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Creating a culture of belonging in a school context

EDUCATIONAL & CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

VOLUME 36, NUMBER 4

Guest Editors

Kelly-Ann Allen, Christopher Boyle & Sue Roffey

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Editorial

Kelly-Ann Allen, Christopher Boyle and Sue Roffey

SO due to the unprecedented response to our call for papers on the topic of ‘School Belonging’, a decision was made to publish a second volume dedicated to this increasingly recognised issue. In the editorial of 36(2), 2019, for *Educational and Child Psychology* – the first issue on ‘School Belonging’ – it was noted that one in four pupils do not feel they belong to school (OECD, 2017). By and large we can anticipate which young people these are likely to be – those who do not excel in academic subjects and are seen as lowering the average standard scores, those with additional educational needs, those who are non-compliant or hard to manage, and those who are ultimately excluded from their school settings.

Gill and colleagues (2017) note that school exclusion in England signals a critical concern for our communities:

Excluded children are the most vulnerable: twice as likely to be in the care of the state, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and 10 times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems. (Gill et al. for IPPR, 2017, p.1)

It appears that the figures for formal school exclusion are underestimated. Despite only 6685 reported exclusions, over 48,000 children were being educated in off-site units that cater for excluded students.

The report for the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) in May 2019 (YouGov, 2019) on off-rolling students highlights issues with modern education in the UK. Off-rolling is arguably a subversive form of exclusion and the informal removal of students. It might

be suggested to parents that the school do not have the resources to meet their child’s needs. It is difficult to estimate how many young people come into this category, but the report finds as many as one in four teachers state that off-rolling occurs in their schools. It is more prevalent in circumstances where parents are less likely to know their rights and schools are struggling with both poor behaviour and low academic achievement.

In an educational climate of school exclusion and off-rolling, notions of school belonging have never been more important. School belonging is critical to psychological wellbeing and those who feel rejected from school may well seek to belong elsewhere (Allen & Kern, 2017). This may be in places that thrive on ‘exclusive’ belonging, where the solidarity of the group is maintained by a demand to demonstrate loyalty to leaders, possibly by violent or criminal action, members are positioned as superior to others, and outsiders may be dehumanised. The evidence of this is apparent both in gangs and extremist groups (see Roffey, 2013; Roffey & Boyle, 2018). The *Timpson Review of Exclusions* (Timpson, 2019) reinforces the point that excluded students are more vulnerable to criminal gangs and proposes over 30 recommendations to help keep pupils in school.

Positive action is needed to foster inclusive belonging for students at school (Allen et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2016). This goes beyond football teams and school uniforms and happens in the day-to-day interactions that either make a student feel welcomed and valued or a drain on the school’s resources. Positive relationships across the school are the crux of this endeavour. As we can

see by the work described in many of the articles in both special issues on school belonging, including the articles before us in this present issue, there are educators and schools doing their best to ensure that every student believes that they matter, often against a backdrop of incongruent policy demands.

The current issue, 36(4), includes seven articles that explore school belonging. It is this deeper dive into the research in this area that will provide solutions and opportunities to best create positive educational climates for all students.

The social experiences and sense of belonging in adolescent females with autism in mainstream school by Myles and colleagues investigates social experiences and sense of school belonging in females with autism spectrum disorder. This study revealed that females with autism experience specific social difficulties in school, and their sense of school belonging can be improved through key friendships and social competencies. The study also found that the female participants in the study seek social connections and form friendships in the same manner as females who are not diagnosed with autism.

'School belonging in adolescents: exploring the associations with school achievement and internalising and externalising problems', by Arslan, aimed to examine the psychometric properties of the School Belongingness Scale (SBS), and determine how sense of school belonging affects achievement and mental health outcomes among elementary school students. The findings of the study indicated that the SBS is an effective and robust assessment tool for measuring elementary school students' sense of school belonging and showed that school belonging is a strong predictor of school achievement and youth mental health.

'Fostering a sense of belonging at an international school in France: An experimental study', by Dunleavy and Burke, evaluated the effectiveness of a classroom-based peer intervention on 55 fourth and fifth

grade students' sense of belonging and wellbeing. Using the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) and the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) the study revealed significant improvement in participants' sense of school belonging and life satisfaction.

'Wellbeing in international schools: Teacher perceptions', by Wigford and Higgins, explored teacher perceptions of wellbeing in international schools using a mixed methods approach. Results showed that international schools provide a unique lens to understanding wellbeing and that appreciation, relationships and belonging were found to be effective in counteracting negative factors such as weak leadership, workloads and lack of resources.

'My class needs my voice: The desire to stand out predicts choices to contribute during class discussions', by Gray, Yough and Williams, discussed the role of standing out in a classroom and provided evidence that the desire for distinctiveness can lead to positive achievement behaviour. The findings of this study urge educators to encourage opportunities for distinctiveness and diversity through appropriate teaching strategies.

"How do I know that I belong?" Exploring secondary aged pupil's views on what it means to belong to their school', by Shaw, investigated student perceptions of belonging through semi-structured interviews and quantitative means. Findings of the study revealed that students primarily associate belonging with familiarity and identification with others and the school as well as reciprocity of relationships. This study reaffirmed the complex and multifaceted nature of belonging; it also highlights the importance of listening to students' views in order to effectively promote a sense of belonging to school.

And finally, 'Agency and belonging: Transformative actions that schools can take to help create a sense of place and belonging for children and young people', by Riley, discussed the findings of two qualitative studies about belonging and exclu-

sion. Findings showed that fostering trust, agency and positive community perspectives are key to developing a sense of belonging in schools. Involving young people as student researchers can help develop their sense of agency, belonging and connection to the community.

Taken together, it is clear that research on school belonging is critical for positive outcomes for students. It is recognised that the various forms of metricisation of schools indirectly contributes to poorer wellbeing in students as finite school resources are taken up by concentrating on exam results (Hardy & Boyle, 2011). Students being supported in school so that their needs are met despite the complexities of school infrastructure (Anderson & Boyle, 2014; Boyle 2007) is a laudable goal. What the articles in this second special issue on school belonging

and contemporary belonging research highlight is that not only is this area of psychology under researched but the importance of belonging in school can sometimes be underplayed.

Just as recent groups in the UK and elsewhere around the world have called for a 'climate emergency', the editors of this special issue suggest that with such a large portion of students not feeling a sense of belonging to school, it is time to declare a 'belonging emergency' and allocate resources appropriately to ensure that the school experience for children and young people is positive and inclusive.

**Kelly-Ann Allen, Christopher Boyle
and Sue Roffey**

Special Issue Editors

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The social experiences and sense of belonging in adolescent females with autism in mainstream school

Olivia Myles, Christopher Boyle & Andrew Richards

Aim(s): *This qualitative study explored the social experiences and sense of belonging of adolescent females with autism in mainstream schooling.*

Method/rationale: *The research explored the views of eight adolescent females with autism. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the ways in which the students experience a sense of belonging and exclusion in school; and what they feel would support them socially.*

Findings: *The findings suggest that key friendships, understanding and perceived social competence are important for adolescent females with autism in developing a sense of belonging in mainstream school. Adolescent females with autism are motivated to form a sense of belonging in school, but they also experience pressure to adapt their behaviour and minimise their differences in order to gain acceptance.*

Limitations: *This study represents a small sample of adolescent females with autism, their parents and school staff. Further replication is needed before the findings can be generalised to other females with autism in mainstream school.*

Conclusions: *The current study addressed an identified gap in the literature by seeking the first-hand views and experiences of adolescent females with autism in mainstream school. Consistent with prior research, the findings suggest that adolescent females with autism are motivated to seek social contact and form friendships in the same way as females without a diagnosis of autism. The findings also highlight the specific social difficulties experienced by females with autism and the way in which this can add to their feelings of exclusion in the school environment.*

Keywords: *school belonging; autism; female students; educational psychology; inclusive education*

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been an increased awareness that autism spectrum disorder (henceforth referred to as ‘autism’) presents differently in males and females (Nichols et al., 2009; Tierney et al., 2016). Females with autism are better able to mask their difficulties (Gould & Ashton-Smith, 2011) and tend not to receive a diagnosis until a later life stage, compared to males (Begeer et al., 2013). Missed or late diagnosis could be associated with increased social isolation and greater risk for mental health difficulties within this population (Wilkinson, 2008). With the majority of research to date using predominantly male samples (Lai, 2015), there is little known about the first-hand

experiences of females with autism, and how to support their social and emotional wellbeing most effectively.

Autism awareness in schools has increased significantly over the past two decades; however, it is suggested that teachers are less aware of how autism presents in females and how to support their needs (Moyses & Porter, 2015). The social impairments, isolation and social exclusion of females with autism can increase the likelihood that they fall ‘under the radar’ in the school environment (NASEN, 2016, p.10). Due to the more subtle presentation of symptoms in females with autism, this could mean they do not receive the social and emotional support they require.

This is supported by research studies, which identify a need for further exploration into issues for adolescents with autism that are specific to females (Cridland et al., 2014; Tierney et al., 2016).

The current study aims to consider this gap in the literature by exploring, first hand, the social experiences of adolescent females with autism in a school setting.

Sex differences in autism

Autism is included within the International Statistical Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11; WHO, 2018). The prevalence of autism has increased gradually over the past four decades and it is now estimated to affect approximately one percent of the population (Baron-Cohen et al., 2009). One of the earliest descriptions of autism emerged from the work of Kanner (1943), who identified a number of shared characteristics in a sample of 11 children. He suggested that these children were displaying early infantile autism. Kanner's sample consisted of eight males and three females, and from this point onwards, research into autism has tended to include predominantly male samples. This may have been due to the presumption that autism affected more males than females. However, it may be that the current understanding of the condition is biased towards males, which results in females going undiagnosed (Dworzynski, et al., 2012).

Presentation of autism in males and females

The brain differences theory (Greenberg et al., 2018) suggests that sex differences in autism are the result of differences between the female and male brain structure, as well as patterns of activation and hormones. Baron-Cohen's (2002) extreme male brain theory proposes that male brains are naturally programmed to understand and build systems, while female brains are better at empathising. Therefore, it is proposed that females are less susceptible to autism because genetic profile makes them more

socially competent. This implies that autism is likely to present differently in females compared to males, due to their superior empathy and social skills (Baron-Cohen, 2002). It could also explain why females are more likely to receive a diagnosis of autism later than males.

A number of studies suggest that there is a difference in the social presentation of males and females with autism. For example, Hsiao et al. (2013) found that male children with autism were less socially emotional, less socially aware and had fewer autism traits overall than female children with autism. Meanwhile Head et al. (2014) found that, compared to males with and without autism, females were more likely to have close, empathetic and supportive relationships with others, regardless of whether they had a diagnosis of autism.

The developmental trajectory of males and females

There are differences in the developmental trajectories of males and females from an early age. Female infants have been found to demonstrate more prosocial behaviour than male infants (Takahashi et al., 2015), to have more advanced speech, and to have better social imitation skills (Rivet & Matson, 2011). However, this is often not recognised by research into sex differences in autism. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the expression of autism in females is significantly influenced by their stage of development in relation to the demands of the social environment. In their early years, females with autism have been found to show less impaired social communication than males with autism (Rivet & Matson, 2011). However, they tend to demonstrate greater difficulty with friendships than males with autism as they enter adolescence; this being a period during which there are increased social demands and female friendships become highly dependent on communication, empathy and social sensitivity (Kopp & Gillberg, 2011). It may therefore be that the symptoms of females with autism are

more intense and expressed more obviously at a later stage of development. This highlights the need to consider the impact of the social environment and expectations on the social functioning of adolescent females with autism.

The ‘female camouflage effect’

It is suggested that females with autism have a greater need for social contact and interaction than males with autism, which motivates them to learn ways of appearing socially-typical (Hsiao et al., 2013). Gould and Ashton-Smith (2011) propose that females with autism are able to give the impression that they have well-developed social skills by watching and mirroring the behaviour of others. There is a growing body of research into the ability of females with autism to camouflage their difficulties specific to the characteristics of autism in this way. Some of this evidence is based on anecdotal accounts such as that of Holliday Willey (2015), who describes the effort she put into ‘pretending to be normal’ for much of her life. More recently, studies have begun to directly examine social camouflaging in females with autism. Tierney et al. (2016) interviewed adolescent females with autism and found that camouflaging was a strategy that they commonly used to make and maintain social relationships. Hull et al. (2017) obtained similar findings from their research based on adults with autism, which suggested that motivations for camouflaging included the desire to fit in and to build connections with others. Whilst these studies provide useful insights into the function and nature of camouflaging, they do not consider differences in camouflaging behaviours between males and females.

Rynkiewicz et al. (2016) suggest that one of the ways in which females with autism camouflage their social difficulties is through their non-verbal communication. This research, based on a Polish sample, found that female children with autism used physical gestures more vividly and noticeably than male children with autism. However,

the females with autism performed worse than males with autism on a test which required them to identify emotions depicted in photographs. The authors suggest that because females with autism appear more able than males with autism in regard to their non-verbal communication, they are able to camouflage their diagnostic features. This increases the likelihood that autism in females is missed.

Social challenges for females with autism

Difficulties with social understanding and communication can make it hard for females with autism to develop relationships and fit in with their typically developing peers (Cridland et al., 2014). This could contribute to the higher rates of social isolation and mental health difficulties (such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders) in females with autism (Nichols et al., 2009; Solomon et al., 2012). It is suggested that internalising symptomatology in females with autism may go unrecognised, due to their tendency to hide their differences (Dworzynski et al., 2012).

Considering the proposed link between mental health and a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) there are surprisingly few studies that have explored this construct for females with autism. The exploration of belonging in mainstream schools is particularly relevant, given recent guidance from the Department for Education (DfE, 2015) on mental health and behaviour in schools. This document emphasises the need to develop pupils’ sense of belonging within their school environment in order to promote their mental health. The complexities of female peer relationships and concerns around fitting in make adolescence a critical time for females with autism (Nichols et al., 2009). Furthermore, exploring the factors that impact on sense of belonging for adolescent females with autism may lead to a more advanced understanding of how to best support their mental health needs.

The need for belonging

The importance of experiencing a sense of belonging is well-established within the literature (Allen & Boyle, 2018; Boyle & Allen, 2018; Slaten et al., 2018). In his hierarchical theory of motivation, Maslow (1987) proposed that progression towards achieving self-esteem or self-actualisation is dependent on humans fulfilling their needs for love and belongingness. Baumeister and Leary (1995) nevertheless support the notion of belonging as a basic psychological need. Following their extensive review of the literature they concluded that a lack of belonging is associated with higher incidence of maladjustment, stress, psychological pathology and health problems. This indicates that there is a human motivation to develop stable, fulfilling relationships with other individuals and that lack of belonging can have significant consequences for wellbeing. The issue of inclusion in schools and the attitudes of teachers and support staff are key factors in whether a sense of belonging for all students is achievable or, indeed, workable (Anderson & Boyle, 2015; Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2014; Kraska & Boyle, 2014).

The need to belong still seems very apparent by the popularity and success of social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram. The need and motivation to belong has also been demonstrated by real life studies into individuals' peer group relationships, occupational settings, school settings and various life transitions (Boyle, 2007; Osterman, 2000; Pesonen et al., 2015).

Aim of this study

This study addresses the need to better understand the lived social experiences of adolescent females with autism at mainstream school, by exploring factors that add to and take away from their sense of belonging. Specifically, the aim is to capture the meaning and significance of 'sense of belonging' for adolescent females with autism and the impact that this has on their social experiences at school.

Research question:

1. What do adolescent females with autism feel about their social experiences in mainstream secondary school?
 - (a) In what ways do adolescent females with autism feel they belong?
 - (b) In what ways do adolescent females with autism feel excluded?

Methodology

Research design

The research explored the views and experiences of adolescent females with autism in regard to the ways in which they feel they belong and the ways in which they feel excluded in school. Semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain the perspectives of adolescent females with autism.

Participants

Ethical approval was received by the University of Exeter Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were selected purposively, with the following inclusion criteria:

- Female, aged 11–18 years old, with a formal diagnosis of autism or Asperger syndrome.
- Attending mainstream secondary or middle school.
- Able to express themselves verbally.

To begin the process of participant recruitment special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in secondary and middle schools in the south west of England were contacted by email, providing a written explanation of the research. Seven SENCOs were contacted and four agreed for their school to take part and to pass on details of the research to female pupils with autism and their parents. Ten pupils were invited to participate in the research and eight agreed to take part. Participants were from three mainstream schools and were aged between 12–17 years old (see Table 1). The details of the three schools attended by the participants are as follows:

Table 1: Participant information

Pseudonym	Age	Diagnosis	Age at diagnosis	School	Education, health and care plan
Ella	12	Asperger syndrome	12	School 1	No
Zara	14	Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)	11	School 1	Yes
Jasmine	13	ASD	10	School 1	No
Scarlett	15	Asperger syndrome	15	School 2	No
Saffy	13	ASD	10	School 2	No
Sophia	17	Asperger syndrome	15	School 2	No
Darcy	12	ASD	9	School 3	Yes
Charlie	12	ASD	6	School 3	Yes

- *School 1*: Mainstream secondary school for girls.
- *School 2*: Mainstream mixed secondary school.
- *School 3*: Mainstream mixed middle school with an on-site autism base.

Semi-structured interviews

The research aimed to explore the social experiences of adolescent females with autism in mainstream school. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the individual views and experiences of females with autism in regard to belonging and exclusion within school. This method has been used effectively in other studies which seek the views of young people with autism (Cridland et al., 2014; Tierney et al., 2016).

Hierarchical focusing, as proposed by Tomlinson (1989), was used to develop the interview schedule. This allowed for the discussion to be led by participants, with prompts employed when a topic had not been raised. Questions explored how participants experience belonging and exclu-

sion and were based on themes identified in the literature, as well as the dimensions of belonging proposed by Hagerty et al. (1992). (The main set of questions used for the semi-structured interviews are detailed in Appendix A.) The broad themes explored by the questions were as follows:

- Importance and understanding of belonging.
- Views and experiences around ‘fitting in’:
 - identification with others;
 - barriers and support around ‘fitting in’.
- Views and experiences around ‘valued involvement’:
 - nature of peer relationships;
 - social acceptance, exclusion and bullying;
 - relationships and support from school staff.

Procedure

Each participant was interviewed on two occasions, to build rapport and trust. Each

session lasted between 30–45 minutes and there was approximately a one-week gap between the first and second interview. At the end of the first interview the ‘feelings of belonging’ sheet was introduced and participants were asked to complete at least one of these before the next interview. These sheets required participants to reflect on the extent to which they felt a sense of belonging at particular times during the school day. Participants discussed their responses for this activity during the second interview.

Results

Semi-structured interviews in phase one were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) to gain a rich and detailed account of the data. Thematic analysis generated key themes corresponding to the research questions for the study. For each research question, a summary of the related themes and sub-themes is presented, followed by relevant quotes taken from the interview transcripts.

Research question: What do adolescent females with autism feel about their social experiences in mainstream secondary school?

Research question 1a: In what ways do adolescent females with autism feel they belong?

Themes:

- Reciprocal friendships.
- Feeling safe and supported.
- Encouragement and inclusion.
- Establishing and adhering to social expectations.

Reciprocal friendships

Participants saw friendship as an important basis for belonging and as beneficial for their school experience. The important qualities of a close, reciprocal friendship were discussed and participants suggested that their overall happiness in school was largely impacted by having a friendship.

Participants identified particular qualities that set apart the people who they would consider their friends. Scarlett emphasised the importance of feeling comfortable and tended to place less importance on verbal interaction.

Scarlett: Like you know when you’re with someone and you’re comfortable with them, so when it’s quiet it’s not weird.

Zara described close friends, who knew her well and who were accepting of her autism. She compared them to other peers in school, who did not tolerate her difficulties and support her in the same way.

Zara: ...true friends... they actually understand and just don’t not like me for my autism.

The companionship that came with having one key friend was seen as particularly important. Some participants reported generally happy experiences of school, which were enhanced by time spent with a close friend. Jasmine described the experience of her best friend joining her in secondary school, after a year apart from her.

Jasmine: She makes it happy. Cos year 7... I loved year 7 so much but the only bad thing was she wasn’t there. That was the only bad thing I had.

Feeling safe and supported

Pupils spoke about the social security that comes through peer relationships. For some, close physical proximity to friends was important to enable them to feel confident in a large secondary school environment.

Ella: Like you sort of have to have friends so you can go around with them and if you don’t have friends there’s nowhere really to go.

In addition to the safety provided by peer relationships, participants also discussed the importance of safety and support provided by aspects of the school environment. Pupils discussed particular areas in school where they feel safe and are able to check-in with staff or peers. For Ella, this was a lunchtime club, where she felt comfortable and welcome.

Ella: It's just a place to go like away from every body and people from student support run it... So we sit there as a place to go and they chat about like 'how's your week's going' and that's been a nice thing to do.

Encouragement and inclusion

Participants emphasised social inclusion as a key aspect of belonging, giving examples of instances where their peers had acknowledged them and made them feel valued.

Sophia: It's like wanting to be there and feeling that people want you to be there... I guess it's just nice to have people to talk to and sort of like realise you're there and... kind of interact with.

Jasmine: Like every time she sees me, even though she's talking she'll turn and say 'hi' to me.

Establishing and adhering to social expectations

When describing the profile of an individual who would experience a sense of belonging in school, pupils often identified qualities that were in line with social norms, particularly in regard to female behaviour. These tended to include references to verbal interaction skills, confidence and kindness.

Researcher: So can you tell me what sort of person you think might be inside the circle of belonging?

Ella: Someone who's confident and has quite a fun, bubbly personality and is chatty. If you don't act nice to them then they won't act nice to you.

Pupils also explained the social benefits of behaving in a way that pleases others and being able to adapt their behaviour to ensure positive interactions with peers. For Ella, this involved mirroring the behaviour of her peers to feel confident that she was adhering to the social expectations of the group.

Ella: I do whatever they're doing...

...Yeah it helps because then it's doing the sort of thing that they like. Then you'll know that they'll like what you're doing.

Research question 1b: In what ways do adolescent females with autism feel excluded?

Themes:

- Being on the periphery.
- Feeling devalued.

Social skills

Being on the periphery

Participants described experiences where they did not feel part of a social group. This occurred more regularly for some than others. Sophia made particular reference to feeling ignored during group interactions.

Sophia: Well I'm just usually kind of like on the outside and I can step away and no one notices.

Zara spoke about instances where she had been more overtly excluded or left out.

Zara: And I join in their conversation and they just look at me and say 'Why are you joining in? You don't need to.'

Others explained that there had been instances where they felt unable to join in with the conversation and activities of the group. Charlie discussed her past experience of being part of a friendship group with whom she could not relate to; and who had very different interests and priorities to her.

Charlie: When I was in a group of girls, they used to like talk about stuff all the time and make fun of like people... at break times they used to go to the toilets all the time and do their hair and make-up... And they could all do gymnastics... I used to have to just stand there and watch them.

Feeling devalued

Participants made reference to social situations where they did not feel listened to, or their contribution was not valued by others.

Scarlett: If I was in the conversation at all I was always like... we always talked about what they wanted to talk about... sometimes I wasn't listened to at all...

Ella: I just sat in the corner for the rest of the time cos I just felt... like left out. No one was listening to my ideas.

Some were conscious of others underestimating them and treating them as they would

a younger child. Participants discussed the way in which staff spoke to them when they found out they had a diagnosis of autism, and suggested that this could often lead to differential treatment.

Darcy: When I first got diagnosed everyone started treating me differently... I got treated differently, like babyish.

Darcy: I think everyone thinks that we're stupid, but we're not.

Charlie: They just talk to us weirdly... Like we're babies... And they sometimes look at us really weird.

Meanwhile, Ella reported that she felt some teachers disliked her because of their perception that she does not listen. For Ella, this seemed to demonstrate the teachers' misunderstanding of her needs.

Researcher: And do the teachers like you generally do you think?

Ella: Some of them... and then some of them absolutely hate me... They hate me because they don't think I listen but I do.

Social skills

Participants discussed their nerves preceding social interactions with peers; often associated with what to say and how to behave. Scarlett expressed fears of awkwardness and rejection due to what she felt were limited social skills. In some instances, this had led to her calling off or avoiding social arrangements outside school.

Scarlett: Because of my lack of social skills it gets pretty awkward pretty quickly...

Sophia explained that she had needed to educate herself about hidden social rules when she began secondary school. She also mentioned that she had not received adequate support in this area during primary school, which may have made the process of transition more challenging.

Sophia: I still wasn't entirely sure of like what to do in social situations all the time... So I did quite a lot of working it out and sort of... and it took like a while.

Participants also discussed their experiences of managing complex social dynamics within groups of friends. Many expressed

a preference for having one key friend, or a small peer group, as opposed to being part of a large social network.

Scarlett: I was actually pretty content, but at the same time... lonely. Like, I wanted friends that I could talk to, like a group... like a small group. Cos this was a big group, everyone was always moving about. It was hard to keep a small group together before they broke up and went off to speak to individuals.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how adolescent females with autism feel about their social experiences in mainstream school. Specifically, it investigated the ways in which they feel that they belong and the ways in which they feel excluded in the school environment. It also explored what adolescent females with autism feel would enhance their social experiences in mainstream school.

Reciprocal friendships

Friendship was suggested as an important prerequisite for belonging. Some pupils discussed the factors that set apart 'true friends' who added to their sense of belonging, compared to other peers at school. For some pupils, this was determined by feeling 'comfortable', understood and by the reciprocal kindness that they experienced with their friend. The pupils' ability to distinguish and describe 'true' friendship in this way is perhaps surprising, considering the association of autism with difficulties around social interaction and reciprocity (Kopp & Gillberg, 2011; Myles & Simpson, 2001). Furthermore, the current findings support recent research suggesting that females with autism are motivated to seek social contact and to make and maintain friendships (Calder et al., 2013; Sedgewick et al., 2016; Tierney et al., 2016).

For many pupils, a sense of belonging was associated with happiness, which was linked to time with friends. This finding is reflective of the views and experiences of

the wider population. Coverdale and Long (2015) found that young people identified friends as one of the most important factors in regard to supporting and promoting their emotional well-being. Furthermore, the current findings support research suggesting that social connectedness and a sense of belonging in school impacts on engagement, motivation and likelihood of withdrawal (Osterman, 2000), and that a sense of belonging can be a protective factor in regard to mental health and needs to be promoted within the school environment (Boyle & Allen, 2018; DfE, 2016; Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Feeling safe and supported

Participants made reference to the challenges of attending a large and busy school. Factors that promoted a sense of safety and security in school were seen as important. These fell into two categories; support through peer relationships and support within the school. Pupils emphasised that it was important to locate friends and ‘stick together’ during break times to feel more confident in the busy school environment. This could be one of the reasons underlying the ‘clingy’ behaviour described by Rivet and Matson (2011) in relation to females with autism. The number of students and the size of the secondary school environment was perceived as challenging by the majority of pupils, as found by Hill (2014). The participants in the current study expressed a preference for smaller, quiet areas of school, ‘away from everybody’; and where they had the option to talk to familiar peers or staff members.

Establishing and adhering to social expectations

Adapting one’s behaviour to ‘get along with people’ emerged as another important aspect of belonging. Pesonen et al. (2015) obtained similar findings from the retrospective accounts of women with autism, who recalled adapting their behaviour in school to fit in. This is also consistent with the notion that females with autism are adept at

hiding their difficulties by mirroring others (Attwood, 2006). Adapting one’s behaviour to fit in with social norms is something that is likely to motivate the majority of adolescents, due to the importance of peer relationships and social acceptance at this stage (McElhaney et al., 2008). It may be that the effort and energy that goes in to this is greater for females on the autistic spectrum due to their social difficulties.

Being on the periphery

Managing group situations was identified as a challenging social aspect of school. Pupils described their experiences of being ‘on the outside’ of social groups and not feeling that their contribution was valued, or acknowledged. In contrast to the encouragement to participate, which was identified as promoting belonging, pupils recalled instances where peers had excluded them and left them out of social arrangements and activities. A number of studies have highlighted the difficulties that children and young people with autism can experience with social isolation and bullying (Muller et al., 2008; Humphrey & Symes, 2010). However, in line with Dean et al. (2014), participants in the current study tended to describe feelings of being ignored, rather than being directly bullied or overtly excluded. The current findings also demonstrate the ability of females with autism to give the outward impression that they are part of a social group. This is consistent with suggestions that females with autism tend to lack social confidence and possess low self-esteem (Nichols et al., 2009).

Feeling devalued

A number of participants expressed the view that others underestimated them and did not value their contribution. Once again, this is consistent with the Hagerty et al. (1992) model of belonging, which emphasises the importance of ‘valued involvement’. Two pupils felt that others thought they were ‘stupid’ and treated them ‘like babies’. One participant explained that her

sense of humour often caused others to get 'offended really quickly' and that she could 'irritate people' in this way. Tierney et al. (2016) found that adolescent females with autism reported unintentionally breaking social conventions. Similarly, pupils in the current study explained that teachers and peers sometimes thought they were being rude or choosing not to listen when this was not their intention.

Social skills

Despite a desire to engage and spend time with peers, a number of pupils discussed their feelings of anxiety in relation to social encounters. It is suggested that while females with autism are socially motivated, they still exhibit social-communication difficulties (NASEN, 2016). However, females with autism are more adept at masking these than males (Lai et al., 2015). Some pupils shared experiences where they had decided not to approach peers, or meet up with friends due to their concerns about 'what to do in social situations' and the potential for it to become 'awkward'. Additionally, participants discussed the challenges of managing the complexities of female friendships such as arguments, jealousy and gossiping. This is also referred to as relational conflict (Nichols et al., 2009). Sedgewick et al. (2016) found that females with autism reported high levels of relational conflict in their friendships. Participants in the current study often reported that they found it easier to manage individual friendships or small groups, which they described as 'not too complicated'. It was suggested that this reduced the likelihood of conflict and exclusion.

Limitations

This study represents a small sample of adolescent females with autism. Further replication is needed before the findings can be generalised to other females with autism in other mainstream schools. The pupils each had a diagnosis of autism, but while some needed limited support, others required greater support. Furthermore, the

age range of the pupils ranged from age 12 to age 17. Future research may therefore need to include a more homogeneous sample.

In the current research, it is possible that the pupils' accounts of their social experiences in school did not accurately reflect their lived experiences. Pupils may have wanted to give the impression that they had more friends than they really did, or misinterpreted others' behaviour as rejection or bullying.

Conclusion

The current study addressed an identified gap in the literature by seeking the first-hand views and experiences of adolescent females with autism in mainstream school. Key themes emerging from the responses were around perceived peer acceptance, friendship and social competence. This was suggested to have an important influence on the sense of belonging experienced by adolescent females with autism in mainstream school. Consistent with prior research, the findings suggest that adolescent females with autism are motivated to seek social contact and form friendships in the same way as females without a diagnosis of autism. However, it is important to look beyond a neuro-typical understanding of belonging when considering how to support female pupils with autism. For some, the priority may be the understanding and identification that comes from one key friendship, rather than membership in a larger group.

The findings also highlight the specific social difficulties experienced by females with autism and the way in which this can add to their feelings of exclusion in the school environment. The findings reveal important insights into the specific social challenges for adolescent females with autism.

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Appendix A – Semi structured interview questions

Theme	Question
<p>Importance and understanding of belonging</p>	<p>If a friend said that when they were at school they felt like they belonged what would they mean?</p> <hr/> <p>Introduce blob playground Point to a figure who belongs. Point to a figure who does not belong. Which of those two figures is most similar to you?</p> <hr/> <p>Circle of belonging introduced: <i>'This is the circle of belonging. People inside the circle feel a sense of belonging when they are in school. People outside the circle do not feel a sense of belonging when they are in school.'</i> Can you tell me what kind of person would be inside the circle of belonging at school? Can you tell me what kind of person would be outside the circle of belonging at school? Which circle are you in most of the time at school? Which circle would you like to be in most of the time at school? How important is it to be inside the circle of belonging at school?</p>
<p>Identification with others</p>	<p>Tell me about the people you like to spend time with at school (Option to draw this) Are there people at school who are similar to you? How important is it for you to be similar to other people at school? Are there people at school who are different to you? Would you like to feel more similar to others at school? If you had to be someone else at school (other student or staff) who would you most like to be? How much do you feel like people at school understand you? Is there anything that would help people to understand you better? How much time at school do you spend with other girls who have autism/Asperger's?</p>
<p>Barriers and support around social skills and fitting in</p>	<p>Do the people you spend time with affect how you feel about school? Social challenge prompts introduced to aid with the following questions. Is there anything difficult about making friends at school? What do you do to manage when you are finding these things difficult? Is there anything that helps you to make friends at school? What else could make it easier to form friendships at school?</p>

Theme (continued)	Question (continued)
Nature of peer relationships	<p>Tell me about your friends at school (Give option of drawing sociogram).</p> <p>How important is it to have friends?</p> <p>What do your friends like best about you?</p> <p>How can you tell when someone is your friend?</p> <p>How important is it to be part of a group?</p> <p>What do your friends think about your autism/Asperger's?</p> <p>Is there anything you would change about the number/ type of friends you have?</p>
Social exclusion and bullying	<p>Introduce 'You in groups' images and discuss which figures are being left out or bullied by others</p> <p>Do you ever feel left out at school?</p> <p>Have you ever experienced bullying from people at school?</p> <p>Is there anything at school that helps to stop bullying or people being left out?</p> <p>What else could be done to stop bullying or people being left out?</p>
Relationships and support from school staff	<p>How do you get on with the teachers and staff at school?</p>
Revisit 'feelings of belonging' activity	<p>Is there anything else the adults at school could do to help you?</p> <p>Review completed 'feelings of belonging' sheets.</p> <p>For each image: What do you think is happening in the picture?</p> <p>Review responses:</p> <p>Did you choose different pictures/ ratings for different times of day?</p> <p>What was your highest/ lowest rating on the belonging scale?</p>

School belonging in adolescents: Exploring the associations with school achievement and internalising and externalising problems

Gökmen Arslan

Aim(s): School belonging is critically important for both school-based outcomes and psychosocial adjustment of adolescents. The purpose of this study is to present further validation evidence for the School Belongingness Scale (SBS) and investigate the predictive effect of the school belonging on school achievement and mental health outcomes (i.e. internalising and externalising problems) in elementary school students.

Method: Participants included 223 students from a public elementary school in an urban city, Turkey (51.1 per cent female and 48.9 per cent male ranging in age from 10 to 15 years ($M = 12.09$; $SD = 1.03$)).

Findings: Findings of the study revealed that the scale had excellent data-model fit statistics, supporting the higher-order school belonging latent structure, comprising of two first-order constructs (i.e. social inclusion and exclusion), adequate-to-strong factor loadings, and adequate latent construct (H) and internal (α) reliability coefficients. Further outcomes indicated that school belonging had a strong predictive effect on school achievement, internalising and externalising behaviours among elementary school students.

Limitations: While the study utilised a cross-sectional approach and is unable to provide causality, the preliminary findings have implications for schools and future research.

Conclusions: The study results provide further evidence supporting the impacts of school belonging in promoting youth academic functioning and mental health.

Keywords: school belonging; internalising problems; externalising problems; the need to belong; academic achievement

SCHOOL BELONGING is critically important for both school-based outcomes and psychosocial adjustment of adolescents (Arslan, 2018a; Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Slaten et al., 2016). School belonging is a feeling experienced by students, which includes an affiliation or sense of connectedness toward school (Allen et al., 2017). Goodenow and Grady (1993) described that school belonging is 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment' (p.61). Students' sense of

belonging at school involves their perceptions of themselves as important, meaningful and valuable parts of their respective school (Arslan & Duru, 2017). The need-to-belong model suggests that the need for belonging is a basic and universal human motivator to build and maintain positive relations with others (Baumeister, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). To this theoretical framework, the sense of belonging is fundamental to individuals' mental health and psychosocial adjustment.

School belonging is a significant predictor of various important school-based and quality-of-life outcomes in youths,

including academic achievement, internalising and externalising behaviours. School belonging increases positive educational experiences and promotes mental health (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Specifically, studies have supported that school belonging is significantly and positively associated with student academic achievement (Benner et al., 2008; Bonny et al., 2000; Özgök & Sarı, 2016; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) reported the significant predictive effect of school belonging on the academic performance of African American adolescents. Students who had high academic achievement reported greater school belonging compared to those with poor achievement (Özgök & Sarı, 2016; Sarı, 2012). Longitudinal outcomes also supported the impact of school belonging on student educational outcomes, such as academic motivation and achievement (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Liu & Lu, 2011).

In addition, literature has indicated that low levels of school belonging contribute to increasing of internalising and externalising problems (Anderman, 2002; Arslan, 2018a; Erdinç & Arslan, 2014; McMahon et al., 2008; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011). Pittman and Richmond (2007) found the significant predictive effect of school belonging on youth internalising and externalising behaviours. Similarly, Anderman (2002) investigated the association between school belonging and various psychological adjustment outcomes with a large sample size ($N = 20,745$), and the results indicated that school belonging was negatively associated depression symptoms and school problems. School belonging also predicted subsequent internalising and externalising problems, even after controlling for initial symptoms (Cruwys et al., 2013; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Shochet et al., 2006). Lester et al. (2013) indicated significant predictive effect of the school belonging on student depression and anxiety symptoms during the transition to secondary school. Moreover, school belonging was reported

as a predictor of externalising behaviours, including substance use, delinquent behaviours, school bullying and suicidal behaviours (Bond et al., 2007; Marraccini & Brier, 2017; Napoli et al., 2003). Given these outcomes, the sense of belonging at school can be protective against mental health problems and curative of existing symptoms (Cruwys et al., 2013).

Within the context sketched above, the purpose of this study was two-fold. The present study first aimed to reinvestigate the technical adequacy of the School Belongingness Scale (SBS) reported in the previous development study (Arslan & Duru, 2017) with elementary school students (for more detail, see method section). Although findings from this initial study indicated evidence in favour of the reliability and validity of the SBS, further research is warranted to replicate the psychometric properties of the measure with new samples. To this end, the present study investigated the technical adequacy of the measure by testing its latent structure, scale characteristics and measurement invariance in elementary school students. Additionally, another purpose of this study was to examine the predictive effect of school belonging on youth school achievement and internalising and externalising outcomes. Despite the previous outcomes suggesting the association between school belonging and adolescent outcomes, its potential impacts on student school achievement and mental health have not been thoroughly investigated, specifically in Turkey. Given the prevalence of internalising and externalising behaviours in adolescents (World Health Organisation, 2017) and the importance of the effective preventions and interventions for students at-risk in school settings (Arslan, 2018b), it is also a critical step to provide a more detailed understanding of the effects of school belonging on adolescent academic functioning and mental health outcomes. In this regard, it was hypothesised that school belonging would predict youth

Table 1: Confirmatory factor analysis results

Scale and items	λ_1	I^2_1	λ_2	I^2_2	H
Social Exclusion Scale	–	–	.86	.74	.72
I feel like I don't belong to this school	.53	.28	–	–	–
I think that I am not involved in most of the activities at school	.51	.26	–	–	–
I feel myself excluded in this school	.76	.58	–	–	–
In this school, my friends, teachers, and managers usually ignore me	.45	.20	–	–	–
I have no close/sincere connections with people in this school	.45	.20			
Social Inclusion Scale	–	–	.69	.48	.74
I can really be myself in this school	.57	.32	–	–	–
I have close/sincere relationships with my teachers and friends	.69	.47	–	–	–
I feel that I am accepted by other people at school	.61	.38	–	–	–
I see myself as a part of this school	.60	.36	–	–	–
I think that people care about me in this school	.48	.23	–	–	–
Total School Belonging Scale	–	–	–	–	.79

Note. λ_1 = item loadings for first-order factors; I^2_1 = indicator reliability for first-order factor items; λ_2 = first-order factor loading for second-order factor; I^2_2 = indicator reliability for second-order factor indicators; H = latent construct reliability for first-order and second-order factors.

school achievement and internalising and externalising behaviours in elementary school students.

Method

Participants

Participants of the current study were comprised of 223 elementary school students from a public school in an urban city, Turkey (51.1 per cent female and 48.9 per cent male ranging in age from 10 to 15 years ($M = 12.09$, $SD = 1.03$)). A paper-and-pencil survey was created using questionnaires of the study (see in measure section), and the survey was administrated to youths who volunteered to participate in the study. The survey was completed in approximately 30 minute during class hours.

Measures

School belonging: Student sense of belonging at school was measured using School Belongingness Scale (SBS; Arslan & Duru, 2017). The SBS is a 10-item self-report screening tool developed to measure sense of belonging at school of Turkish students. It has two subscales, each of which is assessed by five items: Social Exclusion Scale (SES) and Social Inclusion Scale (SIS; see Table 1). All items are scored using a four point Likert scale, ranging from 'almost never' (1) to 'almost always' (4) with higher scores reflecting a high sense of belonging at school. Previous research provided validation evidence, demonstrating that the measure had good data-model fit statistics, and the scales had strong internal and latent construct reliability coefficients (Arslan & Duru, 2017).

Internalising Problems: Youth Internalizing Behavior Screener (YIBS; Arslan, 2019) was used to measure the emotional problems of Turkish youths. The YIBS is a 10-item self-report scale, and all items are scored using a four point Likert scale (almost never = 1 to almost always = 4). The scale measures two dimensions of internalising problems: depression (DS; e.g. 'I feel depressed and pessimistic') and anxiety (AS; e.g. 'I have difficulty in relaxing and calming down myself'). Research provided outcomes supporting the scale's validity and reliability, with all scales reporting adequate to strong internal and latent construct reliability (Arslan, 2019).

Externalising Problems: Externalising problems in adolescents were assessed using the Youth Externalizing Behavior Screener (Arslan, 2018b), which was developed to measure the conduct problems (e.g. 'I often make others angry or annoyed'), attention problems (e.g. 'I get distracted easily, I have difficulty in concentrating'), and hyperactivity (e.g. 'I am an over-active person; I can't help moving') of Turkish youths. All items are scored using four-point Likert scale, ranging from 'almost never' (1) to 'almost always' (4). Previous research has produced evidence of the scales' adequate-to-strong internal and latent construct reliability coefficients (Arslan, 2018b).

School achievement: Self- and school-reported academic achievement were used to assess youth school achievement. Self-reported academic achievement was measured using a single item scale scored based on a five-point grade-range scale ('During the past semester, how would you describe the grades you received in school?'), ranging between 'very poor' (1) and 'very good' (5). Students' school-reported academic achievement was assessed using their grade point average – school transcript – in the past year at school. Students were asked their transcript grade point average, reflecting their performance across all academic courses (range = 0 to 100). Higher scores indicate higher academic achievement of students.

Data analyses

Confirmatory factor analysis was first conducted to investigate a priori hypothesized factor structure of the SBS, which was described in the previous SBS validity study (Arslan & Duru, 2017). Measurement model outcomes were assessed using data-model fit statistics and their cut-off scores: comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) $\geq .90$ = adequate and $\geq .95$ = close data-model fit, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .08$ = adequate and $\leq .05$ = good data-model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015). Construct reliability (H) was also calculated for latent structures and $H \geq .70$ were considered adequate for latent construct reliability (Mueller & Hancock, 2008). Measurement invariance of the SBS was then performed to investigate configural, metric and scalar invariance for both gender and grade with multiple-groups CFA. Findings of the measurement invariance models were interpreted based on the Δ CFI scores, with values $\leq .01$ considered as evidence of invariance across groups (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

Following examining the SBS latent structure and measurement invariance, observed scale characteristics were examined. Kurtosis and skewness scores were used to test normality assumption: skewness $< |2|$ and kurtosis $< |7|$ (Curran et al., 1996). Correlation analysis was then used to examine the associations of the school belonging with youth school achievement and internalising and externalising problems. Finally, latent variable path analyses (LVPA) were conducted to test the predictive power of the first and second order measurement model of the SBS on student school achievement and mental health indicators (Mueller & Hancock, 2008). Findings from the LVPA were interpreted using the squared-multiple correlations (R^2), with traditional decision rules: $.01$ – $.059$ = small, $.06$ – $.139$ = moderate, $\geq .14$ = large (Cohen, 1988). All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS version 25 and AMOS version 24.

Table 2: Measurement invariance results

Invariance Level	χ^2	<i>df</i>	RMSEA [90%CI]	CFI	Δ CFI
Gender					
Configural	99.34	68	.046 [.024, .064]	.924	–
Metric	107.30	76	.043 [.022, .061]	.924	.000
Scalar	115.70	89	.046 [.024, .063]	.911	.013
Grade					
Configural	140.43	102	.042 [.023, .058]	.903	
Metric	162.39	118	.041 [.022, .056]	.889	.014
Scalar	169.39	124	.041 [.024, .056]	.886	.017

Note. All χ^2 values were significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Results

Latent structure and measurement invariance

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to examine the SBS higher-order measurement model structured by the two first-order latent constructs (i.e. social exclusion and social inclusion) as indicators of the higher-order latent construct (representing the school belonging). Findings of this analysis demonstrated that the measurement model provided good-data model fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 40.38$, $df = 34$, $p = .20$, $CFI = .98$, $TLI = .97$, $RMSEA$ (95 per cent CI) = .029 (.000, .059)). Factor loadings of the scale items were adequate-to-strong, ranging between .45 and .76 (SES λ range = .45–.76, SIS λ range = .48–.69), with robust indicator reliabilities (ℓ^2 range = .20–.58). Latent construct reliability coefficients (H) were adequate, ranging between .72 and .79 (see Table 1). Observed scale characteristics also showed that the scales had adequate internal reliability coefficients (SES $\alpha = .70$, SIS $\alpha = .73$, and SBS $\alpha = .76$). These results

provide further evidence supporting the fact that the SBS could be used to measure the sense of belonging in elementary school students.

After confirming the latent structure of the SBS, multiple-groups CFA was conducted to test whether the measurement model was invariant across both gender and grade. Findings from these analyses indicated that measurement models-configural, metric and scalar invariance- provided adequate-to-good data model fit statistics for both gender and grade (see Table 2). With regard to gender, given the change in the values of the Δ CFI, measurement invariance was observed at the metric invariance model but not at the scalar invariance model. Moreover, the change in the values of the Δ CFI across the grade provided scores above the critical value ($\leq .01$), suggesting that the lack of invariance was observed; therefore, further invariance analyses were deemed inappropriate to examine latent mean differences for both demographic variables.

Predictive effect of school belonging

Prior to correlation and path analysis, observed scale characteristics of the variables were investigated (see Table 3). Skewness and kurtosis values ranged from -0.79 and 4.18 , suggesting that all variables of the study were relatively normally distributed (Curran et al., 1996). Correlation analysis was then conducted to examine the association between school belonging, school achievement, and internalising and externalising problems. Findings from this analysis revealed that school belonging had significant associations with self-reported academic achievement ($r = .32, p < .001$), school-reported academic achievement ($r = .36, p < .001$), internalising problems ($r = -.30, p < .001$) and externalising problems ($r = -.42, p < .001$) (see Table 3). Adolescents with higher levels of sense of belonging at school reported greater

school achievement, as well as lower levels of internalising and externalising symptoms. Moreover, the outcomes indicated a strong association between self-reported academic achievement and school-reported academic achievement ($r = .68, p < .001$). The LVPA was performed to investigate the predictive effect of the school belonging and its sub-dimensions on youth mental health and school achievement indicators. Findings of the analyses revealed that school belonging was significantly associated with internalising problems (R^2 range = $.09-.28$) and externalising problems (R^2 range = $.15-.37$) ranging from moderate-to-large effect size. Specifically, social exclusion at school more strongly predicted internalising ($\beta = .52, p < .001, R^2 = .27$) and externalising problems ($\beta = .51, p < .001, R^2 = .26$) compared to social inclusion (or acceptance) at school

Table 3: Observed scale characteristics

Scales	Items	Min.	Max.	M	SD	g_1	g_2
1. SES	5	6	20	15.40	3.43	-.56	-.43
2. SIS	5	5	19	7.92	2.83	1.37	2.01
3. OSB	10	15	40	32.47	5.24	-.79	.30
4. DS	5	5	18	7.53	2.31	1.69	4.02
5. AS	5	5	19	8.35	2.54	1.12	2.02
6. YIBS	10	10	35	15.89	4.28	1.61	4.18
7. CPS	5	5	20	8.45	3.09	1.14	.95
8. AS	4	4	16	5.99	2.29	1.76	3.56
9. HS	3	3	10	5.11	1.90	.99	.32
10. YEBS	12	12	46	19.47	6.58	1.43	1.91
11. SRAA1	1	35	95	81.17	12.73	-.77	.17
12. SRAA2	1	1	5	2.20	.91	.51	.11

Note: Min, Max = minimum and maximum observed scale scores; g_1 = skewness, g_2 = kurtosis, SES = Social Exclusion Scale, SAS = Social Inclusion Scale, OSB = Overall School Belongingness Scale, YEBS = Externalizing Behavior Scale; CPS = Conduct Problems Scale; AS = Attention Scale; HS = Hyperactivity Scale; SRAA₁ = School-Reported Academic Achievement; SRAA₂ = Self-Reported Academic Achievement.

(internalising $\beta = .27, p < .05, R^2 = .07$; externalising $\beta = .45, p < .001, R^2 = .20$, see Table 5). School belonging also had a strong predictive effect on overall internalising ($\beta = .52, p < .001, R^2 = .28$) and externalising problems ($\beta = .61, p < .001, R^2 = .37$) – see Figure 1. Further outcomes indicated that school belonging was a strong predictor of self- ($\beta = .41, p < .001, R^2 = .17$) and school-reported academic achievement ($\beta = .45, p < .001, R^2 = .20$). Social exclusion had negative and moderate-to-large associations with school achievement indicators ($\beta = -.28$ and $-.41, R^2 = .08-.17$), whereas social inclusion positively and moderately predicted these outcomes ($\beta = .31$ and $.39, R^2 = .13-.15$). Overall school achievement was also strongly predicted by social exclusion ($\beta = -.41, p < .001, R^2 = .16$), social

inclusion ($\beta = .39, p < .001, R^2 = .15$) and overall school belonging ($\beta = .50, p < .001, R^2 = .25$, see Table 5 and Figure 1).

Discussion

The purposes of the present study were to reinvestigate the psychometric properties of the SBS reported in the initial developmental study (Arslan & Duru, 2017) and explore the associations of the school belonging with school achievement and mental health outcomes in elementary school students. Considering the significance of generalisation and replication research in behavioural science literature (Kline, 2009; Renshaw, 2017), this study first investigated the latent structure and measurement invariance of the scale. Consistent with the original development

Table 4: Correlation results

Scales	Correlation (r)												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1. SIS	-												
2. SES	-.39**	-											
3. OSBQ	.86**	-.79**	-										
4. DS	-.19**	.37**	-.32**	-									
5. AS	-.15*	.22**	-.22**	.52**	-								
6. YIBS	-.19**	.33**	-.30**	.85**	.88**	-							
7. CPS	-.34**	.38**	-.42**	.62**	.44**	.59**	-						
8. AS	-.35**	.35**	-.41**	.50**	.54**	.60**	.73**	-					
9. HS	-.32**	.19**	-.31**	.49**	.39**	.52**	.74**	.64**	-				
10. YEBS	-.37**	.34**	-.42**	.60**	.50**	.64**	.84**	.88**	.87**	-			
11. SRAA ₁	.25**	-.36**	.36**	-.30**	-.24**	-.30**	-.14*	-.07	-.09	-.09	-		
12. SRAA ₂	.29**	.24**	.32**	.24**	.20**	.25**	.27**	.22**	.16*	.22**	.68**	-	

Note. * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$. SES = Social Exclusion Scale, SAS = Social Inclusion Scale, OSB = Overall School Belongingness Scale, YEBS = Externalizing Behavior Scale; CPS = Conduct Problems Scale; AS = Attention Scale; HS = Hyperactivity Scale; SRAA₁ = School-Reported Academic Achievement; SRAA₂ = Self-Reported Academic Achievement.

Figure 1: Predictive power of the school belonging on the school achievement and mental health problems

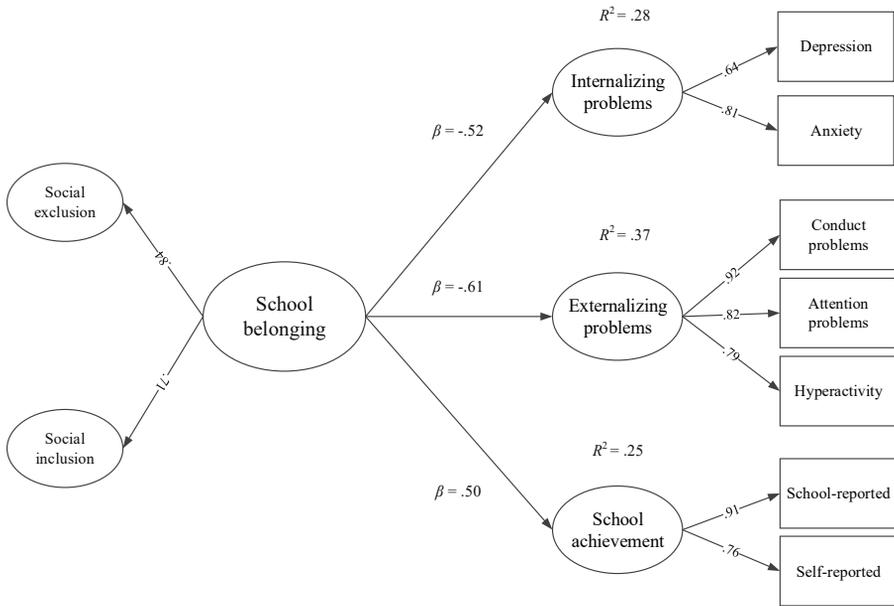


Table 5: Results of the latent variable path analysis

Outcomes	School belonging		Social exclusion		Social inclusion	
	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2
Depression	-.44**	.20	.47**	.22	-.21*	.04
Anxiety	-.30**	.09	.29**	.08	-.17*	.03
Internalising problems	-.52**	.28	.52**	.27	-.27*	.07
Conduct problems	-.55**	.30	.48**	.23	-.39**	.15
Attention problems	-.57**	.32	.50**	.25	-.41**	.17
Hyperactivity	-.38**	.15	.24*	.06	-.37**	.13
Externalising problems	-.61**	.37	.51**	.26	-.45**	.20
School-reported achievement	.45**	.20	-.41**	.17	.31**	.10
Self-reported achievement	.41**	.17	-.28*	.08	.36**	.13
Overall school achievement	.50**	.25	-.41**	.16	.39**	.15

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

study (Arslan & Duru, 2017), the results provided excellent data-model fit statistics, supporting the higher-order school belonging latent structure, comprising of two first-order constructs (i.e. social inclusion or acceptance and exclusion), adequate-to-strong factor loadings, and adequate latent construct (H) and internal (α) reliability coefficients. In addition, multi-group CFA across gender and grade indicated that measurement models – configural, metric and scalar invariance – adequate-to-good data model fit statistics for both gender and grade. Although measurement invariance across gender was observed at the metric level – but not at the scalar level – the metric and scalar invariance across grade did not hold. Taken together, these outcomes provide strong evidence in support of the SBS, suggesting that the measure is an efficacious and robust instrument for assessing student sense of belonging in school.

After evaluating the psychometrics of the SBS, the LVPA was employed to investigate the association between school belonging and mental health and school achievement outcomes. The finding from these analyses revealed that school belonging was a strong predictor of internalising and externalising behaviours of elementary school students. In addition to past research supporting the association between school belonging and emotional and behavioural problems (Anderman, 2002; Arslan & Renshaw, 2018; Cruwys et al., 2013; Erdiñç & Arslan, 2014; McMahon et al., 2008; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011), these results provide an important contribution by supporting school belonging as a strong predictor of internalising and externalising symptoms of adolescents – especially depression and conduct problems, compared with other symptoms. School belonging is students feeling of themselves as important, meaningful and valuable parts of their school (Arslan & Duru, 2017). The need-to-belong framework suggests that belonging is fundamental

to individuals' adjustment, and the model highlights the importance of fostering inclusive experiences in promoting mental health and wellbeing (Baumeister, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In this regard, these outcomes were consistent with the need-to-belong approach, suggesting that being included was strongly associated with positive social-emotional and behavioural outcomes, whereas being excluded was closely related to intense negative outcomes (Baumeister, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Specifically, both social exclusion and inclusion were found strong predictors of externalising symptoms of elementary school students. Similar to these outcomes, Arslan (2018c) investigated the predictive role of social exclusion at school on youth emotional wellbeing and mental health problems, indicating that students who experienced more exclusion at school reported lower emotional wellbeing and greater internalising and externalising problems. Socially excluded individuals reported greater psychological distress and lower adjustment outcomes than those who were non-excluded (Arslan, 2018a; Aydın et al., 2013). Many other studies also reported that higher social inclusion was associated with lower internalising symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Arslan, 2018a; King et al., 1996; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2007). Consequently, the study results provide further evidence, supporting the impacts of the sense of belonging in promoting youth mental health and wellbeing in school settings.

Additionally, the study results demonstrated that school belonging and its dimensions had strong predictive of the school achievement indicators. Previous research was consistent with these outcomes, demonstrating that students with high school belonging reported better academic functioning, including academic achievement, academic motivation, academic efficacy, and lower absenteeism (Arslan, 2016; Benner et al., 2008; Bonny et al., 2000; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Sarı, 2012; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin,

2004). Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni (2013) stated that school belonging is an important source in promoting positive experiences that encourage student academic achievement in school. Özgök and Sarı (2016) reported that students who reported greater academic achievement had experienced higher levels of school belonging compared with those who reported lower achievement. Specifically, social exclusion was found to be more strongly predictive of student academic achievement. These results were in accordance with past outcomes revealing that social exclusion was significantly associated with students' academic achievement (Arslan, 2016; Sarı, 2013). Taken together, adolescents with higher school belonging are more likely to report better academic functioning and lower emotional and behavioural problems compared to those with lower belonging in elementary school.

Implications and limitations

Findings of the present study provide additional evidence for the use of the SBS, which can serve as a basis for mental health providers' efforts in fostering mental health and academic functioning of students in school settings. Increasing incidence of internalising and externalising problems among adolescents in Turkey (Arslan, 2018b; Arslan & Renshaw, 2018) indicates an impetus to develop prevention strategies to promote youth sense-of-belonging at school. Findings of this study thus provide a valuable insight on school belonging as a screener of sense of belonging of Turkish students. School-based mental health providers could use the SBS to measure student levels of school belonging and promote students' sense of belonging in an effort to support more positive mental health and educational outcomes. Additionally, the study results showed that students who experienced higher school belonging reported greater school achievement, as well as lower internalising and externalising problems. School belonging

was found a strong predictor of student mental health problems and academic functioning. Based on these results, school-based mental health providers in elementary school could design preventions and interventions to promote youth academic functioning and mental health in school settings.

Despite these significant implications for research and practice, the study outcomes should be considered in light of a few methodological limitations. Firstly, this study was conducted based on a cross-sectional approach, and thus does not provide causality. Future research could be performed to examine the outcomes related to school belonging constructs using different research approaches, such as longitudinal research. Next, the study sample included adolescents derived from a convenience sample of public elementary school students in an urban city, Turkey. Given this limitation for the generalisability of the study results, further studies are warranted to explore the association between school belonging and the outcomes in diverse and large samples. Additionally, data was collected using self-report measures and this is considered another limitation of the study. Different data collection methods could be used to investigate the impacts of school belonging on student mental health and academic functioning. Finally, considering the relatively small sample size, measurement invariance examining equality of responses across key demographic variables, such as gender should be re-investigated in future research.

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Fostering a sense of belonging at an international school in France: An experimental study

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Aim(s): *The sense of belonging is considered one of the basic human needs, supporting engagement in education and increasing wellbeing. Yet few studies have attempted to enhance levels of student belonging in school, which is what the current study aimed to do. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of a classroom-based, peer intervention to enhance students' sense of belonging*

Method/rationale: *An experimental study was carried out with 55 fourth and fifth grade students, aged nine to eleven, at an international school in France. Two measures were used: The Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM), which measured students' sense of belonging, and the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) evaluating their life satisfaction. Data were collected from the experimental and wait/control group before, immediately post intervention and a month later.*

Findings: *Results of the full-scale tests demonstrate statistically significant growth in mean values in both the PSSM school belonging measure and the MSLSS student life satisfaction measure. Statistically significant growth was also found when the peer group questions were separated from the overall scale, but not in the friendships' subsection of the MSLSS.*

Limitations: *Future studies should consider a larger sample and an experiment with students from at least two schools.*

Conclusions: *Results provided evidence for the effectiveness of an intervention to enhance school belonging and student life satisfaction.*

Keywords: *sense of belonging; wellbeing; positive education; international school; identity; values and experiences.*

YOUNG STUDENTS that become disconnected present many challenges for society, ranging from engaging in poor behaviour (Battistich & Hom, 1997), early withdrawal from school (Finn, 1989), to being disconnected from societal norms in favour of an alternative cause to meet their sense of belonging (Wilczynska et al., 2015). Considering that a sense of belonging helps students connect with societal and educational values (Lambert et al., 2013), it is important to develop school interventions that aim to enhance it.

According to a systematic review relating to a qualitative exploration of the definition of a sense of belonging, it is a multi-faceted construct that incorporates: (i) subjectivity;

(ii) groundedness; (iii) reciprocity; (iv) dynamism; and (v) self-determination (Maher et al., 2013). Subjectivity refers to an individual's perception of fitting into a group, as well as feeling valued and respected by their members. A sense of belonging needs to be grounded within a specific group, to which the individual feels they belong. This group, be it a community or a school class, becomes their reference point for experiencing feelings of belonging. This feeling is reciprocal where an individual receives feedback from the group that makes them feel they are part of it. The authors stress the fluidity and dynamism of one's sense of belonging, whereby social environments may contribute to the changes in an individual's level of

belonging. Finally, they mention the importance of choice and the need for group members to continuously have the right to self-determine, aligning their values with those of the group. Taking all into consideration, a sense of belonging is a complex and fluid process influenced by many internal and external factors.

A sense of belonging is considered one of the basic human needs that allows people to thrive psychologically (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Glasser, 1998; Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) proposed that to reach self-actualisation and higher level functioning, a sense of belonging – being one of the basic needs – must be met. This need to belong is regarded as innate and universal, as all individuals are born with a need to connect and this is evident across all cultures and societies (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Research with adults shows that individuals' sense of belonging influences their life satisfaction (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Rajman & Geffen, 2018) and lack of life satisfaction, in turn is associated with depression (Stankov, 2013).

School belonging

School belonging is 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment' (Goodenow, 1983, p.80). High levels of school belonging are associated with enhanced wellbeing (Sebokova et al., 2018), positive emotions (Reschly et al., 2008) and meaning in life, which has an impact on both students' self-identity and their life purpose (Lambert et al., 2013). Considering the systematic decrease in adolescents' wellbeing, as they progress through their post-primary school (Burke & Minton, 2019), developing students' sense of school belonging may help them sustain or increase it accordingly.

School belonging also builds a shared identity that lends itself to motivation and positive goal pursuit (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Lambert et al., 2013). A student whose values are aligned with the values of the

school and like-minded, pro-social peers develop a self-identity narrative that encompasses school success as part of who they are (Sanders & Munford, 2016). Building confidence and a learner identity along with supportive peer relations are among the recommended interventions suggested by Thomas (2012) to improve students' retention, which needs to be established at a young age and reinforced throughout the students' lives.

Creating a sense of belonging is associated with students aligning themselves with other, like-minded people, who they recognise as having similar social, rather than academic values (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). While it may lead to negative consequences of belonging to a group displaying poor behaviour and weak bonds to the school (Faircloth & Hamm, 2011), a well-developed sense of school belonging is usually associated with fewer behavioural and emotional problems, as well as greater pro-social skills (Newman et al., 2007; Waters et al., 2010). Therefore, regardless of whether belonging is congruent with the school or peer group values, it offers individuals psychological and educational benefits.

In addition to the school and peer group belonging, developing a sense of belonging in a relationship with one adult enhances psychological resilience (Werner, 1993). This one-to-one relationship fuels students' sense of belonging in so far as they feel accepted, connected and their values are mirrored, which results in their ability to cope with stressful events. Mirrored values within relationships are important for the intervention used in this study.

Whilst there are many benefits of developing a sense of school belonging, it is not yet a common practice. In a study in Australia, more than 50 per cent of schools surveyed referenced sense of belonging in their school values or mission statements (Allen et al., 2017), meaning that the other schools either have not considered it, or did not value it enough to note it in their mission statements. A few of the schools that

mentioned belonging in their guidelines and mission statements followed through with fostering belonging within their curriculum or community, highlighting the need for schools to engage in a dialogue about a sense of belonging.

International schools

In an international school environment, students do not experience cultural homogeneity (Hayden & Thompson, 1995), yet they often align themselves with students of similar values and experiences (Druart, 2015). Since they live in a culture different to their parents', they are referred to as third culture kids (TCK: Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Developing a sense of school belonging among TCK is particularly difficult, given that they often move countries and schools (Hayden et al., 2000). While it helps them become more adaptable and tolerant, it also causes a feeling of rootlessness and disconnection, which affects their sense of belonging (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Fostering belonging

There are limited studies exploring the effectiveness of interventions that foster belonging (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Osterman, 2000) and many are not suitable for the current study. For example, writing a gratitude journal enhanced a sense of belonging in young people in the UK (Diebel et al., 2016), the results of a gratitude intervention are inconsistent across cultures (Watkins et al., 2006; Kashdan et al., 2009), so therefore cannot be used in an international school setting. Also, some interventions (e.g. Prujean et al., 2016; Sanders & Munford, 2016) focus on improving an adult–adolescent mentoring relationship to enhance students' sense of belonging. However as students grow older, the influence of adults on students' identity is reduced and that of their peers is increased (Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008), which is why the current study focuses on alternative interventions. Other interventions included wearing a T-shirt that identified students'

interests (Thomas, 2012), or participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports and drama, which helped students to be noticed in a way that complimented them among their peers and mediated sense of belonging in schools with pro-social peers (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005).

The intervention for the current study was created following from a review of 40 papers, which demonstrated that shared feelings, values and experiences were more important in establishing a sense of connection with others than similar behaviours, intellectual or physical abilities (Maher et al., 2013). It adapted the quality world pictures activity (experiences, people, places and things that they value) from the choice theory (Glasser, 1998) to help students share their feelings, values and experiences. Given that individuals with similar quality world pictures tend to understand each other and retain a more sustainable relationship (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Glasser, 2010), the authors hoped that the activity will improve students' sense of belonging.

Methods

Participants

A total of 55 students aged 9–11 ($M = 9.78$, $SD = .76$) participated in the study. Half of them ($n = 28$) were allocated to the experimental group (16 males and 12 females), and the remaining students ($n = 27$) to the wait/control group (12 males and 15 females). The study was carried out at an international school in France and the group represented students from 30 nationalities.

Procedures

The experimental group participated in four classes designed to enhance belonging, whereas the wait/control group took part in their usual morning meetings, which involve school announcements, preparing for upcoming events or a topical discussion. The four intervention classes included three activities: (i) 'Someone Like Me'; (i) 'Find Me Out'; and (i) 'Values Bingo'.

'Someone like me' was an activity similar to 'apples, oranges and pears'. The person in the middle rhymes: 'I'm looking for someone like me who... speaks four languages or once lived in Hong Kong.' The student revealed something about themselves and other participants in the game who had had a similar experience changed their seats accordingly.

In 'Find Me Out', students needed to find someone with a named similarity (e.g. height) and then ask them a pre-set question about themselves, such as if they play a musical instrument, or have a pet. The objective of both activities was to facilitate an awareness of students' own values and learning preferences, as well as those of others in their class and to facilitate bonding of like-minded individuals.

After playing games that allow for recognition of others' experiences, the students reflected further through the development of their bingo cards. In 'Values Bingo' they needed to fill in their quality world pictures based on the choice theory's (Glasser, 1998) needs of love and belonging, power, fun and freedom (one per row on their bingo card). The last row of their bingo card reflected on students' own preferred learning environment. This helped them to consider their behavioural motivations, as well as reflecting on themselves as learners and then find others who felt the same.

Once they had created their bingo card, a sharing game of 'Values Bingo' began, milling around, looking for other like-minded individuals in the classroom. Through recognising mirrored values or experiences in others, this task facilitated shared identification of values. The final class of the intervention, built a conglomeration of shared class values, experiences and preferred learning environments on a wallchart of concentric circles, aiming to extend that recognition and acceptance of each other's values and experiences.

The study followed the University of East London's ethical guidelines (UEL, 2018). Students and parents were given information

about the experiment in advance in writing and were informed about their right to withdraw at any stage throughout the process. The head of school agreed to act in loco parentis, in cases where parents did not respond to the information. Of 64 students, four parents opted out. Another five test cases were excluded due to students being absent on days of testing or during the intervention.

Measures

Two instruments were used in the current study. The Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993) measured students' sense of belonging, whereas the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 2001) evaluated their life satisfaction.

The PSSM is an 18-item measure with responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'completely true'. Items in the scale cover areas such as relationships, learner attitude and connectedness to the school. An example of an item is: 'It is hard for people like me to be accepted here' or 'I can really be myself at this school'. The PSSM or an adapted version, has been used in many studies (Nichols, 2006) on belonging and is generally reported to have a Cronbach's alpha internal consistency $\leq .80$ (Goodenow, 1993b). In the current study, reliability was equally high at $\leq .82$.

The MSLSS is 40-item measure with responses on a four-item Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'almost always'. Examples of the questions are 'My friends are nice to me' and 'I like being at school'. The MSLSS is divided into five dimensions including family, friends, school, living environment and self. The internal reliability for this test has been reported as being $\leq .7$ to $.9$ using Cronbach's alpha (Huebner, 2001). In the current study, reliability was high at $\leq .88$.

Results

PSSM school belonging

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA test was used separately on the experimental

Table 1: Mean pre-test, post-test and follow up tests for PSSM

Test and Group	Pre test		Post test		Follow up test		Wilks' lambda	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	p
PSSM Experimental	81.96	14.18	85.32	11.18	85.57	10.39	(2,26)= 8.71	0.001
PSSM Control	81.59	13.10	81.44	12.09	80.93	10.77	(2,25)= 0.29	0.749

Note: PSSM values are mean scores on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true).

Table 2: PSSM belonging post hoc tests between paired test sessions using Bonferroni

Group	Test session (I)	Test session (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance
Experimental	1	2	-3.357	0.791	0.001
Experimental	1	3	-3.607	0.933	0.002
Experimental	2	3	-0.250	0.444	1.000
Control	1	2	0.148	0.562	1.000
Control	1	3	0.667	0.961	1.000
Control	2	3	0.519	0.672	1.000

Note: Pre-test = test session 1. Post-test = test session 2. Follow up test = test session 3.

group and the control group in order to compare the scores from the PSSM belonging test across the three test periods. The means, standard deviations, F scores and significance values are presented in Table 1. They show growth in the experimental group from pre-experiment results ($M = 81.96, SD = 14.18$) to post-experiment ($M = 85.32, SD = 11.18$), which increased only very marginally in the follow-up results ($M = 85.57, SD = 10.39$). This is compared to the control group which stayed almost consistent from pre-experiment ($M = 81.59, SD = 13.10$) to post-experiment ($M = 81.44, SD = 12.09$), dropping very marginally in the follow-up results, ($M = 80.93, SD = 10.77$). The results show that there was a statistically significant effect between testing times in the experimental group, Wilks' lambda = .60,

$F(2,26) = 8.71, p = .001$, multivariate partial eta squared = .40. There was not however any statistically significant effect in sense of belonging in the control group between testing times, Wilks' lambda = .98, $F(2,25) = .29, p = .749$. Table 1 displays the growth in the experimental group compared to the control group from pre-test to post-test, as well as sustainability from post-test to follow up test, one month after the intervention.

Further analysis using the Bonferroni post hoc tests reveal statistically significant growth, $p = .001$ in the experimental group, between the pre-test and post-test as well as statistically significant growth between the pre-test and follow up test scores, $p = .002$ (Table 2). The growth between post intervention and follow up tests, separated out,

does not show a statistically significant increase, $p = 1$. The results show sustainability rather than further growth in the experimental group from post-test to follow up tests. In contrast, there is no statistically significant effect between tests in the control group (Table 2).

Results of MSLSS Life Satisfaction

A similar one-way repeated measures ANOVA test was used to assess the impact of the intervention on the scores for students’ life satisfaction (MSLSS). The results show growth in the experimental group from pre-experiment ($M = 124.29$, $SD = 13.60$) to post-experiment ($M = 126.61$, $SD = 16.41$) and still further growth at the follow up stage ($M = 128.71$, $SD = 11.64$). This is compared with a slight drop in the

pre-experiment results in the control group ($M = 131.37$, $SD = 13.89$) to post-experiment results ($M = 128.07$, $SD = 10.30$), which stabilised at follow-up tests ($M = 130.96$, $SD = 9.48$). The test showed statistically significant growth for the experimental group between testing periods, Wilks’ lambda = .10, $F = (2,26) = .29$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .900. Table 3 presents the mean growth for the experimental group compared with the control group. The control group showed statistically significant change between testing periods, Wilks’ lambda = .43, $F = (2,25) = 16.67$, $p = .000$, multivariate partial eta squared = .572.

A further breakdown of these results using Bonferroni post-hoc tests reveal statistically significant growth in the experimental group from pre-test to post-test

Table 3: Mean pre-test, post-test and follow up tests for MSLSS

Test and group	Pre test		Post test		Follow up test		Wilks' lambda	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
MSLSS experimental	124.29	13.60	126.61	16.41	128.71	11.64	(2,26)= 0.10	0.000
MSLSS control	131.37	13.89	128.07	10.30	130.96	9.48	(2,25)= 16.67	0.000

Note: MSLSS values are mean scores on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (almost always).

Table 4: MSLSS life satisfaction post hoc tests between paired test sessions using Bonferroni

Group	Test session (I)	Test session (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance
Experimental	1	2	-2.321	0.760	0.015
Experimental	1	3	-4.429	0.528	0.000
Experimental	2	3	-2.107	1.198	0.270
Control	1	2	3.296	1.077	0.015
Control	1	3	0.407	1.203	1.000
Control	2	3	-2.889	0.566	0.000

Note: Pre-test = test session 1. Post-test = test session 2. Follow up test = test session 3.

scores $p = .015$, as well as from pre-test to follow-up test, $p = .000$ (Table 4). The results from the control group display a statistically significant drop between pre-test and post-test before re-gaining ground on the base-level mean score in the follow up tests (Table 4).

The overall full scale results display growth in school belonging and wellbeing that is statistically significant ($p < .05$) over the three testing periods. The post con results break down this information, revealing that there was a statistically significant effect on belonging and wellbeing post intervention ($p < .05$). They also show that although there wasn't further statistically significant growth in the month after the intervention, but the growth gained was sustained for this period after the classes had ended.

Discussion

Using the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993b) and MSLSS (Huebner, 2001) measures, students' sense of school belonging and life satisfaction were seen to increase statistically significantly in this study,

The results confirm that a class-based intervention to develop sense of belonging and overall well-being amongst peers at an international school, can be facilitated by a teacher during advisory time, as part of the overall curriculum. They also verify the effectiveness of peer value identification and recognition of aligned values in others as a tool to increase school belonging and student wellbeing.

Past research shows that gratitude, shared activities and interests enhance a sense of belonging (Diebel et al., 2016; Thomas, 2012). The current study adds to it by providing evidence that value-sharing also has a positive effect on students' sense of school belonging. Further research is required to identify the differences between the effect of various interventions.

These results reinforce previous studies showing that a sense of belonging at school increases wellbeing (Diebel et al., 2016; Wilczynska et al., 2015) and a group discus-

sion of beliefs and attitudes enhances happiness (Lichter et al., 1980). The previous authors were cautious about attributing causation, offering possible alternative reasoning for their results as non-specific placebo, group support effect or perhaps circumstantial reasoning. However, the current study offers additional evidence for the impact of belonging on wellbeing. Further research needs to examine the intervention in a larger sample and more schools.

The reason as to why the study showed increased levels of a sense of belonging and wellbeing may be due to the positive emotions participants experienced when engaging in playing, which may have influenced the results (Fredrickson, 2013). Also, students' strong desire to connect may have led them to wittingly or unwittingly find partners to connect with (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), rather than the value-sharing experience. Future research needs to consider an alternative value-sharing intervention that eliminates the effect of these confounding variables.

Implications for practice

Sense of belonging at school is the psychological part of a double construct- engagement, in which participation is the active part (Willms & OECD, 2003). Previous efforts to increase engagement have involved building sense of belonging to the school; PARTH (Sanders & Munford, 2016), participation-identification model (Finn, 1989), Check and Connect (Anderson et al., 2004; Christenson et al., 2008). The intervention in this study showed growth in students' sense of belonging. It makes sense then that teachers and schools who wish to increase student participation should incorporate a class curriculum that offers students the opportunity to examine and share their values, experiences and learner preferences, which builds sense of belonging and wellbeing at school. International schools that have more movement in the class population from year to year

are encouraged to examine their advisory programmes, in order to establish time, early in the year, to encourage student connectedness and school belonging.

Educational psychologists interested in helping disaffected youth to reconnect, may choose to use value awareness and recognition as a tool to establish relationships and ignite motivation to engage. The absence of positive engagement may create a vacuum filled by more extreme group membership. In addition to this, educational psychologists may also use the findings to help families and youth who relocate, to deal more effectively with their transition, thus prevent any future problems associated with their move. Finally, educational psychologists might be able to use the findings of the current study when giving talks about inclusion in schools and ways in which it can be increased.

An established outcome of this study is that sense of school belonging relating to peer relationships can be fostered within a classroom setting through sharing values

and experiences during advisory time. Interventions that build belonging in peer groups within a classroom situation is an area that has been largely neglected by researchers (Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008). Similar classroom activities that endorse alignment of peer belonging and allow students to develop their identity, promoting recognition of positive values and differences in learning styles is an addition to be considered in future research and practice. Such classes offer teachers an opportunity to help guide the students' development of their self-identity narrative (Sanders & Munford, 2016), and an opportunity to reflect on and promote school engagement and participation as part of this narrative.

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Appendix 1

Questions that make up questionnaire including demographic, PSSM and MSLSS.

1. What's your unique ID number?
2. Are you male or female?
3. What age are you today?
4. What's your homeroom class?
5. What's nationalities do you have?
6. When did you arrive at 'school name'?
7. Are you leaving the school before, or at the end of this school year?
8. PSSM using Likert scale (five choices) ranging from 'Not at all true' to 'Completely true'.
9. I feel like a real 'school name' International School, Paris student.
10. People here notice when I am good at something.
11. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.
12. Other students at this school take my opinions seriously.
13. Most teachers at 'school name' are interested in me.
14. Sometimes I feel like I don't belong here.
15. There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I've got a problem.
16. People at this school are friendly to me.
17. Teachers here are not interested in people like me.
18. I am included in lots of activities at 'school name'.
19. I am treated with as much respect as other students.
20. I feel very different from most other students here.
21. I can really be myself at this school.
22. The teachers here respect me.
23. People here know I can do good work.
24. I wish I were in a different school.
25. I feel proud of belonging to 'school name'.
26. Other students here like me the way I am.
27. MSLSS 4 point Likert type scale: (1 = never), (2 = sometimes), (3 = often), (4 = almost).
28. I enjoy being at home with my family.
29. My family gets along well together.
30. I like spending time with my parents.
31. My parents and I do fun things together.
32. My family is better than most.
33. Members of my family talk nicely to one another.
34. My parents treat me fairly.
35. My friends treat me well.
36. My friends are nice to me.
37. I wish I had different friends.
38. My friends are mean to me.
39. My friends are great.
40. I have a bad time with my friends.
41. I have a lot of fun with my friends.
42. I have enough friends.
43. My friends will help me if I need it.
44. I look forward to going to school.
45. I like being in school.
46. School is interesting.
47. I wish I didn't have to go to school.

48. There are many things about school I don't like.
49. I enjoy school activities.
50. I learn a lot at school.
51. I feel bad at school.
52. I like where I live.
53. I wish there were different people in my neighbourhood.
54. I wish I lived in a different house.
55. I wish I lived somewhere else.
56. I like my neighbourhood.
57. I like my neighbours.
58. This town is filled with mean people.
59. My family's house is nice.
60. There are lots of fun things to do where I live.
61. I think I am good looking.
62. I am fun to be around.
63. I am a nice person.
64. Most people like me.
65. There are lots of things I can do well.
66. I like to try new things.
67. I like myself.

Wellbeing in international schools: Teachers' perceptions

Angie Wigford & Andrea Higgins

Aim(s): This study explored the perceptions of wellbeing of teachers and teaching assistants who work within the international school sector.

Method: A mixed methods approach provided quantitative and qualitative data. An online questionnaire was completed by 1065 staff in international schools from 72 countries worldwide. Data was summarised to provide an overview of the important wellbeing factors for participants. From this, a semi-structured interview was devised and conducted with 18 people, then analysed using thematic analysis to extract major themes.

Findings: International schools provide a unique perspective on wellbeing, possibly due to the multicultural, multilingual staff and student body as well as the relatively high frequency of transition between schools. The importance of appreciation, relationships and belonging were highlighted. When sufficiently robust, these are effective in balancing out the impact of negative factors such as weak leadership, workloads and lack of resources.

Limitations: This study was broad; the initial focus was on wellbeing generally not belongingness. Future studies could deepen our understanding of belongingness in terms of what it is perceived as, how it develops and the benefits. The student voice was not represented. The sample was opportunist and voluntary.

Conclusions: Collaborative and respectful relationships, the appreciation of colleagues and leaders and strong feelings of belongingness were central to positive wellbeing. This could have implications for those who work within schools in all sectors. Educational psychologists are well placed to support leadership teams to implement strategies that enhance the development of relationships and belongingness in schools.

Keywords: belonging; relationships; wellbeing; international schools; teacher perceptions

THIS PAPER is based on the outcomes of research designed to investigate wellbeing in International Schools (IS) from the perspective of the teaching staff.

International schools are unique environments with specific challenges relating to wellbeing. Despite there being a plethora of research regarding teacher wellbeing and teacher stress in general (Flook et al., 2013), there appeared to be very limited research exploring staff wellbeing in this particular sector of education, or findings that provide a more global perspective. This was identified as worthy of further study.

International schools can be defined as: Any school that delivers a curriculum wholly or partly in English outside an English speaking

country, or a school in a country where English is one of the official languages, offers an English medium curriculum other than that country's national curriculum and the school is international in its orientation. (ISC, 2018)

International schools may be non-profit enterprises, for profit, or charities. There is a range of types of school which include some that are state-sponsored and others that are independent. A third of these schools are bilingual and many run international curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB; ISC, 2018). ISC Research reports that there are currently 10,282 international schools worldwide (ISC, 2019) with 503,000 staff and 5.36 million students and the sector is growing rapidly (ISC, 2018).

As an educational sector, international schools present unique challenges; for example, there are often high levels of staff and student mobility (COBIS, 2018), and therefore both teachers and students may experience multiple transitions between schools and countries. There are difficulties that arise from living in countries with different cultures, languages, systems and practices. However, as indicated above, this sector is expanding at a fast rate and therefore is attracting teachers from across the world. In part, it could be that this is because it is seen as attractive and perhaps as offering something that is different.

Wellbeing as a concept has become more prevalent in schools both across the UK and more widely. As a psychological construct, wellbeing has gone through many revisions and is still understood in multiple ways by different people. It has been argued that this is especially the case in educational establishments, where despite an upsurge of interest in wellbeing, most people find it hard to describe what it is (Soutter et al., 2014). When discussing wellbeing, various terms are used interchangeably, such as happiness, positivity and resilience. There has been a notable move away from a focus on negative aspects of anxiety, stress and restrictive emotional problems (Banerjee et al., 2016). For clarity, the type of wellbeing under consideration in the present study is subjective wellbeing (Deiner et al., 1999) which involves emotional, behavioural, cognitive and socio-relational and motivational evaluations of one's life. Given this, the areas that were identified as being worthy of greater spotlight were individuals' feelings about their work such as pride, a sense of meaning and purpose, frustration and pressure; beliefs about oneself, including competency and job satisfaction; and relationships within the school.

The approach to wellbeing that is being adopted within this paper, is that described by Dodge et al. (2012) as it is considered that it embraces the perspective of subjective wellbeing and its component elements as identified above. This is a model of balance,

whereby stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and/or physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the balance tips, reducing their wellbeing and vice versa.

A further part of the rationale for focusing on the wellbeing of the staff initially was the understanding that in any school this is important to promoting the wellbeing of pupils. For example, in the UK:

Wellbeing in schools starts with the staff: they are in the front line of this work, and it is hard for them to be genuinely motivated to promote emotional and social wellbeing of others if they feel uncared for and burnt out themselves. There is some way to go: over 80 per cent of teachers report experiencing stress, anxiety and depression at work, and over 50 per cent feeling 'severely' stressed. National Union of Teachers. (2013)

Research has also highlighted the impact of staff wellbeing on the performance of pupils; motivation and job commitment (Day & Qing, 2009); pupil wellbeing (Spilt et al., 2011); and academic performance (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Enhancing personal wellbeing has been shown to decrease a person's vulnerability to distress, and helps to improve their ability to function effectively on a day to day basis (Frude, 2014).

As discussed above, the focus of this paper is to present the initial findings of research exploring the perceptions of teachers and teaching assistants in relation to their wellbeing. Further papers are planned to complete a deeper analysis of the data and to present findings relating to the student experience.

Aims of the current study

As outlined above, international schools are unique environments with specific challenges. The aim of this study was to explore the views of those who work within these settings regarding their own wellbeing.

The research questions identified that focused the design of the study were:

What are the perceptions of teachers and teaching assistants working in international schools regarding their wellbeing?

- What promotes the wellbeing of teaching staff?
- What are the barriers to wellbeing for teaching staff?

Method

Ethical supervision was provided by Cardiff University, School of Psychology Ethics Committee.

Research design

A mixed methods approach was utilised, as this provides researchers with the opportunity to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data that can answer research questions within a single study (Mertens, 2015). It also offers a number of benefits including validation of data through triangulation, and gives both depth and breadth to support the understanding of the topic being studied (Mertens, 2015). The sequential format was used so that the quantitative data collected initially could inform the indicative questions of the qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Measures

A primarily quantitative questionnaire was utilised but included both closed and open ended questions designed to obtain basic demographic information about participants as well as their evaluations regarding their own wellbeing. Within the questionnaire, the sources that informed the design and structure were the PERMA approach (Seligman, 2011) and the Wellbeing Daisy (Frude, 2014). A copy of the full questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

Appendix B provides the indicative questions that were used to semi-structure the interview process, the responses from the questionnaire determined the areas that it was felt would be appropriate for further exploration.

The questionnaires were piloted with seven teachers (all currently employed within international schools), and based on the feedback received amendments were made as appropriate to ensure the effectiveness of the measure in supporting the collection of data. These were minor, largely changes to wording to assist clarity or to the response format.

Three pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers and one deputy head-teacher, all of whom were also currently employed within the sector. Again, amendments were minimal and so the data collected was included in the final analysis.

Data collection

The Qualtrics online survey platform was used to distribute the survey and collate responses received. In January 2018, the questionnaire was sent electronically to the senior staff in the 9307 international schools around the world through ISC Research. This was the number of recognised international schools at this time. Responses were received up until early April 2018, when the survey was closed.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they would be willing to engage in an interview to explore some of their responses in greater depth. A total of 39 positive responses were received, and a random number generator was used to identify the 18 people who were subsequently interviewed. These were conducted individually, between June to September 2018, using either Skype (audio or video) or in face-to-face meetings, lasting 30–60 minutes. Interviews were recorded and then fully transcribed within two weeks of being completed.

Participants

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for all those who took part in this study were:

- *Inclusion:* Teachers and teaching assistants who are working within the international school sector.
- *Exclusion:* Those who are teachers and teaching assistants but do not work within the international school sector.

Table 1: Participants roles

Role	Percentage
Classroom teachers	51
Teaching assistants	5
Teachers with management responsibility	22
Teachers in a leadership role	21
Specialist teachers	11

Table 2: Experience of participants

Years of experience	Percentage
Less than 4	25
4 -11	40
12 plus	35

Table 3: Interview participants

Participant number	Gender	Length of experience in international schools	Current age group taught	Current base
1	Female	9 years	EY 0-3	Vietnam
2	Male	2 years	11-16	Vietnam
3	Male	18 months	3-11	Philippines
4	Male	2 years	12-18	China
5	Female	8 years	11-18	Poland
6	Male	N/K	3-18	Vietnam
7	Female	2 years	2-6	Vietnam
8	Female	3 years	8-11	Norway
9	Male	N/K	11-18	China
10	Male	9 years	11-18	Netherlands
11	Female	N/K	12-14	Philippines
12	Male	12 plus years	Deputy head	Singapore
13	Female	4 years	Counsellor*	Hong Kong
14	Female	5 years	13-18	Turkey
15	Female	2 years	13-16	Philippines
16	Male	12 years	7-9	Hong Kong
17	Female	14 years	8-17	Netherlands
18	Female	8 years	4-12	Malaysia

* Primary role was as a counsellor but also worked as a teaching assistant.

The key demographic information for the 1056 respondents from 72 countries to the questionnaire is shown in tables 1 and 2.

Additionally, 24 per cent of participants were working in schools with less than 400 students and 46 per cent were in schools with more than 1000 students on roll.

The information regarding those interviewed is shown in table 3.

Analysis

Data gathered from the closed questions of the questionnaire was summarised into percentages, supported by Qualtrics online survey software. Within the questionnaire, the respondents were also asked open-ended questions which fed into the main thematic analyses that are described below.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was identified as the method of analysis most appropriate for this study, as it can be carried out across a variety of data including both questionnaire and interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The six-step process was adhered to, so the researchers ensured that they familiarised with the interview transcripts and the responses made within the questionnaires before codes were generated. This was followed by a process of gradually generating themes that were then subjected to review, naming and defining the themes in order to result in interpretation and the drawing of conclusions.

The researchers were seeking to identify themes and patterns in relation to the two research questions being posed:

- What promotes the wellbeing of teaching staff?
- What are the barriers to wellbeing for teaching staff?

Initially, the analysis was completed deductively with codes being mapped on to these areas, but this was viewed as not being sufficiently reflective of the data, as so many comments related to both. A second round of analysis was then completed inductively, to allow the major themes relating to both the promotion of wellbeing and the barriers

to form into patterns from the responses given and the codes that had been generated.

Validity and reliability

To promote the validity and reliability of the study, reference was made to the work of Yardley (2008) and the principles identified were adhered to. Third party checking was utilised and the initial analysis was conducted by the two researchers separately.

Findings

The quantitative results were very positive and evidenced *high levels of overall satisfaction and wellbeing* within the international school sector. The results demonstrate the strength of this:

- 90 per cent of respondents found their work full of meaning and purpose most or all of the time;
- 90 per cent were enthused about their job all or most of the time;
- 82 per cent said they were satisfied with their job;
- 90 per cent were proud of the work they do when teaching students most or all of the time;
- 93 per cent said that they were proud of the work that they do when supporting the general wellbeing of their students, most or all of the time; and
- 51 per cent reported that they had plenty of energy in work.

In particular, a strong sense of belonging and positive relationships was highlighted:

- 81 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they could count on the support of their colleagues;
- 90 per cent believe that staff in their school are interested in what students have to say;
- 70 per cent felt proud to work in their school;
- 70 per cent of respondents reported a genuine sense of belonging to their school but 30 per cent did not;
- 94 per cent of respondents said that staff and students within their school get on well with each other;

- 90 per cent believe that staff in the school are interested in what students have to say;
- 78 per cent of staff felt that most students behave well; and
- 68 per cent of staff felt that students in their school want to learn.

It is important to balance the positivity reported within the questionnaire with the data of factors that adversely impacted on wellbeing. Examination of individual participant data showed that a high level of positive aspects did not mean that there weren't also high levels of more negative factors. So, for example, a participant may have a high reported feeling of positive factors but equally feel a lot of pressure and frustration:

- 56 per cent reported that they felt emotionally drained by their work half of the time and 16 per cent felt emotionally drained most of the time;
- 49 per cent did not feel that they had plenty of energy when at work;
- 23 per cent felt pressure with unfinished work tasks on a daily basis;
- 42 per cent felt frustrated in the job at least half of the time; and
- 43 per cent did not feel their school was concerned about their wellbeing.

The quantitative data obtained presented a picture that this relatively large sample had a strong sense of overall pride, job satisfaction and supportive relationships. But negative feeling and perspectives were evident relating to feeling emotionally drained, pressure and frustration. A fairly significant 43 per cent of participants did not view their school as being concerned about staff wellbeing.

The next phase of interviews with 18 participants then moved to explore the story behind these initial findings. As indicated above, the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts combined a deductive and then an inductive approach, and was iterative, repeatedly returning to the data to check that the patterns and then themes

were representative of the responses and were providing a coherent and reflective picture.

The four major themes that emerged were: the work environment; appreciation; relationships; and belongingness. Thematic maps for each are presented. The solid fill indicates factors that are described as primarily enhancing wellbeing, the dotted fill the challenging factors and the cross fill indicates those that were noted by participants as potentially being both positive and negative in their influence on wellbeing.

It became clear through both the measures that were used in this study, that challenges were not simply the converse of the support factors but that there were some distinctively different elements. For example, a poor or ineffective discipline policy was identified as impacting adversely, but a strong policy was not mentioned as a support system.

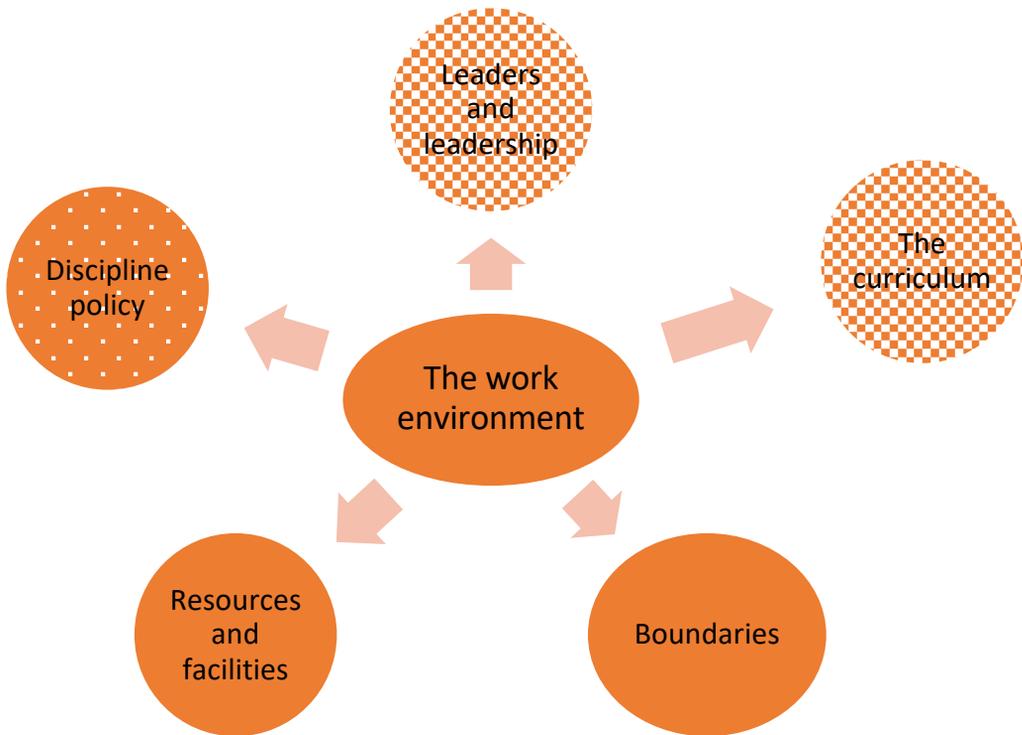
The work environment

For many participants, it was the effectiveness of their leaders and leadership teams that had the strongest impact on their work environment – positive or negative. Leaders that were seen as recognising the work and commitment of school staff were valued highly, as was clarity from the leadership teams about the values and goals of the school and recognition of the need for staff to be informed about decision-making rationale. Participant 8 appreciated that her principal shared his philosophy of education:

We have a great leadership team, especially the Principal, who has a very, a very strong belief in what we're giving, and how we're doing it, and he is very steady, he gives the feeling of, he's seen it all, done it all, and you know, it's just expected... the leadership team are very good at boosting and mentioning what we do. (P8)

But leadership becomes more challenging to an individual's wellbeing when it is 'nega-

Figure 1: The work environment



tive', 'blaming', 'micromanaging' and 'does not acknowledge the effort and commitment made by workers in schools'. 'Seeking profit above all else' was an aspect also mentioned by some.

The impact of the lack of a consistent leader was noted by participant 14:

The problem that I think we face... is leadership vacuum, we've had a lot of intern head of schools come and go, and come and go, and people... lack of vision, lack of long-term, lack of people who aren't afraid to make a decision... you have to know that you're appreciated, because it's probably not going to be said verbally or in a tangible way, that's really paramount, and the leadership right now, they're bogged down... so, what do they do? They don't.

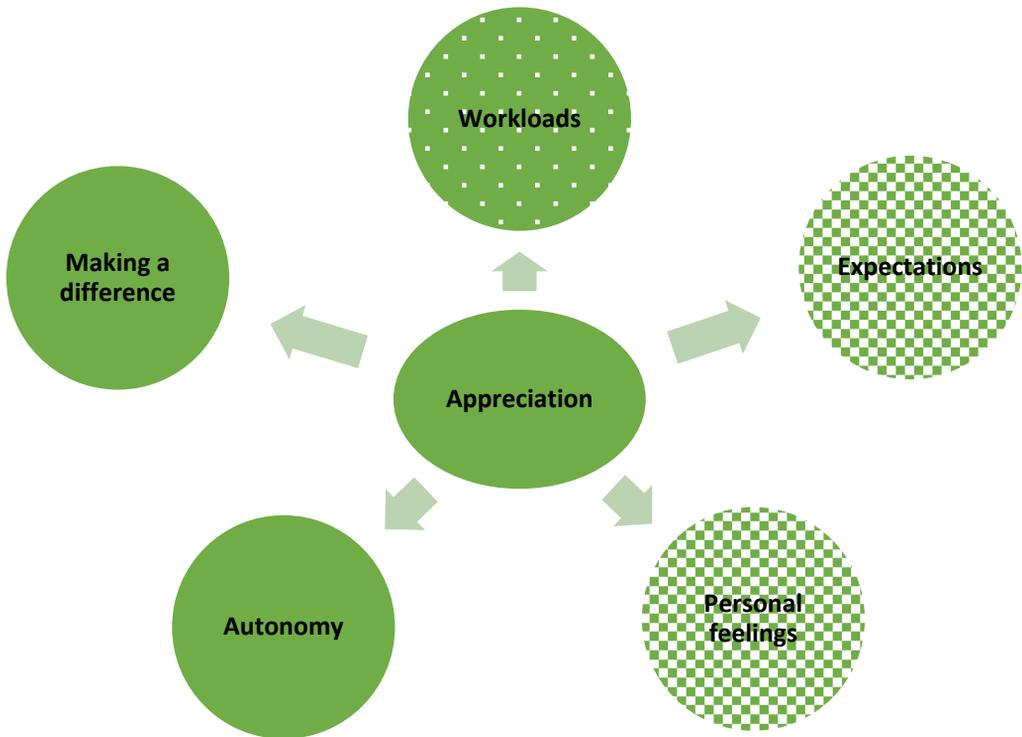
The nature of the work, in terms of the *curriculum* being delivered, was also mentioned

several times. Within the sector, the International Baccalaureate is taught, which for many respondents was positive as it made their work interesting and motivating, allowing for creativity and fostering feelings of empowerment. Participant 16 described it as:

More child-led, so as a teacher it's less repetitive and boring as it were. And I think there's more chance for you to be creative as well in what you're doing, so that's one of the best things I find at the moment.

But for a minority, the curriculum was seen as being 'boring' and 'limiting'. *Resources and facilities* came through as positives that enhanced wellbeing when available. Comments named elements such as: lots of space; new developments and buildings; good working conditions and employment packages; small classes; CPD; and accessible teaching resources:

Figure 2: Appreciation



We have very good working conditions, so, that takes away a whole load of grief. (P12).

We do get a lot of good professional development opportunities, and different speakers coming in from all over the world, so that's really helped. (P11)

Clear boundaries between work and the home were appreciated by some:

One thing that resonates with me is about having appropriate boundaries, so whether they're temporal, so you know, after 8 o'clock you won't check your emails, whatever it is, spatial, when I'm at home I don't work, or cognitive, I will be in the moment no matter where I am. (P9)

For participant 4, the school offered a system that they found to be very supportive:

...we are given quite good recompense when we need it for school trips and things like that. I tend to take it out in a time bank, so if I take children abroad, instead of being paid for the whole weekend, which I could be, I say 'can I just have this in time bank?' So, for me, it works well. (P14)

The 'discipline' policy and practice of a school was highlighted by a number of questionnaire participants and those interviewed as a challenge to wellbeing. Where it was weak, unclear or inconsistently implemented across the school then participants noted it as a negative for them.

Appreciation

This major theme (see Figure 2) linked to the importance for all of our participants of feelings of competency; being valued and making a difference.

A pressure for many were *expectations*

that were seen as being ‘unreasonable’, ‘unrealistic’, and ‘closely monitored’, leading to strong feelings of failure. Parental expectations and the difficulties that came from these could be very challenging, as were the drivers of exam and test outcomes: ‘Parents will be on your back if your child is not getting the correct grades.’ (P17)

But for some, this was perceived as being reduced in the international system:

For me, I think wellbeing and all of that for me has improved no end since moving out of the British state system, be that into the private system or moving abroad, and I think a lot of it does boil down to, you had that professional autonomy, that you didn’t often have because everything was coming down to SATS results, and that was it; and all the kind of work you did was just focused on that, whereas I think once you kind of break out of that system, you’re free to look at the bigger picture and kind of focus on different things and, so for me that’s been the big

difference, not just moving abroad but kind of the different system to the one that I was experiencing. (P16)

Heavy *workloads* with tight deadlines, a view that work would be completed at evenings and weekends, additional work that was unexpected and unplanned all contributed to feelings of failure and impacted more negatively on an individual’s wellbeing.

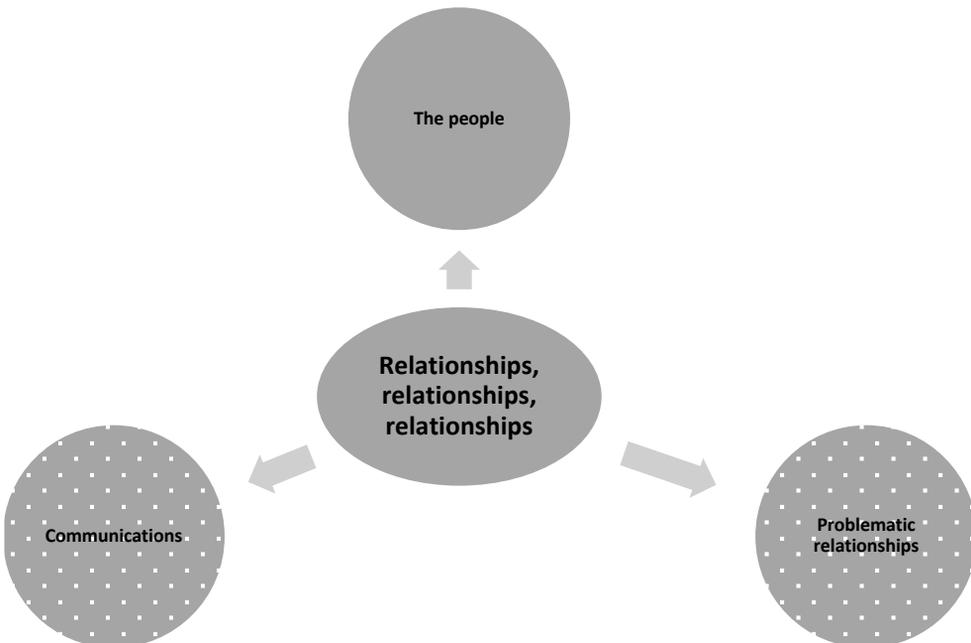
One of the wellbeing enhancers was a perception of ‘*making a difference*’ through achieving goals; seeing students’ progress and being productive was important to staff.

The ‘light bulb moments when students grasp a concept’ was how participant 14 described it to us.

Meaningful work and making a difference were also significant:

It is the small things, you know, a little five-year-old wrote me a note last year going ‘Dear Mary, I like the way you talk to me’, it’s like, wow, I can make a difference for a little five-year-old. (P5)

Figure 3: Relationships



It makes me proud to be a teacher, because I know we're doing a lot... the children are getting such amazing opportunities. (P5)

Personal feelings such as pride, competency, passion, having a sense of purpose and enjoyment were valuable.

Expressions of 'appreciation' also had a strong role to play, both within this theme and as part of the relationships with others. Throughout the questionnaire respondents indicated how much they valued teachers, other members of staff, parents and pupils commenting on their strengths and skills: praise, being appreciated by – parents/pupils/colleagues, acknowledgement, positive feedback, recognition and celebration of success.

Finally, *professional autonomy* was another way that allowed those who work in schools to feel valued and appreciated:

There is a lot of professional autonomy... our head has encouraged us to run research projects ...that is one of the big motivators. (P8)

...the things I like most are the autonomy, the resources, the ambition, the lack of political interference, the broad moral purpose. (P17)

Relationships, relationships, relationships

Linked to the final major theme of belongingness, but nonetheless distinct, was that of relationships (shown in Figure 3). Belongingness was presented as being deeper with more personal meaning to individuals, whereas relationships were the more basic interactions that are critical for efficient working partnerships but perhaps offer less depth at a personal level.

Supportive and effective relationships with all the people involved in school settings were frequently highlighted by participants.

As was cited by many teachers, it is the students that are the most important thing for them: 'It is the reason why I am still in teaching and in this school'. Positive and enjoyable relationships were frequently

mentioned as being very important:

Treating them with respect back and trust in terms of students. I think is very important part. (P3)

Our assistant principal is very mindful of teacher-student relationships and does a lot of sharing of articles and literature to try and help teachers to do that, to continue to build those relationships. (P3)

In my current school I love the learning culture. I love the attitude of the students. I can have 14 different nationalities in there and it is such a melting point of language and culture. I love the fusion that happens in my classroom. (P13)

Positive relationships with parents were also as seen important. It was recognised that these were often difficult because of challenges of language, culture, attitude, difficulties in contact and expectations:

I cannot really confront the parents because they would take the students from our school. (P18)

But because of the culture parents tend to defer to teachers so they may be less engagement. (P12)

But a majority felt that they could count on the support of parents. When there were good links this was satisfying and valuable to teachers.

Supportive relationships with colleagues came through as being crucial for well staff wellbeing. As identified above, 81 per cent of the questionnaire respondents felt they could count on the support of colleagues. When asked to list three things that help staff to feel positive in school, staff-staff relationships accounted for approximately 30 per cent of the responses. Examples of words used to describe the qualities that were appreciated and supported the development of relationships included: 'collegiate'; 'collaborative';

‘easy going’; ‘caring’; ‘positivity’ and ‘kind’; ‘people that could be trusted’:

I like that relationship with the parents, I like the interaction with the parents, and developing this community in that work. (P1)

Parents that I have had have been very supportive and I think that there is a huge community in the school in general. (P7)

The parents are really great and supportive of the teachers... I don't take that for granted for sure. (P3)

I have always tried to be open with parents and communicate with them frequently inviting them to come in and observe if they want to. (P1)

I love my partner teachers, I adore working with them. I respect them professionally and personally and that goes along way for me to overlook the nit-picky things I might gripe about and I think that helps quite a

bit. (P18)

Good supportive colleagues, people you know you can approach if you've problems. (P12)

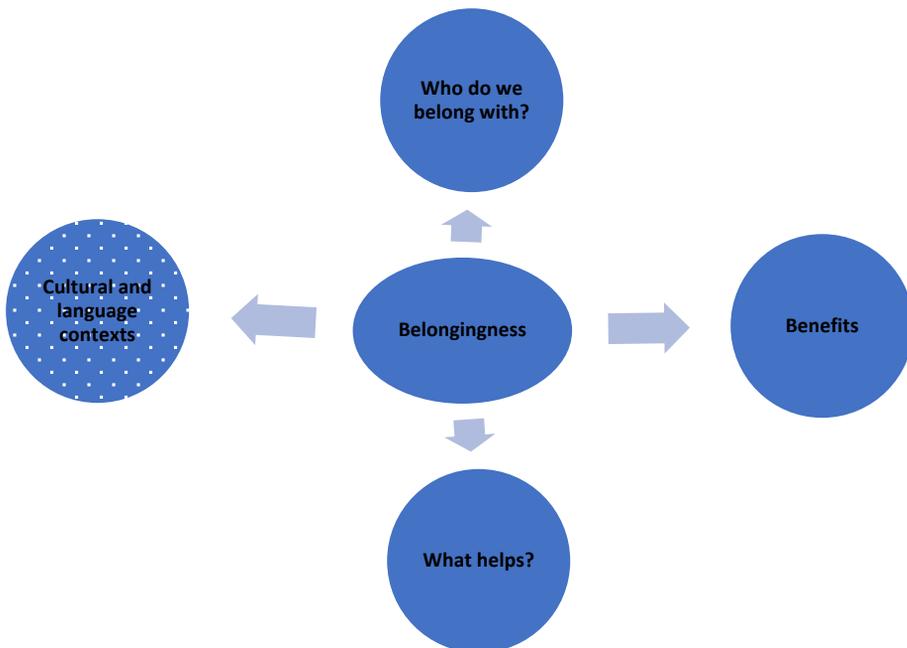
I think the quality of staff, quality of colleagues, of like-minded individuals who are wanting to achieve the same goals and prepare to work, to make it happen. (P8)

Repeatedly, *communication* emerged as a matter of importance, unpopular decisions can be accepted if they are effectively communicated to teams and there is an understanding about how they have been made:

It's like when she is good (the principal) she's very good but actually when she's not good at communicating it really shows you how bad the effect it can have on staff. (P13)

The frequency and clarity of communications were valued, as was a sense of being listened to and use of humour. The benefits

Figure 4: Belongingness



of an open door policy and 'just chatting' were also mentioned:

By having systems which communicate very clearly why we do things, what we do, why we can't do other, why, if we're constrained, what those constraints are. (P12)

Communication, clear communication -giving information in a clear concise way over with a good timeframe. (P7)

Problems of communications that were lacking in transparency and simply not being informed, of minor or major items were all challenges for individuals.

Difficult or problematic relationships resulted in strong feelings of isolation and of being unsupported. These seemed to be linked to behaviours that were particularly disliked such as:

- complaining;
- negativity;
- dishonest behaviour;
- gossiping;
- untrustworthy behaviour;
- prejudice;
- not listening;
- bullying;
- cliques;
- disrespect; and
- disinterest.

Belongingness

All of the major themes identified above were expected by the authors to varying degrees, as being likely 'resources' or barriers for well-being. However, what was less anticipated was the strength of the 'Belongingness' theme (as highlighted in Figure 4). This emerged from both the open-ended responses given in the questionnaire and also the interviews. It was not something that had been identified as a defined area for exploration during the development of the project but it was something that became apparent to the researchers as being core to the happiness and positive wellbeing of individuals.

Three aspects emerged: *who* people iden-

tify as belonging with; *what* helps belonging; and the *benefits* such as the formation of lasting friendships, the cultural aspects that could be barriers also became a sub-theme from the comments made.

There was a lot said with regard to *who people belong with*. Working in a team or department was often reported as very positive and central to positive feelings. Some talked about their school as a family – although this was seen as both positive and negative. One teacher (P4) reported:

They're trying to make you feel at home and make you feel like a family but it's a business, education is a business nowadays so why are we talking of these values of family?

The idea that international school teachers have a distinct identity emerged as supporting that sense of belonging. One teacher (P8) told us:

We have a culture in the school; a sense of belonging because we're all from everywhere, that in itself is a community. It helps belonging knowing there are people who've experienced things like me.

Some participants made strong statements about the power of being a part of a close community they could identify with:

We live and work in a close community we look after each other. (P8)

I think it's the people around me, definitely... we have one staff room that we all manage to fit into, for lunches and things, everybody takes lunch, everybody comes down and, you see everybody, from the whole school, every day... and we have a staff office which we share, so you do see people a lot; that makes a very good connection, that feels that I'm seen and I see other people, that's a sense of belonging. (P3)

Being part of an international community with a clear identity, curriculum and

shared values and/or the curriculum was important. One teacher told us:

I'm in contact with the other (IB) workshops leaders and with people around the world and we use Facebook groups for support, this all creates that sense of community.

...the constant IEPs, paperwork, documentation, getting away from that is tremendous, but it's not just the push away from that, it's the pull here... I love the staff, I love the kids, I love what we do, yeah, I'd rather be here than anywhere, I think, yes please! (P3)

An area for exploration within the interviews became that of *what helps* the development of a sense of belonging for those who work in schools. An ethos of community and belongingness that was embedded into all aspects of school life was described as being most important in promoting this:

The headmaster every day would make sure he said goodbye to all the staff. Just seeing his face and him sitting there saying goodbye to each one of us was nice... it did show some kind of care. So really it is more of this interpersonal stuff and caring for each other. It's not regulated; there is no policy to care; no rule you have to follow, it is just something... I think a good school has people that care about each other and about students and that's the most important thing, I think there is. (P5)

For some, this was supported by aspects in the themes above, such as mutual support at all levels of the school and strong relationships.

For others, there were specific features that were important. Shared experiences came across as fundamental to belonging. These came in several forms such as arrival at the school at the same time as others:

Every batch of newbies gets like really, really close just because of the way they structure orientation and how they settle you in really well. (P13)

Mentoring and coaching systems help:

We are very explicit that you do better at work when you look after yourself. We each have an individual mentor so there is one person looking out to you and you look out for them. In more practical terms there are lots of social things... we also have a programme of wellness opportunities. (P7)

An important feature for engendering a feeling of belongingness from the outset was the welcome into a school. It was something that teachers sensed before they even arrived on the first day, and certainly within the first few weeks. The ways in which this was achieved varied but included help with accommodation, food in the fridge the day people arrived, support in setting up the basics such as bank accounts and phones:

Little things that make your moving in more comfortable – internet, telephone, legal documents – so that you can start the school feeling that you can do this. (P5)

Our school has started implementing new teacher buddies which has been really nice. I have volunteered for it because I felt it was important to reach out to people. (P12)

Teachers mentioned the importance of shared extracurricular activities and shared daily contact. For example: 'Everybody takes lunch, everybody comes down and you see everybody from the whole school every day.'

Throughout all of the data collected for this study was the strength of belongingness in its impact on a general sense of happiness and wellbeing; *the benefits* that it offered. Participants repeatedly conveyed this – even when there were pressures of unrealistic expectations and demands, heavy workloads and feelings of exhaustion, this was manageable if there were strong networks and the feeling that you mattered to colleagues, and that they care.

One teacher reported a tight team

who had supported each other through two personal traumas and said: 'We pride ourselves on being the most functional department in the school.' (P17)

Others spoke about experiences in previous schools where things had been different (more difficult), and having this perspective enhanced their recognition of the importance of their sense of belonging with their current school. Teachers told us about the value of forming bonds quickly on arrival in a new country.

Understanding the need for belonging can change subsequent behaviour. One teacher who was ex-military said he had learned from past experience: 'I know we need each other and I reach out to people.' (P14)

Hand in hand with belongingness came the formation of lasting *friendships*, which again was a feature that was noted by many participants in interviews and questionnaire and which had a fundamental level of importance to their wellbeing and their sense of belongingness.

Barriers to feelings of belongingness within their current lives were both those that resulted from relationship challenges highlighted above and a result of the *cultural and language contexts*.

Being an 'expatriate' was mentioned as an identity issue. Some staff talked about 'living in a bubble', either relating to a small school and/or a small community and having to be friends with people they would not otherwise socialise with. There were several descriptions of alienation in a school where staff do not speak the same languages, which leads to great difficulties with communication.

Discussion

In response to the original research questions: 'What promotes wellbeing?' and 'What are the barriers to wellbeing for teaching staff?', it became clear to the researchers that the factors are complex and intertwined – it is not a simplistic division between promoters and barriers. There

is a strong sense of positive wellbeing for those who work in this sector. The work environment, appreciation, relationships and belonging were core constructs that mattered to people. However, staff did experience negative feelings such as emotional pressure, isolation, frustration and work overload or concerns about poor leadership, lack of communication, insufficient feelings of value and appreciation and difficult relationships. There always will be challenges when working in schools. What became evident through the interviews was that many of these negative elements were being counterbalanced by positive and enhancing factors. These were collaborative and supportive working relationships, feelings of appreciation and achievement, and a strong sense of belongingness to the schools and communities within which people are based.

So, it is suggested that the theory of Dodge et al. (2012) was supported by the findings of this study:

Stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and/or physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the balance tips reducing their wellbeing and vice versa.

Within the theme of work environment, the challenges appeared to be those more related to the fabric of the school in terms of the curriculum; leadership; levels of resourcing and workload pressures, which arguably would be more difficult for individual schools to change, particularly in the short term. However, it was patterns linked to the themes of appreciation, relationships and belongingness, more fundamentally human elements, that were raised and discussed both more often and in greater depth by the participants. This has also been supported by the findings of a detailed investigation on wellbeing in the education profession in England (Ofsted, 2019).

Amongst the recommendations made for leaders was: 'Develop staff wellbeing by creating a positive and collegial working environment in which staff feel supported, valued and listened to and have an appropriate level of autonomy.'

For school leaders this would mean that these are the 'softer' factors that could be addressed by changes in attitudes, behaviours and practice but do not necessarily require significant resources. Therefore, it is posited that these are aspects that could be more easily developed by schools. It is acknowledged that changes to elements such as a core ethos of belongingness, care and support could take time and sustained development in order to be embedded into schools but there is much that could be achieved very quickly and easily that would have immediate impacts for the wellbeing of staff. The section below on the implications of this research, supported by suggestions for interventions in Table 4 will consider these in more detail.

Also, the finding that although teachers reported much that was positive about the work lives in regard to their wellbeing, there was a strong view (43 per cent), who do not feel their school was concerned about personal wellbeing. This would indicate there is much to be done to ensure that the senior leadership staff within the schools highlight this as part of an agenda with their teams.

Belonging emerged as a core construct for the wellbeing of staff who work in international schools. Maslow (1943) included belongingness as a fundamental psychological need. Baumeister and Leary (1995) stated: 'Human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong; that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal relationships.' (i.e. an innate human need rather than a want). They identified 'frequent interaction' and 'persistent caring' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.497) as the two key aspects of belonging. In the meta-analysis of

factors that influence school belonging completed by Allen et al. (2018) it was noted that teacher support and positive personal characteristics were the strongest predictors of school belonging at student level during adolescence. This research has supported these findings in relation to the adults who work in international schools, providing an illustration of the depth and value attached to a sense of belonging. It could be that those who work in international schools have an enhanced understanding and attach greater value to the need for belonging because they have been uprooted multiple times and/or have observed the impact of this on colleagues and students, and therefore are likely to have personally experienced the negative impact of a lack of belonging. Perhaps an additional factor is that experiences of teaching in an international school, where transitions are high, sensitises teachers to the need for supportive relationships. For some participants within this study, steps taken by schools to ensure that even before arriving at a school for the first day staff are made welcome was very important. This becomes embedded through activities such as extra curriculum activities and social opportunities, and most importantly strong, supportive and caring relationships that deepen and develop into an identity with a community and friendships. These all lead to enhancement of personal wellbeing, decrease vulnerability to distress and help with the ability to function effectively on a day-to-day basis.

The extent to which the belonging aspect of relationships is encouraged in a system will be dependent on the awareness of its' importance. Hopefully, this study will go some way towards enhancing understanding of the potential impact of a focus on belonging.

The implications of this research for international schools worldwide

This research has provided an illustration of the centrality of belonging in the international school community. Creating

Table 4: Examples of strategies for schools to employ to enhance wellbeing

Relationships and belongingness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancement of induction programmes to address inclusion and feelings of belongingness of new staff. • Encourage use of social media groups to promote staff interaction. • Foster positive, constructive interaction between school community groups. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Extra-curricular activities that promote social interaction and relationships. – Parent–teacher associations that support shared understandings. – Organised and regular staff social events . – Alumni programmes that include reunions. • Leadership and management training with a focus on relationships. • Recognition by schools of the importance of the wellbeing of staff and ensuring this message is conveyed to those within schools. • Use of psychology-based tools that help the development of strong supportive relationships throughout the school.
Appreciation and belongingness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership teams who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – prioritise acknowledgement of staff in communications; – appreciate the value of 'thank you'; – listen to the views of staff; and – develop professional autonomy. • Coaching and mentoring systems. • School-based recognition systems. • Systems to provide staff with boundaries between work and life. • Agile working – freedom to work from home which implies trust. • Use of psychology-based tools that can help staff to understand the personal needs of the individual • Training for staff and families on the possible impact of moves and transitions in terms of guilt, grief and loss.

and then embedding a sense of belonging for both staff and students emerged as a key component for building the resiliency of staff to cope with the pressures and demands that are placed upon them. Schools could do much to enhance their wellbeing agenda through recognising and addressing the value of belonging. Some possible strategies for this are provided in Table 4.

The role of educational psychology

It is argued that although this paper has focused on the IS school sector, the findings will have application to all educational

psychologists (EPs) within the UK, as well as to the growing group of EPs who are working internationally. The power of enhancing feelings of belonging and the challenges of staff isolation and mobility has to be core to those who work alongside any school.

The role of the educational psychologist in relation to promoting belonging may be focused on raising awareness through research and documentation of the impact that this can have on staff and student wellbeing. This provides a basis for school psychologists and leaders to argue for systemic approaches to focus on developing an effective school ethos supported by poli-

cies and processes for staff at all times and points within a setting.

An ecosystemic approach as described by Bronfenbrenner (1994) to understanding and developing whole school support for belonging at the micro, meso, exo and macro-systemic levels could be an effective way of describing and developing approaches to support this human need to belong within a system that acknowledges and appreciates sustaining relationships. This idea is supported by Allen and Bowles, who concluded:

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model provides the most comprehensive theoretical construct to date with which to investigate belonging in an organisational setting such as a school. (Allen & Bowles, 2012, p.110)

Educational psychologists can use this approach to provide schools with strategies to support whole school relationship building, with the aim of improving the capacity for individuals to develop a sense of belongingness in their community.

Transitioning between schools generally involves a loss of some form, which can result in a grief process. Guilt is also frequently a factor in a move (Gillies, 1998). Managing these feelings frequently can be a significant challenge with which Educational Psychologists can provide support.

Finally, Educational Psychologists are in a position to use their knowledge and skills in the relatively new area of implementation science to enhance the delivery and evaluation of evidence-based interventions designed to promote wellbeing (Kelly & Perkins, 2012). They would also be in a position to support the suggestions of Allen and Bowles (2012), who recommend further studies on belonging in order to design interventions and modifications of organisational structures including policies, pedagogy and teacher training.

Limitations and future directions

In the initial design of this study, the focus

was on discovering the key aspects of the wellbeing of staff in international schools as perceived by teachers, it did not focus specifically on belonging. Belonging emerged as a significant theme. The different aspects of belonging described above lend themselves to further investigation. Investigation of the processes that schools who manage transitions effectively as reported by staff, that lead to a sense of belonging, would be informative.

The sample was opportunist and therefore only represents those staff who were interested in responding. The definition of an international school was broad and therefore a wide range of schools was represented. Both of these factors limit the detail and focus that was possible in the analysis.

There has not been any detail provided on the different features that could be worthy of consideration within the results, such as the size of the school, age range and location. This was a preliminary study and the limits of this paper did not allow for this, but this is being completed and will be reported in a future paper.

Summary

In summary, this study provided an insight into the world of international school teachers and their perceptions of their emotional, cognitive and socio-relational wellbeing within their work setting.

Our findings suggested a high level of wellbeing for staff in international schools. Work environment, appreciation, relationships and belongingness were central pillars of wellbeing. Many positive factors in each area were very powerful in counter-balancing the impact of more negative aspects such as workload demands and pressure for results.

Belonging emerged as a fundamental theme in relation to wellbeing. This lends itself to further investigation in order to understand better how to support school belonging and, in particular, those elements that can impact adversely such as transition and mobility.

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Appendix A: Quantitative survey questions on wellbeing

The following questions were answered as follows: always – most of the time – about half of the time – sometimes – never.

1. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.
2. I am enthusiastic about my job.
3. I am proud of the work that I do when I am teaching my students.
4. I am proud of the work that I do when I am supporting the general wellbeing of my students.

The following questions were answered as follows: Rarely – about half of the time – most of the time.

5. I feel emotionally drained by my work.
6. I feel frustrated by my job.

The following questions were answered as follows: Daily – 4-6 times/week – 2-3 times/week – once a week - never.

7. How often do you feel pressure with unfinished work tasks?
8. How often do you work at home to cope with the demands of your job?

The following questions were answered as follows: true – neither true nor false – false.

9. I have plenty of energy in work.
10. The following questions were answered as follows: strongly agree – agree – neither

agree nor disagree – disagree – strongly disagree.

11. This school is concerned about my personal wellbeing.
12. I can count on the support of my colleagues at this school.
13. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
14. I am proud to work for this school.
15. I feel a real sense of belonging to this school.
16. I would definitely recommend working for this school to a friend.
17. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
18. I am always optimistic about my future.

The following questions were answered as follows: Definitely true – probably true – neither true nor false – probably false – definitely false

19. Staff and students usually get on well with each other.
20. The following questions were answered as follows: 0–20%, 21–40%, 41–60%, 61–80%, 81–100%.
21. Staff can count on the support of what percentage of parents?
22. What three things help you to feel positive about your work and relationships in school?
23. What three things reduce your positivity in school?

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions

1. Please introduce yourself and tell us a little about where you work and who with.
2. If you are working in a country other than the one you trained in, what things do you like the most and what are the most challenging about working in this international school which are different to working in a school in your home country?
3. Are you happy and settled in school and, if so what helps you to feel that way?
4. What are the pressures and how do you address them?
5. What helps you to give you a sense of belonging to the school that you work in?

6. Could you tell us about your work–life balance and what impacts on that?
7. What does your school do that communicates to staff that they care about their personal wellbeing?
8. What do you feel is important in achieving positive relationships between staff and students and staff and parents?

Our study has been designed to explore wellbeing in international school, looking at both the strengths and areas for improvement. Is there any more in relation to this that has arisen that you would like to talk to us?

My class needs my voice: The desire to stand out predicts choices to contribute during class discussions

DeLeon L. Gray, Mike Yough & Wayne A. Williams

Aim(s): Across two studies, we examine links between students' perceptions of the role of contributions to class discussions in helping them stand out, the importance they place on contributing, and the observed frequency of their attempts to contribute.

Method/rationale: We purposefully sampled pre-service teachers at a large university in the US. Two research assistants tracked pre-service teachers' contribution attempts during in-class discussions. In study 1 ($N = 164$), mediational pathways were examined to understand whether and why students participated more during the semester when they perceived contributions as a means of standing out in class. In study 2 ($N = 143$), we administered a distinctiveness intervention to half of the participants at the beginning of the semester.

Findings: Results of the first study revealed that participants who believed contributing to class discussions was a means to stand out placed higher importance on contributing and made more contribution attempts. Results of the second study revealed that the distinctiveness intervention positively influenced the number of contribution attempts made during large-group discussions.

Limitations: We did not assess whether participants exposed to the distinctiveness intervention shifted in their perceptions of the importance of recognising diverse students' voices in their future k-12 classrooms.

Conclusions: Findings support the proposition that a sense of belonging is not a passive, but rather an active process. This study demonstrates that one vehicle for satisfying belonging and identity needs is through contributions in the classroom.

Keywords: belonging; distinctiveness; motivation; class participation; social identity

IN the educational literature, there is both familiarity and a certain vagueness surrounding the term school belonging – often defined as school-based perceptions of acceptance, respect, inclusion and support (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Decades of research demonstrate that school belonging has been linked with a number of positive outcomes across geographical and cultural settings (Allen et al., 2018). For example, school belonging is associated with greater competence perceptions (Hernández et al., 2017), higher academic performance (Anderman, 2003; Hughes et al., 2015; Pittman & Richmond, 2010), greater mental health and emotional wellbeing (Gökmen, 2018; Li & Jiang, 2018; Maurizi et al., 2013),

and higher school engagement (Benner et al., 2017).

At the same time, it has been said that many researchers have discussed and attempted to investigate school belonging in its totality at the expense of the theoretical nuances among the constructs under school belonging's umbrella (Gray et al., 2018). One such nuanced construct in need of further investigation is the desire for distinctiveness. This is a meaningful socio-relational construct, in the sense that asserting one's distinct ideas and viewpoints allows individuals to add something new to a social environment that may not have been contributed without their presence. In this article, we examine how

opportunities to convey one's unique ideas and perspectives can energise and direct patterns of student participation during class discussions.

The distinctiveness motive:

Theory and Research

For decades scholars have documented that people want to see themselves as distinct from others (e.g. Codol, 1984; Lemaine, 1974; Maslach, 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Vignoles and colleagues (Vignoles, 2009; Vignoles et al., 2000) described differentiation as a necessary precondition for establishing a sense of self-definition – viewing distinctiveness as an existential need – essentially, that in order to know what I am, I must also know what I am not. A more traditional view describes distinctiveness as a Western cultural value (e.g. Triandis, 1995). However, in a cross-cultural study, examining more than 4000 participants across 18 countries, a desire for uniqueness was found among both individualist (e.g. UK) and collectivist (e.g. China) cultures (Becker et al., 2012). Further, Goodenow's (1993) assessment of survey items, such as I can really be myself at this school suggests that 'being oneself' is a relevant aspect of how one comes to feel a sense of psychological membership in academic environments.

The notion of distinctiveness is akin to another social identity motive: mattering. Mattering is a fundamental aspect of the self-concept (Rosenberg & McCollough, 1981) that involves being attended to or invested in by others, or helpful to them (Elliott et al., 2004). Self-perceptions distinctiveness and mattering may both be strengthened though identity-affirming statements and messages conveyed by others. However, distinctiveness diverges from mattering in its emphasis on the recognition of personal qualities that comprise one's unique presence or existence (e.g. opinions, perspectives, and experiences; Gray, 2017) as opposed to a recognition that one's presence is has an impact on, and meaning in, the lives of others.

According to optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), the human desires for distinctiveness (standing out) and similarity (fitting in) serve as fundamental contributors to the formation and maintenance of identities. Perceptions of fitting in and standing out are social identity needs in the sense that they provide a person with information about how she or he relates with others in their social environment. Bringing a Standing Out-Fitting In (SOFI) perspective to the study of achievement motivation and behaviour, Gray (2014) suggests that students are agents who are capable of working toward the satisfaction of their own desires for both distinctiveness and similarity. This perspective also proposes that students will be drawn to achievement behaviours (in action and in attitude) when they view such behaviours as opportunities to meet their unfulfilled social identity needs.

Distinctiveness, identity and expectancy-value theory

When integrated with expectancy-value theory, the notion of distinctiveness provides insight into factors that may influence the value that students place on a task. When Eccles (2009) discussed how values are related to identities and identity formation processes, she emphasised that students who place high attainment value (i.e. importance) on a task believe that engaging in the task will reinforce how they define themselves. But this is not the only way in which attainment value may be traced to identities and identity formation processes. The earliest iterations of Eccles and colleagues' (1983) framework included a more detailed account of the construct. In addition to affirming existing identities, tasks also might be seen as high in attainment value when they provide an individual with a challenge or when they help satisfy some unfulfilled need (e.g. a power need, an achievement need, a social need). So, in this framework, attainment value reflects the extent to which individuals see themselves in the activities they perform, as well as the harmony individuals

perceive between their needs and the affordances of these activities for meeting those needs. According to Eccles and colleagues (1983), 'The perceived qualities of the task determine its attainment value through their interaction with an individual's needs and self-perceptions' (p.89). In other words, the importance individuals assign to a task might depend on their perception of whether the task will help satisfy an unfulfilled need – for example, to fit in or stand out.

Recent empirical research on standing out (distinctiveness) and fitting in (similarity) shows empirical support for our theoretical formulation. Gray et al. (2014) took an inductive approach to understanding the active role students take in satisfying their needs to stand out and fit in. The researchers asked 96 high school students four questions: (i) What do you personally do to fit in at school?; (ii) What do you personally do to stand out at school?; (iii) What do other students do to fit in at school?; and (iv) What do other students do to stand out at school? Results revealed that students used 18 strategies to fit in and stand out. Each of these strategies was coded into three larger themes: achievement behaviour, direct interactions with peers, and self-expression (in terms of one's feelings or self-presentation). Regarding achievement behaviour, students reported both achieving and underachieving as strategies they used to satisfy an unfulfilled social identity need. This study reveals that doing well and doing poorly can both enable students to demonstrate their similarity or uniqueness to others. When doing well can satisfy students' social identity needs, their unfulfilled needs to fit in or stand out can lead to increased achievement behaviour.

Other research shows that the importance that students place on achievement tasks can be explained by their perception of these tasks as social mediums for helping them to either stand out or fit in. In a study at a STEM-focused high school, Gray (2014) asked math teachers to collaborate on generating a list of 18 math-achievement tasks that

students might perform (e.g. doing homework, working out problems on the board, taking tests). Students participated by taking a survey on their laptops about the tasks. Students were asked to rate each achievement task in terms of task importance and in terms of how much the task served as an assimilation and differentiation medium (i.e. 'How much does being engaged in this task help you fit in with [stand out from] other students?' (1 = Not at all to 7 = Extremely)). Results revealed that students placed more importance on achievement tasks that they viewed as providing opportunities for standing out than they did on achievement tasks that they did not view as opportunities for standing out. Likewise, students placed more importance on achievement tasks that they viewed as providing opportunities for fitting in than they did on achievement tasks that they did not view as opportunities for fitting in. In a university-based study, Gray and Rios (2012, study 1) observed the same patterns as those found at the STEM high school – that college students who were enrolled in educational psychology courses also placed more importance on achievement tasks when they viewed these tasks as opportunities to assimilate or differentiate. Taken together, this prior research suggests that the distinctiveness and similarity both have motivational properties, and that both of these social-relational constructs can drive achievement behaviour when the achievement task is viewed as an opportunity to fulfil these needs.

Overview and purpose of research

Across two samples of undergraduate students enrolled in educational psychology courses, this investigation seeks to address whether perceptions of distinctiveness serve as a driver of students' choices to contribute during class discussions. Building on prior research, we address two areas of theoretical and practical significance in the present study. Whereas prior work demonstrates that connections exist between identity formation processes and academic tasks in general, more nuanced

descriptions of these identity processes are necessary for understanding why students engage in specific tasks in the classroom – such as contributing to thoughts and ideas generated during large group discussion. Moreover, the notion of students' desires for uniqueness remains relatively under-explored in the context of motivation research.

We chose to investigate this process in the context of undergraduate educational psychology courses taken by predominantly white pre-service teachers. This population focus was consistent with our broader goal of supporting future educators in viewing distinctiveness as an asset that can be leveraged to foster inclusive classrooms. Further, working with this population could demonstrate a direct application of ways to maximize diverse perspectives in the classroom. Such instructional modelling has applied significance in the US, given that the teaching population in 2015–2016 was 80.1 per cent white (Snyder et al., 2019), while the school-aged population in 2017 was 52 per cent non-white (Snyder et al., 2019), and is projected to be 54.8 per cent non-white by 2026 (Hussar & Bailey, 2018). We describe and present two complementary studies below that address distinctiveness as driver of student participation in classroom discussions of course material.

Study 1

Controlling for background characteristics (i.e. cumulative grade point average, total credits earned, and individual differences in the need for uniqueness), we predicted that students who perceived contributions as a way of standing out would make more contribution attempts due to the higher degree of importance they placed on contributing.

Method

Sample

Participants were 164 students enrolled in one of two sections of a large introductory course in educational psychology at a large university in the Midwestern region of the

US (self-reported demographics: 60 per cent female and 40 per cent male; 93 per cent white; 5 per cent freshman, 54 per cent sophomore, 30 per cent junior, and 11 per cent senior). We also obtained grade point average (on a 4.0 scale), age, and total credit hours earned from university records ($M_{gpa} = 2.98$, $SD_{gpa} = .54$, $M_{age} = 20$, $SD_{age} = 2$).

Materials and procedure

During the third week of the semester, we presented students with a brief survey at the beginning of class (taking approximately 15 minutes). Following the approach of Gray (2014), our questionnaire included a list of 16 academic tasks with a Likert-type response scale beside each task (e.g. doing homework, being on time, taking tests). Students were asked to rate each task in terms of task importance (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995: Is it worthwhile for you to put effort into this task?: 1 = 'Not at all worthwhile' to 7 = 'Very worthwhile'; and I feel that being good at this task is: 1 = 'Not at all important' to 7 = 'Very important'). They also provided their perceptions about how much each task is helpful for distinguishing themselves in the classroom (Gray, 2014: How much does being engaged in this task help you stand out from other students?: 1 = 'Not at all' to 7 = 'Extremely'). Responses to the tasks of participating in class and asking questions were aggregated to form composite scores for standing out by contributing ($\alpha = .85$; two items) and importance of contributing ($\alpha = .83$; four items). We also assessed need for uniqueness (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; four items; $\alpha = .75$; sample item: 'I have a _____ need for uniqueness' from 1 = weak to 5 = very strong). In addition, cumulative GPA and credit hours earned were obtained from student transcripts.

We operationalised attempts to contribute as making an effort to supply ideas, opinions, and/or questions during large-group discussions: requests for recognition prior to speaking (i.e. hand-raising) or speaking with the hope of being recognised (i.e. calling

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study 1 variables

Variable	Correlations						
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Standing out by contributing	5.71	1.45	--	--	--	--	--
GPA (Cumulative)	2.98	0.54	0.09	--	--	--	--
Total credit hours	68.78	25.77	-0.05	0.12	--	--	--
Need for uniqueness	3.05	0.59	0.26	0.08	0.05	--	--
Importance of contributing	5.74	1.09	0.41	-0.05	-0.11	0.16	--
Observed contribution attempts	3.26	5.77	0.10	0.07	0.09	0.20	0.25

Table 2: Unstandardised estimates for regression models predicting importance of contributing and observed attempts to contribute

Outcome variable			95% CI	95% CI
Predictor variable	b	SE	Lower bound	Lower bound
Importance of contributing (R2 = .19, R2adj = .17)				
Intercept*	5.76	0.94	5.57	5.94
Standing out by contributing*	0.28	0.07	0.15	0.42
GPA (Cumulative)	-0.11	0.20	-0.50	0.28
Total credit hours	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.01
Need for uniqueness	0.27	0.18	-0.08	0.63
Avg observed attempts to contribute (R2 = .11, R2adj = .07)				
Intercept*	1.11	0.89	0.93	1.29
Standing out by contributing	-0.05	0.07	-0.19	0.09
GPA (Cumulative)	0.03	0.18	-0.35	0.40
Total credit hours	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.01
Need for uniqueness	0.28	0.17	-0.07	0.62
Importance of contributing*	0.25	0.09	0.08	0.43

* Significant coefficient.

All continuous predictor variables are mean centered.

out without raising one's hand). Our goal was to collect behavioural data in an ongoing course without introducing a novel stimulus (i.e. outside observers) or disrupting the natural flow of the classroom environment. We trained three assistants to track students' contribution attempts during large-group discussions for ten weeks of a semester-long course (weeks 6 to 15). At least two assistants were present during each class to record students' attempts to contribute during large-group discussions. Prior to this period, assistants practised recording observations during a class. Each assistant was expected to record every student's participation attempt, but some seating locations provided observers with a clearer view of students' behaviours. Therefore, assistants sat in different locations within the classroom in order to best record contribution attempts for every student. Following practice observations, the team met to discuss discrepancies in coding based on the seating location of the coders. We thereby retained the highest number of recorded attempts in the event that the assistants' recordings were discrepant for any individual student.

Analytics procedure

Means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in Table 1. We tested this hypothesised mediational pathway in a series of multiple regression analyses using Stata 15 (StataCorp, 2017). We used multiple regression because this statistical procedure is appropriate for assessing the contribution of a set of variables to a continuous dependent variable, and can be used to assess the contribution of a focal independent variable after partialling out (or controlling for) the effect of other variables that likely share variance with the focal independent variable and/or the dependent variable. Tests of regression assumptions revealed that no assumptions had been violated. All continuous predictor variables were mean centred. In the first regression model, the mediator variable was regressed onto students' perceptions of standing out by contributing – controlling

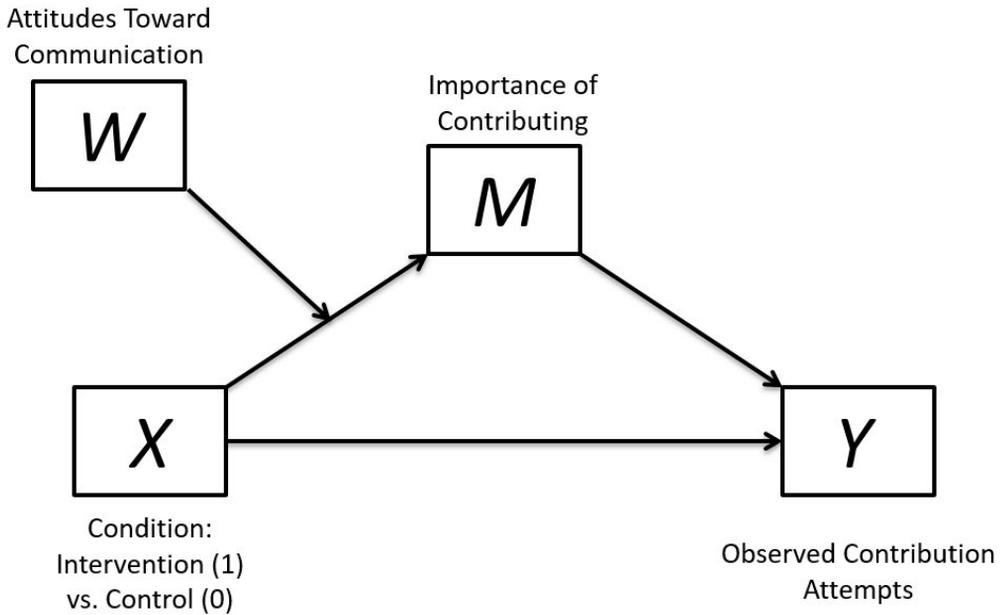
for grade point average (cumulative), total credit hours and individual differences in the need for uniqueness. In the second regression model, observed contribution attempts (log transformed) were entered as the dependent variable. We controlled for each of the aforementioned variables, while also specifying the mediator as an additional predictor in the model.

Results

Results of the analysis are displayed in Table 2. As predicted, the association between standing out by contributing was found to be a significant predictor of the importance students placed on contributing $b = .28$, 95 per cent *CI* [.15, .42], $p < .001$. For two students with identical scores on all control variables but differing by one unit in their perception that contributing will help them stand out, the student higher in their perception of how much contributing helps them stand out is estimated to have an importance of contributing rating that is .28 points higher than the student who is lower in their perception that contributing helps them stand out. Also as predicted, students who placed greater importance on contributing made more contribution attempts ($b = .25$, 95 per cent *CI* [.08, .43], $p = .006$). By exponentiating this coefficient, this association may be interpreted in percentage terms. For two students differing by one point in the importance they place on contributing, the student placing more importance on contributing is estimated to make 28 per cent more contribution attempts in class than the student who places less importance on contributing.

To infer mediation we conducted formal tests by estimating confidence intervals of indirect effects using a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 replications. This facilitated our efforts to test whether importance of contributing serves as a means by which standing out through contributions predicts contribution frequency and observed attempts to contribute. Examining this mediational pathway, we see that the pathway

Figure 1: Hypothesised theoretical model of pathway to classroom contributions tested in study 2



from standing out, to importance of contributing, to observed attempts to contribute is significant (indirect effect = .07, 95 per cent bias-corrected *CI* [.02, .16]). Those higher in perceptions that contributions are a way of standing out were estimated to make 7 per cent more contribution attempts in class due to the importance they placed on contributing.

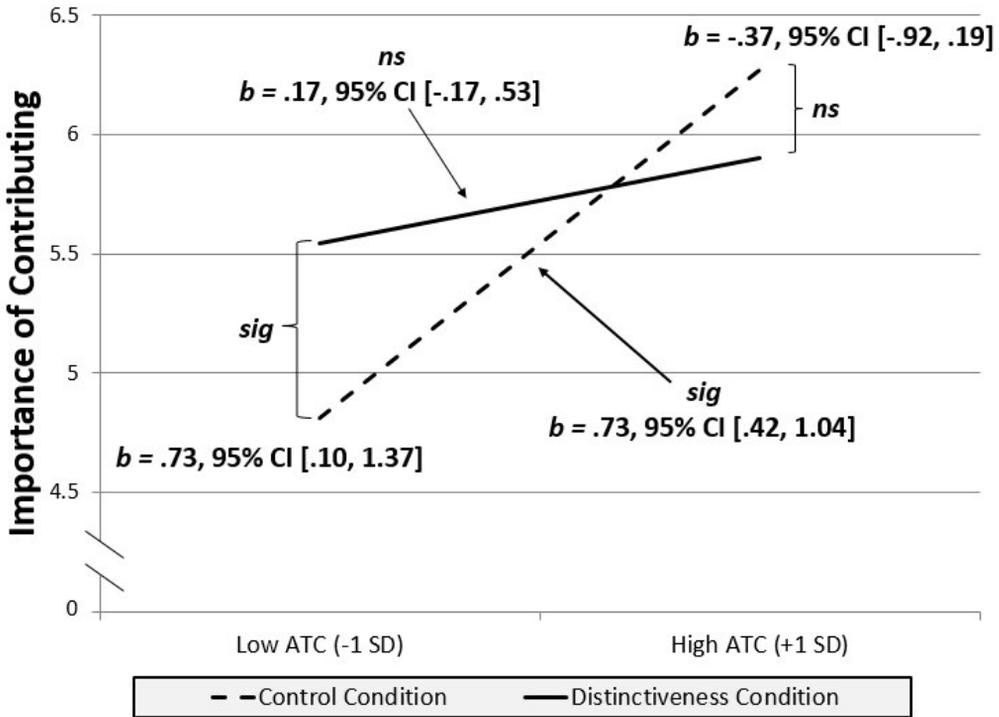
Discussion

In this study, we combined survey responses with observation data to highlight how students' distinctiveness perceptions translate into achievement behaviour in the classroom setting. Results of study 1 reveal that when students view contributing as a means of expressing distinctiveness, they see contributing as more important and contribute more. This indirect pathway is present even when accounting for individual differences in the need for uniqueness, prior academic performance, and how far along students are in their academic course. This study reinforces the stance that the desire for distinctiveness has motivational properties

(Leonardelli, et al., 2010), and that students can be driven in ways that allow them to act in service of their distinctiveness needs (Gray, 2014).

To further demonstrate the applied significance to distinctiveness in classroom settings, a few considerations should be addressed. Although prior theoretical and empirical work suggests that students' perceptions of the importance of academic tasks may be predicted by students' perceptions of how much academic tasks help them stand out (Gray, 2014; Gray & Rios, 2012), our decision to assess both distinctiveness perceptions and task importance at the same time point in the semester raises questions about the order of these two variables in our statistical model. Because replication, temporal precedence and experimental designs can be useful for providing stronger evidence for hypothesised psychological processes (Hayes, 2005), we designed a follow-up investigation with the aim of strengthening causal claims about the role of distinctiveness perceptions in the classroom. Specifically, at the beginning of the semester we randomly chose a group

Figure 2: Importance of contributing as a function of experimental condition and attitudes toward communicating in class



of students to consider classroom contributions as a means of asserting their distinctiveness and then monitored their attempts to contribute during class discussion. We also assessed the extent to which our effects (if detected) were conditional upon students' positive attitudes toward communicating during class discussions and assessed perceptions of the importance of contributing toward the end of the semester.

Study 2

In study 2, we compared a condition in which students were scaffolded to view contributions as a means of standing out (i.e. referred to as the distinctiveness condition) with a control condition in which students were not provided with that scaffold. We predicted that students receiving the distinctiveness intervention would make more contribution attempts than would students in the control condition, due to

differences in the importance they placed on making contributions. We anticipated that our distinctiveness intervention would be especially impactful among students who expressed more reluctance to communicate in class. A visual representation of our conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

Method

Sample

Participants were 143 students enrolled in one of two sections of a large introductory course in educational psychology at a large university in the Midwestern region of the US (self-reported demographics: 83 per cent female and 17 per cent male; 90 per cent white; and 3 per cent freshman, 59 per cent sophomore, 28 per cent junior, and 8 per cent senior).

Method and procedure

Students were prompted during the third

week of the semester to complete a brief survey at the beginning of class. Students completed open-ended questions based on a random assignment to either the distinctiveness or control conditions. Participants in the control condition were randomly assigned to share some concrete examples of things they might say if they were to participate in their class discussions. Participants in the distinctiveness condition were randomly assigned to share some concrete examples of how participating in class discussions could help them express ways in which they are distinct from their peers. Students who received the control writing prompt provided such statements as: 'I would most likely talk about how I personally feel on the matter being discussed in class at that time.' Participants who received the distinctiveness writing prompt provided such statements as: 'Everyone shares different ideas and views that reflect their beliefs and backgrounds. Sharing mine is like sharing part of who I am so others can see my distinctness.' In this way, both sets of students were connecting opportunities to contribute with a chance to share more about personal views, but students who received the distinctiveness prompt also expressed the identity relevance of doing so. We also assessed attitudes toward communication in class by adapting a willingness to communicate scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Specifically, the rating scale was modified to a six-point Likert-type (1 = 'Strongly disagree' to 6 = 'Strongly agree'). Further, items were modified to fit the classroom context of the current study. Sample items include (i) 'I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions', and (ii) 'Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in class' (reverse-coded). The measure had acceptable internal consistency reliability for the present student ($\alpha = .81$). Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward communicating in class.

Students also completed an in-class survey at the end of the semester, and three trained assistants tracked the contribution attempts of students. Students rated the importance of

several academic tasks. Similar to the previous study, ratings regarding the tasks of participating in class and asking questions were then aggregated to form composite scores for importance of contributing ($\alpha = .73$; four items). As in Study 1, student attempts to contribute during class discussions were assessed across a span of 10 weeks (i.e. weeks 6 to 15 of the semester-long course).

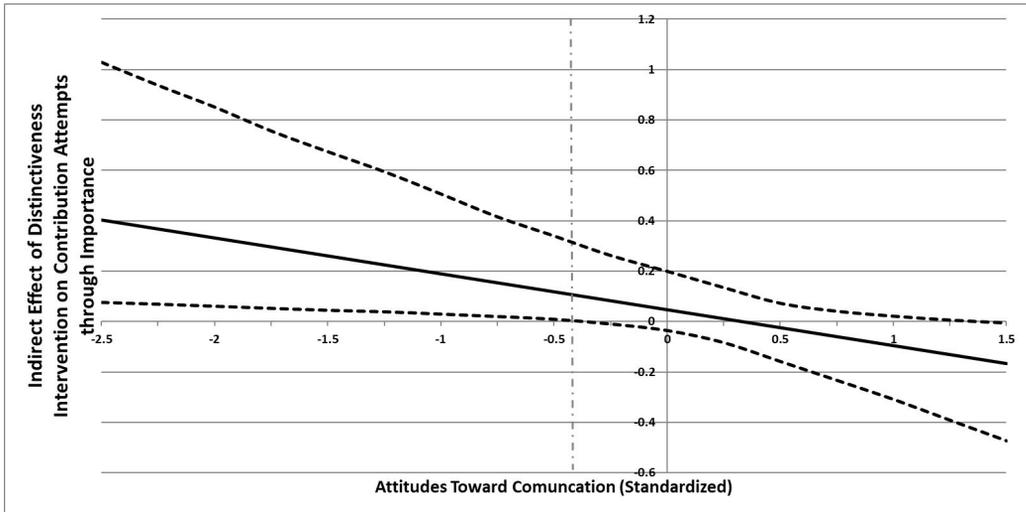
Analytcs procedure

We tested this hypothesised moderated mediation using Stata 15 (StataCorp, 2017) by first regressing importance of contributing on intervention condition (i.e. control vs. experimental), attitudes toward communication (i.e. standardised), and their cross-product (i.e. condition X attitudes toward communication). We then regressed contribution attempts (i.e. log-transformed) into intervention condition and importance of contributing (i.e. standardised). Tests of regression assumptions revealed that no assumptions had been violated. Finally, we conducted a formal test of moderated mediation to assess the extent to which our hypothesized indirect effect (i.e. intervention condition on contribution attempts via importance of contributing) was stronger among students who were lower in their attitudes toward communication. We calculated an index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) by taking the product of our coefficient for our interaction term from the first model (i.e. condition X attitudes toward communication predicting importance of contributing) and our second model's coefficient for the association between our mediator and outcome (i.e. importance of contributing predicting contribution attempts). This index was calculated using a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 replications.

Results

Our first model revealed that the effect of the distinctiveness intervention on importance of contributing is qualified by attitudes toward communication: $b = -.55$, 95 per cent *CI* $[-1.02, -.08]$, $p = .02$. Figure 2 shows simple

Figure 3: Visual representation depicting indirect effect of distinctiveness intervention on contribution attempts via importance of contributing, as a linear function of attitudes toward communicating in class



slopes for the association between attitudes toward communication and importance of contributing among students in the control condition and students in the intervention condition. Among control participants (dashed line), those with more positive attitudes toward communication place greater importance on contributing ($b = .73$, 95 per cent $CI [.42, 1.04]$, $p < .001$). For two students receiving the control prompt yet differing by one standard deviation in their attitudes toward communication, the student with more positive attitudes toward communicating in class has an estimated importance of contributing score that is .73 points higher than the student who is lower in their attitudes toward communicating in class. Among distinctiveness intervention students (solid line), those with more positive attitudes toward communication did not place significantly greater importance on contributing ($b = .18$, 95 per cent $CI [-.17, .53]$, $p = .32$). At high levels of attitudes toward communication (+1 SD), students in the control and intervention conditions showed no differences in the importance they placed on contributing ($b = -.37$, 95 per cent $CI [-.92, .19]$, $p = .19$). However, there was a significant

effect of intervention condition at low levels of attitudes toward communication: (-1 SD), $b = .73$, 95 per cent $CI [.10, 1.37]$, $p = .03$. For two individuals who are both low in their attitudes toward communication, the student receiving the distinctiveness writing prompt is estimated to score .73 points higher than the student receiving the control prompt in the importance they place on contributing.

Holding intervention condition and attitudes toward communication constant, our second model revealed that students who placed greater importance on contributing made more contribution attempts ($b = .26$, 95 per cent $CI [.07, .45]$, $p < .001$). By exponentiating this coefficient, this association may be interpreted in percentage terms. For two students differing by one standard deviation in the importance they place on contributing, the student placing more importance on contributing is estimated to make 26 per cent more contribution attempts in class than the student who places less importance on contributing.

We calculated a 95 per cent bias-corrected confidence interval for our indirect effect using a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 replications (Index of Moderated Mediation = $-.14$,

95 per cent *CI* [-.36, -.03]). Because this confidence interval does not contain a value of zero, the magnitude of the indirect effect of condition on contribution attempts via importance of contributing is contingent upon attitudes toward communication.

Figure 3 depicts the indirect effect of intervention condition on contribution attempts through importance of contributing at different levels of attitudes toward communication. Students' standardised attitudes toward communication scores are presented horizontally from 2.5 standard deviations below the mean to 1.5 standard deviations above the mean – representing the range of observed scores reported by students in this study. Estimated indirect effects of intervention condition on contribution attempts via importance of contributing are presented along the y-axis. The descending solid line depicts the indirect effect at each point along the continuous attitudes toward communication moderator variable. The descending dashed lines are confidence bands (Bauer & Curran, 2005) – the 95 per cent confidence intervals that accompany the slope for the moderated indirect effect. Similarly, when the confidence bands contain a value of zero (as represented by the horizontal line within the figure), the indirect effect is not significant. As the figure shows, the indirect effect of intervention on contribution attempts via importance of contributing is significant at low levels of attitudes toward communication (i.e. $-2.5 SD$ to $-.5 SD$ below the mean).

Discussion

In study 2, we structured a writing exercise in order to nudge the students in our distinctiveness intervention condition to view contributing as a way to express their distinctiveness. Consistent with the argument that successfully modifying basic social processes requires theoretically driven adjustments that can yield practically significant effects on important educational outcomes (Gehlbach, 2010; Yeager & Walton, 2011), we found that this writing exercise made

a difference in the achievement behaviour of those students who would rather, under normal circumstances, avoid participating in large-group discussions. Other experimental research on the distinctiveness motive has shown that the desire to stand out can shape achievement behavior in the form of self-regulatory persistence and performance (Gray & Rios, 2012). However, to our knowledge, this experimental study is the first to demonstrate the impact of distinctiveness motives on achievement behavior in an actual classroom setting. Moreover, our statistical approach of estimating the relative indirect effect of the distinctiveness intervention on classroom contributions provides a more precise estimate of for whom this distinctiveness intervention is likely to be effective at increasing their contribution attempts in the classroom.

General discussion

Educating a diverse citizenry requires that teachers see students as distinct individuals who have something to offer. Environments that satisfy one's need for distinctiveness are those that, by definition, promote diversity. In an era in which the US teaching workforce is comprised of individuals who are predominantly white and female, yet who teach a far more diverse student body (Hussar & Bailey, 2018; Snyder et al., 2019), supporting the need for distinctiveness is critical. Maximising the benefits of diversity can be challenging. However, the present studies take a step toward shaping public discourse about how diversity is an asset – not just for those who grow from engaging with perspectives that differ from their own, but also for the individual who recognises, owns, and leverages opportunities to assert their distinctiveness.

This work has theoretical and practical significance. Prior work highlights various factors influencing when and why students choose to contribute, including confidence (Wade, 1994), fear of disapproval (Kenney & Banerjee, 2011), not wanting to take up class time (Kenney & Banerjee, 2011), inadequate incentives (Smith, 1992), social norms that

discourage contributions (Yoon et al., 2011), instructor feedback (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009), and the extent to which instructors encourage participation (Wade, 1994). However, few studies have examined the role psychological needs play in contributions – specifically, the extent to which students view contributions as a means of standing out in the classroom. In the present study we found this factor to play a significant role in how students approach large-group discussions. The present findings are timely, considering recent work revealing human desires for uniqueness in both Eastern and Western cultures (Becker et al., 2012).

In terms of practical applications, these findings may better-equip instructors to frame discussions about classroom contributions in ways that help students meet their social identity needs. Instructors may frame class participation, not simply as a means of obtaining course credit, but as a mode of self-understanding and self-expression. There are several reasons why pre-service teachers may benefit from classes in which they are afforded opportunities for distinctiveness via class discussions. Use of class discussion techniques in pre-service teacher learning experiences is appropriate for collegiate instructional goals, and constitutes modeling of an appropriate teaching strategy that teachers themselves can eventually make professional use of. Offering contributions to class discussions may function as a way of both asserting one's identities and of continuing to form them through interaction with others (Friesen & Besley, 2013). Discussions expose students to diverse viewpoints and opportunities to substantiate claims (Reisman, 2015), as well as to collectively construct meanings and facilitate understanding (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013).

A few limitations and caveats must be acknowledged. First, we obtained additional demographic information in Study 1 via university records. Our initial rationale for doing so was to statistically control for what was not being experimentally controlled for by the study's design. However, addi-

tional demographic information would have also been ideal for providing more detailed descriptions of our study 2 sample. Second, contribution attempts in the classroom could be assessed in a number of ways, including raising one's hand or making a statement aloud without first being acknowledged by the course instructor. Within the context of large university classrooms, there was not enough within-student variation in types of contribution attempts students displayed to evaluate these types of achievement behaviours independently (as opposed to collapsing these different types of contribution attempts into a single dependent variable). Third, although the rationale behind this project was to support white pre-service teachers in recognising the motivational benefits of distinctiveness and diversity first-hand, we did not directly assess: (i) whether participants evolved in their perceptions of whether distinctiveness could serve as an instructional opportunity for belonging; (ii) whether their classroom experiences directly shaped their own perceptions of mattering; or (iii) whether their perceptions shifted regarding the importance of recognising diverse students' voices in their future k-12 classrooms. This article can serve as a springboard for directly addressing the aforementioned demographic, achievement behavior, practical impact-related questions left open by the design of the current studies.

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Authors' note

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'How do I know that I belong?' Exploring secondary aged pupils' views on what it means to belong to their school

Elaine Shaw

***Aim(s):** To explore secondary aged pupils' perceptions of school belonging across the age range using a mixed-methods, quantitative and qualitative approach, with emphasis on the latter.*

***Rationale:** Much research has been from adults' construction of sense of school belonging, rather than pupils' perspectives. The intention of this research was to address that gap.*

***Method:** Pupils' views were obtained through the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale and semi-structured interviews in small, tutor-based groups. Thematic analysis was applied to the group interview data, and information from the PSSM was analysed to look for patterns across year groups and across two schools.*

***Findings:** The average PSSM scores were surprisingly homogeneous (between 3.7 and 4.0) within the statistical limits. A thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed themes of familiarity, identification with others and with the school, and reciprocity of relationships. While definitions of school belonging appeared to be homogeneous, across the year groups, there were slight differences in focus on what it meant to belong.*

***Limitations:** The study was relatively small, cross sectional rather than longitudinal, and the data collection process meant that thematic analysis was only possible on transcripts from the larger school.*

***Conclusions:** The findings generally aligned with the existing literature on school belonging, highlighted the similarities in definitions across year groups, and reaffirmed the value of listening to young people's views. Because of the numbers, any quantitative differences between pupil responses are at the margins of statistical viability. However, slight qualitative differences in focus from year to year were in evidence.*

***Keywords:** school belonging; group discussion; adolescents; pupil voice; secondary school*

HAVING a sense of belonging has long been identified as an important aspect in wellbeing and development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Educational, psychological and health studies have established that a sense of school belonging is related to a number of desirable educational and social outcomes for pupils (e.g. Anderman, 2002; Anderman & Freeman, 2004; see Osterman, 2000 for a review). Where young people experience acceptance and feel themselves to be valued by those around them in school, they are more likely to adopt and have a positive sense of school belonging (Anderman, 2002).

Sense of school belonging has been found to be positively related to: commitment to school goals (Finn, 1989), expectations of future success (Smerdon, 2002), positive academic self-efficacy and school satisfaction (McMahon et al., 2008), and academic achievement (Adelabu, 2007; Goodenow, 1993b; Roeser et al., 1996). Positive sense of school belonging has been associated with positive motivational beliefs (Anderman, 2011), and well-being (e.g. Adelabu, 2007). It has also been seen as a protective factor against absenteeism (Sánchez et al., 2005), risk-taking behaviour (e.g. McNeely et al., 2002) and negative psychological outcomes.

Defining school belonging

A review of the literature on sense of school belonging highlights the complexity of the construct, not least because of multiple definitions (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Libbey, 2004). Definitions have centred on subjective feelings of acceptance, feeling valued and respected (e.g. Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). Although there are differences in definition, there is consensus regarding the importance of school belonging. Many researchers use the definition developed by Goodenow (1993b), who defined school belonging as, 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected and included, and supported by others in the environment' (p.80). This definition contains the elements of being valued, respected and supported. Furthermore, Pittman and Richmond (2007) suggested, '...school belonging although linked to school affiliation goes beyond just identification with one's school but includes one's perception of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution' (p.271). Thus, sense of school belonging can depend on students' perceptions of the social context of school and their place in it, reinforcing that 'sense of belonging' is a subjective experience (Anderman, 2003), and therefore challenging to define.

Many of the studies used data gathered through national surveys and have provided longitudinal data. Focus has also been on quantitative research, which could have missed the voice of young people in defining school belonging. Subsequently, this led to adults' construction of sense of school belonging (Anderman & Freeman, 2004 & Nichols, 2008) rather than pupils' perspectives. Studies such as Faircloth and Hamm (2005) highlighted the importance of including the voice of young people. Their study about the role of friendship in belonging, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with older adolescents (grades 11–12) gave depth to previous findings. For example, expanding

how friendship acted as a buffer against the negative effects of peer group acceptance on students' sense of school belonging.

School belonging across the years

Interestingly, a number of studies found a decline in young people's sense of school belonging as they progress through high school (e.g. Anderman, 2003; Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b; Ma, 2003; Whitlock, 2006 and Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006). Other studies found no significant differences, or a mixed pattern, with declines in levels of school belonging in certain years. Different reasons for this pattern have been proposed, such as the different teaching practices between primary and secondary education (e.g. Eccles et al., 1993), teacher-pupil relationship (e.g. Juvonen, 2007) and the process of adolescence. Thus, looking at pupils' perceptions of school belonging in the different year groups might illuminate the nature of the differences.

The present study aimed to capture young people's views about belonging, across secondary school in the UK, by exploring whether there were differences in their perceptions of belonging. Through exploring data, it was hoped that the study could find any similarities or differences in young peoples' definitions and understanding across the secondary school age range. Most studies had been from the US or Australia, and therefore may not be reflective of students in the UK. The underlying premise was that different information would arise from discussions with pupils regarding their understanding and definitions of school belonging, compared to when they were required to reflect on their sense of school belonging through predefined measures. It was also hoped to identify factors which promoted or undermined a sense of school belonging and to introduce a group perspective which captured young people's voices.

Data collection was through use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The latter method was important as a means of allowing pupil voices to be a key part of the process.

Table 1: Number of participants

School	Year	N
1	7	38
	8	38
	9	37
	10	25
	Total	138
2	7	16
	8	12
	9	10
	10	8
	Total	46

Method

Participants

Participants were from two secondary schools in two different local authorities. School 1 was from a unitary authority, west of London, which operates a selective school admission system – although this school was non-selective. School 2 was located in an outer London borough (at the time of gathering data, was a maintained school, but it is now an academy). The schools were ‘average sized’ according to the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection reports, and were comparable to other state-maintained schools in their respective authorities, reflecting the ethnic diversity and socio-economic status of their local populations. The schools were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study.

Ethics consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from University College London (UCL) Ethics Committee and from the relevant member of staff in the schools at that time. All participants were given information about the research and all pupils and their parents or guardians/carers gave consent.

In total, 184 young people took part in the study. The participants were drawn from years seven to ten. Table 1 shows participant numbers for each year group in both schools; 93 participants were male (50.5 per cent) and 91 were female (48.9 per cent).

The questionnaires and interviews were conducted by the researcher in tutor groups as the groups provided familiarity for the participants. Each group participated in one session which lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. In total, 30 group interviews were carried out: 20 in School 1 and 10 in School 2. At the start of the session the students were reminded that they could withdraw at any time.

Measures

Pupils individually completed the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale (Goodenow, 1993b), a standardised measure for school belonging. It is an 18-item scale which assesses pupils’ feelings about being part of their school and feelings of acceptance, value and inclusion. Statements include ‘I feel like a real part of my school’ and ‘Most teachers in this school take my opinions seriously’. Reliability and validity measures for the PSSM have been

Table 2: Mean and standard deviations for school 1 and school 2 on PSSM

School	Year	N	Mean*	Std deviation*
1	7	35	3.90	0.61
	8	37	3.98	0.54
	9	34	3.70	0.63
	10	23	3.98	0.50
	Total	129	3.89	0.58
2	7	16	4.03	0.57
	8	12	4.13	0.48
	9	10	4.24	0.39
	10	8	3.40	0.61
	Total	46	3.99	0.58

* Given to two decimal places.

established in other studies (e.g. Adedabu, 2007; Capps, 2003; Hagborg, 1994, and Nichols, 2006, 2008). Hagborg (1994) identified three factors: belonging, rejection and acceptance. Internal consistency reliability coefficients ranged from 0.79 to 0.88 using Cronbach’s alpha (Adedabu, 2007; Goodenow, 1993b; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; McMahon et al., 2008) and were found to be similar across age groups, urban and suburban samples. In the current study, the Cronbach’s alpha for internal consistency of the main scale was 0.86, which is in keeping with results from previous studies.

Semi-structured interview

Group interviews followed the questionnaire; questions were adapted from those used by Mouton et al. (1996) and Nichols (2008) in their mixed-method studies. They were a mixture of open-ended and closed questions about sense of belonging to school (see Appendix 1 for examples). The interviews were recorded digitally for later transcription. Thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to examine pupils’ verbal responses from the interviews because it is a flexible

approach not tied to any single theoretical or epistemological position (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis was conducted only on the transcripts for School 1, which is a limitation restricting conclusions drawn. This was because during data collection in School 2, some interview groups were mixed with pupils from years 8 and 9 instead of separate tutor groups, which would make it hard to separate out the views during analysis. Group sessions still proceeded in School 2, to ensure that these pupils were afforded the same opportunities to discuss their views. Two pupils from School 1 wanted only to complete the questionnaire and not stay for the interview, which was agreed.

Findings

The quantitative analysis provided a general measure of pupils’ connection to school. Initial analysis was carried out to provide descriptive statistics for the scores obtained from the PSSM using year group mean scores (see Table 2). Of the number surveyed, only 175 responses were used in the analyses because of missing data which did not allow for complete analysis. (Missing data were due to more than one rating point being marked

for an item or the pupil failing to complete the item.)

On the PSSM scale, a score of 3 has been identified as a cut-off point. Pupils scoring below 3 are seen as 'at risk' in their commitment and engagement with education or social inclusion (Frederickson & Baxter, 2009; Goodenow 1993b). The results showed that the majority of the pupils in the group had a positive view about school. Only 5.7 per cent ($N = 10$) of the pupils from the overall sample ($N = 175$) had a PSSM mean score lower than three; of these, 6.2 per cent ($N = 8$) students were from School 1 and 4.3 per cent ($N = 2$) from School 2.

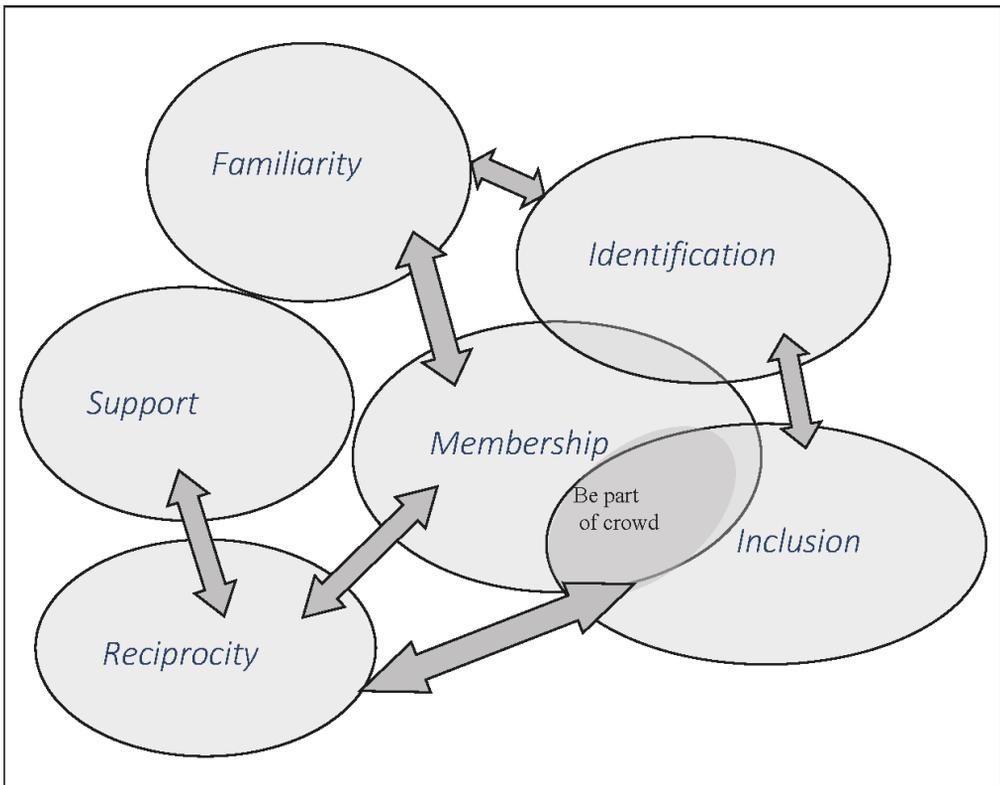
To see if there was a difference in school belonging between the year groups, a non-parametric independent samples test (Kruskal-Wallis) was used because

the data was not normally distributed. In School 1 no difference was found in the mean scores for pupils across the year group, $H, 0.128 (p > .05)$. However, a difference was found across the year groups for pupils in School 2, $H, 0.013 (p < .05)$. Year 10 pupils in School 2 were lower in their sense of belonging on the PSSM compared to the other year groups. Analysis of the scores showed that the difference in School 2 was between pupils in year 9 and year 10. Year 9 pupils had a higher score compared to year 10 pupils. The small number of participants in Year 10 could account for this difference.

Analysis of interview responses

Initial codes were generated followed by deeper analysis in order to start combining

Figure 1: Final thematic map of pupils' definitions of school belonging (shows how some of the codes could be placed in more than one theme)



them into themes and searching for relationships between codes, themes and sub-themes. The initial codes were checked with colleagues from the Educational Psychology team as a group exercise and consensus was sought to build in a credibility check. A review of the themes was conducted and further refined with a final thematic map produced. As an additional check, the codes and themes were also discussed with a teacher colleague.

The themes generated were *Familiarity, Reciprocity, Membership, Inclusion, Support and Identification*. These six themes highlighted the strength and importance of the relationships and interactions that occur between pupils and their school environment in its broadest sense. Each main theme had sub-themes which are defined in Appendix 2.

There were some connections and overlap between the different themes, as illustrated by the connecting arrows and overlap in Figure 1. For example, the theme of 'Identification', although comparable to the themes of 'Familiarity' and 'Membership', pupils' responses highlighted that 'Identification' was more than just knowing the people and the environment (Familiarity), or being part of a group (Membership). It was about pupils' active feelings of commonality and similarity with their school peers, with their school, and with the values and expectations the school represents, as illustrated by the following extracts:

'To belong to a school means to be part of it... and to feel proud of the school.' (Y8, G1)

'Like you're proud to be here.' (Y8, G2)

'You may have good grades.' (Y10, G1)

In comparing responses across different year groups, there was agreement amongst pupils relating to the role of friends and teachers, regardless of year group. For many pupils, belonging to school meant being part of a friendship group, reflecting the role that friendship plays in school belonging that has

been established in the literature (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). The concept of 'friendship group' was common to Years 7–9. Year 10 pupils did not explicitly express it in their responses, possibly because they already had established friendship groups.

Year 7 and year 8 pupils spoke more about participating in activities. Pupils also included the idea of 'knowing' people or the place (school) when defining what belonging meant to them. For year 7 it was about getting to know people new to them as well as systems:

Doing more stuff in school... get into the routines. (Y7, G4)

'Being part of something', from the themes of Inclusion and Membership, was also prevalent in pupils' definitions. Year 10 pupils raised the point that they were part of the school not through choice but because they had to be there:

It's like it's more better in school than out of school. (Y10, G2)

For them, being part of school is not something they actively seek out, but rather is something necessary because it serves as a vocational rather than social purpose.

In comparing information in the PSSM and pupils' definitions, unsurprisingly some statements made by pupils in the interviews were equivalent to those on the PSSM. For example, 'I feel like a real part of my school' (statement from PSSM) and 'Like you feel part of the school' (pupil comment) and 'The teachers here respect me' (from PSSM) and 'Teachers respect me' (pupil comment). Although there were some differences, such as the role of physical resources. For some pupils belonging to school was about the physical resources that the school had to offer them. It was identified in two of the year groups (Years 7 and 9).

In generating their self-definitions of school belonging within their tutor groups, Year 7 pupils tended to use short,

concise phrases, as did those in Year 10. Year 8 and 9 pupils varied in that some gave multiple descriptions of what school belonging meant to them. There are several possible explanations for their concise descriptions: for Year 7 participants, this could be that they were less confident in sharing their views, and the role of maturation in articulation of ideas. However, the fact that individual pupils gave a range of definitions for what belonging to school meant to them emphasises the complexity of the construct, and is in keeping with the findings in studies which asked pupils to define school belonging, such as Nichols (2008) and Whitlock (2006).

Factors that help and hinder belonging

Pupils' views about what promoted and hindered school belonging were examined using previously generated themes to provide continuity. Codes and themes were organised into positive, neutral or negative factors that influenced their perceptions of school belonging. Either the rating that the pupils gave or the words that they used to describe each experience was used to determine to which grouping their comments were assigned. During this process, some comments made by pupils did not fit into the established thematic framework. For example, a Year 8 pupil spoke about parental influence in making her feel connected to school: 'Erm, my parents' encouragement. They want me to do really well and I have to go with what my mum or my dad want me to do.'

There were a range of responses given by pupils, including friendship issues and concerns, pupil behaviour and features of the school building. Positive and supportive friendship groups also aided sense of belonging: 'Cause like my friends are always there if anything happens like...' (Y10, G5)

Similarly, perceived care and support from teaching staff was another positive factor highlighted, as illustrated: 'I can talk to my Head of Year... cause he's like really friendly and easy to talk to.' (Y9, G4)

Being made to feel welcome and listened to were factors which promoted feelings of

belonging to school. Pupils also highlighted the importance of positive teacher-pupil relationships; older year groups placed more emphasis on this point:

So they [teachers] put their trust into you to do something. So basically they think you belong to the school and you have... umm... more roles to take and responsibility to look after the younger children in school. And show as examples and role models. (Y10, G3)

There were also responses given by pupils around pupil behaviour and features of the school building. In comparing the pupils' reflections across the year groups, Year 9 pupils particularly highlighted the variability of school belonging:

I don't think I'm attached [to school], even like I've got my group of friends, my teachers, tells me, like I kinda do feel safe here, but I don't. I just feel I come here because I have to... like I don't feel part of it even though when I'm inside I feel safe with my friends. I have a laugh, I have time with teachers...

Time in school was also highlighted as a positive factor to promote belonging. For example, a Year 10 pupil said that the time they had spent in school helped them get used to the routines: 'And because we've been here from an early age, we've been like it's going like getting into our daily routines' (Y10, G5). The importance of time was mentioned in responses across all year groups. Additionally, Year 8 pupils spoke about their sense of school belonging increasing as they moved from Year 7 to 8.

Comments made by young people suggested that, on one hand, belonging for them was about what they did to make themselves feel that they belonged to school (e.g. joining clubs; making friends). On the other hand, for other pupils it was about what other people did to make them feel that they belonged. Comments such as: 'taking part in activities; you feel like you have actually done something to help the school',

Figure 2: 'Model of belonging' derived from pupils' definitions of belonging

	Interpersonal	Intrapersonal
Active agents	Identification Membership Support Reciprocity Inclusion	Identification Membership Reciprocity
Passive agents	Support Reciprocity Inclusion	

reflected an 'active' part by the pupil to belong. Comments made by pupils, such as: 'I am respected; listened to', reflected being 'passive' agents. A tentative model, shown in Figure 2, was developed from these observations. The themes were mapped onto the model with some fitting into more than one sector. The interpersonal and intrapersonal aspect of the model highlighted the relational aspect of belonging as opposed to the individual aspects of belonging.

The model can provide a framework for understanding how pupils define their sense of school belonging by where they place their emphasis. For example, whether they are active in seeking to belong to school, and in doing so, their focus is on developing relationships. A limitation was that this model was not tested with the participants.

Discussion

The current study revealed pupils' perspectives on their experiences of belonging to their school; themes developed during the qualitative analysis contributed to this understanding. Similarly to Nichols (2008), a key conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that a sense of belonging to school is socially constructed, as it means different things to different people.

Themes produced from this study were similar to those established in the literature. For example, 'Identification' and 'Support' (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005), and the importance of an academic connection

(e.g. Nichols, 2008) were articulated by pupils. There were also similarities in the statements made by the pupils and those on the PSSM suggesting that there are common core features to belonging (e.g. Anderman, 2011).

The model of belonging, derived from pupils' definitions of school belonging (see Figure 2), could aid understanding of what helps pupils to feel they belong. Asking young people where they see themselves within this framework could provide a basis for considering interventions needed to promote sense of school belonging. Further research would be needed to test out the model.

The decline in sense of school belonging across the age range was not apparent in this cohort, with the exception of Year 10, rather the majority of young people had a positive sense of school belonging. A potential area of further study would be to look at pupils who scored below the cut-off on the PSSM and ascertain their views as a group about what they considered promoted or hindered feelings of belonging.

Strengths of the study

In enabling pupils to self-articulate, similarities were found between their definitions of school belonging and that in the extant literature. However, what was of interest is that there were some differences in emphasis for the year groups, highlighting how it is important to consider age-related relevance in defining and identifying factors pertinent to specific year groups.

The study highlighted the relevance of using an additional method of data collection beyond predetermined questionnaires, as new points were brought to light in the group interviews. For these pupils, it was about the importance of knowing the people and place (i.e. school environment). Interviews also provided opportunities to highlight the role of physical resources in defining school belonging, which is not covered in the PSSM.

The qualitative aspect of the study within the group context allowed for a co-construction of meaning that encouraged reflection on and assimilation of different ideas. There was greater value in providing pupils with the opportunity to give their definitions rather than those devised by researchers or adults, which gave them a sense of ownership of their definitions. Moreover, in identifying what pupils considered school belonging did and did not mean for them, the information gathered could provide a useful basis for forming and developing relevant policies and appropriate interventions for pupil support.

Limitations

The study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, therefore it captured pupils' views at one point in time. A longitudinal study would have allowed tracking over time to see how young peoples' definitions changed as they grew older. A cross-sectional study was chosen due to time constraints for data gathering. Consequently, the findings are specific to the pupils involved in this study, at a single point in time, which limits their generalisability. On reflection, if the themes generated were further shared with these pupils, it would have added greater weight to the findings.

Another limitation is that thematic analysis, as noted earlier, was only conducted on interviews from one school which would limit the conclusions to only that school. It is therefore difficult to say if similar themes would have emerged from the other school's data.

The strength of group interviews in developing 'co-construction' of meaning can also be viewed as a limitation, depending

on whose voice dominates the discussion. Furthermore, the group context and dynamics could have inhibited contributions from some pupils, preventing their real views from being considered by others.

The study did not specifically examine sense of school belonging among different cohorts, such as those with special educational needs, gender or ethnicity. Looking at these groups may have provided additional information in pupils' definitions of belonging as found by others (e.g. Booker, 2007; Frederickson et al., 2007; Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

Implications for schools and educational psychology practice

The study highlights the importance of establishing the relevance of school belonging to individuals and groups of students, by providing insight into the levels of engagement or disaffection with school. This could help schools to develop and use more meaningful and relevant programmes or interventions to improve belonging. Examining young people's sense of belonging may help educational psychologists (EPs), by giving them a better understanding of the pupils' perspective in order to act as an advocate. The interview process allowed young people to feel listened to as they spoke with the EP.

In line with Nichols (2008), Ozer et al. (2008), Whitlock (2006) and other researchers the study highlights the benefits of allowing pupils to describe how their sense of belonging is developed at school and what challenges they may experience in developing this. For example, pupils in School 1 described aspects of the curriculum delivery which made them feel less engaged with school (e.g. limited opportunities to work in groups). They also suggested changes that could be used by teaching staff. A potential challenge for school personnel would be how to incorporate multiple views so that pupils feel their voice, as well as collective voices, is heard in defining school belonging. School personnel need to be clear on which factors

of school belonging can be changed (malleable) and which are harder to modify, such as ethnicity or social economic status (Anderman & Freeman, 2004).

This study reaffirms the usefulness of employing a range of approaches to explore pupils' views, in using different practices in everyday work as an EP, including involving pupils in the design and implementation of projects.

Implications for further research

Within the scope of this study, consideration was not given for effective comparison between the views of pupils and teaching staff on belonging. Further exploration can provide useful information for school personnel. For example, how far is there concurrence between pupil and teacher understanding of school belonging? Some studies such as Nichols (2006) found there were differences between pupils' and teachers' views on levels of 'belongingness', which had effects on teacher expectations of pupils. Parental role in developing and maintaining school belonging is also a potential area of research. Some pupils described how their parents influenced them in their school life, such as maintaining engagement in learning and in the types of friends that they sought when in school.

A longitudinal design following young people across their school life, as a group, would help to explore any changes

in belonging, as well as the impact of interventions in promoting school belonging.

Conclusions

Pupils' definitions of sense of school belonging encompass a wide range of factors, highlighting the complexity and multifaceted nature of what it means to belong to school. This study found that for some pupils it is about the relationships established with peers and staff, while for others it is about participating in school life; for a few it is about the academic aspects of learning and how this helps them in future life. The study reaffirmed that school belonging is a complex, subjective and multifaceted concept.

Generating group definitions of school belonging in this study reiterated the importance of developing a shared understanding of the concept. Moreover, it provided the opportunity for pupils to have a voice and listen to the views of others.

Asking pupils what it means to belong to school is important if educators and other professionals are to effectively support them in developing sense of school belonging for their well-being and engagement. This study has outlined an example of how pupils can be involved in this process.

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Appendix 1: Examples of the interview questions

1. I am trying to learn about how young people, like yourself, feel attached to school or feel they belong at school. When I say 'attached' what do you think I mean?
2. Do you think that the school could do more things to make young people feel more part of the school? What could the school do for students so that they will really feel part of it/fit in?
3. How do you find school in general?

Appendix 2 Main themes and subthemes

Theme	Familiarity	Identification	Inclusion	Membership	Reciprocity	Support
Definition	Getting to know the different people and places at school	<p>Pupils' active feelings of commonality and similarity with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school peers; • the school body; • values and expectations that the school represents. 	Pupils' descriptions of their experiences of being made to feel included (overlaps with 'membership' theme)	Expresses the pupils' sense of importance of feeling from being in a group.	Sense of school belonging being dependent on the nature and mutuality of their interactions with people in the school and with the school institution.	Expresses how pupils feel helped and cared for by other people, and how they see the school as a place of safety.
Subtheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity of environment • Familiarity with people • Familiarity with the school's ethos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification with pupils • Identification with the school institution • Identification with the school ethos 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of friendship groups • Membership of school groups and school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with peers • Relationships with staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from peers • Support from teachers • Support from school environment

Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging?

Kathryn Riley

Aim: *Schools represent one of the few points of continuity and stability in the lives of many children and young people today. Yet for a growing number, schools are not places where they feel they belong. Using the conceptual filters of agency, trust and social capital, this article draws on findings from two qualitative research inquiries to ask: What transformative actions can schools take to help increase young people's sense of place and belonging?*

Method/rationale: *The article synthesises findings from two studies about place and belonging – undertaken with a gap of some fifteen years – which involved ninety children and young people. Study 1 used a range of data gathering activities to find out the views of the young people. Study 2 drew on the traditions of collaborative research inquiry to engage the young people as student researchers. Using an educational design research to construct a common framework for analysis, the article offers a fresh perspective on how young people experience school-life, and on the relationship between the design of the research and its impact.*

Findings: *There are two key findings: (i) School cultures that foster trust and draw on the strengths of communities contribute to the development of young people's sense of agency and belonging. (ii) Engagement in collaborative research inquiry about place and belonging helps develop that sense of belonging and is a powerful tool for positive school transformation.*

Limitations: *The analysis drew on two studies undertaken with a significant time gap.*

Conclusions: *Research inquiry can be constructed as an activity for collecting data to contribute to understanding, and/or as a transformative activity. Evidence indicates that a process of collaborative inquiry involving young people as student researchers can contribute to their sense of agency and belonging.*

Keywords: *place; belonging; agency; trust; social-capital*

'When you come from somewhere very different, it's important to feel welcomed.' (student researcher)

BELONGING is that sense of being somewhere where you can be confident that you will fit in and feel safe in your identity, a feeling of being at home in a place and of being valued (Flewitt et al., 2017; Riley, 2017). In a world in which social and economic divisions are widening and more people are displaced – exiled and homeless – than at any time since the end of the 1939–1945 war (Putnam, 2015; UNHCR, 2017), schools need to be places of belonging. Yet across OECD countries, young people's sense of belonging in school

is declining, with one-in-four feeling that they do not belong (OECD, 2017). Young people from socio-economically disadvantaged communities are twice as likely as their more advantaged peers to feel that they don't belong in school and, in the UK, four times more likely to be excluded (Fair Education Alliance, 2017)¹.

National policies and practices shape the climate for belonging or exclusion in school. In the UK, a climate of diminishing resources – coupled with pressures on schools to achieve results at any cost – has constrained

what schools can do and led to an increase in formal exclusions, as well as a behind-the-scenes practice of ‘offloading’² students (Hutchinson & Crenna-Jennings, 2019). With some inevitability, the happiness of young people in the UK is at its lowest ebb since 2010 (*The Good Childhood Report*, 2017).

A sense of place and belonging is a central element of the human psyche, a ‘bedrock of human meaning and social relations’ (Creswell, 2004, p.32). In the 1940s, American psychologist Abraham Maslow developed his list of primal human needs. These included love and belonging (Maslow, 1943). More recently, Ivan Tyrell and Joe Griffin have argued that humans have nine essential or primal needs (Tyrell & Griffin, 2013). These are more a ‘cocktail’ of needs than a hierarchy, as Maslow had suggested (Coates, 2018). Their list includes: having fun and feeling that life is enjoyable; feeling part of and belonging to a wider community; feeling safe and secure day-to-day; and having a sense of some control and influence over life’s events – all relevant to the business of schooling.

Schools are communities, ‘political entities’ in which children and young people learn how to become part of society (Alexander, 2013, p.3). Schools are also one of the few shared social institutions which can create a sense of belonging – or exclusion.

Awareness of the impact of young people’s experience of schooling on their sense of self, as well as on their academic outcome, is far from new. A positive sense of belonging has been linked to higher academic outcomes, increased student motivation, lower absenteeism and improved health and wellbeing (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Louis et al., 2016). Recent evidence from the International Study in Maths and Science (TIMMS) shows a significant link between children’s sense of physical and

emotional ‘safety’ in school – a key aspect of belonging – and their academic performance in maths and science (IEA, 2019).

Young people’s sense of belonging in school is shaped by what they bring to it – their histories, their day-to-day lived realities – as well as schools’ practices and expectations (Riley, 2013, 2017, 2018). This is illustrated in Xin Ma’s Canadian study of some 14,000 Grade 6 and 8 students (Ma, 2003). Expectations, assumptions and relationships all matter. Young people’s relationships are not only with their peers and teachers but with other staff and play out in the dining room, the corridors, the playground, as well as in the class-room. The most significant factor for young people, in terms of whether they experience a sense of belonging or exclusion in school, is how they perceive their relationships with their teachers (Allen et al., 2018).

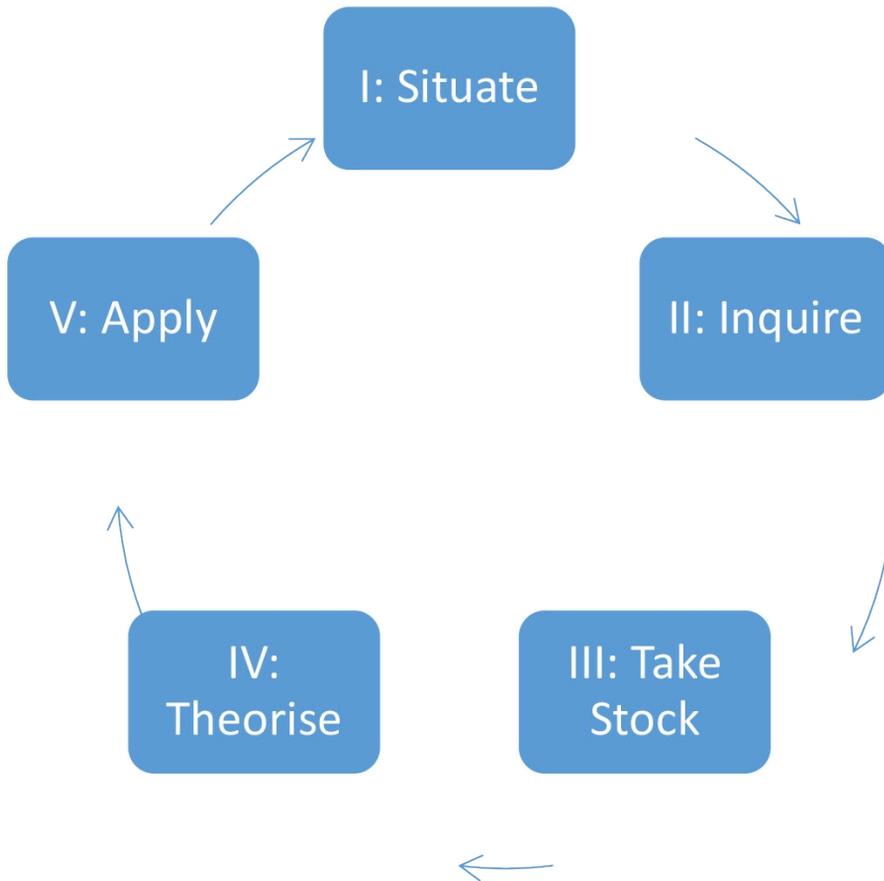
Belonging is a dynamic concept shaped by relational, cultural, historic, geographic and contextual factors. It has been linked to notions of participation, citizenship and entitlement (Yuval-Davis, 2006). A sense of belonging can shift rapidly into ‘not belonging’, with damaging consequences for individuals and society (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002; Riley & Docking, 2004). Health experts have pointed, for example, to the rise in the number of children self-harming, attributing this to a range of factors, including low body image, fears of abuse and pressures to succeed in school (Campbell, 2016). There is also growing evidence that young people who experience a feeling of exclusion from school or society seek ‘belongingness’ elsewhere: through forms of extremism, self-harming, gang membership.

We live in a global context which has witnessed what Zygmunt Bauman has described as a shift from *solid* times (when people knew their place, good and bad) to *liquid* times, which are fluid and unbounded

¹ Researchers have also concluded that five times more children are being excluded from school in the UK than official figures indicate, with strong links between school exclusion and social exclusion (Gill et al., 2017).

² ‘Off-loading’ is a process by which schools pressurise young people who are unlikely to reach the top grades to leave. This issue hit the headlines in 2017 when the ‘off-loading’ practices of a seemingly top performing state school in England (St Olaves Grammar School, Bromley) were exposed (Coughlan, 2017; Weale & Fishwick, 2017).

Figure 1: A framework for analysing research into place and belonging



(Bauman, 2006). Uncertainty characterises the lives of many children and young people today. Their growing sense of social isolation, fears about what is ‘going down’ on the street all serve to reinforce the importance of schools as places of belonging (Riley et al., 2016; Naicker et al., 2014). This article explores how to create school cultures which enable this to happen.

Method/rationale

The article synthesises findings from two studies, undertaken with a gap of some fifteen years. The somewhat unorthodox decision to do this was taken for two reasons: The first was to provide a fresh perspective on how children and young people experienced their schooling – what,

if anything, had changed over the intervening period? The second was to create an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the research design. Can the design influence impact?

The two qualitative studies – Study 1: ‘Bringing disenfranchised young people back into the frame’ (Riley & Rustique-Forester, 2002) and Study 2: ‘School: A place where I belong?’ (Riley, 2017) – focused on issues of belonging and exclusion. Ninety children and young were involved. Both studies explored the perspectives of adults, as well as young people. However, the analysis presented in this article focuses on young people’s responses, using educational design research to create a common framework for analysis.

Educational design research has been described as a strategy for developing and refining school-based interventions that draw on theory and seek to track and build on knowledge gains over time (Cobb, 2001). It has witnessed many developments (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012), with growing interest in how this approach can be used as a knowledge-building tool – part of a process of engagement that involves young people (Bodong & Huang-Yao, 2016) – and as a way of targeting specific ‘problems’, and discovering and sharing new knowledge (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). The educational design research framework used in this article (see Figure 1) contains five elements (Riley et al., 2018):

- *Situate*: Contextualise the study and develop the rationale for the research design: Who are we going to engage in the research process? How are we going to do this?
- *Inquire*: Collect the data and identify gaps: What are we trying to find out? Can the findings be interpreted in different ways?
- *Take stock*: Evaluate and reflect: What have we learned so far? How robust are the conclusions given the evidence?
- *Theorise*: Build the conceptual knowledge: What have we learned about key concepts? How do these ideas travel?
- *Apply*: Share findings and encourage implementation: How can we share what we have learned beyond this school/these schools? What have we to say about the research design and process?

1. Situate

‘Bringing disenfranchised young people back into the frame’ was a two year study (2001–2002) conducted in partnership with a large local authority, Lancashire. It explored the causes and dynamics of pupil disaffection and disengagement from school, seeking to explore the complexity of young people’s experience of learning and identify what could make a positive difference to the experiences of pupils on the margins of school-life (Riley &

Rustique-Forrester, 2002).

‘School: A place where I belong?’ set out to understand more about the dynamics of belonging in schools in challenging urban contexts, from the perspectives of school leaders, teachers and young people: How was it experienced? How was it generated? The Study drew on the traditions of collaborative inquiry (Timperley & Earl, 2011). This approach has been used to foster greater equity, and strengthen children’s rights and their sense of engagement (Ainscow, et al., 2016; Osler, 2010; MacBeath, et al., 2001; Pollard et al., 2000).

2. Inquire

Study 1: Forty-five young people (25 girls and 20 boys, aged 11–16) – all of whom had been suspended or excluded from school – were involved, as well as 140 teachers, school leaders and parents. The research with the young people was undertaken in day-long sessions with five panels of students. These sessions were held in a range of non-school settings, including the local football club. Research inquiry activities included a card sort and a drawing exercise, followed by individual and group discussions linked to these activities.

Study 2: This two-year inquiry (2014–2016) involved thirty-five primary and secondary school student researchers (aged 10–16: 23 girls and 12 boys) from five schools (and their headteachers), and thirty-six teacher-researchers (newly qualified teachers) from a further seven London schools. The inquiry was focused around a shared research question: Is ‘our’ school a place where everyone feels they belong? And if not, what are we going to do about it? The young people were invited to participate in the study and were trained and supported as student researchers by the UCL Institute of Education team.

3. Take stock

Study 1: A key finding from ‘Bringing disenfranchised young people back into the frame’ was that for the majority of the young people school was a fragmented, inconsistent, lonely

Figure 2: 'No escape' (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002, p.97)



and interrupted experience. Their re-entry into school after a gap in attendance could reinforce their sense of loneliness and isolation. One boy described how, on his return to school, his form teacher had encouraged his class-mates to 'welcome' him back – with a slow hand clap.

For these young people, relationships with their teachers were key. Encounters with one or two hectoring teachers who drew on their repertoire of sarcasm or humiliation could tip the balance of their behaviour. 'Bad' teachers were mean and unfair, inflexible and disrespectful of pupils, judgemental of pupils' parents and families, physically intimidating and verbally abusive, unwilling to help or explain ideas, unchanging in their ways of teaching.

However, the support of one or two teachers could keep them on track. 'Good' teachers were helpful and supportive, friendly and understanding, willing to

reward students for their progress, took the time to explain material in depth, knew their subject well, used a variety of approaches. Girls were more likely than boys to identify with at least one teacher who they felt knew and understood them.

The drawing exercise pinpointed young people's anxieties and frustrations: 'I am very sad', 'stressed out', 'lonely', 'depressed', 'on my own'. In one bleak drawing, a boy depicted himself in the middle of a torrent of words from teachers ('You're stupid', 'You're thick') and from the headteacher ('Get out of my school', 'You don't belong here'). Of the 45 drawings completed all were broadly negative and only 15 included any positive elements. School was typically experienced as a prison, as is depicted in Figure 2. The girl who drew this picture told us, 'This is me with the crying eyes. I'm locked in and I can't escape.'

Caught up in a cycle of bad behaviour these young people could find themselves 'on ice' (in isolation), physically separated from their peers, as part of their school's behaviour policy. One mother told us about her son's experience in the following terms:

I went up to the school. He was in isolation in a tiny room on his own. I said to them, 'You can't put him in here, it's like a prison. You have to punish him but not like that' ...They never had anything good to say about him. It was them and us. (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002, p.45)

We asked our interviewees to provide a 'wish list' of what needed to change to

help them feel a part of school life. While the majority recognised the stresses and pressures on their teachers, once they had fallen into the downward spiral of bad behaviour, it was difficult to climb back. Their wish lists included being respected, being listened to and getting support for their work. For them, school was a largely hostile environment. The bonus was that you could meet your friends. However, if you were 'different' or gay, you could be bullied, ridiculed or ostracised.

Study 2: In this study, the research activities revolved around five student researcher teams. (Summary findings from three teams are presented here.) At the first student researcher conference, Team A (who were

Figure 3: Me in the playground



from a secondary co-education school) introduced themselves in their own first languages, beginning as follows: 'Welcome to our student researchers' team. Students in our school speak 68 different languages. Roona speaks German, Rebecca speaks Italian, Bazul speaks Bulgarian, Abraham speaks Yoruba and Nora speaks Lithuanian.'

'Half of our college students are bilingual. I speak four different languages: Tamil, French, English and Sinhala. Every year, there are about 100 new arrivals in our school, and I was one of them two years ago.'

As relatively new arrivals to the UK, Team A student researchers were highly motivated to be part of the project, wanting to compare their own experiences with those of other arrivals and to improve the transition experience for them. As student researchers, they developed their own nuanced research question about belonging: How good is our school at welcoming newcomers?

Team B student researchers were from a primary school. They adopted two data gathering approaches: children's drawings – about how they felt in the classroom and playground (good and bad) – and a mapping exercise in which children indicated where they felt safe and unsafe within the school. The student researchers worked with some 30 younger children (aged 5–6), recording their research findings in their own individual research journals, discussing these as a group, and making recommendations based on their research to their school.

Team C members were from a girls' secondary school in Tower Hamlets. Their research inquiries focused on the connections between a sense of belonging in their community and a sense of belonging in school. Student researcher Nusrat reported on her research journey in the following terms:

I began with my local community because my research team felt that this was the place where we belonged: Tower Hamlets and the East End is our 'place'. Through researching

the history of my community, I learned about how diverse it has been throughout the years – the Jamme Masjid mosque on Brick Lane, which was formerly the Machzike Hadath Synagogue for the Brick Lane Jewish community, is proof of this great cultural diversity... (making) it easier for later groups of immigrants to settle in the area and to achieve a sense of belonging. We can see this in our own close-knit Bengali community.

We also looked at place and belonging in our school, and we thought carefully about whether it is important to feel like you belong in school, and whether students feel like we belong... We decided that it was crucial to feel at home in your school... We found out (through our research) that some students felt a bit lonely because there was no one to talk to because they were new, spoke different languages and no one really understood them. They were embarrassed about the way they sounded and how they looked.

The consensus from the five student researcher teams was that the features of a sense of belonging included feelings of safety; a sense of being included and involved; having friendship networks to draw on; and experiencing mutual respect and kindness.

The two studies

Despite the gap of fifteen years between the two studies, there were strong commonalities in terms of young people's views about the key components which contributed to a sense of belonging. These included physical and emotional safety, being seen and understood by teachers, and positive relationships with their teachers and their peers. A sense of alienation and 'not' belonging were exacerbated by bullying, feelings of isolation, and poor relationships with teachers. Young people needed to feel that they were known, seen and befriended.

The striking difference between the two studies was in the narrative. For Study 1 this was about humiliation, boredom, frustration

and bullying, and for Study 2 – challenge and adventure, opportunity and welcome. Clearly there were significant differences between the cohorts of students in the two studies. All of the young people involved in Study 1 were on the margins of school life, the majority having experienced some form of isolation in school (related to their behaviour), suspension, or exclusion. While the students involved in Study 2 were from a wider spectrum of the school population, the majority were vulnerable to marginalisation for a range of reasons: their status and experience as refugees; socio-economic factors; and their previous sense of themselves as outsiders to school life, as was the case for most of Team C. Participation in the project helped generate a sense of agency and belonging, and connectedness to their communities.

3. *Theorise*

Theorising is a key step in educational design research. Three conceptual filters emerged from the data presented in this article: trust, agency and social capital. They are used here to re-appraise findings.

Trust

Trust is a key component of successful educational reforms: a dynamic concept based on a complex set of interrelationships. Social trust is manifested as institutional trust (the expectations and norms of an organisation) and as relational trust: the interactions between individuals (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louis, 2007). Scholars have argued that as trust is the basis of positive and deep-rooted changes in schools, school cultures need to be trust-based (Louis, 2007; Kruse & Louis, 2008). Teachers' trust in parents and students is critical to school success, as low levels of trust in their turn lead to low levels of student performance (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997).

Study 1 was constructed around the notion of bringing to life the 'stories' of disenfranchised young people on the margins of school life and setting these

against the 'accounts' of their families, teachers, headteachers and other professionals. The aim was to develop a shared understanding about what could be done and to challenge what Seymour Sarason has described as the cycle of blame which gets in the way of successful educational reform: 'Inadequate teachers, irresponsible parents, irrelevant or inadequate curricula, unmotivated students an improvement defeating bureaucracy' (Sarason, 1990, p.13)

Looking afresh at this research from the distance of many years, two things emerge: the lack of trust between the different parties, and the lack of voice and agency of the young people. School was a prison, and survival depended on following the rules. Parents were occasional visitors, invited in because of their children's poor behaviour. As a pupil you couldn't change it, you could only endure it. One-in-three of the interviewees from Study 1 felt that nothing would be done to improve their situation. As one girl concluded, 'I'm seen as part of the awkward squad... It's too late for me'. The blue-print for change which was an outcome from the project was unlikely to benefit those young people who had contributed their stories.

Agency

The notion of agency, defined by Anthony Giddens as an ability to 'intervene in the world' to 'make a difference' (Giddens, 1984, p.14) is well developed in the literature. For Giddens, agency was about purpose, knowledge and competence. More recently, scholars have introduced the notion of 'agentic action' – that is, action which is purposeful – as a way of looking at how people 'construct' aspects of their own lives, a key part of their identity (Richardson, 2015). The literature on school leaders' sense of agency is well developed (Clarke & Wildy, 2011; Lovett et al., 2015), as is that of teacher agency (Pantic, 2015). The notion of student agency, empowered student voice, has also been explored, on moral, physiological, social, educational, pragmatic, and

democratic grounds, and linked to issues about self-efficacy and exclusion and children's rights (Levin, 2000; MacBeath et al., 2001; Pollard et al., 2000; Riley, & Docking, 2004; Riley et al., 2006; Osler, 2010).

A major finding from Study 2 was about the ways in which engagement in the research as student researchers had contributed to the development of young people's sense of agency (Riley, 2017; Riley et al., 2018). The student researchers had developed their skills, built their confidence, found their voice. Nusrat from Team C expressed this as follows:

(As a group) we found a significant link between belonging and confidence – if you feel like you belong in a place, you feel at ease, and are more confident there. We think that confidence is crucial to good learning.

Involvement in the project had led primary school student researcher Zanalı from Team B to reflect on the legacy she would leave behind when she moved to secondary school:

By asking people whether they feel like they belong and getting all this information, it makes us feel like we belong in this school. And it's quite good to do this at Year 6 because we're going to be leaving in one a half weeks, so it's quite good to make sure that we belong in this school, and we know that when we leave.

Confidence, a sense of being trusted were strongly anchored to the notion of agency, as is illustrated by the example of Team A. On completion of their research, Team A members presented their research findings to senior staff; developed a welcome booklet for new arrivals to the school which they translated into 13 languages, helped

shape the school's policy on new arrivals, set up and trained a team of students to act as hosts to new arrivals, and visited other schools to train other young people to be student researchers.

Social capital

Social capital has been defined as 'networks, together with shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups' (OECD, 2007, p.103). A focus on social networks and relationships enables educators to look for the positive features of the cultures of newcomers, rather than on those that emphasise what they lack (Bourdieu, 1999; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Brunn & Delaney-Barmann, 2001). Social capital, as applied in an approach to school community engagement, takes as its starting point that networks and relationships, even in the most disadvantaged contexts, can have a positive impact on schools. An understanding of the importance of building social capital leads to an identification of the processes that can exclude families, a critical issue for refugee families and those who have experienced major dislocations (Koyama & Rwehumbiza Bakuza, 2017; Das Gupta, 2006).

The young people involved in Study 1 felt and believed that the school looked down on their families. Their experience of the school's engagement with their parents revolved around their bad behaviour as pupils. However, the student researchers involved in Study 2 experienced a positive affirmation about their community. For example, members of Team C were encouraged to research the history of their local community, a process that strengthened their sense of belonging in the community, and their identity as young women of Bengali heritage: a rich example of how

Figure II: Student voice – The continuum of involvement in research



to harness social capital. The five school leaders involved in the study each had their own positive narrative about community. For example, one explained why the school had become involved in the research in the following terms:

We are trying to find ways which we can relate on a much more meaningful level with communities. Schools become an agent of community, and the community itself becomes an agent of change within the school itself. Our students are representative of that community. They are in this research and participating about it. They are not only benefiting themselves. But they are actually benefiting the school. (Riley, 2017, p.12)

5. Apply

‘Belonging means that you’re a part of something. You’re not just sitting around on the other side and you’re not just left out and lonely.’ (Student researcher)

Applying the learning is about understanding the contribution of the studies to knowledge in the field. For the young people in Study 1, a feeling of ‘not belonging’ remained a pervasive experience. However, for the student researchers involved in Study 2, engagement in the research had released their creative potential, enabling them to find their voice, explore, reflect and act, a process that promoted their personal growth and feelings of wellbeing.

Young people’s involvement in research can be viewed as a continuum from being research subjects to becoming change agents: See Figure II. The young people involved in Study 2 were data sources: conduits of information about their experience of school, collected to contribute to knowledge about change and improvement. Young people can also be active respondents in research: identifying issues about their own learning, or about matters they are unhappy about. The student-researchers involved in Study 2 were engaged in a journey of discovery which led to purposeful (‘agentic’) actions.

Agency is key. Agency is more than belief that if you act, what you do – on your own and with others – makes a difference. It is also about having the ‘tools’ to act (through cultivating your skills, talents and capacities to make that difference), and the ‘opportunities’ to act. School leaders are critical here, as discussed elsewhere. By stepping into the role of place-maker, they can enact the agency of young people, staff and communities (Riley, 2017). School leaders can also initiate the enjoyable and creative process of collaborative inquiry around place and belonging.

A key conceptual reflection from reviewing the findings from the two studies is about the interconnection between trust, agency and social capital. Schools which build on connections by fostering trust, seeking to grow young people’s sense of agency, and drawing on the strengths of communities help embed feelings of place and belonging.

A school is just a building. Schools become places of belonging and agency when all the different voices are heard (Flutter, & Rudduck, 2004; Kellet, 2010). In a climate that encourages schools – as American researcher Dana Mitra (2018) has described it – to obey mandates, and young people to master facts, schools need to recognise the importance that student voice can play in school transformation. The process of collaborative inquiry used in Study 2 can be applied across countries and contexts (see Appendix I). It is a transformative activity which has the potential to generate a school culture characterised by a sense of place and belonging for children, young people and adults.

Note: Videos in the ‘Art of Possibilities’ series and the booklet *Place and Belonging in Schools: Unlocking possibilities* can be accessed at www.theartofpossibilities.org.uk and www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-placeand-belonging-in-schools

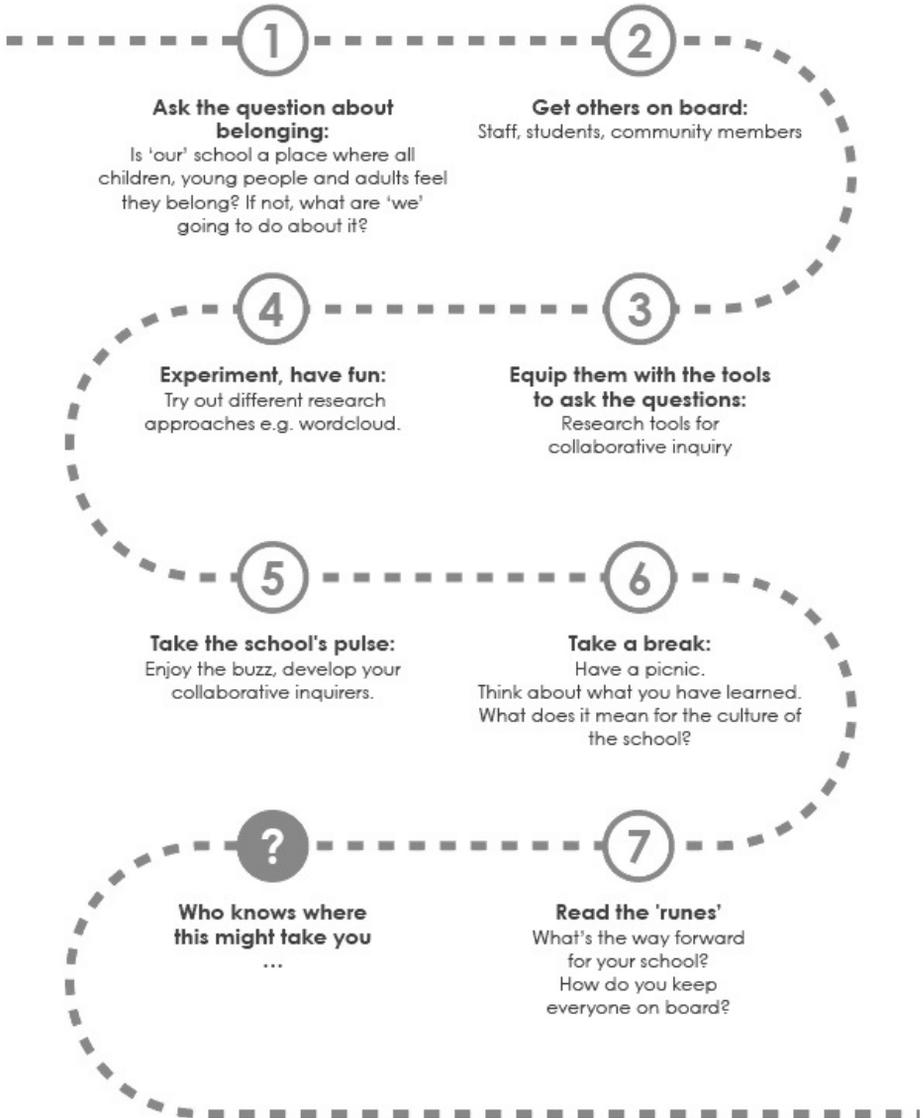
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All papers should include an Abstract (of not more than 250 words) and up to five 'keywords'. The Abstract must be structured and presented under subheadings that indicate: The Aim(s); Method/Rationale; Findings; Limitations; Conclusions.

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The main body of text in papers should usually be 3500–5000 words in length although papers outside this range may be considered at the Editor's discretion. Authors must indicate the word-length of papers with and without the reference section, excluding any tables or figures.

Any one issue of the publication will usually consist of a maximum of eight papers. Referees' comments and Editors' judgement of the balance and salience of papers will determine which papers are finally selected for publication.

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Overall, the presentation of papers should conform to the British Psychological Society's *Style Guide*. Non-discriminatory language should be used throughout. Spelling should be anglicised when appropriate. Text should be concise and written for an international readership of applied psychologists. Abbreviations, acronyms and unfamiliar specialist terms should be explained in the text at least once. Referencing should follow the current Society formats. For example:

Black-Hawkins, K., Florian, L. & Rouse, M. (2007). *Achievement and inclusion in schools*. London: Routledge/Falmer.

Woolfolk-Hoy, A. & Weinstein, C.S. (2006). Student and teacher perspectives on classroom management. In C.M. Evertson & C.S. Weinstein (Eds.) *Handbook of classroom management* (pp.181–219). London: LEA.

Jordan, A., Schwartz, E. & McGhie-Richmond, D. (2009). Preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 525–542.

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An electronic copy should be sent to the Editor for a specific issue, by emailed attachment (in MS Word or rich text format). We are unable to consider papers that are not submitted for a specific issue. Graphs, pictures or diagrams, etc., must be submitted in a format suitable for printing in black-and-white. The cover page must provide the full title of the paper, all authorial details and address (postal and email). The body of the paper, starting on page 2, should include the title and abstract, but omit any detail by which the author(s) may be identified. Text should be in at least 12 point Times New Roman and double-spaced. The submission must confirm that all authors approve the submission and that the paper is their original work and not under consideration elsewhere. Manuscripts that do not conform to these requirements will be returned to the author(s).

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