Belonging and Othering in Research and Education: A Foreword

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The 2024 edition of the Graduate Studies Faculty in Education Journal emerges from Tapestry 2024: Belonging and Othering in Research and Education, a symposium exploring the intricate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in educational and research contexts. This foreword reflects on the conference's central themes through a personal lens, highlighting the profound impact of identity, culture, and lived experience in shaping scholarly and pedagogical work. Drawing on the metaphor of a tapestry, it underscores the richness of diverse narratives and methodologies—from autoethnography to community-based research—that challenge dominant paradigms and reimagine education as a site of belonging, recognition, and justice. Emphasizing reflexivity, vulnerability, and the transformative potential of embracing difference, the foreword invites readers to consider their own positionalities and roles in fostering inclusive practices. The contributions in this volume call for sustained, collaborative efforts to dismantle systems of othering and co-create educational spaces grounded in equity, respect, and relationality.

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As we unveil the 2024 edition of the *Graduate Studies in Education Journal*, we write this foreword with deep gratitude, reflection, and a profound sense of purpose. The 2024 conference, *Tapestry 2024: Belonging and Othering in Research and Education*, provided fertile ground for critical inquiry, creativity, and collective action. Against a global backdrop of sociopolitical polarization and educational inequity, the conference invited participants to interrogate how inclusion and exclusion—belonging and othering—are enacted, resisted, and reimagined in contemporary educational spaces.

The tapestry metaphor evokes for me the interwoven nature of personal narrative, cultural memory, pedagogical commitment, and scholarly inquiry. As an immigrant, artist, and educator, my own experiences navigating cultural in-betweenness mirror the central question raised by many of the contributions to this volume: What does it mean to belong, and how do educational systems reproduce or disrupt the boundaries of that belonging?

Belonging, as noted by Abawi et al. (2022), is not merely about presence but about participation, recognition, and relational connection. Yet many of us, like the "insider-outsider" adult learners described by Rautins et al. (2024), live in a state of tension between proximity and distance, visibility and erasure. This dual positionality is not a limitation but a critical lens. It pushes us to consider how structures of power and identity co-construct the meaning-making processes in graduate education and beyond.

The works featured in this issue reflect a methodological and epistemological richness that challenges the boundaries of conventional academic discourse. The use of posthumanist inquiry in Burnett and Stewart's (2023) *Redefining Educational Places* reminds us that belonging is not only socially mediated but spatially and materially constituted. Educational "place" is not fixed but emergent, relational, and entangled with the human and more-than-human world—a view that invites us to rethink how spaces of learning are constructed and experienced.

This volume also foregrounds the emotional and embodied dimensions of education. For instance, Wilson and Jones' (2023) study using *HeartMath biofeedback and SEL* interventions among adolescents illustrates that fostering emotional self-regulation is not tangential but foundational to cultivating belonging. Emotion, often marginalized in traditional academic discourse, is central to how students experience safety, inclusion, and connection.

Belonging, however, must be held alongside its shadow: othering. As Ahmed (2012) notes, inclusion often operates through mechanisms of conditionality: "you can belong, but only if you conform." This tension is echoed in Phan's (2024) exploration of her own affective responses to the "curriculum of fear," where English language learners are positioned as perpetual outsiders, marked by their difference. Her work challenges us to consider how emotional labour, linguistic borders, and racialized expectations shape the pedagogical landscape.

A similar critique emerges in *Belonging and Othering in Research and Education: Bringing Indigenous Voices into the Classroom* (Walker et al., 2024), which calls for the centring of Indigenous epistemologies not as additive but as constitutive to just education. As the authors argue, inclusion that does not engage with the historical and ongoing effects of settler colonialism risks becoming performative. True belonging, they suggest, is co-constructed through relational accountability, land-based knowledge, and ethical engagement with difference.

Several contributions push the boundaries of conventional pedagogy through the integration of technology and creativity. Sharma's (2024) exploration of generative AI in middle school art education presents a compelling case for leveraging digital tools to foster collective meaning-making and creative risk-taking. Similarly, López and Huang's (2024) investigation into machine translation tools demonstrates that, when critically implemented, these technologies can support, not supplant, language learners in constructing multilingual identities.

Across these works, a recurring theme emerges: belonging is not a static end-state, but an ongoing, negotiated, and co-created process. It is not merely about being included in what already exists, but about reshaping the very conditions of possibility — curricular, spatial, emotional, and epistemological — that define the educational experience. This aligns with Florian's (2014) assertion that true inclusion necessitates a shift in mindset: from viewing diversity as a problem to be managed to embracing it as an opportunity for transformation.

Through my research [Rodriguez] and arts-based practice, I have come to understand that fostering a sense of belonging requires reflexivity and vulnerability. It requires that we, as educators and researchers, continuously interrogate our own assumptions, positionalities, and complicities. As the conference underscored, creating inclusive spaces is not only a theoretical endeavour but also profoundly ethical and affective.

This volume stands as a testament to the courage, imagination, and commitment of its contributors. It offers no simple answers but instead invites critical dialogue. It challenges us to disrupt the comfort of sameness and embrace the generative tension of difference. Let it serve as both a provocation and an invitation to reimagine what education can be when belonging is not merely a goal, but a way of being, knowing, and relating.

As you engage with these articles, I invite you to ask: Where do I locate myself in this tapestry of belonging and othering? How might I act, personally, pedagogically, institutionally, to ensure that education becomes a space where all are recognized, valued, and transformed?

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Appendix A: Acknowledgements

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