EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP IN LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In construction and supporting learners' sense of belonging in a learning environment, teachers have proposed stimulating learners' desire to learn. This article will present the results of a literature review on belonging to support the authors' viewpoint that it is needed to foster a sense of belonging and accentuate school belonging in learning programs, practices, and research. This article explores how a sense of belonging prepares and support learners to take ownership of learning to promote self-directed learning (SDL) in learning communities. It argues for the need to locate the need for belonging in learning communities and define the essence of success for taking ownership of learning. Furthermore, the article will show how a sense of belonging is an essential human necessity and that nurturing a sense of belonging can be seen as imperative, irrespective of learners who do not have a deep understanding of non-belonging. However, for learners to effectively be part of a learning community, a nuanced approach to belonging should be followed to provide learners with a sense of belongingness for taking ownership of learning and how to support learners who do not feel like they belong (fit in) or feel left out. Nevertheless, this article will also attempt to show that, although there might be learners who experience deep senses of non-belonging, they learn, but they manage to excel, it still remains essential to fulfil the need to belong in educational contexts. In terms of the latter, this article proposes that belonging is one of the first things teachers ought to attend because when learners do not feel like they belong, they can find it challenging to have a sense of ownership.

Hence, the article aims (a) to review the theoretical literature on a sense of belonging, emphasising its essential features. Then, in light of the essential features recognised, the author proposes (b) general and practical recommendations for educational stakeholders wanting to build and support learners' sense of belonging at school as well as towards how teachers can cultivate a sense of belonging in learning communities to support learners who do not feel like they belong (fit in) or feel left out.

Keywords: learners, a sense of belonging, ownership of learning, self-directed learning, self-determination, motivation

INTRODUCTION

The notion of belonging is comprehensive and well-defined in many ways: relatedness, sense

of community, support, and identification (Allen et al. 2018; Osterman 2000; 2010). Regarding the noting of belonging, belonging(ness) emphasises that learners look for a sense of attachment with learning and the learning community (Nyamnjoh 2015). In addition, within the South African and the broader international context in the literature and educational practices, it is proposed that knowledge in the realisation of the necessity for a sense of belonging in learning communities can relate to improved learner autonomy, academic enthusiasm and motivation (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman and Ryan 1981).

It is believed that a sense of belonging is where learners feel individually acknowledged. In recent years, the field of research on the role of motivation and belonging in learning has created new evidence on (a) how to optimally function in the learning community (Martinez-Callaghan and Gill-Lacruz 2017; Job et al. 2015), (b) the positive effect a sense of belonging have on being self-directed in learners learning and (c) how to improve on academic achievement and active learning engagement (Allen et al. 2018; Neel and Fuligni, 2013). Previous studies have reported that extra attention needs to be given to the significance of satisfying the necessity to belong (Maslow 1962) in learning communities. Scholars accentuate the importance of a learning environment that enables a "sense of community and belonging" between learners in a learning community (Deci and Ryan 2008; Osterman 2000; Yilmaz 2016; Yao 2016). This sense of belonging is also established in the literature as a "sense of school belonging". Research has consistently shown that a "sense of school belonging" is defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (Goodenow 1993, 80).

The issue of the importance of a sense of belonging has grown in importance in light of recent research that showed that having a sense of belonging in a learning community is encouragingly associated with learner engagement, motivation, behaviour and performance (Anderman 2003; Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr 2017; Niemiec and Ryan 2009; Osterman 2000). However, far too little attention has been paid to research exploring the influence of belonging in learning environments on learners willingness to take ownership of their learning and be more self-directed in their learning.

Consequently, this indicates a need to understand the importance of belonging to take ownership of learning. Therefore, this article aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the importance of a sense of belonging as a key factor influencing learners' willingness to be more autonomous and take ownership (sense of ownership) in learning. Thus, this article offers some important insights concerning a sense of belonging as an indispensable component of human drive, motivation and ownership, which is also imperative for self-direction in learning.

In addition, this article proposes that belonging(ness) is a fundamental human motivation driving a learner to reason, perform, taking ownership, strive and be self-directed in ones' learning. Failure to satisfy this necessity to belong can lead to outcomes that are psychologically and developmentally. In this regard, Maslow (1970) observes that instability and confusion in society might hinder the failure to satisfy the fundamental human necessity for belonging. Learners who exhaust their energies attempting to meet this deficiency have no reserves left for higher-level cognitive functions (Maslow 1954).

This article aimed to address the following research question: *What would belonging(ness) as a key factor influencing learners' willingness to take ownership of learning entail?*

To answer the research question above, a systematic exploration of appropriate resources was taken for this article. In this regard, this article concentrated "primarily on theoretical advances without relying on data" (Yadav 2010).

In conclusion, this article presents (a) a review of the theoretical literature on a sense of belonging and provide (b) general and practical recommendations for educational stakeholders wanting to build and support learners' sense of belonging at school as well as towards how teachers can cultivate a sense of belonging in learning communities to support learners who do not feel like they belong (fit in) or feel left out. Therefore, for this article's sake, the author believes that having a sense of belonging is necessary for taking ownership in learning to promote SDL.

ON THE ROAD TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF BELONGING

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the explanation of a sense of belonging (Allen and Bowles 2012; Allen et al. 2018; Boelens, Deci and Ryan 2003; De Wever, and Voet 2017; Cho, Kim, and Chio 2017). As stated before, one of these descriptions is that a sense of belonging is a crucial element that underwrites confidently to a learner's emotional growth, the progression of a learner's identification, and their social identity. It must be acknowledged that a sense of belonging is also seen as the point to which learners feel appreciated, accepted, and sustained by teachers in learning communities. This view is supported by Allen et al. (2018), Boelens et al. (2017), Cho et al. (2017) and Korpershoek et al. (2019), who penned down the prominence of relationships in human relations and collaborations; and Maslow (1962) classified love and belongingness central in his order of needs, and he states further that a sense of belonging to a community can increase your learning motivation.

A broader perspective has been adopted by Pintrich and Schunk (1996), Weiner (2006) and Abubakar et al. (2016), who acknowledged that one significant individual component of motivation is belonging, and it is proposed that belonging can be a fundamental way of learners'

learning motivation (Knowles et al. 2010). Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that it is clear that learners are intrinsically motivated and encouraged by a necessity to belong and "have a place" (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Boston and Warren 2017; Korpershoek et al. 2019; Vallerand, Pelletier, and Koestner 2008).

Drawing on an extensive range of sources, the author set out that for a necessity to belong, relations ought to be encouraging inside a conducive learning environment where learner motivation is an influential determinate of learner's self-directedness, sense of ownership, and accomplishment in their learning. The necessity to belong has been acknowledged as an essential human element, as seen in Maslow's research (1962; 1970; 1987). Therefore, in my view, this article complements Maslow's argument by suggesting that a sense of belonging is a vital necessity and imperative to be a motivated, self-actualised learner. And in addition, I am proposing that self-actualised learners can develop into self-directed motivated learners, willing and capable of taking ownership and responsibility of their learning, thus being a self-directed learner who has a strong sense of belonging in a schools' learning environment. Several researchers (Creemers and Kyriakides 2008; Du Toit-Brits 2015; 2018a; Du Toit-Brits and Van Zyl 2017; Eccles and Roeser 2009) support the argument mentioned.

To get a broader understanding of the importance of belonging, it is necessary to look at motivation. Motivation is also applicable to this research as from the literature stated above. In this regard, several studies have found that both intrinsic and extrinsic have various significances on learning (Deci and Ryan 1985; 2009; 2013; Korpershoek et al. 2019; Lei 2010). There is a consensus among researchers that these two types of motivation are grounded on the self-determination theory that ruminates learners to learn enthusiastically and self-directed (Deci and Ryan 1985; Perlman 2013; St-Amand, Girard, and Smith 2017). For the sake of this article, it must be acknowledged that through intrinsic motivation, positive learning experiences can inspire a more profound sense of belonging and cognitive processing. These positive activating emotions derived from a greater sense and understanding of belonging can lead to the satisfaction of learners' needs for competence and ownership, increasing learners' self-efficacy, self-determination and self-direction.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the second category, extrinsic motivation (Battistich et al. 1997; Deci and Ryan 2013; Knowles 1978; 1979; Fisher and King 2010; Maslow 1962; 1970; Waaler et al. 2013). These studies talk about a range of commenced actions other than the learning itself, but extrinsic motivation focuses on external rewards, reimbursements, or punishments. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation encouraged learners to have a stronger sense of belonging, supporting them in learning challenges and encompasses their learning experiences. Consequently, this article proposes that learners' motivated actions

concerning their choice of learning tasks, their determination, their choice of learning resources, their drawing up of own learning aims, as well as their persistence in learning, have been associated with learners level of intrinsic motivation, their willingness for taking ownership of their learning and their self-directedness (willingness to be more autonomous).

In this article, Knowles' (1975) explanation of SDL will explicate my conceptualisation of SDL. Knowles defines SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles 1975). Mahlaba (2020, 125) states that "SDL is generally concerned with both the learning environment that allows for the promotion of SDL skills and learners' ability and readiness to be self-directed in their learning". Also, Du Toit-Brits (2018b, 55) believes that SDL is "a meaning-making learning change process focusing on students' development of SDL and their willingness to participate in SDL", and by "encouraging students to adopt self-directed learning can enhance their persistence in learning and a desire to learn with self-confidence". Learning conditions in learning environments thus need to enhance learners' motivation to take ownership of their learning and learning processes (Du Toit-Brits and Van Zyl 2017; Pilling-Cormick and Garrison 2007). Consequently, this article proposes that it is essential that the social-contextual factors in the learning environment encourage a sense of belonging, autonomy, and competence. In essence, a sense of belonging can improve learners' sense of ownership and self-belief in their learning potential in becoming more self-directed in their learning. It is also proposed that learners will be more persistent in their learning as they experience autonomy, freedom, and belonging within the learning environment.

The author believes that learners with intrinsic motivation, self-determination, and a sense of belonging are expected to employ SDL skills like critical thinking, autonomy, taking ownership, taking responsibility, being accountable, and reflection, to mention a few. Drawing on an extensive range of research (Carr and Walton 2014; Cerasoli, Nicklin, and Nassrelgrgawi 2016; Cho et al. 2017; Korpershoek et al. 2019; Moore 2016; Shirazi et al. 2018; Vanslambrouck et al. 2018), the authors described that intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm could be related to the contentment of necessities for independence and autonomy, which is necessary for SDL. Therefore, the need for autonomy in learning is clear as autonomy is the internal locus of control and giving learners more control over their own learning experiences will tend to increase their intrinsic motivation and self-determination to be actively involved in SDL. As a result, this article proposes that learning communities that develop autonomy by giving learners opportunities for self-direction are related to intrinsic motivation. Importantly,

these learning communities that enhance learner autonomy can lead to greater belonging(ness) and their ability to take ownership of their learning.

By drawing on the concept of self-determination, Deci and Ryan (2013), Ryan and Deci (2006), Cerasoli et al. (2016) and Dee (2015) have shown that motivation needs to consider three basic human needs, namely autonomy, competence, and, lastly, relatedness. Deci and Ryan (2013) identify that firstly, within learning communities, supporting autonomy in learners is essential in their review of self-determination and self-directedness. As seen earlier in this article, individual learners need to feel in control of their learning, their learning experiences, and their own learning goals. Secondly, supporting the need for competence is necessary for learners to flourish in their learning. Given all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that it is essential to consider that learners ought to gain learning responsibilities and learn diverse skills, especially skills related to SDL. Lastly, supporting the need to connect to learning, belonging to the learning community, and relating to stakeholders and learning content inside the learning community is essential in providing learners with the necessary self-determination to be more self-directed.

To this end, it is proposed that learners can have a sense of belonging when (a) they have more autonomy to make their own choices (regarding learning aims, learning resources, to work cooperatively) in their learning, (b) they feel connected to learning and the learning process, teachers and other learners, (c) they are interested in their learning, and (d) learners who are self-determined. Consequently, learners with a sense of belonging are motivated and engaged with strong goal orientation, self-determination, and self-direction. Furthermore, an essential element that influences learners' engagement in learning is, thus, learners' association with learning. Therefore, nurturing a sense of belonging can generate a learning community where (a) learning can flourish; (b) learning is directed; (c) learners can share their thinking, and (f) learners will be interested in their learning.

In the following discussion, I explore what belonging(ness) as a critical factor influencing learners' willingness to take ownership of learning entails.

DISCUSSION

The need for belonging in learning communities

Given all that has been mentioned so far, one may propose that if learners feel they belong to a learning community, they will have a better sense of belonging with more cooperative support, leading to a more specific understanding of learning associated with progression in learning. Furthermore, the author also believes that if learners have a sense of belonging, they can have

self-directedness focusing on learners' capabilities and skills that can be extended to a higher cognitive level, where they can share knowledge that can lead to quality learning. In essence, when learners experience belongingness, they will also experience a sense of purpose and association in learning with cyclical and fluid knowledge growth.

When learning has a purpose, learning will be meaningful, and learners will have a better sense of association within a learning community, with an improved sense of confidence, independence, autonomy and self-management in their learning, leading to deeper learning. Also, when learners belong to a learning community, they will have confidence in themselves and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses in learning; thus, being self-directed. Therefore, it can thus be suggested that an essential requirement for feeling a sense of belonging(ness) to a learning community can construct and shape a learner to be autonomous, motivated and self-directed; needless to say, their need also to be supported by a teacher – assisting learners to belong in learning communities.

Teacher support: Supporting learners to take ownership through their sense of belonging in learning communities

It can therefore be assumed that an understanding of belonging is essential for teachers. Furthermore, it permits teachers to plan effective teaching practices to foster learners' sense of belonging in a learning community. This argument is in agreement with Ayyildiz and Tarhan (2015), Cotterall (2017), Du Toit-Brits (2019), and Olivier's (2019) findings which showed that teachers need to be compassionate and accommodating so that learners will accept and share their teacher's educational standards, which can sway in what way learners feel about learning and how they value learning (Cotterall 2017). Furthermore, according to Du Toit-Brits (2015; 2018b; 2019), Knowles (1975), Perlman (2011) and Shirazi et al. (2018), teachers need to implement instructional strategies like SDL where learners, with supervision, guidance and support from the teacher, decide what they learn and how they will learn, with or without cooperative learning, with the aim of learners taking ownership and responsibility of their learning in learning communities. Hence, because many studies state that teachers need to implement instructional strategies like SDL, the author also comments that educational activities need to develop SDL skills.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider that teachers need to foster instructional strategies that cultivate belonging, namely, to construct a supportive learning community where teachers are thoughtful to learners' learning needs, giving them emotional and academic support. It must also be acknowledged that teachers need this to demonstrate attentiveness in learners learning expedition and learning progress and understand learners' views on learning (learning

outcomes, learning resources, and learning aims) so that learners can create a sense of ownership and self-direction in their learning community.

Du Toit-Brits (2018a) believes that a teacher's constructs can increase or decrease a learner's capability to take ownership of learning (Ferreira, Ornelas, and Turner 2015; Shirazi et al. 2018). Hence, the learning community ought to cultivate learning support and recognition to create an atmosphere for growth for each learner in the learning process. Similarly, for learners to feel in control and take responsibility, they need to be empowered to advocate for themselves and take ownership of their learning to make their learning needs knowing. In this regard, Allen and Bowles (2012), Freeman et al. (2014), and Korpershoek et al. (2019) suggested instructional strategies to support teachers in fostering learners' sense of belonging and these approaches are consistent with Osterman's (2010) situation regarding his idea that a sense of belonging can be improved through reinforcement of autonomy. Thus, the need for SDL in learning communities is clear. However, it is essential to bear in mind that within learning communities, teachers need to foster a passion for learning within learners where they can relate their learning to real life, mounting their learning strategies, choosing their learning contents, being motivated to learn, and learning to foster in learners a progressive mindset. When learners learn in a self-directed manner; thus, it can manifest in them a willingness to take ownership of learning.

Accordingly, this article also proposes that if learners are not empowered and do not feel they belonged within a learning community, they can feel that they had no sense of control and autonomy over their learning community; thus, they are not willing or able to take ownership of learning. The author says this because the necessity for belonging is one of the five elementary necessities as seen in the research of Maslow (1987), and it empowers the capability to realise and see value in life. Therefore, the author further believes that there is a need to construct learning communities where learners can function optimally by cultivating a sense of empowerment, and teachers need to support learners' sense of belonging, sense of meaning, self-directedness, and accountability.

Having said the above, the authors' outlook further is that the challenge then remains on how teachers can cultivate and support learners' sense of belonging[1] who experience deep senses of non-belonging. The author is thus of the opinion that if the above-mentioned situation prevails in the learning environment, a fundamental requirement is then that learners need to have a growth mindset and self-confidence in (a) that they have control over their learning for the ability to set learning goals and (b) the aptitude to base their learning on their own learning goals, so that a culture of learning can be developed.

Develop a culture of learning: Empowerment of learners

Generating choice and learning opportunities for self-direction is a method teachers can use to support autonomy, improving learners' enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation (Du Toit-Brits 2018; Perlman 2012a; 2012b). By constructing learning opportunities aimed at a learner's rights, responsibilities, interests and giving learners choices, those accountable for the learner's education can secure a sense of belonging in their learners. Furthermore, the author of this article also suggested that learners have a right and responsibility to have a voice in their learning by obtaining a sense of belonging. Having said the above, the authors' outlook further is that the learning environment needs to (a) install trust, (b) instil a sense of empowerment, (c) create learning opportunities for learners to engage in teaching and learning; (d) provide motivation to learn, and (e) encourage commitment in students to the development of SDL skills.

As a result, this article suggests that central to this discussion is that supporting learners to have a voice in their learning and mounting a learning community culture where every voice is respected and valued is essential to assisting learners in directing their learning, trusting in one's aptitude to cultivate, learn, mature, and be successful. I believe that such learners are confident in their learning and understanding to take ownership. By taking ownership, learners need to be (a) inquisitive, (b) know their learning needs, (c) know that learning and knowledge are essential, (d) set a purpose for learning, (e) self-access their learning progress, and (f) know when they have attained their learning own learning goals. Therefore, the author suggests that offering learners' opportunities to (a) belong, (b) voice, (c) choice, and (d) authentic learning experiences makes available chances to change learners' mindsets and empowers them to take control and ownership of their learning experiences.

The author is thus of the opinion that if the aspects mentioned above prevail in the learning opportunities, irrespective of academic skills, learners are conscious when they sense they are encompassed in a learning community. When they feel a sense of belonging(ness) and empowerment, learners will actively participate in their learning rather than only be passive receivers of knowledge.

Having said the above, the authors' outlook further is that learners will have a sense of belonging in learning environments when they can actively participate and control their SDL skills development process. This can emphasise independence and empowerment in learning, influencing learners' self-directedness in learning, focusing on learning as belonging. In addition to this, the author's viewpoint is that to mature in learning, they need learning communities where every individual learner is acknowledged and accepted as an individual

with unique learning aptitudes and learning interests (Brookhart, Moss, and Long 2009; Deci and Ryan 2003; Du Toit-Brits 2018b). It is essential to consider that a learning culture needs to be employed within learning communities to empower learners to realise the enjoyment, determination, and purpose of learning. The building of a culture of learning and belongingness in learning communities does not take place instantly. It needs to be unlocked, employed and explored before learning can reach its full potential (Cantor et al. 2018).

Further to this, the author concludes that learners will not have their necessities for belonging with the lack of ownership and a lack of belonging. As a result, learners will feel withdrawn in their learning and learning community, and learners may not strive for excellence in their learning (Kolesovs and Melne 2017). It must be acknowledged that ownership of learning consists of (a) goal setting, (b) self-direction, (c) persistence, (d) self-awareness, (e) motivation, (f) help-seeking, (g) monitoring of their learning progress, (h) self-efficacy, and (i) their readiness to persist in their learning. Once learners' learning goals have been established, this can be the driver for learners to take ownership of their learning and assist learners in understanding that they can control their learning (Perlman and Webster 2011).

Consequently, learners with these skills will manage the demands of learning communities in which they need to be enthusiastic and actively involved to be successful. The author believes that learners' capability to take ownership of their learning will be fundamental to their learning success and all through their lives. For the sake of this article, by stirring learning belonging and cultivating a sense of learning ownership, learners will feel free to make mistakes in their learning because they will be able to express their voice in a real autonomy-supportive learning community.

EPILOGUE

Seeking a praxis of belonging in learning environments as "*a sense of place and a place that makes sense*": Building on citizenship education

I aver that education needs to be recognised as a praxis of belonging where learning environments are seen as "*a sense of place and a place that makes sense*". In this way, it provides learners with the knowledge and skills to be active, informed, and responsible citizens who can take accountability for themselves and contribute responsibly to their learning and communities. In addition, "*a sense of place and a place that makes sense*" can support learners to grow and mature in self-confidence and a sense of agency to deal with life vicissitudes and encounters such as discrimination efficaciously. Education in learning environments as "*a sense of place and a place that makes sense*" can provide learners with a voice in their schools and

communities, and it can empower them to provide a confident and constructive input by mounting the knowledge and skills necessary to assert their rights and responsibilities. The author believes that the focus in learning environments needs to cultivate and promote self-directed learning spaces and -opportunities through which learners can learn to value oneself and by learning through and with others learners. Seeking a praxis of belonging, thus building on citizenship education, can produce motivated, self-driven, empowered, and responsible learners who connect constructively to each other, teachers, and the learning society. For the learning society, it aids in supporting the building of responsible and vigorous citizenry, prepared to take part in the learning process and to take part in a democratic society as autonomous citizens.

My argument is further that education in learning environments as "*a sense of place and a place that makes sense*" should avoid the "pedagogical dilemma", and it is in consonance with the views of Waghid and Davies where "teachers determine beforehand" what learners "need to know about democratic citizenship" (2016, 4). But, more importantly, I believe that the education society needs to be more all-encompassing with democracy and belongingness where learners can feel free to contribute and belong to, focusing on improving their autonomy and responsibilities. It is in this regard that I also agree with Waghid (2005) and Waghid and Davids that "student autonomy is an aim of democratic citizenship education" (2016, 3), where learners should be "encouraged to come up with ideas on how to make education more responsive to societal concerns" (Waghid and Davids 2016, 5), to have the "autonomy to come up with reasonable understandings of such a form of responsible education" (Waghid and Davids 2016, 5). My call for seeking a praxis of belonging where learning environments are "*a sense of place and a place that makes sense*" is grounded on the argument that teachers should become agents of a praxis of belonging, thus a learning community of equals. In this learning community of equals, education should actively promote equity, tolerance, openness, social honour, and accountability, where learning spaces are created for learners to express thus who they are and what qualities they can bring into their learning environments, working together to achieve the goals of learning (Waghid 2004; 2009). In these learning spaces, learners need to explore their responsibilities and rights as individuals in learning communities, depending upon one another, and finding connections to their learning environments and -communities (De Groot 2017). Lastly, my call for seeking a praxis of belonging in learning environments is that learners need to have a sense of "I" and a sense of "we". The aim of learning environments cannot be restricted to a curriculum. Learning environments need to be seen as "*places*" to encourage self-belief, a sense of belonging, and recognition. This is fundamental for learners' autonomy, empowerment, and to participate more freely in learning, where belongingness can

be seen as a vital component in the learning experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

The author has identified that a sense of belonging in a learning community is an imperative element to the flourishing learning experience from the exposition above. We need to consider that features like personal and community demographics, the learning atmosphere, and the learning community significantly influence this necessity to belong. However, traditional learning environments *can* hinder cultivating a sense of belonging and the empowerment of learners with the right and responsibility to have a voice in learning. Consequently, it is proposed in this article that learning communities can enhance *all* learners' sense of belonging(ness) by accentuating the significance of taking ownership over ones' learning and that self-directed learning environments ought to be "a place that makes sense". With the implementation of SDL in learning communities, *all* learners can be encouraged to take ownership of their learning and where *all* learners are actively involved in their learning process. Specific constituents of how belonging(ness) is a crucial factor influencing learners' willingness to take ownership of learning was discussed in this article. But still, the challenge remains on how *learners can be supported to succeed/excel in their learning if they do not feel they belong*?

From the discussion, the author believes that if learners fail in learning, it can be that they feel isolated in and from the learning process. However, research has maintained that having a sense of belonging in school is an elementary "psychological need" and that, if it is fulfilled, the consequence will be positive and constructive outcomes. In that sense, I see belonging in a learning environment as a forecaster of learners' academic results. Furthermore, allowing learners to have autonomy, rights and responsibilities in their learning and the learning community can provide learners with a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning process, as stated earlier in this article. Also, letting learners be responsible for their learning and taking ownership of their learning process can empower those who do not have a sense of belonging. It is also my view that by implementing SDL, thus having ownership over learning and being autonomous, the "pedagogy of belonging" can be recognised as a means of life, inside and outside the learning community.

So how can we generate a sense of belonging in learning environments so that learners who do not have a sense of belonging, although they might learn, can be supported to cultivate a sense of belonging? Learners might find themselves in circumstances where they feel like outsiders, and their energy that should be used for learning is then used to protect themselves.

Due to the above situation, learning environments must be constructed where learners can endeavour and learn. Therefore, in this article, the author proposed that cultivating a praxis of belonging in learning environments can encourage learners' commitment, rights, responsibilities, accomplishment, and sense of ownership.

So, from the discussions above, the author will make general and practical recommendations for teachers and pre-service teachers in teacher education institutions wanting to build and support learners' sense of belonging as well as towards how these mentioned teachers can cultivate a sense of belonging in learning communities to support learners who do not feel like they belong (fit in) or feel left out. The author is thus of the opinion that for the fostering of a sense of belonging for *all* learners in learning environments, *all* learning environments need to:

a) Be cultivated as a safe and secure environment with a sense of community in the learning setting;

b) Encourage independent learning in learning communities while mounting necessary skills, thereby developing autonomous and open-minded lifelong "owners of learning" who can recognise their own learning needs. Learners need to be confidentially and personally involved in the learning process, and they need to be ready and willing to take ownership of their learning. For learners to be confidentially engaged in their learning process, they need to have a sense of belonging.

c) Have trusting and personalised interactions amongst learners and teachers;

d) Ensure that each learner has an opportunity to fulfil a part in a team and feel acknowledged by other learners;

e) Provide and generate a supportive learning setting with academic support to learners so that they can find personal value in pursuing learning;

f) Create a learning space where learners can sense who they are, how they learn, what they want to learn, and why they want to know. Learners need to pursue their learning with passing and curiosity, where there is space for mistakes.

g) Inspire joint responsibility for learning, promoting mutual learning goals and collaboration;

h) Generate an all-encompassing learning community with increased learning opportunities for all learners;

i) Focus on learners' needs and emotions ;

j) Focus on learners' rights and responsibilities;

k) Have high standards and expectations for learners;

l)   Encourage a growth mindset and attitude;

m) Show awareness and interest in learners and that their voices matter, and lastly

n)   constructively and encourage learning setting management where teachers intentionally provide learning opportunities that are self-directed and determine their sense of belonging to the learning community.

The above mentioned general and practical recommendations can support teachers and pre-service teachers to build and support learners' sense of belonging, and thus their sense of ownership, in a learning environment. This article suggests that a sense of belonging is essential in learning environments, regardless of whether learners have a sense of belonging. Therefore, teachers should attempt to lead even these learners who do not have a sense of belonging and still perform in their academia to a degree of belonging through the mentioned recommendations. Establishing a sense of belonging in learners in the learning environment can serve as a foundation on which learners can build life experiences.

WRAPPING UP

To this end, it is proposed that for belonging(ness) as a critical factor influencing learners' willingness to take ownership of learning, learning communities need to be created that can foster a sense of belonging, where learners need to feel they have a stake in their learning, feel motivated to become involved in learning and feel empowered through the learning experiences. Furthermore, support needs to be given to *all* learners to generate confidence in the learning process, discover their sense of accountability, and establish self-discipline. Therefore, it is vital to encourage self-advocacy skills and show that belongingness, ownership, autonomy, and self-efficacy in learning are essential.

When pre-service teachers leave higher education institutions, they substitute it with the learning environments of primary and secondary schools. Consequently, teacher training programs in higher education need to consider the above-mentioned general and practical recommendations so that pre-service teachers may expand their understanding of education to embrace the development of the learner holistically by seeking a praxis of belonging in education. In addition, pre-service teacher students need to connect what they have learnt in higher education and what occurs in learning environments so that these teachers can be responsive to their learners' strengths and needs and thus construct productively and meaningful learning environments. Therefore, higher education institutions should enable pre-service teachers to develop learning environments that are physically and psychologically safe, with personalised learning communities and spaces where learners feel they belong and where

they can become "citizens" in the praxis of belonging in education as they take responsibility for their learning.

Further to this, the author concludes that essential characteristics of belonging to a learning community are of paramount significance. A sense of belonging is a crucial factor in learning environments where learners should obtain assistance to cultivate practises and mindsets that encourage persistence, resilience, and resilience and self-direction. Teachers and pre-service teachers need to play an indispensable part in influencing learners' views on their learning abilities, sense of belonging, and learning mindset.

NOTE

1. Which is essential for taking ownership of their learning to promote SDL.

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