Review Report

This paper addresses an important and timely topic, examining student belonging in a masters programme with a unique teaching setup that lacks a stable geographic classroom environment. The research tackles a relevant issue for geoscience education, and the paper is well-written with clear presentation of results that fits well within the scope of Geoscience Communication.

Opportunities for Enhancement

Strengthening the Methodological Foundation The methodology section would benefit from expansion to help readers fully appreciate the approach's value. Consider elaborating on why this particular method is well-suited to your research questions and how it provides unique insights. The coding process, which forms the foundation of your compelling findings, deserves more detailed explanation to help readers understand its rigour and reliability. Moving some of the limitations discussion from section 4.4 into the methodology would provide helpful context about methodological choices. This additional detail would strengthen confidence in your interesting findings.

Clarifying the Case Study's Contribution Your case study offers valuable insights that could be made even more impactful with clearer positioning. Consider expanding the discussion of which findings stem from the unique characteristics of your programme versus those that might apply more broadly to geoscience education. This would help readers better understand the transferability of your results and appreciate what makes geosciences education distinctive in fostering belonging. Strengthening the connection between the programme's specific properties and your theoretical framework would enhance the paper's contribution.

Enhancing Organisation and Contemporary Context The introduction provides a solid foundation that could be strengthened with additional recent references to position your work within current scholarship. Consider clarifying the rationale for the current section organisation, particularly the relationship between sections 1, 2, and 4.3, to help readers follow your argument more easily. The conclusions, whilst identifying important patterns, could be developed further to provide more specific insights and recommendations that build on your valuable findings.

Suggestions for Further Development

Figure 1 Refinement A small adjustment to have the arrow point to "Belonging is achieved" would better reflect that belonging is possible throughout the intersection of Availability and Ability circles, with Motivation being the activating factor.

Expanding the Belonging Framework Section 4.1 provides excellent insights into the social dimensions of belonging. Consider acknowledging that whilst students emphasised social aspects (which is itself an interesting finding), belonging also

encompasses connections to science content, academic environments, and geographic settings—dimensions you explore thoughtfully in other sections. This would highlight the comprehensive nature of your belonging framework.

Inclusive Learning Considerations The 'Ability to belong' section presents an opportunity to discuss how the programme could support students with diverse learning needs. Consider incorporating perspectives on adaptive education practices and multi-modal learning experiences, which could strengthen your recommendations. Relevant recent work includes:

- Spaeth, E., and Pearson, A. (2023). A reflective analysis on neurodiversity and student wellbeing: conceptualising practical strategies for inclusive practice. J. Perspect. Appl. Acad. Pract. 11, 109–120. doi: 10.56433/jpaap.v11i2.517

- Heron, P.J., F. Crameri, E.F. Canaletti, D. Harrison, S. Hashemi, P. Leigh, S. Narayan, K. Osowski, R. Rantanen, and J.A. Williams (2025), Art, music, and play as a teaching aid: applying creative uses of Universal Design for Learning in a prison science class. Front. Educ. 10:1524007. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1524007

Overall Assessment

This paper makes a valuable contribution to understanding student belonging in innovative educational contexts. The unique teaching setup provides an excellent opportunity to generate insights relevant to the broader geoscience education community. With some enhancements to methodological detail, clearer positioning of the case study's broader implications, and more specific conclusions, this work could provide important guidance for educators designing programmes that foster student belonging. The research addresses real challenges in geoscience education and offers a solid foundation for advancing our understanding of how students develop connections to their academic communities.