

# Doing, being, becoming through belonging: An exploration of belonging in occupational therapy education

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## Background

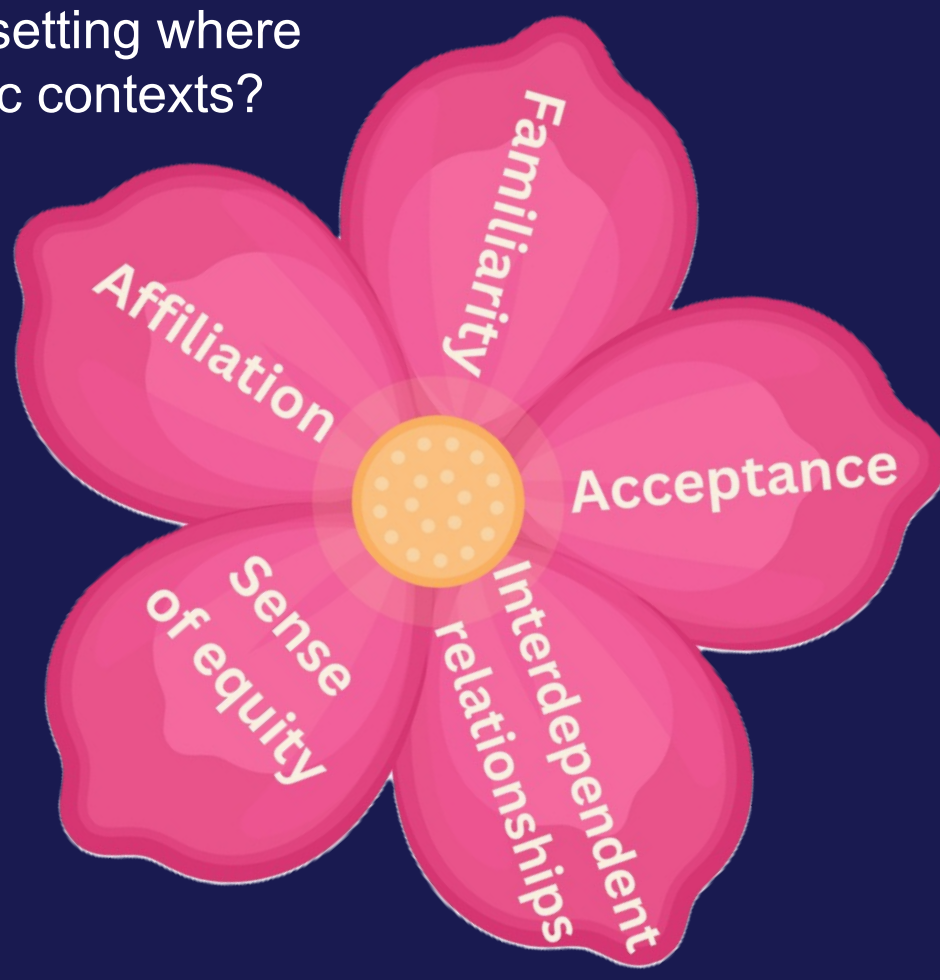
- Belonging is essential to well-being, academic success, and commitment to the program and the profession
- To address shortages of occupational therapists, Canadian programs are expanding via geographically distributed learning, adding complication to the sense of belonging.



**Question:** How can we support student belonging in occupational therapy programs, especially in a setting where a single cohort is distributed across geographic contexts?

## Methods

- 16 student interviews, Art-elicitation,
- Thematic analysis
- Modified Belonging in Academia Model



## Findings

**Relationships are key educational infrastructure** that require investment from the institution, educators, and students.



Belonging and relationships are built through **shared occupation in shared spaces**

## Recommendations

- Relationship building as foundational
- Foster connections within cohorts through social events
- Encourage socialization beyond classroom time
- Increase informal interactions outside of class
- Educator training in relational pedagogy, managing emotional presence in virtual spaces, and strategies for inclusive engagement across cohorts
- Equitable distribution of resources across cohorts
- Offer virtual drop-in times for cross-cohort discussion
- Increased cross-cohort course activities within first semester



- Foster connections within cohorts through social events
- Relationship building as a foundational element
- Encourage socialization beyond classroom time

**relationships must be treated as  
essential infrastructure.**