

MODULE THREE: CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING AND AGENCY

Learning Objectives:

- a. To understand what belonging is, why it is important and that it is a prerequisite for students to develop agency
- b. To understand that it's a teacher's responsibility to cultivate a sense of belonging for their students in their classrooms, and further in their community and greater society as well
- c. To learn practical ways teachers can incorporate belonging and agency in their own classrooms

Part One: Introducing the idea -- creating an interest for belonging

- a. Exercise - Role Play: We need two volunteers who will role-play a scene for me. It will require a little bit of improvisation, but it won't be too tough:
 - a. Scene One: Provide the story of Nabi Musa and Khizr visiting a new place. "We don't like people like you, we don't like people like you." Now, it's time for checking into the hotel. You are about to check-in, and I am the hotel person.
 - b. Scene Two: Instead you go on vacation. This time, it's different. First restaurant, you go to the restaurant. Not only do they serve you, they bring you out a special halal menu. On the way home, they say, we have Qur'an playing, just for you. And now you get to the hotel.

What's the difference between the two situations? Why was it that the people couldn't sit on their hands during the second situation?

 - a. It's because they felt a sense of belonging and ownership. It became their "job" to actually fix the problem.
- c. In this module, we will be discussing the idea of belonging. Specifically -- what is belonging, why does it matter, and how we can incorporate it into the classroom.

Part Two: What is belonging and why does it matter

- a. Question: Can somebody in layman's terms describe what belonging means?
 - i. Definition: Belonging is the feeling of being a part of something. It is related to the idea of "agency," that is, if you feel like a group belongs to you, you now "own" it, and you can make a difference through your actions.
 1. In our example prior, the individuals didn't feel "belonging", and as a result, they didn't feel compelled to get involved. However, in the second story, the individuals did feel like they belong. As a result, they felt ownership of the circumstances and therefore, made a change.
 - a. Belonging is intimately tied with ownership and agency.
- b. Question: If a child doesn't feel like they belong, why would that be a bad thing?
 - i. Yes. They will feel inferior. They may feel like they are "second class". Additionally, they may not have confidence to believe in their potential.

- c. Chalk-talk. Walk around the room. I want you to look at the quotes that we have listed. These are quotes from a 2016 study that we conducted in San Francisco. We wanted to understand how Muslim children are dealing with Islamophobia
- A. Sofia, age 6, said “Sometimes I pretend I’m not Muslim in my other school [public school]. Because I don’t want anybody to know. Because I told - once I told my other friend...she made fun of me.”
 - B. Asiyah, age 8, “Yeah, sometimes I feel like I don’t want to talk about it [being Muslim] because they just embarrass me and tell other people...I’m really shy at school [not out of school].”
 - C. Amna, age 5, said “they [kids in public school] don’t know [that I’m Muslim] and I don’t want them to know.”
1. Questions:
- a) After reading these quotes, do you think these kids feel like they belong?
 - (1) 1-in-2 kids don’t know if they can be both Muslim and also American
 - (2) Anti-Muslim discrimination is at an all-time high
 - (3) There is a serious issue associated with belonging
 - b) As Sunday school teachers, what role do we play in this?
 - (1) Faith-based schools have a unique opportunity to define what it mean to be an American Muslim
 - (i) Informed, active, and engaged in affairs
 - (ii) Standing for justice; defending our own rights and according those rights to others
 - (iii) Understanding laws and institutions that govern us
 - (iv) Contribute in discourse about the issues society faces
 - (2) We can help children at a minimum feel like they belong here, and wherever possible build a sense of belonging in their community as well.

Part Three: Strategies to cultivate belonging at Islamic School

Our goal is to facilitate constructive identity development, such that children feel like they belong in the classroom, and also in their community:

- Take pride in being part of their community/school
 - Don't feel that they are split between being American and being Muslim
- a. Cultivating Belonging in the Classroom
- i. Establish Class Norms - During the first meeting of the year (or whenever), spend time to create classroom norms. That is, what are the expectations and responsibilities of the students and teachers.
 - Example: Beginning of this workshop
 - ii. Create Opportunities for Collaboration - Promote opportunities for collaboration - can't create friendship but you can create the spark
 - Example: Qur'an practice with each other
 - iii. Inclusive Layout - thinking about creating safe, inclusive spaces; how to organize desks to promote activity and interaction among students
 - Example: In smaller classroom, organize your class as a half-circle such that each student has the ability to see all of the other students
 - iv. Provide recognition and rewards - Provide recognition and rewards (not extrinsic --- growth mindset: praising effort, not just outcomes). Reward shouldn't always be a physical object, should be a spiritual thing too. Rewards to stimulate a desired action -- good question or kindness, etc

II. Cultivating Belonging in the Community

A. Tie American Events/Culture into the Lesson:

1. Example: In a class on history, tie in black history month or women's history month into the classroom.

B. Sharing work / activities with the community

1. Example: creating a board outside the classroom, on which you can showcase student work. Or, after Jumma prayers, allowing children to give a presentation

C. Service-learning: Instead of just learning something, put it into action.

1. Example: Learning that planting a tree is sadqa jaariya, go and actually plant a tree

D. Non-Muslim Guest Speakers:

1. Example: Invite a pastor to your class if you are talking about Christianity. Or, invite your Mayor into the classroom

E. Fields trips

1. Example: go to the Old-folks home