

Welcome to the community – fostering a sense of belonging

We were all keen when Tati suggested creating a newsletter as way of making community.

Community is essential for a sense of belonging and it is often implicated in well-being. Belonging, now identified as the fourth strand of EDI, as DEIB, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). From a Person-Centred Experiential (PCE) perspective belonging is a relational process that is co-created, it is never a given. The experience of depression, that all of our work is organised around, is consistently described as a loss of belonging, alienation from self and others, the world leeched of colour and meaning. The importance of belonging writ large through its absence. Even more reason for the PCE-CfD community to understand how to better create the conditions for a sense of belonging.

If only it was as simple as saying that “you belong here,” “you belong with us” for it to be true, felt as such by the other. The verb ‘to belong’ is often used in categorical sense, as a matter of fact, as definitive. A PCE approach understands that this engenders *power over*, a stuck process, an external locus of evaluation, as opposed to engendering authenticity, openness to experience and wellbeing. ***Belonging as an experiential-relational process also implies a potential for acknowledging how intersecting privileges and oppressions, difference and diversity, shape a sense of belonging.***

Depending on our own social location a sense of belonging might feel like a given, or, it can feel conditional and precarious at best. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, poverty, pollution ... are examples from a long list of oppressions that impact a sense of belonging. ***Having a place to belong to is a privilege in the current context of so many people having to leave their homes*** due to violent conflict, threat of persecution, and economic need, issues entangled with and exacerbated by the climate emergency. These issues are local and global and intersect at a collective and individual level.

There has never been a more important time (it is an overused phrase but sometimes cliches are true!) to make efforts towards engendering a universal sense of

belonging. Universal here should not be conflated with 'sameness' as while these contemporary challenges impact everyone, they do not impact us equally. Neither are all moves towards belonging inclusive. It is also true, according to a PCE approach, that we cannot discern someone else's sense of belonging based on inequity alone i.e. from an external frame of reference. ***This is where empathy comes in, understanding as a way of knowing, and intersectionality as mutual education of self and other.*** Empathy is something this community is skilled at offering, and its diversity and difference is a strength for co-creating the relational conditions needed to foster a sense of belonging.

This newsletter and my pontificating on belonging is my attempt to start a conversation, to build community and foster a sense of belonging towards well-being. We have a number of offers towards this that we want to share with you. If the thoughts resonate with you get in touch so we can continue the conversation.

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