

## 60-Second SoTL

### Episode 82 – Belongingness during Work-Integrated Learning for Healthcare Students

#### Featured Article

O'Connor, Deborah A., Leah M. Stade, Cassidy Johnson, Simone Regnier, and Molly A. Whitlow. 2026. "Exploring Belongingness during Work-Integrated Learning for Healthcare Students in International Settings: The BeWIL Study." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 14: 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.14.13>

#### Transcript

(Music)

0:10

#### Jessie L. Moore:

What helps students feel like they truly belong in professional learning environments? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In "Exploring Belongingness during Work-Integrated Learning for Healthcare Students in International Settings: The BeWIL Study," Deborah O'Connor, Leah Stade, Cassidy Johnson, Simone Regnier, and Molly Whitlow examine how healthcare students experience belonging during work-integrated learning—or WIL—placements across institutions in the United States and United Kingdom. Their article appears in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, an open access journal, and it's part of a special section on work-integrated learning, featuring research from the Elon University Center for Engaged Learning's 2022-2024 research seminar.

1:05

WIL experiences—like clinical placements—are central to professional learning, giving students opportunities to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. But beyond skill development, these environments also shape students' sense of identity and belonging within their professions.

To explore these components of placements, the researchers used a validated survey instrument—the Belongingness Scale—Clinical Placement Experience—which measures three key dimensions:

- esteem, or feeling respected;
- connectedness, or relationships with others; and
- efficacy, or students' actions to build belonging.

They surveyed 79 healthcare students from three universities in the United States and the United Kingdom, with participants representing multiple healthcare professions and degree levels. The researchers analyzed both overall belongingness scores and differences across contexts and student characteristics.

1:59

Overall, students reported moderate to high levels of belongingness, suggesting that WIL can support students' professional identity development. Students frequently engaged in behaviors that foster belonging—like helping others and seeking support—and reported feeling respected by colleagues.

But the findings also highlight important nuances.

Students' sense of connectedness—their interpersonal relationships—were consistently lower than other dimensions. In other words, even when students felt competent and respected, they didn't always feel fully integrated into the social fabric of the workplace.

2:35

The study also found that longer placements—six weeks or more—were associated with stronger belongingness, likely because students had more time to build relationships and establish their roles.

Differences also emerged across contexts and identities. For example, belongingness varied by age group and gender in some settings, and cultural or institutional factors appeared to shape how students experienced inclusion and support.

These findings reinforce that belongingness isn't automatic—it's shaped by structures, relationships, and intentional practices.

3:10

So what can educators and partners do?

The authors suggest focusing on all three dimensions of belongingness:

- For Esteem, create welcoming environments where students feel respected and valued;
- For Connectedness, foster meaningful relationships through mentorship and inclusion in team interactions; and
- For Efficacy, encourage students to actively engage, ask questions, and contribute.

Importantly, responsibility for belongingness is shared—among students, educators, and workplace partners.

3:41

Ultimately, this study reminds us that belonging in healthcare placements is central to learning, identity development, and even long-term professional retention. As we design work-integrated learning experiences, we might ask not just *what* students are doing—but whether they feel like they truly belong while doing it.

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article.

4:04

(Music)

4:09

**Jessie L. Moore:**

Join us for our next episode of 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning. Learn more about the Center at [www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org](http://www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org).

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