

21 Learned Words: A Poetic Content Analysis of 'Belonging' in Higher Education

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Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract

This study utilises poetry as a unique medium for investigating perceptions of 'belonging' among higher education staff. By applying poetic content analysis, we delve into an intricate examination of belonging within the lens of individual intersectional identities. Eighteen poems, contributed by professionals from the higher education sector, were subjected to scrutiny, which led to the discovery of four primary themes: 'Community', 'Exclusion', 'Transformation', and 'Self'. These revelations have prompted a series of proposed strategies that could potentially enhance the sense of belonging for all personnel within higher education institutions. The recommendations and emergent narratives pivot on an aspiration for the higher education industry to acknowledge more fully and foster the inherent dedication prevalent among staff towards the promise and potential of higher education in the present and beyond.

Full paper

I. Introduction

This paper highlights the novel approach of using poetic content analysis to explore the concept of 'belonging' within the context of higher education. Building upon intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989), we focus on the experiences and emotions of university staff members, and how these intersecting identities play into their sense of belonging within their institutions.

II. Methodology

Our study employs poetic content analysis, a qualitative research method that engages with the textual intricacies and emotional richness of poetry (Illingworth, 2022). 18 poems were collected from staff across different institutions, demonstrating a spectrum of experiences. This sample size was guided by the principle of thematic saturation (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Our selection process was inclusive, as only duplicate submissions were excluded. The interpretive lens was grounded in our positionality as researchers and educators (Berger, 2015).

III. Analysis and Results

Four major themes were unearthed: 'Community', 'Exclusion', 'Transformation', and 'Self'. Each theme was resonant with past literature in higher education, adding depth and emotional nuance to our understanding. The theme of 'Exclusion' for example, echoes research on marginalised identities within academia (Mayhew et al., 2006).

IV. Discussion and Recommendations

While the sample size is recognised as a limitation, our study underscores the richness of the data that can be extracted from poetic analysis, and the power of such narratives in guiding institutional change (Prendergast, 2009). Recommendations, grounded in the emergent narratives, encourage institutions to foster a culture of inclusion and recognition.

V. Conclusion

Poetic content analysis provides a nuanced perspective on belonging in higher education. Future research should further delve into this innovative method, considering the varied contexts of different educational institutions.

References

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