

Connect

Action Research Project

Eva Feld



INTRODUCTION

Connect - You and Your Connections

About the project and me.

- About the correlation between **connecting** and **belonging**.
- Social Justice context: Inclusion and Diversity
- Course: LCF - SDT - MA Innovative Fashion Production
- Part of the teaching team, Student cohort: International only

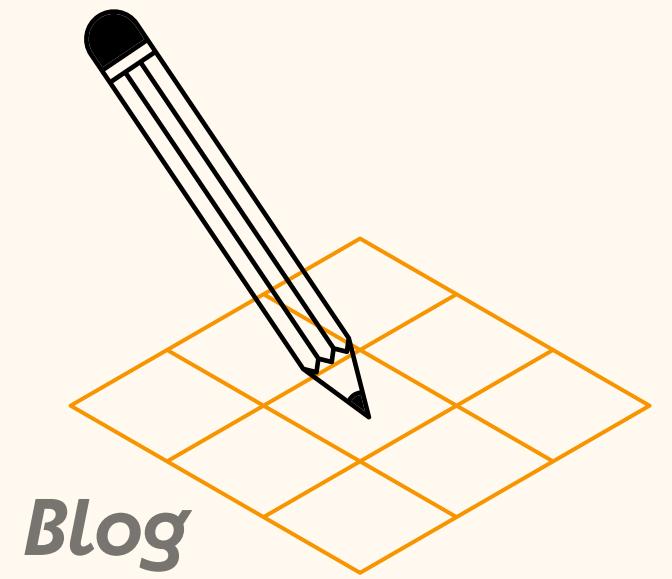
INTRODUCTION

Connect - You and Your Connections

About me.

- Former student on the course, 2021/22.
- Curious about my peers, keen on making friends.
- Reserved by nature .

INTRODUCTION



Connect - You and Your Connections

The idea.

- Stems from my own experience.
- Desire to meet like-minded people with similar interests.
- Originally planned as a connection-building event.

QUESTION

What are **meaningful connections** between MA Innovative Fashion Production (MA IFP) students and students from other MA courses, and do they **increase** the students' **feeling of belonging** to the UAL community?

RATIONALE

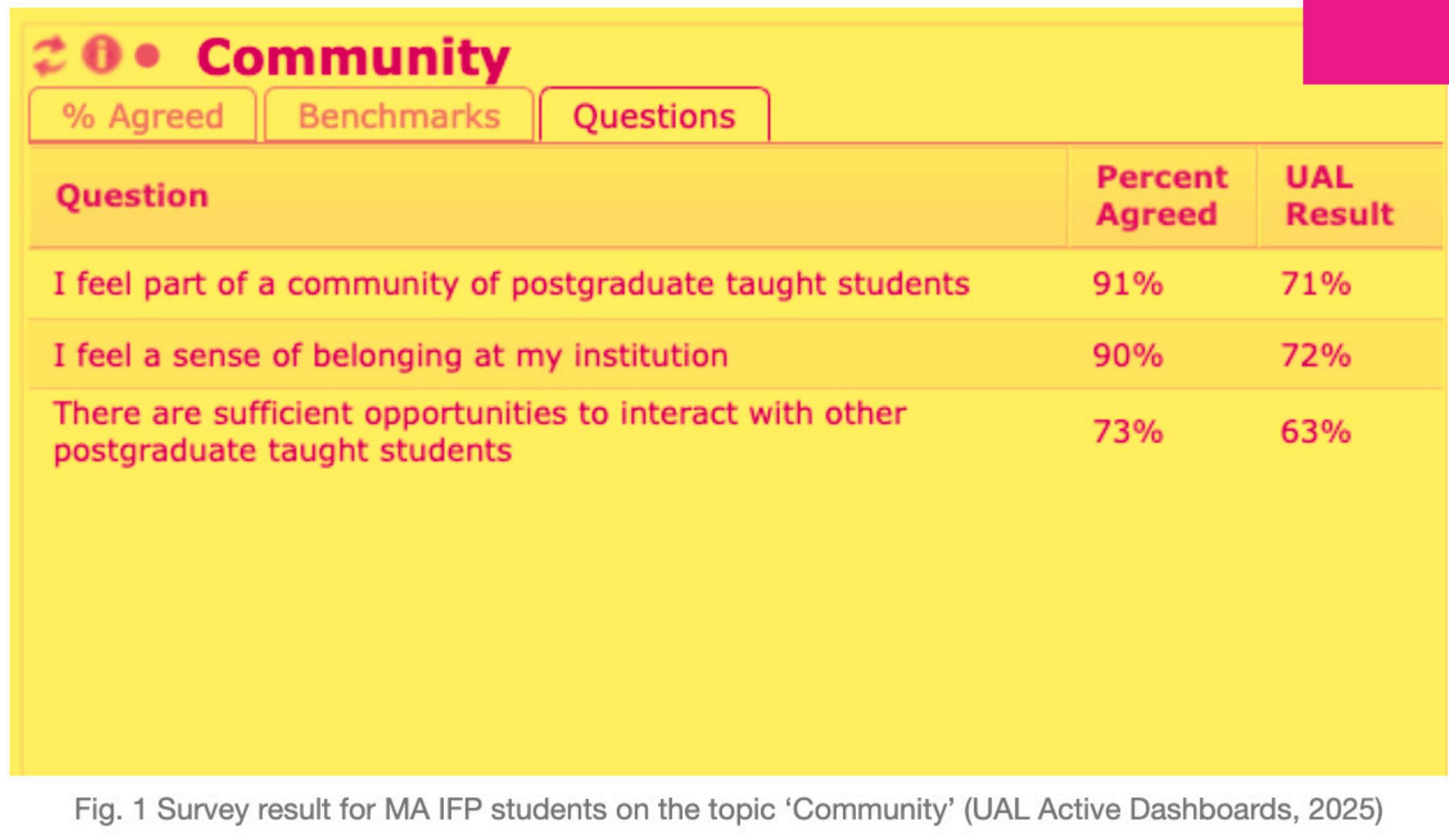


Fig. 1 Survey result for MA IFP students on the topic 'Community' (UAL Active Dashboards, 2025)

Community
There are sufficient opportunities to interact with other postgraduate taught students.

73% agree

RATIONALE



“Not to belong affects our physical and mental health. Even **the fear of not belonging** triggers a physical reaction and puts us into a fight and flight state”.

(Eastwood, 2022)

RATIONALE



“Humans are hard-wired with the desire to belong; belonging to family, a group of people, a community. It is existential for us now and historically.”

(Eastwood, 2022)

RATIONALE

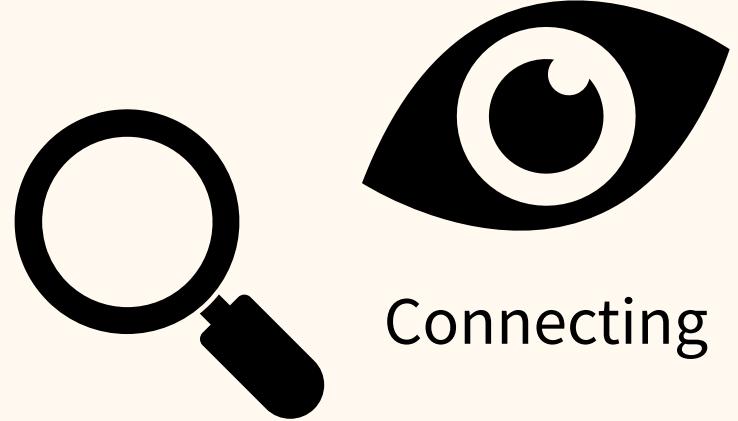


Our **core relationships**, the people we **choose** to surround ourselves with, are our core **network** and the place that we think of as belonging to.

RATIONALE

Reminder:
I want to support my students in making
meaningful connections.

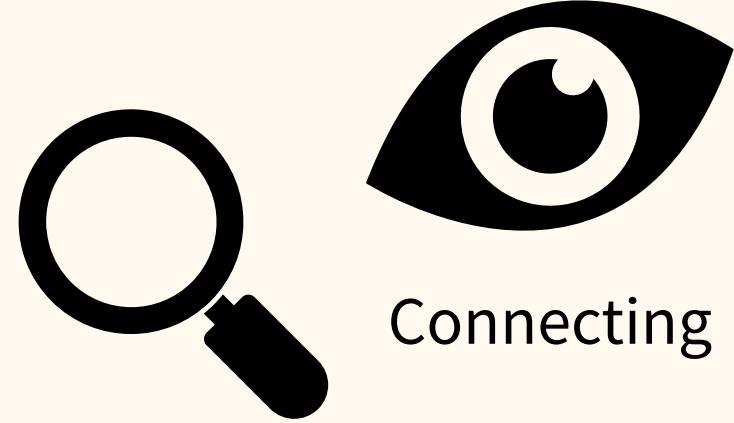
RATIONALE



Unfortunately, the term 'networking' is associated with **negative** connotations, "reeking of being inauthentic and manipulative".

(HBR, 2022)

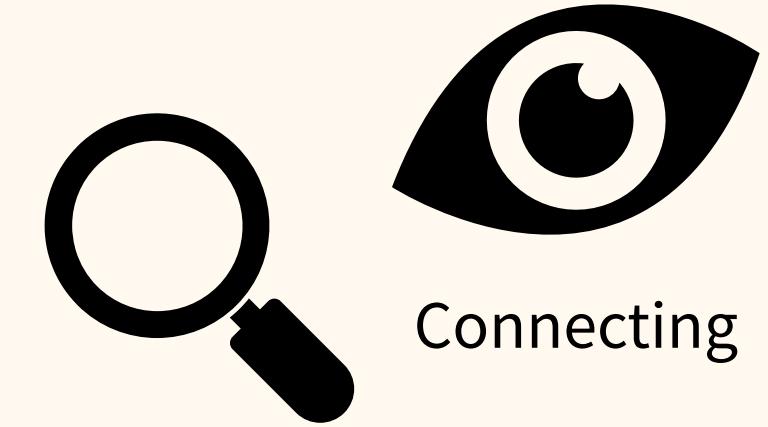
RATIONALE



However, recent research underscores that modern networking strategies are not only effective, but promote our **well-being**.

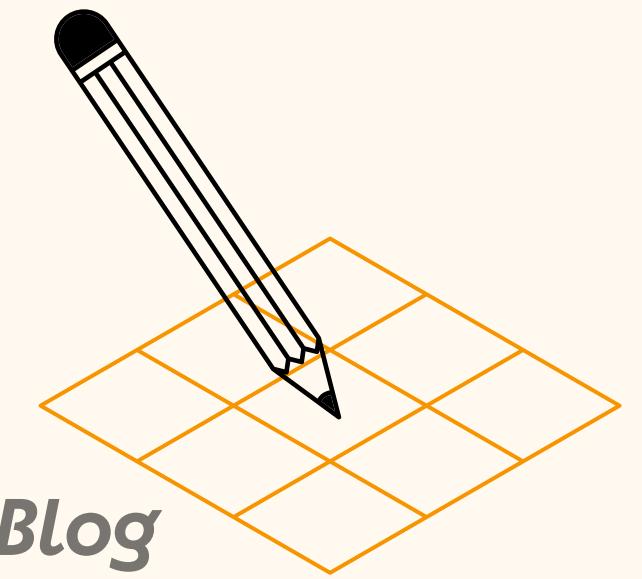
(HBR, 2022; Eastwood, 2022)

RATIONALE



"The people who rank top 20 in both **performance** and **well-being** have diverse but select networks made up of high-quality relationships with people who come from several different spheres [...]" (HBR, 2022,min. 15:17).

RATIONALE



I believe having an authentic, **meaningful** and effective **network** is directly related to our sense of **belonging**.

Action Research Methodology

- qualitative data collection & reflective/ reflexive practice
- taking a responsive evaluation approach
- Data collection tool & Intervention: **Focus group**
- Data analysis: **Constant comparative** method

Focus Group

- Screener: MA IFP, Y1 (3 months in), similar level of expertise
- Purpose: gain insights about what meaningful connections are to students
- November, 2025, London College of Fashion, 10th floor canteen, after classes from 5-6pm. The atmosphere was nicely relaxed.

METHODS

Data Analysis

Step 1: Constant comparative method: coding
Codes:

- 1 = question 1
- A/b = part a and b of one question if applicable (ie. 1a1)
- 1.1 = Question 1 insight 1

Reflection

Whilst I was proceeding with the coding on question two, I realised that I needed to capture more dimensions. I thought of Costello's (2003, p.4), approach and implemented his use of **bold** and underlining to capture agreement and differences. In addition I introduced **colour** to highlight additional dimensions.

Data Analysis

So, I added:

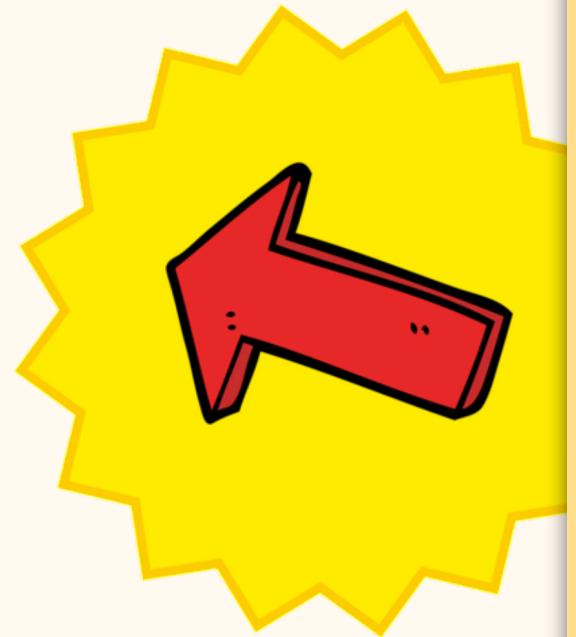
- Underlining = agreement, may have differences in wording
- **Pink** = same insight provided, however for differing reasons
- **Bold** = new reason on a same insight

METHODS

Data Analysis

- Then, produce an analytical summary (finding) for each focus group question

FINDINGS



Would you like to connect with Master students from other courses? If so, why?

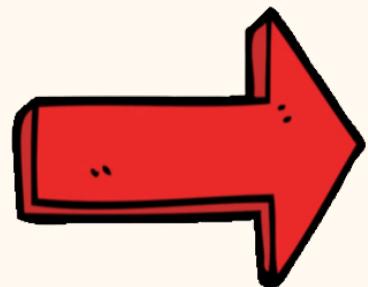
Which of your current connections are meaningful and valuable to you and why?

Which kind of relationships would you like to make during your studies?

Thinking about your desired University experience on your Masters course overall, what would make you feel connected to the student community?

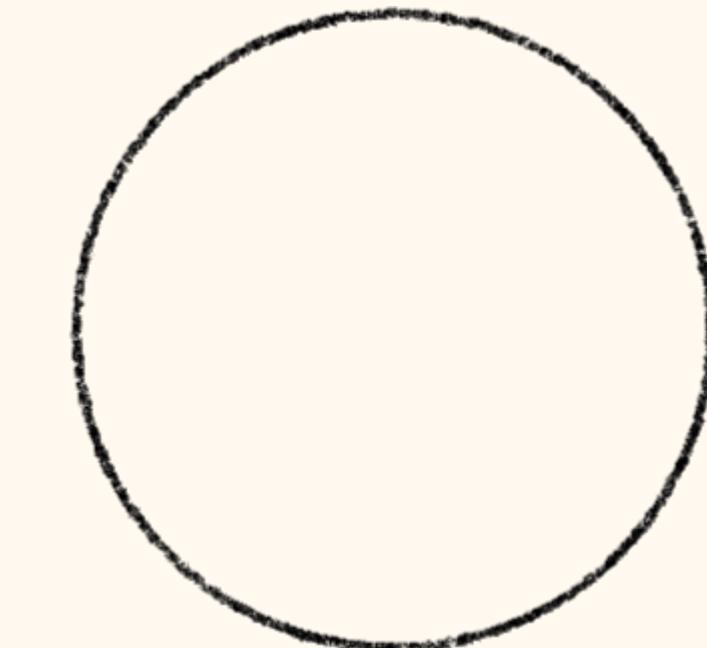
What does being part of a student community mean to you?

FINDINGS



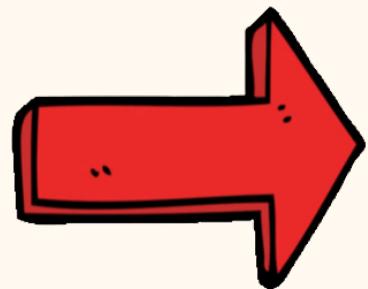
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100% would like connect to other MA students.

FINDINGS



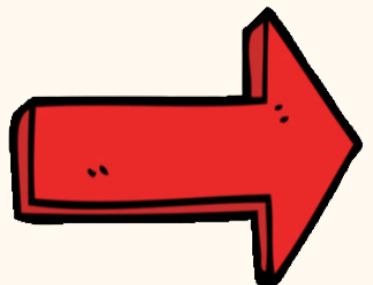
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Some would like to make connections that

- will be useful in their future
- provide inter-disciplinary experiences

FINDINGS



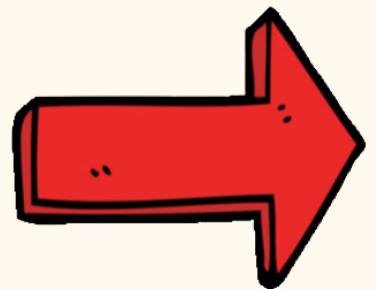
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One would like to

- meet someone from a course they weren't accepted for.
- to learn from others.

FINDINGS



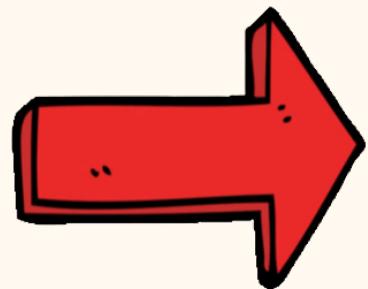
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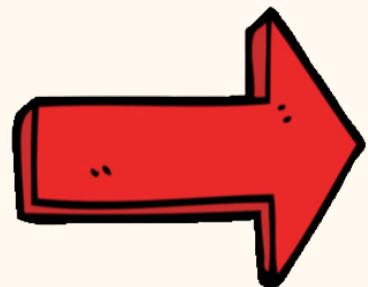
Which of your current connections are meaningful and valuable to you and why?



The students listed

- To other MA students
- To my room mate
- To my classmates
- To my friend in Manchester
- To a paid guide

FINDINGS



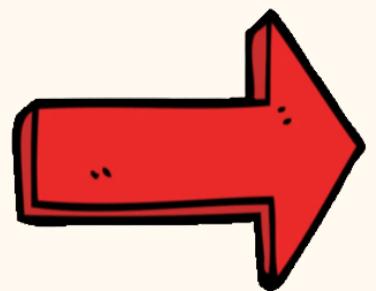
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As to why?

- Support
- Stress release
- For speaking English
- For helping me in London

FINDINGS

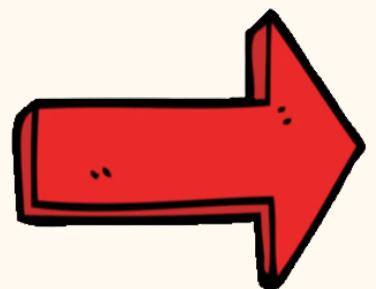


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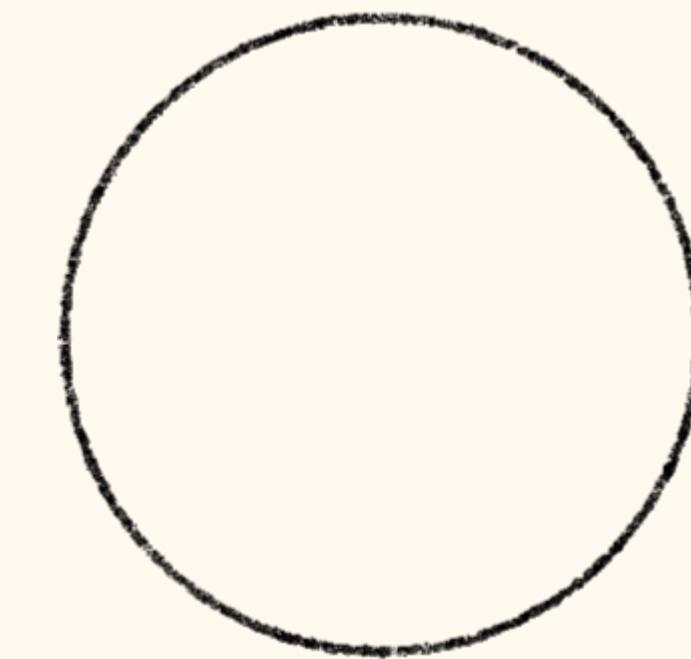
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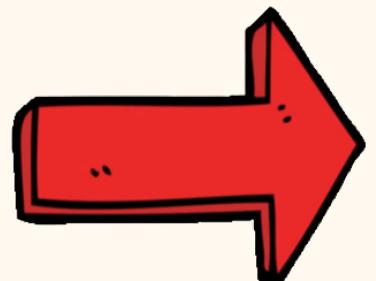
What does being part of a student community mean to you?



70 % would like to meet

- like-minded people
- who have the same research topic
- who might want to build a business with

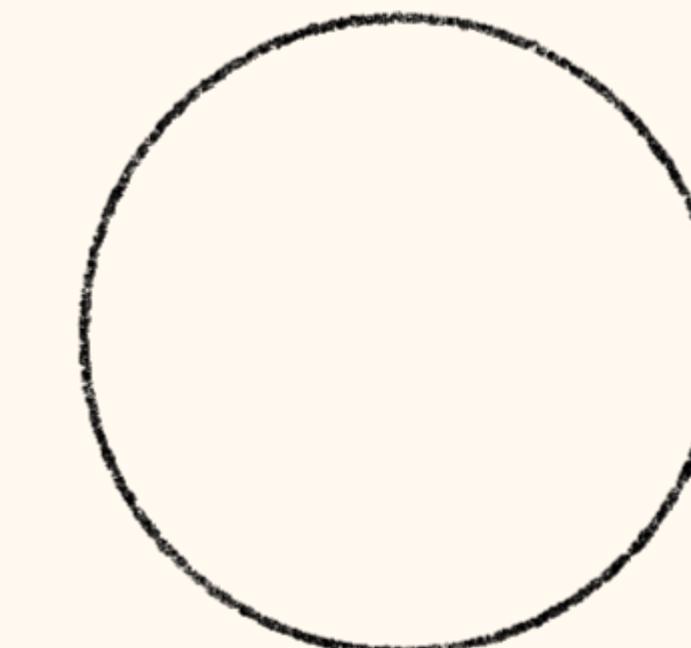
FINDINGS



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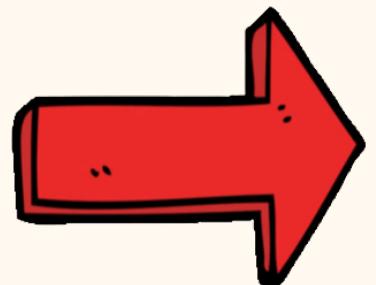
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30 % would like to find

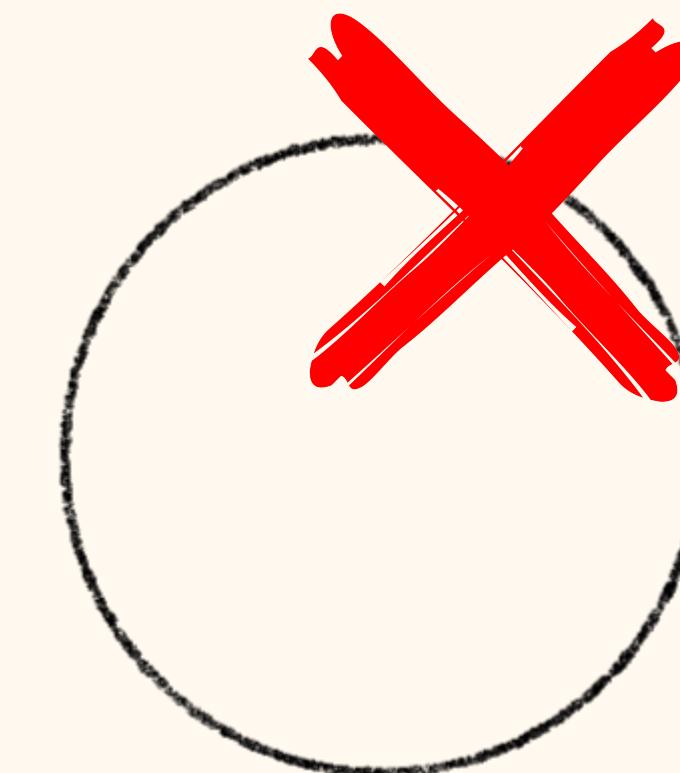
- a husband

FINDINGS



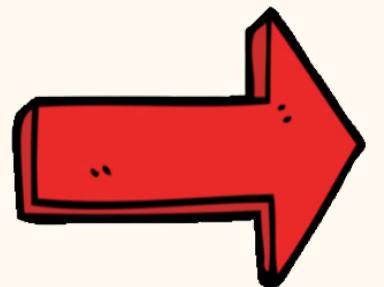
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With qualitative data, as the sample size is so small, it is better to use quantities in terms of all, a few, half, ...

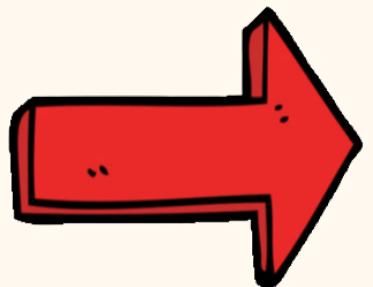
FINDINGS



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FINDINGS



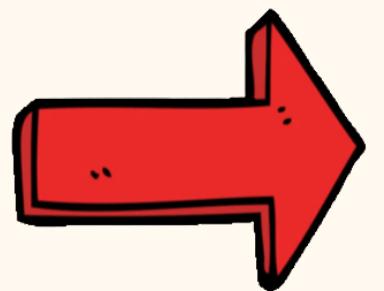
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Students wished for

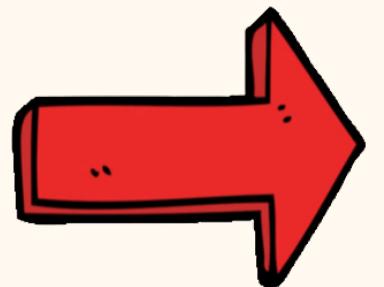
- knowing more people
- reciprocal support
- being respected
- connecting on a personal level

FINDINGS



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being part of a
student
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mean to you?

FINDINGS



What does
being part of a
student
community
mean to you?

" When I'm known and I
know others, then I feel
being part of a student
community".

Focus group participant (2025)

SUMMARY

What are meaningful connections between my and other Master students?

Research Question Part 1

Findings (with reservation)

- Meaningful connections are **both of practical and emotional** nature.
- Students are interested in meeting other MA students for various reasons (needs further sampling).
- Students are well aware of what connections they seek to make.

Summary of findings evaluated against the research question.

SUMMARY

[...] do they increase the students' feeling of belonging to the UAL community?

Research Question Part 2

Findings (with reservation)

- Most students stated they would feel part of a student community by **knowing more people**.
- The **quality** of connections are important.
- Secondary research indicates that **there is** a correlation of **connecting** and **belonging**.

SUMMARY

Survey

Maybe there are sufficient opportunities to interact with other students,?

73% seems too high for there not to be any opportunity.

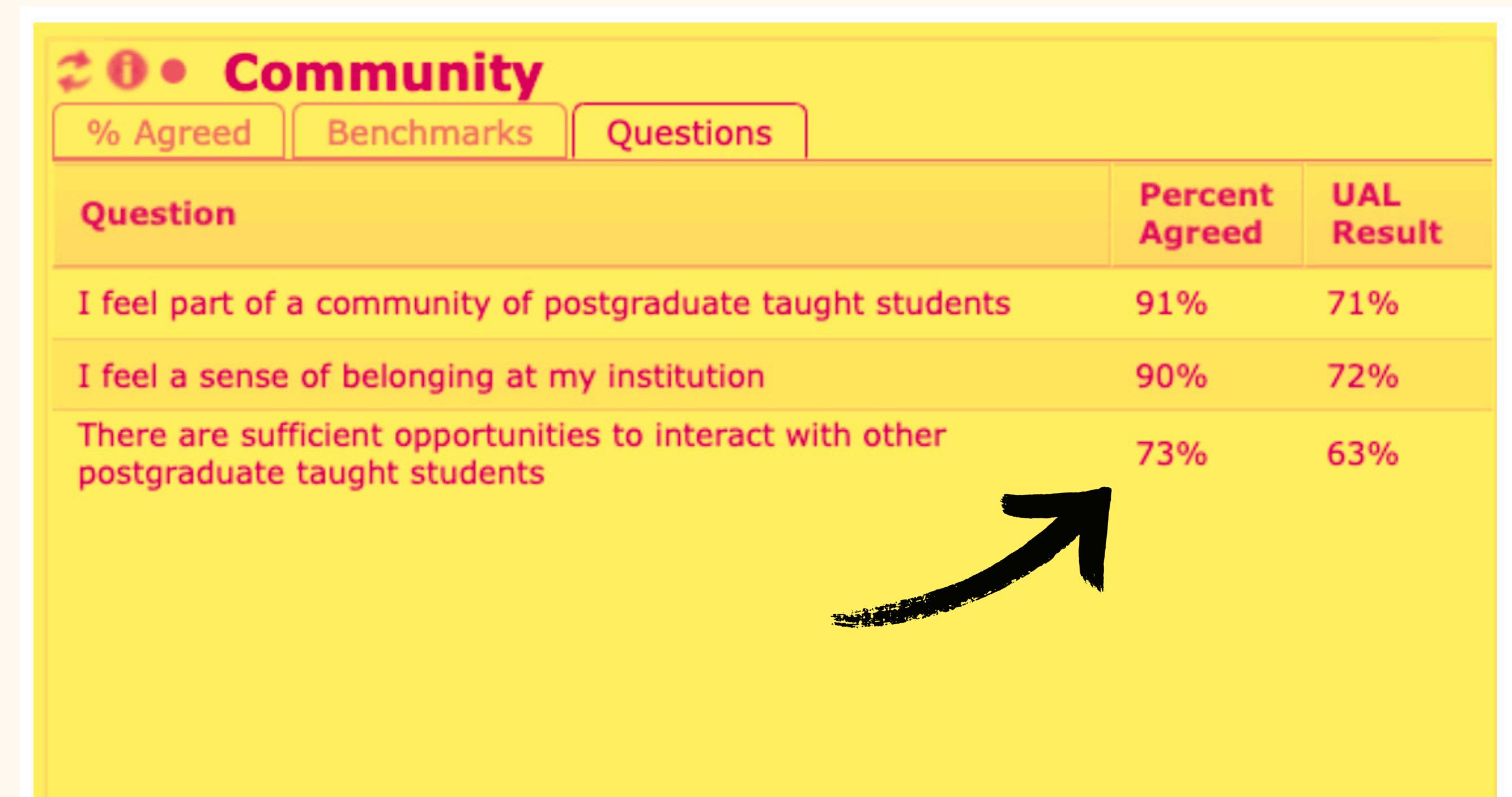


Fig. 1 Survey result for MA IFP students on the topic 'Community' (UAL Active Dashboards, 2025)

SUMMARY

Survey

- Which response options are the students given? (agree, not sure/ no preference, disagree)
- What would they answer if they weren't interested in meeting other students?
- Who made the survey?

LIMITATIONS

Project and methods

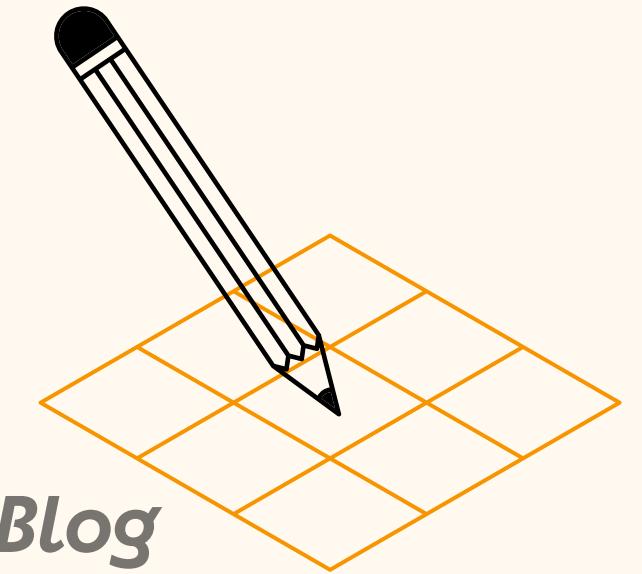
- Scope of project is very small.
- Data: not comprehensive, focus group needs at least 3 iterations (Krueger and Casey, 2000)

FUTURES

For the **future**, I propose to

1. Revise the focus group questions and conduct 2-3 more iterations.
2. Use the focus group findings for the purpose of preparing a questionnaire.
3. Conduct a practice-based action research project and test a workshop, that I created informed by this research.

FUTURES

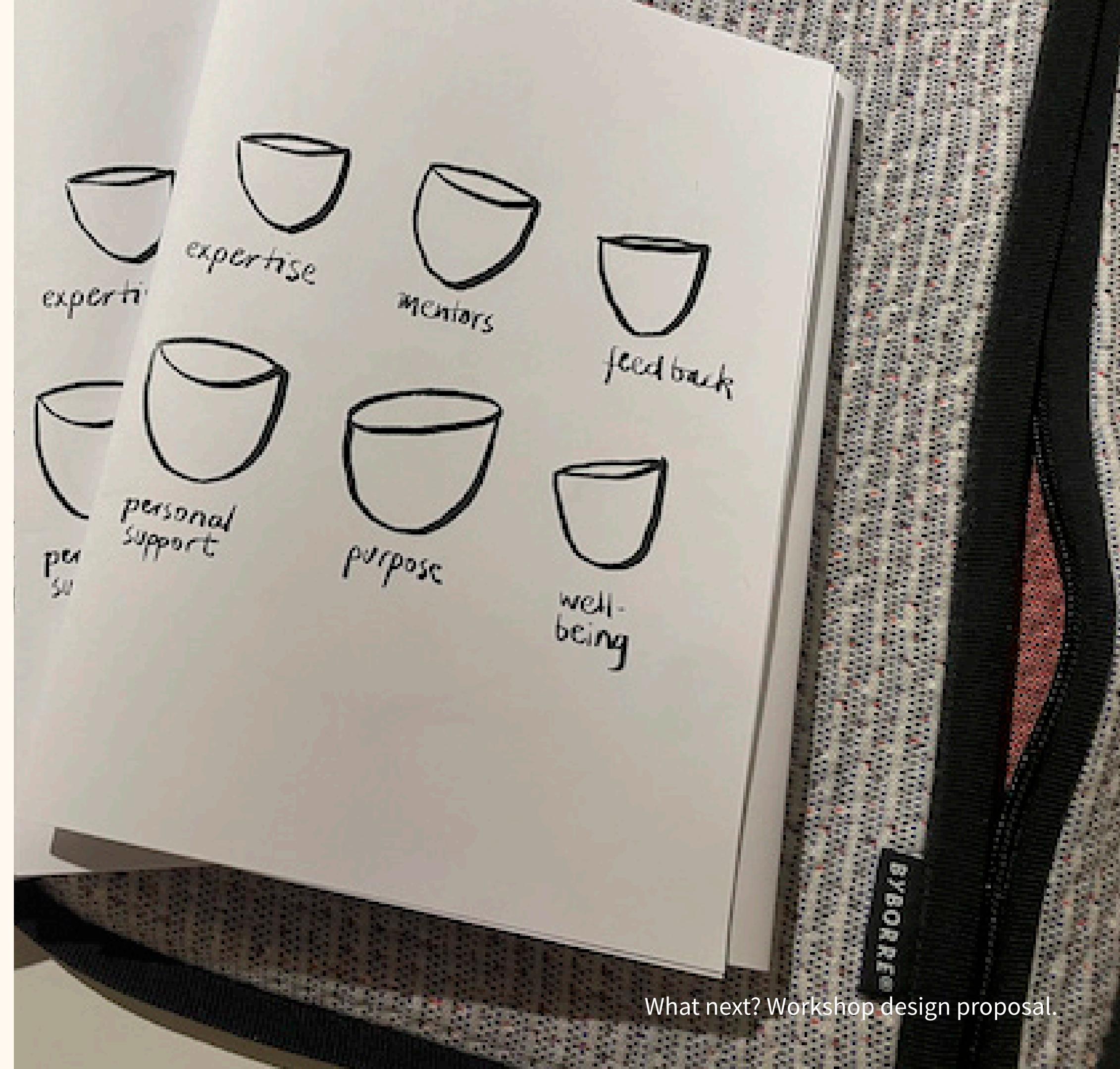


Future workshop proposal:

This session today is guided by the question “what do you think makes your network meaningful? “

FUTURES

I would like to start by giving you now a little bit of context based on my research into the latest paradigms of what networking means now.



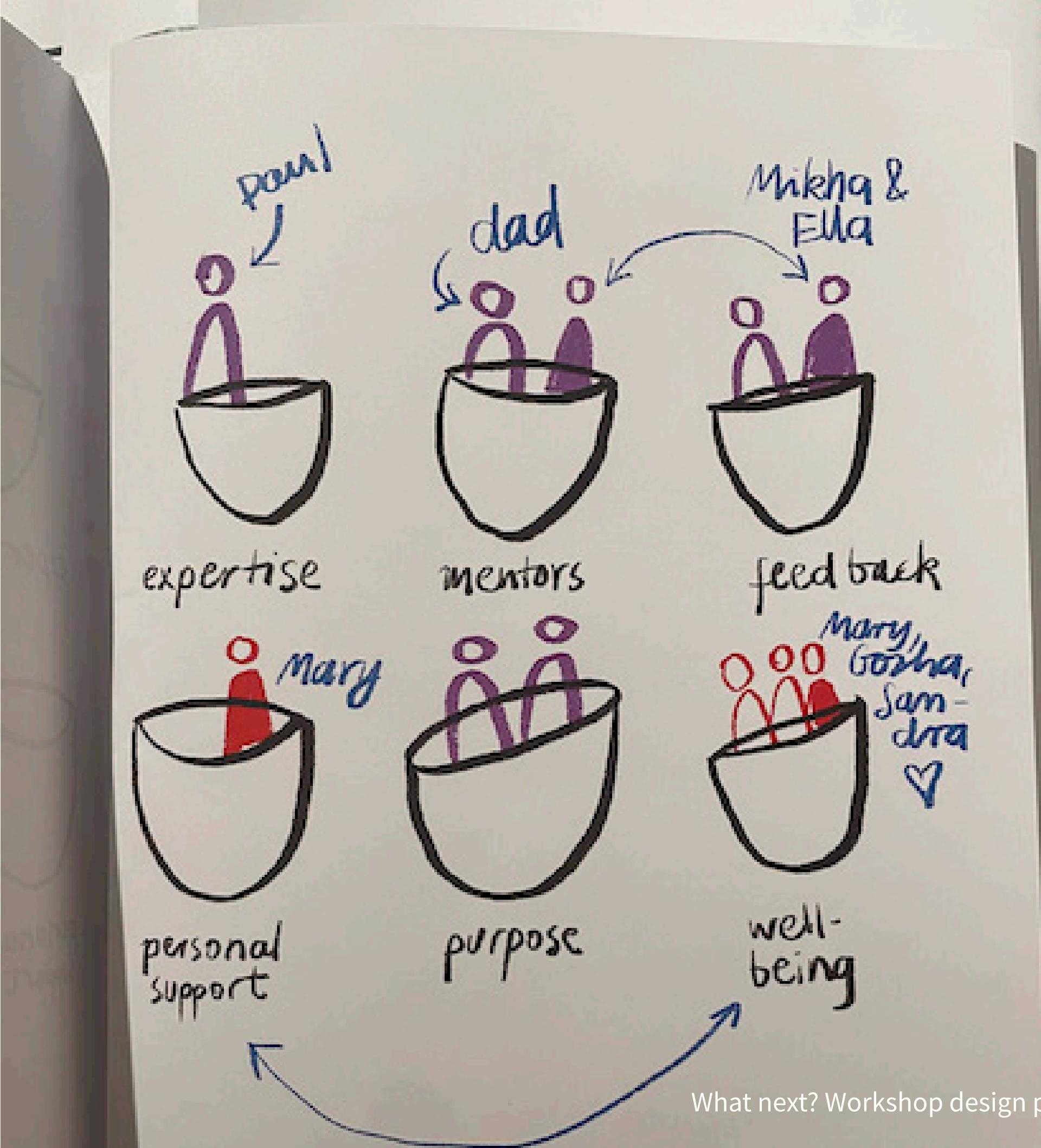
What next? Workshop design proposal.

FUTURES

6 critical kinds of connections

4 step process

Think about these six identifiers and think about your current connections. Sketch them into the provided category bowls. How evenly are yours distributed?

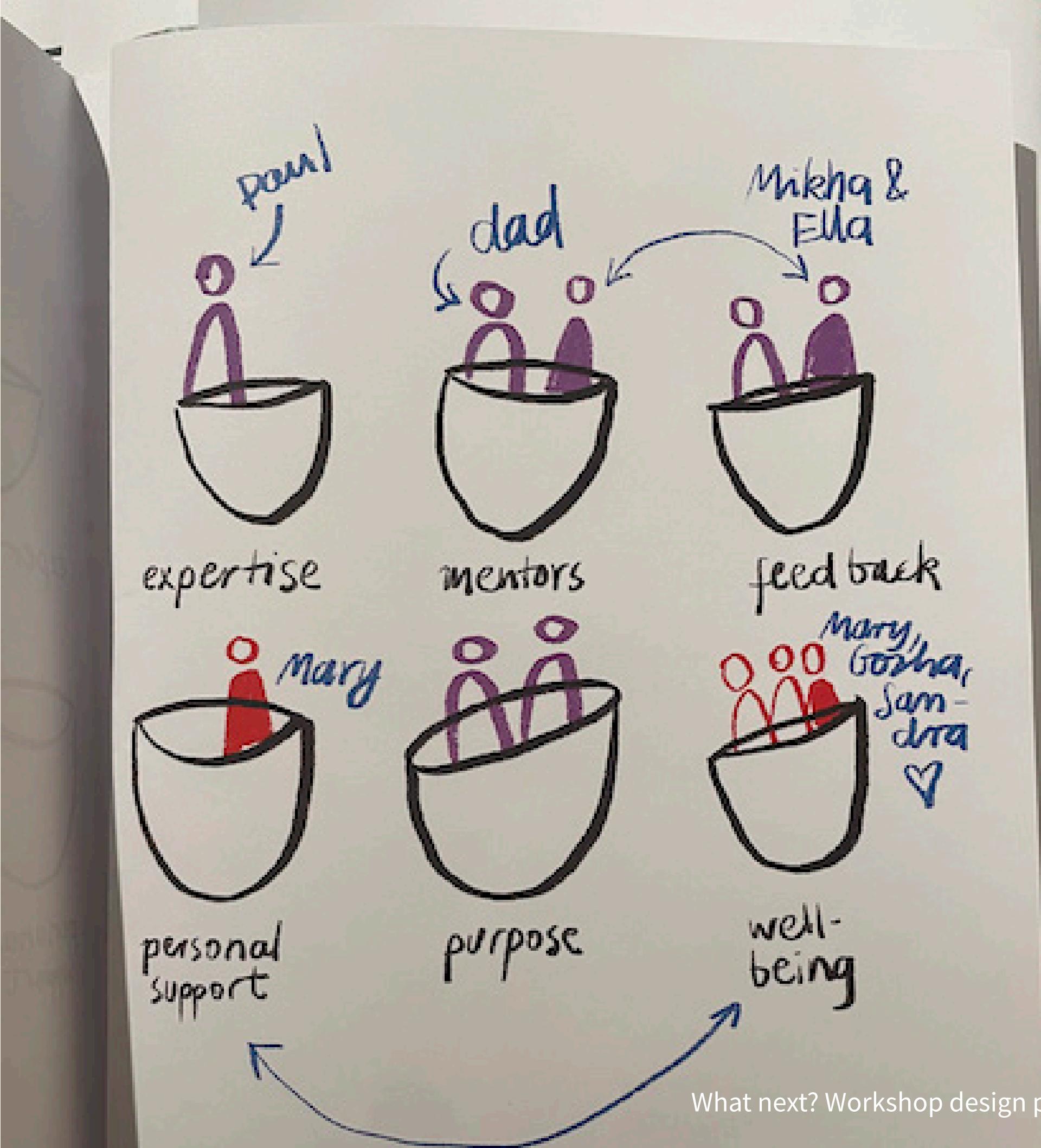


FUTURES

6 critical kinds of connections

4 step process

Now I would like you to write down three goals for the next 6 months, such as "I would like to become better in academic writing" or I'm really interested in capsule wardrobes,

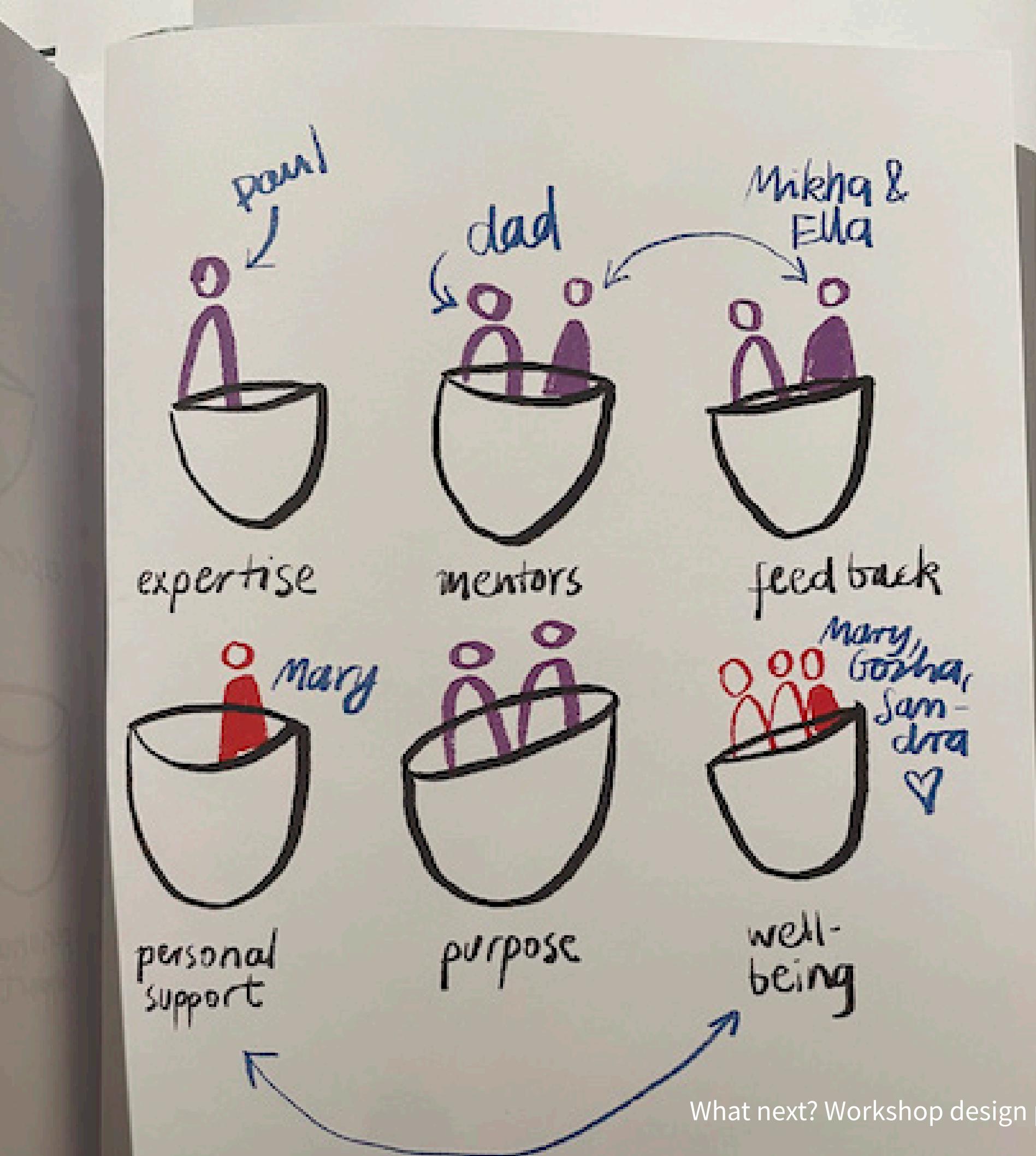


FUTURES

6 critical kinds of connections

4 step process

customised avatars... Who would you need to help you with those? You can provide names or roles or characteristics of people.



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