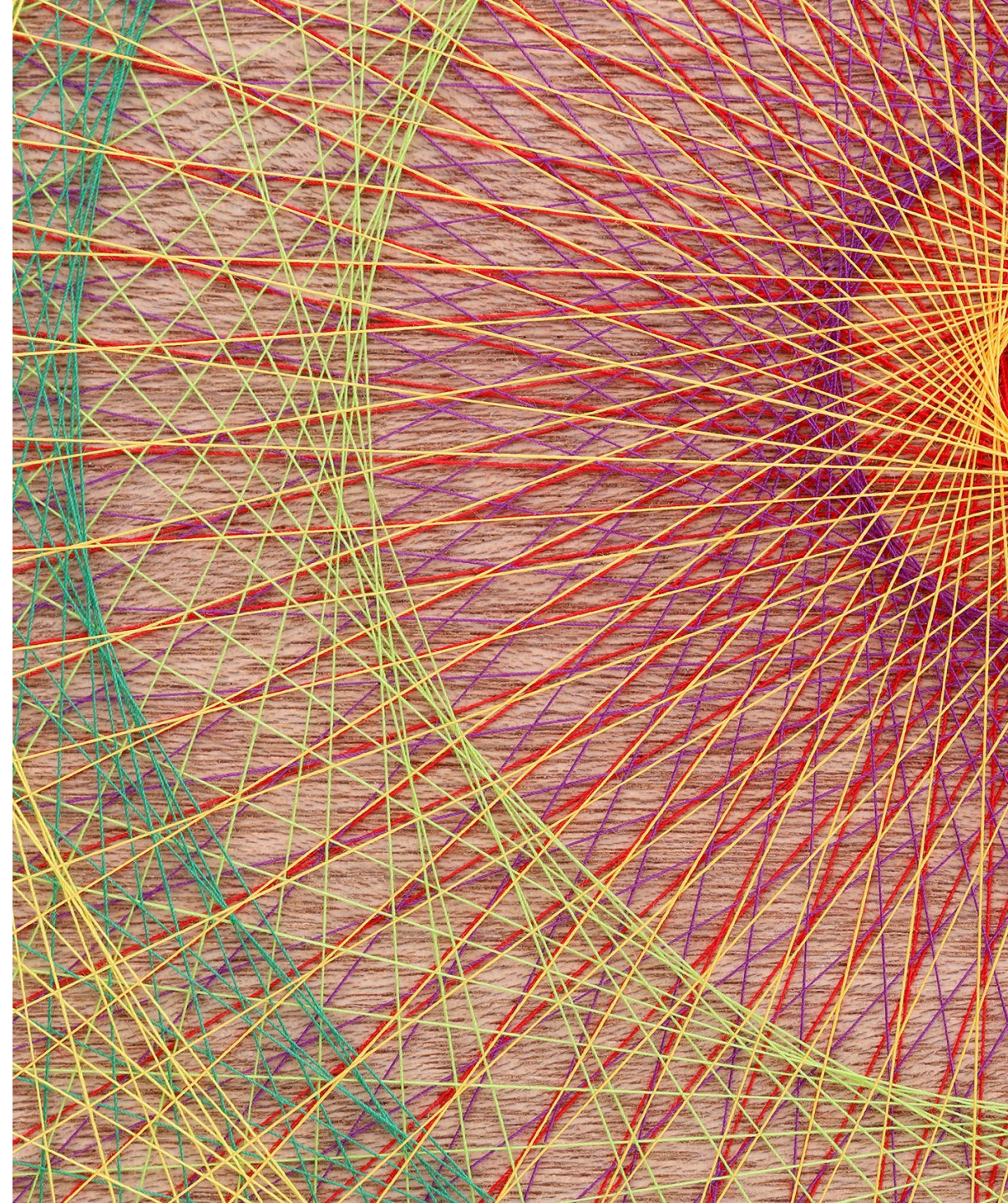

THE ABCS OF MOTIVATING LEARNERS: BELONGING

Megan Calvert

Instructional Designer

Center for Teaching and Learning





Summit - Attendance



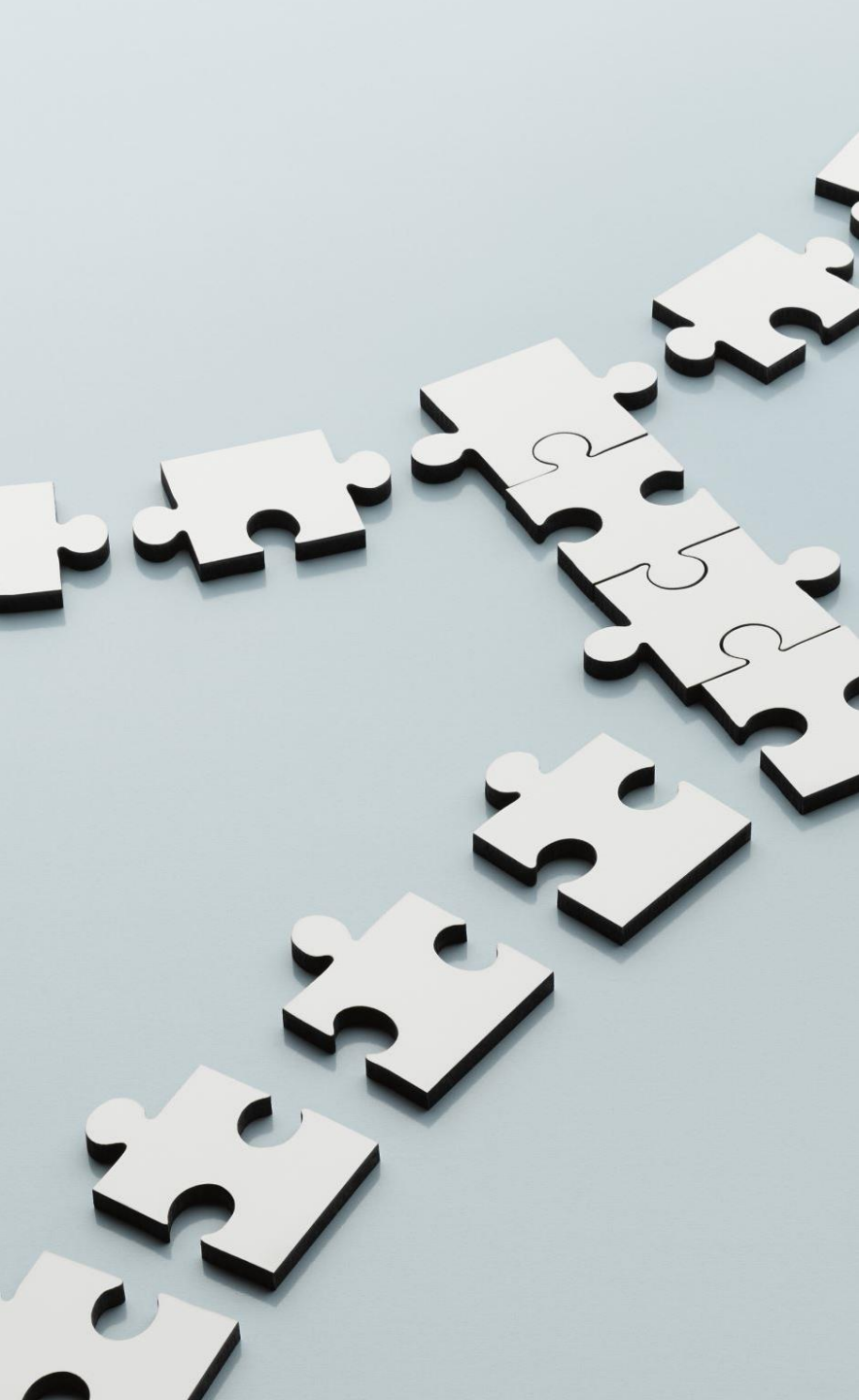
INTRODUCTIONS AND ATTENDANCE

Take 30 seconds to type in the chat:

- Where you work and what you do
- What got you interested in this topic

Please also register using the link in the chat or QR Code

<https://forms.office.com/r/m0SUgbaiq1>



THE PUZZLE OF MOTIVATION

- In the early 1970s, Edward Deci studied a group of people who enjoyed doing puzzles or tasks and asked what would happen when they were offered payments or rewards.
 - He found they spent *less* time on tasks they enjoyed when payments were given.
 - So, what really does motivate people? (See more in [Dan Pink's TED Talk!](#))
-

THE ABCS OF MOTIVATION AND THE SELF- DETERMINATION THEORY

([RYAN & DECI, 2000](#); [MARTELA & RYAN, 2016](#);
[MCNEECE, 2020](#); [PINK, 2009](#))

Autonomy

Belonging
(Relatedness)

Competence

+Meaning

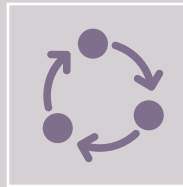
LEARNING OUTCOMES



Describe how a sense of belonging impacts student motivation and persistence



Identify at least 3 teaching strategies to foster connection and inclusion in the classroom



Outline a plan to implement one strategy in your teaching

WHAT IS RELATEDNESS?

"...[R]elatedness concerns a sense of **belonging and connection**. It is facilitated by conveyance of **respect and caring**."

--[Ryan & Deci \(2020\)](#)



WHAT IS BELONGING?

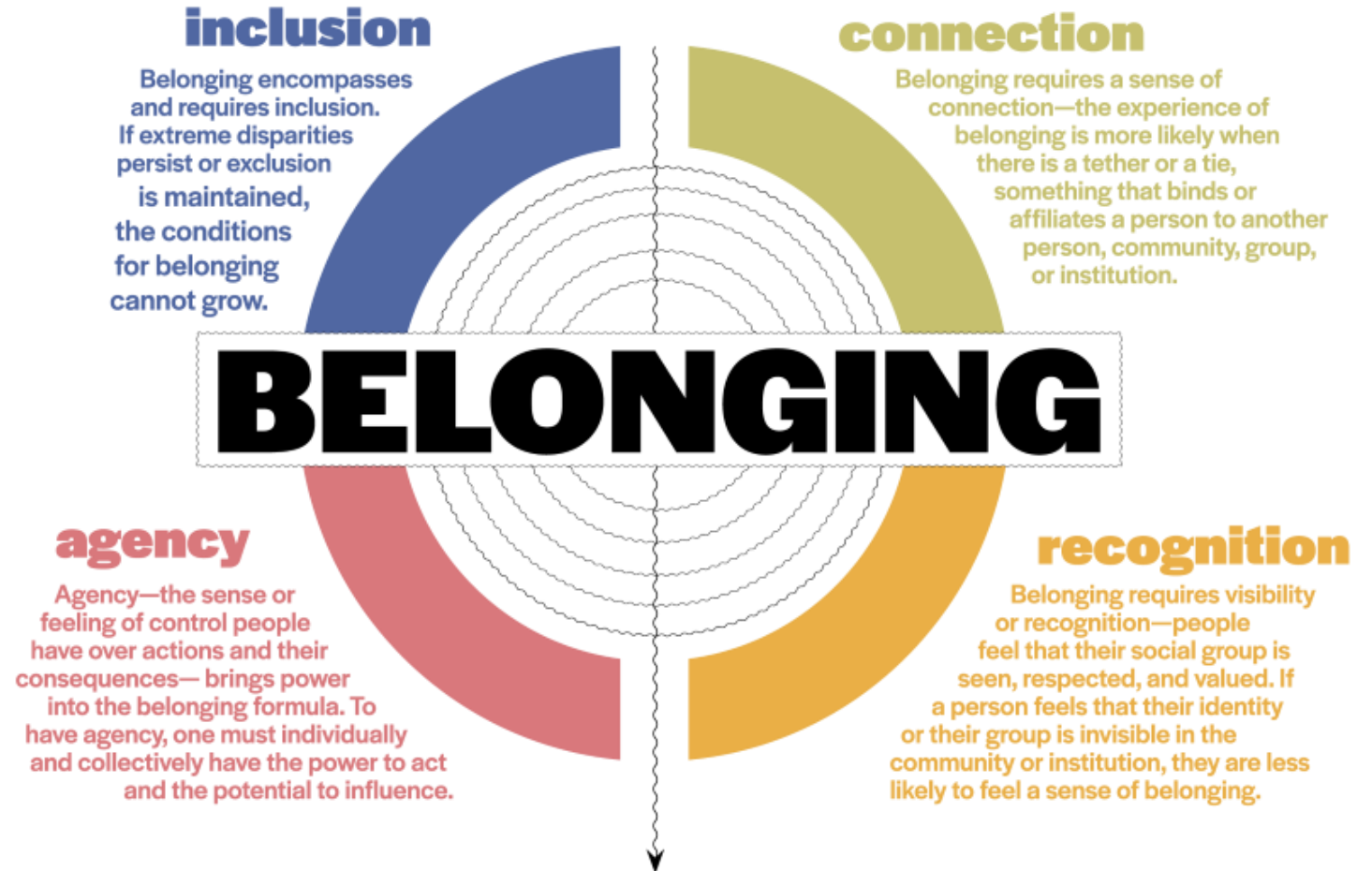
"I think that belonging...encompasses a general feeling that we have when we sense that we're a valued part of a larger group. We feel like we matter to the group and the group matters to us. And we also feel like we can...be our authentic self..."

The opposite of loneliness. It's not quite love but it's that sense of, that there are people in your corner...who have your back, and that you have their back.

And as a human species, we really evolved to belong. We need other people to get through this life...And it's a very fundamental need."

--[Geoffrey L Cohen](#), Author of *Belonging, The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides*

ANOTHER DEFINITION OF BELONGING



At its core, belonging means ensuring that everyone has the right to contribute to the political, social, and cultural systems that shape their world.



RESEARCH SHOWS THAT BELONGING:

- Fosters **motivation and academic engagement**, leading to stronger learning and performance ([Gopalan & Brady, 2019](#); [Li et al., 2023](#))
- Strengthens **persistence and retention**—students who feel they belong are more likely to stay and succeed ([Student Experience Project, 2022](#); [Murphy et al, 2020](#))
- Supports **mental health and well-being**, creating conditions where learning can thrive ([Dost & Smith, 2023](#); [Gopalan & Brady, 2019](#)).
- Reduces **equity gaps** by buffering against isolation for first-generation and underrepresented students ([Walton & Cohen, 2011](#); [Murphy et al, 2020](#)).

See also [report from IHEP](#) and [Dr. Gopalan at MIT](#)

Strategic Plan Goals



Goal 1

Enhance connections between
Montgomery College and our
community

Learn More →



Goal 2

Cultivate a sense of belonging for
everyone at the College

Learn More →



Goal 3

Enhance educational and
organizational effectiveness

Learn More →



Goal 4

Increase economic impact for our
students and community

Learn More →



REFLECTING ON RELATIONSHIPS AND BELONGING

- **Think about a learning experience you have had where you felt a lack of social connection or belonging.** What made you feel like you didn't belong? How did it affect your learning experience?
 - **Compare that learning experience to one where you did feel a sense of belonging.** What made you feel a sense of belonging? How did it affect your learning experience?
-



HOW DO WE BUILD A SENSE OF BELONGING?

What strategies have you used?



7 IDEAS FOR INCREASING MOTIVATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS AND BELONGING

1. Make time for relationship building
 2. Share stories of belonging
 3. Give "wise feedback"
 4. Use jigsaws
 5. Try a values affirmation activity
 6. Rethink your office hours
 7. Include content that reflects your learners
-

1. MAKE TIME FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- Give students a "get to know you" survey in the beginning of class
 - Use [ice breakers](#)
 - Have students share bios online
 - Play name games so everyone can learn each other's names
 - Take 1-5 minutes for small talk in every class
 - Use check in polls, activities, or emails
 - Have one-on-one meetings with students once a semester
 - See "[Encouraging Connections](#)"
-

2. SHARE STORIES OF BELONGING

Sharing your own stories or more experienced students' stories of struggling and then fitting in or succeeding, particularly during times of transition, has been found to:

- Raise students' grades and retention
- Close achievement gaps
- Improve student health and well-being

[Creating Belonging Stories](#)

[Video: Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection](#)

[PERTS Social Belonging Research Project](#)





EXAMPLE BELONGING STORY

“I became fascinated by statistics while going to college at <name of school>. I was intimidated by statistics at first, and after I failed my first midterm, I worried that I wasn’t cut out for this field.

However, after talking to my professor, I accessed tutoring services and learned some new study techniques, and I earned a significantly higher grade on the final. In time, I developed a passion for the subject. I hope to share that passion with you.” ([Ryan et al, 2024](#))

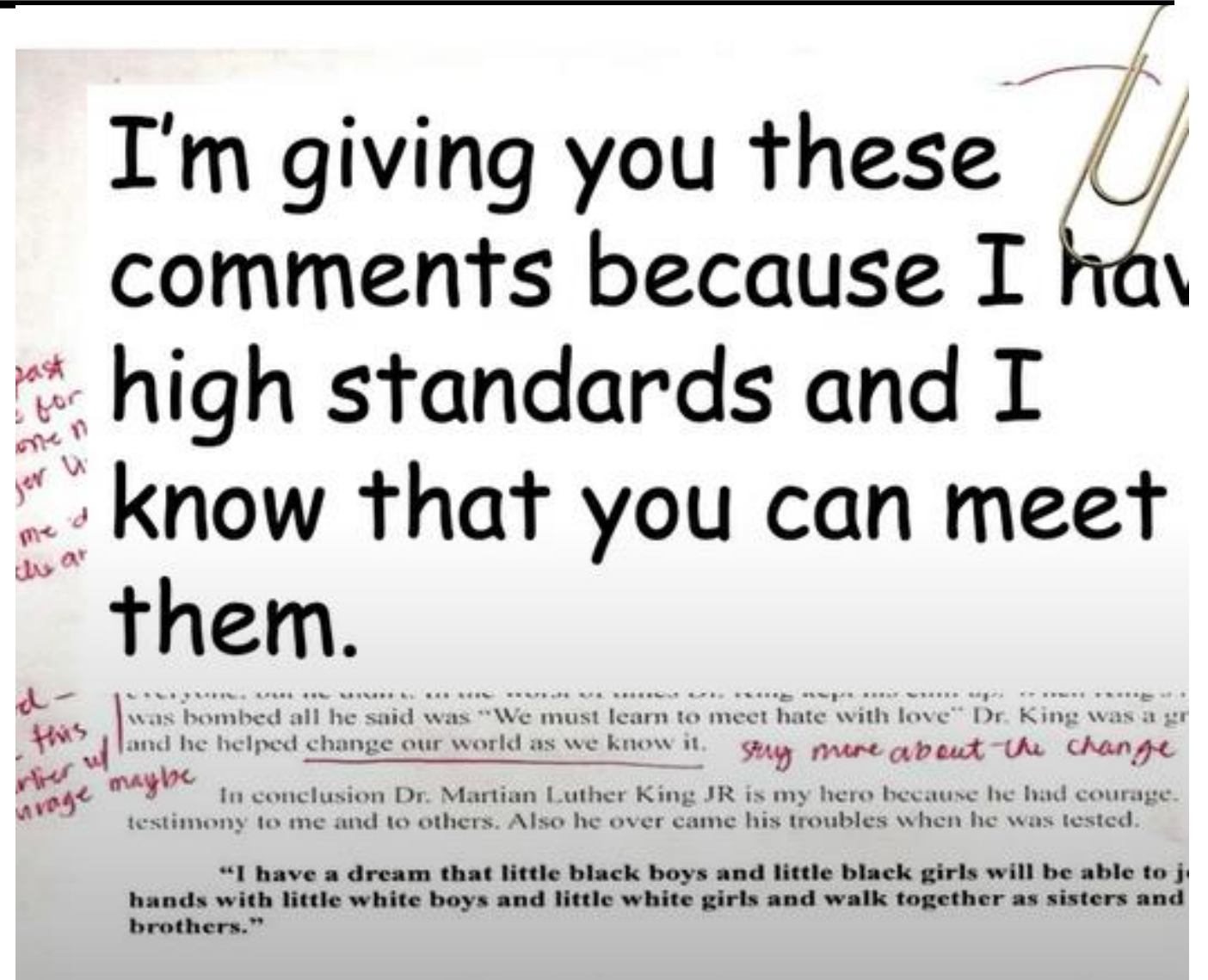


3. GIVE "WISE FEEDBACK"

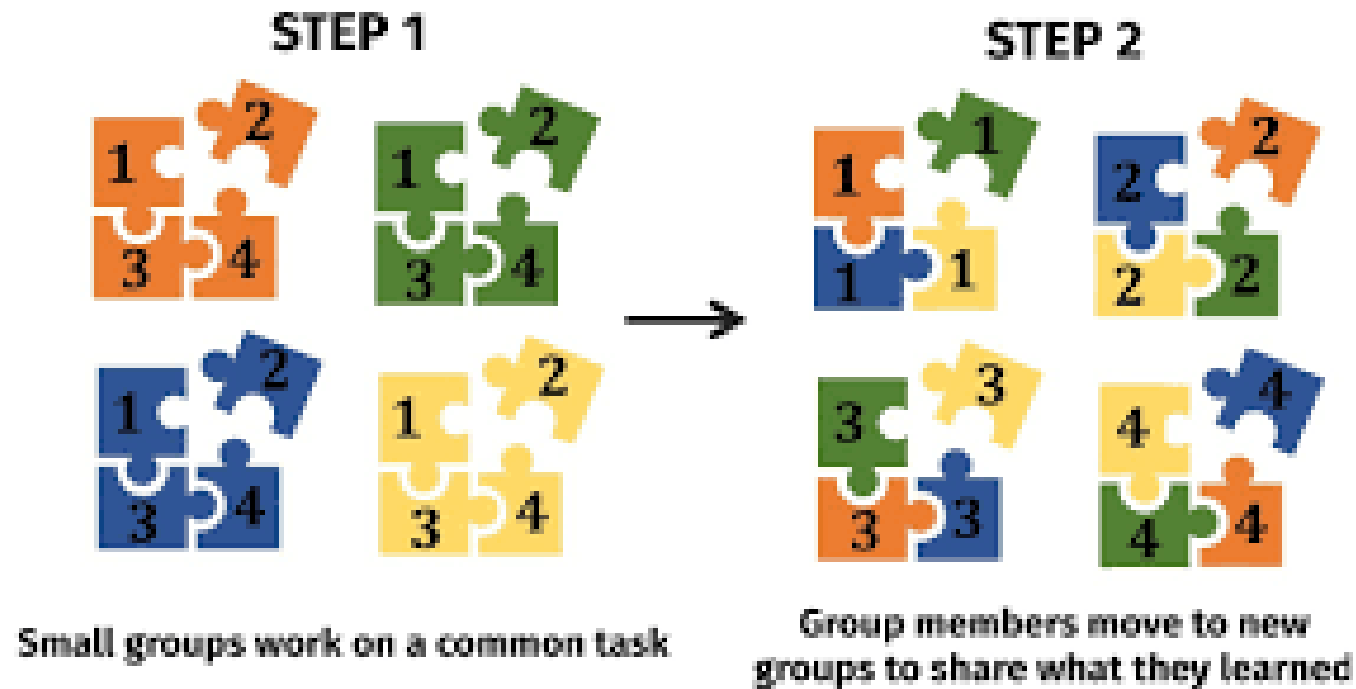
- Start with specific, actionable feedback: "See below for several comments on how to make your assignment better."
 - State high expectations: "This type of writing can be very challenging."
 - Express your confidence in the student's ability to do the work: "I know from past assignments that you have the ability to make the necessary improvements to your writing." ([Giving Wise Feedback, Greater Good Science Center](#))
-

GIVE "WISE FEEDBACK"

- In a study of 7th grade students of color, adding this note increased the percentage of students who revised their essays from 17% to 71%.
- Years later, 70% of the students who received the note were attending a four-year college vs 40% who did not ([Yaeger et al, 2013](#); [Cohen, 2024](#))



4. USE JIGSAW ACTIVITIES



- Designed to reduce racial conflict
- Has been found to improve test performance, reduce absenteeism, and increase liking for school

[Aronson's Jigsaw Classroom](#)

5. TRY A VALUES AFFIRMATION ACTIVITY



- Reaffirms a sense of self and reduces anxiety when belonging is in doubt ([Cohen, 2024](#))
 - Has been found to reduce achievement gaps ([Miyake et al, 2010](#))
 - Examples activities: [Example from Greater Good Science Center](#) and [Example from Geoffrey Cohen](#)
-

6. RETHINK YOUR OFFICE HOURS

- Tell students what office hours are for and why they should use them
 - Rename them, for example: "student hours" or "hangout hours"
 - Move them to a place where students like to be, such as a coffee shop or library room
 - Explain that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness ([Nadworny, 2019](#))
-





7. INCLUDE CONTENT THAT REFLECTS YOUR LEARNERS

- Get to know your students' interests and career goals and use them to personalize what you teach
 - Include materials that reflect the gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of your students
 - Learn more about Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) from the [National Equity Project](#), [Montgomery College](#), and [Greater Good Science Center](#)
-



WHAT IDEAS DO YOU PLAN TO TRY? HOW?

1. Make time for relationship building
 2. Share stories of belonging
 3. Give "wise feedback"
 4. Use jigsaws
 5. Try a values affirmation activity
 6. Rethink your office hours
 7. Include content that reflects your learners
-

ACTION RESEARCH IDEA

- Try one of the 7 strategies we discussed for building relationships and belonging.
- Administer a [belonging survey](#) (scroll to the bottom) before and after to get a more accurate picture of the impact.



MORE RESOURCES

- [The Dignity Index](#)
 - [Greater Good Science Center Relationships](#)
 - [Greater Good Science Center Bridging Divides](#)
 - [How to Create More Belonging for Yourself and Others](#)
 - [Building relationships in higher education to support students' motivation](#)
 - [Cultivating Relationships in Secondary Classrooms: Practices That Matter](#)
 - [Equity Accelerator Classroom Practices Library](#)
 - [Fostering Belonging in Teaching from UC Berkeley](#)
 - [Better Teaching Through Building Relationships \(MC Presentation\)](#)
-

PULSE CHECK



Did you learn something today?



Can you apply this information to your work or life?



Was the workshop presented well (presenter, materials, activities)?

PLEASE
COMPLETE OUR
EVALUATION
FORM!

<https://tinyurl.com/ctlevals2026>





THANK YOU!

Megan.calvert@montgomerycollege.edu
