shannon hopes to “...be able to apply the information I was given in this class to my future career and continue to advocate and make a difference among the tough topics we discussed in class.”

Aspects of class that enhanced this area of connection included the various surveys students completed. Amelia wrote about the SPENT game, saying that it was “...very eye opening and should be done in a lot of classes so people can better understand what people who are barely making it paycheck to paycheck go through, and the really hard decisions they have to make.” *Perspectives* was also mentioned in this context. Shannon felt it was a “...really mind-opening experience to have before going into a field where you work with many different cultures.” In terms of connection to a big picture, students utilized the skills they learned from *Perspectives*. Shannon reflected, “I try to use the skills I’ve learned from the Perspective lessons with everything I do to have an open mind and listen to multiple different perspectives.”

Connection to Self Facilitates Connection to Others. A theme that emerged in reflections 2 and 3 was that when students wrote about their increased connection to self, this facilitated a broader connection to peers or the big picture. Virginia succinctly noted, “I feel like I’ve learned more about who I am and where I belong in the world.” Missy wrote about how learning about her own culture helped her find a sense of community:

I knew there were different parts of my history and culture that went into my identity, but not exactly where they fit. This class helped me to realize the different working parts of my past and present that go into my identity, and finding out how these different pieces fit helped me to realize where I find the most comfort and belonging in a group of people. Becoming more aware of my identity was incredibly important in the sense of comfort and community I felt in the classroom, and I can now confidently state parts of my identity that I didn’t understand before. Having this newly defined sense of self is freeing, and I feel more aware of the paths I need to take moving forward into my personal and professional world.

Increased knowledge about the one’s own culture and identity lead students to aspire to meaningful actions that benefit others. Kelly explained, “Also, the material we have learned has made me question myself, my culture, and identity. I think of this in a positive way as I think this will help me grow into a better person.” Brianna wrote that “All semester I was very consciously checking my bias at the door so that I could learn from all of the different people that surrounded me in class.”

Theme 4: Belonging Despite... In the first reflection, students often wrote about a sense of belonging occurring despite being in the midst of a difficult time in their lives or a challenging class. This theme of “Despite” was also present in the second and third reflections.

Despite Individual Differences. Like in the first reflection, connection to peers remained a highly noted subtheme. In their final reflections, students remarked on how peer connections occurred despite individual differences. Jared noted,

We came from different backgrounds but found we had similar core values and believed in many of the same things despite the difference in how we grew up. It was really amazing and interesting to see how there was someone that grew up completely different from me, but I had more similarities than differences.

The design of the “Cultural Self” graphic as an assignment to connect students with their own identities. Many students, however, noted how this assignment was an important way they connected with their peers through differences. Josefina felt especially strongly about this assignment, “I particularly liked that I was able to see firsthand how people can be so different yet have so many things in common.” There were components of the *Perspectives* program that students mentioned that facilitated connections through differences. Teresa appreciated that “...it was an allotted time each week for us to sit and talk and discuss our differences and our similarities, and we were able to have some really meaningful conversations.” Also important was that it gave students skills to make connections positive ones. Shannon wrote: “I liked that it gave me tools and tips on how to be a good listener and conversationalist while still getting my point across, and understanding the opposition's view as well.”

Despite Tough Topics. Students wrote about belonging (and associated feelings like comfort and nonjudgment) despite talking about “tough topics”, “hot-button issues”, or “controversial” areas. Amelia wrote,

I think my sense of belonging in this class felt much different than in other classes I have liked before. This class felt very open and low stress even when we were discussing some hard to swallow topics. I think I felt that ultimately I could share an opinion without feeling too nervous about how others felt.

For many, the ability to connect despite difficult content was surprising. Brianna explained, “With all of these more hot-button topics and all the differing opinions in our classroom, you would think the environment would be less welcoming but that is not the case.”

Because they felt like they belonged, students were able to continue engaging despite difficult content. Lisa reflected,

In classes I am typically not one to speak up when discussing a controversial subject that could upset members of this classroom but in our class I feel comfortable enough to share an opinion that may not be the opinion of the general public.

Actions by the professor helped students remain engaged despite challenging content. Lisa recounted,

I brought up the concept of reparations which can be a very high-tension topic but although I was initially nervous the more I talked and received feedback from you, both verbal and non-verbal, (nodding, eye contact, etc.) I felt more confident in what I was saying.

Discussion

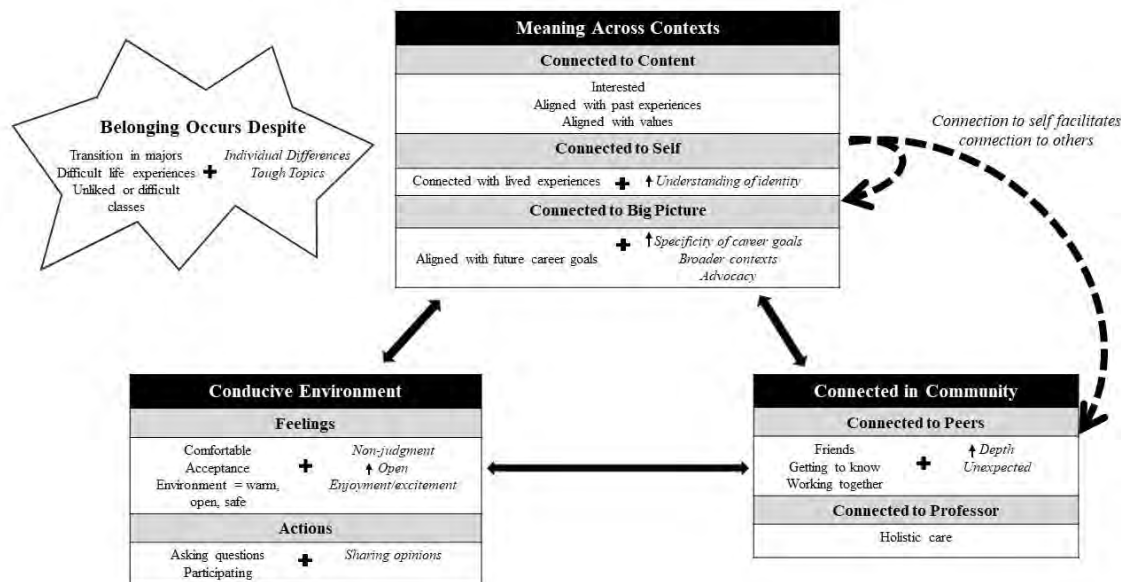
This study explored students' experiences of belonging in the context-specific environment of a cultural and linguistic diversity course that was designed to foster belonging. Students' reflections revealed that experiences of belonging entail a conducive environment, connection within community, and meaning across contexts. Critically, belonging is also possible in the face of challenges. The experience of sense of belonging did not fundamentally differ between contexts (prior learning versus context-dependent); students described a sense of belonging within the contours of the same four emergent themes. However, students' reflections highlighted components of belonging that were salient in the context of a diversity course, as well as adding some specifications. See Figure 1 for a graphic depiction of sense of belonging that emerged directly from student reflections. The model aligns with prior research in depicting the interrelationships among the emergent themes of this study that paint the experience of belonging as less of a state and more of an evolving process. Sense of belonging illustrates the interplay between the individual and the institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and can thus be hindered or promoted by complex interactions between environment and personal factors (Mahar et al., 2013).

In line with extant literature, students in this study related belonging to a feeling of comfort (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Across all reflections, a conducive environment characterized by connection to the professor, but especially to peers, was paramount. This importance of positive interpersonal relationships is a consistent theme within belonging literature (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Strayhorn, 2019; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). In all reflections, students included actions related to engagement, which is a core component of belonging. Other studies have also shown that belonging impacts learning behaviors (Freeman et al., 2007). Behaviors related to sense of belonging may be especially critical to foster in those moving towards helping professions. In a study of student nurses, the absence of meaningful interpersonal relationships (a critical component of belonging as identified in this study and many others) led to an increased willingness to conform; this entailed behaviors such as an unquestioning agreement with other's decisions and engaging in negative behaviors as long as they were sanctioned by the group (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009).

Belonging in a Diversity Class. This study adds to literature related to sense of belonging in the classroom by discussing specifications of belonging that are especially salient in the context of a diversity class. For example, in a course in which "tough topics" and "difficult conversations" are present, this study revealed that feelings of non-judgment and openness were important for students. These feelings led to increase of learning behaviors especially related to the sharing of opinions.

Figure 1

Graphic Depiction of Students' Experience of Sense of Belonging in Prior and Context-Specific Learning Environments



Note. Italic text to the right of the “plus” mark, and dashed arrows, indicate context-specific aspects of belonging.

A theme that emerged from this study that was not present in other studies of belonging was the theme of making meaning across multiple contexts, which may be an important aspect when examining belonging in the context of a specific classroom (rather than at an institutional level). Previous literature has described belonging as a feeling of connectedness within a context (Mahar et al., 2013); an important context in the classroom is how one makes meaning. In the reflections of belonging in prior contexts, students primarily spoke about making meaning through connection with the content. However, in the context-specific reflections, learning about and making meaning through oneself (first-person learning) and through connection to a bigger picture was especially important.

Opportunities for first-person learning were embedded throughout the course (discussed in more detail below). Vaccaro and Newman (2016) noted the importance of authenticity, or “...knowing and being true to oneself.” (p. 934), in the context of their study of belonging for privileged and minoritized students. They noted that “...authenticity requires a certain level of self-awareness – if you do not know yourself, you cannot develop authentic relationships.” (p. 934). Increased self-awareness and understanding of one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, plus the opportunity to share them in an open, nonjudgmental environment may have fostered authenticity in the current study. As students connected with themselves in the classroom, it is not surprising that sharing of opinions increased in the diversity context. Opinions, or a thought, belief, or judgment about something or someone (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), are a way for students to bring knowledge from their own perspective into the classroom.

Critically, students did not remain in a self-centered, egotistical frame of mind. Student reflections indicated that an increased understanding and awareness of the self (identities, lived experiences, etc.) led to / enabled / triggered an increased willingness to seek awareness, understanding, and connection outside of one's own frame of reference, or ways of knowing and making meaning in the world (Mezirow, 2000). In a discussion of contemplative and transformative pedagogy, Arthur Zajonc (2006, para. 1) captured the connection between the self and others:

In reality, the interconnectedness of the world has its reflection in the connections among the diverse aspects of ourselves. When we find peace among the component parts of our own psyche, then we will possess the inner resources to make peace in a multicultural society.

Course Design to Foster Belonging. Filling a gap in existing literature, examples of specific aspects of course design or professor actions that fostered belonging (as noted by students) were explored. See Table 5 for a summary of practice recommendations to foster belonging in the context of a diversity course. These practice recommendations emerged directly from student reflections and are tied closely to the literature related to sense of belonging that was drawn upon to design this course.

Identity and Belonging. Student identity influenced the avenues through which students accessed belonging. While students wrote about components across the four emergent themes of this study, no two stories or experiences were exactly alike. As noted throughout the Results section, student demographics, identity characteristics, and values influenced how they felt and acted in class, to whom they connected in class, and how they made meaning across contexts. Further study, as noted in the Limitations section below, is warranted in this area.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all qualitative research, there are limitations to generalizability of these findings. It is noted throughout the literature that belonging is defined and described differently by people from minority backgrounds, of which there were very few in the current class. However, the demographics of the class did align with the demographics of other CSD classes, and with the profession into which many students are entering. These considerations may enhance the generalizability of this sample to other student groups.

Extending this work to include students from a greater diversity of backgrounds and/or different geographic regions would enable a better understanding of experiences of sense of belonging. Relatedly, in this study, identity was self-defined by students, and no additional demographic data were collected. While this offers a unique and person-centered perspective, it does somewhat limit the exploration of the influence of identity on belonging in the classroom, as students' reflections on the data were not particularly rich or detailed. Additionally, collecting data via a different or additional method (interviews) may have yielded richer and more specific data as it would have enabled probes into parts of the questions that were not addressed by students or clarifications about certain statements that were difficult to code.

Table 5

Categories of Actions that Promote a Sense of Belonging in a Diversity Course with Suggestions for Implementation Practice Recommendations

Contribution to Belonging	Suggestions for Implementation
Prioritize Peer Connections	
Feelings of non-judgment and enjoyment/excitement	Include learning objectives related to peer connection.
Increased depth of connection to community	Include collaborative component in major assignments.
Increased connection to content	Connect students in each class period (e.g., think-pair-share).
	Teach skills that promote positive relationships, if appropriate.
Include Opportunities for First-Person Learning	
Feelings of non-judgment and openness	Include learning objectives related to self-awareness and self-reflection.
Increased sharing of opinions	Include course-relevant content related to knowing oneself, as appropriate
Increased depth of connection to content	Include a self-reflection component in major assignments.
Increased connection to self, knowledge of identity	Offer moments for self-reflection throughout class.
Pair Opportunities for First-Person Learning with Opportunities for Peer Connection	
Feelings of non-judgment, openness, and excitement	Before sharing or discussing, give students time to reflect and collect their own thoughts, opinions, and perspectives.
Link between connection to self and connection to others (peers, big picture)	
Place Discipline-Related Issues Within a Larger Context	
Feelings of openness and enjoyment/excitement	Include content related to the historical context in which discipline-specific issues have evolved
Increased depth of connection to content	
Increased connection to the big picture	
Set the Stage for Belonging with Actions that Indicate Holistic Care for Students	
Feelings of comfort and non-judgment	See Table 1
Sharing of opinions	
Increased depth of connection in the community	

It is also important to take the researcher/professor's positionality and critical reflexivity into consideration, particularly in the context of studies in diversity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Sultana, 2007). For a more in-depth reflection on the author's own identity and how it influenced the development of this course and research study, see Chapman (in press).

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Appendix

Detailed Description of Aspects of the Course

Table A1

Specific Course Design Factors and Their Relationships to Belonging

Assignments and Activities	Peer Relationships	Task Value	First-Person Learning
Cultural Self Graphic: Inspired by Hyter and Salas-Provance (2023), students made a one-page graphic depicting how they perceived themselves as a cultural being. Students were asked to present their graphic to peers, along with a short story of how one important life event, value, or experience shaped them.	X		X
Perspectives: A blended learning program that consists of individual lessons, self-reflections, and peer conversations. The program includes content regarding the inner workings of the mind and psychological roots of ideological differences to help students better understand themselves and others. In peer conversations, students learn skills to engage across differences. (Constructive Dialogue Institute, 2023). Students were intentionally paired to maximize diversity, as engaging in meaningful experiences with diverse others can have a positive effect on belonging (Hussain & Jones, 2021; Johnson et al., 2007).	X		X
Cultural Profiles Group Presentation: Students chose cultural groups they were interested in studying and worked together throughout the semester to apply general course concepts to specific cultural groups. Individually, students summarized research articles related to their cultural group and chosen field of study.	X	X	
Cultural Appreciation Gathering: Students presented revised versions of the Cultural Self graphic, and shared a cultural artifact from their own culture with the group.	X		X

Table A1 (continued).

ASHA's Taking Action Against Microaggressions Micro Course Series (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.b.): In four 30-minute micro courses, students gain different perspectives of experiencing microaggressions. The goal of the course is increased self-awareness of how one contributes and responds to them.	X	X	
Belonging Journal Reflection: See Methods for an overview of this assignment.		X	
Games and surveys: assigned to get students to understand concepts in the context of their own lives and beliefs. Students played the online game SPENT (McKinney & Urban Ministries of Durham, n.d.), a game about choices made in the context of poverty and homelessness. They took quizzes to better understand their political views (<i>Hidden Tribes</i> , More in Common, 2022) and their implicit biases (<i>Implicit Association Test</i> , Greenwald et al., 1998). They explored their own identities in relation to privilege, power, and oppression.		X	
Think-Pair-Share (Lyman, 1981): Daily TPS activities enabled students to discuss salient pieces of content with their peers after considering their own opinions and views.	X	X	
Presence Practice: Each class began with a quiet minute in which students were invited to notice what they were bringing into the space that day (emotionally, physically, etc.)		X	
Other Aspects of Course Design and Activities	Peer Relationships	Task Value	First-Person Learning
Course Learning Objectives: related to student feelings, relationships, self-awareness and knowledge	X		X
Ground Rules for Class Discussions: activity entailing collaborative setting of expectations to promote belonging, compiled and noted in the syllabus. Setting ground rules for class discussions is an effective way to establish a safe place for students to learn and share (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015).	X		X

Table A1 (continued).

<i>Transparency in Teaching and Learning Framework</i> (TILT; Winkelmes, 2023): transparently linked activities, assignments, and projects to course goals. The TILT framework promotes students' conscious understanding of how they learn. It has been linked to improvements in sense of belonging and other learning benefits (Winkelmes et al., 2016).	X
Content to support first-person learning: Topics on what composes a culture, what is bias, and how our brains work to create bias	X

The following is the purpose statement for the Belonging Reflection Journal assignment in its entirety.

john a. powell has previously written “Belonging means more than just being seen. Belonging entails having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of social and cultural structures. Belonging means having the right to contribute to, and make demands on, society and political institutions. Belonging is more than just feeling included. In a legitimate democracy, belonging means that your well-being is considered and your ability to design and give meaning to its structures and institutions is realized.” (Grant-Thomas, 2016)

We have an opportunity to create a classroom in which we all feel a sense of belonging. Especially in a class like this one, where we will consider issues that are sometimes challenging or difficult to discuss, it is important that we all move from a space in which we all feel like we belong.

The purpose of this set of reflection journals is to encourage you to examine what a sense of belonging feels like to you, and how it is realized in this particular class.