Fitting In vs. Belonging
Large Group 101 | Low Trust | 20 mins | Essentials | Icebreakers

Materials & Media:

- Large flip-chart paper (or large sticky-note paper)
- Markers or other bold writing implements

Set Up:

- N/A

Goals & Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will be able to define the differences between “fitting in” and “belonging”
- Participants will be able to describe at least one reason why conversations about belonging are appropriate to social justice learning

Framing:

- This activity is about defining the differences between fitting in and belonging

Process Steps & Talking Points:

1. After framing the exercise (see above for suggestions on how to intro) split the group into two groups. Give each group one large piece of flip-chart paper and a marker.
2. Explain that you want each group to spend 5 minutes or so defining their term. One group will need to define belonging and one group needs to define fitting in. Beyond defining the terms, they should write anything else they believe is relevant: what it feels like to belong or fit in, who is doing it, how do you know you’re doing it, etc.
3. Give the groups time to work together to complete the task.
4. Bring the groups back together.
5. Ask each group to present out to the larger group their conclusions.
6. See if anyone in the other group has anything to add to the conclusions of the other group.
7. Process/debrief the activity.
Debrief/Process Questions:

- What are some of the major themes we see across these two terms?
- Does anyone have any emotional or visceral reaction when thinking of the difference between these two terms?
- Why do you think it is important to consider the differences between fitting in and belonging?
- What do fitting in and belonging have to do with social justice?

Wrap Up:

- When we talk about inclusive spaces, often what we are really getting at is creating a space where more people have the opportunity to feel like they belong there.
- Fitting in takes a lot of energy from the individual. Belonging may take special effort from the community, but a lot less energy from the individual.
- It is the responsibility of people who create the norms of a group or environment to consider who feels they belong and who is simply fitting in.
- Social justice education often helps us bring to light the work that some people are doing to “fit in” to our communities, as well as helps us acknowledge ways that we can make more people feel they have the opportunity to belong.

Bring Your Style:

You could also do this activity reflectively by asking participants to use a blank sheet of paper and to personally define the differences between fitting in and belonging. They could then speak to the large group to debrief or debrief with a small group or partner.

Challenges & Tips:

This is a great activity to help clarify the goals of any social justice training, and, thus, it’s a great way to start off a workshop/training. Try to let participants lead this discussion as much as possible, because it is also a great opportunity to get them participating and to practice active listening right off the bat.

This activity was heavily inspired by an activity Dr. Brene Brown mentions doing in her book Rising Strong, a book we highly recommend for many reasons. The social justice slant of the activity is our contribution to the already well-crafted and powerful idea.