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Stepping Over the Threshold. May 2026.

**Exploring Four Elements of
Belonging Without Othering:**
Why should we and how do we make tertiary
education a place of belonging for all?

METHODOLOGY

- Autoethnography: 'providing a 'scholarly space to the lived experiences of the underrepresented' (Datta and Chapola, 2023, p.121).
- The myth of the neutral voice (Poerwandari, 2023).
- Autoethnography as a 'genre of dissent' (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2022, p.13).
- (Note to readers post conference – the autoethnographic content is not on these slides as it was delivered live, but the hope is that an expanded paper will be published within the next year. The references refer to resources mentioned in the talk – again, not all are cited on the slides).

THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

- *I want to absolve myself of the many burdens of representation which people carry around...I'm expected to speak for the entire black race on all questions theoretical, critical etc (Hall, 1996, p.263).*
- *I find myself seeing tropes that my colleagues often don't see and having to point out what to me causes discomfort – ways of seeing the world that are unexamined and come from a place of racism or a colonised mentality' (Olusoga interviewed in Henry and Ryder, 2021, p.49).*

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM IN TERTIARY MUSIC?

Stats from 'Slow Train Coming' (EDIMS, 2022). See also 'Culture is Bad for You' (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, updated 2025).

- Generally low level for Asian British – around 2% (11% Asian British average for other disciplines).
- Black and mixed-race show marked decline across tertiary years
 - Undergrad – 4% and 5% respectively
 - Graduate level – 2% and 3%
 - Doctoral – 1% and 2%
- Absence at managerial/professor level.
- Significant awarding gap across tertiary education.
- UK domiciled music students are more likely to be white than the general student population.
- Inequalities starker for women. Music is in contrast to other disciplines – male students are in the majority.
- The intersectional effect-exponential exclusion for marginalised women.

THE AWARDING GAP

Our own Access and Participation Plan (2020-2025) identified the awarding gaps experienced by Black students to be a recurring pattern which cannot be explained by previous education, socio-economic background or other intersecting variables such as gender or postcode: a Black student's racialised identity is the most stable predictor of their attainment.

(Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2024)

ANALYTICAL LEVELS OF BELONGING

Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.199:

1. Social Locations

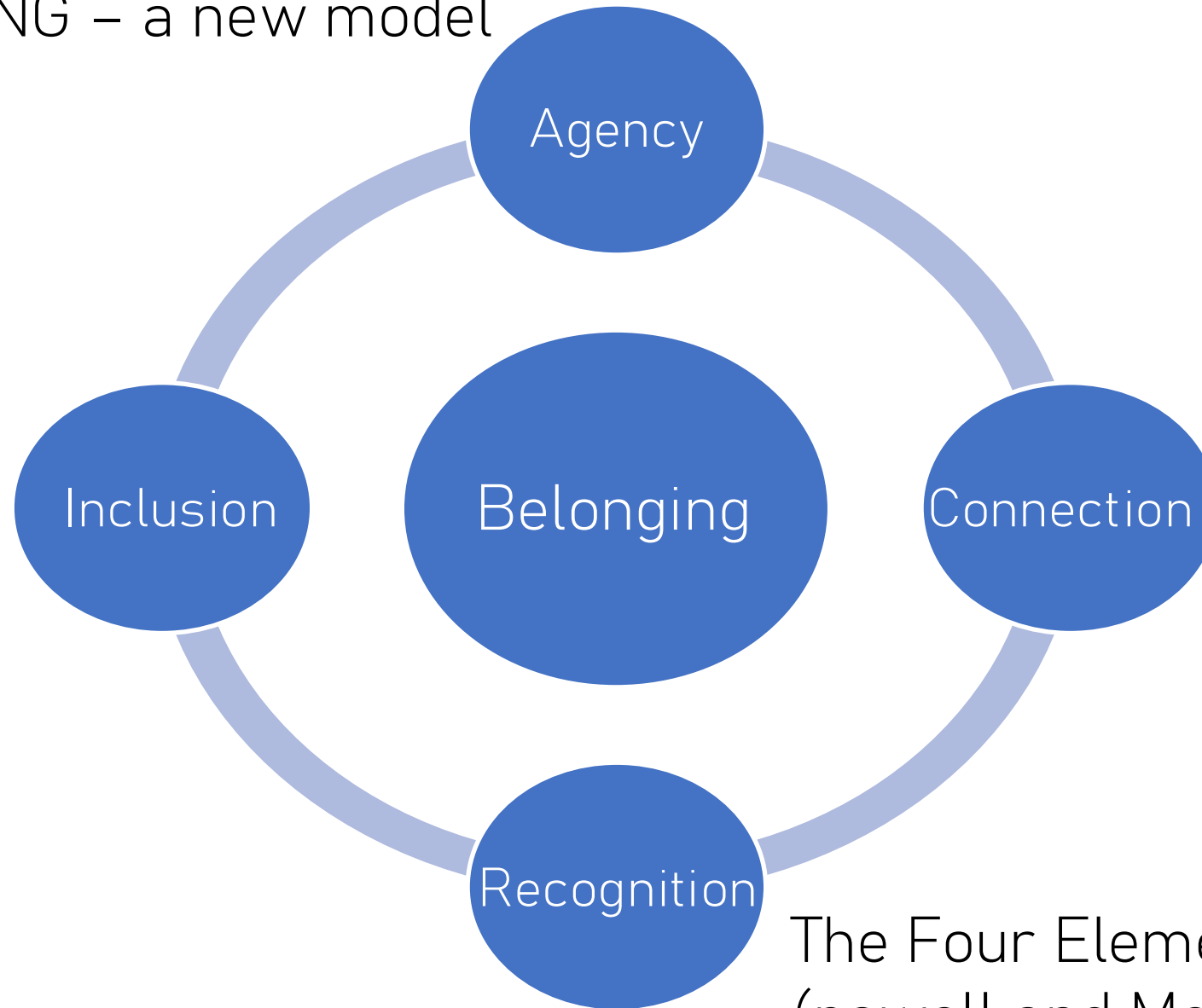
- Structural placement within society/power hierarchies.
Multidimensional identities/privilege.

2. Individual identifications and emotional attachments.

- How individual feel about and construct their identities. The narratives about who they are and how they fit.

3. Value systems – ethical and political beliefs. (Do we neglect this third aspect in pedagogy?)

BELONGING – a new model



The Four Elements of Belonging
(powell and Menendian, 2024)

INCLUSION

- Inclusion is not the whole story. We include a guest but they do not belong.
- Symbolic violence (Burke, 2018).
- Tokenism (Ahmed, 2012).
- Gatekeeping vs questioning the rule book.

CONNECTION

- Community of Practice – enough?

If an institutional setting for learning does not offer new forms of identification and negotiability – that is, meaningful forms of membership and empowering forms of ownership of meaning – then it will mostly reproduce the communities and economies of meaning outside of it. It will not open new trajectories of participation unless they are already opened somewhere else. (Wenger, 1998, p. 269)

- Building connection into the curriculum is essential to making connection equitable (students with jobs/caring responsibilities/students living far away).
- Hidden rules of university and the shame of getting it 'wrong' (Burke, 2015)
- Du Bois's Double Consciousness (1887, quoted in Bruce, 1992).
- Wellbeing implications. The risks of fitting in to the dominant culture through connection (see recognition slide for more...)

RECOGNITION

I'm going to come into the space and I'm going to bring my Blackness with me, and you are going to acknowledge it, because it's a part of who I am' [quote from Musician 1]

(Hendry, 2023, p.41).

- Connection needs recognition.
- Who does the recognising?
 - Acknowledge and mitigate hierarchies and power dynamics.
 - Examine value systems (what the lecturer/institution values vs what the student values).
- Look at curriculum and assessments to facilitate self-recognition through choice and autonomy.

AGENCY

Agency has 2 parts (Alkire, 2008 – in reference to Sen's Capability Approach):

- Autonomy
 - Ability
-
- Autonomy probes the person's own self-understanding of their situation; it reflects their own assessment and valuation of goals and abilities. Ability probes the objective powers that a person enjoys.
 - What do students value? What does the industry value? How does this affect wellbeing (see 'Can Music Make You Sick' by Gross and Musgrave, 2020).
 - If we give the student autonomy, without looking at the 'ability' side of the equation will they run towards a career that proves unsustainable?
 - The dark side of autonomy without institutional/educator reflection on values.

DISRUPTING POWER STRUCTURES

- Bridging Practices (*See the OBIU – Othering and Belonging Institute University for many free resources on this).
- Narratives before facts (but not instead of...)
- Requires: 'a curated space, a set of ground rules, and a strong moderator or facilitator' (powell and Menendian, 2024, p. 175).
- Difficult topics are not to be avoided – requires educator training and frameworks.

INTERNAL OPPRESSION

Definition: the internalisation of racism or other negative identity-based stereotypes.

Why do we need to embed deconstruction of internal oppression into the curriculum?

*There is always some emotional personal element to it. Because I think anything creative, it's coming from a personal perspective, it's coming from someone's, you know, aspirations and feelings and **sense of self**. (Student discussing creative collaboration).*

Students often do not have the language or critical tools to interrogate the messages they have internalised. Address gaps between promises and reality (Giroux, 2004).

...helping students to see and understand that musicians have had key roles in helping to shape and comment on the geopolitics of the day can give a new sense of meaning for students (Holder, 2024, p.p.16-17)

ONE FRAMEWORK

- Dialogic Pedagogy.
 - Collective, Reciprocal, Supportive, Cumulative, Purposeful (Alexander, 2017)
- Goes beyond discussion, to consider power dynamics and the learning environment.
- Pathway to critical thinking.
- Compassionate pedagogy.

We have all been, to some extent, socialized to feel comfortable listening in on or talking in a conversational manner, so defensive barriers are less likely to be put up...conflict based discussion almost always invites the mind to close, while conversation as a mode of interaction calls us to open our mind (hooks, 2010, p.45).

OVER TO YOU

At your tables discuss what has resonated in this model of belonging.

- Do you think there are gaps in your local settings in these 4 elements of belonging: inclusion, connection, recognition, agency?*
- How might you use some of these ideas to take action locally to make meaningful changes without waiting for systems to change as a whole?*

<https://padlet.com/anitamackenzie/belonging>

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS

Sharing our ideas. (Please feel free to write your responses post-conference – the ongoing conversations are so important).

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To pursue a paradigm of belongingness requires a deliberate effort and strong commitment to that end. It must serve as an aspirational ideal, which like many ideals, orients our action and guides our efforts, even if that ideal is never perfectly achieved.

(powell and Menendian, 2024, p.161)

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The End

But spoiler – it's not the end as this has to be part of our reflective practice throughout our career. The act of enhancement is never finished, it's the ongoing commitment that matters.

Always happy to chat – get in touch!

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