

# NourishED

Growing Together Through Inquiry

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Hello Inspiring Educators,

As we all both embrace and brace for the holiday season ahead, the concept of "belonging" keeps bubbling up for me. What does that truly feel like? How could that look in our homes, in our schools, in our classrooms?

*"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."*

—Brené Brown

The recent cell phone ban in the classroom shifted a blinding spotlight onto "belonging"—quickly. Our previous digital filter, our mobile sunglasses, if you will, were abruptly removed from our eyes. Last year, we could have escaped from the problem illuminated in front of us by donning the shades of our digital realm. However, this year, we were left staring at the conflict ablaze before us, unsure of how to proceed. After several social mishandlings, it became clear we hadn't fully developed the skills to mitigate and diffuse situations as generations before us had, and we needed to understand how to live and learn together without our devices.

I, as I'm sure many of you do as well, witness daily the direct impacts of a sense of belonging on academic success. Unsurprisingly, my most comfortable and authentic students ask more questions, grapple with tricky topics vulnerably, display resilience through failure, and seem to grow more throughout the year. I want that for all who walk into my classroom. Thus, understanding how to belong is critical for us to grow as humans and as academics.

We deconstructed belonging into factors, and initiated our study with an overview of different communication styles. We identified our own tendencies and discussed various situations where each style may be appropriate. We liked an assertive style for group work and an aggressive style to combat bullying; we giggled at the quantity of "That's my mom's style!" exclamations when introducing passive aggressiveness. We wondered... How does communication impact belonging?

Communication differences naturally led us to conflict (in study and in reality 😊). We decided to expand our own approach by exploring unfamiliar resolution options to a given problem. As an example, we centered "someone spreading false rumors about us" in a circle on the board. We then brainstormed possible responses, and placed each on its own ray. Of course, a few silly ones crept in like tap dancing out a resolution proposal, or making sure they stubbed their toe. Finally, we categorized them into these conflict resolution approaches. We wondered... how can we navigate conflict and still belong?

Lastly, we investigated our unique brains. We compared equity with equality, and discussed simple, dignity-preserving supports which group members can offer each other to maximize group production. If we notice someone struggling through the directions, we could just gather together and read them aloud. If we observe someone challenged by focus, laying out fidgets nearby may suffice; no words necessary. We decided that learning differences are not a barrier to success. We wondered... What small supports can we offer to be sure that each brain has a place here?

This experiment is on-going. We're at the point where shared vocabulary slips into student conversations spontaneously, and self-reflections lead to goal setting, "I realized I tend to avoid conflict during group projects, but that doesn't always work out for me. I think I need to try being more assertive."

So, I continue to ask without answers,

*How can we, as educators, create a space for each learner to truly belong through the holidays and beyond?*

## About NourishED

NourishED is an educator-led digital platform where we pursue curiosities and challenges of practice—you don't need to agree with my opinions above to join. We seek to inspire educators and to impact our Oklahoman school system at large. We value and need all of your voices.

Please find us at our website, and be sure to check out our latest webinar!

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