Human-Centered Teaching: Promoting Health Equity, Inclusion and Well-Being in the Online Classroom.

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Belonging is Biological

- Think of a time when you felt fully **respected, valued & included** as a learner.
- Now think of a time you felt **disconnected, dismissed** or that you **didn't belong**.
- What changed in how you engaged?
- Belonging is not a soft skill.
- It is a biological necessity.



We Are Wired for Connection

- Connection is a human need.
- Belonging supports safety.
- Safety creates conditions for engagement & learning.



What Does Belonging Mean for a Learner?

- Feeling accepted, valued & connected to others, with the ability to be your authentic self without fear of exclusion or judgment.
- Our sense of belonging can shape confidence, identity & behavior.



Seen • Heard • Valued • Supported • Able to Contribute.

What Creates Belonging Online?



Why Belonging Matters for Learning

When students feel they belong, they are more likely to:

- Engage and participate
- Ask questions and seek help
- Share ideas and perspectives
- Take intellectual risks and learn from mistakes
- Build connection with faculty and peers
- Persist when learning becomes challenging



Belonging creates conditions where students can engage, learn and succeed.

Today's Online Learner

- Students don't leave their lives at the virtual classroom door.
- They may be navigating
  - Work
  - Caregiving
  - Health & Well-being
  - Financials pressures
  - Technology & Accessibility
  - Language
  - Prior Learning Experiences



Human-centered teaching begins with understanding the learner in front of us.

Equity asks us to consider what students may need to have a meaningful opportunity to succeed.

When Students Don't Feel They Belong

Disconnection may show up as:

- Limited participation or engagement
- Reluctance to ask questions or seek help
- Hesitation to share ideas or perspectives
- Withdrawal from peers or course activities
- Missed assignments or inconsistent participation
- Questioning whether they belong or can succeed

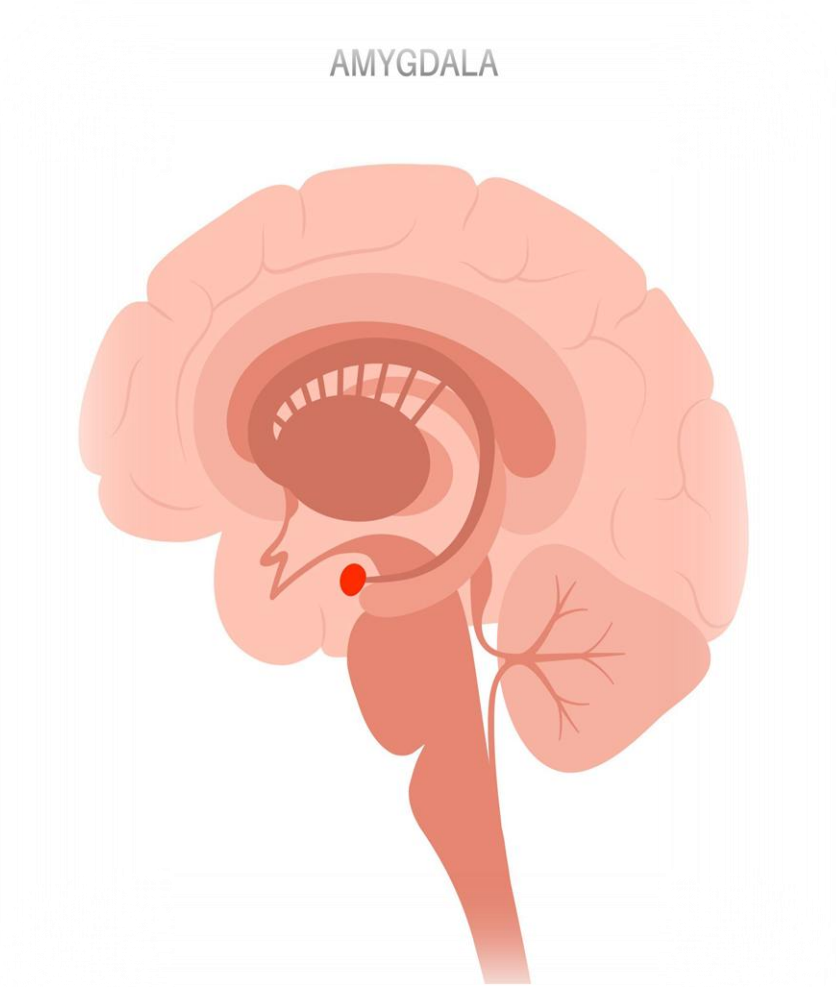


What looks like disengagement may have more behind it.

What might we be missing?

The Brain, Safety & Learning

The brain is constantly scanning for safety or threat.



Threat:

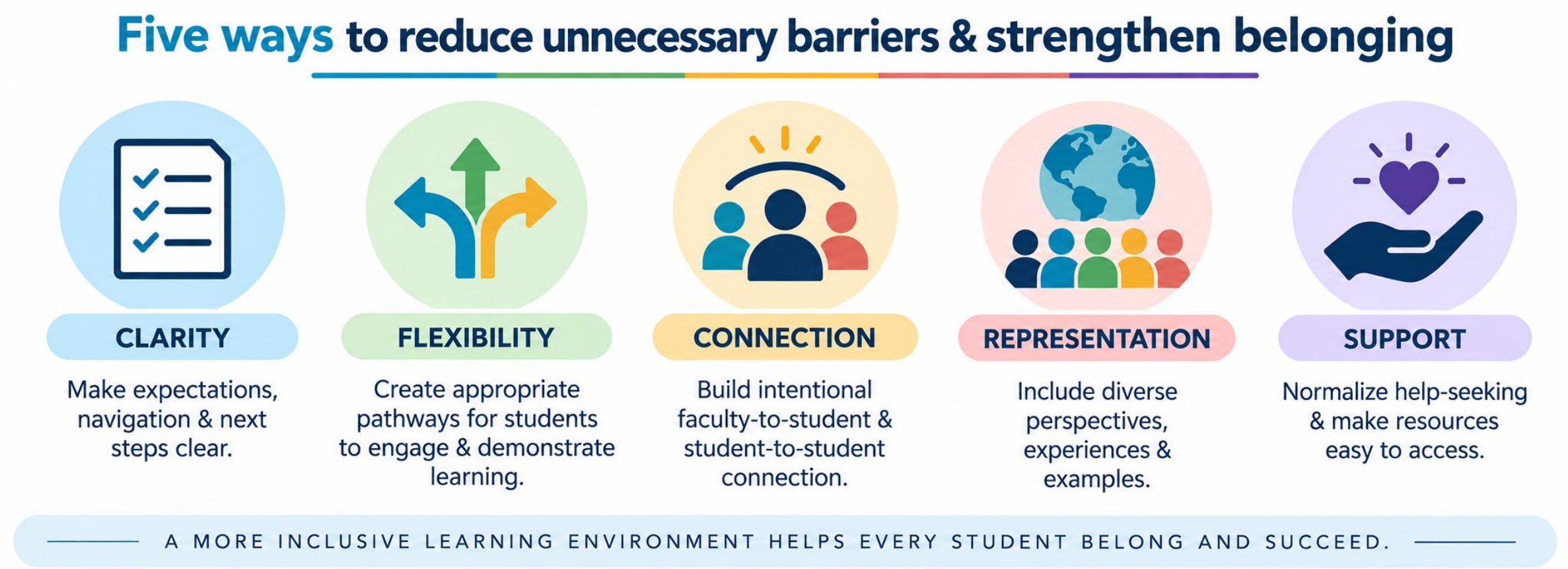
- Stress response increases
- Attention shifts toward protection
- Thinking can become narrow
- Learning & participation become harder

Safety & Belonging

- Supports curiosity & exploration
- Encourages questions & participation
- Strengthens connection & engagement
- Creates better conditions for learning

Safety creates the space for students to engage, question & grow.

Human-Centered Teaching in Practice

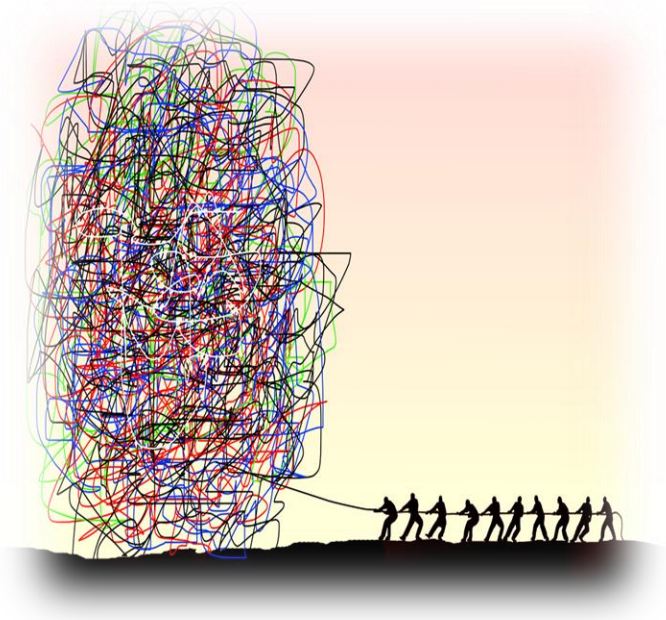


From Assumption to Curiosity

They don't care → **What else might be happening?**

PAUSE before interpreting behavior:

- Question your first assumption
- Seek context
- Consider potential barriers
- Respond with curiosity
- Maintain expectations while exploring support



Curiosity creates space for a more human-centered response.

Your Turn: Student Scenario

A student who regularly participated stops engaging and they miss an assignment and don't respond immediately to your outreach.

1. *What might your first assumption be?*
2. *What else might be happening?*
3. *How could you respond while maintaining the learning expectation?*



Look at Your Own Course

ASK YOURSELF	REFLECTION QUESTION
CLARITY	Where might students experience confusion?
FLEXIBILITY	Where might an unnecessary barrier exist?
CONNECTION	Where do students experience you & one another?
REPRESENTATION	Whose experiences & perspectives are reflected?
SUPPORT	How easy is it to ask for and find help?

Small Changes Can Make a Difference

- You don't have to redesign your entire course.
- Start with one:
  - Announcement
  - Discussion Prompt
  - Assignment
  - Feedback Practice
  - Course Resource
  - Communication



What is one change you will make in the next 7 days?

Write in the chat

Human-Centered Teaching Toolkit

Take these tools back to your classroom:

- Human Centered Course
- Online Belonging Checklist
- PAUSE Before You Assume Tool
- Inclusive Communication & Feedback Prompts
- One-Change Action Plan

Human-Centered Teaching Starts Small

- See the learner.
- Question the assumption.
- Reduce the unnecessary barrier.
- Create connection.
- Make it easier to ask for help.
- When students feel seen, supported & that they belong, we create better conditions for them to learn.





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