The Questions of Belonging: Youth Experience

1. Prior to the session, write a list of example student questions of belonging on the board or on poster paper from “The Many Questions of Belonging” article located in the “Read it” additional resources located in the “Take It Deeper” tab of this module. Questions should include:

   Does anyone here even notice me?

   Are there people here whom I connect to?

   Do people here value me, or people like me?

   Is this a setting in which I want to belong?

   Can I be more than a stereotype here?

   Are people like me incompatible with this setting or behavior?

2. Provide participants with five minutes to write or draw a reflection to the following questions: In what ways do I feel like I belong here? In what ways do I not feel like I belong?

3. Then, ask participants to highlight (or label, if they drew a picture) any thoughts from their writing that might be factors that affect their sense of belonging at school.

4. Challenge the participants to turn those factors impacting their sense of belonging into questions. They should write their questions on separate pieces of scratch paper.

   Provide an example: If I wrote about feeling like my friends at school have different hobbies or interests than I have, perhaps I would turn that into a question such as, “Are there people here whom I connect to?”

   Show the participants the example questions on the board. Tell them they can use those questions if they make sense, but they should also not feel limited to those questions and can write their own.

   Encourage the participants to be honest. While you will be collecting their questions, it will be anonymous.
5. Collect the participants' questions and shuffle them.

6. Following the first part of this session, type the participants' questions to a) ensure you maintain the list of questions to consider interventions for the classroom, and b) use in the second part of this group activity while ensuring anonymity.

7. Assign participants into groups of approximately five participants. Distribute one question to each group.

8. Pose the following prompts for participants to see:

   What actions or behaviors might we be displaying in our school that could cause our peers to have this question?

   If you knew a close friend had this question in mind, what might you do to help the friend feel a greater sense of belonging?

   What actions or behaviors could we display in our class or school to help our peers who might ask this question feel a greater sense of belonging?

9. Provide adequate time for participants to discuss their assigned question, using the prompts. By the end of the group brainstorm, groups should be prepared to share 1-3 possible ideas to address the question and help their peers feel they belong.

10. Ask each group to share with the class. After each share, ask the rest of the class to share any additional possible ideas to help their peers feel they belong, based on the question posed.

11. After all groups have shared, distribute the next set of questions and repeat the process.