

Belonginess

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*Wouldn't you wanna be some place where
everybody knows your name.*

Line from the theme song of the television program, *Cheers*

My interest in the topic of Belonginess began when I was visiting a Makers Space classroom at a local middle school. Most of the students were working in small groups and a few seemed highly engaged in an individual project. But one young boy was sitting by himself on the windowsill looking outside. I struck up a conversation and one of the things he said was that nothing others were working on was of interest to him and no one ever invited him to work with them. As is always the case, I began to do some searches of studies about belonginess and found dozens of articles related to this topic. Two of the most interesting articles are referenced below (Arslan, 2018; Goodenow & Grady, 1993), and I recommend that interested persons look at them for more detailed information on this topic.

Because of the importance of identifying students who may be experiencing belongness issues, I used the several research articles to develop a student self-rating scale that is included below. The instrument contains items about both general belongness and school related belongness.

It is my hope that such an instrument may be helpful in identifying young people who might need counseling and some suggested options for participating in group work that may facilitate social interactions. Previously developed instruments called Interest-A-Lyzers could also be useful in helping schools form groups of students who share common interests. In addition to counseling, it is recommended that schools consider developing a series of club-like classes called Enrichment Clusters.

Enrichment Clusters represent a “brand of learning” that focuses on providing resources, guidance, and feedback to individuals and small groups based on their interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. The teacher serves as a guide-on-the-side rather than a dispenser of prescribed curriculum. Students use authentic investigative skills, how-to books, and inquiry strategies to produce a product, presentation, or performance for targeted audiences. Enrichment Clusters are the academic equivalent of extra-curricular activities with teachers serving as coaches or facilitators rather than traditional instructors (Renzulli, 2001).

The keys to a successful enrichment cluster program are: (1) the teacher or other adult facilitating the cluster has a genuine interest in the topic, (2) students who select the cluster share the same or similar interests as others who signed up for a particular

group, and (3) the focus of a cluster is always producing a product such as a school magazine, performance, presentation, or some kind of school or community action service.

A second requirement is that students will work cooperatively in small groups to explore the following questions:

1. What do people with an interest in this topic or area of study do (e.g., filmmaking, paleontology, journalism, pottery making, storytelling, fashion design, etc.)
2. What products do they create and/or what services do they provide?
3. What methods do they use to carry out their work?
4. What resources and materials are needed to produce high-quality products and services?
5. How and with whom do they communicate the results of their work?
6. What steps need to be taken to have an impact on intended audiences?
7. How will we use this information to decide on the product we will create?

See, for example, a YouTube video that students at a New York City school made in an enrichment cluster on the Holocaust.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2sTTI-apll>

It is opportunities like this that allow students who share a common interest that create feelings of belongingness. In the outside-of-school world (work, fraternal organizations, sports, clubs) people come together to pursue common goals and feelings of satisfaction because they are doing things that reflect a shared purpose. Creating situations like this in schools can help students facing belongingness issues to feel they are a part of something. It is recommended that teachers examine the major interests of students experiencing a lack of belongingness and arrange a cluster that might attract others who share an interest in the topic. We have found that common interests are the best way for creating situations where young people enjoy working together on interest-related projects.

References

- Arslan, G. (2018). Exploring the association between school belonging and emotional health among adolescents. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 7(1), 21–41. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2018.3117>
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>
- Renzulli, J. S. (2001). Using enrichment clusters for performance based identification. *Gifted Education International*, 15(1), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026142940001500104>

General Belongingness

	Almost Always	Sometimes	Never
1. I feel accepted by others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have a sense of belonging.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I feel I am respected by others in my age group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I feel connected with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I have close bonds with family and friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I feel like an outsider.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I feel as if people do not care about me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Because I do not belong, I feel distant during group gatherings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I feel isolated from the rest of the world.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Friends and family do not involve me in their plans.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

School Belongingness

	Almost Always	Sometimes	Never
1. How well do you feel connected to the students in your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. How well do you feel connected to the teachers in your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How welcoming do you feel about your school as a whole?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do students feel themselves valued at school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. How much respect do students at your school show you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. How happy are you when you are at your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. How "at home" do you feel when you are at your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Overall, how much do you feel you belong at your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>