



Special Issue: Inclusive Learning


Leveraging the W.H.O.L.E. Experience Framework to Elevate Inclusive Learning

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Abstract

The case study methodology was used to analyze instructional strategies to discuss and refine diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices in two psychology courses at a community college in California's Bay Area. A mentor and mentee professional development experience, referred to as the DEI studio, used four sessions over 5 weeks to explore reflective practice using the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework as a guide to review current DEI practices and implement additional strategies intended to improve the engagement, experience, and success of all students. Student feedback and data were collected via a six-question student evaluation of the courses. Results showed that inclusion of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework elements, welcoming, holistic, open, liberating, and empowering, increased student belonging, motivation, engagement, and overall success. Educators/practitioners can employ this framework to consider their own DEI practices.

Keywords: *diversity, equity, inclusion, student experience, higher education, welcome, holistic, open [communication], liberating, empowering*

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Introduction

When engaging the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), language is extremely important. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020), language can help or hinder DEI efforts. Thus, this document begins by operationalizing these critical terms. According to Bolger (2020), diversity is often professed to include discussions about perspective, representation, tough conversations, and supporting inclusion. Özturgut (2017) posits that diversity can also describe ways in which individuals and communities

are distinct from each other, while also recognizing and placing value on differences between individuals and or groups.

Equity discussions reference equal opportunity where one's identity is no longer a strong predictor of one's success. Equity, in many instances, is aspirational and is concerned with distributing opportunities in a manner driven by individual need where everyone can succeed as opposed to distributing resources equally, which is more likely to perpetuate existing inequities. Examples of existing inequities involve access to resources that foster student achievement, such as access to Advanced Placement and college-level courses, school counselors, as well as digital resources, to name a few (Erwin & Thomsen, 2021). Equity is also described as fairness, sameness, and valuing diversity and inclusion.

Inclusion prompts solutions aimed at creating environments conducive to feedback, supporting diversity, and being open. Inclusion is active and requires continuous attempts to incorporate historically marginalized groups in a way that fosters a sense of belonging, access, and voice. Inclusive environments and experiences go beyond general admission and tolerance and authentically create space for everyone (Özturgut, 2017).

Within the sphere of higher education, specifically the teaching and learning context, approaching this topic can present difficulties. Despite broadly understanding DEI, faculty/staff, researchers, and or practitioners often find it difficult to articulate if or how they are employing these important principles within their respective practices (Zambrana, 2018). Therefore, the W.H.O.L.E. Experience was developed by one of the authors as a conceptual framework to identify practical approaches for engaging DEI.

This framework is designed to make DEI in action more accessible and applicable. The W.H.O.L.E. Experience has been used to provide professional development opportunities involving an iterative structure to support continuous improvement. This framework allows for groups and individuals to assess their unique strategies as they pertain to creating "The W.H.O.L.E. Experience." In this particular study, a mentor and mentee professional development experience, referred to as the DEI studio, took place over 5 weeks and included four sessions to explore reflective practice using the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework as a guide to review current DEI practices and implement additional strategies intended to improve engagement, experience, and success of all students. According to Ganly (2018), reflective practice is an opportunity for practitioners to pause, reflect, and take notice of instructional practices that may benefit from further assessment, revision, and adaptation. The W.H.O.L.E. framework was used as the lens for which the mentor and mentee leveraged to reflect on DEI practices. The W.H.O.L.E. Framework is an acronym including five elements represented by the following terms, Welcoming, Holistic, Open, Liberating, and Empowering. In the literature review, we provide a more in-depth explanation for each term. There are also possibilities to leverage this framework for instructional observation and syllabi review purposes. To date, syllabi have been reviewed by faculty at several institutions, assessing course components such as materials, activities, assessments, multimedia, and images juxtaposed with the elements of the W.H.O.L.E. framework to examine and improve DEI strategies in this context. Similarly, the W.H.O.L.E. framework can be used for instructional observation. Moreover, participants who used this framework were able to assess their courses' components to determine to what extent their courses address DEI, while also expanding the design and delivery of their practices to enhance various environments and experiences.

In order to help facilitate learning, the environment in which the learning takes place must provide suitable conditions (Thomas et al., 2017). Thus, as explained in the Literature Review, the W.H.O.L.E. framework considers and draws upon the ENHANCE Learning Model, Andragogy, Significant Learning, Reflective Practice; Universal Design for Learning (UDL); and Sense of Belonging theories and research.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, W.H.O.L.E. is an acronym that represents five terms that comprise this framework's elements, Welcoming, Holistic, Open, Liberating, and Empowering. The next section of this document will further explain the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework and the associated literature that supports the five elements of this model. This framework explores Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) through an iterative and intentional experiential paradigm. This simply means that a person applying the W.H.O.L.E. Framework can revisit these elements as often as needed, with specific intentions to guide and or inform participants' experiences. The framework does not require one to employ these components in a hierarchal or sequential manner, which supports its iterative nature. Figure 1 provides a brief explanation of each component of the concept.

Figure 1. *The W.H.O.L.E. Experience Framework*

| The W.H.O.L.E. Experience | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Welcoming | Considers how participants are engaged in an environment and experience not only at the experience's beginning but throughout its duration. |
| Holistic | Considers how the "whole" person is engaged throughout the experience. |
| Open | Considers how feedback and self-reflection is leveraged throughout the experience. |
| Liberating | Considers if the experience includes opportunities for flexibility and adaptability. |
| Empowering | Considers if the experience provides opportunities that are connected and relevant to the desired outcomes for the participants. |

Welcoming

Welcoming considers how participants are engaged in an environment and experience not only at the experience's beginning but throughout its duration. Engagement is essential to the welcoming element of this framework. In the Enhance Learning Model (ELM), engage includes engaging learners in three distinct ways: learner-to-instructor, learner-to-content, and learner-to-learner (Thomas & Harrison, 2019). Thomas and Harrison (2019) found that engaging learners with the instructor, content, and their peer learners develops a sense of community. This sense of community nurtures a welcoming environment. A primary focus of the ELM was the linkage between the learners' emotional and cognitive aspects needed to positively affect the learning environment and the learners' experience. Each letter in ENHANCE represents terms providing instructional strategies to inform intentional course design and delivery (Engage, Navigate, Highlight, Assessment, Network, Connect, Edutain, a portmanteau of "education" and entertainment"). When considering the W.H.O.L.E. Experience, a facilitator is encouraged to consider how their participants will encounter a sense of being welcomed throughout the entire experience.

The previously mentioned method in the ELM involving engagement provides opportunities for creating a welcoming environment. When conceptualizing what it means to be welcoming, educators should consider

the term hospitality. Hospitality includes such characteristics as being enthusiastic, inviting, detailed oriented, and helpful (Brotherton & Wood, 2010). These characteristics can be leveraged by employing principles of andragogy. Andragogy is the science and art of helping adults learn. According to Chan (2010), the six assumptions about adult learners include relevance, self-concept, prior experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation. Thus, when considering ways to create a welcoming environment, we recommend that educators acknowledge the six assumptions of andragogy in a hospitable manner throughout the experience.

Holistic

Holistic considers how the “whole” person is engaged throughout the experience. According to Fink (2007), every time a learning experience occurs, the situation is different and various situational factors are present. In Fink’s work, considering the situational factors is part of creating significant learning. The teaching and learning activities, learning goals, and feedback and assessment should all consider situational factors (Fink, 2007). This framework suggests that educators should consider the characteristics of the learners, such as the learners’ life situations, prior knowledge, goals, and expectations. Based on the aforementioned, each learner’s experience and characteristics may be different; therefore, it is recommended to engage the learners in understanding their unique characteristics. Harrison and Thomas (2019) discuss Engage as an instructional strategy in the ENHANCE Learning model (ELM). As previously mentioned in the Welcoming element of this framework, the notion of engagement is grounded in andragogy, or the science and art of helping adults learn. To engage learners andragogically, it is important to understand the experiences of these learners, their needs, and what motivates them. Therefore, consider including iterative and intentional practices in the learning experiences that provide opportunities to gather information about the learners’ characteristics. For example, if an activity or assignment is being introduced, the facilitator can also incorporate an opportunity through an interactive discussion, polling, or icebreaker to gauge how this activity or assignment is relevant to the learners’ prior experiences, needs, and/or motivational factors. As the learner’s characteristics become known, educators must find ways to incorporate this knowledge to address the learners within the learning environment and throughout the learning experience. To accomplish this, gathering learner characteristics will increase the likelihood of considering the “whole” person, ultimately creating a holistic learning experience.

The ELM provides two additional strategies that may be helpful in acquiring information about the learner’s characteristics; these strategies are Network and Connect. Network is a strategy providing learners with an opportunity to get to know their peers. Networking creates lasting and positive relationships over time, which facilitates knowledge acquisition through engagement (Palmer & Thomas, 2020; Rovai, 2002). Whereas the Connect strategy recognizes that human connection is synonymous with human communication, which can create opportunities for instructors to make appropriate emotional connections with each learner. Learners form a deeper bond with instructors while maximizing their learning experiences (Thomas et al., 2017).

Open

Open considers how feedback and self-reflection are leveraged throughout the experience. Ganly (2018) provides the PARA model (pausing, attending, revising, adopting, adapting) as an extension of existing reflective practice models. In this model, reflection begins with a pause, which can be very beneficial for those who facilitate the learning experience as well as provide benefits for the learners (Ganly, 2018). This pause can lead to the other components of the PARA model. For instance, the P in the PARA model represents pause, which can serve as the impetus for understanding what aspects of the learning environments and experience require attention, ultimately allowing for needed revision, adoptions, and adapting (Ganly, 2018).

The notion of being open is an intentional practice that allows for communication and exchange to improve learning experiences. As mentioned in the definition of inclusion, spaces that provide access, power sharing, and a voice for participants lend themselves to being inclusive (Özturgut, 2017). Therefore, intentionally including

opportunities for participants and practitioners to be able to pause, provide feedback, and self-reflect support improving the overall experience while fostering an environment that practices diverse, equitable, and inclusive principles. In order for this element to be fully realized, the instructor must be open to practicing reflection and receiving feedback.

Liberating

Liberating considers whether the experience includes opportunities for flexibility and adaptability. Historically, academic environments such as courses are very structured, planned in advance, and have little room for adjustments. Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have made it extremely clear that being able to pivot, adapt, and make adjustments while maintaining academic continuity is essential. According to Rincones et al. (2021), COVID-19 challenged educators to redesign and rethink strategies to provide flexible and creative learning experiences. The need for flexibility was due to the COVID-19 crisis affecting everyone involved in different ways. It took a specific crisis like COVID-19 to increase the openness to creating flexible and adaptive learning environments. However, the need for such environments existed prior to the pandemic and is expected to continue due to matters involving diversity, equity, and inclusion (Bolger, 2020).

Moreover, the landscape of higher education has changed. Yavorski (2019) reports that almost 50% of college students are over the age of 25, with 40% of that number being over 35. In addition, more of those students work and are parents, first-generation college students, and Pell Grant eligible (Yavorski, 2019). Nevertheless, in many instances learning environments and experiences remain quite traditional.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that has emerged out of the need to provide specific parameters around the discussion of inclusion in education. It is notable because UDL provides clear recommendations for proactively addressing inclusion issues in the broadest sense of the word (Al-Azawei et al., 2016). The recommendations for creating an environment and experience that is liberating include providing learners with multiple means for engagement, expression, and representation. Employing the multiple aspects of UDL can provide learners with a more liberating experience by including increased flexibility and adaptability. An example of how UDL might be realized in an instructional setting would involve an instructor providing course materials in more than one format, such as written as well as multimedia; this would constitute multiple means of representation. Another example of UDL in action would be, in an instructional and or interactive context, allowing participants to engage in written format, verbally, or electronically, which would constitute multiple means for engagement and, potentially, expression as well.

Empowering

Empowering considers whether the experience provides opportunities that are connected and relevant to the desired outcomes for the participants. Empowerment can be defined as increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices [about what they want] and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Therefore, it is important to consider what you would like your students to be able to do at the end of a class session or course. What would you like your students to become after completing your course or as a result of having had you as an instructor? How does what occurs in your courses empower your students to achieve the desired outcomes? And, in alignment with andragogy and the notion of empowerment, what choices is your learning experience providing for your learners? In addition to choices, an environment that fosters a sense of belonging can be empowering. According to Strayhorn (2018), sense of belonging refers to a student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group. Lee and Fogle (2020) found that diverse representation in course content helps learners feel like they belong. Building community among learners is important and enhances learner engagement, creating a superior learner experience in environments where students feel a sense of belonging, leading to greater satisfaction with their choice of institution and learning experience (Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Studies show that the more time and effort students invest in the academic and social opportunities available in a learning environment, the more enhanced their academic achievement, personal growth, satisfaction, and persistence will be (Chu, 2016).

Method

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) case studies allow for observational research that includes descriptive analysis of a single individual, group, or event. We utilized a process of reflective practice (Ganly, 2018) in four coaching sessions over 5 weeks. Reflective practice is an opportunity for practitioners to pause, reflect, and take notice of instructional practices that may benefit from further assessment, revision, and adaptation. For all sessions, the mentor, a leading teaching and learning practitioner, and the mentee, an instructor of psychology, engaged in professional discussions to explore Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices in two psychology courses. These four sessions, aptly named “DEI Studio,” due to their focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices, were intended for instructor development and as an opportunity to cultivate reflection, assessment, and then action in relation to instructional approaches, strategies, and practices with a focus on DEI. Specifically, the coaching sessions used a course mapping tool and the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework as a means of observing and assessing current course design and delivery. Case study as a design provided flexible opportunities for researchers to collect data, including, but not limited to, direct observation and unstructured interviewing.

Session 1 involved an overview of all sessions and offered an opportunity to pause and reflect on the DEI practices in use. Course mapping (Figure 2) and the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework (Figure 1) were introduced as the tools that would be utilized as the basis for assessment and application throughout the process to provide insights for the instructor. According to Beckham et al. (2017) course maps serve as tools providing a visual element, which can be useful for the design or redesign of courses. A course map can be used in backward design to represent the intended approach for assessing student outcomes, objectives, and goals. The course map goes beyond supporting course design by informing the alignment process for the various course components, such as the course activities, assignments, assessments, etc. The course map serves as a visual representation of a course and provides clarity and sets a transparent path to support student engagement and academic success. Session 2 focused on the course mapping tool. Its content was applied to the syllabi for General Psychology and Research Methods in Psychology. Attention for Session 3 was centered on the psychosocial aspects of course design. The W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework was introduced as a lens to view current teaching strategies with particular attention to equitable and inclusive practices around course content and to maximize each student’s engagement and assignment success. The fourth and final session centered on the mentee’s application of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework to psychology courses at a community college in California’s Bay Area and formed the basis of the case study design used in this study. All aforementioned sessions utilized reflective practice (Ganly, 2018) with mentor and mentee engaged in collaborative in-depth discussion, including elements of question and answer, to review and implement teaching best practices that address areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A subsequent anonymous student evaluation with six open-ended questions was conducted in two of the mentee’s courses, General Psychology ($n = 31$) and Research Methods in Psychology ($n = 28$), to discern if student experience, engagement, and success had improved based on enhanced practices.

Figure 2. *Course Mapping Tool*

| Course Map Sample Snapshot | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| CPU101: Introduction to Computer Basics | | | | |
| Course Learning Objectives: CO1: Gather, interpret, and critically evaluate information from a variety of information sources. CO2: Demonstrate and understand ways in which information plays a role in public administration decision-making. CO3: Critically evaluate sources of information. CO4: Recognize and articulate a research problem. CO5: Use and apply information effectively. | | | | |
| Week 1 Module Learning Objectives: 1. Confirm you know how the course is set up and where to get help. 2. Introduce yourself to the class. | | | | |
| Week 1 – Module 1 | Activities | Readings/ Assignments | Learning Materials | Assessments |
| | 1. Post to Introduction Activity 2. Read Chapter 1 3. Attend synchronous Zoom Class Session on X date at X time and provide an associated link | 1. Read & submit a confirmation post to the Syllabus and Course Expectations Agreement. 2. Complete Week One Discussion Board Forum Assignment(s) | Chapter 1: The Computer Age https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/from-the-plow-to-the-pill-how-technology-shapes-our-lives Research and Technology in Public Management Syllabus.docx Watch Video The relationship between technology and scientific research Esraa yousry TEDxMenouf Duration: 15:56 User: n/a - Added: 8/10/20 YouTube URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGHdJdVd1Qo | 1. Reply to three of your peer's instruction post 2. One page summary of Chapter 1 |

Results

Of the 59 anonymous online surveys offered to students in the two independent courses with no student redundancy, 36 surveys (66%) were returned with an 82% response rate in Research Methods in Psychology and a 42% response rate in General Psychology. Discrepancy in return rates may have resulted from the fact that both courses were offered 100% online; however, Research Methods in Psychology was offered 50% synchronously, where students met via video conferencing software four times a week, while General Psychology was offered completely asynchronously—students never met or saw one another for the duration of the course. Figure 3 highlights relevant student responses, organized by each W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework component.

Analysis and Recommendations

Students notice from one course to another the differences in instructional methods, course materials, pacing, organization, and requirements. Students also take note of their own personal experience in relation to these differences as shown by one student’s feedback: “during the welcoming week, the first thing I do is watch your video. Honestly, it is the best welcoming video I’ve had. I will never forget your advice ... because I found it very helpful.” Evidence from the student evaluations reported in this study are persuasive enough to encourage every instructor to examine their teaching practices closely for the presence of welcoming, holistic, open, liberating, and empowering elements (Figure 3). Every instructor could benefit from making adjustments to course structure and design to ensure that a positive W.H.O.L.E. experience is provided for students. Introducing or increasing instructional practices that are based on each of the components of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework can benefit both instructors and students by engaging students more fully, humanizing a course and its content, and leading to positive dividends of student retention and higher levels of student success (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *W.H.O.L.E. Experience Framework With Relevant Student Evaluation Comments*

Note: Thomas, M., The W.H.O.L.E. Experience Framework, 2021

Welcoming

- “I feel very welcomed, comfortable, and confident in class. I have since day one.”
- “Professor S. Thomas was very reassuring that we could all make it through the course. She was very kind and open to any questions and concerns and stayed after class answering all my questions.”
- “My experience of being welcomed into the course was great. I came into the class feeling scared because of the amount of work I would have to do, but the instructor assured me ... that everything was going to be fine and doable.”

Holistic

- “I feel very humanized by this course. I feel like I am working to within an inch of my studious life, in the absolute best possible way. I am being held to a standard that is both challenging and within my reach.”
- “I feel like I am a whole human being as well as being recognized as a student in the classroom from the check-ins.”
- “I liked that we were given a rundown of the assignments and their due dates from the start, that way we were aware of how much time we’d have to dedicate to the class.”

Open

- “I really liked how honest the professor was from the start in regards to the work load. I also appreciate how caring and genuine she is, specifically how willing she is to always answer questions and give feedback.”
- “The professor ... thoroughly explained all of the expectations and assignments.”
- “Going over the syllabus and constantly checking in with us definitely makes us feel like we aren’t alone in this course.”
- “An example of open communication is especially shown in her edits on our homework assignments, allowing students to know where to improve.”

Liberating

- “I like the idea of doing the survey before class to put us in groups. It lets us choose our own topic to work on and find classmates that have similar interests or thoughts.”
- “The teacher was very flexible when it came to unavoidable obstacles coming up.”
- “She explains what she wants very clearly and will further elaborate when needed.”
- “I have really appreciated that the professor allows us to create revisions from our drafts and eventually submit a final product that is cohesive with her edits.”

Empowering

- “[The course] seems designed to support students in learning and applying practical knowledge.”
- “I felt like I was reassured by the professor and by my peers that I can ask for help when needed.”
- “I can see the ramping up of higher point assignments where we can apply all we learned on smaller assignments.”

Welcoming

Extending a warm and authentic welcome to students on the first day and at the beginning of each class session can set the tone for the whole term. Instructors ought to consistently incorporate activities, reflections, or other design aspects into each course to encourage students to connect with each other and the instructor as soon as possible. Students recognize and appreciate assignments completed early in a term that connect them to others: “I had a really positive experience being welcomed into the course. The professor was able to connect us students really well via the discussion platform, and it’s nice being able to easily communicate with each other.” Welcoming can be especially important in an asynchronous online course where students never meet or see one another face to face. As an example, the addition of a welcome video and an online discussion for students to introduce themselves to others functioned to create a sense of belonging and welcome for students, as explained by one student: “I felt pretty welcomed into the [asynchronous] course where we were given an introduction assignment I was able to share about myself and also learn about my classmates a little bit. Responding to them also let me feel like it was a real class.” Using instructional time to develop a welcoming environment connects students to a course, engages students, is conducive to learning, and activates a student’s sense of belonging.

Holistic

Considering each student as a “whole human being” with competing commitments, demands, and desires that may affect an individual student’s performance is also important. A simple note added to the syllabus inviting students to share any barriers experienced during the term or a shift in language on the part of the instructor to indicate an understanding that students have concerns beyond classroom walls can help students feel recognized. As one student explained: “as a human with needs ... there are issues I deal with on a daily basis. I have commitments and life experiences that don’t pause for school but that doesn't mean school isn't important to me. This course does not stress me out when I think about working on the assignments for this course which makes my life much easier.” Advocating for and supporting students in and out of the classroom inspired a student to notice: “I actually feel like this learning format allows me to better exercise my own autonomy and feel like I can still show up to other areas of my life.” Additionally, a holistic approach on the part of the instructor conveys authentic caring to students: “I also see the weekly and constant announcements that tried to remind us that assignments are due, and it is a way that shows the instructor cares about the students.” Students tend to work harder in courses where instructors see and acknowledge their humanity.

Open

Developing positive student-instructor relationships in the classroom is imperative for learning. Teaching best practices always include the essential nature of clear, open, and effective communication between students and the instructor. Inviting student feedback shows trust, respect, and an authentic desire for the exchange of ideas, indicating that learning is a two-way street: “I think Professor Thomas has been open with students, letting them know that if her students have any issue, or any question they can contact her with confidence that they’re not alone in the class, and together they can find any solution.” In addition, good communication builds trust. Constructive and honest feedback on assignments from a trusted instructor is critical for students to improve their work. Student evaluation comments bear this out: “Personally, you have been giving me feedback on my ... paper assignments and it’s pretty important for success in this class” and “the feedback on

assignments is simple, to the point, and full of encouraging words that show your willingness and openness to communicating with students.” Additionally, inviting student input regarding course improvement is a way to communicate in an open way, as evidenced by the following student observation: “This course evaluation also demonstrates the instructor’s willingness to be an open communicator. By sending this evaluation out, the instructor demonstrates and encourages open communication in the class.”

Liberating

Students are grateful for an instructor who is not rigid, adjusts to student needs, and allows for student errors. This student evaluator said it best: “This flexibility also allows me to be less focused on losing points and more focused on learning and applying what I’ve learned to my life.” Including second attempts at assignments can be motivating for students: “We have the option to explain our understanding of our course material and learn from others. As for motivation to be a fully active student throughout this course, the professor requires participation in her class and has set the due date ... but the professor leaves the assignment open as a second chance option. I feel respected in this course and I believe the professor has done a great job in that aspect.” In addition, predictability can be liberating for students. It can be freeing for students to find that a course is organized and easily understood, as expressed here: “This course was very organized and concrete, and it was easy to understand the ... syllabus.” Furthermore, assessments can be quite stressful for students. Instructors who can offer multiple attempts at testing for students allow for greater retention of information, and this can also lead to stress reduction for students. One student wrote: “Flexibility that I see in the components of this course includes the multiple chances for the quizzes. I think this is also beneficial to the success in this class for me.” Another student commented: “Having the ability to take tests twice is very stress relieving and honestly makes me focus even harder on retaining as much information as I can in hopes to get it all right.” The liberating principle in the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework allows students to relax enough to focus, retain information, and ultimately, be more successful in a course.

Empowering

Students recognize when they are learning concepts, theories, and terminology that are relevant to their everyday lives. Deliberately interjecting curriculum and assignments that are pertinent to their experience functions to engage, enthuse, and motivate students (Chu, 2016; Strayhorn, 2018; Zimmerman, 2000). This can promote further study, maximize student effort, and increase attention to course-related content. Students learn better and begin to connect ideas when, as one student wrote, “It is relevant for me because the topics mentioned [in class] are things we experience every day.” Students thrive when the class, as one said, “feels deeply personal to my life.”

Many aspects of the framework work together. For example, holistic and liberating principles are both evident in this student comment: “I remember in the first discussion where students were introducing themselves, ‘flexibility’ was a key theme in people’s comments. They appreciated having the flexibility to learn on their own terms/time while still maintaining their lives outside of class.” Another student wrote: “The course also offers room for error and ways to make up errors and lost points.” This student expressed appreciation for the ability to make up for human mistakes and found freedom in recognizing the mistake and not being penalized for it. This is just one example of W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework principles working in tandem. The synergy created by incorporating all five principles of the W.H.O.L.E Experience framework into a course only enhances the overall positive student outcomes.

Conclusions

This study used a case study design and reviewed the implementation and application of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework in two psychology courses at a community college in California’s Bay Area. This framework contributes to the current goals of higher education that emphasize the implementation of

teaching practices that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion and that increase student retention and student success. The W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework does that by enhancing the course mapping tools, which focus on placing curriculum and content appropriately, and instead centers each student's experience in the learning process. This framework draws from several theories and research, such as the ENHANCE Learning Model, Andragogy, Significant Learning, Reflective Practice, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Sense of Belonging. It stresses the student experience as primary, or at least as an equal consideration in design. The increased focus on each student supports students gaining a sense of connectedness and the experience of feeling that they matter, ultimately fostering a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018).

Strengths of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework include:

1. Professional development opportunities involving an iterative structure, which can be applied to support continuous improvement
2. DEI principles become more accessible and applicable
3. An instructional preparation aide to evaluate syllabi and teaching strategies
4. A group and individual assessment tool for evaluation of DEI approaches in learning environments and continuing improvement

Limitations

The current study was not without limitations. This study was conducted in one community college with a relatively small sample size. While results seem promising, attempts at replication on additional campuses with a broad array of instructors, disciplines, and varying campus sizes and locations would serve to validate the widespread applicability of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework. In addition, due to a worldwide pandemic for the duration of the study, all course offerings were limited to asynchronous online courses or courses conducted through video conferencing applications.

Therefore, it is recommended that future studies continue to investigate tangible best practices for each element of the framework across a variety of campuses and teaching modalities. Furthermore, additional benefits of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework could be realized from considering alternate research designs. Studies that examine the correlational relationship of the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework elements in conjunction with self-esteem, motivation, engagement, learning, and student success would advance the understanding of the framework's impact. Conducting a pretest/posttest design, in which students report levels of any given variable before and after taking a course from an instructor who implements all elements of the framework during the term, could yield important findings.

It is important to note that while the W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework was implemented in psychology courses for this study, it is applicable in any discipline or educational modality, whether the instruction takes place online (synchronous or asynchronous), hybrid, or face to face. This is further supported by andragogy principles, represented throughout this framework and not bound to a specific discipline (Chan, 2010). Every effort on the part of instructors to enrich the student experience while they are engaged in the learning process is time well spent. The W.H.O.L.E. Experience framework principles give every instructor additional tools to consider every time they are designing or redesigning a course.

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