

**Thesis: Exploring Theories of Belonging Held by Senior Leaders in a
Secondary School.**

DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

This practitioner research sought to explore the way in which the senior management of a school for children with behaviour, social and emotional difficulties understood student belonging at school. Belonging is considered to be an important component in emotional well-being and protective of mental health. However, attempts to explore belonging at school have been frustrated by the use in the literature of a range of allied concepts, including relatedness, engagement and school connectedness, and research approaches which over-focus on self-evaluative methods and the correlation of data.

A theory of change approach was initiated to explore the management team's understanding of belonging and to support planning for interventions to develop student sense of belonging. Semi-structured interviews were completed with the school senior management team over 4 phases of research covering three years, and theories of change developed. However, the implementation of the theories in the school was unsuccessful, and the direction of the research had to be reviewed. The theory of change framework was, instead, used as an analytic tool along with thematic analysis of the data corpus.

The management team's understanding of belonging appeared to fall into two areas; belonging as experience, which focused on the subjective experience of belonging and belonging as transition which focused on the development and changes of the student and the community (the school) as belonging develops. It was also suggested that the management team considered that student sense of belonging at school could be developed through good relationships with staff and by making the school more accessible and attractive to students.

Further conclusions were drawn about the way students are perceived by the school management team, and the failure to include the students in the research process. It is suggested that there are particularly challenges for educational psychologists carrying out research in schools where there are pre-existing relationships with staff.

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Introduction

My interest in belonging began with some of the conversations I had with staff as part of my job as an educational psychologist (EP). In a previous research assignment for the DEdPsy, I explored concepts of social and emotional wellbeing with a group of teaching staff working in an academically successful secondary school with students from a largely privileged socio-economic background; as part of my day to day work, I spent time in a secondary special school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In these very different contexts, staff talked with me about their perceptions that a better sense of belonging at school would lead their students to achieve more. Teachers told me that they believed their schools should do more to develop student sense of belonging, and that this could be possible through the use of a range of strategies. They suggested team building activities, or intra-school competitions (focusing on sport, or raising money for charity). Other ideas included vertical tutor grouping (where tutor groups are mixed by age, rather than being taken from the same year group) and opportunities for staff to mentor some of their students.

I became particularly interested in the implicit theory that the teachers appeared to hold, that having a strong sense of belonging (or an increased sense of belonging) would be instrumental in helping students to perform better socially, emotionally and academically. However, when reflecting on these conversations, I did not feel that the staff were able to articulate a clear understanding of what a sense of belonging is, or how it might impact on a student's development, despite having some ideas about what actions they felt would help improve it. This became the basis of my initial research question:

- What can be done to develop young people's sense of belonging at school?

Exploration of the literature suggests that belonging is a fundamental human drive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which contributes to social and emotional wellbeing (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). However, understandings of belonging in the literature are varied and at times unclear (Frederickson & Petrides, 2013), and there has been relatively little exploration of what a school can put in place to increase the feelings of belonging of their students, (Osterman, 2000). This is further explored within the Literature Review (p 8). Nonetheless, if belonging is as important as the teachers thought it might be, then it

is something that should be considered explicitly by those in school leadership, ensuring that the structures are in place to help students feel that they belong. If, as they suspected, having a good sense of belonging contributes to student wellbeing, then those working with individual students should be cognisant of the individual's experience of belonging. This consideration led me to begin to develop a research project which would enable leadership staff in a school to be able to consider strategies which might impact on student sense of belonging and evaluate their impact.

The research project itself is strongly influenced by my principles as an EP and by my Research Stance (p 4). I locate myself as a critical realist and this informed the research design in that I was interested in finding ways to explore mechanisms of change which may help develop belonging but was aware that not all mechanisms of change will be active in all contexts. This led to me to seek a research design which would allow me to explore a single context over time and evaluate the impact of actions taken in that context to develop belonging. As part of this I wanted to consider the various understandings held of belonging and how these might relate to the actions taken. A theory of change approach seemed to be the most helpful in this instance. This approach is further discussed in the Methodology (p 39).

The implementation of the theory of change approach was by no means straightforward and a number of adaptations to the research process were made. More details of the research as it eventually developed are given in the Method (p47), whilst the reasons for some of those difficulties are discussed in the chapter entitled Reflections on the Research, (p122). Whilst actions taken to develop belonging were not evaluated, it was possible to use a theory of change framework as an analytic tool and explore the implications of the management team's theory of change for their understanding of belonging (p89). This, along with thematic analysis of their thoughts about belonging (p61) led to two different conceptualisations of the concept: belonging as experience and belonging as transition. Whilst the components of belonging as experience share much with the literature on belonging, belonging as transition has more in common with ideas of community, and suggests that belonging facilitates change, for the individual and the community, and may allow for a greater integration of values and aims with that community (see p 99). It is this idea of community, and associated models (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Wenger, 1999) that may be more useful to school leaders who wish to support their students

in having a stronger sense of belonging. Further reflections suggest that sense of belonging may be more challenging to develop if we do not include students more wholly in the process, as collaborators and as a potential belonging resource.

This is a somewhat challenging time to be researching belonging within an educational context. At the time that the project was planned, belonging was identified within education strategy documents including the Birth to Three Matters framework, (SureStart, 2003) which contained references to developing secure relationships alongside one's own identify as an individual and within a group. Similarly, social and emotional development featured in the National Curriculum. SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) a structured emotional literacy curriculum stretching from Key Stage 1 to 4, incorporating opportunities for staff development and whole school policy reform, formed the third strand of the national strategies, alongside literacy and numeracy (DfES, 2005, 2007). Researchers in education (e.g. Daniels (2006)) had begun to explore the importance of an emotionally literate environment in schools alongside strategies which sought to develop skills. Here, the philosophy had extended to include skills being 'caught' (i.e. modelled) as well as 'taught' (Weare, 2000). That is not to say that having a sense of belonging is the same as emotional and social wellbeing, although some writers (for example, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)) consider that having a sense of belonging is a vital component of wellbeing. Exploring belonging seemed an appropriate extension of the work already happening in schools.

However, since then, with a change of government has come a change in ideology. There have been major reforms to many areas of education. Fortunately, the EYFS framework which replaced Birth to Three matters still assesses children's progress in personal, social and emotional development, but without the focus on belonging (DfE, 2012). Sadly, within the national curriculum (DfE, 2013), there is no mention of social and emotional development, beyond a requirement that schools 'make provision for personal, social, health and economic education' (paragraph 2.5, p5). Approaches like SEAL no longer have the endorsement they once did. And yet, the students have not changed, and staff continue to question how they can make the student experience of school as good as it could be. This piece of research seeks to add to the body of knowledge that supports teachers and school leaders in doing that.

Chapter 1: Research Stance

I have decided to start the thesis with a discussion of my research stance in order to contextualise this research in terms of my values, my ontological stance and my professional principles. I have tried to distil some of the more important aspects of my practice as an educational psychologist (EP) here in order to frame this discussion.

In my role as an EP, I work with a range of schools each with a distinct climate, context and priorities. My role is to support all of them in making change to help their students make progress in all areas of development. As my practice has developed, I have come to hold the following principles as an applied psychologist, which I hope to also extend to my practice as a researcher (or more specifically, perhaps, researcher psychologist). In general, these principles address my views about the centrality of change, the importance of understanding the child in context, and frameworks which I find most helpful in best understanding the individual.

- Educational psychology practice should have a strong focus on managing change; whether this be change for the child, family, staff member or organisation. Almost all referrals ask the EP to be involved in situations because of a perceived need and our role is to support people in doing something different to meet that need. Similarly, as a researcher, I wish to promote positive change. When considering research topics, I felt it was important to work on something that would support and promote such change.
- All school contexts are different; in order to work effectively in them the EP needs to develop a conceptualisation of the school alongside a conceptualisation of the child within it, identifying particular strengths and barriers to change in both. This means that intervention to promote change needs to be a tailored, individualised response to the child in context so that change is more likely to be successful. One size does not fit all when it comes to planned change (suggested strategies, programmes of support or interventions) and the role of the EP is to help identify which intervention is likely to be most successful for that particular child in that particular school. As a researcher I was drawn towards approaches which would allow me to explore the complexity of a single organisation.
- Following from the point above, in my professional practice, in order to be most effective, I tend to focus both on the school context and the individual child. This may mean working with individual staff, groups of staff or seeking to influence

processes and practices within the school. This is because I believe change which is supported at a school level is more likely to be reinforced and barriers to success are more likely to be removed. New strategies are more likely to be generalised to support a wider range of students. This is not to say that I think EPs should move away from referrals relating to individual children, or that we should never work directly with those children (see Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) for a discussion of this). It is to suggest that students are best supported and EPs most effective when change happens at a systems level too. Again, in terms of research, this meant that I was looking to being involved in work primarily at a systems level.

- To suggest that the practical characteristics of change vary between settings does not, in my view, negate the importance of seeking models of change. Again, referring to my own practice I am aware that often the process of change is similar in different instances, and consider it an important part of my role to support organisations through a process of change as easily as possible. I was hopeful at the inception of this research that I would be able to develop more knowledge about change processes which would contribute to my professional knowledge as an EP.
- In my practice I have always prioritised an understanding of children's emotional wellbeing. As an EP, I am asked to be aware of student's development in all areas, including their learning, cognitive and physical development, (Beaver, 2011) and I believe this holistic stance is important. However, of all these developmental areas, my interest has been more focused on ensuring that children are enabled to be emotionally well. This may be through accessing an emotionally literate learning environment (Weare, 2000), through developing their own skills (DfES, 2007) and through ensuring additional support for those students who need help in this area. I was therefore drawn to a research topic which had emotional wellbeing at its heart.
- In my work as a psychologist and as a researcher, I am influenced by my cognitive behavioural training. When considering how people understand their world and what leads them to act in the way that they do, I am heavily influenced by some of the principles underlying cognitive- behavioural schools of thought (Beck, 1995), namely that:
 - People are rational and behave logically according to their internal cognitions and beliefs.

- Actions, cognitions and emotions are inextricably linked. Actions follow from cognitions; which themselves are derived from perceptions filtered by internal biases. Individuals are likely to behave quite differently in the same situation because of these internal biases (known as 'hot thoughts' 'conditional assumptions' and 'core beliefs'). Actions are therefore best understood from the thoughts and assumptions underlying them, and it can be helpful to make biases explicit in order to understand the actions they take better.
- Emotions tend to follow from cognitions, and also drive actions.
- Thoughts, perceptions and beliefs are accessible to the individual; can be brought into conscious thought and explored.

My ontological assumptions are perhaps best described as critical realist. I make the assumption that there is a mind-independent physical world, although I do not believe that we are able to observe that world directly. Our understandings of the natural world are influenced not only by our perceptual systems, but by the cultural and paradigmatic context in which we live. I also take the view that the social world is mind-independent but in the sense that it is independent of any one mind. The social world is a construction of many minds, and language and social power are important tools in such construction. (Gorski, 2013). I therefore take the stance that it is possible to talk of social concepts such as belonging, and to assume that the concept will have some shared meaning between different people. However, there are aspects of this meaning that must be negotiated and will be understood differently depending on people's experiences and culture. The researcher must be aware of the constructions that are active in any piece of research, particularly in research on social concepts such as belonging. The researcher must also be aware of the impact of their own assumptions and how this may affect any piece of research (Silverman, 2006).

Realist researchers take the view that the search for causal laws is fruitless, particularly in the social sciences. This is because the identification of the constant conjunction of events (the observation that for every x there is a y) (Hume in Robson, 2002) is impossible to identify in the complexities of the social world, where it is not possible to control all variable, and where systems, including humans are open, (Gorski, 2013). However, causal explanation is still possible through identification of the mechanism of change which is active in a particular context and leads the input to the outcome (Robson, 2002). This focus on the importance of context chimes with my practice principle outlined above that interventions will work better in particular

contexts. It is the role of the researcher (or EP) to determine which factors in a context will allow changes mechanisms to work effectively, and which will hinder them. In research on belonging, this means that I would not be seeking to subject students to experiments whereby all factors are controlled and an independent variable is manipulated in order to measure the effect on belonging (the dependent variable). Rather, I am interested in looking at what inputs might achieve the output of belonging in a particular context and hypothesising what mechanisms might be active here. This may give research outcomes in terms of greater understanding of potential mechanisms of change which could be tested in other contexts.

Given my practice principles as an EP, and my ontological and epistemological assumptions, I was therefore interested in research questions which would give me the opportunity to:

- Research a topic that had implications for children's emotional wellbeing
- Engage in research which allowed me to explore one organisation, primarily at a systems level
- Work to facilitate positive change
- Generate data on mechanisms of change in this context, but which may be of value in other contexts.

Having contextualised the research in terms of my research stance, I will contextualise it in terms of the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section reviews the psychological literature in relation to the concept of belonging. My interest in belonging came from a desire to support young people in their social and emotional wellbeing at school, and an initial research question was developed:

- What actions or interventions support the development of sense of belonging of young people at school?

In order to address this through the literature, I first take a step back to explore the evidence for sense of belonging as a unique psychological concept which has an important role to play in wellbeing and positive mental health. The challenges of defining the concept are outlined including disagreements about the possible components which make up belonging and the objects of belonging, problematized as 'what one belongs to'. The relationship between belonging and identity is considered.

I go on to explore the concept of belonging at school, and discuss whether this is different to the more general concept of belonging. The impact of belonging at school on engagement with school and learning is discussed and it is suggested that belonging contributes positively to student engagement with learning. The final section of the literature review considers those factors which are thought to help students gain a greater sense of belonging, including challenging attributions, classroom climate, and extra curricula activities, and provides a context for the research under discussion.

2.1: The Concept of Belonging.

Belonging is thought to be a multidimensional construct, incorporating affective and cognitive components and being closely related to social behaviour, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Frederickson & Baxter, 2009; Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002) although there continues to be a lack of agreement about what specifically comprises each of these dimensions. Theories around belonging tend to group into two main areas; which are best described as belonging as drive, and belonging as experience. These two theoretical groupings are largely complementary, and approach the concept in slightly different ways. The theories explored here, from Baumeister and Leary (1995) and from Hagerty, et al. (1992) represent examples of these two approaches.

There is considerable psychological work that suggests that belonging is a fundamental human drive; that is, an innate motivator which shapes behaviour regardless of age, culture or previous experience. Maslow and Lowry (1968) identified love and belonging as the third level in the Hierarchy of Needs model; suggesting that once physical and survival needs are met, humans will expend time and energy seeking and maintaining social relationships and fulfilling the desire to achieve a sense of belonging to social groups, such as friendships, family and sexual partnerships. Their work is largely theoretical and lacks empirical testing (Hagerty, et al., 1992) but has face validity, and has been used in education circles to explore ideas around learner's availability for learning (Reece, Walker, & Walker-Gleaves, 2000)

Baumeister and Leary (1995) take the idea of a drive to belong a step further, presenting extensive evidence that the need to experience belonging (what they refer to as the belongingness hypothesis) is fundamental in shaping human behaviour across the lifespan. They suggest that:

'human beings have a pervasive drive to form, and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships....there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare.' p497

This drive is argued to impact on all areas of experience, including cognitive, affective and behavioural processes, and appears to be related primarily to the need for individual, enduring positive relationships. Where Baumeister and Leary (op cit) present evidence about group membership, this appears to be the back-drop for those one-to-one connections. This raises questions about whether the experience of belonging to a group is different from the experience of 'belongingness'; and whether, for the authors, this distinction is important. At its most basic, it would seem that the belongingness hypothesis indicates a need for positive social relationships, not necessarily group membership. The theory itself makes helpful connections across many fields in psychology, which the authors argue suggested a greater validity for their work, but their work falls short of any empirical testing of its own.

In contrast, Hagerty, et al. (1992)'s conceptualisation of belonging focuses on the experience of belonging, rather than the drive to belong. Belonging in this instance is defined as:

“the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment, so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment”
Hagerty et al (1992) p172

Belonging in this instance is thought to comprise two main factors (i) a sense of being valued or needed, and (ii) a sense of fit, whereby one perceives that one's values are reflected in the group. These components were identified through factor analysis in the development of the Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996) and based on focus group surveys with a range of different groups, including students, patients using mental health services for depression, and academics working in related fields of study. The experience of belonging was found to have a positive impact on mood, and be protective of mental health. (Hagerty, et al., 1992). This approach to understanding belonging seems to suggest that the same experience of belonging can be present in a range of groups, from intimate dyads to larger communities, as long as the experiences of value and fit are present.

It can be seen that there is considerable overlap between the two approaches, belonging as drive and belonging as experience; both suggest that belonging has strong affective and cognitive components, both suggest that those cognitive processes impact on social behaviour, and both suggest that belonging has a positive impact on the individual, as will be seen below. It may be that these two approaches are, in fact, complementary, and that we can consider that belonging comprises both a drive to form and maintain relationships because they provide us with the positive experience of feeling needed in a context where our values are shared.

However, each approach has different implications for research; belonging as drive can lead researchers toward asking questions about the quality or quantity of social relationships, whilst belonging as experience operationalises in terms of perceptions of shared values and positive affect. This, however, also raises the question of whether belonging can be considered to be more than the sum of its parts, or whether it would be more valid to take each hypothesised element separately in

research. This continued discussion does, at least, reflect the complexity of the concept, and the difficulties associated with research in the area.

Whether one component, or a combination of many, belongingness, it is argued, plays a key role in emotional wellbeing and positive mental health. Baumeister and Leary (1995) present evidence that being accepted or included leads to feelings of happiness and calm, whilst being rejected or excluded leads to negative feelings such as loneliness. In the longer term, the lack of significant, interpersonal relationships is linked with higher incidence of physical and mental ill health, including feelings of suicide. Hagerty and colleagues similarly note that the absence of sense of belonging is associated with negative emotional experiences, such as loneliness, anxiety and depression (Hagerty, et al., 1996).

A study exploring the relationship between sense of belonging, stress and depression (Choenarom, Williams, & Hagerty, 2005) suggests that having a positive sense of belonging mediates the relationship between perceived stress and depression, suggesting that those who have experienced depression have an increased vulnerability to perceived stress when they also have a lower sense of belonging. Generally, participants who had experienced depression had statistically lower scores on a range of measures of social engagement and integration (such as perceived social support and spousal support as well as sense of belonging) but only sense of belonging was found to mediate between perceived stress and depression. Whilst we must be cautious of any apparently causative conclusions from a study which uses correlational data, as this does; it does appear that the experience of feeling valued and sharing values has an impact on mental health over and above that which comes from social contact alone. Consequently, Hagerty et al conclude that

“sense of belonging is a unique concept, different from other interpersonal phenomena such as attachment and social support, and (is) a vital component of mental health” Hagerty et al (2002) p794.

Belonging, therefore, can be seen to be a unique psychological concept, which is beneficial to the individual in terms of promoting and maintaining positive social contact with like-minded others. This, in turn, has benefits for mental health. There continues to be debate around how the specific components of belonging are

manifest and what the object of belonging can be i.e. what is it that one belongs to, and does this alter the experience of belonging?

There is a range of different groups to which an individual may feel they belong, from romantic dyads, through larger social or family groupings to those more disparate groups to which we describe ourselves as belonging even though we do not know all the group members. At its greatest this can represent cultural, or racial groups. It can be argued that each of these experiences of belonging vary in terms of their affective dimensions and levels of intimacy, yet each of them appears able to provide a sense of belonging. By intimacy, I take to mean closeness and knowledge of the members of the group, and the opportunities to interact with all of the members of that group (Jamieson, 2012). It is possible that the experience of belonging remains at the level of individual relationships, such that membership of a group enables people to find others with whom to form relationships, as would be suggested by the belongingness hypothesis. In this way, relationships would be nested within wider social groupings, including cultural or national groupings. However, it may also be possible to experience belonging to a wider social grouping without the presence of individual relationships, which would suggest another mechanism by which belonging can be derived.

It would appear that individuals do describe themselves as having a sense of belonging to broader cultural and national groups irrespective of their individual relationships. Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000)'s work with adoptees found numerous examples of inter-national adoptees (born in one country but adopted into another) who felt they did not experience a sense of belonging in either country, because they felt they were 'in-between' or 'didn't quite fit' (Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000 p83) This suggests that for those people there is a belief that one can experience a sense of belonging to one's country, and that the lack of this is perceived as a loss. There are issues of generalisability here, and some questions about how belonging may have been understood by this group of participants. However, the suggestion of belonging at the level of nationality, challenges the idea of belongingness through relationships alone. It also begins to suggest a blurring of boundaries between ideas around belonging and ideas around identity, which is explored further below.

In theoretical terms, the description of belonging outlined in Hagerty et al's (1992) work allows for the experience of belonging to be active at many levels. It is possible

to experience a sense of fit (of having the same values as others) in anything from romantic relationships to national cultures. Thus, the adoptees in Yngvesson and Mahoney's study appeared to feel that their values did not fit with either their home or adoptive countries. Work on imagined social capital may be helpful in exploring how this might happen at the cultural level, where an individual's evidence of their fit with others may be sparse (Quinn, 2010). Imagined social capital is postulated to be the force of connections with those who are imagined to be 'just like me' in a group or organisation. Individuals think about the other people in a group who would be like them, or who represent the ideals that they purport to represent and use this as an anchor (my concept) for belonging. In this way, belonging at a cultural level can be fostered with little real information about other group members. Similarly, processes such as social categorisation allow individuals to engage in a process of depersonalisation, that is to think about the typical group member and use this idea to facilitate social comparison and belonging, (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). In this way, the individual may compare themselves with the perceived typical member of a culture, and derive a sense of shared fit and therefore a sense of belonging from this.

The same process can also work the other way. There has been considerable research into the impact of race on sense of belonging in higher educational establishments (e.g. Hurtado & Carter, 1997) which suggests that many black and Latino students in the U.S. experience a lack of sense of belonging at college, leading to poorer academic performance and risk of drop out. It is suggested that there is a conflict between the perceived cultural values of those racial groups and the perceived values of college students which then becomes challenging for the individual to manage. Again, the possibility of having a sense of belonging is based on individual perceptions of values and how these are expressed within those two communities.

To summarise, belonging seems to be best understood as an emotionally positive experience, with associated thoughts about shared values, and which drives elements of pro-social behaviour. Having a sense of belonging is considered to be protective of emotional wellbeing. There is a lack of clarity within the literature about what one needs to belong to in order to experience sense of belonging; whether it is limited to relationships with other individuals or whether one can have a positive sense of belonging to broader social and cultural groups. This latter consideration entails a stronger focus on the perceptions that one makes of self and other in order

to support ideas of belonging and group membership. This links to ideas of identity and will be considered in the next section.

Belonging and Identity

In considering belonging and identity, the literature appears to reflect a notable ontological shift, from the realist position to a more socially constructed position. That is, from a stance which suggests there is a concept that can be called belonging, and that individuals tend to experience it in the same way; to a standpoint whereby belonging is considered in relation to the socially defined self, As such, it seems to be a transient phenomenon, loosely related to identity and social experience.

There is a complex dynamic between experiences of belonging and identity. At its most basic, considering belonging forces us to also consider the person who belongs (Probyn, 1996). Several theories of identity have sought to explore the relationship between social experience and identity, and many of them are similar in that they consider the self to be socially constructed. (Hogg, et al., 1995). I have focused here on social identity theory, as it considers identity as being primarily derived from group membership and therefore gives the best opportunity to consider belonging.

Broadly, social identity theory considers that the self is constructed from the social experiences of the individual relating to the social groups of which one is a member. Therefore there is no one identity but rather a multi-faceted range of identities that the individual may take at different times depending on the range of groups to which they belong. Two cognitive processes have been postulated to explain how group membership can impact on identity: categorisation and self-enhancement. These processes accentuate the differences between the in-group (the group to which one is a member) and the out-group (those who are not members) and serves to ensure that the in-group is perceived more favourably, (Hogg, et al., 1995). Identity can be changed through these processes as individuals change their self-perceptions and behaviour in line with the in-group prototype (i.e. the stereotyped typical member).

The idea of groups and therefore identity as constantly in flux presents some challenges for the idea of belonging. It appears not to be as simple as a stable 'I' joining a group of similar 'I's and gaining a positive experience from this. Probyn (1996) writes of the impact of the realisation that the world does not fall into comfortable ontological categories (challenging the idea that there are stable groups to which she can belong), and she and Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000), drawing on

their work with adoptees, both write of the instability of belonging which results from the sense of self and the world around the self changing. They identify feelings of uncertainty and worry and note that the desire to belong does not diminish, echoing the belongingness hypothesis discussed earlier (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However for these writers, belonging is viewed as never attainable because of the changing nature of the self and of the group one belongs to (Quinn, 2010). Even the consideration of belonging puts one on the outside of belonging (by reminding oneself of the individual again), Probyn (1996). For researchers such as Kraus (2006) belonging becomes something the individual chooses in order to maintain their sense of identity and to provide themselves and others with a narratology which allows us to present ourselves as coherent individuals. This assumes that without groups to belong to, we have no identity to speak of. Belonging then becomes a contingent and potentially transient experience, which needs constant renegotiation of roles, relationships and the self.

A related process which reinforces the formation of identity is othering, by which individuals in a group understand themselves as different from those not in the same group, and by which an individual defines themselves also in terms of the groups of which they are not a member, (Bath, 2009). One of the key aspects of social identity theory is that one can identify who is in my group (the in-group) and who is not (the out-group). The awareness of the other helps to boundary the groups that one belongs to, and thereby define oneself.

Belonging, then, is considered to be an experience which is associated with group membership, and almost appears to be a side effect of the complex interrelationship between the individual, their identity and the groups to which they belong. This appears more complex, more subjective and more dynamic than is suggested by theories such as the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and ideas of fit (Hagerty, et al., 1992), but similarly echoes ideas around the importance of the desire to belong, and the impact that not having a sense of belonging has on emotional wellbeing.

I will now consider the literature relating to belonging in the school context. I have focused on research relating to school aged children, rather than those in post compulsory education, although where I felt theories had explanatory value for those in school, I have included them. The next section considers understandings of

belonging at school, as separate from but related to belonging as a general concept, and explores the suggested impact of belonging on student learning and students' social experience of school. This leads into a discussion of factors which are thought to increase students sense of belonging to school.

2.2: Belonging at School

Definitions of belonging at school have generally referred back to the belongingness hypothesis, focusing on the importance of forming and maintaining positive, meaningful relationships.(See for example, Frederickson & Baxter, 2009; Osterman, 2000; Willms, 2003). However, in practice, this understanding of belonging appears to have been adapted to accommodate aspects of the educational environment. Sense of belonging at school is often conflated with other terms, including engagement (e.g. Zyngier, 2008) , participation (e.g. Finn, 1989), relatedness (e.g. Ryan and Deci (2000b), and social connectedness (e.g. Allen et al 2014), although it would undoubtedly be possible to include other concepts here too. There is a lack of clarity in the literature about whether these concepts are essentially the same as belonging, or if belonging is a component of a broader theoretical construct. Research on belonging has been influenced by these allied constructs, and it is difficult to identify the relative contribution of belonging or other socio-psychological elements in research outcomes. In discussing the overlap between belonging and these allied concepts, I have explored constructions of the terms and related research which explores the impact of belonging on the school experience.

It should also be noted that research in this area is not without contention. From a psychological standpoint. Ecclestone & Hayes (2009) argue that a focus on socio-emotional concepts like belonging at school have led students to be over focused on their emotional experiences at the expense of other areas of curricular teaching, and has normalised ideas around vulnerability to the detriment of emotional wellbeing. By doing so, it is argued, students lose the opportunity to experience education as liberation from their own experiences and perspectives which may ultimately be more helpful than pseudo-therapeutic activities.

Research in the area of belonging has also been criticised from a methodological standpoint. The most common research method in the area has been self-report surveys from group of students, correlating perceptions of belonging with other areas of social experience. As such, it is possible that the data suffers from common

method variance (Frederickson & Baxter, 2009), which may increase the apparent relationships between the factors studied as a result of the method by which that data is collected. Similarly, since the research tends to be correlative, it can only lead to associative rather than causative conclusions. It is also likely that cultural aspects will impact on the specific factors associated with belonging in different studies.

A further concern relates to the challenges in operationalising a concept like belonging, where specific definitions appear not to be universally agreed, and there appears to be heavy overlap with other similar concepts. There is a danger that questionnaires that purport to measure the same concept, belonging, are in fact measuring different ones: known as the jingle fallacy, (Frederickson & Petrides, 2013).

One area in which belonging at school has been measured is through the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), (Goodenow, 1993b). This was developed from ideas about belongingness and school membership and has been popular in the exploration of belonging at school both in its original and adapted forms, (see Frederickson & Baxter (2009) for a discussion of adaptations). In this instance, belongingness was operationalised to be how accepted, included, supported and respected a student felt they were. Factor analysis of the scores using this assessment from over 500 Australian high school students by You, Ritchey, Furlong, Shochet, & Boman (2010) suggested that three constructs account for the variance in test scores; (i) caring relationships, (ii) acceptance and (iii) rejection. It is suggested that these components make up belonging at school.

McClellan and Morgan (2008) completed similar research in the UK. Three components of belonging were also identified in their work with secondary aged students across a number of schools in the south of England using the PSSM following factor analysis. These components were (i) being noticed and feeling others take an interest (ii) feeling that I am different to peers and (iii) perceived acceptance by peers. McClellan and Morgan's factors 'feeling that I am different to peers' and 'perceived acceptance by peers' appear to mirror those of acceptance and rejection identified by You et al. However, the third factor is slightly different: caring relationships in the You et al study, and feeling others take an interest in the McClellan and Morgan study. These may be different aspects of a similar underlying factor relating to positive interpersonal connections, or may have arisen due to small

adaptations made to the questionnaire, or the impact of the different cultures where the research took place. In their analysis of the research into factors which make up belonging at school, Frederickson and Petrides (2013) identify only two factors which are common to the concept, a general affective sense of belonging, and perceptions of peer support. However, they also note the confusion around the plethora of concepts and terms used in this area, and the variability of research samples on which surveys are carried out.

Relatedness

Relatedness is hypothesised to be a key factor in intrinsic motivation along with autonomy and competence which make up self-determination theory. (Deci & Ryan, 1994, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994). Relatedness, in this instance, is defined as *“the desire to feel connected to others, to love and care, and to be loved and cared for”* (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 231), and is considered by some to be the same experience as belonging (Osterman, 2000) Hagerty et al (1996) however, consider relatedness to be allied with social support (quantity and quality of social contacts) and attachment (emotionally intimate social bonds) and belonging to be a sub-component of both of these. It is the former definition which has received most attention within the literature on education, and this which is further discussed below.

Goodenow & Grady (1993) have also considered belonging to be a motivational construct, equating it with relatedness. Student perceptions of their own belonging, as measured on the Psychological Sense of School Measurement Scale have been positively associated with their expectancy of success (Goodenow, 1993a); with task goal orientation (being focused on completing tasks) and the endorsement of social responsibility goals (agreeing with pro-social community rules) (Anderman & Anderman, 1999).

Further research has explored the relationship between relatedness and aspects of social integration. Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) found that relatedness assessed through feeling respected and cared for by teachers and parents was associated with greater internalisation of school values and behavioural regulations. This is different from the studies above which stress the importance of peer relationships in belonging at school, and may therefore reflect a slightly different mechanism at work. It may also represent the different influences between belonging with peers and belonging

with adults. The impact of relatedness to peers is less clear. Ryan et al (1994) noted that emulation of friends was somewhat negatively related to school adaptation, whilst Furrer and Skinner (2003) found a small positive effect of relatedness to peers. Given that belonging is thought to include some aspects of shared values within a relationship, the results here may be explained by the values of the peer group and how they interact with the aims and values of the school, so that if an individual's peer group feel positive about school and see the value in education then this will have a positive impact on school adaptation, whilst if the peer group is more negative then this is likely to conflict with the motivation to achieve at school.

Engagement and Participation

Another area of overlap with belonging at school comes from the area of engagement. Belonging has been hypothesised to be a component of engagement (Harris, 2011; McLellan & Morgan, 2008; Zyngier, 2008). The model of engagement here is generally taken from Finn's (1989) identification / participation model, developed from work in relation to students who dropped out of school. Engagement is thought to be made up of two main components, identification and participation. A sense of belonging is considered to be the affective component of the identification element, which also includes valuing the aims of the organisation. It is hypothesised that one of the reasons students withdraw from school is because they fail to experience belonging and they do not identify themselves as part of the organisation. The identification / participation model raises two issues for the understanding of belonging. Firstly, Finn appears to define belonging as a purely affective term, splitting off the cognitive experience of fit or shared values to sit alongside it in his concept of identification; and secondly, this model highlights the differing perspectives that exist around participation and belonging.

Participation refers to the extent to which an individual is present within a group, and actively involves themselves with the activities of the group, and is perhaps best considered as a continuum (Finn, 1989). A further, more politicised, aspect of participation defines it as students being fully included in the organisation, with a role in influencing the actions and aims of that organisation (Bath, 2009). For example, within research on education, participation is generally measured by reviewing data on absenteeism (whether a student is present at school or not), by measures of behaviour at school (the extent to which they could be considered to be involved in learning activities) and the extent to which they engage in (or are enabled to engage

in) decisions about the running of the school. If mere presence at school is thought of as one end of a continuum, then contributing to decision making can be considered to be the other end. It would seem obvious that participation and belonging must be strongly linked. Logically, if one has a drive to belong, then participation will be the way in which this drive is satisfied; the way in which values are shared and in which the feeling of being valued and accepted will be recognised. However, this may be affected by the level of participation that the individual is able to achieve.

It has been suggested that engagement can also be considered as a continuum (Zyngier, 2008) ranging from technical engagement, whereby students are seen to be conforming in their education, completing work set for them and following school rules (and are seen as outputs of an education system) through to critical transformative engagement, whereby students and teachers are working together as collaborators in learning which is devised and developed by them in response to students' own interests and self determined needs. In terms of belonging, it is this latter type of engagement which is likely to give rise to students having a sense of belonging at school, (Dei, 2003). If participation is the increasing involvement in the running of a school, engagement can be seen as the increasing involvement in the development of the curriculum, although the boundaries between the two are quite blurred; which in turn blurs the boundary between participation and engagement.

Returning to the identification / participation model of engagement, (Finn, 1989); perhaps the most exhaustive survey of levels of student sense of engagement (and within that, belonging) was undertaken by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) with 15 year old students from 42 countries (Willms, 2003). This gives an international picture of rates of student engagement. Identification was measured using a brief bespoke self-report questionnaire which students completed alongside assessments of their literacy, numeracy and science knowledge. Analysis of the questionnaire suggested that results were found to load onto two factors; whether students felt liked and accepted by their classmates, and whether they like school and found it interesting. However, poor correlations between the two factors meant that the latter factor was discarded; and belonging, in this instance, was then related wholly to feeling liked and accepted.

Students were considered to have a low sense of belonging if they disagreed or strongly disagreed with positive statements relating to peer liking and acceptance more often than they agreed or strongly agreed. Average scores were derived, which do not differentiate between, for example, a student who disagreed with all of the items and one who agreed with most but strongly disagreed with one or two. A break in the distribution of data was found at the point where students answered more negatively than positively, which was considered to be helpful in delineating the group with low sense of belonging. 17% of students from the UK fell into this category compared with an OECD average of 24.5%. The national scores were noted to cluster around the mean, and did not suggest a significant difference in the percentage of students with low sense of belonging scores for the UK in comparison to other OECD countries.

Hierarchical linear modelling of the students' scores (analysing firstly by nation, then by school and then by individual) indicated, however, that the prevalence of students experiencing low sense of belonging varied significantly among schools for all countries except three (Iceland, New Zealand, and Sweden). Whilst students classed as having a low sense of belonging were drawn from across the range of socio-economic status (as indicated by the income quartile for the family), students were more likely to have a low sense of belonging in schools where there is a high proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (the bottom income quartile). Conversely, students were less likely to have low sense of belonging when there was a strong disciplinary ethos in the school, and there were positive student-teacher relations. These were again assessed through student report.

Interestingly, those born outside the country where they took the test were found to have lower sense of belonging than those who were not. This echoes the studies considered earlier (p 12) which suggest that inter-national adoptees struggle with sense of belonging to their home and new countries.

The PISA study also measured the participation of the students; this is the other element of Finn's (1989) engagement model. They were assessed using student self-report of absenteeism, missed classes and late attendance over the two weeks before the study. It was noted that this is not a particularly accurate or thorough assessment of participation, covering only participation at its most superficial level and relying on student recollection. Practical differences in education across the

countries measured (for example, in areas such as homework, and extra-curricular opportunities) meant that any more in-depth measure of participation was considered to be impossible at such a large scale.

The results suggest that contrary to the assertion above that participation and belonging are mutually reinforcing, participation, in school at least, is possible without developing an associated sense of belonging. Around 13% of the students surveyed were found to have good participation but a low sense of belonging. Again, the superficial nature of participation measured here must be noted. It may be possible to be present without belonging, but a deeper participatory experience may be more reinforcing of, and reinforced by belonging. Although the PISA results suggest that participation can exist without belonging, it does not address the question of whether belonging can exist without participation.

Similarly, despite the evidence that aspects of belonging in the form of relatedness can impact on the motivational aspects of the learning experience, evidence for the relationship between belonging and academic achievement is equivocal. The OECD study outlined above (Willms, op cit) found no correlation between perceptions of belonging and academic performance in reading, maths or science. In fact, it was noted that students with low sense of belonging tended to cluster into two groups, one with relatively high academic achievement and the other with very low academic skills, especially in literacy. It may be that the opportunities to feel socially accepted are lower for students at the extremes of academic achievement.

Social and School Connectedness

The hypothesised relationship between belonging and social connectedness remains unclear, and has been used differently by different researchers. The terms belonging and connectedness have been used interchangeably to discuss issues around social climate in schools, and the impact of positive relationships between children and their peers and teachers. (Juvonen, 2007; Rowe, Stewart, & Patterson, 2007).

Connectedness is used by some to refer to the quantity and perceived quality of social connections and relationships the individual experiences within an organisation or community, and by others as a more general statement of positive affect towards school; it is often poorly operationalised within research literature. As such, it has been separately argued that connectedness forms part of belonging, and also that belonging is the outcome of social connectedness (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, &

Waters, 2014). This reflects, again, the difficulties in differentiating the concept of belonging from other similar constructs.

School connectedness (in this case, positive affect towards school and those in it) has been significantly associated with reduced risk taking behaviour in adolescence, including reduced use of controlled substances, early and unprotected sex, and violence, (Resnick et al., 1997). Murdock (1999) suggests that there is a relationship between perceived positivity of relationships with peers and teachers and likelihood of dropping out from school, although it must be noted that race and socio-economic status were potential confounding factors here. Interestingly, sense of belonging was found to be a mediating factor for students between the relationship with their teacher and their academic achievement, (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996) suggesting that belonging and social connectedness may be distinct factors with differing impact on students. In each of these studies, data was collected through student self report, and causal links were not established, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the possible relationships between the factors.

Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, and Lewis (2000) suggest, using data from the development of the Child Development Programme (CDP) that connectedness can be developed through a multi-layered approach in school, with direct teaching of social and emotional skills which are reinforced through cooperative learning activities and whole school approaches to discipline. This key study is discussed in more detail below (p27). Similarly, Rowe, et al. (2007) argue that school connectedness can be improved by paying attention to the curriculum, organisation of the school, and relationships with school partners and services. They present a range of evidence from the literature regarding the ways in which these can be altered to support student's experience of school connectedness, although this is largely aimed at facilitating social interaction, with the assumption that connectedness will develop as a result.

As with relatedness, the evidence of the value of peer relationships in developing school connectedness is equivocal, and appears to depend upon the values of the friends one makes. An individual with friends who have good school connectedness is likely to do so too; whilst friends who are not connected to school are likely to reduce school connectedness in the individual. Juvonen (2007) suggests that peers amplify their positive or negative behaviours over time, thus influencing school

connectedness. It should be noted that negative experiences with peers, such as conflict and bullying can also impact on school and social connectedness, (Hendry & Reid, 2000; Juvonen, 2007)

This brief discussion of belonging as one of a number of allied concepts reiterates the difficulties there are in trying to define belonging as a separate and unique concept. Belonging is sometimes considered to be a component of a broader psychological concept, as with engagement and sometimes equated with other concepts, as with relatedness. Interestingly, much of the research in the area focuses on belonging as being strongly focused on peer acceptance and lack of peer rejection, although this may have come about because of the reliance on particular surveys of belonging (the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993a)). Belonging is suggested to be linked to positive attitude towards learning, to the values of school, and to lower levels of risk taking behaviour. In general, it seems that we should not be concerned about levels of belonging at school with only 1 in 6 students in the UK experiencing a low sense of belonging (Willms, 2003) However, for those students who do not experience sense of belonging at school, the prognosis is less good. Many of them appear to be struggling with learning, and some with participation (Willms, 2003) and they may be socially and emotionally vulnerable (Resnick et. al, 2007)

2.3: Developing Belonging at School

The previous section has explored the difficulties in measuring and delineating belonging from other concepts, and has gone some way to outlining factors which are associated with belonging, albeit obliquely. Little research, however, has focused on precursors to belonging, or interventions which seek to develop belonging in school students. This is an important area; if belonging is considered to be a protective factor for mental health, or a precursor to engaging students in learning, then it is helpful to know if and how belonging can be developed.

Reviewing the studies discussed above, it can be seen that some common factors have emerged which may contribute to the development of belonging in school. These include the peer group, relationships with teachers, disciplinary ethos in school, and the extent to which students are involved in school organisational decisions.

To recap, the potential impact of the peer group in developing belonging is complex. Peer acceptance and lack of peer rejection are considered to be factors contributing to relatedness to school, (McLellan & Morgan, 2008; You, et al., 2010). There appears to be an association between reported sense of belonging and the sense of belonging of peers, which applies when sense of belonging is good (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Juvonen, 2007), and when it is not so good, (Juvonen, op cit; Ryan, et al., 1994). Finally, attending a school where most of the students come from low socio-economic status families is also associated with low belonging (Willms, 2003).

There are organisational factors which also seem to impact on belonging. Willms (2003) suggested that good teacher-student relationships and a strong disciplinary ethos are both associated with better student sense of belonging. Students who have more opportunity to contribute to the running of the school and to the learning curriculum are hypothesised to have better sense of belonging, (Bath, 2009; Dei, 2003; Rowe, et al., 2007) although this has not been verified directly through research.

The studies discussed earlier and noted here all rely on correlational research; that is, observing a relationship between two factors which were identified through self-report. This means that it is not possible to say that peer relationships, or school discipline or relationships with teachers cause belonging, and, in fact, it may be the other way around, that belonging causes better peer or teacher relationships. There may be a third unidentified element which underpins both, for example, sense of belonging and disciplinary ethos. The research discussed in the next few pages has sought to identify actions or precursors which can be said more confidently to lead to or impact on better sense of student belonging.

A number of studies (Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2009; Shnabel, Purdie-Vaughns, Cook, Garcia, & Cohen, 2013; Walton & Cohen, 2007a, 2011) have exploited the fact that belonging is based on perception, seeking to alter the experience of belonging by altering the perceptions and attributions associated with it. One such area of study examines the fear that one may not belong, known as belongingness uncertainty, and the impact this was thought to have on black students' academic achievement. Initial studies, (Walton & Cohen, 2007b) carried out with black college students new to campus, demonstrated positive effects on sense of belonging as measured on self-report questionnaires and grade point

average when belonging uncertainty was reduced. The results were explained in terms of identity threat and attribution theory. Black students in college are thought to be already questioning whether they belong because of the perceived clash between their cultural identity and their student identity (see p13 for further discussion). In this context, neutral events are perceived negatively, and attributed as evidence of not belonging. Information was presented which suggested that new students often have feelings of uncertainty about belonging, but that these are normal and pass quickly, and thereby encouraged a different attribution of events which then reduced the threat to identity.

In further studies Shnabel, et al. (2013) analysed the content of essays written by 7th grade African American students (that had previously been used for self-affirmation studies, (Cohen, et al., 2009)), and found that students who wrote about elements of belonging as well as self-affirmation had greater academic gains than students in a control group who did not. Writing about belonging in this case was judged to include comments about sharing activities with others, or the perceptions of others towards themselves, and was found to mediate the effects of the self affirmation intervention, increasing its impact on academic achievement at two year follow up. A similar pattern of results was found when analysing the performance of female undergraduate students on a maths test (where women experience negative stereotyping). Writing about how their core values contributed to their experience of belonging lead to an immediate improvement in performance on the test in comparison with a control group who wrote about a neutral, less personalised topic.

Interestingly, when white students or male students (who were not, it is argued, subject to identity threat in these situations) wrote about belonging, this was associated with a drop in performance. Schabel et al (op cit) argue that when people experience identity threat, by being in situations in which they are negatively stereotyped, bolstering a sense of belonging (*“reminding individuals of their meaningful connections with significant others who love and support them”* p672) counters that threat. It is unclear why the performance of non-threatened individuals should be worsened by reflecting on belonging. The authors suggest two possible explanations; that considering belonging reduces stress leading to sub-optimal performance in those not subject to the stress of identity threat; or that reflecting on belonging may cause non-threatened individuals to feel conflict between belonging goals and the desire to be distinct and independent from others. Both explanations

are highly speculative and require further research. Measures of belonging in this instance were somewhat subjective, and determined by researchers reviewing written or video work from the students involved in the study. It is not clear how what was written was judged to include a dimension of belonging or not.

This body of research suggests that both self affirmation and belonging have some impact on academic performance for students who experience identity threat, and not for those who do not. This is helpful for students who are traditionally known to be marginalised in education settings, but the results suggest that students who do not consider themselves to be marginalised may not benefit from these types of interventions.

Very little research has directly explored the impact of planned interventions at a whole school or class level on student sense of connectedness or belonging. The extensively reported Child Development Project (CDP) is one intervention where belonging was a key focus, (Solomon, et al., 2000). This was a schools based study exploring the possibility that interventions at an organisational level could alter the social context of the school which would then more effectively meet the personal and social needs of the students. Personal and social needs were hypothesised to be autonomy, influence and belonging. The research aimed to track student perceptions of change at an organisational level by assessing their sense of school community, and to track the impact of that change on personal and social skills as well as academic progress and attitude to learning.

Twelve elementary schools in California (with twelve matched comparison schools acting as a control) were involved over a three-year period, introducing developments in classroom practice, as well as school wide initiatives. Specifically, teachers were trained to implement:

- developmental discipline, a collaborative approach to developing classroom climate and reinforcing commitment to pro-social behaviour at school;
- cooperative learning, teaching strategies in which students worked in pairs or groups and then reflected on the skills needed to do so; and
- literature based reading instruction, the use of high quality literature and books which contain a focus on social skills and emotional literacy.

In addition to this, schools in the CDP were encouraged to develop school wide interventions to develop social and emotional skills, for example, buddy programmes involving students from different year groups, and were also encouraged to make

schools more welcoming and open to parents through the establishment of parent – teacher coordinating teams.

Programme implementation was monitored through school and classroom observations every three months, and the impact of the programme was assessed using a range of student self-report measures and a teacher questionnaire. Only five of the twelve programme schools were felt to have implemented the CDP well (based on the observer reports and teacher questionnaires). In those schools, sense of community scores were found to be higher than in the other programme schools or the control comparison schools. Students were found to have made gains in personal, social and ethical attitudes relative to comparison schools, but there was little evidence for an increase in academic attainment or skills. Analysis suggested that student sense of community was the mediating factor by which these increases occurred; the school interventions lead to an increased sense of community or connectedness which then impacted upon student’s socio-emotional wellbeing and skills. The role of the teachers was considered to be key in introducing and developing the CDP interventions and in influencing student engagement in the classroom.

The relevance of this study to belonging is perhaps not straightforward, belonging was not measured as a characteristic of the individual student as in other studies, but rather there was a focus on whether the students perceived that their school was a community. The sense of school community scale (SSCS), (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995) devised for use in the CDP is based on the McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) sense of community model, which incorporates sense of belonging as a factor. The SSCS questionnaire explores students’ perceptions of the extent to which the students have warm and supportive interpersonal relationships at school, receive support from each other and from staff, and the extent to which they can participate in decision making. This can be said to incorporate aspects of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995); and dimensions relating to value and fit are not measured. This would suggest, then a need to further consider the impact of school level interventions on student’s individual sense of belonging in order to see if perceptions of the school as a “*caring community*” (Solomon, et al., 2000, p. 4) are linked with sense of belonging.

Aspects of the study which warrant more consideration relate to the importance of teacher actions in developing belonging and the extent to which elements of the CDP were implemented. Fewer than half of the schools taking part were considered to be implementing the programme well. This is not an uncommon feature of social and emotional programmes which are externally generated and introduced into schools. Similar issues were identified in the SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) curriculum in the UK, a school wide, multi-layered programme to develop social and emotional skills development. Implementation, particularly of whole school elements, was found to be very variable, and therefore it was difficult to ascertain its impact on students (Humphrey, Lendrum, & Wigelsworth, 2010)

Further work has explored the impact of classroom level factors on student experience of belonging (Frederickson and Petrides, 2013). 304 8-11 year old students completed self report assessments of their experiences of belonging, using an adapted version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale (Goodenow, 1993a) as well as surveys of their perceptions of classroom climate and of social support from peers. As noted above (p 17), belonging was hypothesized to be made up of two factors; the affective experience of belonging, and the perception that one is supported. It was found that classroom climate, which in this case measured features such as class cohesiveness, interpersonal friction, difficulty of work, competition in the classroom and liking of the class, had a positive effect on both aspects of belonging, and peer relationships had an effect on the perceived peer support component. Further, for boys, classroom climate loaded directly onto peer relationships which also loaded onto the peer support element of belonging. As with the CDP studies, it is concluded that classroom level features of the school environment can have a significant impact on student experience of belonging.

Another area which has been explored in developing school belonging comes from the wealth of literature into the impact of extra-curricular activities. A full review of this area is not possible here, but selected studies have demonstrated some promise in developing factors associated with sense of belonging. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) suggested that involvement in school based extra-curricular activities appeared to lower the incidence of early school drop-out for students identified by staff as being at risk 4 years earlier, but was not related to dropout rates in those not previously identified. Similarly, students sampled by (Darling, 2005) demonstrated a more positive attitude to school and an intention to stay in school for longer when they had

participated in school based extra-curricular activities. These studies begin to suggest an association between attitudinal aspects of belonging and extra-curricular engagement, but should be considered with caution since neither directly accessed perceptions of belonging over and above participation in or liking of school. Further, the correlational nature of data analysis does not allow one to draw direct conclusions about causation; it may be other factors influenced both engagement in extra-curricular activities and a more positive attitude towards school.

One study has attempted to specifically gauge student sense of belonging in relation to extra-curricular activities by sampling 1160 early teenagers from youth centres across four states in the US. (Akiva, Cortina, Eccles, & Smith, 2013). Students self-reported sense of belonging varied with the frequency with which they engaged in extra-curricular activities, and was associated with a perception that staff were welcoming. However, belonging was related to whether young people felt they belonged at the extra-curricular activity, not whether they belonged at the associated school. Indeed, in this instance, not all the activities sampled were provided by school and belonging was only very briefly assessed (by one question) alongside a number of other dimensions.

2.4: Conclusions and Context for this Research

Schools have a responsibility to ensure that their students are mentally healthy and emotionally well (DfE, 2014a; DfES, 2005, 2007). Having a good sense of belonging is an important component of emotional wellbeing, and its lack has been associated with loss of emotional wellness, and vulnerability to depression (e.g. Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty, et al., 1992). In my experience, teachers are keen to develop sense of belonging in their students, but do not know how best to go about it. As with research into student engagement, (Harris, 2008) there is a paucity of research into teacher's understandings of student sense of belonging and how they might go about developing it in their students. Also, the research in this area is difficult to penetrate; there is confusion over terminology, with terms poorly defined and operationalised (Frederickson & Petrides, 2013) and an over-reliance on correlational research using self-report surveys (Frederickson & Baxter, 2009).

There are some exceptions to this. Work on attribution theory (e.g. Walton & Cohen, 2007a) is promising for those students who experience belongingness uncertainty, a fear that their place in an educational programme does not fit with their ethnicity or

gender. But what of students who do not experience this uncertainty? There is no evidence as yet that attribution theory may be helpful to students who experience a low sense of belonging at school where race and gender issues are not at play.

There are isolated studies that suggest that extra-curricular activities may have some indirect impact on belonging, (Darling, 2005; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997) but the research again suffers from conflation of terms, focusing on attitude to school and participation rather than belonging per se. More research is needed to verify this connection.

Focusing on aspects of school and classroom climate appears to have the potential to impact on the sense of belonging of all students. It seems that it is possible to impact on student belonging by promoting a positive climate of learning and discipline which eschews respect, social collaboration and warmth (Frederickson & Petrides, 2013; Solomon, et al., 2000). The most thorough research in this area comes from the Child Development Programme (Solomon et al, op cit). However, this research suffered from difficulties in programme implementation, with less than half of the schools implementing the programme fully.

Further research is needed, then, to explore how school staff might develop their schools in ways which will support the sense of belonging of their students. In particular, school staff need to be enabled to fit changes to their own context in order to ensure that the difficulties in change implementation are avoided. Related to this, and following Harris (op cit) there is a need for staff to be aware of their own understandings of belonging, and how these might influence the actions that they take. This information was helpful in informing my thinking about research design and eventual implementation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

It should be said at the outset that the research was not straightforward to implement and this meant that decisions had to be revised throughout the research process. This is discussed in more detail below. This chapter seeks to contextualise the research that was undertaken in terms of its context, design and methodology.

3.1: Research Context

The research was carried out in one school; a special school for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in a large local authority in the north-east of England. I have called it Whitfield school for the purpose of the study, but, in order to protect anonymity, this is not the school's real name. In order to thoroughly contextualise the research, this section will address aspects of the national, and regional context impacting on the school where the research took place, including political and demographic factors, before addressing school and researcher contextual factors.

National Context

The school under discussion is a special school for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). At the time of the research, this was a categorisation of special educational need relating to students who experience

“clear recorded examples of withdrawn or disruptive behaviour; a marked and persistent inability to concentrate; signs that the child experiences considerable frustration or distress in relation to their learning difficulties; difficulties in establishing and maintaining balanced relationships with their fellow pupils or with adults; and any other evidence of a significant delay in the development of life and social skills”. (DfES, 2001. 7:43).

This is not a medical diagnosis, but rather a descriptive label used solely within education to identify those children who are presumed to experience difficulties which are primarily related to their emotional experiences, challenging behaviour, and/or social interactions. It is perhaps worth noting that this descriptive category is somewhat contentious, since there are no clear defining features of a student with BESD, and a range of very different needs are included under one heading. Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) have raised concern that the contextual nature of behaviour is not considered enough when identifying these students.

All the children attending the school were in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Need, under the 1981 Education Act (DfE, 1981) and had been placed at the school through a process of negotiation between officers of the local authority, those with parental responsibility for the child and the head teacher of the school. All had been considered by the local authority (based on the evidence presented to them by school staff, educational psychologists, parents and other professionals) to be experiencing significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties such that their needs could not be met within a mainstream school setting.

Other aspects of national context which are relevant here relate to the national curriculum, which at the time of the research prescribed teaching of core subjects of English, maths, science, religious education, physical education, and personal, social and health education along with other foundation areas including geography, history, music, and modern foreign languages (DfES; & QCA, 2004). Alongside this, was the introduction of the 14-19 strategy which sought to provide a range of pathways for young people from key stage 4 onwards, including vocational and skills training alongside a more academic school and college pathway (DCSF, 2008a),

Regional Context

The region is classed as the least wealthy (estimated income and assets) in the country. Between 2010 and 2012 approximately 21% of people in the region were classed as being in poverty (that is, having a household income that is lower than 60% of the contemporary median income) which reflects the national average (Parekh, MacInnes, & Kenway, 2014). It is worth noting that the local authority has a mixed socio-economic profile, with some areas of deprivation alongside others which are wealthier. The local authority also has a mix of rural and urban communities; but is culturally homogenous, with 94% of the population describing themselves as white British (Office of National Statistics, 2011).

Referring to the legislation above, this local authority has a proportionately higher number of students with Statements of Special Educational Need than the national average (3% in comparison with a national average of 2.8%) (DfE, 2014b)

School Context

Whitfield School is one of three special schools for secondary aged (11-16) students with BESD in the Local Authority. It is a day school with extended evening provision, but no residential capacity, and caters for 60 students. This means that students

attend school from 9.00am until 3.15pm from Monday to Friday, but have the opportunity to stay until 7pm from Monday to Thursday in order to take part in extra-curricular activities such as sports, outdoor education, and leisure activities. Class sizes average around 8 to 10 students with two members of staff present in each lesson. Students are drawn from across the local authority, and are transported to school by taxi; some travel up to an hour each way from their home communities each day.

The staff was made up of around 9 teachers, and 12 learning support assistants. These teams are managed by the head teacher, deputy head teacher and assistant head teacher. The management team experienced a great deal of change across the period of the research. In the months before the research began, the previous head teacher was unexpectedly seconded to another school in the local authority, and the then deputy head teacher became acting head (she later successfully interviewed for the headship and is referred to throughout the project as the head teacher (HT). When she moved to become acting head teacher, another teacher within the school was appointed to become acting deputy head teacher. He was later appointed to the position of substantive deputy head teacher. He is referred to throughout as the deputy head teacher (DHT). The third member of the leadership team was the assistant head teacher. This post was created sometime after the HT and DHT had been appointed. A member of staff who had previously worked in the school was appointed to this post (she is referred to throughout as the AHT). Unfortunately, she subsequently left this position after around 18 months and was only in post for the second and third phases of the research.

Researcher Context

More information about my stance as a researcher and an educational psychologist is discussed in detail in the chapter on Research Stance (p 3). This section gives details about my relationship with the school, and how the research project came about. I had been the assigned educational psychologist to the school for five years prior to the research project. This meant that, at the conception of the project, I visited the school for one morning a week during term time and worked closely with staff and students within the school. I had a varied range of work there which brought me into contact with most members of the school community; including work with individual students and their parents, and members of staff, to group work with

students, staff training events and consultation work with senior managers within the school.

The opportunity for the research project came about partly because of the changing circumstances described above. The new head teacher wanted to take the school in a new direction; changing the climate of the school and the principles on which it was managed. She wished to make her ethos for the education of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties clearly explicit to students, their families and her staff. She wanted more of a focus on what she described as nurture within the school and was particularly interested in developing student sense of belonging. She was interested in my input as a psychologist in supporting developments within the school and hopeful that I could offer some support in planning and evaluating any developments.

In summary, there were some positive factors which lead to the selection of this school as the basis for my research:

- There was clear commitment from the HT to develop work on student belonging, and to commit time and resources to this;
- The school was at a point of change, with a new leadership team. The HT had asked for help in terms of being able to plan and evaluate change as it happened;
- It was hoped that change would happen at a number of levels within the school, including school systems, staff and students. I felt that I was able to work across these different levels;
- I had a positive, on-going relationship with the school, and (at that time) had the time available which could be used on supporting the school in developing belonging;
- I was hopeful that this would be a mutually beneficial experience, in that the HT and school would benefit from the research and I would be able to complete my doctoral thesis.

There were also some factors which may also have negatively affected the research:

- The topic of the research was belonging; an inter- and intra- personal construct. The students attending the school had difficulties with their social and emotional skills as they had been identified as having BESD

(Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties). It is possible, therefore, that the students' experience of belonging might not be typical, affecting both this study and any more general conclusions that can be drawn about belonging at school. It must be noted that the term BESD describes a range of difficulty which varies according to presentation and severity, and so the impact of the student's Special Educational Needs on belonging could not be predicted. Furthermore, the way in which students were placed at the school may also affect their experience of belonging. It is unlikely that a student would attend Whitfield from the start of Y7 through to the end of Y11, as might be typical in a mainstream school. Students joined the school in all year groups, and at any point during the school year. Finally, students were drawn from a wide geographical area, so were less likely to have relationships outside the school with other students and fewer community links.

- as has been noted, the school, and especially the management team was going through a period of change; there may have been unforeseen consequences from this which made it difficult for planned changes to be implemented;
- the relationship between me and the school may have been helpful, but I was aware may also have affected the research process.

3.2: Research Design

The topic of belonging was appealing to me, and I was interested in carrying out this particular piece of research because it chimed with my values as a practitioner, as someone who is particularly interested in the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. I felt that working with a school I already knew professionally allowed me to try and link research elements into my day to day experience of being an EP, something which is often noted as challenging in the profession (MacKay, 1997, 2002) An initial conversation with the head teacher led to the development of a broad research question:

- What actions or interventions support the development of sense of belonging of young people at school?

As I began to refine this, I began to consider what methodology might be most helpful in addressing the question, and how the methodology might be dictated by the research context and my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

As noted above the research context consisted of one school, which itself was quite unusual as it is a special school for children with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. The HT was seeking to make change over time, and across this organisation. In sampling terms, this was perhaps best considered a purposive sample, as the school both stimulated and met the needs of the research project, (Robson, 2002). This meant that I was looking for a research method which would allow me to plan and track change over time in one context. This kind of research approach appealed to me as it fits with my belief, as discussed in my research stance, that each case I work with needs to be understood individually in order to ensure that change is most likely to be successful. I felt that working with one school would allow me to develop an in-depth understanding of that setting and what might work well there.

In terms of ontology, the research reflects my own research stance, and takes a critical realist perspective. I am making the assumption that there is a social object, an experience which can be called belonging, and this experience is similar enough between individuals to be possible to understand as an entity in itself. I note that each individual experience of belonging will vary according to the knowledge, culture and previous experiences of the individual, but consider that it is possible to access these experiences sufficiently to achieve a joint understanding (Reicher, 2000, in Willig, 2013 p3). I also note that any research into belonging that I undertake will be influenced by my own experiences, knowledge and values, and that I need to take steps to ensure that this is clear to the reader, so that judgements can be made about the trustworthiness (Robson, 2002) of the research. This is discussed further below.

Following a critical realist perspective, the research seeks to explore those actions which lead to belonging as an outcome, in this context (Whitfield school) and the possible mechanisms which can explain how this might happen (Robson, 2002). This model means I am not seeking to vary an independent variable (interventions planned by the management team) in order to measure the impact on a dependent variable (belonging) but rather exploring what might be happening in this particular school when an action by the management team appears to lead to a better sense of belonging for students. I acknowledge that the agency of the management team and the students in school is likely to be affected by the structures both in school and in wider society which influence how belonging may be developed or not, and that

conclusions must then be seen as explanations which may not be applicable in other social contexts.

As I explored this further and began reading more about belonging, I became aware that the concept of belonging is not strongly operationalised in the literature; and even if it were, the management team's understanding of belonging might vary from this. Since the HT's priority was to develop student belonging, I wanted to find a method which would allow me to explore this with her in greater depth, so that planned interventions were more likely to enable belonging to develop in the way she expected it to. I was also mindful that any planned changes at school would not just be introduced by the HT but by other members of the management team too, so their views about belonging would also be important. I therefore amended my research questions:

- What understandings do the management team in school hold about belonging? and
- What is the impact on students' belonging of actions, interventions or strategies introduced to develop belonging?

These research questions again reiterated the need for a research method which allowed me to work at the level of the organisation, and to track change over time in that organisation. I was also seeking a method which enabled me to explore the views and perceptions of the management team as well as the actions that follow from those views. Whilst this was a context driven piece of research, in line with a critical realist stance, I was interested to see what mechanisms of change could be identified here, and hoped that this would contribute to the broader question about what actions or strategies can develop sense of belonging for young people at school.

Possible frameworks for research which met the criteria outlined above included action research approaches (e.g. Lewin, 1946) and theory based evaluation approaches (e.g. Pawson, 2003). These both offered me opportunities to be involved with planning and evaluating change in the school organisation over time, and to explore the impact of perception on action; that is the understandings that the staff hold about belonging and how this translated into action in the school. Whilst the reflective stance of an action research approach would allow me to do this, I was more attracted to the prioritising of understandings that occurs within a theory based

evaluation approach (Chen & Rossi, 1983). Two evolving strands within theory based evaluations appear to be realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and theory of change (ToC). Realistic evaluation seeks to explore the generative mechanisms which help to explain why something works, in a particular context and for particular people. ToC appears to have a more explicit focus on action, with the focus of evaluation being whether a programme can be seen to have achieved its goal; although I recognise that the distinction drawn here perhaps overemphasises the differences between the approaches. Of the two, I felt that the clear structure offered by a theory of change (ToC) model (Anderson, 2006) and its focus on action as well as understanding would be most helpful in the context of Whitworth school.

A ToC framework implies that research moves from A to B in a relatively straightforward pattern, with A being the starting point of the research and B being the attainment of the goal of intervention, whilst action research has been likened to a spiral, (Kemmis and Wilkinson, (1998) in Robson, 2002) with the progression from A to B achieved through a series of cycles. In the event, because of the difficulties in the research process, the research approach was more reminiscent of this cyclical experience than of a linear progression, and therefore retains a flavour of action research.

Since the primary research framework was ToC this is explored in more detail below.

3.3: Methodology – Theory of Change (ToC)

Theory of Change is an example of a theory-driven evaluation model, (Chen & Rossi, 1983; O'Connor, 1995). Broadly, a Theory of Change approach to evaluation takes the premise that any planned action or intervention is done because those implementing it believe that it will lead to a certain change or end point. Evaluation in this instance seeks to validate both the theory behind the intervention and the impact of that intervention towards the desired change. Data is used to track progress in the short and longer term, with the hope the desired change will be achieved and the theory behind the intervention supported.

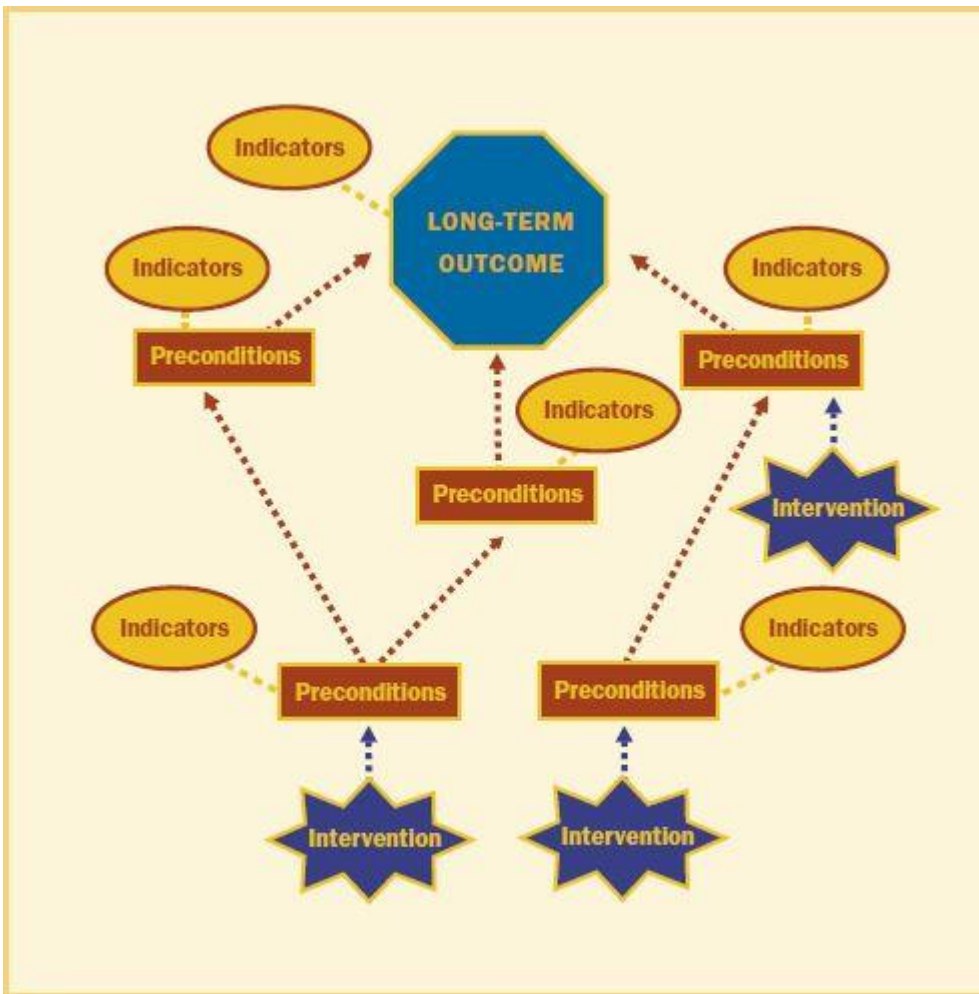


Figure 1: Diagram to show the elements of a Theory of Change, taken from Anderson (2006)

Whilst the level of detail in a Theory of Change varies, (see, for example, Ashton (2007) compared with J.P. Connell and Klem (2000); a well articulated Theory of Change will incorporate information about the end-point or goal of a project, the proposed interventions, and the impact of the interventions over time, tracked through the identification of intermediate goals. Also included are a rationale as to why the intervention is believed to lead to these outcomes, and associated underlying assumptions (Anderson, 2006).

Theory of Change, then, functions both as a planning guide and an evaluative tool (Weiss, 1995). The approach enables one to work backwards from an end goal to identify the necessary preconditions for that goal to be achieved. This influences the choice of interventions that are used, and allows for indicators of change (or short term goals) to be derived against which data can be collected and compared. (Anderson, 2006; Weiss, 1995). A Theory of Change approach is usually tailored towards interventions in complex social contexts and to projects whose ultimate

goals are anticipated to be met in the longer rather than the short term (Kubisch, Weiss, Schorr, & Connell, 1995). One of the major advantages of this model is that it enables a level of tracking and adjustment en route, through the articulation of indicators of change and preconditions for success leading to the end goal.

My research at Whitfield school fulfilled some of the conditions for using a ToC approach; there was an intention to make change in the organisation over time, with better student belonging identified as the goal by the head teacher. She had expressed an intention to make a number of changes across the school, and was hoping for support from me in planning and evaluating the impact of those changes.

The ToC approach was also attractive to me because it had the potential to allow the school management team to track change as it developed, and to make changes if the proposed interventions to develop belonging were not working in the way that was anticipated. I felt this would potentially give the head teacher a greater chance of success in developing the school in the way she hoped. I was aware that ToC had been used mostly in larger and more complex contexts than just one school, but noted that there were also some examples of ToC being used with individual school settings, for example, by Dyson and Todd (2010) who developed a number of ToCs with schools as part of their evaluation of the broader full service extended schools initiative. I was interested to see whether this was an approach that worked well in the smaller setting of a school.

ToC was developed in order to evaluate complex social projects, which operated at many levels and with many strands of intervention within one community, such as the CCIs in the US and similar projects later in the UK (e.g. Spicer & Smith, 2008; H; Sullivan, Barnes, & Matka, 2002). It developed in response to dissatisfaction with the summative models of evaluation that had been used until this point. These had been criticised as being too focused on judging the success or otherwise of social projects on the basis of narrow criteria, often decided by the project funders (O'Connor, 1995) and with little regard to the reasons why a project might have worked rather than a blunt judgement about whether or not it was successful. In contrast, ToC approaches were developed with the aim of facilitating a better understanding of why a project might have been successful, and with a view that the hoped for outcomes of a project may be different for different stakeholders, thus their judgements of success may also be different, (Weiss, 1995). I have been involved in a number of evaluations

at a school level as part of my professional role, for example, the SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) initiative (DfES, 2005). In those evaluations, I have been frustrated by requests to demonstrate the impact of such initiatives using solely quantitative data, and blunt measures of impact. I feel that this approach missed some of the depth and richness of the changes that I observed in schools working with such initiatives. I was hopeful that a ToC approach would allow for data collection to be more sensitive to the changes in the Whitfield school context than I had experienced in other evaluations.

It should be noted that the ToC approach is not always implemented in the same way. There are differences in, for example, how flexibly the model can be applied (see Davies, 2004) and who are considered to be the stakeholders in any one project (Sullivan & Stewart, 2006). A major area of difference concerns the derivation of the initial ToC, with some researchers suggesting that it should always be developed from first principles with the stakeholders, (Weiss, 1995) while others suggest that the researcher should develop the ToC in line with previous research, working with stake holders to apply it to the current situation (Connell & Kubisch, 1998). In the case of this research project, I wanted to respect the expertise that the team I was working with brought to the situation, in terms of their knowledge and skills the school and those in it, and sought to develop the ToCs from their ideas alone. I viewed myself as bringing expertise in the research approach, and hoped that this would allow us to co-construct the ToC, and plan and collect data together.

Another area of interest for me in the ToC approach came from the role of the researcher in this framework. Brown (1995) identifies that researchers using this approach inhabit a wide and shifting range of roles, requiring a broad skills set. These include the different skills required in surfacing the ToC and mediating between different stake holders, bringing knowledge of best practice from other initiatives and from related research literature, collecting data, and supporting others to collect data, and the synthesis of data. As the EP for the school, I had a number of roles including consultant, reflective practitioner, and as a supporter of change. I felt the ToC approach had the potential to allow me to continue in these roles but with a slightly different focus, that of developing the climate of the whole school rather than focusing on the special educational needs of individuals or groups of students.

There are aspects of the ToC approach that present problems from a positivist perspective. It focuses on development of one social context over time, and does not attempt to establish a counterfactual, that is, an idea of what would have happened in the absence of any intervention, (Hollister & Hill, 1995). ToC is generally considered to favour a more constructivist epistemology because of the recognition of the differing perspectives of those involved, and the importance of the unique context of each social community. Because of this, positivist critiques of validity and reliability would be inappropriate (Silverman, 1996). However, this does raise the question about how good research is assured from a ToC approach. That is, does the ToC approach enable researchers to be rigorous, and establish trustworthiness? (Robson, 2002)

Connell and Kubisch (1998) argue that one of the ways that ToC ensures validity is through the confirmation of theories made by the ToC itself. It is suggested that the theories that form the ToC are developed through reference to practitioner skills and knowledge, and through recourse to previous research in the area. If this is confirmed through the ToC implementation, this is itself further confirmatory evidence and represents a valid, or trustworthy piece of work. It is noted that this is dependent upon the initial theory having some external validity, (Mackenzie & Blamey, 2005) and is also dependent upon good data collection to find out whether failure to confirm the theory comes from programme failure (an error in the underlying theory) or implementation failure (a difficulty with incomplete or erroneous implementation) (Birckmayer & Weiss, 2000; Robson, 2002).

Having reviewed the literature, I was satisfied that a ToC approach would allow me to address my research questions in this context and in a way which fitted with my research stance. The implementation of the framework was influenced by the Aspen Institute's Community Builder's Guide to Theory of Change manual (Anderson, 2006) (the ToC terms referred to throughout the rest of the thesis come from here) and by the approach taken by Dyson and Todd (2010).

3.4: Ethical Considerations

The steps taken to ensure that the research was ethical are described here. I have split this section into steps taken at the planning stage, the data collection stage and

the analysis stages of the research. I will return to the ethics of this research later in the discussion section.

At the planning stage, I wanted to consider the implications of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013) including who would potentially benefit from the research, and what might the implications of the research outcomes might be. The aim of the research was to understand what can be done to develop sense of belonging for young people at school, and through this, to give the students at Whitfield a better experience of school through having a better sense of belonging. I felt that this was a positive aspiration and did not raise ethical concerns. If the research outcomes could demonstrate the actions that could be taken at a school level to develop belonging, then this would potentially be positive for these students and could give some ideas to those working in other schools who wanted to support the emotional well being of their students. If the research was not able to identify actions which could support the development of belonging for the students, this would not benefit the students, but would not be ethically disadvantageous.

I was aware at the conception of the research, that I would be involved in researching people that I knew well, worked with and got along well with. Braun and Clarke (2013) note that this has ethical concerns, which need to be considered, especially during interview. I needed to be aware of the potential impact of our relationship on data collection and analysis. I also needed to ensure that the potential power imbalances which can occur between researcher and participant were carefully managed throughout the process so as not to cause undue anxiety, and so that we could continue to have a working relationship outside the research process (Garton & Copland, 2010). I hoped that the use of the ToC approach would help ensure that the staff and I viewed ourselves as collaborators in the project with complementary areas of expertise.

Finally, in the planning stage, before the research was undertaken, I made an application to the University's research ethics committee to ensure that my research met their standards for ethics.

At the data collection stage, all those interviewed gave their written consent to be involved in the project following detailed information given to them about the ToC approach and the aims of the project. Participants were given both written information and an opportunity to discuss the project with me privately before giving

consent, and all took this opportunity. The assistant head teacher (AHT) joined the management team, and therefore the project, later than the other two members of the team, and I ensured that she was given the same information and opportunity for discussion as had happened before. Consent was explicitly sought at the beginning of each interview, and the team were reminded that they could withdraw at any time, before, during or after interviews. Similarly, where questionnaires (see p 40) were used with the students, those administering the questionnaires were asked to read out written instructions which included the student's right to refuse to take part and to withdraw at any time.

I was aware that the topic of belonging might be emotionally challenging for the team and students to consider, particularly if they felt that they did not have a good sense of belonging at that time, or in the past. I ensured that a written debrief was available to the students who had been involved in filling in questionnaires, which could be read to them as necessary. I asked teachers and support assistants to be vigilant for students who may be upset by thinking about belonging, and to offer them support through the usual school systems. This would normally involve access to a member of staff with whom they had a good relationship, time to talk and further planned activities as necessary (for example, discussions with parents and carers, additional time with a trusted member of staff, access to the schools' counsellor or other external services). I made myself available to school staff so that they could bring any concerns either about themselves or students for discussion, as would happen as part of my EP role. In the event, this was not needed by any student. Similarly, when completing interviews, I ensured both before and after interview that the interviewee was not upset, and allowed time to talk confidentially about the interview.

Every attempt was made to anonymise the data, both at the point of collection and when transcribing. I reminded staff not to mention the school, staff or students by name, and had to edit the audio data of two interviews before they were sent for transcription to remove the names of students at the school. (This involved cutting the audio file at the point that the names were mentioned; I ensured that no data relating to the research was deleted at the same time.) The school, staff and students have not been mentioned by name during discussions with others, and are not referred to by real name here, and associated information, such as demographic data, has been scrutinised to ensure that it does not make the school identifiable. Transcripts and audio files have not been shared.

Finally, I was aware that each member of the management team had taken on new and potentially difficult roles, and that their workload was very high. I tried to be flexible in my availability to meet with them, and rescheduled interviews several times across the period of the research to facilitate this.

During analysis I was keen to ensure that the outcomes of my analysis were shared and discussed with the management team. This was part of the ToC approach in any case, but over and above this, it allowed me to ensure that I had not misrepresented the team's views at any point. A final meeting was arranged to give an overview of the whole research at the end of my involvement, and was attended by the DHT and HT (the AHT had left the school). Having reviewed the results presented to them, they asked for some amendments of how one of the themes was described, as they felt that a different description would better represent their views. This was agreed.

Chapter 4: Method

As has been noted previously, this was not a straightforward piece of research. The process was beset by difficulties and interruptions, which impacted significantly on the work given that I had hoped to track the ToC developments over time. There were long gaps between research activities, and this meant that considerable effort was required by myself and the team to re-engage with the process, which almost felt like restarting at times. Similar issues were noted by Dyson and Todd (2010) in their work with ToC in schools. In addition, some activities felt like blind alleys, in that they did not take the research any further forward, and so the process had to be reconsidered and re-planned.

There were times when I was unavailable to work in the way I had planned; a restructure of my service between phase 1 and 2 of the research meant that the time available to implement the ToC and collect data was significantly reduced, which meant that the research plan had to be reconsidered. I also took a period of maternity leave between the phase 3 and phase 4 interviews. There were a number of changes within the senior management team which, arguably, impacted on their ability to move on with making changes as rapidly as they would have liked, this is summarised in the timeline in Figure 2.

Partly as a result of this, I struggled with issues around our respective roles, responsibilities and ownership of the project throughout the process. This is further explored in the discussion section.

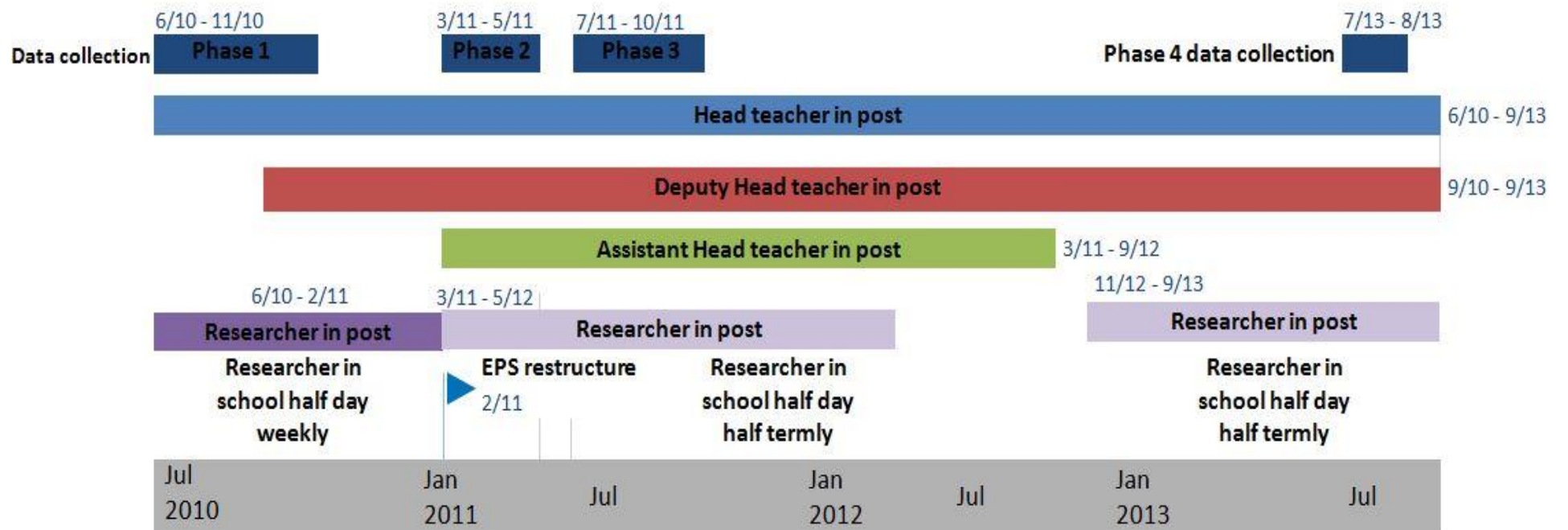


Figure 2: Timeline showing the phases of research and availability of key participants.

As noted in the section on research design, the research took on a framework akin to action research (Lewin, 1946) and I have presented the research here in terms of the four broad phases that occurred. The phases have been defined according to a broad plan – do – review structure; thus each new period of planning signals the start of a new phase. I hope to give the reader a sense of the research process as it unfolded, and the decisions taken by the researcher.

4.1: Phase 1:

Initial Scoping and Interviews

When the HT and I planned the project, it was agreed that data collection would happen over a period of one to one and a half years, with an expectation that I would be involved with planning and data collection over this time, along with the other members of the senior management team (this was before the educational psychology service time available to the school was significantly reduced). It was acknowledged that the HT's desired changes in school would continue to have an impact beyond this, but the agreed time frame would allow for changes to become embedded and many of their impacts to be seen. It also fitted well with the time demands of the DEdPsy programme.

It was decided that the initial stages of the research would be the development of a joint ToC from interviews with the HT and DHT and that once this was agreed it would form that basis of further planned data collection, to test indicators of success. Therefore, the specific details of what data would be collected at the school were not planned at this time. That said, I was hopeful that I would be involved in data collection across the school community, involving staff and students as well as the management team.

Finally, I was hopeful that I would be able to collect data during my weekly visits to the school. At that time, I visited the school for half a day each week as part of my EP role and I was keen to integrate this research project into that role. I felt that the regular contact I had with the school, and my familiarity with those in the organisation would facilitate flexible data collection.

Initial Interviews

Information about the project was provided and consent was sought before any interviews were completed, (see Appendix A). Interviews were carried out with the

HT and DHT (schedule given in Appendix B) in order to begin to develop the ToC. The structure of this interview was taken from Dyson and Todd (2010) and sought to contextualise the ToC process. Questions explored the current context of the school, and the hoped for outcomes of the project, along with their personal views about belonging. I used a semi structured interview approach because I wanted to have the opportunity to follow up on things that were raised and to explore issues in more depth as the members of staff raised them, (Robson, 2002). I felt that a more structured interview would be too constraining, even with open-ended questions, as it would not allow me to gather the richness of data that I was seeking, and may constrain me from properly exploring the links between goals, interventions and success indicators. Further, with only two participants at this point, I did not feel that there were any time or resource constraints for me in offering the longer interviews that tend to follow from semi-structured interviews.

Development of the TOC

Using the transcribed interviews from the HT and DHT a summary diagram of the information from these first interviews was constructed in order to give an overview of the school as it was then, and as the team would like it to be. This is presented and discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. I have grouped the context and changes into themes in order to make presentation clearer.

A more detailed ToC was also constructed from these interviews; drawing together what the HT and DHT talked about and some suggestions from myself. This is further discussed in Chapter 6 p61. I wanted to use this as a basis for further consultation with the management team, so that the ToC would be jointly constructed. The ToC followed the model given by Anderson (2006)

The summary diagram and proposed ToC were shared with the management team at one of their regular weekly meetings. Notes from my research diary from the meeting indicate that whilst the summary document was felt to be a good reflection of what was intended in school, initial reactions to the ToC diagram suggested it was complex, and the team wanted to spend some time considering it before taking it any further.

4.2: Phase 2:

Joint interview and Survey of Student Sense of Belonging.

It was not possible to meet with the team again for a further 3 months, and this interview is recorded as the 'joint' interview (and is referred to as 'J' in the results). Unfortunately, the DHT was called away from this meeting, and the consequent discussion was between the HT, and newly appointed AHT.

My aims from the joint interview were to re-engage the management team with the ToC approach (it had been a few months since we had met, and I wanted to spend a little time remembering the discussions we had had) as well as helping the AHT to understand the process we were following. I also wanted to find out what their views were of the ToC that I had brought to them at the previous meeting now that they had had time to think more about it. Finally, I was hopeful that we might be able to discuss the indicators of success element of the ToCs and agree what data might be helpful to collect from the school. It would be too costly and time consuming to following all the pathways of change developed in the ToC diagram. This is usual for ToC developments. (Anderson, 2006) . I was hopeful that I could work with the management team to choose one pathway of change which would be practical and realistic to develop.

This meeting did not run as a semi structured interview, as it was more flexible than an interview might be considered to be. However, consent was sought verbally to record the discussion and use the data for research purposes. I was hopeful that this discussion would allow us to form a plan and so it is perhaps best described as a consultation discussion. However, both the HT and AHT consented to the discussion being recorded and transcribed and the data has been used as part of my analysis.

General comments from the management team again suggested that the ToC presented was too complex to be workable, although it was acknowledged that it captured much of what was planned in school. It was clear that since our last discussion, the management team had spent some time cross referencing the proposed ToC with their School Development Plan. The AHT noted that the strand that culminated with the precondition "students feels they have a sense of commonality with other people at Whitfield / the purpose of Whitfield" (the pink boxes in the diagram) was part of her job role. The strand relating to participation, listed as "students participate in lessons at school and may access other organised activities

such as extended day, school trips, lunch-time clubs” (the purple boxes in the diagram) was noted to be inherently interesting and somewhat challenging to the team. The HT and AHT felt that the suggested indicators of success were not right; some were felt to be too difficult for the students to achieve, and others were too cumbersome to measure. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the indicators of success were almost all proposed by me, and I did not have as good a knowledge of the school as the leadership team. It was agreed that the SMT and I would re-visit the indicators of success at subsequent meetings. The team also raised the possibility of using some specific assessments of belonging as data which could form part of the success indicators. This is discussed in more detail below.

Survey to Baseline Sense of Belonging

At the joint interview meeting, the AHT, HT and I discussed the possibility of completing some baseline assessment of current levels of sense of belonging with the students. It was hoped that this would enable the tracking of any changes in the sense of belonging the students experienced, and thus contribute to the validity of the ToC. The staff were hopeful that baseline data might allow them to decide which of the strands of the ToC might be most fruitful to follow.

A survey method using self report questionnaire was decided upon because it was thought this would allow data to be collected from all the students, and would allow relatively easy translation into quantitative data which would then allow for comparison over time. This was also felt to be a helpful approach given the time constraints which were now in place on the management team and on myself. The AHT suggested that a questionnaire could be distributed to students, during tutor group time, and that they could then choose whether to complete it or not. Tutors would be available to support students in completing the questionnaire as necessary and to give instructions and debrief. Full details of the consent, instructions given to the students, and their tutors as well as a copy of the questionnaire are included in Appendices C and D. My role was to identify a suitable questionnaire, to distribute it to tutors and collate the data, and to be available to support the tutors as necessary following the administration and debrief with the students. It was not anticipated that the students would find the questionnaire distressing, but staff were asked to be vigilant for students who may be upset at the time or later; and I wanted to be aware if this was the case. I also wanted to offer support to the staff if they were supporting students who were upset. It seemed more appropriate for the staff to be available to

the students because they know them best. However, had the case arisen that I was needed to offer support, I would have done so.

The survey questionnaire selected was the Sense of School Community Scales (SCSS) (Secondary) (Battisch (1994) in Frederickson & Baxter, 2009). This is an adaptation of the questionnaire developed for use with primary aged children that was used in the Child Development Programme, as discussed in the literature review (p 27). I felt this was helpful as the aims of the study here were broadly similar to those in the CDP, and the questionnaire was designed for use with groups of pupils as a way of tracking their response to school level interventions. The SSOS (Secondary) contains two subscales; school supportiveness and pupil autonomy and influence. The former is perhaps most helpful in considering belonging as I have defined it, although I thought the latter scale would provide interesting information for the staff to consider as they tried to develop student access to learning and the curriculum. This scale was also chosen because, although it was designed for secondary aged pupils, the literacy demands of the test seemed low, and I was aware that many of the students struggled with reading.

My research diaries at the time note that it was difficult to get any feedback from the school staff about the questionnaires, and none of them were returned to me. When I explored this further, I found that only two tutor groups had attempted to complete the questionnaires. Informal conversation with the tutors themselves revealed that the tutors from the other six tutor groups had decided that the questionnaires were too difficult for the students to try; both in terms of the literacy demands on the students, and the potentially emotional content of them. One of the tutors that had completed the questionnaires with the students reflected on how difficult the process had been. She noted that the sporadic attendance of many of her students, and the literacy demands of the questionnaire itself meant that it took a long time to complete them, and that the students tended to lose interest and tick boxes without reading the content of the questions. She considered the data collected here to be invalid. I was told by one of the management team that the other tutor had completed the questionnaires with the whole tutor group together, reading the questions and telling them what answers to write. This was also felt to be invalid, and so the questionnaire data was abandoned.

Following this experience with the questionnaire data, I decided to re-focus on the management team. This was partly because of my realisation that I did not have the capacity to collect data in the way that I would have liked, or to facilitate the process in the way I had initially planned. I was also aware that it had been some time since my initial interviews with the HT and DHT, and it felt important to get an updated picture from them of the school context. This necessitated a change in stance in my research role; from taking a full collaborative part in the process to a more observational role. I hoped that I could still support the development of belonging in school by using the ToC framework, and sought to arrange some further interviews with a view to continuing to evolve the ToC framework developed from the first set of interviews.

4.3: Phase 3:

Interviews with Management Team

A second set of interviews were completed with the management team, now consisting of HT, DHT and AHT between July and October of 2011. The interviews were again semi structured (interview schedule in Appendix B), and were intended to be an opportunity to review and reflect on progress since the phase 1 interviews. Interviewees were asked if they still consented and given a further copy of the information and consent forms (Appendix A). I wanted to explore the actions taken by the team in relation to developing student sense of belonging, and any outcomes which they could consider to be indicators of success. Where opportunities arose to link actions directly back to understandings of belonging, these were explored.

The interventions and outcomes they talked about were summarised in Appendix E which, as before, was discussed with the team at a management meeting. This sought to capture more of the real experience of the staff instead of their hopes and plans as in the first interviews; the goals seem more refined, actual interventions enacted and initial indicators of success noticed. However, as can be seen, I did not attempt at this point to tie them together into pathways of change (Anderson, 2006) as I had before. This reflected a shift in my thinking, to do with my role in the process. I had felt my suggestions on the first ToC had been less useful than they could have been because of my lack of detailed knowledge of the school context. I wanted to discuss the indicators of success with the team in order to make them more specific and meaningful to the school.

During the second interviews, the staff told me that they were making use of an external consultant to support their planning and implementation of change. I explored this further at the management meeting I attended, and they indicated that the process they were using to plan change in school was not based on ToC. My notes following the meeting once again indicate that the team found the summary diagram interesting but hard to follow, in that there was a lot of information contained in the diagram, but it wasn't immediately easily accessible to them. I did note, however, that the HT had a strong reaction to the presence of the goal of 'calmness from chaos'. She told me that she had not been aware of how important this was to her, as, for her, it was both a goal and an indicator of success relating to belonging. For her, if students had a good sense of belonging, the school would have a calm atmosphere.

However, the team felt that the ToC model did not support them well enough in their planning at that time. In retrospect, this is perhaps unsurprising given the fact that I was much less present in school, and when I was, there was little time to focus on ToC related activity. I was not there to help them understand the ToC more fully, and to work with them to adapt it to something that they might find more useful. I had made a conscious decision in this second iteration of the ToC to add to the data given to me by the team, with the intention that we could collaborate more in developing a ToC, but then did not find opportunities to do this collaborative work. This again raised questions for me about the demands of the ToC method on the researcher in terms of the role they play in the process. In this case, I was torn between wanting to lead the process and try and make some headway, or trying to retain more of an observational role, watching the process unfold of its own accord, and trying to capture some of the changes as the management team perceived them. I felt that I had underestimated the time required to complete either role, which was particularly difficult in the light of my changing relationship with the school, and also felt that I was having to make compromises in the research process.

4.4: Phase 4:

Interviews with Management Team

A final set of interviews were completed in the summer of 2013; a few months after my return from maternity leave. The AHT had by this time left the management team. Once again, I wanted to use semi structured interviews to take a 'snapshot' of what

the school was like now, and how this related to the interventions introduced by the team. I also wanted to give the HT and DHT the opportunity to review the progress that had been made since the start of the project in 2010. Consent was sought verbally and information provided as at the start of the research. The interview schedule in Appendix B notes that I wanted to explore themes with the staff around belonging, and what progress they felt they had made towards their initial goals. A feedback session was arranged with the HT, and DHT to which the former AHT was also invited at which I wanted to discuss the themes which had occurred throughout the project (and which are discussed in the results section). Whilst this meeting did happen, it was cut very short because of other school business which needed immediate attention from the HT and DHT. At that meeting, I presented the newly derived individual ToCs (p 89), the themes relating to belonging (p 61) and the themes relating to the school context (p 109). This, again, was a lot of information for the staff, and difficult to get detailed feedback on. However, as noted in the ethics section, the only disagreement about what I presented came from the way I had labelled one of the themes, and I agreed to change this as I wanted to represent the staff's views as closely as possible. I decided not to present information to the HT and DHT about the issues I felt had impacted on the research, as I did not think it would be helpful to raise some of these issues with them in that forum.

In summary, a total of 8 interviews was carried out with members of the SMT; 7 of these were individual interviews and one joint interview with the HT and AHT.

For information, a summary table of the key interventions introduced by the management team over the project is included in Appendix E

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion: Overview and Methods of Analysis

This group of chapters seeks to take the reader through the analysis of data, and subsequent discussion of the results. Whilst the results and discussion chapters are all grouped together here, in actuality data was collected throughout the period of study, and informed the planning of the later phases of data collection. This is typical of theory of change approaches. If the study had been administered as a standard theory of change, results would have been presented at the end of each data collection phase. However, because the approach has been adapted in this instance, and much of the data analysis was completed on the whole data corpus, the results are grouped together here.

The first chapter reviews the ToCs developed after phase 1, and then phase 3 of the data collection, and is based on the semi-structured interviews completed with the management team at those phases. The validity of the data gathered in relation to the research questions and use of the ToC framework is discussed. The chapters following this consider the analysis of data collected from interviews at all research phases, and a slightly different use of the ToC approach. This analysis of the data as a whole lead to two different sets of understandings around belonging, each of which warrant discussion in their own right. I have called these different sets of understandings belonging as experience, and belonging as transition. I take each strand separately, outline the key results from each analytic set and discuss each in relation to the psychological literature and my research questions.

Chapter 7 considers the understandings about belonging that appear to be held by the management team derived from thematic analysis across all the data collection phases. This led to the concept of belonging as experience, and echoes much of the work in the literature. Following on from this are the chapters which discuss the ToCs derived from the interviews with each member of the management team which further explores belonging as a form of transition. The implications of this idea of belonging are discussed with reference to models of community; the sense of community model, (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1999). There follows an analysis of the management team's apparent assumptions about the context of the school, including the staff, the students and the organisation and how this may have impacted on the research questions. Finally, the process of

the research is explored in terms of factors which impacted on the process and may therefore have impacted on the results.

Methods of Analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed using a thematic approach, following the suggested protocols laid down by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013). This approach was chosen because it presented opportunities to analyse the data directly in relation to my research questions, taking the top-down approach of using pre-determined themes, but also allowed for inductive analysis of the data which allowed me to make connections and develop further themes which I had not originally anticipated. I was further attracted to thematic analysis because it allows for a contextualist reading of the data which fits well within a critical realist paradigm. That is, themes can be explored in relation to the individual's understanding, and there are opportunities to contextualise that understanding in broader social contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I was primarily interested in engaging with the data at a semantic rather than linguistic or phenomenologically interpretative level. Data was therefore transcribed orthographically and analysed according to utterance, paralanguage and tone of voice were not attended to (Braun & Clarke, 2013). That said, I ensured that comments were understood in the context of the interview and not decontextualised in a way which might affect intended meaning (Silverman, 2006).

Data was initially coded according to predetermined themes, what Braun and Clarke (op cit) describe as a top-down approach. These were comments made about belonging, and comments made which fit into the ToC framework, broadly falling into goals, interventions and indicators of success (p 40), (Anderson, 2006). Where possible, links were identified between these 3 areas. The construction of the ToCs and the development of the theories of belonging that followed were an interpretation of this analysis.

A number of further themes were constructed using an inductive (bottom-up) approach. These themes were eventually split into two sections; comments about the key players and the organisation in which the team were working (contextual factors) and comments which, I felt, related to the process of change, or the research process (process factors). Including these themes allows for a more coherent account of the data corpus, and in turn, has relevance for the research questions.

Most of the themes identified are presented from across the data as a whole. However, the ToCs in Chapter 8 (p 89) are presented by participant. This allowed for a more detailed description of the apparent understandings of belonging held by the members of SMT, in line with my research question.

A note about annotation:

Quotations are referenced according to the speaker and which interview it was taken from. For example, for the HT there were individual interviews at 3 points in the research, and a joint discussion with the AHT (this is annotated as 'J'). Quotations are therefore referenced HT 3.2 (to indicate that data was taken from the head teacher at the third interview, page 2. Throughout INT refers to the interviewer (me). Quotations are given verbatim, and any editing to clarify meaning is clearly stated.

Trustworthiness

The term trustworthiness (Robson, 2002) is used here in order to capture ideas about how rigour was ensured through the research process, and the results can be regarded as a fair representation of the management team's understandings. Some of the steps taken are discussed within the procedure, and includes scrutiny of the data by myself and the team to ensure that the results are representative of their views, and rejection of data (such as the surveys) which, it was felt, were not representative of the student's views.

In the analysis that follows, I have tried to ensure trustworthiness by following an adapted version of Henwood and Pidgeon (1992)'s criteria for evaluating qualitative research. It should be noted that this checklist stems from evaluations of grounded theory, and some adaptations have been to the categories made to make them appropriate to this context. However, Willig (2008) notes that there are no overarching guidelines for the evaluation of good qualitative research because of the range of methodological practices employed. Given the similarities in the nature of the data, and aspects of analysis, I felt that this was a reasonable guide to follow.

Table 1 Henwood and Pidgeon's criteria for evaluating good research

Evaluation factor:	Described by Henwood and Pigeon as:	How I applied this in the research:
The importance of fit	Ensuring themes fit the data well	Themes were constantly compared with the data to ensure they described and summarised the data well. Themes were carefully labelled to ensure they appropriately represented the content. When new themes were developed this was checked retrospectively back through the data. I asked a colleague to ensure that a sample of data was congruent with the themes. See Appendix F
Integration of theory	Structure of emergent theory is explored, links made between data and themes at all levels; meaningful connections with the problem	Theme were synthesised into models of belonging and ToC models. Data checked and clarified to ensure it fit themes (as above) Links explicitly made between themes, their connections and ideas around belonging.
Reflexivity	Discussion of influences of own values, ideas and skills on the research process.	Impact of the values and skills of the researcher is acknowledged throughout the research from conception to write-up of thesis and discussed through-out the text.
Documentation	Ensuring an audit trail of evidence of research decisions, findings, reflections and so on.	Electronic research folder was kept which included information relating to details of actions taken, outcomes, reflections, transcripts, analysis of data at all stages, and information from literature.
Theoretical sampling and negative case analysis	Sampling in later data collection to ensure the falsification is sought. Seeking disconfirming examples in data analysis	Sampling was not altered to seek falsification of data. However, during analysis, themes were checked through to ensure that they related to comments from at least two of the team. Where a theme was not represented by all three members of the team, this was reviewed to ensure that it was still representative, by my judgement. Themes and comments refined to include omissions, or disconfirmations.
Sensitivity to negotiated realities	Ensuring that theory developed is representative of participants views.	ToCs were checked back with the team at all stages to ensure that this captured their understanding of development across the school. Ideas about belonging and contextual assumptions were discussed with the DHT and HT after the third interview (the AHT had left by this time). Amendments were made to the description of the 'our kids' theme to represent their views more closely.
Transferability	Clarity about context which allows for researchers in similar situations to consider application to their contexts	Context is an integral part of the research design, and is fully described here. However, attempts are made to present the results at a level of abstraction which may be supportive to other researchers.

Chapter 6: Results and Discussion: Theories of Change Developed During Phase 1 and 2.

This chapter considers the ToCs developed during the research process, using data from semi-structured interviews with members of the management team who were in post at the point of data collection. The development of the ToCs is described along with some comments about the use and validity of the data that was produced.

In order to support the reader in understanding the generation and analysis of data across the research, I have repeated the figure showing the phases of research and availability of key staff here.

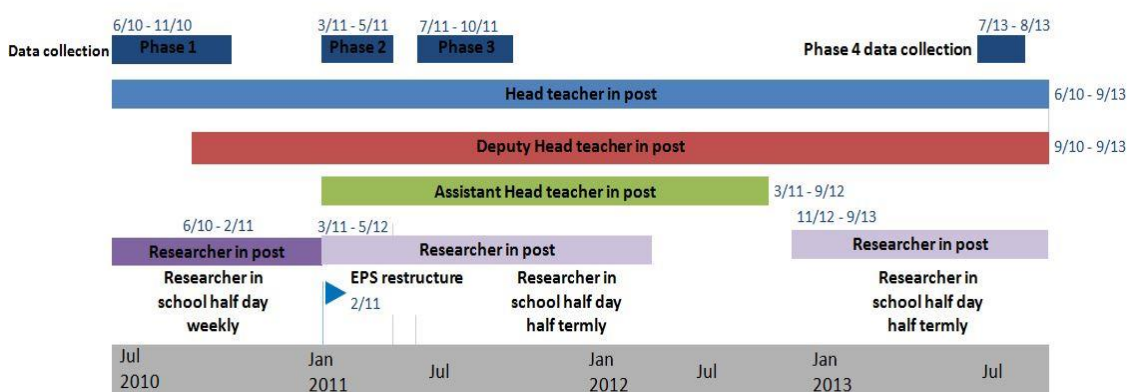


Figure 3: Timeline showing the phases of research and availability of key participants.

Initial ToC Development.

Following the first phase of interviews with the HT and DHT, I began to draw up diagrammatic representations of the hoped for developments in the school, following Dyson and Todd (2010), see Figure 4 below. This allowed me to capture in a broad sense what the managers said about the current situation in school, the hoped for outcomes of the work of the management team and the suggested mechanisms by which development might happen. Information was taken from the interviews, although I have themed them for ease. Thus themes about improving learning and building relationships are mine, as is clustering information in relation to staff, students, school and leadership. This could be argued to be a first step towards a theory of change, but was not detailed or explicit enough to be helpful in supporting plans for school development, or in elucidating understandings about belonging.

Whitfield School. Theory of Change. November 2010.

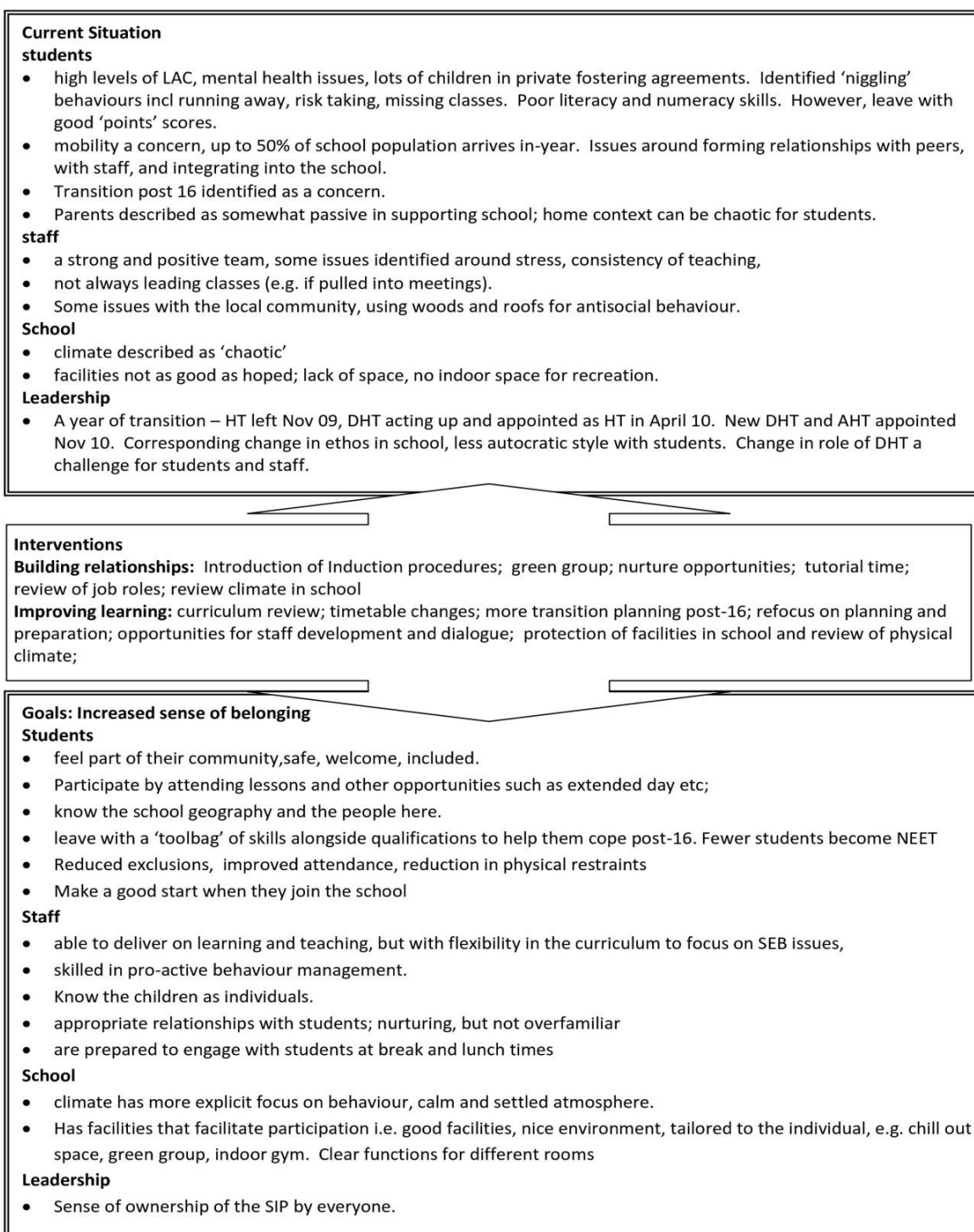


Figure 4: Summary of phase one interviews.

I wanted to make more explicit connections between the interventions discussed by the managers and the outcomes; to begin to explore the proposed mechanisms by which an intervention could impact on student belonging. For example, how might the timetable review suggested by the DHT lead to the school feeling calmer, and how might this link to belonging? I felt that making these connections using a ToC framework would result in the development of a structured planning tool for the management team to use at school, and which would enable evaluation of interventions in terms of whether students had a greater sense of belonging. Also, by making connections explicit, there was more opportunity to explore further the management team's understanding of belonging. I therefore began to develop a ToC using the Anderson (2006) framework to try and articulate the connections between outcomes and interventions, see Figure 1 (p40). This led to a series of diagrammatic representations which are shown in Figures 5-9 (p 65) onwards.

Using the transcribed interviews, I first identified the long term outcome ('all students have a good sense of belonging at Whitfield School') and the pre-conditions to success that the interviewees seemed to describe. This is shown in Figure 5 below. This first iteration of the ToC shows four interlinked strands of development which, I thought, were identified by the management team as contributing to the long term outcome. These are shown at the head of each column and directly below the long term goal. They are 'students feel they have a sense of commonality with other people at Whitfield / the purpose of Whitfield' (pink boxes); 'students have positive relationships with peers' (green boxes); 'students have positive relationships with staff' (blue boxes) and 'students participate in lessons at school, and may access other organised activities such as extended day, school trips, lunchtime clubs etc.' (purple boxes).

Below this are earlier pre-conditions, that is goals that must be achieved before the later pre-conditions or long term goal can be met. (Diagrams are read from bottom to top, with early goals, interventions and indicators near the bottom and later ones higher up; a notional y-axis could be included indicating timescales, but was not used on occasion). They are also colour coded according to which area of development they appear to impact on. It is noted that some pre-conditions can contribute to two areas of development, and this is shown on the diagrams using arrows. Thus, the pre-condition of 'opportunities (both structured and unstructured) and time are made available for relationships to develop and be maintained' was felt to need to be in

place before the goals 'students have positive relationships with peers' and 'students have positive relationships with staff' could be realised. In developing the ToCs I attempted to stay as close to the management team's words as possible, but felt it was necessary to add to what they said in order to ensure that the ToC was coherent; that a sequence of change could be identified which did not have gaps, and showed hypothesised progression toward the long term outcome. At this point in the research, I felt that it was most important to develop a planning tool which would be useful to the school, and so went beyond what was said to do so. I consulted with the management team on the ToCs once they had been developed, in order to ensure that what I proposed was in accordance with their views; however, it must be noted that much of what appears on these ToC diagrams is influenced by my own thinking and reading.

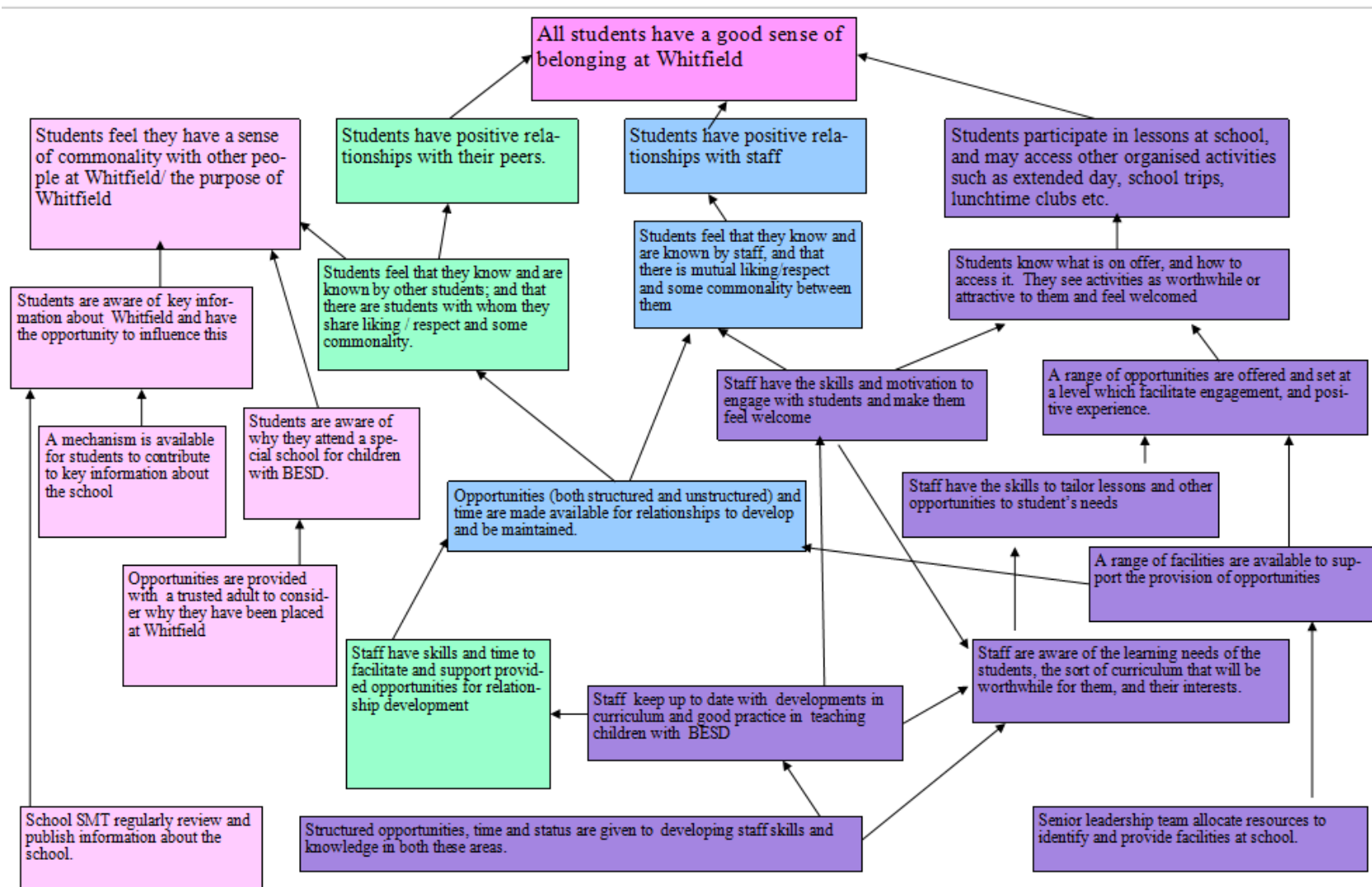


Figure 5: Initial Theory of Change showing long term outcomes and preconditions

Having identified the pre-conditions identified by the HT and DHT in interview, I went on to try and identify interventions that would allow the pre-conditions to develop and to identify indicators of success for each of the pre-conditions, including suggestions for measurement. Where possible, I used information given by the management team for interventions and indicators. If information was not given in interview, I made my own suggestions and brought these to the management team for discussion (see p 50). The diagrams below (Figures 6-9) show the strands of the ToC with the suggested interventions (orange boxes with red edging) and suggested indicators of success (yellow boxes). To illustrate, Figure 6 below shows the strand associated with 'students feel they have a sense of commonality with other people at Whitfield / the purpose of Whitfield'. Here two interventions are suggested as indicated by the orange boxes: 'student council is established and meets regularly....' and 'students have a conversation with a member of SLT within two weeks of starting at Whitfield....'. The first intervention was suggested by the DHT as something that he wanted to develop in school so that students have an opportunity to review and contribute to information about the school. The second was my suggestion as a means of facilitating the pre-condition 'students are aware why they attend a special school for children with BESD'. No other planned mechanism for doing this was evident from the interviews, and I felt that it was important that an intervention was introduced which aimed to facilitate this, otherwise the pre-condition would not be achieved.

In this strand, all the suggested indicators of success were made by me when developing the ToC. This was done in order to give some measures by which progress could be tested, and was not evident from the interview data that I had. I was aware that I did not have detailed enough knowledge of the school to be able to use data that was already being collected, and that perhaps suggested targets were unrealistic. I hoped that the team would collaborate on this with me in phase 2 of the data collection (see p 51).

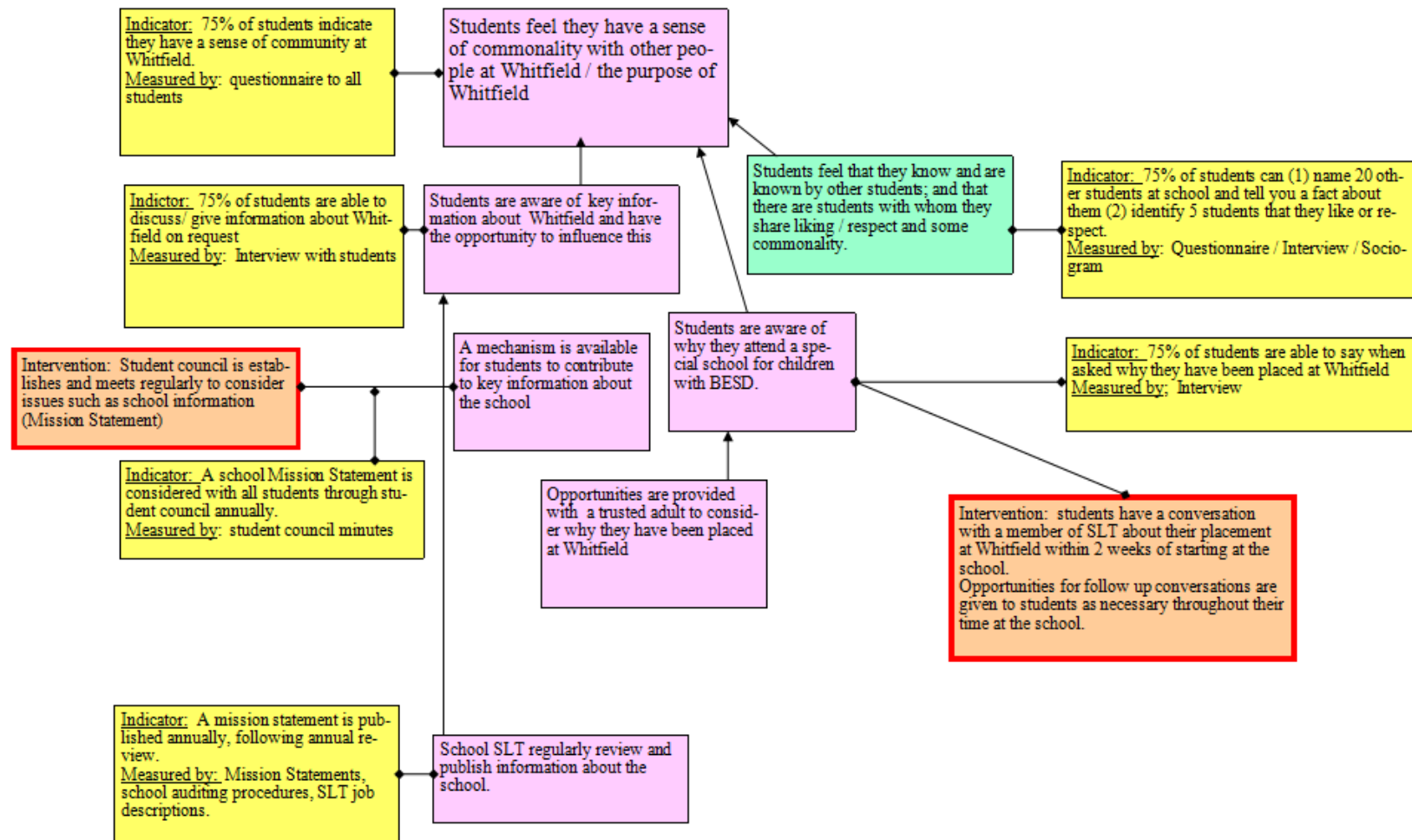


Figure 6: ToC Strand showing pre-conditions, suggested interventions and indicators of success for 'students have a sense of commonality....'

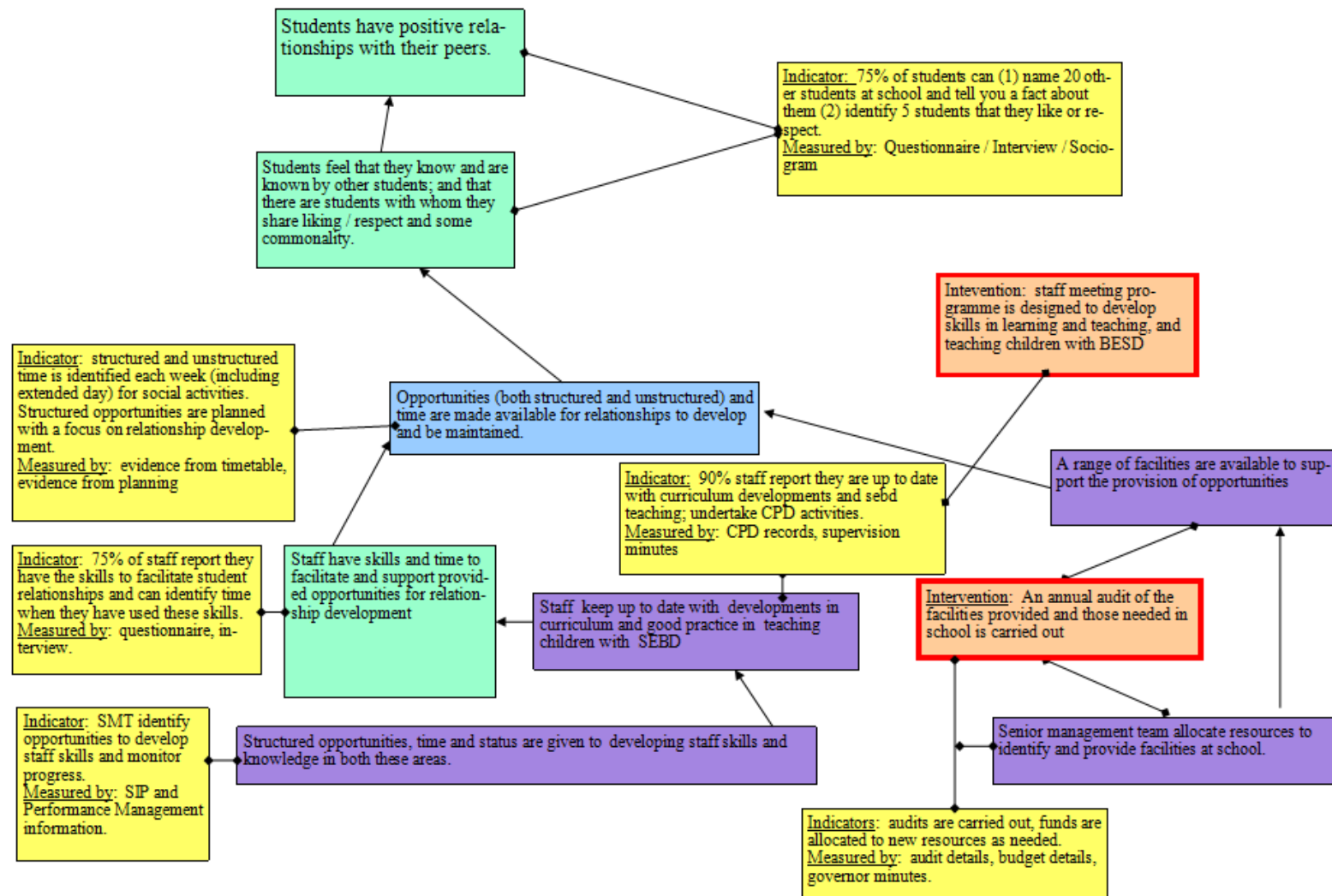


Figure 7: ToC strand showing pre-conditions, suggested interventions and indicators of success for 'students have positive relationships with peers'.

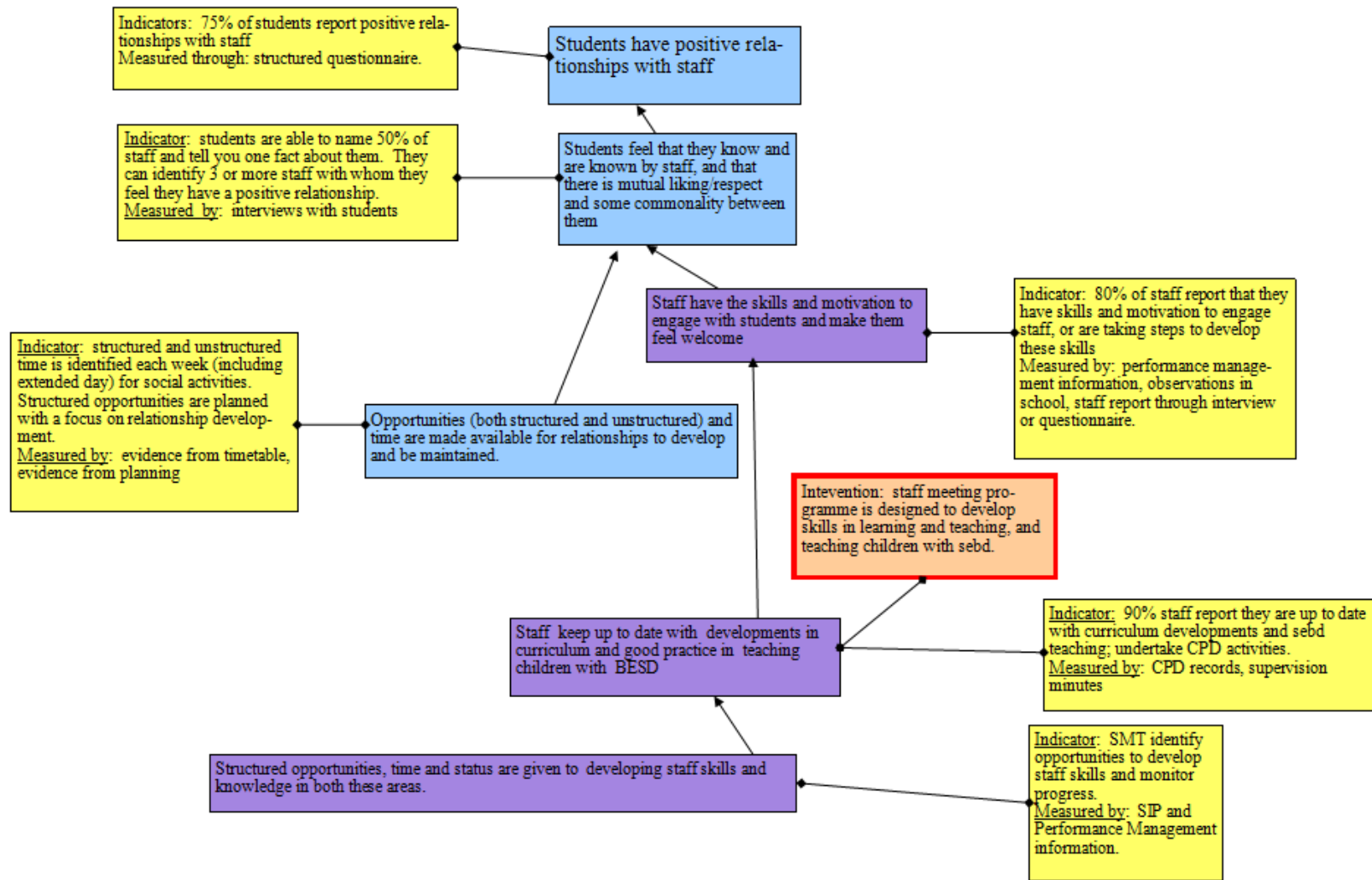


Figure 8: ToC strand showing pre-conditions, suggested interventions and indicators of success for 'students have positive relationships with staff'

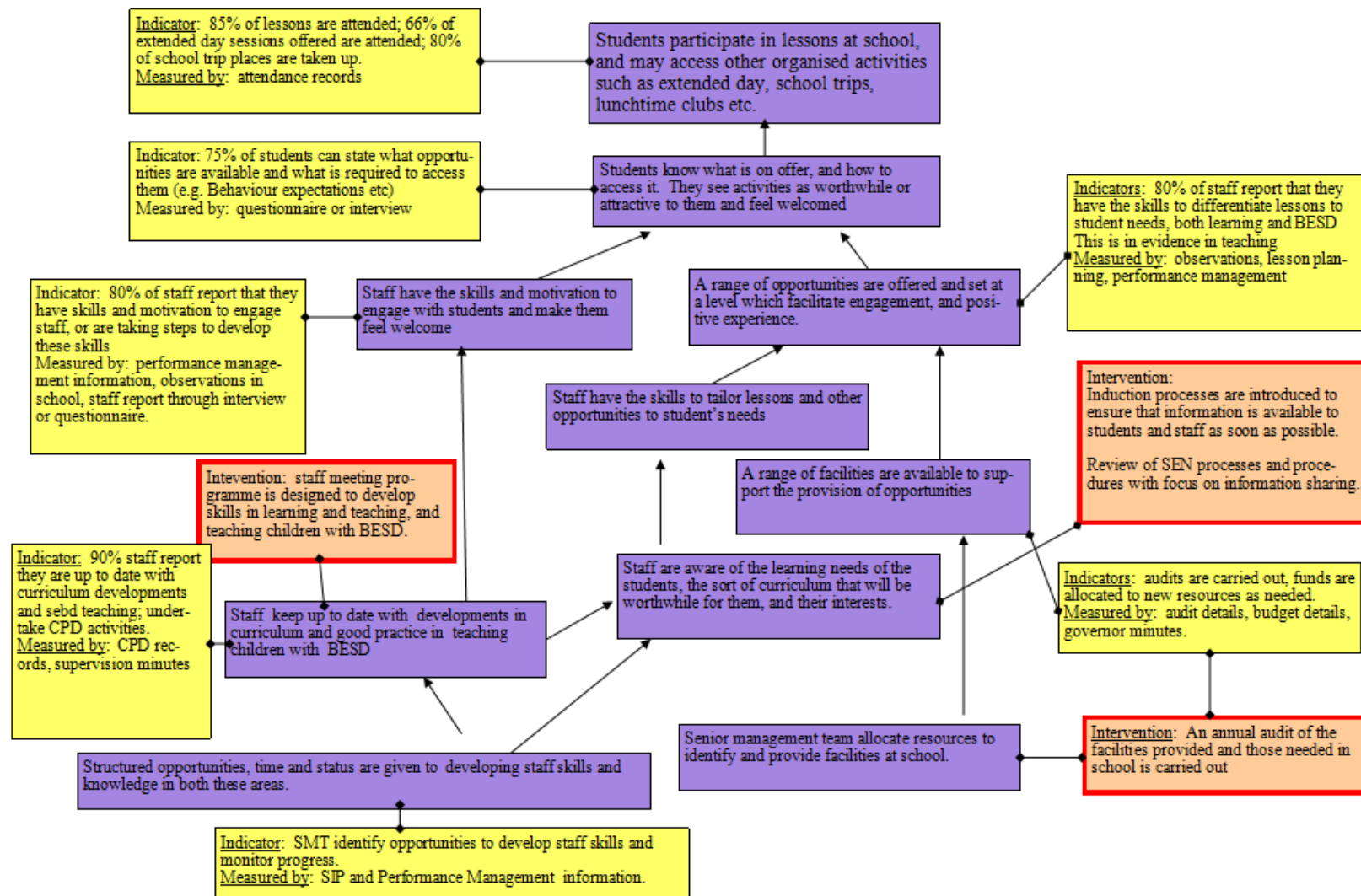


Figure 9: ToC strand showing pre-conditions, suggested interventions and indicators of success for 'students participate....'

Subsequent ToC Development Following Phase 3 Interviews.

As has been noted in the methods section, the management team's response to the ToCs was to suggest that they were in accordance with their views, but appeared complex. There were particular concerns that the indicators of success were not appropriate, amendments were planned but not agreed. Although two pathways of change were suggested which could have been followed (relating to student participation and students feeling a sense of commonality with the school) concrete plans were not made to do so. Some of the possible reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 10 (p122). In response to this, and to my developing concerns about my role as researcher, I chose not to develop articulated pathways of change following the phase 3 interviews. Instead, a further summary diagram was developed showing suggested end goals, interventions that had already been introduced and the changes that SMT had already noticed in school, see Figure 10 below. In this summary, the boxes are colour coded according to which member of the SMT made each comment; thus comments in blue were made by the HT, in green by the DHT, in pink by the AHT and in black were made by all members of the team.

I decided to present this summary to the management team without trying to make connections between interventions and pre-conditions, or suggesting indicators of success because I wanted to engage the management team in more of this type of discussion. I hoped that my collaborating more on the ToC development, the team would find it more helpful to them in practice, and we would be able to test some of the ToC in school. My notes from my research diary indicate that when I presented the summary diagram to the management team, they recognised the elements within it as being part of the school plan. They all identified the three goals 'additional and different' 'progression for all' and 'a sense of belonging' and could see broad links with the interventions that they had introduced at school. The HT had a particularly strong response to the goal I had identified from her interview, which I had titled 'from chaos to calmness' and talked about how this encapsulated for her a huge need within the school (to be more calm) and for her personally so that she could engage in the more strategic parts of her role. Once again, the indicators of success were difficult for the management team to consider. What had been included on the summary were things that had been noticed by the team, rather than outcomes of planned data collection. I felt this was necessary at the time because the attempts at data collection in phase 2 (see p51) had been unsuccessful, and other possible

sources of data had not been agreed with the team following phase 1 interviews. This means that opportunities to validate the ToCs and the underlying assumptions were missed, because data was not available to test the theories held within it. I hoped that in this second iteration of the ToC, that we could work together to identify data streams that would enable such testing. However, as noted in the method, opportunities to further develop and elaborate the ToC were not found, and the team found it difficult to use the framework as a tool for planning or evaluation.

GOALS	A sense of belonging	Progression for all	Additional and different	From chaos to settledness.	A reduction in exclusions
INTERVENTIONS	Transitional activities on arrival relating to points (HT, DHT)	On track system in classrooms (HT, DHT, AHT)	Change in expectations about how students arrive at lessons (HT)	Y7 taught separately (HT)	Review of induction processes (HT, DHT)
	Family conferencing (HT, DHT, AHT)	Changes to dinner arrangements. (HT)	Review of Points system (DHT)	Exclusions? (DHT)	Re-branding of school (DHT)
	Setting of Y10s (DHT)	Review of tutorials (AHT)	Focus on relationships with tutors and co-tutors (AHT)	School climate / expectations / culture (AHT)	Ensuring accessible learning (AHT)
INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	AHT perception that relationships with students changed once they were found out she had taught there before		The passport has had a 'huge impact', 'kids like it' and 'motivation' in the perceptions of the DHT.		Induction processes —'kids appear more settled' 'they want to stay longer in school' in the perceptions of the DHT.
	DHT has identified both positive and negative case studies as a result of family conferencing		Family conferencing AIMS for a reduction in exclusions, and an increase in attendance.		HT notes that children are making it to lessons without being dismissed from the hall. Also feels that there is a 'crisper' start of lessons?
	Staff report that Y7 are getting higher aspirational challenge,	Perception that Y7 less victims of bullying, reductions in smoking.		HT feels that transitional activities have allowed for relationship building (no evidence of this given).	
	HT feels she is more relaxed, has better work life balance, perceives school are more settled, with her being interrupted less.	Y7 parents evening, had greater involvement of parents, children requesting to stay back.,		On track has reduced the number of students leaving classrooms, reduction in some excusions	
NO increase in extended night participation	Case study JM "It's better here"		HT notes that staff are mentioning that going to lessons (not hall) works and has a positive impact on students.		

Figure 10: Summary of phase 3 interviews

Reviewing Interim ToC Development and Moving Towards Summative Analysis.

Following phase 4 of data collection, which occurred some time after the earlier phases I once again reviewed the ToCs shown above. In doing so, I was concerned that they did not sufficiently reflect the views of the SMT but was too influenced by my own perspective which was, in turn, influenced by my need to produce a workable planning tool for the staff. This was particularly so for those shown in Figures 6-9, where I had introduced suggested interventions and indicators of success. The impact of my influence would mean that I could not adequately address my research questions, particularly relating to exploring the school management team's understanding of belonging at school. I felt that the summary diagrams presented in figures 4 and 10 were more closely linked to what the team told me, with less interpretation, but did not make helpful connections between actions and outcomes (interventions and indicators of success) which did not allow me to explore the suggested mechanisms of belonging, and their impact.

I also noted that the ToCs did not encapsulate everything that the SMT had told me about their views about belonging, and my analysis of the interview data into a ToC framework had meant that there were things which had been discarded because they did not directly relate to pre-conditions, interventions or indicators of success.

This led me to consider other ways of exploring the data in order to gain a better understanding of the understandings the SMT held and how these might relate to belonging. I was further interested in the apparently disparate views of the different members of the management team. I noted this in interviews, and it also seemed apparent in Figure 10, where there is very little overlap in the interventions suggested to develop belonging, and none in the indicators of success. I did not feel that the ToCs derived after phases 1 and 3 represented each of the members of SMT equally, and were skewed towards the HT's perspective. It is usual when using a theory of change approach that consensus is sought from all the key stakeholders in an initiative (Weiss, 1995) which can mean that different stakeholders have more or less of their views represented in the final ToC plans. However, I was concerned that this did not allow me to fully explore the different views brought by the different team members.

I therefore decided to extend my data analysis in two ways. Thematic analysis was used to explore the whole data corpus to try and articulate what the team seemed to understand about belonging, and an individualised ToC approach was used to explore the apparent differences between the team members in terms of what interventions might be helpful in developing student sense of belonging.

Chapter 7: Results and Discussion: How do the Staff Understand Belonging?

This chapter explores the senior management team’s understanding of belonging. Data is taken from a thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews across all research phases rather than from individual phases as in the previous chapter. The idea of belonging as a subjective experience is considered.

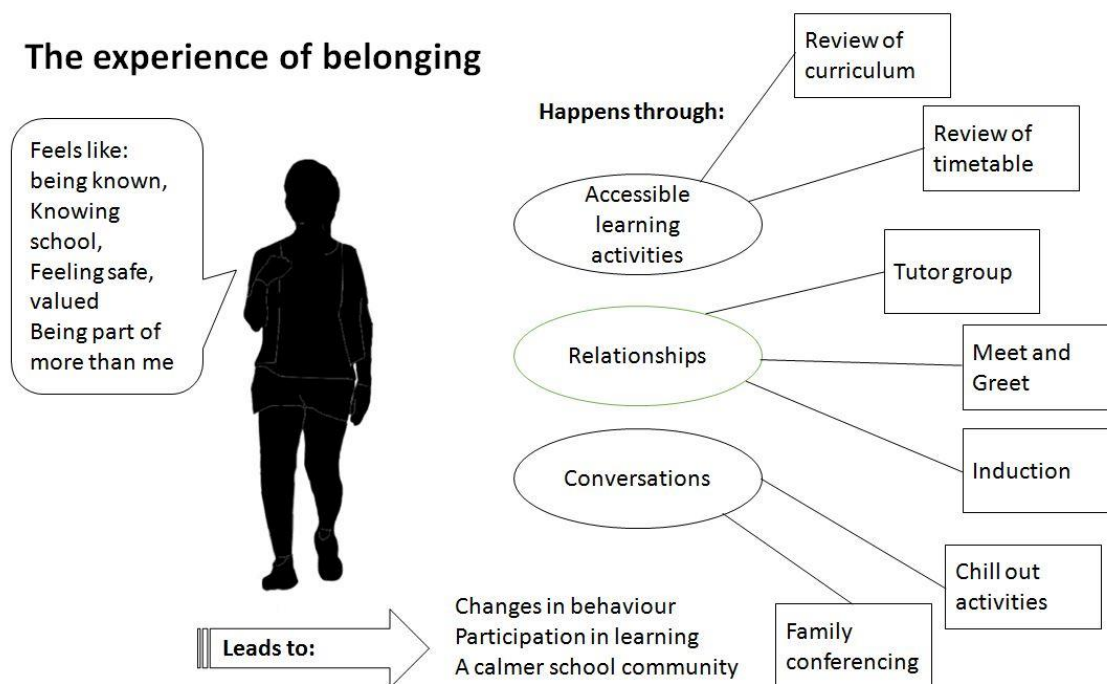


Figure 11: Concept map to illustrate the themes from thematic analysis.

The concept map above summarises the themes constructed from the interviews with SMT to describe their understanding of belonging. The data corpus was explored using a bottom up (Braun and Clarke, 2013) approach with all comments relating to belonging included.

The research questions were broadly, how do the team understand belonging at school, and what actions do they believe would help develop belonging in the students. The thematic analysis presented here primarily addresses the first of those questions.

It is important to note that the analysis of belonging in this instance related directly to their understandings of belonging in school, and perhaps more specifically, this school, and this cohort of students. It is unlikely, therefore, to reflect everything that

the team understand about the concept of belonging. It should also be noted that what was said in interview is likely to have been influenced by the respondent's role within the school organisation, and perceptions of that organisation. The interviews were initially designed to support the development of ToCs, and so the way in which interview questions may have affected the way in which belonging was talked about with me. A strength of the ToC approach (Connell & Klem, 2000) is that it helps develop an understanding of a unique context, and plan for change within that context. It is perhaps less helpful, therefore, in exploring people's understandings of general concepts such as belonging at school.

Exploring the comments made by the staff about belonging, led to the construction of several themes which highlighted aspects of their understanding of belonging in this context. The overarching themes identified in semantic thematic analysis, (Braun & Clarke, 2013) related to the understanding of belonging cluster into three areas and are identified as: ***the subjective experience of belonging, the outcomes of belonging*** and ***the mechanisms of belonging***. As with all the themes in this research, I have named the overarching and subthemes myself, the themes attempt to summarise the content clearly and memorably (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

7.1 The Experience of Belonging

One aspect of the team's views about belonging related to their perceptions of how it feels to belong. What they spoke about appeared to cluster into three themes, relating to the importance of knowledge (***knowing and being known***) the emotional experience of belonging (***feelings follow***) and the experience of belonging to a community (***part of more than me***).

Knowing and Being Known

Each of the management team talked about the importance of students knowing about their school community and being known by that community.

Having knowledge of the community was felt to be important for belonging, in terms of knowing their way around the school, understanding routines and processes, and knowing what was expected from them.

“we give people opportunities to understand how Whitfield ticks, and what their expectations can be and what our expectations are, so kids don’t just get parachuted in” HT 2.13

This was about knowing things, there was, interestingly, little reference throughout the interviews to knowing staff, and no positive reference to knowing the other students in school. Indeed, at times, knowing the other students seemed to be viewed as unhelpful.

To illustrate; one intervention that was introduced was that Y7 was educated separately from the rest of the students, in a different classroom base, with access to a smaller number of staff and had different break and lunch times. This was thought to prevent them from learning behaviours and habits (such as smoking and fighting) from peers in their early months in the school. It was felt that this had a large positive impact on those same students later in Y9.

... a settled Year 7 group, we've only had one experience of that in the past. And we know that group of young people are actually a group of young people who've maintained their attendance incredibly high, their exclusions are pretty near zero, and their major incidents are pretty near zero as well....that's our one experience of a settled cohort of kids, who had two tutors assigned to them. And that other cohort that are going into Year 9 next year have maintained that profile, and that's evidence based right through the school.....They also don't smoke. HT 3.6

Along with students knowing about the school, the DHT felt that it was important for a student to know that they are known about *“..that's important, it gives them a sense of 'Oh, you're interested in me'”* (DHT 1.46). This was not just for the sake of being known, for all of the team the other reason for knowing about students was so that aspects of what was on offer in the school community could be altered in order to facilitate student participation. Thus, the individual student can affect organisational change. Adaptations ranged from altering learning opportunities to support students better, *“the part of belonging for me is I get equal access to learning opportunities”...AHT 1.6* to developing a programme of social activities which would suit the students' interests, to knowing how best to handle a student when they were upset:

“We gave a period of ignoring him. Didn’t give him the attention. That didn’t work either. Em, we found out that he’s very tactile... he’s wanting the cuddles.. So instead [of becoming aggressive requiring physical restraint], he used to come up to certain staff, and they’d just put their arm round him.” DHT 1.37

Both the HT and DHT talked of the importance of collecting data about the students as groups as well as individuals, as this level of knowledge provides valuable feedback to the staff about aspects of the school.

“Em, funny enough we have a bad day a week and that’s always a Tuesday. For the last six or seven week’s it’s been a Tuesday. Em, and certain cohort have a lesson they don’t like and I think that permeates through the school, the... the waves.” DHT 2.8

I noted that interventions that were introduced to help students know the school were both formal and informal. At a formal level, two systems were introduced: induction and family conferencing, both mechanisms to facilitate the flow of information between students, their parents and carers and school staff to increase knowledge of each, see Appendix E. At a less formal level, more opportunities were created by which staff and students could spend time together out of lesson times; these included staff being available to meet and greet students at the start of the day (*it’s a good way to take the temperature of the school, get a sense of where those kids are” HT 3.4*) activities to do before school starts, which were also staffed, and extended tutor group time at the beginning of the school day.

Feelings Follow

When members of the SMT talked about their understandings of belonging, all of them mentioned belonging as an emotional experience. The DHT said that belonging includes a *“feeling of being wanted. It’s a feeling of being needed. It’s a feeling of being safe. Valued. It’s all them things I guess you can’t touch because it’s all emotional” DHT 3.25*. The HT talked of *‘feeling valued....feeling safe, welcomed and included” HT 1.6* and the AHT talked of it as having *“an emotional component” AHT 1.8* and talked of students feeling *“safe”*. AHT 1.14

One of the questions raised by the analysis in relation to belonging, is how a feeling of belonging might be different to other emotional experiences. Staff did not readily differentiate between feelings of safety, (AHT) or self worth (HT) or happiness (DHT)

and the feeling of belonging. This difficulty is also apparent in the literature, with a wide range of terms used apparently synonymously with belonging, and may reflect a difficulty with the construct itself. Interestingly, in both the HT and AHT's individual ToCs (p 92 and p 96) the emotional experience of belonging was identified as happening late in the process of belonging. This is in contrast to ideas around knowing, which often appeared earlier in the ToCs, suggesting that knowing perhaps happens earlier in the process of belonging than any affective experience does. Thus, the staff appeared to hold a belief that any emotional response related to belonging is essentially an outcome, a result of the other experiences that happened to the students at school. However, interestingly, at no point when we talked about indicators of success did the team talk of measurement of student affect, either formally or informally.

Related to this, it was noted that interventions did not seek to simply produce a positive, affective experience of belonging in the students. It could have been possible for the school to introduce activities which were solely designed to have fun, and to enjoy being in a group together which would arguably have had a similar impact on students' feelings of being welcomed, valued and safe. The fact that this did not happen suggests that other factors were at play here. It is possible that the staff held an understanding of belonging that suggested that the experience of belonging is related to more than just positive experiences. However, it seems likely to me that the staff were also mindful of the other factors that shape the planned experiences at school, such as the influence of the national curriculum, evaluation by Ofsted, and the need to support students in achieving qualifications and making a successful post 16 transition, all of which require students to engage with prescribed learning activities.

There is some overlap between what the team appeared to understand about these aspects of belonging and what appears in the literature. The affective components of belonging identified here largely mirror the constructs of belonging discussed in the literature (see, for example, Hagerty, et al. (1996), Osterman (2000), Frederickson and Baxter (2009) which incorporates positive affect with cognitions relating to feeling valued and welcomed. What the staff did not talk about was the sense of finding like-minded others which appears in the literature, for example, Hagerty's (1992) second element of belonging which relates to a fit between an individual's values and those of the others in the group. It may be that the management team did not consider

belonging in this way, or that they felt this was an integral part of feeling valued. It may also be because of the team's perceptions of students at the school, which is discussed below in the theme ***Our kids*** (p 109).

Part of More than Me

Each of the three members of the team recognised an aspect of belonging which is related to group membership, which was supported by, but seemed to go beyond individual relationships in school.

Out of that we hope we're going to create a sense of belonging, because our young people will work better when they feel they belong within a community
HT 2.13

"sense of belonging...and being, wanting to be a part of our community" DHT
1.80

So whether they're in a classroom or not, I don't think they'll say 'Oh, I don't belong to this group at the moment'. So, I think they'll be much more simplistic than that. You still belong to the school, but actually I did things in that particular class...AHT 1.37

This apparent focus on group or school membership as a feature of belonging appears to come spontaneously from the data, but may be a demand characteristic because of the nature of the research. We were exploring ways of developing belonging for a group of students in one school; it may be that the staff stress that belonging in this instance refers to community membership, but in other contexts may consider that belonging can be different. This is illustrated by the HT who noted that some of her students appeared to have a sense of belonging to each other but not to necessarily to the school organisation, as evidenced by their lack of participation in school:

INT: What about a kid then who is maybe having conversations with his peers, spending time wandering down the back end of the field, does he have a sense of belonging?

HT: Yeah

INT: Okay. Is that what you're trying to cultivate?

HT: No, I'd prefer him in the school. Having a sense of belonging
HT 3.14

7.2 Outcomes of Belonging

At the inception of the project, I noted in my research diaries that the HT talked about her desire to increase the sense of belonging in her students. At this time, developing sense of belonging appeared to be an end in itself. This was further reinforced when the school mission statement was produced: developing a sense of belonging was identified as the overarching aim of the three strands of the mission statement, the other two being, provision that is additional and different, and facilitating progression for all. (see p 90 for further discussion)

However, as the interviews progressed, there were comments that challenged the idea that any of the team were holding belonging as a goal in and of itself. They expressed their hopes that belonging would lead to other benefits for the students. In this section ideas are explored relating to what the team hoped would happen if the students had a greater sense of belonging. The hoped for impact on **behaviour**, on **learning** and on the school climate (**from chaos to calm**) are discussed. It is in this section that I have included information both about what the staff thought would happen if student sense of belonging increased, and, then, what they noticed that they thought was as a result of their interventions. These were often anecdotal examples, based on noticing an individual student's response and taken to be indicative of change that was happening across the school. (see p 97 for further discussion of anecdotal evidence).

Behaviour

In terms of the impact on behaviour, the team appeared to make a connection between student sense of belonging and student interpersonal behaviour. When asked whether they had noticed any evidence of increased belonging, the team noted a particular increase in positive interpersonal behaviours, such as;

“having conversations with peers and staff”. HT 3.13;

“increased participation in classrooms or on school trips” DHT 1.8

“children getting along with each other” DHT 2.33

“Y7...had their parents’ evening last night...and the kids were desperate to show their parents when they had been in the school and things like that” HT 2.6

However, the management team shared ideas that some students may respond to feelings of belonging by behaving in a more challenging manner than before, because they felt safe to do so.

“and I think the other thing about it, and I think the bit we haven’t really addressed yet is, if kids do feel safer and safer, then for some of them their behaviour’s going to get worse isn’t it?” HT 3.12.

“so I’m in a bad fettle, therefore I will take it out on all of you lot because I can, you know what I mean, and I will. And, no, I don’t do this anywhere else, but I can here. And I think that’s the dilemma they’re in.” AHT 1.17

The DHT had noticed changes in students’ behaviour which seemed to illustrate that there were increases in student sense of belonging but that potential loss of safety, and perhaps therefore belonging, engendered by the school holidays would itself lead to difficult behaviour:

“I think it’s (sense of belonging) one of these things that gets stronger and stronger. You can tell by the amount of kids getting it right all the time..... You can tell, I mean this is an awful thing, but you can tell at the end of term towards a holiday because behaviour sort of increases a little bit because they don’t want to go. And although that’s not a good thing, it proves that--,they’ve got some attachment to the school, and some sense of belonging.” DHT 3.10

It should be noted that there is little literature on belonging which makes connections between student behaviour, either good or bad, and belonging. However, there is some suggestion (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Juvonen, 2007) that there is some influence from peer group to sense of school belonging which may impact on student behaviour.

Learning

Analysis of the interviews with the team suggested that they thought that having a sense of belonging at school would mean that students are more able to access

learning, although no comments were made about whether belonging had, or might have, any impact on attainment:

“I think, actually, some of the sense of belonging is, I can take a risk in my learning, and that’s OK. I can take a risk because everything is here and the expectation is you can take a risk and its okay. And I think that’s a massive amount of social and emotional sense of belonging” AHT 2.14

“Out of that we hope we’re going to create a sense of belonging, because our young people will work better when they feel they belong within a community” HT 2.13.

By the time of the third phase of interviews, the HT talked of changes she had noticed in the students’ behaviour in relation to learning;

“I think they’re comfortable in the school, I think they walk to lessons and engage in learning more. Not all the time” HT 3.13

From Chaos to Calm

A final proposed outcome of belonging was a suggested change in the school climate. At the start of the project, the HT particularly perceived the atmosphere in school as chaotic and wished for a calmer atmosphere and calmer students (it is worth noting here that calmer students are equated with better behaved students), which she appeared to connect with them having a better sense of belonging at school.

“We have...kids coming from chaos into chaos. And so we have absconding behaviours, challenging behaviours, which I believe but can’t evidence will come from not actually belonging...” HT 1.5

“I want to be cooler and calmer. I might ask to be cooler and calmer. Hmm. That’s part of what we’ve been trying to achieve isn’t it, with activities, and not having kids running in the corridor, and not having kids running around outside. It’s reduced that sense of chaos. That was one of our intended aims wasn’t it.” HT 3.29

A number of interventions introduced by the team appeared to impact on school climate. These included; the on track procedure which provided a systematic response to challenging behaviour from students, changes to the school timetable, a new expectation that students find their own way to lessons instead of being dismissed from the school hall, and a streamlining of communication systems for staff, so that they knew who to pass information onto at any point in the school day.

Whilst no formal measure of the school climate was planned to monitor change, the HT appeared to have developed her own indicator of success,

“a change in lifestyle of me, which I think is a performance indicator for the school...Because I’ve now spent a lot of time in my office, undisturbed by anybody coming through the door, or by noise within the school and I’ve been able to do quite tedious and boring tasks...But the ones, I am told, apparently Head Teachers do like write policies, do performance management, think about things, etc.” HT 2.2

The suggestion that belonging may lead to better participation in learning, better behaviour and, therefore, a more settled school climate echoes ideas of engagement as described in the identification / participation model (Finn, 1989) whereby belonging is hypothesised to facilitate participation in school and in learning. Interestingly, this model has a strong focus on identification of individual aims and values with the aims and values of the organisation. The idea that the staff may be attempting to develop belonging as a means to changing students’ values about school is discussed in the next chapter.

7.3 Mechanisms of Belonging

In this final section exploring the management team’s understanding of belonging, I discuss their views about the key factors which seem to contribute to the development of belonging. If the experience of belonging can be considered the what of belonging, and the outcomes of belonging the why of belonging, this section is the how of belonging. The themes identified were the ***role of relationships***, and ***conversations***

The role of relationships

The team were working with the stated aim of increasing student belonging in school; and suggested a number of interventions, through which this might happen. However, during analysis, I increasingly felt that the team were telling me that it was not the new systems themselves that would directly increase belonging, but they would have an indirect effect, facilitating the conditions by which belonging could take place. One aspect of this has already been discussed; the role of knowing, whereby interventions like induction processes and family conferencing were put into place to get to know students better, which lead to differentiated learning and social

opportunities in the school, and, hypothetically, made the process of participation easier for students.

It seemed that the team thought one mechanism by which students would experience belonging at school was through developing positive relationships with staff:

“the rest of the time they can have with their tutors, which is really where their belonging should be rooted” HT 2.19

“well, sense of belonging is obviously about building on relationships because relationships are at the heart of everything we do, and you can’t work with our young people without relationships, they are the focal point of all our work. So relationships.....at all levels, and of course beyond to the wider community” HT 3.2

Conversations

The HT identified conversations as *“the key to everything we do”*, HT 3.13. This was partly related to the relationships theme discussed above, in that conversations are associated with forming and maintaining relationships.

“Conversations in the classrooms and conversations when we’re actually doing the transition activities, I think that’s actually one of the most important times of the day I’ve decided because that’s actually one of the most chilled times of the day because they’ve got no pressures on them whatsoever” HT 2.17

And in understanding some of the decisions taken in school which may impact on them:

Yeah. I mean we have got these boundaries, and it is hard for some kids to try and understand why some sanctions are different for them. That are different for other kids. But you have a conversation, it’s all about these conversations you have with them, as long as they’re thought through, they understand, they can sort of deal with it, you know. DHT 3.8

In addition, conversations were a means by which students could receive feedback about their progress, and develop a sense of self-worth. This appeared to be key for the HT as expressed in her ToC (p 90).

“We would pull in our Chair of Governors now to actually have those conversations with them. All of which includes them in a big family, a big family that’s actually involved and worried about how they’re getting on”. HT 3.9

“I think kids are beginning to have the conversations that needed to happen. And they’re informed conversations, and they’re, they’re still rigorous conversations, but they’re much more child centred conversations. And I think as part of that package parents and carers also have that sense of being involved in the process. All of which builds to our sense of community”. HT 3.4

It was interesting that within this theme, ***mechanisms of belonging***, the team seemed to understand that belonging would be developed through one to one interactions, either through conversations, or through the impact of one to one relationships. However, when considering the ***experience of belonging***, the team seemed to suggest that part of the experience of belonging was a sense of being part of a group, a class or an organisation. There are a couple of points to be made here; it may be that the team thought that the experience of belonging did feel like the experience of belonging to a group or community, but that this was mediated through individual relationships or interactions. This is congruent with ideas of belonging contained in the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the suggestion that belonging is achieved through enduring, positive relationships with others and is a fundamental driver to behaviour. It also appears to be common sense. Most of the experiences we have of group membership are framed around the interactions that occur within that group, or the relationships we build there. However, this presents some challenges for those more abstract experiences of belonging, those which relate to cultural or national belonging where one to one relationships are not always possible. This dilemma is also reflected in the literature (see p 12).

A second interpretation comes from the fact that the team highlighted conversations as belonging mechanisms and may also be important here. Some of the conversations that have developed in school are more formal than simply staff and students talking together; for example, the conversations around induction, family conferencing or with the chair of governors. It is possible that the experience of belonging to a community is shaped partly by the experience of these more formal conversations because of the meaning that is attached to them. The potential importance of rituals such as these is discussed in the chapter on theories of community (p 99).

This chapter has considered what the management team appeared to understand about belonging and is based on analysis of the interviews they gave, focusing on comments about belonging. The understandings of belonging discussed here appeared to cluster around themes relating to the experience of belonging, the outcomes of belonging and the mechanisms by which belonging might happen. Links are made with the literature and suggest a high level of congruence between belonging as discussed in the literature and understandings of belonging here. The next chapter reviews the theories of change constructed from the interview data from each of the team members.

Chapter 8: Results and Discussion: Theories of Change

In this chapter the theories of change for individual members of the management team are outlined and discussed. These were developed following phase 4 of the data collection, but incorporate all the data from the 4 phases. This is different to the ToCs presented in chapter 6 which were developed following individual phases of the research and refer only to the interview data gathered during that phase.

Individualised ToCs were developed in response to some concerns about the way in which the initial ToCs represented the views of the management team; and in response to the apparent disparity between the members of the management team in their perceptions of how to develop belonging across the school. This means that in this use of the ToC approach, the framework is used in a different way, as an analytic tool rather than a planning or evaluation tool.

8.1 Individualised Theories of Change

At the start of the research process, it was hoped that a shared ToC would be developed with the school SMT, and that subsequent data collected could be used to test its validity. In reality, as explored in the methodology section, this did not happen. I had also noted, in the second phase of interviews, some differences in each individual's understandings of belonging, and particularly how they felt student sense of belonging could be developed. I became interested in the variation in these approaches and what this might reveal in terms of the understandings held by each member of the team about how belonging might be developed in the school. The interview transcripts were therefore analysed to try and construct the individual theories of change that the staff held in relation to belonging.

The ToCs presented here are based on Anderson's (2006) approach to ToC development, incorporating goals, interventions, and success indicators. The assumptions, i.e. the rationale for how the ToC might work, are included in the description with the text, where this was possible. The ToCs are likely not a complete representation of the theories held by the team about how belonging might be developed in school; they are derived from the interview data, which is itself partial and constructed (Silverman, 2006) and may therefore have some gaps in them. As a consequence, in the analysis it is sometime difficult to find a thread linking

goals to interventions and interventions to success indicators. Where I felt it was warranted by what was said in interview, I have identified links between the areas identified.

In order to explain ToCs and their underlying assumptions clearly, I have also provided a narrative, outlining the proposed process by which each member of the team seems to suggest belonging will be achieved. However, it should be noted throughout that these are theories constructed from the data rather than having been described to me verbatim by the participants, and, as such, may not fully represent what they thought about developing belonging at Whitfield school.

The Head teacher

The Head teacher appeared to have developed quite a clear theory around belonging at school by the time of the second interview. She had been working with a consultant on the school mission statement, which was summarised in three key points:

- **Additional and different;** provision at school gives a wider range of opportunities from that which would be available within a mainstream environment. This includes both learning and social, emotional opportunities.
- **Progression for all;** all students can make progress in their learning and social and emotional skills at school, because they are able to access individualised provision. Staff progression was felt to be important too.
- **A sense of belonging;** students have a sense of allegiance and commitment to school: they feel valued and safe enough to behave in a calm way and to access learning.

She stated that belonging was the over-arching goal.

Underpinning the mission statement appeared to be a fully formed, explicit theory of how students might achieve a sense of belonging. In her view belonging comes partly from feelings of self-worth which come from feelings of success. In interview, she talked about the importance of staff knowing their young people as soon after they arrive at school as possible, and suggested that this was so that they could tailor key aspects of school, including learning, to enable them to participate in school activities. Through participation, she suggested, students can achieve success,

which can be reviewed with them, and can support the development of feelings of self-worth.

Just as staff need to develop their knowledge of the child, she also felt it was important that the child develops their knowledge of the school; including behavioural expectations, geography and routines. She identified the mechanisms by which knowledge of each other could be developed, through 'relationships' and 'conversations'. This was also the means by which student's progress could be reviewed with staff, in order to build the experiences of success and feelings of self-worth that she considered would build belonging. Interventions introduced into school were therefore focused on developing knowledge, both of the student and for the student; and on reviewing the provision to increase the level of access that students could have.

This TOC, shown in Figure 12 was developed from interviews with the HT,.

Figure 12: Head teacher's Theory of Change

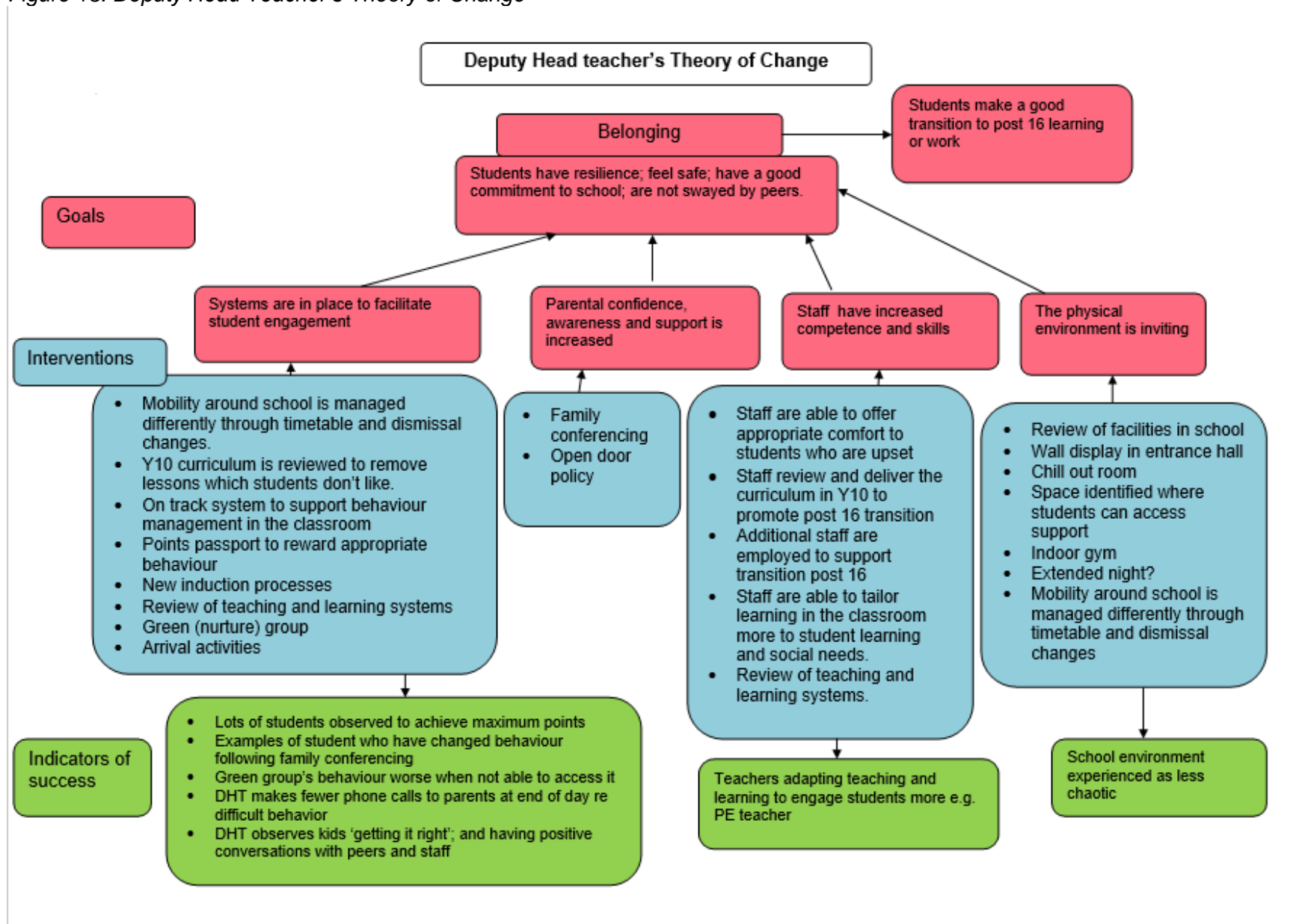


The Deputy Head teacher

In contrast to the HT, the DHT did not appear to have an explicit theory of change that he could tell me about during the interviews. It was more difficult to explore a theory of change with the DHT as he did not readily articulate assumptions that may have underpinned the interventions; although he appeared to feel the interventions themselves were important. That is, he did not say how he thought a proposed change at the school would impact on student belonging. At times, it was difficult to categorise things he talked about in the ToC framework, as they were not clearly stated as goals, or a proposed intervention. For example, on a few occasions he referred to the need to develop a better induction process for students; and it was hard to see whether this was, for him, an end in itself, and therefore a goal or an intervention intended to improve belonging. It is possible that, for him, they could be considered to be both, illustrating perhaps the difficulty of imposing a fixed framework to structure theory building.

However, the DHT appeared to have some understandings of belonging which linked with interventions and outcomes in school. He talked of belonging as a subjective experience associated with feelings of being valued, feeling safe and having attachment to school. This subjective experience, he felt would be objectively evident in student behaviours which included participation in activities (including learning activities) in school and students displaying fewer incidents of challenging behaviour. His ToC as I best understood it is shown in Figure 13. It seemed that in considering student belonging, he found it easiest to think about the different things, school routines or groups of people that impacted on the students (school staff, parents, the physical environment) and then considered interventions which would change those aspects in order to facilitate student's commitment to school, and thereby their belonging in school.

Figure 13: Deputy Head Teacher's Theory of Change



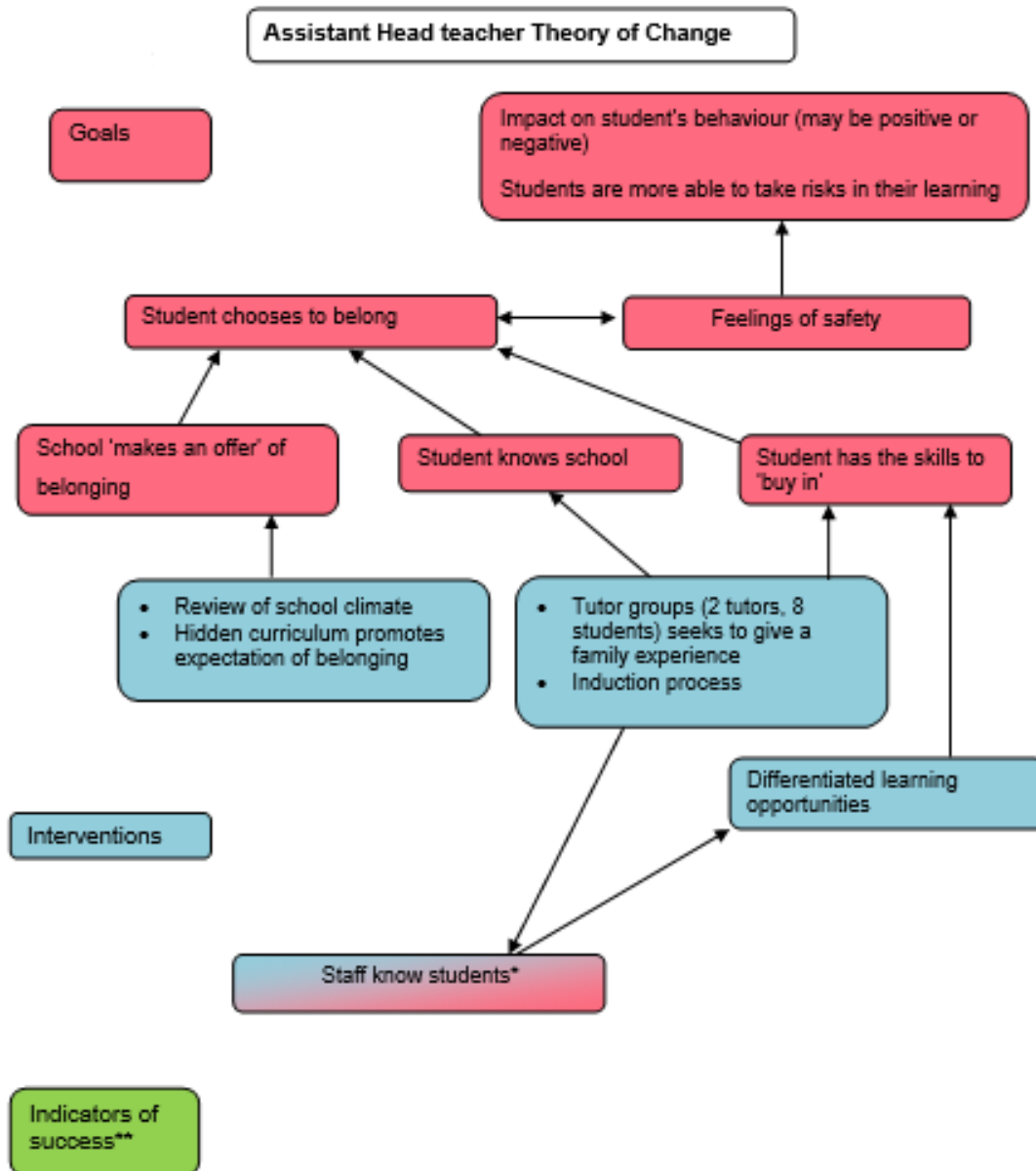
The Assistant Head teacher

In interview, the AHT appeared to take a slightly different focus in her understanding about belonging to the other two members of the team. Her comments were far more concerned with the responsibility of the community rather than the individual experience of belonging that the student may have. She talked about the partnership between students at school and the school community; and described belonging as part of what is on offer to all students when they join. This offer would include opportunities to access learning, to be treated fairly and respected but was not totally permissive; not all behaviour, she felt, would be acceptable. For some students, she felt this would contrast with their experiences in the home environment.

The AHT made few comments about the student experience of belonging, but suggested that she thought the individual student would make a choice as to whether to take the opportunity to belong; in which case they would experience an emotional effect which would give them a feeling of safety. This feeling of safety would enable them to take risks in their learning and would also affect their behaviour (sometimes positively, sometimes negatively). She talked a great deal about the experience of Whitfield School as being like a family, and noted that much of the structure of school and the hidden curriculum was set up to replicate this family experience. This is further explored later. However, she noted that the experience of family for many of the students at the school was likely to be unusual, and had concerns that the experience of belonging may not be possible for “*our kids*” AHT J.41.

The construction of the AHT’s ToC given here is likely to have been affected by the fact that data was available from just two sources; one individual and one joint interview carried out some 5 months apart. Also, despite knowing the school well and having worked there before, she joined the leadership team and therefore the research part way through the process. This may have impacted on her perception of the school and what was needed from its leadership. She later commented that the timing of one interview (at the end of the school summer holidays) was difficult for her, in terms of not feeling ‘up to speed’ in her thinking. The AHT’s ToC is shown in Figure 14

Figure 14: Assistant Head Teacher's Theory of Change



* it was unclear from the data whether this was considered to be an intervention in itself, a goal or both

** no indicators of success were noted in the interviews with the AHT.

8.2 Reflections on the Theory of Change Process

The ToCs attempt show how the management team thought that belonging could develop for students at Whitfield school. Some comments are made here which give a flavour of some of the opportunities and challenges I found in using this approach.

One aspect that proved quite difficult was encouraging the staff to theorise about belonging, and about what could be done in school to develop belonging. This is perhaps unsurprising; other researchers in the area have similarly noted that teachers do not always carry implicit theories of change ready to be 'uncovered' by researchers, (Dyson & Todd, 2010) and that a good deal of work is required by the researcher in order to construct ToCs (Anderson, 2006). The HT was an exception to this; it appeared that she carried a well formed ToC as far as belonging was concerned. In many ways, she had had the opportunity to think more about this than other members of the team; and I did wonder whether the other members of the team had been able to frame their own thinking on the topic before I carried out the research.

The ToC diagrams reveal how little the team and I had engaged in consideration of success indicators. This was, in the main, because the ToC approach was adapted during the research process, so that instead of driving planning and evaluation, it became a framework for exploration and analysis. This meant that we were not able to plan and use data to validate the ToCs as they were implemented. However, that is not to say that the team members were not aware of changes that seemed to be related to the interventions they introduced. There were some interesting examples of anecdotal evidence that they had noticed which suggested to them that change had happened in the way that they had hoped, for example, the HT's realisation that the school was calmer because she was able to get her work done without being disturbed. This noticing of change is not in itself enough to validate the theories, but does provide opportunities to sensitise staff to the impact that their work is likely to be having (Dyson & Todd, 2010) and is likely to have helped the team maintain their motivation for change; noticing the positive impact of change is considered powerful in encouraging people to persist (O'Hanlon & Beadle, 1999). Indeed, when the staff talked about what they had noticed, they seemed at their most enthusiastic.

Finally, of note is the reference in all the ToCs, (perhaps most strongly in the HT's) to changes both in the external school environment (e.g. activities to promote success)

and the subjective experience of students in the school (e.g. the development of self-worth). It is through this interplay of external and internal, they seem to suggest, that belonging develops.

The ToCs go some way in exploring how the SMT thought belonging might be developed with the students at Whitfield but they do not capture everything that the team talked about in terms of belonging. They do, however, have an element of face validity. They focus more clearly on what had happened in the real world, rather than what the interviewee was thinking about doing. This goes some way to combating the criticism that interview data “does not allow direct access to the ‘facts’”, (Silverman, 2006, p. 117) because of the constructed nature of interview data. Of course, I was still largely reliant on what the team told me they had done, which does not eliminate this source of error completely, but I was able to triangulate what I was told about at interview with what I saw as a professional working in the school, which allowed me to see many of the interventions being implemented. I felt that the ToC framework allowed the team’s ideas about belonging to be operationalised more than perhaps would have been possible through simple interview.

When considering the analysis of the interviews, I was particularly struck by the team’s apparent views about the dynamic interplay between the individual (or perceptions of the individual) and the school community. Given that this was broadly the focus of the research using the ToC framework, it may be that this perceived interlinking is over-emphasised; nevertheless, I was interested in the dynamic that appeared to emerge. The individual appears to impact on the whole, which in turn impacts on the individual. As an example, knowledge of individual students led to changes in activities offered in the community, which were designed to impact on the individual’s experiences of safety, values, success and ultimately, belonging. This conceptualisation of belonging as an unfolding process for the student and the organisation contrasted with the analysis of belonging as an experience, which tended to come from the thematic analysis of the data. I have therefore referred to this as belonging as transition. In the next section, I consider theories of community and whether their conceptualisations of belonging are helpful in further exploring the idea of belonging as transition.

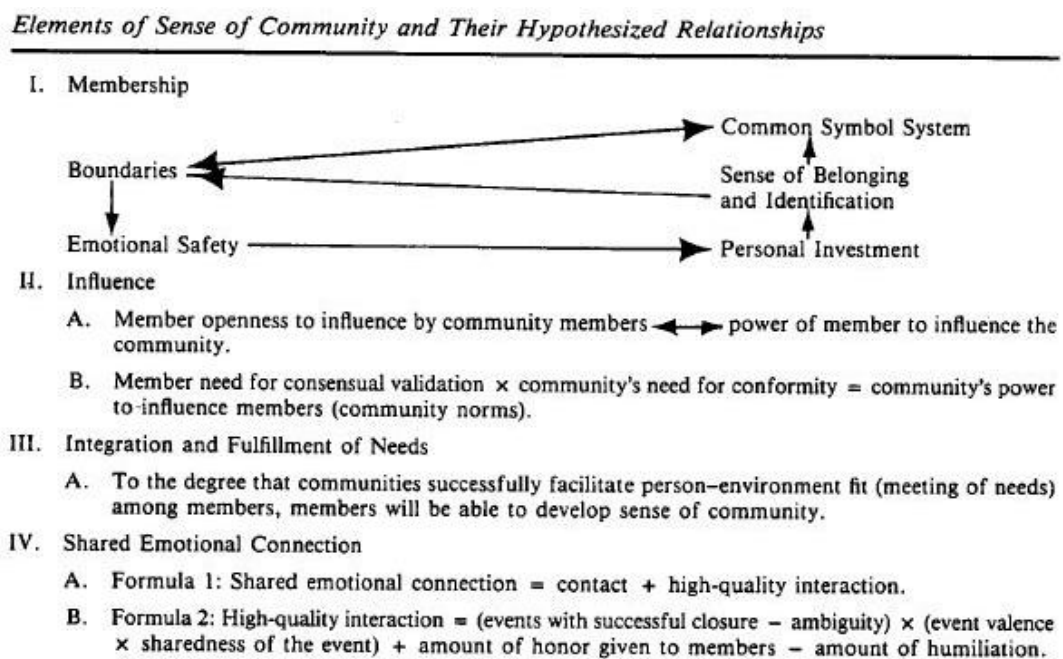
8.3: Theories of Community

Theories which seek to explain the interplay between organisation and individual tend to come from community psychology. They are also helpful in considering communities as unique enterprises which allows for consideration of the particular elements of the experience at Whitfield. The next section uses theories of community; Sense of Community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1999) to discuss the possible function and process of belonging as transition.

Sense of Community

The Sense of Community model (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) seeks to identify the key elements which contribute to sense of community. It is hypothesised that the four key elements are Membership, Influence, Integration and Fulfilment of needs, and Shared Emotional Connection. Their comprising factors are shown in the diagram below. Whilst the diagram presents the factors in linear form, it is suggested that the interrelationship between the elements is actually more complex than this, and a later iteration of the model (McMillan, 1996) suggests that the four elements are linked in “a self-reinforcing circle” (McMillan, 1996, p. 323)

Figure 15: Sense of Community Model (McMillan and Chavis 1986).



Sense of belonging and identification are grouped together in the model, and are considered to be “the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group and a willingness to sacrifice for

the group” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 10). This forms parts of the membership element of the model.

There are some cautions which must be considered in applying the sense of community model to this particular research project. The model tends to focus primarily on neighbourhood communities, with a sense of geographical co-location and elements of domestic, civic and leisure experiences. This does not mean that the model cannot be applied to other community setting, but means that care must be taken in ensuring its applicability to those settings.

Similarly, although not explicitly stated, McMillan and Chavis (op cit) were exploring sense of community primarily in relation to adults. McMillan and Chavis explore ideas around rootedness; the length of time one has been part of a community and how long one expects to do so. This is hypothesised to impact on how one interacts with the community, and therefore on the experience of sense of community. Students attending a school are likely to have different perceptions around rootedness; membership of a school community is necessarily (and normatively) temporary and there is an expectation that one will leave at the appropriate age. This experience of temporary membership is certainly true at Whitfield school, where new students continue to be admitted right through to Y11. The impact, if any, of this on rootedness has not been explored.

Secondly, school membership has an element of compulsion for students; unless students are registered by their parents to be electively home educated, they are required to attend an educational provision until the end of the school year when the student has their sixteenth birthday (Education Act, 1996 section 7). The choice of this provision, particularly for students at Whitfield, tends not to lie with the individual student, but with their parents or carers in conjunction with the Local Authority. One must question the impact of enforced school community membership on the student’s sense of community or belonging.

Nevertheless, there has been some work in applying the sense of community model to education, most notably by Bateman (2002) who concluded that the sense of community model was applicable to students and schools (in this case, US 6th Grade students (UK Y7). Also, McMillan and Chavis (1986) make some exploration of the theory as it may apply to adolescents joining gangs, and college students forming a sports team, which is suggestive that the authors consider the theory has some

applicability to younger people but without considering the issues of temporary membership and compulsory attendance noted above.

The data available from the interviews does not provide enough information about parts of the community for a full mapping of the Whitfield findings onto the sense of community model. The information collected was from the perspective of the management team, not the teachers or students. There are many aspects of the school community which will not have been described as a result which could have relevance for the application of the model. However, there are elements of comparison which warrant exploration in order to further understand the Whitfield team's understandings about belonging, in particular the membership element, and ideas around influence, identification and integration.

The membership element describes the factors which allow new members to join the community, but also the way in which community membership is maintained. Just as with the four main elements of the model, membership is noted to be circular and self-reinforcing (McMillan and Chavis, op cit). The table below shows the possible links between the membership element of the model, and the interventions introduced at Whitfield. Further information is available on the interventions in Appendix E. It can be seen that much of what was happening at Whitfield appears to have been designed to promote the students' membership to the community.

Table 2: Sense of Community Membership elements applied to Whitfield.

Element of Membership	How this occurs at Whitfield
Boundaries: indicate who belongs and who does not.	<p>Students are on role, have access to the school building, activities (incl. lessons), named tutor group. Name on register.</p> <p>Induction period allows students to learn school rules, routines and expectations.</p> <p>School building redecorated to give more school identity includes photos of students and staff.</p>
Emotional safety: feelings of security in the community, a willingness to share.	<p>Review of curriculum to ensure learning activities students can access,</p> <p>Provision of chill out time and social activities students can enjoy,</p> <p>Opportunities to develop positive relationships with staff, deliberate family set up of tutor groups.</p> <p>Green group for those students who are perceived as being at risk of losing membership</p>
Personal Investment	<p>Follows from emotional safety. Students begin to demonstrate allegiance to the school, participate in some learning and social activities, have some positive relationships with others. Good attendance. Reduction in challenging behaviours.</p> <p>Students who do not demonstrate personal investment likely to have their place at school reviewed through family conferencing.</p>
Sense of belonging and identification	<p>Follows from above. Students with good sense of belonging and identification likely to demonstrate good participation with classes and in extended night activities. May join the school council, may begin to consider what they would like to do when they leave school.</p>
Common symbol system	<p>Knowledge of community symbols developed and reinforced though induction and family conferencing. Include, for example, points passport, on track system, dismissal procedures, star of the week.</p>

The second helpful area of comparison from the sense of community model makes references to ideas around identification, influence, and integration. This seemed a helpful process to consider the development of belonging in this instance.

Identification is the perception that one is part of a group, influence goes further in suggesting that the individual's actions and beliefs might be changed as a result of group membership (and that the group might be changed because of the individual) and, finally, integration and fulfilment of needs occurs when the individual's values are aligned with the group, such that the actions of the community can meet both. This hypothesised process seemed to fit what the team were telling me about their understandings of belonging. It seemed, in their view, that students would go through the process of being placed at the school whereupon they may begin to see themselves as members of the school community. It was hoped that the relationships that developed with staff, and through the differentiated opportunities for learning and socialising, students may be influenced to develop shared values around the importance of learning and managing their behaviour, which would then maintain the wish to participate and to achieve. Thus, belonging appeared to be not just an end in itself for the Whitfield team, but a process by which students could be facilitated into engaging with team's other goals for the students. In this way, belonging can be seen as the means of transition for the students into membership of the Whitfield community, and then into developing their values to be more aligned with those of the school, impacting on their learning and behaviour.

It should be noted that this process of identification, influence and integration whilst congruent with the model is not explicitly considered in this sequenced way within it. The sense of community model identifies elements constituting sense of community but does not say how this process might happen, suggesting instead that this will vary according to the community in question. It is, therefore, difficult to use the model predictively. What is presented here is my interpretation of the model in relation to the data from the management team, and as such, may not entirely represent the way in which the team understood the function of belonging.

A second model of community which appears to have application in explaining the results from the Whitfield team comes from ideas around communities of practice.

Communities of Practice

The Communities of Practice Model (Wenger, 1999) seeks to articulate the dynamic between the individual and the community, suggesting that learning and identity are derived from social experience, and through communities of practice (communities which share a commonality of purpose and participatory knowledge). This model has been mainly focused on post compulsory education, and vocational organisations rather than compulsory education. Whilst Wenger (op cit) gives a hypothetical account of how school students may engage in their own community of practice, there has been a dearth of research in this area. Once again, the potential impact of the context of Whitfield should be noted when applying this model, particularly the fact that attendance is compulsory and most of the population is there for only a few years.

A further issue in the applicability of this model to this data relates, again, to the partial view of the school which is available from the data. The communities of practice model embraces all that is learned through a community, formally and informally from more senior staff and from peers; in educational terms, this can be described as learning from the formal and hidden curricula (Reece, et al., 2000). The data available is limited by the research question which focused on interventions introduced by school managers. Therefore, it does not give any indication of whether and how students might be engaging with hidden curriculum learning, and whether this fits with the model. There are some instances when the possibilities of such learning appear to have been curtailed, for example, where the Y7 class has very limited access to the other students in school; this conflicts with Wenger's more naturalistic approach.

According to the communities of practice model, individuals joining the community are recognised as being less skilled or knowledgeable than those who have been in the community for some time. This puts them at the hypothetical edge of the community, known as legitimised peripheral practice and means that the individual is able to seek support in developing their skills, along with a reduction in demands than would be made on members that had been there longer. In terms of Whitfield, new students are not exposed to the full school community for a few weeks after joining as part of induction procedures; or in the case of Y7 for most of the year. Induction procedures also allow for students to learn the artefacts and reifications of the community (broadly, the objects and actions that have particular meaning within

the community). As students become more familiar with practice elements of the community, they move towards the centre, and are expected to become more active within the community. There are hypothesised impacts on the individual's identity. Newer members of the community impact on the community practices, shaping and developing them through their own interpretation of those practices.

At Whitfield, students may be perceived to be more involved with the community of practice through the adoption of practices such as the point's passport, and on track system, as well as through participation in learning and social activities, and potentially in coping with the changes in the dismissal procedures. This encourages students to take more personal responsibility for their learning and behaviour. This, too broadly reflects the process of belonging described in the ToC frameworks.

One of the key elements of the communities of practice model is its relationship with learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) consider that situated learning is a powerful and valid form of learning by which individuals develop skills and knowledge through the communities of practice. In this case, learning does not refer to the school curriculum, reified knowledge, but participatory knowledge in the form of practices, routines and attitudes. Thus, as students become more active participants in the Whitfield community of practice (they develop belonging) it is hoped they are more likely to engage in social and learning activities. The interventions introduced by the management team can be seen as ways in which students are encouraged to become more active participants. However, as this view of the Whitfield community is incomplete, there may be many other areas of learning which are not captured here; for example, students may learn that smoking carries social kudos, and learn how to smoke from their peers. (I note that the HT told me that none of the first Y7 cohort to be taught separately from the rest of the school smoked by the time they got to Y9).

Related to this, and an issue which warrants discussion is what happens when a student does not move on from the position of legitimised peripheral practice. It is possible that students who are perceived not to move on from this position are then excluded from the community?

In terms of the ToC models, "*learning to belong*" (Wenger, 1999, p. 5), would be the process of moving towards a more central position within the community by adopting the practices of the community, which the team seem to suggest is characterised by participation in learning and school social activities, as well as a reduction in

challenging behaviours. Wenger suggests that the experience of belonging plays an important role for the individual in a community of practice, mediating learning and identity development. He suggests three modes of belonging are possible: mutual engagement, imagination, and alignment. Of these, mutual engagement seems most applicable to the analysis here.

Mutual engagement refers to the sense of belonging that comes from engaging with the practices within a community, and entering into a shared meaning in relation to such practices and artefacts. It also describes the community's investment in, and adaptation to the individual. Considering Whitfield, students could be described as being engaged if they participate in the activities on offer, attend lessons and take heed of systems like on track. A student may be said to be engaged if they share the intended meaning of events in the school, for example, understanding that a conversation with the head of governors represents a formal discussion about their place within the community, and an invitation to become more active within it. It is through engagement, Wenger (op cit) argues that members identify themselves as part of the community, and develop skills that are valued by that community. Again, this resonates with the themes that were derived from interviews, as the team appeared to seek to develop student belonging as a means of enabling those students to engage in valuing learning and with the hope that they would be successful in gaining qualifications and in moving onto meaningful post 16 opportunities.

A further aspect of the communities of practice model which seems helpful in exploring the data here relates to the recognition that there is more in the world than just the community of practice, and that communities of practice function within broader societal contexts (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003) . In the case of Whitfield, the community is partially shaped by the national educational context in which it is set, which then impacts on the way in which community practices and activities are developed. This broader context impacts not only on the organisation but on the management team, the staff and the students within the organisation. As I discuss in the theme *a place like this* (p 117), the decisions about the interventions the school could introduce were limited by the need to continue to fulfil their function as a school. This, potentially, has implications for belonging.

Following on from this, whilst mutual engagement in the model seems to closely fit the descriptions of belonging from the senior management team, it may be useful to consider alignment for a moment. Wenger describes alignment as a mode of belonging which involves recognising one's role in something beyond the community of practice, and as such seems to be similar to ideas of belonging to wider social and cultural groupings. The senior management team seemed to want students to experience belonging to their school, but they also appeared to want students to experience something more, to be successful in leaving their school and moving on. For students, this involves sharing values with those wider communities, and considering the possibilities of engaging with them through continued education, apprenticeship or work (ways in which students avoid becoming NEET (DCSF, 2008b) . If students are to be able to achieve this, it might be argued that the team should have considered ways in which the alignment mode of belonging could be developed more strongly, perhaps through curriculum and careers input, work experience placements and so on. It is not possible to say from the interviews with the managers whether attempts at alignment were happening, or to what extent, but the data suggests that belonging was considered primarily at the level of the school by the senior management team.

The two models of community (sense of community and communities of practice) both have something to offer in exploring the process of belonging as it seemed to be conceptualised by the management team. Both offer explanations of the ways in which belonging can facilitate students becoming community members, either through membership aspects outlined in the sense of community model or through the adoption of practices in the community of practice model. Both models seek to explore the impact of community membership on the individual, the way that this changes identity. This has resonance with social identity models, as discussed in the literature review (p 14), reinforcing the idea that belonging to a group leads to viewing oneself differently. Given that the management team at Whitfield appears to perceive the students as disadvantaged and difficult to engage with (see *our kids*, p109), it may be that the function of belonging, for them, is precisely this impact on identity. They are perhaps seeking the gradual transformation of students who they perceive as being alienated from education to students who view themselves as learners, willing to engage with the social and academic demands of school, and who, it is hoped, will have the skills and resilience to move onto post 16 learning.

In this chapter I have used the ToC framework to analyse the interview data from each of the three members of the management team. I have constructed ToC diagrams which outline the interventions that the team appeared to think would develop belonging, and the mechanisms by which this might happen. The interplay between personal experience and community change was noted. The ToCs were discussed in terms of theories of community. What appears to come from this data is the idea that belonging is being considered by the team as transitional; the experience of belonging may change the students' feelings about themselves and school with the result that they may be more likely to engage with learning and to demonstrate less challenging behaviour.

The next chapter explores the management team's views about the context in which they were working, and the potential impact this may have on their views about developing belonging

Chapter 9: Results and Discussion: Contextual Factors Impacting on the Theories of Change

Within a ToC framework, the content of the ToCs are based not just on the goals individuals wish to achieve, but also on their skills, experience and assumptions. These assumptions cover ideas about what actions might lead to what outcomes, and also includes assumptions about the context in which the goals are being achieved, (Anderson, 2006). The next section explores what the team said about aspects of their context, which may give some indication of the assumptions and beliefs underlying the research. These assumptions may have had some impact on the team's understandings of belonging at Whitfield.

The contextual factors considered here were constructed from a bottom-up thematic analysis of the whole data corpus, that is, the themes were not predetermined by the researcher. The themes identified were named ***our kids; robust staff*** and ***a place like this***. These themes will be considered in terms of how they were discussed and described in the interviews, and the implications that this suggests for the SMT's understanding of belonging.

Our Kids

The management team frequently referred in interview to the students at school as "our kids". This appeared, upon consideration, to be shorthand for a description of the students at the school which incorporated ideas about the students being somehow disadvantaged. This theme seemed to be overarching, in that it appeared to pervade each of the interviewee's discussions and was evident at several points in what was said and in what was implemented in school.

A number of different areas of difficulty were raised which served to highlight the difficulties the students encountered, difficulties which were perceived to be more significant in this cohort than in previous years. They included learning difficulties:

“their literacy and communication difficulties”...AHT J.17

“Er, I think we’ve got huge issues around (mobility)... literacy... numeracy probably, certainly social skills.” HT 1.3

“A long time ago through my studies I did quite a bit on emotional intelligence as well. And I think the biggest thing that came out was one was expression and language and describing how they feel, but the other one was it’s not a normal – and I hate that word ‘normal’. It’s not a normal pattern, so they’re really topsy-turvy. So you have some young people with an incredible empathetic nature who can’t identify any feelings they’ve got, and, and I think it’s very topsy-turvy, and I think that’s the nature of EBD”. AHT 1.20

mental health difficulties:

“Yeah. Em, but the children change as well. When I first started they were more physically aggressive. You know? Now, you don’t have the physical as much..you have the more odd behaviour. And that’s why there’s more CAMHS involvement. Em... refusing to work, where there’s no challenge. Yeah, ‘I’m not going to do it,’ full stop. Children maybe’s hurt themselves.....We’ve had one incident, a couple of times, this young chap tried to hang himself, and I was a witness to that. And it wasn’t very nice. Em... so there’s a lot of self harm and, ‘Woe is me.’ A lot of crying... a lot of head banging. You know? And a lot more kids on medication.” DHT 1.6

home life difficulties, including involvement from social care:

“I think we’re used to things being complicated for them, you’ve also got their home lives which chop and change which I think really hinders (belonging), you know.” AHT 1.46

INT *“Do you have more kids in the Looked After system now?”*

DHT *“Em, we do. Last year it was something like 39%. But it’s quite good. And there’s kids in Looked After, the thirty odd percent, and there’s kids in care, that aren’t Looked After, so they’re living with gran or auntie, you know, that sort of thing. That get missed really because you know, grans are getting old, and they can’t cope as much as they could when they were younger, and all the rest of it. Going back to the odd behaviour... sexualised behaviour as well...”*

INT *“And would you say you’ve got more kids who are in the Looked After system or being cared for by family members, than you had 10 years ago?”*

DHT *“Yeah, definitely”*

DHT 1.7

and previous school experiences:

“For your son or daughter, who has been excluded from school permanently, and had 2500 years in the PRU going odd days...they probably haven’t had those opportunities to put their feet down and get included in something”. HT 2.16

This continual focus on the needs of the students, and the challenges that they presented to both teaching staff and management raised concerns for the AHT about whether a sense of belonging was achievable for the students at all.

“And, and I think that in terms of belonging, you’re, you’re moulding a group of very misfit young people into this lovely idea of belonging which is possibly not on their radar in the way they perform” AHT 1.50

She seemed to be concerned about whether they might have the skills to achieve it:

“...a lot of our kids don’t have a sense of belonging at home ... so have they actually got the skills to do it for one, do they know what sense of belonging is, does it just happen?” AHT J.41

Or whether it was something they would even be motivated to experience:

“If we’re, you know, say we’re trying to present that kind of belonging as a family, you know, to some of our young people, that’s your idea of hell. Some of it is like, ‘Well, I don’t know what you’re talking about.’” AHT 1.46

This was not a view held by the whole team:

“See, I think all kids want to belong”. HT 3.15

The AHT’s comments may have been affected by her apparent perception of the school organisation as a pseudo-family experience, which will be discussed under **a place like this** (p 117), but I felt that her comments went further than, in that they implied that belonging to any group may be too difficult for the students at Whitfield.

As has been discussed under the theme **behaviour** (p 75) a further concern raised during the interviews was that increasing student sense of belonging for the students at Whitfield actually appeared to be associated with some risk. The team shared ideas that the students would respond to feelings of belonging by behaving in a more challenging manner than before because they felt safe.

“And I think the other thing about it, and I think the bit we haven’t really addressed yet is, if kids do feel safer and safer then for some of them their behaviour’s going to get worse isn’t it ?” HT 3.12

“So I’m in a bad fettle, therefore I will take it out on all of you lot because I can, you know what I mean, and I will. And no I won’t do this anywhere else, but I can here. And I think that’s their dilemma they’re in”. AHT 1.19

There was some confusion in whether difficulties in belonging for the students would be related to a lack of motivation to belong, or a lack of skills to do so. It was not clear in any of the interviews what individual skills the staff thought would be necessary for a student to achieve a good sense of belonging; although the AHT talked of the students lacking emotional literacy skills and having difficulties with communication especially of their emotions.

Finally, the AHT spent some time exploring the idea that as long as the need to belong is met somewhere, there does not need to be a sense of belonging at school:

But that’s one of my theories, because the (names a mainstream school in the area)’s kids, they belong at home..... so they don’t need to sense allegiance because it gives them the service they provide, whereas a lot of our kids don’t have a sense of belonging at home. AHT J.40

She felt that the students at Whitfield, by and large, did not have this positive experience of belonging at home, and so would need to experience it at school. This leaves the students in somewhat of a double bind; either they have experienced belonging at home, and so do not need it at school, or they have not, in which case they have not developed the motivation or skills to do so. It should be noted that this apparent contradiction in thought may not be a true representation of the AHT’s beliefs, it has not been explicitly checked with her, and has been abstracted from the interview data and may not reflect her true meaning (Silverman, 2006) . However, if it is, it represents a negative appraisal from which it appears impossible for students to escape.

If the management team held views about their students as lacking in terms of learning skills, emotional skills and the skills to belong, it would seem logical that this would affect the choice of intervention used to develop belonging. Reviewing the ToCs, it seems they intended to make the school somewhere where the commitment to belong is easier than it might be in other educational environments. Interventions

were aimed at making Whitfield more accessible and more attractive to the students. This was through differentiation of the lessons, Green Group nurture provision, review of the curriculum, alterations to the environment and provision of more social activities. It is interesting to think that in doing so, the management team were still working within the framework of the organisation as a school, which may have limited some of the actions they would have liked to take. This is discussed further in ***a place like this.***

On the one hand, making the school more attractive can be seen as a pragmatic response; the students at Whitfield were placed in the school precisely because it was felt that their needs could not be met within a mainstream school (in line with SEN legislation, and arguably another example of students being identified as somehow lacking (DfES, 2001). However, the impact of the view that the students were disadvantaged became evident to the HT. She identified an example of a change that was introduced so that students had to get to their lessons themselves instead of being dismissed from the school hall.

“So now, instead of having to go to the dining room every time the bell goes they simply go to their lessons... and they do it and that’s the shocking bit, in some ways...I think it says something about us as a staff team, in that we’d got stuck in old habits...And didn’t have high enough expectations” HT 2.4.

This suggests a level of passivity was expected from the students, perhaps because they were viewed as unable to do things for themselves. They were often considered to be the recipients of services within the school. This appears to have extended to the way in which students were involved in key decisions in the school. The HT noted in her first interview at the start of the research process that:

“ the other structure that needs to come in, is pupil participation, because we’re very poor at actually involving kids in what we’re doing. We do to rather than with” HT 1.24.

I was aware from my educational psychologist role in the school that a student council had been established before the start of the research, but none of the staff discussed this, or any other form of student participation with me during the interviews. This suggests that students may not have been involved in planning the interventions identified in the ToCs.

A second possible impact of the assumptions made about students relates to the way in which peer relationships were discussed. Generally, comments about peers in the interviews were notable by their absence. Where peers were mentioned, it seemed to me that this was to reinforce ideas around the difficulties associated with the students, and perceived difficulties in forming social relationships.

I think peer influence is really strange here, because actually the young people are really... they work as individuals. And I think we teach often with those individuals.... I think because they are so complex, they are individuals. AHT 1.48

There were elements of the management team wanting to control peer influence, through the limited contact with peers during the induction period, and the separation of Y7 from the rest of the school, as was discussed in the theme **knowing and being known** (p 77)

The lack of consideration of peers is particularly interesting given the research on belonging at school discussed in the literature review. Constructs such as liking and acceptance by peers have been found to be positively associated with belonging at school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; McLellan & Morgan, 2008; Willms, 2003) and the views of school held by the peer group appear to influence school liking and behaviour (Juvonen, 2007; Ryan, et al., 1994). It may be that the impact of peers received little consideration from the management team because they did not perceive that they had control over this aspect of the school organisation, or it may be that the assumptions they appeared to hold about the students extended to assumptions about their ability to provide peer support for each other.

The idea that the students in school are disadvantaged may have its roots in current discourses in education. The areas which may have relevance here relate to learner identities, disadvantaged students, and disabled students.

Quinn (2010) discusses learner identities of groups that she described as marginalised, drawing on her work with women in university, young people in jobs without training (JWT) (jobs which do not include training and progression) (Spielhofer et al., 2009) and homeless learners. These learners contrast with the students in this study in that they are all over the age for compulsory education, but may have some similarities, in that those at Whitfield are considered, by virtue of their school placement, to be at the margins of education (Visser & Stokes, 2003). She

identified three conceptualisations of the self which appear to be active in post compulsory education; the authentic self, who is struggling for realisation, but is set free through education; the inescapable self who is limited by the impacts of culture, class or social disadvantage, and therefore cannot fully engage with education; and the self-made self, who can achieve anything through hard work and determination. In her examination of working class white males, she identified that they were often considered unable to engage with learning, due to the limitations considered to be inherent in their authentic selves; or because of the bounds of the inescapable self. Both these were evident in what the team said about the students, as has been discussed above. Students were described in terms of their lack of skills, abilities and motivation to change; and their social difficulties. Whilst Quinn's work has not been directly researched with students in secondary education, it would seem that her work has applicability here which would benefit from further investigation.

In a similar way, Zyngier (2008) argues that there is a discourse active in education related to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Disadvantage becomes equated with deficit in many schools, and is reflected in an attitude that students are not capable of taking on responsibility or planning, and compliance is valued above other forms of engagement. This connection becomes viewed as common sense, and is not open to challenge. The suggestion of a discourse around disadvantage has received some attention in the literature, in terms of race, class, and special educational need (e.g. Dei, 2003; Jupp, 1992; Quinn, 2010).

The impact of this could mean that achieving a sense of belonging at school is more difficult for students who experience disadvantage; especially if the perceived gap between their values and interests and those of the school are large (Zyngier, 2008). It is hard to say whether this is the case at Whitfield, most of the students have had previous negative experiences of school and may similarly feel negatively towards Whitfield. Equally, the students may experience Whitfield as a positive experience in comparison to their previous school(s) and find their values and interests reflected well. This reinforces the view that students should have been more involved with the research process.

A final discourse which may have been active relates to the status of behaviour, emotional and social (BESD) difficulties as a disability within the legislative literature at the time of the research (DfES, 2001). BESD is considered an area of SEND

which compels schools to make reasonable adjustments to include such students, and local authorities to make appropriate provision for them. The fact that Whitfield is designated as a special school for BESD implies that the students within it are disabled. This is perhaps reinforced further through the day to day understanding of special schools as places where disabled (usually learning disabled) students receive their education.

The social model of disability (e.g. Jupp, 1992) explores ideas around the perceptions made of disabled people in society, including perceptions that they are incapable, a pervasive view that extends well beyond any disability they experience, and a consequential view that they should be passive recipients of treatments and services. It is possible that the management team at Whitfield are unconsciously espousing this view of disability because of the way in which the education systems in this local authority are organised.

A final point to be made about the way students appear to be conceptualised in this piece of research relates to the ToCs developed during and after the research. I noted some concern that the ToCs developed after phase 1 were not representative enough of the management team's views, and had perhaps been influenced too much by my own thoughts. These diagrams indicate that a pre-condition of belonging is having positive relationships with peers, (the green boxes). This appears to stand in contrast to what has been discussed here, and perhaps indicate that I had, indeed, moved away from the team's views in producing the ToCs.

Following on from the views that the team appeared to hold about the students, a second set of beliefs about the context of the school seemed to be related to perceptions of the staff.

Robust Staff

Assumptions about the staff are described here as a separate theme, although in many ways during the interviews they were discussed as a feature of the school organisation. Here, comments made specifically about the staff alone are considered.

The management team generally described the staff (teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) in positive terms. They were identified as "*a great staff team*" DHT 1.81, "*a very positive staff team... I think with a, with what you consider to be a good*

sense of belonging amongst them...And a good set of skills.” HT 1.7. “I think the LSAs do love the kids.” HT 3.32

The fact that a key ***mechanism of belonging*** suggested by the team was relationships with staff suggests that they consider the staff to be an important way of developing belonging in school. As has been discussed (p 85), many of the interventions in school appeared to be designed to allow opportunities for these relationships to develop and thrive. The same could not be said for opportunities to develop peer relationships.

Where concerns were identified with staff, they related in the main to the attitude that some staff displayed towards their role within a special school.

“Because I still feel very strongly if you come to work in SE (social-emotional) Setting, you shouldn’t expect to be working in a mainstream setting when it suits you to do that and not at other times. I think, you know, when you come to work in an SE school, you work all day so obviously my values clash.” HT 2.8

“but I think that sometimes people lose the sight a little bit....There’s lots of talk at the end of term about the kids getting up people’s nose. They need to step back a bit and remember this is a special school the kids have needs we need to meet those.” DHT 1.81

The suggestion that the staff must behave differently from mainstream school staff because the students are different once again links into ideas discussed in the ***our kids*** theme, suggesting that the students are somehow disadvantaged. It is not clear from these quotations whether the staff shared the perceptions about students that the senior management team did; or whether, in fact, the staff behaviour indicated that they did not perceive the students as requiring special treatment. However, from my knowledge of the staff team in my educational psychologist role, I perceive they pride themselves on their strong relationships with each other precisely because they perceive that the students they are dealing with are challenging. The strong relationships they have with each other is a valued source of support in the face of such challenge.

A Place Like This

One of the main aspects of the organisation that the team touched on was to do with the mobility of the students. It is perhaps helpful to reiterate at this point that because the school is a special school in a large local authority, it draws its

catchment from a large area, with students often travelling a long distance each school day. Students can be put onto the school role, and taken off at any time in the school year in response to their changing educational status (in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Needs or not, requiring special school education or not, for example (DfES, 2001) and in response to a change in home address. Some students will be moved on from the school mid-way through the year because the management team, in conjunction with staff from the local authority and child's parents or carers believe that Whitfield can no longer meet their needs as discussed above. The management team said that student mobility was one of the features of the school organisation they felt impacted most strongly on belonging because of the impact it had on the school climate.

At the start of my research, mobility was considered to be a major factor affecting the school. The DHT noted that: "*The last two years it's (mobility) been around the 50% range*". DHT 1.41, which indicates that at the start of the school year, the school was only half full, and around 35 students joined the community during the year.

"Mobility impacts on the ability to have a sense of belonging, for those joining and those already there. There's no opportunity for assimilation. Chaos, kids coming from chaos into chaos." HT 1.5

"I'm much more aware of the transitional nature of the school. So I'm much more aware that say my tutor group.... in the two terms I've been there, we've had three extra people. So our group has gone from kind of five, six, to eight". AHT 1.5

Whilst this situation did improve in the 3 years of the project, in that there were substantially fewer moves in or out of the school during the school year, there remained issues around the impact of a high level of student mobility; and the team were of the view the frequently changing nature of the organisation affected the possibility of belonging for the students.

"We will never achieve belonging because it's a community that's always disrupted. It's disrupted constantly with new kids coming in, and I think that will always create a potentially very unstable environment to work with and to be with kids. So, I think that's going to be one of the biggest factors in it, and that won't change, that's the nature of the beast isn't it". HT 3.15

A further issue that became clear to me during the research, although it was touched on only lightly by the interviewees was to do with the fact that Whitfield is a school.

Although this seems obvious, the impact of the organisation functioning as a school may have implications for the possibility of belonging there. During interviews, the team talked about teaching and learning requirements, lessons, and the need for the students to achieve qualifications; agendas which are associated with schooling. The management team were therefore trying to develop a sense of belonging which could incorporate these things, arguably a more difficult challenge than if these elements were not present in the organisation.

“INT: What about a kid then who is maybe having conversations with his peers, spending time wandering down the back end of a field, does he have a sense of belonging?”

HT Yeah.

INT Okay. Is that what you're trying to cultivate?

HT No, I'd prefer him in the school. Having a sense of belonging”.

HT 3.14

Because of the boundaries on the organisation which were there because it is a school, there appeared to be some students for whom the team thought that belonging was not possible. The AHT discussed a student with me who *“when I first met her, she was the little girl who literally you just used to see her spasmodically playing Lego behind HT's desk”*. AHT 1.15, and for whom it was felt that a more specialised, alternative education package might be necessary. The decision about changing her educational placement appeared to be based on the perception that the behaviours she showed were preventing her from participating in those activities which were to do with schooling, and were therefore non-negotiable. There was a perception from key staff in the school that this student would not be able to change her behaviour in order to participate; and so she would need to change schools. This makes belonging contingent on participation, and on perceived possibility of change.

A final aspect of the school community which the team appeared to think was important in terms of belonging was the way in which the school community resembled a family. This appeared to infiltrate the whole organisation, with the senior leaders perceived as taking a parental role

“Em, sense of belonging I think first and foremost is Whitfield is set up and has a feel of a family situation.” AHT 1.1

“there’s been huge change, you know, dad’s left, mum’s took over, and the uncle’s stepped in (laughter) sort of thing. So, yeah, um, the kids responded quite poor to start with” DHT 1.11

“But I think it is more the expectation that ‘you are part of this school and you are part of this family which is made up of staff, students, other people who aren’t teaching staff’. AHT 1.3

This is felt to have some advantages for the students,

“Belonging is.....and it’s being a mum and a dad. And it’s showing them what’s right and wrong I guess because a lot of them, not all of them, a lot of them haven’t got that at home.” DHT 3.25

“we would pull in our Chair of Governors now to actually have those conversations with them. All of which includes them in a big family, a big family that’s actually involved and worried about how they’re getting on”. HT 3.9

and, has been discussed above (see **Our Kids**), some disadvantages;

“It always makes me think, because it is like a family at Whitfield, does that mean I can kick off more and everything because at the end of the day they will always love me, it’s the first steps, a fresh start..” .AHT J.43

Taking these elements of the school community together, it seems that the management team believe that there is a relationship between school climate and belonging. The impact of students belonging is to make the environment feel calmer. Belonging is more difficult if there are lots of changes in the student body; and easier if there is more consistency. Belonging is more difficult because of the constraints on the organisation that come from it being a school, and which therefore requires a participatory response from the students, but easier if the school gives students pseudo- family experiences. Interestingly, whilst classroom and school climate have been identified as features impacting on belonging (Frederickson & Petrides, 2013; Willms, 2003) none of the factors mentioned here have been specifically researched. These factors, then may be specific to Whitfield’s context, or to that of special schools for children with social and emotional difficulties and would benefit from further investigation.

Summary

This sequence of chapters has considered how the senior managers at Whitfield school appeared to understand belonging. Semantic thematic analysis of the interview data allowed for an exploration of what the team appeared to think were the main components of a sense of belonging whilst analysis using the ToC framework allowed for exploration of the actions taken in relation to developing belonging. Theories of community appear to be most helpful in considering the complex interactions identified between the school and the individual, with both the sense of community model and the communities of practice model offering ways of explaining some of the apparent intentions of the team; to shape student identity, through processes of influence, or embedding into the community of practice so that students will be more likely to be successful in learning, social development and post 16 transition. Whilst a number of similarities between the understandings of the Whitfield team and the literature have been identified, there are also some key differences, for example the absence of consideration of the peer group in developing belonging. Differences appear to relate to the team's assumptions about their particular context and the nature of the students at the school.

The next chapter discusses the use of the ToC approach in the research, and explores some of the factors that impacted on the use of this approach.

Chapter 10: Results and Discussion: Reflection on the Research

This chapter is split into two main sections. The first explores factors which I feel impacted on the research and how these were contextualised in the interview transcripts. The second section contains some reflections on the research which come from my own reflections.

Through the process of carrying out the research, I noted some factors which appeared to impact on the team's ability to engage with the ToC process. As has already been discussed, one of the key difficulties encountered related to the availability of the researcher, and the impact this had both on the time the project took and the data that could be collected. Further difficulties were identified through the interview data, and, it is suggested that these too had some impact on the research. These themes discussed here are; ***challenges for the senior management team; the use of another consultant; and the relationship with the researcher.***

Challenges for the Management Team

As has already been noted, the research took place at a time when the school was going through major changes, particular at the level of the management team. These changes are summarised in Figure 2 (p 48). The number of changes of the leadership team over the 3 years I was working with them arguably impacted both on the development of the school and of the research process. The impact on the development of the school was mentioned under the theme of ***a place like this,*** where the staff talked about the changes in the sense of a family (*"dad's left, mum's took over, and the uncle's stepped in"* DHT 1.11).

In terms of the research, the changes in the management team meant that staff were often unsure of their roles which sometimes made it difficult for them to think about the development of the school; I had a sense that the AHT, particularly, coped with her new role by focusing on her 'bit of the picture' rather than the whole;

“INT So if you’ve got a plan as a senior leadership team which is about improving sense of belonging, is that right, amongst the kids, how will you know that it’s been successful?”

AHT That’s DHT’s department.

INT Oh, okay. So that’s the deputy head’s.....

AHT I mean, I think – no it isn’t, of course it isn’t, but I think for me it’s in terms of... for me it’s in terms of achievement and it’s in terms of progress.”

AHT 1.21

Not that this was necessarily perceived negatively by other interviewees;

“It’s because AHT is managing on her own in teaching, reporting back in... I mean AHT is absolutely appropriate isn’t she? Motor off, do it myself, clock in, yes that’s okay, off you go.” HT 2.22

But raised questions for me about how the staff understood what was happening in their school, and the understanding of belonging in this context.

I often felt that the team were overwhelmed by their new roles and the impact this had on their day to day workload, which meant they were not always able to spend time reflecting on the whole school context.

“our roles, for those who stepped up, weren’t really defined. It was difficult to, you know, to put a stamp on what you actually did. Yes, you could give people jobs to do, which isn’t leadership. But, em, you know, to expect somebody to lead without....and I think there was....both of us..I think we, and some still do, struggle with the idea, it’s leadership, not jobs....DHT 1.11

In terms of the research process, the demands on the staff meant it was often difficult for them to find the time to be interviewed by me, or to meet and discuss the TOC plans with me. As, perhaps, an indication of this, all my interviews with the HT and two of the three with the DHT were subject to interruption, whilst the AHT arranged for us to meet in school holiday time to ensure that she had the time to talk with me.

A further issue for the management team appeared to relate to their on-going relationships. I was aware from my knowledge of the team that they struggled at times to work well together; which is perhaps unsurprising given how new they were as a management team. This was partly due to the working styles of different team members in terms of how they organised themselves, how they completed tasks and

how they generated ideas. If the team had been consistent over a longer period of time, they may have been able to accommodate these differences in each other, but this did not happen. Both the HT and DHT referred in interview to the difficulties they were encountering, and again, I wondered how much this impacted on their capacity to engage in school development work together. As the HT noted in her final interview with me:

“HT: I think we all have a clearer understanding of our roles. And a clearer understanding of the teams we lead. But I think we don’t speak a common language, we can’t find a mechanism for talking together...and so we role play being a team.

INT So how important is it to you that you guys are a team? For you to be able to have student sense of belonging?

HT: Me? Really important. It would be easier if we had the team, if we all spoke the same language. I’m not sure that’s possible. HT 3.20

Differences of opinion are not uncommon in ToC research. Indeed, from its origins in social policy work (Brown, 1995) it had been noted that ToCs are helpful in bringing together the diverse views and goals of different stakeholders in a process. From observation, the team appeared to manage their difficulties by assigning very clear areas of responsibility to each of the members, as discussed above. This again lead me to wonder whether all of them had the opportunity to really contribute to the development plan for the school, encompassed in the mission statement that the HT told me about: additional and different; progression for all; and sense of belonging.

Finally, there were challenges in involving the rest of the school in the changes that were taking place. There was an awareness that *“the school improvement plan is totally top down...waiting for the leadership team” HT 1.25* alongside a desire that *“...the SIP (school improvement plan) needs to be owned by everybody truly” HT 1.26*. It did not seem that this was possible over the time of the interviews, possibly because of the difficulties that team were facing in forming themselves as a team, and also because of an awareness of the needs of the school community as a whole:

“... em, because... and we made a quite strategic decision that we’d roll this out slowly and gently..... because everything is changing and everything is changing here.” AHT 1.8

As has already been mentioned, I had hoped at the start of the project to be able to involve other groups in data collection or in shaping up ideas around student belonging. That this did not happen was disappointing, and runs counter to the principles of the original ToC approach, where all stakeholders are involved and consulted. In hindsight, it would have been better to seek a way of involving other groups, such as the wider staff team, the students themselves and their carers; although to do so would have meant taking much more of a directive role in the research process.

Use of Another Consultant

“you know, she’s been our guru.” DHT2.37

During our first phase of interviews, I was aware that the HT and DHT were employing an external consultant to work with them. She was initially involved with the remit of supporting each member of the team’s induction into their new roles. However, by the time of the second phase of interviews, the same consultant was working with the whole team not only on their respective roles and relationships, but also on the school vision. *“it was (developed) very much in consultation with BK (the consultant)” DHT 3.2*

I wanted to explore this a little further in the third phase of interviews, as I was interested in how the staff understood her involvement alongside mine. The HT identified that:

“we’ve worked with her and another consultant in terms of talking about kids, and what works and what might not work. And we tried to see how that fits into this environment because remember we’re talking about a culture change”. HT 3.12

of particular value had been

External conversations, reflective conversations, different ideas, different ways of working, and opportunities to talk about it and reflect upon it. And opportunities to bring someone back in who keeps us on task with what we set out to do, as opposed to letting it just drift away from the beginnings of where we started. And you come back in a year’s time and say, oh we forgot about that bit. HT 3.21

"I think somebody who speaks my language. Who really does have kids at heart of what she wants to do, truly, without being twee about it. And I think a realism about what is achievable. And an understanding of the school, where it's come from and where it wants to go to. And someone who can actually put some frameworks on your thinking. So you can talk about stuff and someone else will come back and give you the framework. It's actually what you've talked about, it's just that I haven't been able to put it into an accessible format I suppose. And I think that's been the most helpful. Plus, I mean you could have gone out of school couldn't you, and researched different places. In order to do different things, but actually, you'd end up with 20 different models and none of them would be right for you. So I think BK's also brought in different ways of thinking that we can actually say, hmm no, we'll have a go at that bit, and we'll pick up--," HT 3.22

In many ways, the work that was valued with the consultant echoes what is considered of value in the ToC approach. The HT talked of culture change which is developed specifically for this environment (instead of copying from a plethora of other models) which is at the heart of ToC approaches (Weiss, 1995). She felt that the consultant had provided her with a helpful framework following opportunities to reflect on her thinking, and an approach which helped keep them on task, and not let things drift away. Give ref that suggests that this is all key within a TOC approach.

It is common for school leadership teams to use a range of consultants in order to help them develop their vision and support their planning. The School Improvement Partner (now Education Development Partner) model was designed to support just this. The use of another consultant is not, in itself, problematic to the use of a ToC approach. However, I felt that in this instance it was difficult for the management team to engage with a planning process with the consultant, and then to engage fully in the ToC process with me.

Relationship between the Researcher and the Management Team

At the inception of the project, I had been working in Whitfield School for around 5 years as the school's Educational Psychologist. I felt I had good relationships with the HT and with the person that later became the AHT, and was familiar with all of the staff and many of the students. At times during the project, I wondered whether this previous relationship had led to a number of assumptions and actions which were, in hindsight, not helpful.

I had hoped to work in a collaborative way with the management team, using the research to help plan and focus the actions they wanted to take as part of their jobs.

Collaborative research has the potential to promote change, allow sharing of insight between researchers and participants, and respect research contexts, (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010). This fitted well with my research aims, and also allowed me to respect the knowledge and experience of the school management team. I felt a collaborative approach allowed me to mitigate the issues of power which can occur in research (Willig, 2008)

In the research, I wanted to facilitate the management team in order to help them make conscious their ideas about what might impact on belonging and in leading the school through planned change. I had hoped that I might be able to support the process of data collection in order to explore indicators of success as the process developed as an adjunct to data that was already being collected in school.

In hindsight, I believe that I did not articulate this position clearly enough to the staff at the point of setting up the project and that failing to do this led to issues of engagement with the ToC process. It was unfortunate that soon after I arranged this project with the school, my available time to the school was significantly reduced, which did impact on my ability to support data collection, and also, possibly, meant that I was not around to clarify issues about our respective roles as they arose. This potentially compounded the problem because my role inevitably changed, and this was perhaps not negotiated well enough with the team. I feel that because of a lack of clarity about who owned the ToC, the process stalled. Had we not known each other at the start of this project, it is possible we would have spent more time negotiating and clarifying our respective roles in the work before the research started. This is noted as a key challenge in collaborative research, (Costley et al., 2010).

A further aspect became clearer in the data analysis; where I identified a theme of 'helpfulness' running through some of the interviews, particularly with the HT. In the conversations, there are occasions when she questions me with a variation of, 'what would be most helpful to you?' and I respond with a similar comment about 'wanting to do what is most helpful to her'. This discussion of being helpful reflects a strong relationship between us, and a desire to support each other (me, supporting her in her role, and her supporting me in my doctoral studies) but suggests that at those times our focus is not wholly on the development of the school.

There may have been positive aspects of the relationship between myself and the team which facilitated the research. There were lots of aspects of the school

community which the team did not have to spend time explaining to me, because I knew the context well, and an element of shared knowledge of education which allowed us to explore issues at a deeper level than may have been possible if the staff did not know about my knowledge of education (Coar & Sim, 2006). Similarly, there were times when, I felt, the team were able to be open with me about their concerns about each other, and the students in a way that they might not have done if they did not know me (Garton & Copland, 2010).

However, as Coar and Sim (2006) note, being interviewed by a peer, especially one with a similar vocational background can lead to anxiety for the interviewee in terms of concerns about their performance. It can feel as though their knowledge is being tested, and they are being evaluated. I identified this as a potential issue in my interview with the AHT who expressed a little concern at the end of the interview that she had not prepared enough for it.

At the start of the research, I expressed an interest in linking the researcher role with my work as an EP. I had questioned myself during the process about whether the difficulties encountered were related to my dual roles in school. However, on further reflection, I believe that the issues experienced were not as a result of the EP role itself, but were partly attributable to my relationships with the management team, and how this affected our behaviour. My relationship with the team arose because of my presence in school as an EP, and EPs do tend to have on-going relationships with the staff in the school in which they work. This is, therefore, something that EPs need to be careful of in their research roles.

Further Research Reflections

This section includes brief reflections on two aspects of the research process, the partial nature of the data and a further discussion of the ethics of the research.

Whilst the research questions focused data collection on the views of the management team and the systems and processes that could support belonging, this presents an incomplete picture of the school, and therefore other factors that might support belonging there. As I have discussed, there is no data relating to peer relationships in the school and how the day to day experience of students might be affected by the other students around them. There is a lot of research on the importance of peers, particularly during adolescence, and they can undoubtedly have a positive or negative impact on school experience. This is powerfully highlighted in

observations of Maggie's day at school where engagement in formal learning activities and relationships with staff was minimal in comparison to the opportunity to spend time having fun with friends (Thompson, 2010). Peer relationships are considered an important component in belonging for many researchers (e.g. Frederickson and Petrides, 2013; Furrer and Skinner, 2003; Ryan et al, 1994). The real experience of students at Whitfield is not captured in this research, and so opportunities to consider other factors which may impact on belonging are not available for further exploration.

It is disappointing that I did not find opportunities to work with the students as part of this research, and I feel that not doing so was a missed opportunity. On a practical level, who better to comment on their belonging at school than the students themselves? Ethically, it seems strange to discuss an inclusive concept like belonging without affording the students the opportunity to collaborate in developing their own belonging, and reflects a power imbalance in the research, with the students being research 'on' instead of being researched 'with' (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This was particularly so in the use of the questionnaire survey, which was poorly planned on my part, and highlights this discrepancy for me. Inclusion of students in discussions about concepts such as engagement remains unusual (Zyngier, 2008). Zyngier feels that this reflects the conceptualisation of students as products of education; in this instance, I feel that it reflects a perception of students as incapable of contributing to the discussion. In retrospect, I wonder if I should have asserted the need to work with students more strongly as part of the ToC development, and whether I too was unconsciously drawn into the team's apparent perceptions of the students. However, to do so may have had implications for my role as the researcher, and may have affected the relationship between me and the management team.

Chapter 11: Conclusions

This research sought to contribute to the wealth of literature on student emotional wellbeing. Belonging is considered to be an important component in emotional wellbeing (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and motivation (Maslow and Lowry, 1968; Deci and Ryan, 2000), and a lack of sense of belonging has been associated with loss of this emotional wellness, and vulnerability to depression (Hagerty et al, 1992). There has been some interest in developing student sense of belonging at school, and some work has been undertaken reviewing possible components of belonging, and associated with belonging in school settings (e.g. Frederickson and Baxter, 2009; McLellan and Morgan, 2008). However, it is noted that this work has been difficult, with lack of agreement about the concept, and considerable overlap with other allied concepts such as relatedness (e.g. Ryan and Deci, 2000b), engagement (e.g. Zyngier, 2008) and participation (e.g. Finn, 1989). Programmes to develop sense of belonging at school are rare and have met with difficulties in implementation (e.g. Battistich et al, 1995).

As a practitioner, I wanted to support the staff I work with to apply insights from the literature, and did so by working with the management team in a special school for children with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties to explore how they could develop student sense of belonging. Using a theory of change approach with one school management team allowed for exploration of their understandings of belonging, and how these understandings then led to interventions intended to develop student sense of belonging. In this way, it was hoped that interventions would be tailored to the school context, thus avoiding the implementation difficulties found in previous research. I was also interested to see how the real life understandings belonging held by school practitioners reflected those found in the literature.

This chapter summarises the research outcomes and suggests areas for further research and development. The links between my research outcomes and the literature are explored. It should be noted that more detailed reflections on the outcomes and the research process are discussed in the previous chapters, and so will only be briefly touched on here. The conclusions are discussed in terms of the two research questions, the students, the use of theory of change and the role of the researcher.

Understandings about Belonging

The first research question developed was 'what understandings do the management team in school hold about belonging?' This was important to explore because I believed that the understandings that people held about belonging would influence the actions they took to develop student sense of belonging. My results suggest that two distinct conceptualisations of belonging may be helpful; those of belonging as experience, which describes in the intra-personal experience of belonging, and belonging as transition which describes the dynamic inter-relationship between the individual and the community to which they belong.

The management team's views about the experience of belonging shares much with the extant literature. The management team thought belonging was a combination of positive affect including feelings of safety and welcome, and cognitions about being known and valued and part of a community. This links closely with Hagerty et al's (1996) work on sense of belonging and fit. Belonging was thought by the team to be related to positive relationships with staff at school and to be developed through those relationships and through conversations. It was thought that having a good sense of belonging would impact on learning and behaviour, which would have associated benefits to the school community, making it a calmer place. This again echoes much within the work on belongingness, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and more specifically belonging at school, which emphasises the importance of relationships, (e.g. Frederickson and Baxter, 2009; Osterman, 2000).

Using the ToC framework to analyse the interviews suggested that belonging might also describe a process of change for the individual, and for the organisation. This is rather like Piaget's view of schema development, which suggests that knowledge develops through interlinking new pieces of information into schemata. The new knowledge is assimilated into the schema, and the schema adapts (changes) to include it, (Piaget, Cook, & Norton, 1952). In this way it seems, individuals are assimilated into a community, and the community adapts to accommodate them. This presents a different view of belonging as dynamic, and as a means of helping the individual become part of a community, or a deeper part of that community, and as such was labelled belonging as transition. This is in contrast to belonging as experience which appears more binary (it is either present or it is not) and static.

The conceptualisation of belonging as transition add another dimension to considerations of belonging at school, which has taken individual experience and individual benefit squarely as the focus. Belonging as transition suggests that there is an ongoing process of negotiation between the individual and the community, which involves change for both as belonging occurs. There is some resonance with the literature here, from theories of identity development (p 14), although this has not been specifically applied to the experience of belonging at school. Ideas of belonging as a process, and of mutual change also occur in the literature about sense of community. There seems to be a great deal within the literature on sense of community which could be fruitful for those seeking to develop belonging at school. Both the sense of community model (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) offer opportunities to consider belonging in this way, and offer dimensions which could be considered by school administrators seeking to develop sense of belonging.

The Impact of Interventions to Develop Student Sense of Belonging

The second research question I attempted to address was ‘what is the impact on students’ belonging of actions, interventions or strategies introduced to develop belonging’. It is much more difficult to draw conclusions here because of the difficulties experienced in the research process. Had I followed the original research design, I was hopeful that I could have gathered data relating to the impact of interventions which stemmed from the management team’s understanding of what would be helpful to develop belonging. This would have given ideas about how successful strategies to develop student sense of belonging were in this context. As it was, the data I collected related to the identification of possible interventions to develop belonging, and some anecdotal data which was meaningful to the management team on the impact of those strategies.

Reviewing the interventions that the management team discussed in interview, they seemed to cluster into two key areas;

- systems which facilitate the development of relationships between staff and students in school
- differentiation of the school experience, including learning activities and social activities to be more attractive and accessible to students.

Interestingly, the focus on relationship development was very clearly between students and staff, not peer relationships, which runs counter to much of the literature in this area. I have discussed this further below in the section on students.

There is mention in the literature of the importance of staff relationships, and this research strengthens the view that this as a possible area for those seeking to develop student sense of belonging at school. Relationships with staff is thought to be a contributing factor to belonging for school connectedness, (Murdoch, 1999) and relatedness (Ryan, Stiller and Lynch, 1994). The management team were particularly interested in the formal and informal conversations that can support relationship development, and thereby belonging. It was not clear what the key elements of a helpful conversation were in this instance, and it may be helpful to consider this further and more explicitly in the future.

The potential of differentiating school experiences to make them more attractive has received little attention from researchers. There are challenges for schools in how far they can go in implementing interventions to make schools accessible and attractive to students to develop belonging, whilst still adhering to the prescribed functions of a school, as outlined by organisations like Ofsted and examination boards. The work on extra-curricular activities and belonging may be one such way in which this can be addressed (see, for example, Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; Darling, 2005) but research in this area to date has been small scale and not explicitly belonging focused. Students are unlikely to have a sense of belonging to a school where they can feel attracted by lunchtime or after school activities, but feel marginalised by the taught curriculum. Quinn (2010) notes that learners whose strengths and interests are not reflected in the taught curriculum can feel marginalised. Further, some writers consider that too strong a focus on attracting students can have detrimental effects on learning. Harris (2008) cautions from her research that when teachers seek to increase student psychological engagement in learning (which includes sense of belonging), they tend to lower the cognitive demands of their teaching in favour of increasing affect, and warns against programmes designed to make students just feel good.

Some writers suggest that simply making schools attractive will not ultimately enable belonging. For example (Dei, 2003) urges schools to draw alongside students; to tune into and to value their cultural knowledge and use this to structure learning; and

Zyngier (2008) argues for a review of the system to involve students in an authentic, generative pedagogy to which they can truly contribute. But this may be challenging to set against the demands of the national curriculum and judgements from Ofsted.

Notwithstanding these concerns, there does seem to be something here that would benefit from further consideration. School administrators could be encouraged to think about how they can adapt curriculum and social experiences for their learners, perhaps bearing in mind Willms (2003) suggestion that around 17% of learners in compulsory schooling the UK experience low sense of belonging, and that this is clustered around the most and least academically achieving students.

Students

Students were notable by their absence in this research. They were not included as part of the research process and featured very little in the Theories of Change, suggesting they were not considered by the management team to be a potential resource in developing student sense of belonging at school. I have discussed the former in more detail under Further Research Reflections (p 128).

The management team appeared to think about the students as disadvantaged, with several areas of difficulty in their lives. They were unsure as to whether the students would be able to experience belonging, and, if they did, were concerned about whether this would in fact make the students more challenging. Strategies involving peer support were not suggested as means of developing student sense of belonging. The apparent conceptualisation of the student body may well have influenced the management team's views of belonging for their students, as well as the strategies that could help develop belonging.

It may be that the management team did not feel they had the same level of control over the students as they did over other aspects of the school community (such as the actions of staff and school systems) and this is why they did not think about them as a means by which belonging is developed. It may also be that the unique features of the school and this peer group precluded against it. Students were identified as experiencing BESD (Behavioural, Social and Emotional Difficulties), there was noted to be high mobility in the school population, and students were drawn from a wide catchment area. All of these might reasonably be expected to impact on the student experience of belonging, and the ability of the students to support each other's sense

of belonging. However, there is some evidence that the views held by the team about the students as disadvantaged precluded them from being considered as a resource.

The difference between the management team's apparent views about the importance of students as peers, and the literature on the importance of peers for belonging is striking (e.g. Juvonen, 2007). Several writers consider perception of peer relationships as being a key component of belonging (McLellan and Morgan, 2008; You et al, 2010) or contributes to a stronger sense of belonging in school, (Frederickson and Petrides, 2013). Further research would be helpful in exploring whether the management team's views in this instance are found elsewhere, for example in other special schools (as a result, perhaps, of their consideration of students as disabled, see p116) or whether the ToC framework does indeed encourage school managers to think only of their own resources rather than those across the school organisation.

My lack of inclusion of students in the research process was a significant methodological error. At the conceptualisation of the research, I had hoped that I would be consulting with students as part of the implementation of the ToC that would have been developed with the management team. However, I now think it would have been more appropriate to include a wider range of key groups from the very start in the development of the ToCs, especially the students. It seems in retrospect, very difficult to draw any conclusions about student sense of belonging at school without recourse to the students themselves, as they may have different perceptions about their own sense of belonging than those that teach them. To not include them presents an ethical challenge too. If research seeks to be emancipatory (Robson, 2002) or at the very least to avoid replicating power imbalances (Willig, 2008) then the students should have been more centrally involved in an inclusive research process.

The pervasive impact of views about student disadvantage were a surprising outcome of the research for me. I have been forced to reflect on my own role in perpetuating a discourse of disadvantage in this research and in my own practice. If I have done so, it has been because I have wanted to help and support families, and act as an advocate for them. I have no doubt that the management team at Whitfield feel the same way. However, it seems that this is no longer enough, and that I should, as a researcher and psychologist be more aware of such discourses and be

more prepared to challenge them. For me, this means a stronger focus on collaborating with children and young people in all areas of my work.

Theory of Change

Turning now to consideration of the research process. This was a difficult piece of research to undertake and involved a great deal of rethinking and revision as the research process unfolded. Theory of change was not used as originally planned, and I feel that I underestimated the resources that would have been required to do so, in terms of time and also in terms of the need to lead the research process more clearly. There were confusions over the relative contributions to the research process from myself and the management team, and a lack of negotiation of roles at the start, and throughout the project. Much of the learning here is personal. I am aware of a greater need to plan carefully in research projects and to ensure that time and resources are clearly identified before beginning any research process.

The framework for the research was theory of change, and was based on the Anderson (2006) model, which focused on the iteration of long term outcomes, pre-conditions (for that outcome), interventions which would lead to the pre-conditions being met and indicators of success. As the research developed this framework was used as an analytic tool rather than a planning or evaluation tool; as a means of exploring the link between the management team's beliefs or assumptions about belonging and the actions that they subsequently took. I am not aware of ToC being used in this purely analytic way in other research approaches; and felt it would be helpful to consider the benefits and disadvantages of doing so here. My conclusions are made tenuously, as I had not planned at the project inception to use the framework in this way, and, had I done so, may have collected my data differently.

I found the ToC framework helpful in providing a different approach to data analysis alongside thematic analysis. It encouraged me to try and explicitly link things that the participants talked about, to make connections that I might not otherwise have done. The approach appealed to me because it enabled me to make connections between beliefs and actions; which is a strong theme in cognitive behavioural therapeutic approaches, and is part of my preferred way of working as a psychologist. In this way, I was reminded that change in organisations is driven by the people within those organisations; and by the beliefs and assumptions they bring with them. The theory of change framework brought me to consider the organisational changes that were

necessary to facilitate student belonging in a way that I do not think thematic analysis would have done.

However, I felt there were some disadvantages to using ToC purely as an analytic tool, which is perhaps unsurprising for a tool that was not developed to be used in this way. The approach didn't allow me to take account of all the data in the interviews; hence thematic analysis was required alongside to better capture all that was said about belonging. I struggled with how much of my own views and ideas were represented in the ToCs, particularly in those that were drawn up after the first phase of interviews. This collaborative approach seems appropriate for ToC as a planning and evaluation tool (see, for example, Sullivan and Stewart (2006)) but was less helpful when I was seeking to elucidate others' understandings of belonging.

If ToC is to be used as an analytic tool, I would suggest that it would be helpful for researchers seeking to generate and analyse data where the research questions are about exploring the reasons for change and how to make change happen. However, even then, I think caution would be needed to ensure that all of the data corpus is captured using this approach.

The Role of the Researcher

I have already touched on some aspects of the researcher role above and in Chapter 10, see p 126. However, brief conclusions are reiterated here and relate particularly to the challenges and opportunities for the educational psychologist as researcher. EPs have long sought to develop their role in research (MacKay, 1997) alongside the other activities that are part of the job, and are well placed to do so given their skills set and relationships with schools.

Educational psychologists often have on-going relationships with the schools they work in. This presents positive opportunities to negotiate and carry out research in those organisations, and with people that they know relatively well. Knowing an organisation allows the researcher to be sensitised to opportunities for rich data collection (Coar and Sim, 2006). In this instance, the research would not have occurred without the pre-existing relationship I had with the school, and the shared values that we held relating to student social and emotional well-being. Educational psychologists know education systems and school organisations well; and this presents good opportunities for collaborative research with those schools; removing

some of the barriers to understanding that may occur with researchers who don't know the 'territory' (Garton and Copland, 2010).

However, working as an educational psychologist and researching those I knew well on a school senior management team presented some particular challenges; I felt that there was little initial negotiation of our respective roles and expectations of one another, and this led to confusion over our relative contributions to the process. This was particularly notable in the development of the ToCs, where our unclear expectations of one another (my hope for more collaborative development and their hope for clear answers) led to the process stalling. In retrospect, I needed to negotiate a clearer leadership role in the process, and this needed to be agreed with the management team. Educational psychologists need to have cognisance of the need to negotiate their researcher role, particularly in school settings where other expectations of the educational psychologist role might affect or limit perceptions of what and how they can work.

A further element affecting the research came from our respective desire to be helpful to one another, perhaps to preserve our positive relationship. This, at times appeared to override the research itself. On a personal level, there has been some anxiety in presenting research findings back, particularly where they could be considered to be critical of Whitfield School. This is true of much research, but the stakes are higher where professional relationships could be seen to be at risk. Educational psychologists should be particularly vigilant to the impact of their previous relationships with staff on the way staff present themselves through research, whether they are intimidated, as Garton and Copland (2010) suggest, or overly helpful as in this research; and the way that this may affect research validity.

Belonging at school is important, and it is challenging. Around one in six of our children doesn't feel they have good belonging at school, despite spending a substantial number of hours there every week, which leaves them potentially vulnerable. Teachers want to develop belonging, but do not know what to do for the best. This work encourages teachers and school administrators to focus on belonging as transition as well as belonging as experience; which means to think about the community as much as the individual student, and on facilitating the inter-twining development of both. It suggests that students will have a better sense of

belonging if conscious steps are taken to make the school more attractive and more accessible. Staff should be encouraged that relationships with staff and the conversations that stem from them are a key component in supporting student sense of belonging.

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Appendices

- A. Information and consent forms for staff
- B. Interview schedules: interviews 1, 2, 3.
- C. Information and consent forms for students
- D. Instructions and sample questionnaire
- E. Summary of interventions introduced by management team at Whitfield
- F. Sample themes checked by colleague.

Appendix A: Information and Consent Forms for Staff

The aim of this research is to use a theory of change evaluation approach to help develop student sense of belonging at Whitfield. It is hoped that a theory of change can be developed using information from the management team which can then be implemented in school. This process is planned to take around 4 terms.

If you consent to be involved, you will be interviewed at stages during this time in order to explore your views about belonging and how it can be developed at school. You will work with me and other members of the management team to plan and evaluate changes in school. I will also be involved at data collection, and I am hopeful that we can monitor how things are going at the management meetings.

You can choose not to be involved. You can change your mind at any time and choose not to be involved anymore in interviews, planning or data collection. What you tell me in interview will be anonymised in any presentation to anyone inside or outside of school. If you want me not to report something we have discussed, I will keep it confidential.

I consent to be involved in the theory of change research on developing belonging at school.

Signed:

With thanks

Rachel Leonard

Appendix B: Interview Schedules, Interviews 1, 2, 3.

Interview 1

1. What is the current situation of the school (may include key positive and negative factors, may include staff, students, parents and families, community factors, leadership, and recent history).
2. What would you like to achieve; outline of goals of leadership. Explore in relation to key negative areas outlined above)
3. What does belonging mean to you? How does this apply to Whitfield School?

Interview 2 – (ToC document as prompt.)

1. What is the current situation of school now / key changes since we last met?
2. What interventions / changes have you introduced in school?
3. What do you hope to achieve by those interventions?
4. Have you noticed any changes as a result of the interventions you introduced?
5. What are your thoughts about belonging now? Have they changed since we last met?
6. Have you seen any evidence of increased belonging in your students?

Interview 3 – (ToC document 1 and 2 as prompt)

1. What is the current situation of school now / key changes since we last met
2. How have the changes you introduced developed? Have you made any further alterations to those changes?
3. What differences have you noted now that you think are due to the interventions?
4. Are there any new interventions in school since we last met?
5. What are your hopes for those interventions?
6. Have you noticed any impact from the new interventions?
7. How has school changed since you came into post?
8. What is your understanding of belonging now?
9. How has this understanding changed since you came into post?

Appendix C: Information and Consent Forms for Students

Information for tutors

I would be grateful if you could spend some time in tutor time completing the enclosed questionnaires.

- Please would you give students the time to complete the questionnaires, and offer them support with reading the questions if necessary.
- Students may choose not to take part, or may change their minds part way through. This is fine. Please allow students to take part in another activity whilst the rest of the group is completing questionnaires.
- The content of the questionnaires may be upsetting to some students. Please be aware of any students what might be vulnerable in thinking about concepts like belonging at school.
- I would be grateful if you could be aware of the students over the next few days and weeks, and make sure that you give those that might be feeling vulnerable opportunities to talk to someone in school if necessary.
- If you need any additional advice or support, or want to arrange more support for a student please contact me on [phone number] or [email address].

With thanks

Rachel Leonard
Educational Psychologist

Information to read to students:

I am studying how students feel about school, and whether they have a sense of belonging at school. I am asking all the students at Whitfield if they would fill in a questionnaire about belonging for me. There are no right or wrong answers on this questionnaire. You do not have to fill in a questionnaire, and you can change your mind at any time if you later decide you don't want to take part.

If you do decide to fill in the questionnaire, what you tell me will be kept confidential. I won't tell anyone what you write. Please follow the instructions on the questionnaire, and ask your tutor if you need any help.

Thank you
Rachel Leonard

Debrief

Thank you for taking the time to fill in the questionnaire. Your results will be really useful in helping me understand more about sense of belonging at school.

My research is about trying to find out what teachers can do at school to try and help students feel like they belong at school.

Some people find it upsetting to think about belonging. If you feel upset, please talk to someone in school that you trust and tell them how you are feeling. You can also talk to me if you like, and you can ask your tutor or [deputy head teacher] to get in touch with me to arrange this.


If you have anything else you would like to tell me, or any questions, please let your tutor or [deputy head teacher] know, and we can arrange a time to meet.

Thank you again
Rachel Leonard

Appendix D: Sample Student Questionnaire

THE SENSE OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY SCALE

SECONDARY




the measure of potential

Name Date

Age Class Please circle: Male / Female

		Disagree a lot 1	Disagree a little 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree a little 4	Agree a lot 5
1.	People care about each other at this school.					
2.	Pupils at this school don't seem to like each other very well.					
3.	Pupils at this school just look out for themselves.					
4.	Pupils at this school are willing to go out of their way to help someone.					
5.	Pupils at this school work together to solve problems.					
6.	The pupils at this school don't really care about each other.					
7.	Pupils at this school don't get along together very well.					
8.	Pupils at this school are mean to each other.					
9.	When I am having a problem, some other pupil at this school will try to help me.					
10.	Pupils help decide what they will work on in class.					
11.	Pupils have little chance to have their ideas heard at this school.					
12.	Teachers and pupils plan things together at this school.					
13.	The teacher and pupils here usually decide together what the class rules will be.					
14.	Pupils at this school get to help plan special activities and events.					
15.	The head teacher and teachers really rule things here.					
16.	There is a pupil council here that can decide on some really important things.					
17.	Pupils help to decide what goes on at this school.					
18.	Pupils have the chance to start up their own clubs at this school.					



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This measure is part of *Measures of Children's Mental Health and Psychological Wellbeing: A Portfolio for Education and Health Professionals*, edited by Norah Frederickson and Sandra Dunsmuir.
Published by GL Assessment Ltd, The Chiswick Centre, 414 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5TF, UK.

The Sense of School Community Scales (SCSS) (Secondary), Battisch (1994) in Frederickson and Baxter (2009).

Appendix E: Table of Interventions Introduced by the Management Team

Green Group	Students who are perceived to be disengaged from their lessons are given the opportunity to access a 'nurture group' type intervention. Students spend some or all of their time in a small group with one member of staff (selected for her positive and nurturing relationships with the students). They access a practical, explorative curriculum.
Induction Processes	New students to the school are given up to 2 weeks gradual induction to the school. During this time, they spend time either in the Green Group or in the Station with an increasing amount of time in their tutor group. Whilst in the Station or Green Group they are given opportunities to build relationships with staff, and to learn the expected rules and routines of the school. At some point during this time, there is a meeting between the student, their family and their school tutor in order to discuss the levels of support that is available to the student as part of the school and the expectations on the student from the school.
Family Conferencing	Students perceived to be disengaged from learning, or who demonstrate poor relationships with staff have a meeting with their parents / carers and members of the school staff. The Parent Support Advisor prepares the family and arranges transport to the school; the meeting is chaired by the HT or DHT with support from the student's tutor. At that meeting, the support available to the student is outlined at Wave 1, 2 and 3 (reference); planning takes place on how best to support the student, and targets are set for the student. At its inception, it was hoped that all students would have a Family Conference annually, with students where there are concerns having a Family Conference more regularly.
On Track	A new behaviour management system intended to make the way behaviour is managed by staff more transparent to students, and to encourage students to become more self-sufficient in their behaviour. There is a 4 stage system, with increasing/
Points Passport	Students are awarded points for their behaviour and their effort in learning for each lesson they attend; they can achieve a maximum of 10 points per lesson (5 for behaviour, 5 for effort)
Y7 Teaching	Y7 work to a different timetable than the rest of school and are taught by fewer teachers. Many of their lessons are delivered by one tutor and LSA team.
Timetable review	The number of lessons and length of lessons was altered to reduce the number of lesson changes through the school day. Students were required to find their own way to their classrooms instead of being dismissed from the school hall.
Review of teaching and	This has several elements. Systems were put in place to review the quality of planning and of teaching and learning in

learning / curriculum	school (including auditing of teaching related paperwork, and observations in classes). The curriculum was reviewed to remove lessons that the students did not like (Opening Minds) and add lessons that would support the development of functional skills and life skills.
Review of physical environment and equipment	Art installation placed in the entrance hall which was developed as a project in school in collaboration with a local artist. Indoor gym and chill out room installed.
Arrival activities	A variety of activities are available for the students to engage with before the start of the school day. Access to some areas is dependent on the points achieved on the 'passport' (described above). Activities include access to the chill out room, indoor gym, computer room.
Meet and greet	Staff are present at the start of the school day to greet the students as they arrive from their taxis. Staff are available to talk with students as necessary, and can judge how individual students are feeling as they arrive.
Tutor group time	The timetable was adjusted to allow 20 mins each day for students to spend time with their tutors (8 or 9 students with 2 members of staff); usually at the start of the day following arrival activities. Activities which seek to develop social and emotional skills are available, but not compulsory.
Data tracking	On track and points passport data was used from across the student population to identify times of the day, week or term when students were more unsettled. This was used to support review of the curriculum.
Vertical tutor grouping	This was due to be brought in from the September following the project. Each tutor group will have students from each year group in it, rather than forming tutor groups from students of the same year group.

Appendix F: Sample Themes Checked by Colleague

<p>So there's two defined roles (<i>appt of substantive deputy head and aht; dht to be 'front of school' and aht to look at teaching and learning</i>)</p>	smt	1.14
<p>So they know what's coming round the corner, whereas when G first left..... it was... yeah, it was sudden, and it was... it was unique really... <i>when he came back for ofsted, it was like a square peg in a round hole the school had changed that much in a matter of weeks</i></p> <p>But er, it's a good thing, it means that we're doing a good job in moving the school forward...</p>	climate	1.15
<p>So... I think the differences between that leadership and the current one is that the current one doesn't have somebody who is recognised as being the authority figure.</p> <p>Oh, she manages it, but it's not... it's not in your face.</p>	Climate Smt Authority (shouting?)	1.16
<p>...yeah. S was put out at first (<i>in response to changing role in school, not being the pastoral manager for staff and students</i>)..... and she made it known..... you know, people come to me and cry on my shoulder, and S said, 'I miss that. 'You know, 'That's my job.'Yeah. But then she went around saying, 'It's my job,' and you know...? The thing is with Sue, she's great, she's a brilliant head teacher..... but she... I've told her this time and time again... she likes to be in control. She needs to let go, and let other people have a bit of, you know? And she doesn't need to know everything that's going on, em, if it's, you know... whatever it could be. You know, if it's something important, she'd know about it. But she was quite put out one time when, er, she found that two members of our staff were going out with each other, and I knew for ages, I just didn't think to tell her, you know? [laughter] So when she found out, she went round everybody and said, 'Did you know? Did you know?' You know?</p>	smt	1.17

Discussion of new role – people choose to come to him with issues instead of others. Means he must be doing a good job. And if he didn't know what to do he'd go to HT	smt	1.20
<i>Articulated as a goal, so suggests this not present now...</i> you should see kids engaged. Happy not wanting to leave the classroom. Wanting to go on educational visits and being about to take the whole class. With the social skills to be welcoming; and skills to get involved in constructive things at break and lunch times	students	1.27
Difficult to get staff involved with extra-curricular things	staff	1.27
Mobility at 50%. They try and form relationships, but by the time they've formed them, they've left. And someone else has turned up	Mobility Students? Climate?	1.39
(3 acting ahts teaching most of the time) Which leaves the school in Sue's hand..... which isn't good. She needs support, and we've got, em, D... but, em, it needs somebody who can make decisions, other than S. S needs to be in a room doing work.	smt	1.58
Family experience – mentioned in relation to tutor groups, arrival time, relationships with teaching staff, part of induction areas. INT raises concern about the model of family that the kids at school have experienced	family	1.60
ethos is about enjoy and achieve Sense of belonging..... and being, wanting to be a part of our community.	climate	1.77
Its about kids coming in with low self esteem, low expectations and leaving here with their heads held high saying 'I've really achieved something'	Climate students	1.78
And I think it's right to be different... .. from normal schools Mainstream schools.Kids have come in with baggage..... and it's our job I think to unpack that bag... and see if we can rearrange it and make it ... a better fit.	Students climate	1.79
RES Mm. Well, we have a great staff team. Em, but I think that sometimes people lose the sight a little bit. I think	staff	1.81

<p>it, what would be good if, you know, if, if it was possible, for some, for some staff to go into mainstream schools..... and see the difference. Lots of talk at the end of tem about the kids getting up people's nose. Need to step back a bit a remember this is a special school the kids have needs we need to meet those. Need to move away from 'j has been bad what is his punishment to 'j has been bad, why has he done that. Aim to address though staff training</p>		
<p>Well, we're still going to exclude. (if family conferencing, passport and on track are not successful) It's as simple as that. If they don't get it right then we'll have to exclude and they're back... whenever they come back they'll be picked off the taxi..... into On Track until they do... do start to learn that this is what we're about.</p>	<p>Climate? Behaviour?</p>	<p>2.25</p>
<p>Branding – new logo, art installation downstairs, brochures and website</p>	<p>Climate? branding</p>	<p>2.35</p>
<p>RES [telephone rings] Once we get that all sorted, done and dusted, which it almost is, BK... INT Yeah I know B RES ... you know, she's been our guru. She's coming in on Monday just to finalise the training. INT Right. RES Because she's going to come in and deliver some of the training...</p>	<p>Other consultant Toc process</p>	<p>2.37</p>
<p>INT Yeah as a deliberate policy then from the Senior Leadership Team, drip it in?</p>	<p>smt</p>	<p>2.38</p>
<p>[Interruption door opens, female enters] ? Fucking nothing. INT This will be the Head Teacher joining us. [laughs] It's alright. ? Fuck. Do you know... really cross. INT Would you like me to pause this? ? Yeah, on that outcome for JM INT I am going to pause it now.</p>		<p>2.39</p>

<p>? I think we have to state... I think, well I am stating.</p> <p>INT Hang on, don't say anything.</p> <p>END</p>		
<p>RES But I don't think that came out as such until S got the headship, and then we worked through it.</p> <p>INT Right. So is it a vision that all of you shared, or that you and she shared? Or was it her vision that you adopted? Does that make sense?</p> <p>RES No, I think it was both of ours. I think we had lots of discussions around where we can go and what's different.</p> <p>INT Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>RES And it was very much in consultation with BK as well.</p>	<p>Smt consultant</p>	<p>3.2</p>