

The Importance of Sense of Belonging in the Classroom

Dialogue Purpose

This mini-dialogue explores the importance of a sense of belonging in classroom environments, particularly in settings where students come from diverse cultural, social, and educational backgrounds. Because students bring different identities and experiences into the classroom, their sense of belonging may vary and influence how comfortable they feel participating in learning activities.

Through reflective structured dialogue, participants will share personal experiences and listen to others' perspectives to better understand how classroom environments shape feelings of inclusion. Developing a stronger sense of belonging is important because it can increase student engagement, encourage participation, and support persistence and retention in academic settings.

Dialogue Structure:

Opening and Dialogue Agreements

The facilitators begin by briefly explaining that the purpose of the dialogue is to explore experiences and perspectives rather than debate or persuade others. Participants are invited to reflect on their own experiences and listen respectfully to others.

Facilitators will introduce several basic dialogue guidelines:

- Speak from personal experience
- Listen without interrupting
- Respect different perspectives
- Focus on understanding rather than responding immediately

Participants are also reminded that passing is always acceptable if they prefer not to respond to a prompt.

Stage 1: Building Connection and Trust

Goal: Create a comfortable environment where participants begin reflecting on experiences of belonging.

Prompt

“Think about a class where you felt comfortable speaking or participating. What helped create that feeling?”

Participants take one minute for silent reflection, after which the facilitators invite a brief go-around so each participant has an opportunity to share.

Facilitator move

Facilitators acknowledge responses and encourage concise sharing to ensure that all voices are heard.

Stage 2: Exploring Experiences of Belonging

Goal: Help participants explore how belonging is experienced differently across classroom contexts.

Reflection prompt

“Think about a time in a classroom when you either felt included or felt disconnected from the learning environment. What contributed to that experience?”

Participants take two minutes for quiet reflection, followed by voluntary sharing.

During this stage, facilitators may deepen reflection using questions of curiosity, such as:

- “Could you say a little more about what made that experience meaningful for you?”
- “What do you think contributed most to that feeling of belonging or disconnection?”

These questions help participants elaborate on their experiences while encouraging attentive listening from others.

Stage 3: Considering Classroom Dynamics and Structures

Goal: Encourage participants to reflect on broader classroom practices and dynamics that influence belonging.

Prompt

“What role do instructors, classroom norms, or peer interactions play in shaping whether students feel that they belong in a class?”

Participants may reflect briefly before sharing their perspectives.

Facilitators may invite deeper reflection with a curiosity-based follow-up question:

- “How did that experience influence how comfortable you felt participating in the class afterward?”

Facilitators guide the conversation toward classroom structures and practices rather than focusing only on individual behavior.

Stage 4: Reflection and Moving Forward

Goal: Encourage participants to reflect on insights from the conversation and consider ways to support belonging.

Closing prompt

“What is one insight or idea from today’s dialogue that you will take with you about creating belonging in classrooms?”

Participants briefly share their reflections in a final go-around.

Facilitators may conclude with a short optional reflection:

“What is one small action that students or instructors could take to help build a stronger sense of belonging in a classroom?”

Facilitator Role

Throughout the dialogue, facilitators aim to create a respectful and inclusive space by encouraging balanced participation and thoughtful listening. Facilitators will use reflective prompts and questions of genuine curiosity to help participants deepen their reflections while keeping the conversation focused on understanding different experiences of belonging.