Faculty of Design

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What Does Belonging Mean? A framing and network approach to tackle loneliness among students

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What does belonging mean?
A framing and network approach to tackle loneliness among students

Online 3 hours workshop RSD9

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Limit of participants: 15

Introduction

Are you working in an educational context or are you interested in the wellbeing of students? Then this workshop is interesting for you! At the faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, Delft University of Technology, we set up The Belonging Project. This is a research project that seeks to understand and learn how we can design for belongingness and human connectedness. According to the Cambridge dictionary, when you belong, you are in the right place or you feel happy or comfortable in a situation[1]. Every person has this intrinsic need to belong and form relationships, and therefore, your sense of belonging impacts your overall wellbeing. In our project, we are particularly interested in young people – children, teenagers, students – as human connection and well-being are also intrinsically connected to learning and thereby have a great impact on their chance to flourish in life[2].
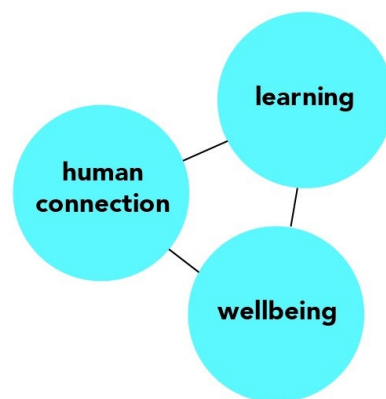

Figure 1. Our wellbeing and ability to learn are impacted by the quality of our human connections

What we currently notice in our society, is that interventions mostly focus on how to make miserable people less miserable[3]. Within our project, we are interested in what happens if we flip this focus on curing to prevention, and ask ourselves 'how can we make young people flourish'? However, this is also what makes 'promoting belonging' a systemic challenge: as belonging and relatedness concern to almost every aspect of our life, there is no obvious stakeholder or organisation that can be held responsible for promoting it.

This made us curious: can we, as design researchers, create a shift in social innovation towards prevention and reinforce the wellbeing of young people? Can we foster the development of a so-called designing network, consisting of (public) organisations that create interventions by using the

'fertile ground' that derives from our design research? Are our developed design practices useful for these organisations in addressing such an open, complex, dynamic and networked problem?

Proposed activities

In this workshop we will look into the specific context of university students - a context maybe many of you work in - and the feelings of loneliness that occur among some of them. Every participant will first take a look at their own situation: what actors can you put in your stakeholder network map that might have an impact on the sense of belonging and relatedness of students? And what is your position and role in this network? Next, we will support the participants to reframe the challenge of loneliness among students, based on these new insights and the themes that we found in our own research so far.
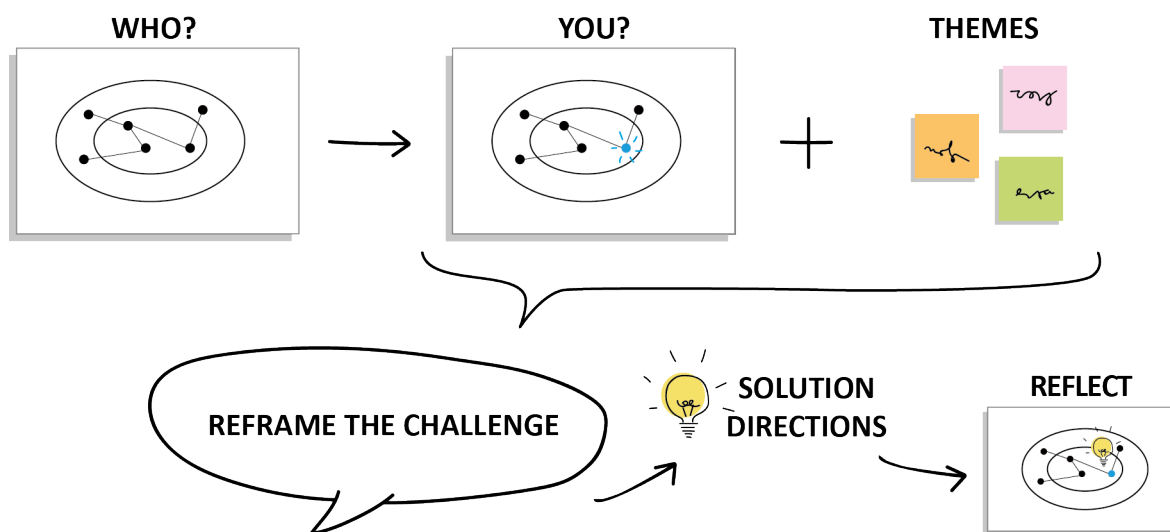

Figure 2. Set-up of the workshop

We will base the reframe-approach on the method Frame Innovation developed by Dorst[4]. Together with the participants we will explore the deeper meaning of belonging and human connectedness and collaboratively translate them into innovative frames that will enable us to rethink tackling loneliness among students. We focus on creating new approaches to the problem situation and will use our new frames to think of some possible solution directions. Finally, we will draw our attention back to the network to reflect on the 'portfolio' of solution directions required to tackle this challenge, and on what we can start doing from our own personal positions within the network to contribute to the required change.

Workshop goals and outcomes

The aim is to learn from each other's stakeholder networks that impact belonging and relatedness among students and everyone's view on the situation. Besides that, we are interested to conduct reframing to find out whether this method can be applied to come up with innovative frames concerning the topic of belongingness and, above all, to do this with people that have an interest or expertise in systems thinking. Participants get the opportunity to deep dive into the topic, and create and collect interesting frames and solution directions that can be applied to their own educational context.

Approach

We will work with Zoom. To divide the group in sub-groups, 3 break-out rooms will be made, so each room has its own facilitator. Miro will be used to be able to brainstorm together and to map things collaboratively.

Structure of the workshop, 3 hours
1. Walk-in & short introduction [5 min]
2. Sensitizer [15 min]
   Getting acquainted in small groups and discuss what thing or object represents 'a sense of belonging' for you
3. Introduction to the topic [10]
   Why is loneliness among students a problem? And why focus on 'promoting belonging'?
4. Network mapping [15 min]
   Individual exercise. Who in your network is involved in the topic? Who could be involved? What is your position within the network?
5. Compare and reflect on network [15 min]
   The participants compare their network with each other in smaller groups and reflect on their own position
6. Present themes from our research [5 min]
   We present some themes we found in the context of loneliness among students
7. Analyse themes [15 min]
   The participants will analyse the themes by discussing their own experiences and viewpoints.
8. Present theme analysis [10]
9. Break [10 min]
10. Reframing [30 min]
    Come up with metaphors per theme and map these out
11. Solution directions [15 min]
    Use the new frames to come up with solution directions
12. Present the frames and solution directions [15 min]
13. Reflect on what you can do within your own network [15]
    Does the 'portfolio' of solution directions propose opportunities to tackle this challenge from our own personal positions within the network?
14. Closure [5 min]

References

1: Cambridge Dictionary. Belonging. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/belonging
2: Van der Bijl, M. (2020, June 20). Learning is joy — wellbeing challenges in pandemic higher education. *Medium.* https://medium.com/@miekevanderbijl/learning-is-joy-wellbeing-challenges-in-pandemic-higher-education-f74aaae67ec4
3: Seligman, M. E. (2002). Positive psychology, positive prevention, and positive therapy. Handbook of positive psychology, 2(2002), 3-12.
4: Dorst, K. (2015). Frame innovation: Create new thinking by design. MIT press.