

Facilitated Learning Spaces for Intentional Belonging in Post-Secondary Education: Bridging the Chasm Dividing Education and Community

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Abstract

In a competitive, managerial, and reactive post-secondary educational environment, the authors believe that the sense of campus community is hindered. As complex issues continue to emerge on college and university campuses, reactionary approaches serve to diminish the transformational and humanizing purposes of learning in educational settings. The authors, Black and Dutta, both employees at a community college, reflect on their recent graduate-level education, as well as their roles at their college as they explore the tension between education and community development. The concepts surrounding the dialogical method—transformative learning, placemaking, and use of self—are explored to tune into these larger purposes of post-secondary learning. Principles of community development are used to integrate these theories into a framework that promotes facilitated learning spaces in colleges and universities towards the goal of engaging a sense of belonging for students, faculty, staff, and administration. Preliminary recommendations are proposed to implement and evaluate this framework.

Keywords: belonging, learning spaces, campus community, community development, post-secondary education

When reflecting on our experiences in post-secondary education, we note a tension between education and campus community development. We posit that post-secondary education, in an effort to promote both, is more reactive rather than responsive in its approach to community enhancement on campus. Such reactivity stems from institutions competing for the same students, the need to compete on the world stage, the desire to expand programming to a far wider population, and the ever-present concerns around funding (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Sommer, 2014). Moreover, education reform to enhance campus community consists of marketing, managerialism, and performativity, which are pre-conditions for various forms of “privatization” and “commodification” of core public services (Ball, 2003, p. 215). In turn, these limitations on who can participate in post-secondary education often permit individuals to occupy public space only as spectators and passive consumers (Kohn, 2008; Sandlin, Burdick, & Norris, 2012).

The problem with a reactive and passive approach lies in its compromise of participation, collaboration, awareness, and empowerment. These active principles promote community building and belonging to more tangibly support learning in post-secondary education, particularly for equity-seeking groups as defined by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (2015). Several authors name examples of where the challenges and opportunities lie in community development in post-secondary learning spaces. Burack (2005) finds the discrepancy for lowest-paid workers and higher-paid staff to limit participation in a more fulsome campus community. Geiger et al. (2017) examine whether comprehensive campus resources can promote a feeling of belonging in foster care students on campus. Scherrer and Morrison (2015) propose that, to more effectively support students living in poverty, campuses must use

collaborative resources to combat the poor decision-making and poor health that come with poverty. Students who struggle with mental illness worry about stigma (Beatie, Stewart & Walker, 2016) and require a campus environment that promotes awareness and respect for students to feel like they belong (Linden & Stuart, 2020). Regarding issues around race, educators are recommended to move toward addressing the deep emotional complexities that surround race for both racialized and white students (Zembylas, 2012). Post-secondary institutions are compelled to explore decolonization as a way to incorporate Indigenous science and methods of teaching, as well as research, and community building (Mitchell, Thomas, & Smith, 2018). Moreover, community collaboration within post-secondary institutions is pivotal in achieving greater gender equity on and off campus to overcome obstacles in representation and opportunity (Edge, Kachulis, & McKean, 2018). While campuses have provided numerous services such as student engagement, LGBTTQI+ groups, Indigenous student services, and collaborative learning spaces, the overall reactive approach to creating these services have perhaps compromised a more comprehensive way of community building and belonging.

Purpose – The Reminder and Return to Transformative Education

This paper introduces a conceptual framework of post-secondary education that reflects the values in what we outline as *intentional belonging*. It synthesizes themes of Indigenous education, experiential learning, belonging, and community development. The rationale for this paper and the proposed framework is to give voice to the gaps described above and to remind educators of our interest in employing education as a vehicle toward transformative social change. An analysis and integration of three theories (dialogical method, transformative learning, and placemaking) and the incorporation of one's self in this process will be provided. The framework is proposed as a heuristic device to ground post-secondary administration and employees in the work of both challenging the tensions in education and implementing an educational approach that reflects inclusivity and belonging.

Conceptual Framework – Intentional Belonging in Facilitated Learning Spaces

Education is the primary and most comprehensive format through which transformative social change takes place (Freire, 2000; Sinclair, 2015; TRC, 2015). The following framework (see Figure 1) meaningfully combines the dialogical method, transformative learning, placemaking, and use of self (four cogs) with four principles of community development (participation, awareness, collaboration, and empowerment) to humanize post-secondary education. We propose the notion of *facilitating learning spaces* to demonstrate how these elements interact to minimize the negative aspects of post-secondary education (consumerist and competitive) and reactivate the more meaningful principles of education founded in community development. Centering learning spaces around those interacting within the space enhances a sense of what we term *intentional belonging* as part of a campus community, which in turn fosters an environment conducive for transformation to occur.

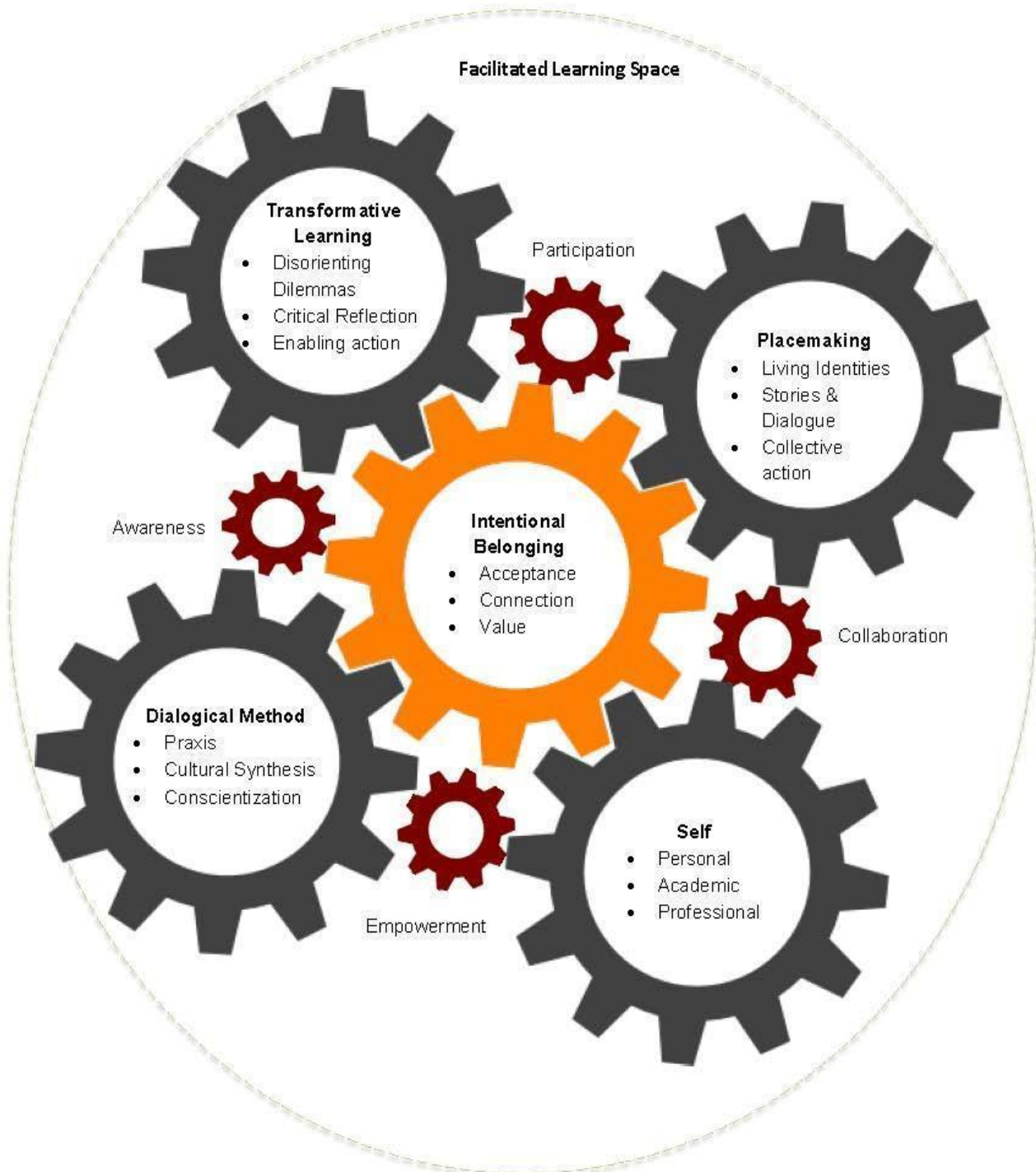
As outcomes, the proposed conceptual framework below (see Figure 1):

- illustrates a systems approach to post-secondary education and community development within a facilitated learning space (as all the cogs interconnect);
- mediates gaps and tensions between social change theories related to education and community development (spaces between larger cogs);
- reconciles these gaps using four common principles of education and community development: participation, collaboration, empowerment, awareness (smaller red cogs);
- enacts these principles through the relationships between three pillar social change theories (dialogical method, transformative learning, and placemaking) and a depiction of the self (one's nature, experience, and self-understanding) (large gray cogs);

- sets outlying gray cog into motion, promoting simultaneous motion amongst the other cogs including the central cog of intentional belonging, while mediated by the smaller red cogs; and,
- supports the balance of intentional belonging through one's choice to belong and community-based responsibility within the facilitated learning space.

Figure 1

Fostering Intentional Belonging in a Facilitated Learning Space



Defining the Framework's Overarching Concepts

We use the following key concepts to ground the foundations of the proposed framework. While we name and define these concepts distinctly, we see them as intertwined and layered in the larger implementation of the framework.

Campus Community

Post-secondary education is, in and of itself, a community that holds an integral role in transformational education. Peter Block (2018) states, “Community offers the promise of belonging and calls for us to acknowledge our interdependence” and draws on social capital, social fabric, association, and communal power to illustrate the transformational potential of a community to overcome problems (p. 4). There are a range of applications to post-secondary education. Heasley, Boone & Davidson (2020) use a “sense of community” model to identify membership, influence, reinforcement of needs, and shared emotional connection as important elements that link students living in residence to overall campus community enhancement. The connections between the professional field and the classroom are also ways in which mutual awareness and collaboration can be enhanced (Baechler, 2017) to foster community. The elements of sensemaking, namely campus identity, geographical place, institutional resources, and institutional image, can be harnessed to promote community building on campuses (Weerts, 2019). These examples of community highlight post-secondary education as a forum for transformational social change.

Facilitated Learning Spaces

A campus community is its own system and, in this framework, the cogs interact in what we call *facilitated learning spaces*—the space that sustains the learning community and promotes transformational change. We suggest a learning space is virtually any environment where community members share knowledge, engage in dialogue, hear one another’s ideas, and nurture the functions of teaching and learning. Adding the term *facilitated* to learning spaces embodies a deliberate process with respectful and respectable leadership, defined purposes, and learner-grounded needs to further enhance the functions of teaching and learning (Moyer & Sinclair, 2020). Facilitation engages these functions, as well as the whole environment. As such, facilitated learning spaces are fluid, yet managed and constructed.

Intentional Belonging of Learners

Post-secondary institutions aim for all learners to feel a part of the campus community and learning spaces. Adult learning principles—including making learning relevant, ensuring interactions amongst learners and their environments, and linking to the student’s knowledge and experience—are important to community building and student empowerment (Palis & Quiros, 2014). As such, intentional belonging for adult learners is more purposefully and meaningfully fostered because of its deliberateness, premeditation, and planning. Belonging means that one has a sense of their purpose in a space, that they can make meaning for themselves within that space, and that they can have relationships in that space. Therefore, in this framework, intentional belonging is incumbent upon the institution to 1) foster a learning space where students feel like they are accepted as individuals as part of a larger community, 2) promote and create opportunities for connections between the learners and the various components of the institution, and 3) engage learners in ways that help them feel valued individually and as members of the community. In concert with adult learning principles, intentional belonging also reflects the choice of the individual to belong to the extent that they wish (Banas & Wartalski, 2019). Even as the institution is responsible for fostering and intentionally creating a sense of belonging, it also respects the choice and consent of people to participate in the institution to their comfort and need (Shepherd, 2020). Therefore, interdependence and reciprocity are rooted in intentional belonging within this framework.

Community Development Principles

In this interdependent framework, fluid learning space is mitigated by principles of community development to manage any overreaching or overemphasis of the theories. In short, community development ensures that all the cogs (components) operate in synchronicity with one another. To generate communities for intentional belonging, we explain the following four terms as action-based principles.

Empowerment

Understanding empowerment is challenging, partly due to the need to operationalize empowerment within the context of those persons being empowered (Keough, 2008; McWhirter, 1991; Rappaport, 1981, 1987; Zimmerman, 1990a, 1990b). As such, personal empowerment emphasizes obtaining skills, experiencing self-efficacy, exerting influence, and strengthening capacities to contribute to greater control over one's life and impact on the environment (Zimmerman, 1990b). Empowerment also translates to organizations and communities by providing opportunities and outlets for members to participate, influence, protect interests, and use collective action to improve their communities (Zimmerman, 1990a, 1990b).

Awareness

Gaining a critical awareness or consciousness is the process by which an individual is better able to assess and understand their environment (Miller & Keys, 1996). This requires one to make note of their position in society and examine where they fit and where they do not fit. Critical awareness encompasses the ability to identify those with power and resources, as well as understand the impact that such allocations have on society and oneself (Miller & Keys, 1996). Such awareness then leads to an understanding of what one might do about their situation.

Participation

Participating is an important means of gaining self-help, skills, knowledge, and practice that aid the growth of individual empowerment and foster collective action (Kieffer, 1984; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Involvement can "help decrease the sense of powerlessness, alienation, and withdrawal from community living" (Zimmerman, 1990a, p. 9). Engagement provides opportunities to take risks, relate one's own experience, receive feedback, and obtain mutual support (Miller & Keys, 1996). Participation may be active or passive, but there is a level of engagement beyond the self. This engagement is reflected in campus citizenship initiatives at colleges and universities across the West with departments that now focus on citizenship, campus life, and student engagement (Oikonomidou, 2018).

Collaboration

Tyler et al. (1983) suggest collaboration to be a bi-directional model of helping in which both parties recognize each other's resources and limitations and acknowledge reciprocal gains resulting from working together. Developing relationships and reciprocity through collaboration allows groups to accomplish what no one individual could achieve on their own (Miller & Keys, 1996), whether toward individual or collective goals. Collaborative practice necessitates collective action as stated above. In education, this manifests in the co-ownership of learning (Owusu-Agyeman & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019).

Sensitizing Theories for Transformative Practice

Together, while these components of community development can be practiced in post-secondary settings, we assert that there is something in the intentional embodiment of these principles that transcends their apparent definitions. The insertion of *belonging* into the learning space means that community development principles in post-secondary settings need a more thoughtful approach as shown above. Since the framework is centered on transformative learning principles, community development must, therefore, also be transformative. Various institutional departments must transcend their often

singular and siloed foci, and move more meaningfully towards awareness and collaboration. Keeping in mind that the student is more than a passive recipient of education can help institutions make efforts for an engaged citizenship that promotes inclusiveness and belonging. The following theories are explicated to make links between their underpinnings to suggest how post-secondary learning spaces can be facilitated for these purposes.

Cog 1: The Dialogical Method

Freire (2000) proposed an educational model rooted in the dialogical method, emphasizing processes such as praxis, cultural synthesis, and conscientization. As per the cog in the framework above, this model of facilitation moves the organization toward transformative social change, with the goal of freeing learners from oppression. This process empowers learners, groups, and communities toward social change (Lee, 2001); in so doing, learners engage in and take ownership of their learning by becoming critically aware of their place in society, and their potential for further participation. Dialogic learning engages learners to explore their own self-reflections by developing empathy-based respect for others (Wells, 1999). The assertion that there is no “one” method and format for learning (Arnett, Bell, & Harden Fritz, 2010) engages dialogic learning by exploring, and then exposing, one’s own biases (Freire, 2000). Thus, power emerges as an analytic focal point since power shapes knowledge. Dialogic learning challenges this power by naming bias, thereby engaging the learner in deepening self-knowledge. For this awareness to occur, the learning space needs to facilitate safety for growth for both the institution and the learners who comprise it.

Dialogic learning requires “praxis” (Freire, 2000) where a teacher or facilitator supports a person’s increased awareness of how they identify, deconstruct, and reflect on problems in their lives. However, praxis uses reflection to more deeply explore one’s positionality, i.e., knowing one’s place in the world, to then emerge from it (Freire, 2000, p. 51). This process engages the individual to observe a nuanced understanding of their position in society, and then take a stance against it (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Such an approach also challenges the idea of singular learning styles (Hutchings, Scammell, & Quinney, 2013) to a position where inclusivity and wholeness are valued over compartmentalizing the student’s identities. Praxis then engages the teacher to premise their work on co-intentional education to guide the student to expose the reality of their life, thereby furthering one’s knowledge of their problems and possible social action (Freire, 2000), to release oneself from these oppressions. This praxis enhances reflection, which lies at the heart of empowerment. Post-secondary institutions can engage praxis by promoting student engagement in community initiatives, on and off campus, that raise social conscience, citizenship, and peer responsibility. Educators can also engage praxis by inviting students to participate in power-sharing in the co-creation of services and campus-based opportunities (Coffey & Elsayy, 2017). Such an approach then embodies inclusiveness and belonging for students.

The final term in the dialogic method is Freire’s (2000) conscientization, “a mobilization of consciousness aiming to produce historic knowledge about oneself and about the groups to which one belongs, thereby producing a different understanding, and giving sense to one’s temporal and spatial place in society, and in one’s specific life-world” (Montero, 2009, p. 73). Through conscientization, the learner interrogates the realities of their own social world and their positions in this world to assess how such factors impact and shape their lives (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Heron, 2005). This knowledge-development approach is cumulative, building through socialization. Thus, the importance of reflective dialogue is a key process in conscientization (Sleeter, Torres, & McLaughlin, 2004) drawing upon a scaffolded learning approach (Vygotsky, 1978) where students’ learning increases as they complete general tasks and engage in interactions with one another. Applied to the framework, colleges and universities can facilitate learning spaces that bridge the gap between the classroom and the campus. Activities in this regard include cross-program projects, shared classroom lectures, and team-teaching.

In sum, Cog 1 is rooted in Freire’s (2000) process of “problematization” whereby learners question and are skeptical about beliefs and assumptions they previously took for granted (Montero, 2009). In other words, “the way things are” is no longer a valid statement. Problematization helps to name oppressions as the learner and other oppressed groups understand how to make sense of or interpret the

world. This helps the learner deepen their understanding of themselves (Martín-Baró, 1994). Learners not only recognize their place in society but, utilizing the same processes, then explore education as a route toward liberation from oppression. Therefore, the experience helps learners experience the shared aspects of community building and participatory citizenship. However, for this liberation, community building, and citizenship to take place, the post-secondary environment must open up its spaces to share power and, at times, be led by students. By engaging in education, learners acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote citizenship and professional engagement, thereby reducing their own oppression.

Cog 2: Transformative Learning

The critical awareness ignited by the dialogic method is also embodied and sustained in transformative learning. Transformative learning starts with the notion of “disorienting dilemmas” whereby learners are compelled to reconsider and critically reflect on the world and their place in it. In this process, Mezirow (1991) uses critical reflection to encourage people to be reflective and emotionally available for transformative change. This requires genuine relationships (Cranton, 2006), the reconstruction of personal meaning (Dirkx, 2006), and enabling action to embody new worldviews. Transformative learning results from challenge and struggle whereby one’s consciousness and knowledge increase drastically (Mezirow, 1991). However, this transformation is a movement upward, a release from unconsciousness and ignorance to a level of self-awareness that vastly increases one’s knowledge of one’s place in the world (Cranton, 2006). Such knowledge takes place in the context of increasing diversity, shifts in the political landscape, and fuller recognition of events in the world that are now closer to home than ever before (Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004). The implication for transformative learning here is that constant change in our socio-political environment necessitates the need for lifelong learning (Dirkx, 2006). In a post-secondary setting, transformative learning takes place in the exploration of ideas through vehicles of debate, discussion, and an application to the learner as an informed citizen who can employ critical thinking (Hayden & McIntosh, 2018). For the institution, the learning place is where the primary disorienting dilemma for the student to explore and resolve revolves around their immersion into higher learning, ethical scholarship, and engaged professional practice (Schon, 1987). The institution can, therefore, provide a place of transformative learning where the student incorporates many perspectives into their repertoire of growth and development. This requires expanding traditional approaches to teaching (e.g., lectures, presentations, and group work) to more creative venues for growth. Examples include community engagement (Ricke, 2018), autoethnography (Cabrera, Gilmour & Lovell, 2019), photovoice (Lichy, 2013) and blogging (Alexander & Bach, 2014).

When exposed to transformative learning, a person endures major adaptations in one’s personality, ego, understanding of self, and even an organization of the self (Mezirow, 1991). Whereas reflection on a change is limited to thinking about an issue, transformative learning is a fundamental shift in one’s identity (Brookfield, 1984). The changes are integrated as a part of one’s personhood, reflected *within* rather than reflected *upon*. There is a sense of profoundness and extensive depth for someone who experiences transformative learning (Polkinghorne, 1988). Furthermore, transformative learning changes one’s assumptions about the world around them, to a point where underlying cognitive structures of understanding and meaning-making alter and shift (Cranton, 2006). A poignant aspect of transformative learning is that, beyond personal shifts and movements, it also invokes one to transform their actions and behaviors (Mezirow, 1991). Through intentional belonging, as proposed by the framework, the institution is thus charged with the duty to go beyond classroom learning into engaging the student into a holistic campus community. The campus community then provides a safer environment to challenge one’s assumptions and behaviors to facilitate a more socially informed and personally responsible way of being in the world.

Disorienting dilemmas and a reorganization of the self-engage the learner in critical pedagogy and critical reflexivity. Critical pedagogy is a method of educational practice based on examining dominant and oppressive organizational structures in society. Its task is to expose and undermine forms of subordination by challenging the power-based dynamics that marginalize people. Its goal is to work toward emancipation: the freeing of people who are oppressed, otherwise silenced and

made invisible (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Specific to power dynamics in education, critical pedagogy aims to challenge and topple institutionalized inequalities and inequities. Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to create spaces and places where 1) the institution can model how it navigates such power sharing, and 2) the student can practice the skills necessary to upset such power inequities. In other words, the institution has a responsibility to practice and model critical reflexivity for its students, so that they may engage in this vulnerable, yet highly reflexive process.

Critical reflexivity goes beyond reflection; when combined with critical pedagogy, the aim is toward three areas. First, the educator or practitioner examines the state and status of knowledge in the field. Second, the educator explores their own self in the context of education by exploring how their position is conceived and given power. The third area is for the educator to understand their power in practice. This combination implores the educator to understand their own anxieties, inner tensions, and difficult feelings as they examine the power in their role (Glisczinski, 2007). If educators are to engage in critical reflexivity, they must explore issues concerned with how knowledge is constructed, the implications of subjectivity, and how power relations play out (Trevelyan, Crath, & Chambon, 2014). Applied to our proposed framework, higher learning must facilitate these learning places for students and all employees, where the exercise of reflexivity can be practiced without the threat of reprisal from higher levels. Concurrently, such exercises must be conducted in ways that enhance the integrity of the institution as it practices facilitating such places.

Cog 3: Placemaking

Facilitating learning spaces requires an acknowledgment and understanding of participation with a location, i.e., placemaking. When considering land pedagogy (Styres, 2017; Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009; Donald, 2009), there is a connection to the concept of place, something grounded and unifying. “Place” conceptualizes how people ascribe meaning to their physical and social surroundings, as well as their emotional effects. Placemaking encompasses interconnections about stories and experiences between learners, teachers, and their communities. It is an emerging movement where teachers and learners (and administrators) participate in creating and transforming learning spaces to “strengthen the connection between people and the places they share” (Project for Public Spaces, 2017). This entails recognizing that the term *space* in itself suggests an area that is available or unoccupied, rather than *place* which is grounded in purpose for those connected to it. In this process-oriented model, there is great emphasis on the act of observing beyond the object of observation. This reflects an Indigenous worldview of the processes and interactions between all spiritual entities including animals, the earth, the heavens, people, trees, rocks, and rivers (Donald, 2009). In a similar vein of interconnectedness, when alumni of colleges and universities return for homecoming events, career forums for students, and even to mentor students, the institution can build on these relational areas by supporting students to appreciate and acknowledge how they were shaped and supported to be transformative citizens in that place.

Critical placemaking functions by accessing and transforming public places into spaces of dialogue, inclusion, and democratic participation. These storytelling and dialogical functions create the platform for conscientization and empowerment. Critical placemaking negotiates and communicates *who* belongs in a place through symbolic features of the physical environment. It also reveals the active, creative role of learners as agents of change rather than as passive consumers of place (Toolis, 2017), allowing for the representation and remembrance of histories previously rendered invisible by master/dominant narratives. These memories represent familiarity, recognition, and expectations that, developed over time, may lead to strong attachments to place (Knez, 2005). The sharing of these stories validates Freire’s (2000) dialogical method, which can counteract a culture of silence and invisibility. Our proposed framework represents a solid shift that can facilitate community building and belonging through collaboration, dialogue, discussion, engaging the campus community, and promoting campus citizenship.

Another function of placemaking is embracing living identities: an embodied experience where our norms, identities, and behaviors shape and are shaped through these places of collective meaning-making (Toolis, 2017). Placemaking is a bottom-up, person-centered approach that emphasizes collaboration and participation to enhance the student experience (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). While

post-secondary education certainly has venues for some level of person-centered, bottom-up actions, placemaking is all-encompassing and transcends inclusivity and respect to more fulfilling ideas about unconditional belonging. This necessitates the campus to be far more intentional as it not just aims towards inclusivity, but looks to where it has marginalized members of its community. Placemaking may be a way to develop, beautify, and regenerate spaces perceived to be neglected (Bedoya, 2013) but placemaking also risks contesting and erasing histories and identities connected to that place and those who are framed as “out of place” (Loewen, 1999; Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2005; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Tileagă, 2007). Therefore, placemaking has the potential to challenge the status quo by promoting social inclusion and a sense of belonging (Thomas, Pate, & Ranson, 2015), rendering the stories and histories of marginalized groups visible (Baca, 2005; Hayden, 1994), and providing a unifying framework for mobilizing collective action (Martin, 2003). As all members of a campus community experience engagement and belonging, there is an overall higher sense of self-esteem and pride, stronger neighbourhood ties, collective efficacy, and civic engagement (Brown et al., 2003; Lewicka, 2011). This process connects placemaking to transformation by praxis: “By facilitating dialogic encounters, recovering plural and contested histories, revealing the socially constructed nature of spatial relations, and articulating the important social issues of one's local context, critical placemaking can serve as a pathway for critical awareness and critical action” (Toolis, 2017, p. 189). Through the community development principles of awareness, participation, collaboration, and empowerment, campuses can indeed move beyond efforts towards inclusivity to places of transformation for both students and staff. For example, Ryerson University engaged in a process to reconsider the symbols and names of people on its buildings, originally who contributed to Indigenous genocide (McQuigge, 2017).

Cog 4: Use of Self

Thus far, placemaking, transformative learning, and the dialogical method are found to be key components of facilitating learning spaces. The fourth cog that activates the framework is via the various “selves” (i.e., student, faculty, staff, and administrators) that embody the post-secondary environment. As such, the use of self in this synthesis is necessary to reflexively articulate and position oneself in terms of social location, resulting in implications for power and privilege, as well as limitations. Intentionally making space for the self allows learners to be cognizant of the perspectives and interests they bring to learning (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Inserting all aspects of self (personal, academic, and professional) into the learning space humanizes education. For this section, we intentionally and consciously use first-person language to offer a brief example of the use of self in its three aspects as per this framework.

When I examine my *personhood*, I (Black), identify as a cis-gender, heterosexual woman in my early thirties. I come from relative stability and I recognize the privilege I have by being white. I actively partake in self-care to manage stress and well-being to counteract mental health concerns. I am socially well-connected throughout my family and community in various ways. *Academically*, I excelled in secondary and undergraduate studies, resulting in numerous awards. I immersed myself in the process of education through activities that contributed to the development of my entire self. Soon after my B.A., I saw my college as a forum for community building (e.g., dignity, self-determination, respect, advocacy). Ideas around equity and inclusion were prominent in my mind and, ultimately, the transformative experiences I encountered were what I wanted for all students. After a few years of working in my college, I sought the M.Ed. for additional theory and context through which I could focus my interests and ideals. As a *professional*, I am highly motivated by collaboration, connection, and community. I support campaigns promoting inclusion and respect, which requires connections with people and attentiveness to a process that nurtures relationships and enhances outcomes. I have a full-time, permanent position at my college, which includes a middle-class income and a comprehensive benefits package. The unique positions I have held necessitate productive working relationships with fellow employees. I was approached for many of these opportunities specifically because of my collaborative leadership skills and my philosophies around social change. In addition to supporting students, for me, these connections are value-based, intentionally directed activities that require risk, vulnerability, trust, and compassion.

As for my *personhood*, I (Dutta) am a cis-gendered, heterosexual male in my early fifties. I am a racialized person. I am aware of the power I have given my positionality, and the comfort I have in many ways due to my social and economic standing. In terms of *academics*, I was an average student through my secondary, undergraduate, and graduate education. School for me has been a challenge as, while I enjoyed learning, I find reading and persistence difficult and encountered cultural expectations that did not always align with my experience. After my B.A. and B.S.W., I immediately entered an M.S.W. program, and then practiced social work for many years. I began teaching at the college and university levels and, 15 years after the M.S.W., I entered a Ph.D. program. What my teachers and professors gave to me, are what I wanted to give to clients and students: care, guidance, acceptance, and community. *Professionally*, I experienced a career that is fulfilling and traverses a wide range in the social work field. At the micro-level, I aim to help people feel validated, cared for, respected, and acknowledge that their oppressions are real. As someone who works behind the scenes, I tend towards building services, programs, and approaches that empower, include, and nurture. I contribute to others' bigger pictures, by concretizing their visions into workable entities.

The above mini-autobiographies are intended only to exemplify how we bring our "selves" into this framework. The implications of who we are position us with our tasks and roles at our college. For example, I (Black) have a significant influence in shaping policy, while I (Dutta) significantly influence classrooms. Together (and with additional peers), we envision community at our college and in our roles. We support each other (Black at the macro level and Dutta at the micro-level), as we implement our vision as much as possible. We consciously maintain a position of respectful curiosity and always interrogate our own assumptions (and that of each other) in the face of students and employees who are vulnerable, marginalized, or disempowered. We engage in this dialogic praxis together and remind one another about the fact that, in the work we do, there are significant aspects of our identity, voice, and being. In retrospect, when we fully participated in our various roles academically as learners (and educators), we were empowered to engage, learn, and transform in these spaces. As a result, we sought out collaborations to further connect with the learning community. In turn, intentional collaboration led to further awareness and empowerment within the learning space, leading to a more realized sense of belonging in the campus community.

Applied to the framework, we assert that the use of self pervades the work that we all do at our respective colleges and universities. As a way of recognizing the importance of facilitating place, we believe that all staff have a role to play in noticing and being aware of people who "don't fit" and "don't belong." Just as important, staff must also notice, contribute, and amplify the privilege and gifts of each other to dismantle systems that harm, as well as hold space for those who experience that harm, directly or indirectly. The use of self, therefore, allows us to intentionally practice inclusion, belonging, and transformational learning.

Conclusion

As a systems approach, the proposed framework's effectiveness and functionality are dependent upon buy-in from a larger educational system, the relative speed of motion and change of the community development principles, and any institutional barriers that may impede the motion. However, the facilitated learning space allows openness for other components to be applied to better support the system and counteract barriers, such as consumerism culture. Implementing this framework requires intentionality, balance and context, which in turn, requires awareness about the tensions that naturally occur with the above framework.

To begin, we suggest that each department in post-secondary settings initiate conversations that traverse their individual roles into interdependent functions. The basis for such conversations requires collaboration and creativity. Further, we suggest that institutions invite and incentivize student participation in the planning of such cross-collaboration. In addition to engaging students, this increases organizational transparency and decreases the impact of institutional hierarchy. Students can share the specific ways departments can contribute to their citizenship, learning, and belonging experience.

Students and staff can act as co-ambassadors to the larger campus community as they intentionally facilitate these spaces.

A second recommendation we suggest is ongoing and frequent evaluations of these processes. Similar to *temperature taking*, institutions can engage students to evaluate how they experience belonging and community. Measures such as the University Connectedness Scale (Stallman & Hurst, 2016), the School Belongingness Scale (Arslan & Duru, 2017), Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks (O'Mara & Richter, 2017), and the Belonging to University Scale (Karaman & Cirak, 2017) can be drawn upon to solicit student feedback. Concurrent with administering such scales, we suggest focus groups and community town hall forums to hear in-the-moment reflections of student experiences, which can help strategize practices that dismantle and transform campus systems that perpetuate harm and exclusion. Again, not only does this engage students, but it also models the activating of these transformative places and processes, whereby the institution shifts its engagement of students from passive recipients and providers of feedback to participation and practice in co-creating spaces that transform learning.

A third recommendation we suggest is intended as cautionary. Proposed shared spaces must also embrace the natural tensions caused by competing human rights, misinterpretations of academic standards, language and cultural differences, and power dynamics and injustices. As institutions transition into facilitating learning places, they must go beyond acquiring or speaking to a knowledge of inclusivity and equity into demonstrating true environments of citizenship, belonging, and participation. This entails processes for building trust, communication, and understanding, equity-informed departments, and objective ombudsperson offices.

The framework we propose is reflexive and does indeed humanize education via the use of self. It is a reminder that humanizing education necessitates humanizing ourselves and the institution. Such a balance also must consider diverse and intersectional identities. Otherwise, there is a risk of alienating the self linked to the displacement of individual qualities and introjection in response to external contingencies, resulting in inauthentic practice and relationships (Ball, 2003, p. 223). For instance, the newcomer student faces language barriers and acculturation challenges while they are attempting to engage with their education. The student who identifies as LGBTTTQI+ struggles with marginalization while seeking gender-safe and neutral washrooms. The student struggling with mental illness faces stigma and challenges to their confidence and competence. Therefore, the institution needs to ready itself around the community principles (awareness, participation, empowerment, and collaboration) to intentionally account for, and include, diverse identities and experiences as part of belonging.

We acknowledge the primary limitation of this paper as theoretical. As we contemplate this synthesis, we see ourselves transcending defined roles such as “administrator” and “teacher” by more actively tapping into our common identities as a professional, academic, and person. In other words, the synthesis is less about the roles and more about the functions and activities within, and outside, these roles. Subsequently, the implications for personal growth and professional development are directed at functions such as leadership, coaching, and mentorship. A second limitation, in line with the theoretical approach to the paper, is the lack of a more thorough review of the literature around evidence of these concepts in post-secondary education. Future research that implements and evaluates the proposed framework would be better positioned to gather existing literature that examines how colleges and universities operationalize, implement, and evaluate these concepts.

As we balance and integrate social change and education, we look to employ *facilitated learning spaces* to maximize belonging for marginalized and Indigenous peoples, fellow employees, and learners. To broaden this framework's application, we endeavor to encourage and support others as they practice reflexivity and insert themselves into the framework. This framework is meant to facilitate dialogue with colleagues at professional development workshops, conferences, and collaborative working groups. Since the general principles of humanization ground this framework, we foresee further opportunities for applications in elementary, secondary, private, familial, and public education facilitated learning spaces. For accountability and growth, these opportunities will require measuring and evaluating principles qualitatively and quantitatively with assessment tools developed by social change leaders. Intentional belonging is, therefore, an ideal as well as an action.

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