The Experiences of Sense of Belonging for Children and Young People with a Physical Disability in Education Settings

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Declaration

This thesis is being submitted for the award of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. I declare that this work is my own and has not been assessed or submitted for any other qualification. I have acknowledged where material used is the work of others.

Overarching Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the experiences of young people with physical disabilities, particularly their experiences of sense of belonging within an education setting. It is comprised of four chapters: a systematic literature review, a bridging document that critically considers methodology and ethics, an empirical research project and a reflective synthesis.

Chapter 1: This chapter contains the definitions of sense of belonging and the affirmative model of disability adopted throughout this research. A meta-ethnography was carried out with seven papers identified as relevant and analysed. Seven themes were identified as important to young people's sense of belonging, including relationships with peers and school staff, self-esteem, others' perceptions, accessibility in education settings, feeling included and transition. These offer insight into and act as a starting point for understanding the experiences of belonging for young people with a physical disability.

Chapter 2: This chapter acts as a bridging document between the systematic literature review and the empirical research project. It provides rationale and critical consideration of the methodology used and ethical issues that may arise. Further, it discusses my ontological and epistemology position and how this informed the chosen methodology.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the empirical project which explores the sense of belonging experiences of five young people with a physical disability who attend a mainstream education setting. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore these experiences. Interviewers were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. From this analysis, six themes emerged as contributing to young people's sense of belonging: relationships with adults, relationships with peers, identity, access, the purpose of learning and transition. These findings are discussed alongside the limitations and implications for young people, school staff, leadership within school and Educational Psychologists.

Chapter 4: This chapter offers a reflective synthesis of the skills and experience I have gained as part of this research project. It discusses application of developed research skills to my practice, dissemination of findings and wider implications. The role of allyship is considered within this research.

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Chapter 1. How do Children and Young People with Physical Disabilities Experience Sense of Belonging in Education Settings?

Abstract

Aim: This systematic literature review aimed to explore and gain an understanding of how young people with physical disabilities experience sense of belonging within their education setting.

Rationale: Sense of belonging has been associated with a number of positive effects for children and young people. Existing literature suggests that young people with a physical disability are more likely to experience isolation and peer conflict, directly impacting their sense of belonging.

Method: I utilised a meta-ethnographic approach to the review, searching data sets and identifying relevant qualitative papers. Seven papers were selected and analysed.

Findings: Synthesis highlighted several factors influencing sense of belonging which were grouped into seven themes: Peer-Student Relationships, Education School Staff Relationships, Self-Esteem, Others' Perceptions, Times of Transition, Accessibility in Education Settings and Feeling Included.

Limitations*:* Meta-ethnography is a highly interpretative method and as such individuals' experiences should be treated with this in mind.

Conclusions: This review contributes to the understanding of this group of young people's experience of sense of belonging in education. The development and maintenance of relationships were identified to be important for supporting young people's belonging within education. Implications for Educational Psychologists are discussed.

Key Words: Sense of belonging, school, physical disability, experiences, young people

This research will be submitted to Educational and Child Psychology following examination. As such, it is in the style of papers typically published by this journal.

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 Sense of Belonging

School sense of belonging has been described as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 60). However, more generally, sense of belonging has been described using various terms within literature including connectedness and community (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018). This inconsistency in terminology has been suggested to ‘dilute’ the research conducted within this area (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018). Researchers have identified key shared aspects of belonging across literature including forming and maintaining school-based relationships, a student’s general feeling of school as a whole, valuing school as a concept and being provided with opportunities to be involved in aspects of school life (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). Research suggests that sense of belonging is a significant factor and there are key benefits for students including academic outcomes (Pittman & Richmond, 2007) and positive attitudes toward learning (Chen & Zhou, 2019) alongside higher levels of wellbeing (Jose et al., 2012; O'Rourke & Cooper, 2010). For individuals with physical disabilities research suggests there are additional challenges to their sense of belonging. A recent report from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF, 2020) suggests physical disabilities were wrongly excluded from the original ten Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as there is clear evidence that they are associated with poor adult outcomes and social inequalities.

1.2.2 Defining Physical Disability

Early 2020 statistics showed that 1.37 million children and young people in England were identified as having a special educational need or disability (SEND). Of these young people, 2.9% were identified as having a physical disability (DfE, 2021). The Equality Act (2010) defines a disability as “a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on a person’s ability to do normal daily activities”. Many models of disability have been developed over time to better explore and define physical disability. The medical model of disability reinforces the view that a disability is found within a person and their impairment, resulting in disability being viewed as the problem of the individual (Brown & Smith, 1989). The social model of disability challenges the medical model, adopting the view that disabled people are not disabled by impairments, but by the disabling barriers faced in society (Oliver, 2013). The affirmation model of disability builds upon the social model, looking to ‘celebrate difference' in disabled people's lives. It criticises the medical model of disability as it 'encourages a simplistic view that disability is a personal tragedy for the individual concerned' (Johnstone, 1998, p. 19). Further, it suggests the social model of disability still presents 'impairments' in such a way that even in an 'ideal world of full civil rights and participative citizenship for disabled people' an impairment could still be seen as tragic (Swain & French, 2000, p. 571). Therefore, the affirmative model aims to address these criticisms as it 'directly challenges presumptions of personal tragedy and the determination of identity…embracing an affirmative model, disabled individuals assert a positive identity, not only in being disabled but also in being impaired. In affirming a positive identity disabled people are actively repudiating the dominant view of normality' (Swain & French, 2000, p. 578) However, the 'tragedy model is so dominant, so prevalent and so infused throughout media representations, language, cultural beliefs, research, policy and professionals practice' (Swain & French, 2000, p. 572) and as Oliver (1996, p. 5) states 'most of the world still thinks of disability as an individual, intensely personal problem'. Therefore, existing research and policy is seen to focus largely on the individuals 'personal tragedy' as opposed to utilising an affirmative model.

1.2.3 Supporting Children and Young People with Physical Disabilities

The SEND code of practice states schools and education settings do not have to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities by making physical alterations, however they must "publish accessibility plans setting out how they plan to increase access for disabled pupils to the curriculum, the physical environment and to information" (DfE, 2015, p. 17). Further, it recognises that young people with a physical disability may "require additional ongoing support and equipment to access all the opportunities available to their peers" (DfE, 2015, p. 98). While adaptations to the physical environment are likely to have been made within education settings to accommodate children and young people with a physical disability, the physical integration of students does not necessarily lead to inclusion (Haegele, 2019). Students with physical, sensory and learning disabilities have been identified as less likely to experience feelings of belonging and acceptance as compared to their peers (Hogan, 2000). Additionally, students with these additional needs are more likely to experience loneliness and isolation, less likely to experience kindness from peers and are more likely to experience peer conflict in their school setting (Hogan, 2000). Further, children identified as having SEND experience fewer friendships and less social acceptance as compared to their peers (Frederickson et al., 2007). As within the UK education system young people are described under the umbrella term of ‘SEND’, it can therefore be difficult to identify recent literature that focuses specifically on physical disability, as opposed to young people with needs that fall outside of this category. Assuming young people with physical disabilities fall within this category, it seems likely that they experience a range of barriers, although there is a lack of clarity regarding the particular challenges experienced.

1.2.4 Exploring the Experiences of Children and Young People

The perspectives of children and young people with disabilities are lacking across literature (Banks et al., 2019). This conflicts with the United Nations’ description of a young person’s right to express their ‘views freely in all matters affecting them, the views of the child being given due weight’ (Krappmann, 2010, p. 1). However, this relies on adults’ ability to listen, understand and act on views in a way that can be sustained and holds meaning (Rinaldi, 2006).

1.3 Method

My research question for this review was: *‘How do children and young people with physical disabilities experience sense of belonging in education settings?’*. Qualitative research was used to explore the ways in which these individuals understand their social world (Atkins et al., 2008). Meta-ethnography was chosen as an appropriate method of qualitative synthesis. Britten et al. (2002) describe this as a well-developed method with clear origins within the interpretive paradigm and as a view to create new understanding. I acknowledge that this approach could be regarded as reductionist, as individuals' rich and complex experiences gathered via qualitative research are reduced in the process of synthesis. Further, my position as a researcher is likely to impact the interpretation of information, as the theoretical orientation of researchers is said to impact this process (Atkins et al., 2008). However, the goal of interpretivism is to ‘enlarge and enrich human discourse’ (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 41). This synthesis may therefore provide a way to explore existing research focused on the experiences of sense of belonging from young people with physical disabilities, identifying commonalities and differences.

Noblit and Hare (1988) suggested seven overlapping stages within a meta-ethnography which are listed below. Stages one to five are considered within the method section and stages six to seven relate to the findings of this review.

Table 1. Seven Stages of Meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988)

Meta-ethnography Stages
1. Getting Started 2. Deciding What is Relevant 3. Reading the Studies 4. Deciding How they are Related 5. Translating the Studies into One Another 6. Synthesising the Translation 7. Expressing the Synthesis

1.3.1 Phase One & Two: Getting started & deciding what is relevant to the initial interest

Noblit and Hare (1988, p. 27) described phase one as ‘identifying an intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform’ and phase two as identifying and selecting studies to synthesise. Although Noblit and Hare (1988) suggest the intention of a meta-ethnography is not to provide an exhaustive search of literature, a literature-search was carried out to explore a wide body of literature from which a sample could be selected. Further, Atkins et al. (2008) define this process as narrowing the focus of the synthesis, locating studies and making decisions on inclusion - suggesting a review would be appropriate.

This literature search was carried out between September and November 2021 using the following databases: ERIC, British Education Index and Scopus. Hand searches were carried out over the same timeframe. Search terms relating to sense of belonging are based on literature defining sense of belonging from Allen, Kern, et al. (2018) and Prince and Hadwin (2013) as these definitions appeared to sufficiently encompass the concept as it is present across research. Searches were conducted to include papers published between 2011 and 2021 to ensure recent research that is relevant to the current education contexts were included. Several search combinations were trialled throughout this period with the final search terms listed below:

- Mobility disability OR SEND OR disabilit* OR physical disability

- School experience OR peers OR sense of belonging OR belonging OR belongingness OR connectedness OR feeling to belong OR student relationships OR teacher relationships OR school community OR social inclusion OR school value

Using the Boolean ‘AND’ combinations is suggested to increase sensitivity of searches but, in turn, can lead to a decrease in specificity (Bramer et al., 2018). This could be considered a limitation of the current research as general terms such as ‘sense of belonging’ and ‘belonging’ were used, instead of specific terms such as ‘school belonging’. This led me to consider how discrete search terms could yield further specific search results, in comparison to more generic terms. However, through scoping searches it was found that the inclusion of these more specific terms restricted the scope of relevant studies found. The search process was ended when ‘saturation’ was research; this refers to searches no longer yielding additional studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

Initial results yielded 675 results after duplicates were removed. Initially, it was anticipated that only studies that specifically referred to physical disabilities would be included. However, as the searches were carried out, it became clear many researchers chose to use the term ‘SEND’, used widely in the UK education system as an umbrella term to describe a wider group of young people, including those with a physical disability. This results in the population of some studies being ambiguous as they do not specify a need or disability. Therefore, I chose to include all studies that defined their population as ‘SEND’ and exclude studies that referred to populations with young people who did not have a physical disability. The process of berry picking (Bates, 1989) was implemented by applying an inclusion criterion when making decisions of inclusion and exclusion. A Population Intervention Control Outcome (PICO) table was used to form the inclusion criteria, a method supported widely in literature as it allows for the review to be focused and facilitates the search process (Eriksen & Frandsen, 2018). The inclusion criteria is included in Table 2.

Following the results of the search and removal of duplicates, a title search was then carried out to exclude unrelated studies. Following a title search, 202 abstracts were screened and 74 of those papers were read in full following exclusion. The inclusion criteria was then applied to these 74 papers resulting in 7 suitable for synthesis. This process is outlined in Figure 1.

Table 2. PICO Inclusion Criteria for Meta-ethnography

Population	CYP within an education setting Aged between 0-25 years CYP with a physical disability*
Outcome	Must include young person's experiences/voice as opposed to external people in their lives** Exploration of features of school sense of belonging including: - School-based relationships - Student-teacher relationships - Students' general feelings of school as a whole - Valuing school as a concept - Opportunities to be involved in aspects of school life
Type	Focus on qualitative studies (to explore the experiences of young people)
Geographic location	UK only
Journal type	Peer Reviewed only Between 2011-2021

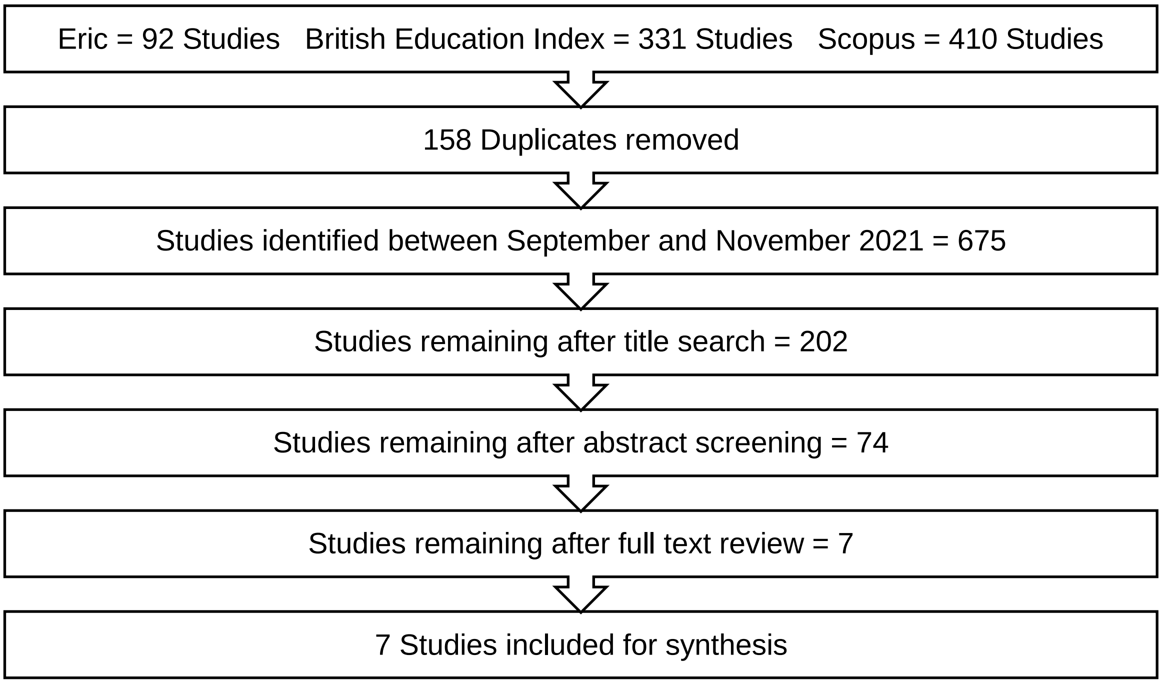

Figure 1. Flowchart Demonstrating the Literature Screening Process

1.3.2 Phase Three & Four: Reading the studies & deciding how they are related

Stage Three is described as reading the studies to become as familiar as possible with the detail, beginning the process of extracting metaphors or themes and stage four which focuses on determining how these studies are related (Atkins et al., 2008; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Although these stages are suggested by Noblit and Hare (1988) this is not prescriptive, allowing me to approach stages in an iterative, as opposed to a linear, process. All seven papers were read in-depth repeatedly and demographic information was extracted, collated and recorded (see Table 3).

Table 3. Demographics Information for the Papers Chosen for the Meta-ethnography

Author, Year and Title,	Sample	Setting	Data Collection	Measure or Theme
Fitzgerald and Stride (2012) Stories about Physical Education from Young People with Disabilities	3 young people aged 12-13 years old with disabilities	UK school setting	Narrative approach Semi-structured interview	PE experiences impact widely on other areas of life, feelings of exclusion, negative impact of PE, participation in PE
Gibson (2012) Narrative accounts of university education: socio-cultural perspectives of students with disabilities	5 students with disabilities	UK University	Semi-structured interview	Experience of education. Relationship and learning experiences with teacher/tutor, relationship and learning experiences with peers, relationship and learning exp with educational institutional practices
Hamilton et al. (2021) Experiences of higher education for students with chronic illnesses	67 students with chronic illness	UK University	Online survey with open-ended questions	Academic work, university staff, social and extracurricular activities, and participants miscellaneous options

Lumsdaine and Thurston (2017) Growing up in a Mainstream World: A Retrospective Enquiry into the Childhood Experiences of Young Adults with a Physical Disability	10 young people aged 17-23 year olds with a physical disability Including Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida and Muscular Dystrophy	UK school setting	Retrospective experiences Semi-structured interviews	The emotional impact of disability, societal reactions, the school system, social integration, awareness and identity
Sharpe et al. (2022) Voice, vlogs and visibility: the experiences of young people with SEND engaging in the school games	18 young people aged 11-18 with SEND	Mainstream, SEND provision and special education settings	Video experiences Edit worktop Analysis using reflexive thematic analysis	Experiences of school PE across three themes; Opportunities for inclusive school sport, Challenging perceptions and Meaningful School Games.
Thurston (2014) "They Think They Know What's Best for Me": An Interpretative Phenomenological	2 young people 15 & 16 years old with visual impairments/ albinism	UK school setting	Semi-structured interviews	General experience of school, experiencing low vision in school, experiencing additional support in school and friendships.

Analysis of the Experience of Inclusion and Support in High School for Vision-Impaired Students with Albinism				
Worth (2013) Making friends and fitting in: a social-relational understanding of disability at school	28 young people who self-identify as having visual impairments Aged 16-25 years old	UK education setting in North of England	Interviews and audio diaries	Stories, spaces and social self. Peer relationships and teaching staff in both special and mainstream provisions.

To begin the process of determining how studies relate to one another, quotes from participants were included as first order constructs (Atkins et al., 2008). Further, the interpretations and explanations contained within the studies were treated as second order constructs. Given the aim of my review, it is important to recognise that through this process first order constructs have been interpreted by both the original author and within this meta-ethnography (Atkins et al., 2008). Therefore, there is a risk that participants' voices are not truly represented within the review. Please see appendix A for further details.

Recurring concepts identified through this process were translated into one another, creating themes (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

1.4 Findings

1.4.1 Phase Five & Six: Translating the studies into one another & synthesising the translation

Phases five and six include translation of meaning which accounts for each study’s context including setting and sample, as outlined in Table 3. Noblit and Hare (1988) refer to two types of translation in these stages: reciprocal and refutational. This is an iterative process by which I examined and then identified key constructs from each study and decided if they were similar (reciprocal translation) or differed (refutational translation) (Noblit & Hare, 1988). France et al. (2019) outline that these translations are not mutually exclusive, instead they should and can co-exist. Refutational translations ‘explore and explain differences, contradictions and exceptions in studies’ and are described as a strength of meta-ethnography as few similar methods require researchers to focus on inconsistencies (France et al., 2019, p. 10). These identified inconsistencies and differences ensured the approach is interpretive and therefore avoids simple repetition of the findings of the primary studies. Please see appendix B for further information.

As the first and second order constructs were identified, it was then possible for me to establish relationships across studies, resulting in individual translations then being developed into a ‘line of argument synthesis’ (Atkins et al., 2008; Britten et al., 2002). The following themes listed in Table 4 were taken forward for synthesis. The synthesis is expressed in Table 5.

Table 4. Themes Identified

Education Staff-Student Relationships
Peer-Student Relationships
Self-Esteem
Others’ Perceptions
Times of Transition
Accessibility in Education Settings
Feeling included

Although the studies’ context were highlighted, A key limitation of this method is that reporting of contextual information within the chosen studies is restricted, likely due to word limit requirements of the journals in which they are published (Atkins et al., 2008).

Table 5. Constructs, Interpretation and Synthesis

Constructs	Interpretation	Synthesis
Education relationships	In five of the final papers, young people discussed relationships built with education staff. Some of them share positive experiences with education staff where they were able to discuss academic difficulties.	**Education Staff- Student Relationships**
Support from education staff	Participants discussed the support received from education staff as some shared being able to approach adults in school for support and help when needed. Others discussed lack of support from staff, particularly in university where lecturers did not consistently stay in contact or did not have a good understanding of the affect their disability had on their engagement with learning.	
Being ‘policed’ by education staff	Participants discussed their experiences of not being able to make decisions or use the skills they had learnt to support themselves in education settings. Some shared that education staff acted as a barrier to this as they would insist participants use aids or access spaces in a specific way. Further, when supported by a one-to-one member of staff they were unable to behave in a way that others were, such as talking to their peers due to the presence of staff. Privacy and autonomy appeared to be challenged by education staff presence.	

Peer relationships	In six of the final papers peer relationships were discussed. Many of them shared that friendships and peer relationships were positive, being able to share how they were feeling with others about their disability and feeling connected. Some discussed the negative peer interactions they had experienced such as name-calling, bulling and being laughed at.	**Peer – Student Relationships**
Learning experiences with peers	Two papers referred to their interactions with peers within a learning context. One participant discussed being placed with another disabled peer within learning environments for most of the time. One participant discussed this being a negative experience with a peer complaining about being paired with them. Another shared experience of friends providing support in lesson by reading words from the board.	
Peer representation and role models	Participants shared positive experiences of others with disabilities. One discussed seeing disabled people on TV programs and the Paralympics. Seeing others with disabilities often addressed the stigma surrounding disability and that those who are disabled are unable to do what able bodied people can. Further, participants shared interactions with 'student reps' within their education setting and felt this was supportive as being able to speak to someone with similar experiences.	
Self-image/ confidence	In six of the seven final papers specific reference was made to participants self-esteem and confidence. Many participants discussed the differences between themselves and the people around them due to their disability.	**Self-Esteem**

	They shared experiences of others treating disabled people as "below them". One participant shared feelings of sadness and self-loathing toward their physical appearance.	
Self-worth	Six of the seven papers made reference to participants self-worth. They shared experiences of feeling lonely, frustrated and angry with their disability and the way others interacting with their disability. One participant shared they felt 'worthless' and 'like there was something wrong'.	
Times of Transition	Some participants discussed the positive transition to university as others are older and often are more mature in their reactions. There was discussion of less concern of being laughed at by those around them in this transition.	**Times of Transition**
Becoming older	Four of the seven papers highlight change over time. These papers discussed a participants self-view as they became older as they shared the differences between themselves and others become more apparent as they became older. Some participants shared the negative effects of this on their self-esteem and others felt becoming older was positive as their peers were more understanding and supportive.	
Future Plans	Two papers discussed participants' future plans beyond education. One participant shared that they found it difficult to consider aspirations due to their disability. A further participant discussed feeling as though there was little employment opportunities due to their disability.	

Others’ perceptions	Six of the seven papers included made references to others’ perceptions of their disability. This was highlighted often when young people shared their experiences. Young people shared other’s negative perceptions and assumptions about them and their disability. Some referred to experiencing bullying when in school, often directly related to their disability. One paper highlighted the frustration young people felt when others do not recognise a disability as ‘legitimate’ when it is ‘invisible’.	**Others’ perceptions**
Others’ Understanding	Young people expressed frustration at the lack of understanding of disabilities from others. This was particularly in reference to education staff who made assumptions about their abilities and needs. They expressed a need for education around disabilities. Some shared positive experiences of peers and disability advisers who they felt were understanding and therefore better able to offer support. Access to an understanding culture/practice appeared beneficial for young people.	
Access to support	Young people across all seven papers referred to access to support. Some young people shared positive experiences of accessing support that prepared them in using specialist equipment. Education staff such as a disability advisor was shared as a positive form of support. Others discussed frustration at the disparity between disabled young people, feeling that some young people receive more support compared to others. Some young people expressed frustrating at the timing of support, one	**Accessibility in Education Settings**

	shared that they received more support from professionals when accessing university as opposed to when they were younger.	
Accessibility in the physical environment	Young people shared frustration with their settings for not making reasonable adjustments such as recording lectures and access to extensions for deadlines. Further, some young people shared frustration at not being able to access spaces such as the student union and desks.	
Opportunities offered	Some young people were offered alternatives to classes such as PE and shared this as a positive experience. Further, others shared positive experiences of attending a specialist school as they were given more opportunities to access activities such as dance.	
Feeling safe	Young people discussed feeling worried and preoccupied, particularly around times such as PE when their disability may be more likely to influence their experience.	
Feeling included/excluded	Young people across all seven papers referred to feelings of inclusion and exclusion. Participants discussed feeling excluded in certain areas of school and not receiving the same treatment as other peers.	**Feeling Included**
Having a voice/autonomy	Young people shared that they would like a voice in the decision-making process within education. Some shared that they had felt others would try to do things for them or make choices without their permission or input and that this was a negative experience. One shared their appreciation with researchers for providing a platform to share their voice.	

Feeling valued and connected	Young people shared that feeling connected and valued by others is positive, it can result in forming closer relationships and feelings of security and trust better themselves and others.	

14.2 Phase Seven: Expressing the synthesis

Noblit and Hare (1988) recognise the need to communicate any synthesis in a format that is suitable and accessible for your audience. I have chosen to express my synthesis using a visual format in Figure 2.

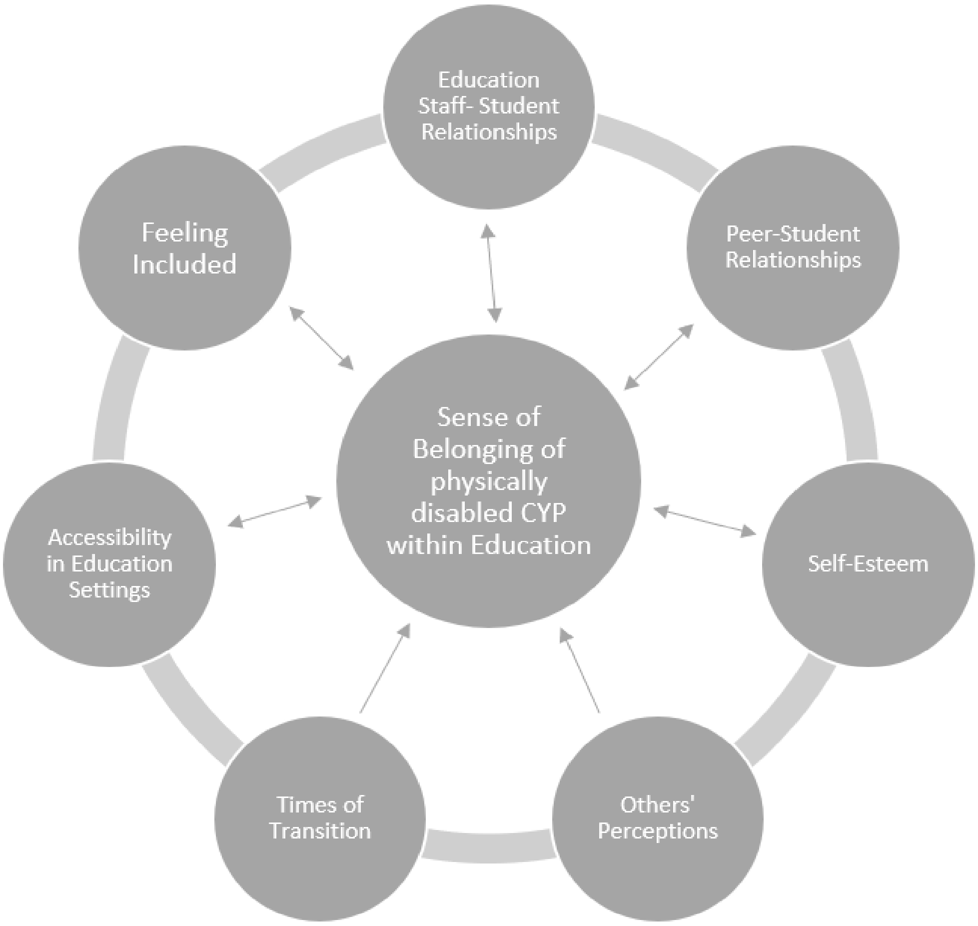

Figure 2. A Model of Young People with Physical Disabilities Experiences of Sense of Belonging within Education Settings

In relation to the seven studies considered, I have utilised a circular model to demonstrate my interpretation of how each concept interacts with one another. Five of the seven themes are bi-directional which implies that sense of belonging influences that concept and visa-versa. For example, peer-student relationships effect a student's sense of belonging and their sense of belonging influences their peer-student relationships. Two further themes, times of transition and others' perceptions, are shown to have a unidirectional relationship with sense of belonging. This shows that times of transition and others' perceptions have an influence on sense of belonging. I aim to consider and discuss the findings above in relation to relevant literature and explore any implications of findings and the limitations of utilising a meta-ethnography.

1.5 Discussion

1.5.1 Relationships

Student's relationships with peers and education staff emerged as two key themes. The synthesis highlighted positive relationships to have a positive effect on sense of belonging. This may be expected as forming and maintaining school-based relationships are fundamental to many conceptualisations of sense of belonging (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

The synthesis explores how positive peer relationships are said to be supportive in the education setting both emotionally and in relation to their learning, the same negative effect was seen in relation to negative peer interactions. Broomhead (2019) suggested that young people with SEND are less accepted by others in comparison to their typically developing peers, however many had at least one friendship. This is consistent with further literature suggesting young people described experiencing less social acceptance (Estell et al., 2008; Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Positive peer relationships are said to provide support to young people's learning, including providing notes and spending time with them when there were physical barriers to movement in areas of education settings (McMaugh, 2011). Further, interactions with peers who have physical disabilities themselves were viewed positively within this synthesis. Findings from Gibson (2012) suggests experiences with peers who have similar learning needs to be positive in reassuring young people they would feel accepted within the setting.

Education staff-student relationships are further highlighted within the synthesis, positive relationships were said to be supportive to learning. Education settings have been identified as an opportunity to build positive relationships with adults and young people are said to look for emotional support, belonging and trust from these adults (Catalano et al., 2004; McMurray et al., 2011). A review from Holdsworth and Blanchard (2006) highlights the importance of developing strong relationships with staff in school to engagement with learning. Further, Allen and Kern (2017) suggest teacher support to have the largest effect on student's sense of belonging within school. However, synthesis suggested those negative relationships with education staff and ‘over policing’ behaviours had a negative effect on young people’s experiences of education, their support and autonomy. Hamilton et al. (2021) found staff lack of understanding of students needs to be a barrier to engaging with the learning environment and feeling supported.

1.5.2 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem has been defined as what an individual determines to be the value of their attributes and limitations (Gallahue & Ozmun, 1998). It is also associated with self-respect, self-worth, self-acceptance and self-feeling (Hattie, 1992). Student’s feelings of frustration and anxiety around their disability emerged, highlighting the differences between their bodies and others. Many of the experiences present within this synthesis appear to relate to a medical model of physical disability whereby the disability is viewed as within a person and solely their impairment, resulting in disability being viewed as the problem of the individual and not the context (Brown & Smith, 1989). Literature focusing on the self-esteem of individuals with disabilities suggests that contextual, social, physical and emotional factors affect self-esteem (Barnwell & Kavanagh, 1997; Craig et al., 1994). This is seen within this synthesis as individuals focus on the difference between their bodies and others’ and consequently others’ perspectives and the effect of this on their self-esteem, alluding to a sense of otherness. One participant within the Thurston (2014, p. 112) study shares:

> “*you feel that you’re just a bit different than everyone else, and like you’re not quite part … you’re not just quite … when you’re with your friends you’re just like “I’m not … right with them”*

There appears to be a link between social interactions and self-esteem (Harter, 1993). Literature suggests a strong self-identity in social groups can support self-esteem of the individual and group (Nario-Redmond et al., 2013; Turner et al., 1979). This implies that through adopting strong self-identity in peer relationships there would be a further development of self-esteem. As both self-esteem and sense of belonging are closely related to approval or support from others within a setting (Harter, 1993; Strudwicke, 2000), it could therefore imply young people with lower self-esteem may not have their sense of belonging needs met and visa-versa.

1.5.3 Others' Perceptions

Others' perceptions appeared to influence young people's experience of education and their overall sense of belonging in education. Perceptions also appear closely related to peer-student relationships, education staff-student relationships, self-esteem and feeling included. Perceptions appeared to fall into two categories: negative perceptions of young people's disability and positive understanding from others. Negative perceptions of marginalized groups and the societal stigma of physical disability may have a negative effect on others' perceptions and make them less likely to associate with those who identify as disabled (Nario-Redmond et al., 2013). Further, education staff understanding, and perception of a young person's disability appears to influence the support offered, the relationship between these parties and therefore a young person's sense of belonging (Hamilton et al., 2021). Additionally, this synthesis highlights that others' perceptions of more 'hidden' or 'invisible' disabilities as compared to more visible disabilities appear to differ. Visible disabilities are defined as traits that would be visually obvious to another person, for example, use of mobility aids. Invisible disabilities may not be as overt and could include individuals experiencing conditions such as arthritis or multiple sclerosis (Esmail et al., 2010). Individuals with invisible disabilities express that others place unachievable expectations on their bodies (Dale Stone, 2005) and those with more visible disabilities are likely to experience early stigma (Esmail et al., 2010).

1.5.4 Times of Transition

Synthesis highlights times of transition as an important aspect of young people's experiences. Transition to higher education settings such as university was related to a sense of experiences becoming more positive, however a mixed picture was found when focusing on the transition from primary to secondary settings. This is demonstrated within Lumsdaine and Thurston (2017, pp. 188-192) research into young people's experiences:

> *"When I was younger I felt different and I wished I could walk and be normal but at secondary I started accepting it more and just getting on with it"*

> *"I didn't think about my disability until I was in Secondary when I slowly started getting isolated."*

Transition between settings can be considered challenging for many young people as it involves a new learning environment, new relationships with peers and staff and adopting their role as students of a new setting (Araújo et al., 2014). Therefore, sense of belonging is a focus during times of transition as during this period young people experience a reduced sense of connectedness (Lester et al., 2013; O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010; Van Herpen et al., 2020). Due to the lack of literature in this area, it would be beneficial to investigate the relationship between physical disability and school transition further in future.

Further, synthesis highlighted young people's feelings about plans for future careers when transitioning to adulthood. There appeared to be a negative view of employment opportunities when moving beyond education due to their physical disability. Findings from (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 31) share

> *"The further into uni I got the less I believed I had potential to get a good job"*

This view is supported by UK statistics that suggest that one in five school leavers with a disability are unemployed or inactive (Dewson et al., 2004) and those with a disability are three times less likely to find full time employment as compared to their abled bodied peers (Lamb & McKenzie, 2001).

1.5.5 Accessibility in Education Settings

Young people's access to spaces, resources, and support from others alongside reasonable adjustments across these areas with their education setting was highlighted within the synthesis. Young people experienced frustration at a lack of access to these resources and types of support and shared positive experiences of when this was offered in their education settings. This is conflicting with the Equality Act (2010) which outlines the need for equal opportunities and anticipation of reasonable adjustments. Doubt and McColl (2003) found peer/staff support and inaccessible activities influenced individuals' sense of 'integration' which they describe as a sense of belonging in the school community. This lack of access to resources and support may relate to education staff's insufficient understanding of disabilities and how to best accommodate students (Royster & Marshall, 2008). Further, research suggests that teachers often feel inadequately prepared, unsupported by others and find it difficult to facilitate practice that promotes inclusion (Butler & Hodge, 2004). As being provided with opportunities to be involved in aspects of school life (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Prince & Hadwin, 2013) is said to be key in developing sense of belonging, a lack of access and support within setting would influence young people's belonging.

1.5.6 Feeling Included

The final construct relates to young people's feelings of inclusion within school. Feeling connected, valued, and having a voice were all positively associated with feeling included within education settings. Being treated differently to others and others making decisions for them was believed to be a barrier to feeling included within school. Individuals with a low sense of belonging within a setting can feel excluded as they are felt to be left out, ignored, and therefore may not wish to participate (Hall, 2009). Feeling included and accepted by others is said to be directly related to how young people's sense of belonging is constructed (de Jong et al., 2023; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Similarly, feelings of exclusion can lead to isolation and negatively influence a young person's sense of belonging. Literature argues that if young people 'feel empowered to participate and contribute to their settings a sense of belonging will ensue' (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017, p. 39), further highlighting the relationship between feelings of inclusion and sense of belonging.

1.6 Conclusion

1.6.1 Summary

This research offers seven constructs that are closely related to the sense of belonging of young people with physical disabilities within education. The constructs identified within this meta-ethnography are consistent with aspects highlighted by existing literature. However, this meta-ethnography offers a unique view of sense of belonging through the experiences of this specific group of young people, previously underrepresented in literature. These constructs are complex, focusing on the individual experiences of young people.

Findings from this meta-ethnography suggests developing strong relationships with both student's peers and their school staff is important for developing sense of belonging and can have a detrimental effect if not positively formed. This is closely related to others' perceptions of the young people as individuals who felt better understood by those around them experienced a greater sense of belonging, as does the self-esteem of a young person. Further, feeling included, access to appropriate support and resources and transition should all be considered when focusing on the sense of belonging of young people. This may be further relevant to young people with physical disabilities who can feel disempowered through other's perceptions of what they can achieve and what is needed to support them.

Overall, young people's relationships with others and the ways in which those around them interact and aim to support them appears to have a significant effect on experience of sense of belonging in education.

1.6.2 Limitations

Whilst this meta-ethnography has provided conceptual insights into the experiences of young people and their sense of belonging, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this qualitative method. Meta-ethnography is a highly interpretative method (Noblit & Hare, 1988), Sandelowski and Barroso (2006) critique this as experiences are required to be re-interpreted by several individuals, moving further away from the unique experience and context of those from the primary study.

Further, the use of quality-assessment tools within meta-ethnography has been discussed within literature (Toye et al., 2013). Noblit and Hare (1988) did not suggest a form of quality appraisal as part of meta-ethnography prior to the synthesis stages. As meta-ethnography aims to be highly interpretive, using quality assessment tools could be perceived as inappropriate as the 'unique contribution' of a study could be lost during the quality assessment process. Further, Campbell et al. (2012, p. 45) suggests that the 'inclusion of poorer quality studies is unlikely to have a very distorting impact on qualitative synthesis' particularly as the purpose is to gather new understanding or insight. This is in opposition to that of quantitative synthesis which can often focus on aspects of effectiveness, the findings of which may be more heavily affected by quality appraisal (Campbell et al., 2012).

1.6.3 Implications for Educational Psychologists

These findings have potential implications for the practice of Educational Psychologists across the three levels in which they work: the individual, group and organisational levels. Francis et al. (2021, p. 49) suggested "Educational Psychologists' are particularly well placed to enhance young people's sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community". Understanding the experiences of a young person with physical disabilities can contribute to a rich and deeper understanding of sense of belonging for Educational Psychologists. They may be well placed to provide specific training in this area and work with schools to think about how they can best develop their students' sense of belonging at both group and systemic levels. Sancho and Cline (2012) highlight the benefits of Educational Psychologists' involvement in supporting sense of belonging, including whole school training, workshops with school staff alongside individual work with young people.

Whilst sense of belonging has been associated with positive outcomes for all young people, there are some challenges unique to those with physical disabilities that Educational Psychologists may be well placed to consider, address and overcome. For example, these findings may inform training or work about inclusion within education and how this can be supported (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019). Awareness about disabilities/conditions could be raised through other aspects of practice, positively influencing others' perceptions and understanding. This research can contribute to their work in supporting times of transition and the introduction of reasonable adjustments and accessibility within education.

Further, the affirmative model of disability utilised within this research affirms a positive disabled identity and challenges any presumptions of personal tragedy (Swain & French, 2000). There is an assumption in society that those with disabilities want to be other than they are, which in itself can be disabling (Swain & French, 2000). If an affirmative definition was utilised within the school system with a focus on promoting sense of belonging for - and listening to the voices of - these young people, an affirmative identity could be strengthened. This would directly challenge the view of disability as something to be ashamed of and would ultimately support self-esteem and the understanding of others, leading to the empowerment of these young people and fostering their sense of belonging (Berger & Wilbers, 2021).

As sense of belonging has been highlighted as an important contributor to a number of positive school outcomes for young people, Educational Psychologists should consider this when working with a young person, their families and educational staff. Further, the skills within research and evaluation that Educational Psychologists possess could further contribute to research within this area, particularly in relation to times of transition.

Chapter 2. Bridging Document: From Systematic Literature Review to an Empirical Project

2.1 Personal Experience that has shaped my research

My interest in the experiences of young people with a physical disability originates from hearing from a family member and friend who identify as disabled. It appeared that their experience of friendships, school staff relationships and feeling included within the school context was challenged and changed as their chronic illness progressed. I then began to critically reflect on these experiences as I became an assistant psychologist within an educational psychology service as part of a local authority (LA). I worked with several young people who shared similar experiences of exclusion, the effects of their disability on relationships with others and their engagement with the school experience. One young person shared that teachers often underestimated their ability and the extent of their disability, leading to needing to be 'believed' and understood by others.

Upon hearing these stories, I began to reflect on the concept of sense of belonging. This concept, which was introduced to me through my work as an assistant psychologist, focused on supporting young people with adverse childhood experiences. I found that the experiences of young people shared with me appeared to relate directly to their sense of belonging within school. I discovered through conversations with school staff and advisory teachers that they were sometimes unclear as to how involved these young people considered themselves to be within school and believed that their voices were often not truly heard.

Together, this led me to consider: what are the experiences of young people with physical disabilities in education settings? How are these being heard, captured, and valued by those around them? Additionally, how can these experiences then lead to change within education settings to promote a sense of belonging?

2.2 Bridging the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to the Empirical

The findings of my meta-ethnography highlighted seven key themes: student-staff relationships, student-peer relationships, others' perspectives, self-esteem, accessibility, feelings of inclusion and times of transition as all important to the experiences of sense of belonging for this group of young people. Many of my findings appear to align with anecdotal evidence I have heard working within LAs.

Within the SLR, I found very few studies focused specifically on the experiences of young people with physical disabilities, particularly as relevant documentation group the needs of young people under the umbrella term ‘SEND’ (DfE, 2015). This is a challenge as it can be argued the experiences of a young person with a learning need differ from that of a young person with a physical or sensory need. Therefore, how are smaller groups of young people whose primary need is often classed into one of the four broader categories of SEN being captured and understood?

Within the SLR I found papers relating to research that was carried out with young people over the age of 18, often in a university setting. This led me to consider if the voices of younger primary and secondary school age pupils are being missed or and unrepresented in current literature.

Additionally, the literature that related to young people under the age of 18 included special school settings. There appeared to be a gap as to the experiences of young people under the age of 18 who attended mainstream settings. The Department for Education highlights most young people with physical needs are ‘able to attend a mainstream school with school-based support’ (DfE, 2015). Further, there is an increase of young people who are considered to be ‘SEND’, under which physical disability falls. Indicating that it would be important to consider and explore the experiences of these young people within a mainstream setting.

In the following section I discuss the methodological and ethical considerations of the Empirical Project.

2.3 Values/Stance

2.3.1 Ontology & Epistemology

Ontology has been described as the starting point of research (Grix, 2002), defined by Blaikie (2000) as the assumptions about a social reality including how this reality and the things within it are perceived. Epistemology follows on from ontology (Grix, 2002) as it is concerned with the method in which we gain knowledge about this social reality (Blaikie, 2000) including how knowledge is gathered and communicated (Scotland, 2012).

I have approached the research with the assumption that young people’s sense of belonging ‘exists’ within the world and that it can be identified and discovered, meeting a critical realist stance. Further, the affirmative model of disability adopted within this research aligns with critical realism. It assumes that the concept of disability exists alongside and separate to individuals' 'impairments'. Critical realism assumes there is a world in which events are observable and knowledge about this world is created through perceived observations and experiences (Fletcher, 2017). This suggests that there are processes that exist and can be identified and described by the researcher with the acknowledgement that researchers might not 'provide direct access to this reality' (Willig, 2013, p. 11).

In taking this critical realist stance to my research, I am seeking to generate knowledge, and to capture the experiences of young people as truthfully as possible (Willig, 2013). Critical realism assumes that 'the world and what happens in it, how and why, can be understood, provided that the researcher is skilled enough to uncover the patterns, regularities and structures of experience and behaviour which characterise human existence' (Willig, 2013, p. 15). However, in relation to the current research, this implies that interviews may only provide a partial picture of young people's experiences (Smith & Elger, 2014). I also recognise that sense of belonging, and disability will be experienced differently by each individual young person.

Willig (2013) suggests 'giving voice' to marginalised groups with the assumption that these experiences reflect a social reality, which should be acknowledged. Therefore, this paradigm appears to closely align with this research, as through listening to the experiences of young people I aimed to capture and gather knowledge as to what is happening within their world.

2.4 Methodology

A more detailed account of my methodology can be found in Chapter 3. The following section provides insight regarding choice of method.

My chosen method for the empirical portion of this research was guided by my epistemological stance, the research aims and the question, alongside my developing values as a professional of collaboration, accessibility and respect.

I chose to interview five participants as part of this research. Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that when using reflexive thematic analysis, the saturation of sample size is of less importance as instead the approach is pragmatic and relates to timescales. Recruitment of participants was more difficult than I expected. My intention was to recruit participants from a range of year groups within education however this was not possible. I therefore took a pragmatic approach to recruitment due to the time constraints placed on this research, leading to a smaller sample size. The aim of this project was not to generalise to all young people with physical disabilities, but rather to explore how these specific individuals experience sense of belonging, gathering rich and detailed data. Additionally, due to the analysis process I recognise that their experiences and interviews will not be fully represented in my findings.

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore young people with physical disabilities' sense of belonging in mainstream education settings. This method aims to gather rich, in-depth data from interviewees as to their experiences, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2013; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Willig, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are guided by the research questions whilst providing flexibility in the form of opportunities to ask follow-up questions and probe, often leading to generation of rich data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021).

An interview schedule (see appendix A for sample schedule) was created to guide data collection utilising a funnelling technique. This allows for broad interview questions to be asked first with later questions becoming more specific as the interview progressed (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The development of these questions was influenced by a number of factors: the themes identified through my systematic literature review, the definition of belonging utilised (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Prince & Hadwin, 2013) and previous research focused on exploring belonging in interviews (Pooley et al., 2008; Sayer et al., 2013). There is a potential limitation of using open-ended questions to explore associated factors of belonging within an interview schedule. For example, the factors 'others perceptions' and young people's 'relationships with others' were grouped together. As these two factors are said to be closely interlinked within literature (Doyle & Barreto, 2023; Hamilton et al., 2021; Lennon et al., 1989), it was hoped that using broad, open questions relating to relationships would encompass discussions of others' perceptions. Further, although an interview schedule was created and followed, literature suggests that different questions can be used with different participants to follow the interest of the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Kidder & Fine, 1987). This flexibility allows for an individual's experience to be shared in the way they wish, acknowledging that there are possible effects of my own social identity as a researcher and how this could impact the data generated and the direction of the interview (Willig, 2013). It also accounts for linguistic variability as young people may consider terms such as 'belonging' to have different meanings (Willig, 2013). As such, as a researcher I remained flexible in my approach leading to variation across some of the questions asked within the interviews. However, the interview schedule acted as an important tool to ensure the research question and aims were kept in mind to guide discussions and not lose sight of the overall purpose of the research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Terry & Hayfield, 2021).

2.5 Data Analysis

A more detailed account of the data analysis can be found in Chapter 3. The following section provides insight as to what informed the choice of data analysis.

When considering my method for data analysis I wanted to ensure it allowed for any materials, including visuals, which would support the accessibility of interviews for the young people taking part, tailoring the method to their needs. I considered using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as it concerns itself with an individual's lived experience and outlines that interview questions should be nondirective (Willig, 2013). However, I believed that if I were to tailor interviews to my participants' needs using tools such as visuals, this may not be truly their experience and therefore would not be in line with my understanding of the phenomenology of IPA.

I therefore began to explore Reflexive Thematic Analysis which I chose as the appropriate method for data analysis. Thematic Analysis involves 'systematically identifying, organising and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 57). It is a flexible approach that provides rich accounts of an individual's experiences and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Frith & Gleeson, 2004). Further, I took an inductive approach which is described as a bottom-up approach as it is data-driven, allowing themes to emerge from the participants' transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As thematic analysis concerns itself with rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences it appeared an appropriate choice of data analysis coherent with my epistemological stance and research aims.

Thematic analysis has been criticised due to the lack of literature of the analysis methodology, as compared to other methods such as grounded theory (Nowell et al., 2017). Further, unlike approaches such as conversation analysis, thematic analysis does not allow for claims relating to language use (Braun & Clarke, 2006), meaning the possibility for exploring the role language plays in young people's experiences is reduced. Additionally, the flexibility of thematic analysis has been said to lead to inconsistency when developing themes (Holloway & Todres, 2003). However, I hope to address this by explicitly outlining my epistemological position of critical realism as a researcher, supporting the coherence of findings (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

The reflexivity of Thematic Analysis allows for 'critical reflection on your role as a researcher, and your research practice and process' (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 5). It was therefore important, as part of the reflexive process, to acknowledge the impact of my own social identity and experiences on the research (Burr, 2003). For example, my experience of education as an able-bodied person and my personal and professional relationships with young people with physical disabilities will have influenced my own interpretation of their experiences.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This project was granted ethical approval from the Newcastle University Ethics Committee and follows the ethical guidance set out by the British Psychological Society (2021) and HCPC (2016).

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice'. Procedural ethics refers to the ethics committee approval that is granted and ethics in practice to the everyday difficulties that arise when carrying out research. The distinction is made as it is argued that procedural ethics 'cannot in itself provide all that is needed for dealing with ethically important moments in qualitative research' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262). I therefore aim to discuss how various ethical issues are addressed both by the ethics committee and in the day-to-day of carrying out qualitative research. Due to the needs and age of my participants, I made adjustments to ensure that my practice remained ethical throughout this piece of research, as discussed below.

2.6.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a key concept in ethical research as highlighted by the British Psychological Society (2021). Providing information as to what a research project entails ensures participants have an understanding of what participation would involve and aims to lead to informed consent (Wiles, 2012). I provided a full written information sheet which I shared with and described verbally to participants and their parents/carers. As a number of my participants had difficulties with their vision, I tailored my information and debrief forms to a size to meet their need and then described this verbally (Wiles, 2012). I also obtained written consent from both the young people and their parents/carers. Deception was addressed through this process as participants were aware of the aims and purpose of the research (Willig, 2013).

However, it is suggested that it is not possible to obtain consent that is entirely informed as participants in this case had no knowledge of the content of the interview, only the topic (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). Further, participants may have felt the need to respond in a socially desirable way and continue with the research, particularly as this is more common in research focused on sensitive topics (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Therefore, I believed it to be important to focus on other signs of consent beyond the formal process. This included looking for visible signs of discomfort, their engagement in the process and ensuring ongoing consent (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002; Preece & Jordan, 2010). This included verbal reminders of their right to withdraw and 'check ins' to ensure ongoing verbal consent was obtained.

2.6.2 Power Dynamics

As the BPS outlines 'a difference in power typically exists between researchers and participants even if researchers seek to minimise it' (2021, p. 9). Issues of power were therefore considered throughout this project. I value the dignity, autonomy and worth of all individuals, underpinning my approach to research. I acknowledge children and young people to be the experts of their own lives. Relating to issues of power, their lives have often been explored through the ‘voices of adult proxies’ working in their best interests (Christensen & James, 2008; Jones et al., 2000). I hope to highlight their voices, experiences and perspectives on the world in which they live.

Endeavouring to act reflexively in my approach to research is said to be beneficial to, bringing awareness of, the issues of power that arise (Barker & Weller, 2003). As such I utilised the reflexive questions outlined by Phelan and Kinsella (2013) to inform the planning and process of the interviews. These questions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Reflexive Questions Relating to Power (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013)

- How have I presented myself to the child? How does the child perceive my role?
    - In what ways have I created a safe space?
    - What aspects of the research relationship are making me feel uncomfortable?
    - What aspects of the research relationship are flourishing?
- How have I continued to offer opportunities for the child to withdraw? Ask questions?
- How do the methods used contribute to the balancing power dynamics and allowing for the child’s influence on the research?
    - Have I considering the benefits and risks to each method?
    - In what ways am I sharing power with the child in the research process?
    - Is the child’s right to share power with the research being upheld?

As part of the process of gathering informed consent I shared my first name, what it means to be a researcher in my capacity and the project to ensure they had an awareness of my role.

I aimed to show awareness of and sensitivity to the perceived authority of my position as researcher. I endeavoured to be consciously aware of and looking for any non-verbal signs that participants may be experiencing discomfort or distress within the interview. I employed aspects of attuned interaction including active listening, looking attentive, leaving space to talk and reaching new understandings (Kennedy et al., 2010). I found these were beneficial in building trust, a shared understanding and establishing open communication with participants (Kennedy et al., 2010). I ensured that, although the questions asked posed a low risk of harm or distress, the young people were able to direct questions or concerns to me and reminded them of someone in their school they could speak to after the interview. I ensured I arranged with school staff who this named member of staff would be, their awareness of the project and their availability.

Using language within an interview that young people may not understand or that a teacher or someone else in position of authority would use can lead to inaccessibility and create a power imbalance (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). I therefore aimed to consider all language used within my interview schedule and adapted my language in response to the young person's understanding, providing further detail or descriptions where necessary. I found ‘belonging’ to be a difficult concept for young people to understand and needed more description where possible to address this power imbalance and ensure accessibility. However, I acknowledge that providing some description of ‘belonging’ may have influenced how young people described their experience of this within school. I therefore tried to keep an explanation as broad as possible and would often ask instead what ‘not belonging’ might mean to them which appeared to further their understanding.

Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point and it was explained if this were to happen, they would not be asked to give reasons for this. However, Mishna et al. (2004) highlights that children often do not understand they are able to withdraw unless asked directly. I therefore was vigilant of their body language and responses for any indication of discomfort. Further, when describing their right to withdraw I explained what we would be discussing in the interview when speaking about the information sheet, if this sounded ok, if they had any questions and if they would like to participate (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). This ensured informed written and verbal consent.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an opportunity for me to explore and describe aspects of the decision-making process that has led from my systematic literature review to my empirical research. I have outlined my values, ontological and epistemological stance which have informed the choices I have made. I have further explained my position as a reflexive researcher, allowing me to reflect on the way in which I have shaped this research (Willig, 2008). By endeavouring to remain reflective I have also explored the ethical considerations made when approaching this research. Within the next chapter I consider the rationale informing this research, the methodology chosen, the findings from this empirical study and future implications and considerations.

Chapter 3. The Empirical Project: The Experiences of Sense of Belonging for Children and Young People with a Physical Disability within a Mainstream Education Setting

Abstract

Aim: The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of young people with physical disabilities in relation to their sense of within a mainstream education setting.

Rationale: Fostering a sense of belonging within an education setting is said to result in several positive outcomes for children and young people. Research suggests poor outcomes for children and young people considered under the umbrella term of ‘SEND’. Further, there is a lack of published research as to how young people specifically with physical disabilities experience sense of belonging. This project therefore aims to amplify the voices of these young people to learn and understand more about their experience of school and sense of belonging within this setting.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were carried out with five young people from three mainstream settings on an individual basis. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

Results: Data gathered from interviews revealed six overarching themes exploring how young people with physical disabilities experience a sense of belonging in their school setting. These included: relationships with adults, peer relationships, identity, access, perceptions of learning and transition.

Conclusion: The research offers a rich account of sense of belonging for young people who have a physical disability, contributing to wider literature focused on the sense of belonging experiences of children and young people.

Key Words: Sense of belonging, mainstream education, physical disability, experiences, young people

This research will be submitted to the British Journal of Educational Psychology following examination. As such, it is in the style of papers typically published by this journal.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Terminology Used

Throughout this research project the broad term of ‘physical disability’ is used and I recognise that many individuals may identify with this term. However, I acknowledge large distinctions between individuals and bodies of this community and that individuals may not identify with this terminology. As Withers (2020, p. 11) states, ‘disabled people are not a homogenous group; we are diverse and impacted by different oppressions.’ I hope this terminology will be accepted by the community to which it relates for the purposes of this research project. Further, I utilised the language used by participants as part of the interview. For example, if a participant used the phrase ‘VI child’ I adopted this language in the interview.

3.1.2 Findings of the systemic literature review

The SLR, outlined in Chapter One, highlighted concepts that appear to have a relationship to fostering a sense of belonging in education. Relationships with staff and peers, feelings of inclusion, accessibility and self-esteem were reflected to influence belonging and, in turn, for a sense of belonging to affect these. Movement and the perceptions of others were also important in affecting students’ sense of belonging.

3.1.3 Fostering sense of belonging in mainstream education settings

As Baumeister and Leary (1995) state that the human need to belong is universal, it is assumed that all young people wish to experience belonging within their education settings. A definition for sense of belonging was offered in Chapter One, alongside my description of the Affirmation Model of Disability, which I have utilised for this research project (see pages 2-3). The benefits of fostering a sense of belonging have been highlighted (Jose et al., 2012; O'Rourke & Cooper, 2010; Pittman & Richmond, 2007) indicating that young people who are characterised as ‘SEND’, under which physical disability sits, are likely to have more negative experiences of belonging in school (Hogan et al, 2000). Further, on a systemic level, the structures in place within school and everyday culture can be ‘disabling’ for this group of young people, affecting their experience of school as a whole (McMaugh, 2011).

Hall (2009) outlines that a lack of belonging in a setting can lead to feelings of being ignored or left out, and that fostering a sense of belonging includes participation, no fear of judgement and not feeling a burden to others. The latter aspect could be particularly pertinent to young people with physical disabilities as much of the structure of society is built around the medical model, implying that disability is the problem of the individual (Brown & Smith, 1989). Further, disability is said to exist ‘as a consequence of an active process of marginalisation’ (Withers, 2020, p. 7). This systemic disabling of individuals could lead to young people perceiving themselves as a ‘burden’ placed upon others. This relates closely to the link between sense of belonging and the approval or support from others within a setting (Harter, 1993; Strudwicke, 2000) which is echoed in the earlier meta-ethnography. This does not imply young people with physical disabilities cannot foster a sense of belonging, but that there are barriers at the individual, group and systemic levels that could influence their sense of belonging to a larger extent as compared to their peers. These barriers would need to be considered and addressed by education settings striving to foster a sense of belonging for students.

There appear to be differences in young people’s experiences of special and mainstream settings within literature. This is outlined in a recent report by the Office for National Statistics (Jordan et al., 2022). They report that some young people who had experience of both setting types described a more positive experience in a special setting and a greater sense of belonging. However, there is recognition of a stigma surrounding the labelling of ‘special school’, implying mainstream schools are ‘normal’. This can lead to parents/carers enrolling young people in a mainstream setting to avoid marginalisation even if this is not always in the young person’s best interests (Jordan et al., 2022). Further, young people described being labelled as ‘SEND’ and therefore treated differently to their ‘typical’ peers in the mainstream setting, particularly regarding the work given, which can be perceived as a barrier to sense of belonging. More specifically for young people with physical disabilities, young people describe having access to facilities such as lifts as positive but that these were often more available in special settings (Jordan et al., 2022). As there appears to be a perceived difference in these settings, and the Department for Education suggests young people with physical disabilities are typically able to attend mainstream settings, it would be beneficial to explore the experiences of the young people attending this type of setting (DfE, 2015). As identified within the SLR there is a lack of the experiences of young people in mainstream primary and secondary settings were not represented.

3.2 Methodology

The aim of this research is to explore the sense of belonging experiences of young people with physical disabilities within a mainstream setting. Using my definition of sense of belonging and the results from the SLR, I aimed to explore the different aspects of young people's perceptions and experiences of belonging throughout this project.

3.2.1 Participants

Two primary mainstream settings and one secondary mainstream setting within a Local Authority based in the North East of England took part. One of the primary settings and the secondary setting had resource provisions in the form of a base. This provision is within a mainstream setting, where students are taught mainly within the mainstream classes but access base resource and some specialist facilities where necessary. The bases in these settings describe themselves as supporting young people specifically with visual impairments.

I recognise that my definition of physical disability can include several needs as the Equality Act (2010) defines it as 'a limitation on a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina' with substantial and long-term impact on a person's daily life. Young people who took part in this research described their needs as, for example, 'having bad eyes', 'bad handwriting' or that their heart condition could stop them from doing certain things. They did not use phrases such as disability and disabled but rather described their need or the impact their disability had on their daily lives. Therefore, as the definition describes a limitation on daily life, young people's descriptions of their experience could be perceived as a description of their disability. It may be that by belonging to groups, such as the VI base, young people were more familiar with language such as 'VI kids' and use this to identify themselves as opposed to the terms disabled or disability.

Gatekeepers, in the form of school staff, were approached to explore interest in the research and asked whether any young people attending their school would like to take part. When approaching school staff, in this case SENDCos, I discussed in depth what the study would include and my definition of physical disability to ensure they were fully informed. SENCOs approached parents and carers to discuss the study as they have pre-existing relationships with the families of the young people attending school. Information sheets and consent forms were then distributed to young people and their parents/carers. Those who wished to take part responded. Five young people in total participated in this study. Participants' characteristics relevant to this study are detailed in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Demographic Information of Participants

Student Pseudonyms	Year Group	Gender	Disability	Length of time attending setting	Type of provision
Sophie	5	Female	Visual Impairment	From nursery to year one and then year three to present day	VI base with full time access to mainstream primary
Lucas	5	Male	Visual Impairment	From reception	VI base with full time access to mainstream primary
Tom	7	Male	Visual Impairment	From the start of the 2022/23 academic year	VI base with full time access to mainstream secondary
Laura	5	Male	Difficulties with motor coordination and balance	From reception	Mainstream Primary
Oliver	5	Female	A heart condition affecting mobility	From reception	Mainstream Primary

3.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore the lived experiences of young people's sense of belonging within school. An interview schedule (see appendix A for sample schedule) was used to structure interviews, but this was used as a guide only, ensuring the interview was not restricted and allowing for flexibility and co-construction between the researcher and participant (Terry & Hayfield, 2021).

Interviews took place within their school setting, in a quiet room and on an individual basis with each young person. When entering the room young people were given the option to sit where they wished to, be on the floor, chairs or in some schools a sofa chair to ensure they felt comfortable. All interviews were recorded using audio with written and verbal consent from the young person. I took time to show them the voice recorder, how this worked and what it would be used for as part of this process. These interviews were later transcribed verbatim and then deleted. Each interview varied in length from 15 to 45 minutes.

Further information relating to my methodology can be found on page 30.

3.3 Data Analysis

I drew upon the approach of Braun and Clarke (2021) to reflexive thematic analysis as a flexible method of making sense of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was an inductive process, involving coding at two levels: semantic and latent. Semantic codes reflect explicit meanings in participants' language, whereas latent codes refer to conceptual or implicit meanings that are not always obvious within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I utilised the program NVivo to assist me in organising and analysing my data sets (Dhakal, 2022).

A reflexive journal was kept throughout the data collection and analysis processes to document decision making, rationale, personal reflections on values and emerging impressions of the data sets and how they relate to each other (Richards & Morse, 2012; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This journal of emerging impressions can inform the initial themes within phase three of reflexive thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Table 8 outlines the six phases of Thematic Analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Table 8. Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021 p35-36)

Phase	Description

Phase One: Familiarising yourself with the data	A process of immersion in the data through listening to audio recordings and making notes related to the data set.
Phase Two: Coding	Working through the data set systematically, highlighting parts of data relevant to the research question and aims. This captures single meanings or concepts within the data.
Phase Three: Generating initial themes	Identification of meaningful patterns across the data set, clustering codes that share a key concept to create initial themes.
Phase Four: Reviewing themes	This involved re-visiting the data set, ensuring themes make sense in relation to the coded extracts and the full data set. Some themes may be pulled together or split into further themes. The relationship between all themes must be considered.
Phase Five: Refining, defining and naming themes	This refining process ensures each theme is clearly demarcated and has a strong core concept. Each theme must then be named and given a detailed description.
Phase Six: Writing the report	Writing the report includes pulling together the analytic narrative and data extracts to show how this addresses your research question. The informal writing - in the form of reflexive journaling and note taking throughout the data collection and analysis process - informs this phase.

3.4 Findings and Discussion

The findings from the thematic analysis detailed above resulted in subthemes that were then grouped into six themes: Access, Relationships with Adults, Relationships with Peers, Identity, Purpose of Learning and Transition. By presenting the sub themes alongside the broader theme to which they relate, I hope to provide a more detailed insight into the factors that contribute to a sense of belonging for the participants.

3.4.1 Access

The theme access pertains to the access participants had to different materials or adjustments that were made via gatekeepers. This theme comprises the three sub themes: materials, adjustments and gatekeeping.

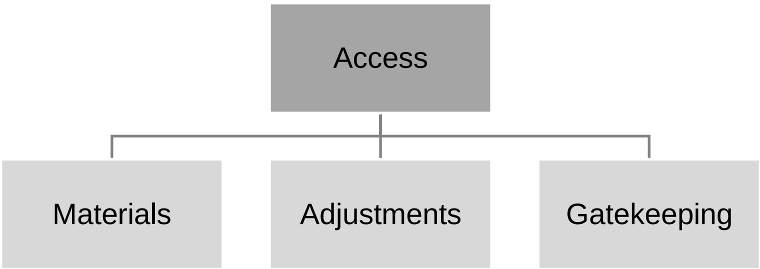

Figure 3. Thematic Map for Access

Materials

The sub-theme of materials refers to the physical materials participants can access when in school, this was particularly prominent in interviews with Sophie and Tom:

> *Sophie: “when we’re doing some piece of work they always type it up in big font and print It out so we can see it”*
>
> *Sophie: “lots of machines that spell braille and everything it’s got lots of cabinets in with like books in for us”*
>
> *Tom: “in the PE department… they have like bell balls and stuff so if we get put into groups or we’re playing something… we all use the bell balls so I know where it is”*

Participants' comments suggest that resources they are able to see or hear are important in supporting their access to learning or participation in classroom activities.

Adjustments

The sub-theme of adjustments refers to the changes put in place within school to support young people to engage in learning on an individual basis.

> *Sophie: "I appreciate how they spent a long time doing our assessment and like our work and I think that they do a good job"*
>
> *Tom: "I beat the rush of people coming out the classrooms because I come out I come five minutes early for every lesson and leave 5 minutes early"*
>
> *Oliver: "I am able to do my work on a laptop sometimes"*

This suggests that the changes school staff make to the school environment or systems were viewed positively by participants.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping relates to the permissions young people are granted by school staff when accessing materials or when adjustments are made.

> *Tom: "I'm allowed my friends my two friends I can come in with me about five minutes early"*
>
> *Laura: "I got into year 5 Miss P like let me so in my classroom we have a comfy chair and she started letting me go on that every day… now I only go on it when I need to calm down"*

Participants used words such as 'allowed' and 'let me' which demonstrates the gatekeeping mechanisms at play as young people are given permission to make changes. It suggests a hierarchy of authority existing within school systems.

Summary and Discussion: Access

The theme of access also featured in the findings of the SLR as accessibility was identified as important to fostering a sense of belonging. Consistent with these findings, access to materials, reasonable adjustments and given permissions to access resources/areas were all viewed positively. These offer opportunities to be involved with aspects of school life (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Prince & Hadwin, 2013) and therefore having no or limited access would likely affect participants' sense of belonging.

Little research exists relating to belonging in physical space for young people with disabilities. However, Trawalter et al. (2021) described a link between belonging and access to physical space. They suggest that those with low socioeconomic status often have less access to public space or are discouraged from using this space, undermining individuals' sense of belonging to the community. Individuals with physical disabilities often encounter inaccessible environments (Rimmer et al., 2004). Without adaptations to learning materials and adjustments to learning tasks or the environment, large aspects of school could be deemed inaccessible to participants in the current research. This suggests that if young people are unable to access space or discouraged from doing so within education, this would have a detrimental impact on their belonging within school.

A potential barrier to this access is gatekeeping. I consider gatekeeping in this context to refer to the responsibility and authority of school staff to make adjustments. The Equality Act (2010) outlines that education settings must make reasonable adjustments to ensure young people with disabilities are not disadvantaged. However, what is deemed to be a reasonable adjustment is decided by school staff. This is understood by students, as evidenced in the current findings as they describe being 'allowed' to engage with adjustments. The hierarchical structure adopted by the UK education system has been discussed previously in this body of writing and can be seen in recent behaviour guidance (DfE, 2022, p. 7) stating schools must aim to promote 'proper regard for authority'. It may be that a process by which students are consulted on these adjustments would help to empower young people to be included in decision making (Gillies, 2013; Tancredi, 2020). This would act as a further opportunity for young people to be actively involved in school life, contributing to a sense of belonging.

3.4.2 Relationships with Adults

These subthemes were grouped to demonstrate the factors affecting young people's experiences of relationships with the adults within school.

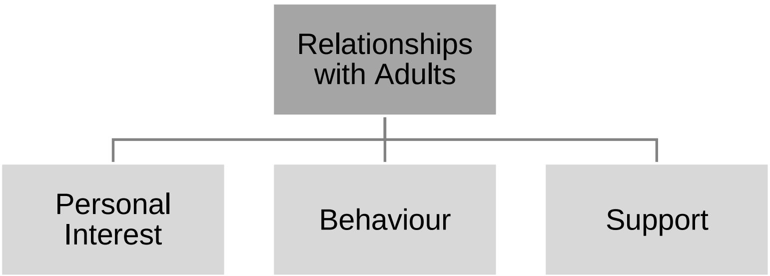

Figure 4. Thematic Map for Relationships with Adults

Personal Interest

The subtheme 'personal interest' refers to the interest that school staff take in young people and whether they share any personal interests. Tom and Oliver expressed that talking more informally with adults in school was positive for them, perhaps contributing to a sense of connectedness.

Oliver: "Like they ask me about how I've been doing"

Tom: "Because they're always talking they always talk to me"

Lucas: "I like talking to them like when I see Mrs C I'm going to see if she was at the stall on Wednesday because I think I saw her"

Further, Tom appreciated a common interest he shared with his teacher which appeared to contribute to his relationship with them:

Interviewer: "ah ok so you said you were excited to join her class what was exciting?"

Tom: "Because I like doing computers and she likes doing computers too and she usually and she's just usually fun like learning in the computer suite"

Behaviour

However, the school staff's behaviour in school, particularly in relation to behaviour policy and learning in the classroom could have a negative effect on this relationship. Participants referred to some teachers as 'strict' and that they would 'shout' a lot which was viewed negatively:

> *Laura: "sometimes I'm literally like so annoyed at her because like if she shouts at me I think she's so annoying"…." the bad thing about it is sometimes she can just like shout like she shouting and it gets annoying because I don't like strict teachers"*

Some participants did not perceive being strict as a negative aspect and highlighted that there may be a positive effect of this teaching behaviour:

> *Sophie: "The teachers are sometimes they're really funny actually sometimes they're a bit strict but I like that they're strict because it helps us with our learning a bit more learning how we can't do something bad or something silly so it helps us"*

Support

'Support' refers to the support or 'help' participants received from school staff and external professionals which appeared to have a positive impact on their relationship. Sophie described the different types of support she receives in school, specifically in relation to supporting her difficulties with vision.

> *Sophie: "if we cant see our pens or so they help us and get felt tips and do it for us if it gets a bit struggling"*
>
> *"I do like how we have got lots of teachers… and got some more people that are VI and I like how we have got more staff because it makes it easier"*

Additionally, school staff appear to be described as good, nice or 'my favourite' when participants were describing their helping behaviours:

> *Oliver: "Miss X she was my first ever favourite teacher because she helped me with my work"*
>
> *Tom: "Its got nice teachers who are helpful"*

Tom referenced positive support he received from an external professional to ensure he was able to navigate a new school building during his transition:

> *Tom: "before I moved to the academy my mobility teacher used to take me out with my cane but before I came here, I have tried my cane twice to try and like navigate myself around the lunch hall for getting lunch"*

Participants discussed in detail the support received and this was seen positively by each individual.

Summary and Discussion: Relationships with Adults

This theme relates closely to the findings of the SLR and to literature that suggests these relationships are fundamental to fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). In both the SLR and this research, support was highlighted to be beneficial to this relationship. This research suggests that school staff's behaviour towards, and personal interest in, young people are further important aspects of this relationship.

The 2017 green paper 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' promotes pastoral care within the teaching role (DfE, 2018). School staff showing a personal interest in young people, including shared interests and an interest in their wellbeing, was found to be important to this relationship within this research. This is consistent with existing literature that describes frequent discussion of topics beyond the subject of learning as being supportive of close relationships and having a positive effect on students' mental health (Mælan et al., 2020). Further, Littlecott et al. (2018) found that the way in which secondary students perceive the personality of school staff and the rapport between them is influential when deciding to approach school staff with concerns. The ability to approach adults with concerns and view them as 'approachable' is said to be important to students' satisfaction in school (Samdal et al., 1998), perhaps influencing their valuing of school, which is said to be important to a sense of belonging.

Participants in this study referred to teachers but also support staff who worked ‘one to one’ with them in class and external professionals such as mobility teachers. This highlighted the importance of relationships with all school staff, not just teachers. It is argued that these relationships with other members of school staff are important to connecting students to their school (Bishop et al., 2001; Pound et al., 2016) particularly as teachers can be perceived as authority figures (Hargreaves, 2000). This relates to the sub-theme of ‘behaviour’ as teachers that were perceived as ‘strict’ or sometimes ‘shouting’ may be more associated with an authority figure and therefore less approachable.

Students who are considered to have better relationships with teachers or greater perceived teacher support were also found to have a greater sense of belonging (Osterman, 2000). Their perception of their teacher’s encouragement, friendliness, helpfulness and preparation were all found to be related to the sense of belonging in class (Freeman et al., 2007). This is consistent with findings from this research as participants described teaching staff as helpful and described their preparation in providing support, such as having the right materials. This supportiveness can be challenged by the authoritarian structure of school systems as individuals are said to be less likely to build friendships with those of a different status and therefore students and teachers are said to be less likely to provide support to one another (Farh et al., 2007; Hofstede et al., 2010). However, this challenge to support is not seen in the current findings as all participants shared positive experiences of support received from school staff. Overall, the personal interest expressed by school staff, their behaviour and the type of support received were all deemed to be influential to young people’s sense of belonging.

3.4.3 Relationships with Peers

Analysis highlighted relationships with peers as a key theme for participants' sense of belonging in school. The data was grouped into four sub-themes before becoming the overall theme of relationships with peers.

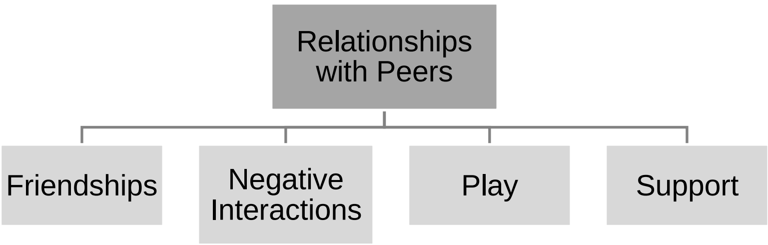

Figure 5. Thematic Map for Relationships with Peers

Friendships

Friendships were described across all interviews, particularly in response to being asked how participants know they belong or are a part of school. This highlighted to me the importance of friendships and peer relationships to young people's belonging in school.

> *Interviewer: "do you feel like you belong at school?"*
>
> *Sophie: "Yeah because I've got all my friends"*
>
> *Interviewer: "how do you know that you are part of this school Tom?"*
>
> *Tom: "Because erm all the other children like talk to me"*
>
> *Laura: "My mum has talked to me about moving before to a different school but like I say no because I my friends like I've got a lot of friends here… like that's why I wouldn't move school"*

Negative Interactions

Interviews also featured the negative peer interactions that occur within school. This related to peers falling out with each other, loneliness and peers saying things that were considered unkind by the participants.

> *Laura: "Alright iffy cause like if A is playing with somebody else like I have got B which is like a really really good friend and I can play with B and stuff but if A and B are both off with somebody then I can play with C but if hes off with somebody I can't play with anybody"*
>
> *Oliver: "they just kept saying you look like a banana and I just walked off because no one wanted to play with me"*
>
> *Sophie: "some friends have like a little bit fights I mainly just try and help but sometimes if it's still going on after a long time I just…. let the teacher sort it out because I don't know what to do"*

Oliver highlighted that he feels to not belong in school would mean that he *"wouldn't have like I wouldn't know all of my friends that I do now".* This relates to the idea that friendships are central to the sense of belonging young people feel in school.

Play

When describing what they did with their friends in school, play was a consistent theme across interviews. Oliver described that in school *"you can find a really fun game to play with people at break"* and Lucas shared his friends as *"fun and [he likes] playing with them".* Tom and Laura shared more details as to what this play involves:

> *Tom: "like was friends with them and stuff I met them because I was playing football"*
>
> *Laura: "we played a game called run away from the zombies but you can only use parkour so like if you're running then the zombies would be coming"*

This suggests that play might be a key factor to the formation and maintenance for these young people at this stage in their development.

Support

Similar to the participants' relationships with adults, support was a theme when describing positive interactions with peers that may support these relationships. This appeared particularly salient to Tom who described that he *"made a few friends in my tutor group and they like helped me".* He also shared examples of the support he receives from peers.

> *"Like someone's coming through they will move out the way and erm they all like for example if my support goes to the toilet or something then they would stand next to me and sometimes they read out what's on the board and stuff"*
>
> *"if they're passing out the books they'll remember that like I have a folder they'll pass out to me"*
>
> *"like my friend carries my tray and does that for me and eats with my and plays with me and stuff outside"*

This appeared particularly pertinent to Tom who has difficulties with his vision and therefore the support from peers appeared helpful in different school contexts. Further, Sophie described enjoying helping peers herself as *"now Phil is in this class which I really like because me and Phil have a good bond and I like helping him".* It may be that reciprocal support between peers is important for fostering their peer relationships, affecting their sense of belonging.

Summary and Discussion: Relationships with Peers

Peer-peer relationships have been identified as important to developing a sense of belonging throughout literature (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018; Gowing, 2019; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). Peer relationships were also highlighted within the SLR. However, within the current research, participants consistently described friendships as the most important aspect of belonging to their school setting. This is supported by the findings of Gowing and Jackson (2016) who report relationships with peers to be central to school life. Despite this, much of the existing literature focuses on teacher-student relationships and therefore these findings hope to add to growing literature on the peer-peer relationship and how this supports belonging.

School is said to be one of the key places where peer relationships are formed (McGrath & Noble, 2010). The sub-theme of 'play' may be an important aspect of these peer relationships. Play is essential to a young person's development, particularly in the early years, as it supports social skills and understanding the perspectives of others (DeVries, 2015; Whitebread et al., 2012) which can support the formation and maintenance of peer-peer relationships. The act of 'playing together' offers opportunities to support belonging as it is an opportunity to interact with others and to connect to a desired group (Allen et al., 2021).

Whilst peer relationships have been shown to support sense of belonging, they can also be a barrier, as seen in both the current findings and literature. Peer relationships can be associated with bullying, stress and social isolation, which has a direct effect on students' connection with school and therefore their sense of belonging (Agoston & Rudolph, 2016; McGrath & Noble, 2010; O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010). These themes are seen within the current findings as young people described being excluded from play, name calling and conflict between peers. These could therefore be seen as challenging a young person's sense of belonging in school.

The act of being 'supported by others in a school social environment' is an important aspect of Goodenow and Grady (1993, p. 80) definition of belonging and this is highlighted within this research. Further, Osterman (2000) suggests that interpersonal support received can enhance belonging. The current research reflects this as the support received by participants from peers was discussed and described in interviews. Additionally, the subtheme of support may be more pertinent to participants with vision impairments who are supported across the school day. Peers are often said to assume a primary support role in the absence of an adult including clarifying instructions and modifying class materials for peers with disabilities (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). Literature has suggested that peers' perception of students with disabilities as unable to carry out activities could result in this helping behaviour (Yu et al., 2012). However, participants described the support received as positive within this research and this can be seen to positively support sense of belonging.

3.4.4 Identity

Sub-themes relating to group identity, self-identity and disability as an identity were all clustered to create the 'Identity' theme.

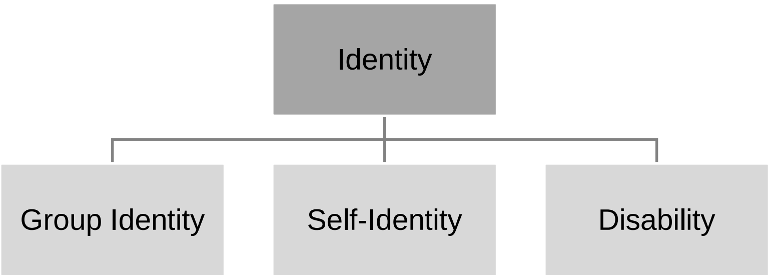

Figure 6. Thematic Map for Identity

<u>Group Identity</u>

The sub-theme of group identity relates to experiences that participants described, particularly Sophie, Lucas and Tom who all access a Visual Impairment (VI) Base within their school setting. All three of these participants described the VI base and peers as 'VI children' - a collective identity to which they belonged. Sophie shared that *"the VI base has less tables and there's only VI people and there's only VI teachers who go in there"* and that *"our VI base where we go to do stuff because we've got bad eyes".* Sophie, Tom and Lucas often referred to themselves and others as 'VI kids'. This appeared as a smaller community within the school that they belonged to. Sophie referenced having more 'VI kids' in her class positively:

> *Interviewer: "Did you say there was more VI children in this class than there was last year?"*
>
> *Sophie: "Well last year it was just me, Lily and Charlie but now Phil is in this class which I really like because me and Phil have a good bond… there's also a lot of younger children in the VI and I just like how they are like really strong even though they've got bad eyes that's what I think I like about them"*

This was not shared in interviews with Laura or Oliver who did not attend a VI base. They instead referenced the uniform they wear as part of a collective school identity as Laura shared *"I've got a school badge".*

<u>Self-Identity</u>

Self-identity has been conceptualised as the way in which participants described seeing themselves. They describe school systems that support their confidence in their abilities and act as an encouragement. These include being included in games or lessons and receiving extrinsic rewards. Laura describes *“in this school…I got a prize out the prize box today for my drawing”* and *“I got two headteacher awards for it too because it was really detailed and really good”.* Tom described that school supports him to feel more inspired:

> *Tom: “Because it inspired me to do stuff like inspires me to do stuff that other people can do as well”*
>
> *Interviewer: “Ah what do you mean by that?”*
>
> *Tom: “So for example like erm I take part in stuff that other people can do so I don’t feel left out”*

Disability

The sub-theme of disability refers to how young people described their disabilities in interviews as part of their identity. This was more prominent in interviews with participants who accessed a VI base. Sophie in particular described worries she had before attending school due to *“having bad eyes”* but also that school surprised her and appears to have encouraged a positive self-image of her disability.

> *“when I was little I didn’t like having bad eyes because I thought id get bullied for it but I don’t”*
>
> *“I really like how other people have it and its just me because I think it’s really good having bad eyes now because it just makes you feel unique and special”*
>
> *“Because all people have got other needs like hearing like can’t hear or can’t see and I just think that it makes them unique and the other children that don’t have anything wrong with them erm it’s still they are unique in another way but I think that being like you can’t hear or can’t see just makes you feel unique”*

However, Laura appeared to feel differently about her disability. She shared that *“it does effect because I had someone…they did say go away of I’ll get a magnet which would kill me…yeah like it can effect me because people can like threaten me a bit more”.* This may relate to how Laura feels safe within school and her concern about others perceptions of her as opposed to her disability itself being a negative aspect of her identity.

Summary and Discussion: Identity

These sub-themes closely relate to existing literature surrounding disability identity. Identity is defined as a range of concepts that define who you are in relation to society, a particular group or characteristics that identify you as an individual person (Burke & Stets, 2009). More specifically, disability identity is an identity context, relating to a positive sense of self and connection with other members of the disabled community (Dunn & Burcaw, 2013). Participants belonging to VI Bases within their school described their disability as part of their identity, and that because of their disability they are a part of this smaller community within school. Identity is suggested to be influential to belonging (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) as McCarthey and Moje (2002) suggest that the construction of identities allows individuals to belong. Further, school belonging has been found to correlate with the development of a positive identity (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Davis, 2012).

Some participants self-labelled as ‘VI kids’ and were positive about their experiences of being part of the VI Bases. This self-labelling may be a result of school staff using this phrasing to describe the VI base and the group that accesses it. Literature suggests that forcing an identity on an individual can result in feelings of unhappiness and contribute to a negative identity (Erikson, 1994). This could be applied to education as adults work to ensure young people are fitting within a mainstream narrative. Whilst it is likely school staff introduced this labelling, the VI base appeared to be regarded positively by those within school and acted as a small community for these participants, suggesting that labelling may in fact have had a positive effect on their identity and reinforced their belonging to the group. The self-labelling shows that young people are aware of and identify with this group. This contributes to their perception of connection to the group, which is suggested to be the basis of a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021).

Access to the VI base offers opportunities for participants to interact with others with likely similar experiences and characteristics, as shown by a participant describing *‘I like how other people have [a disability]’*. Opportunities refer to the ‘availability of groups, people, places, times and spaces that enable belonging to occur’ (Allen et al., 2021, p. 92). Without the existence of these opportunities, the ability to connect becomes useless (Allen et al., 2021). Sense of belonging is said to be supported by ‘the opportunities a person has to belong to a desired group’ (Allen et al., 2021, p. 90). Young people with disabilities are not usually taught about the disabled community within the UK system (Shakespeare, 2017), whereas in this smaller community it is likely this broader context would be discussed. The VI Base appears to be viewed positively by participants, and potentially acts as an opportunity for experiences and values relating to disability to be shared. It may therefore be that young people who access the VI Bases are viewed as a ‘desired group’ by participants and that opportunities to interact with others who are ‘VI kids’ contribute to a sense of belonging. Consequently, education settings should ensure opportunities are available for young people to interact with peers who have a similar experience and introduce a positive view of disabilities into their ethos, allowing for open conversations about disability with young people.

There appeared to be a difference between young people who were part of the VI base and the young people who were not, in their description of collective identity. As discussed, the VI base was regarded positively by the young people who attended and was discussed at length by several of these participants, particularly relating to their identity within this base. Conversely, the young people who did not attend a VI base discussed concrete indications of belonging, such as their uniform. The importance of uniforms in generating a collective identity in school and, in turn, contributing to a sense of belonging has been documented in literature (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016). Whilst all participants discussed friendship as being important to their belonging, it may be that young people who do not have the opportunity to be part of a group that is based on their disability, such as the VI base, develop a collective identity with other groups in school life including friendship groups. A sense of membership is suggested to develop when individuals perceive shared values with others, including an emotional attachment to and security in the group, which friendship may act as (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). Further, friendship may form a strong basis for sense of belonging to a wider community (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005), existing as a smaller group within a wider school setting, just as the VI base might.

3.4.5 Purpose of Learning

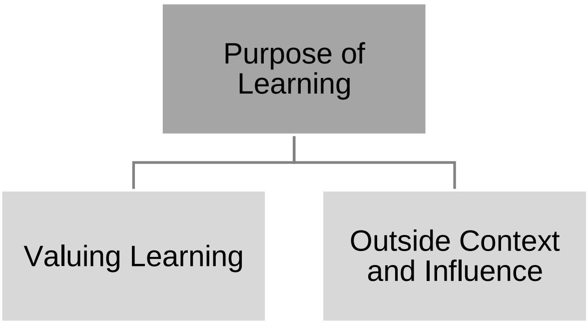

Figure 7. Thematic Map for Purpose of Learning

Valuing Learning

Some participants described their school as “good”, “great” and “fun” which suggests valuing the school experience and contributes to the sub-theme of valuing learning.

> *Laura: “Sort of fun cause you can do baking if you’re like learning about that subject so fun could be a bit boring at times”*
>
> *Sophie: “it helps me because in science we learn about materials if I like what to be a builder I know what the materials… but sometimes it’s fun and sometimes it’s hard”*
>
> *Sophie: “the important bit is the work”*

Laura and Sophie shared several subjects they enjoyed learning in school but also that learning can be difficult or ‘boring’. Sophie shared that the important part of school is ‘the work’ which suggests she values the learning aspect of education.

Outside Context and Influence

Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic resulting in school closures and home learning, Laura, and Oliver both raised this experience as part of their interviews. These came together to create the sub-theme outside context and influence, pertaining influences on the wider community or national context beyond the school context alone.

> *Laura: "I could be doing funner things at home I'd rather be learning at home than at school its funner at home"*
>
> *Oliver: "when we had to do like covid meeting because someone had covid…. I just stayed home… then I ignored them all and I just looked at the work and mum would say have you seen how much work and I wouldn't do it"*
>
> *Laura: "when I had covid when I was off school I actually wanted to go back for a bit but when I'm back at school I don't want to be there"*

This suggests that Laura valued having time at home during school closures and that overall, she felt she preferred this. Further, Oliver generally described his time at home as a positive experience but shared that he was unlikely to engage with learning at home.

Summary and Discussion: Purpose of Learning

Students' general feeling of school as a whole is said to be one of the key aspects of belonging in school (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018). Participants generally described school in a favourable way as 'fun' and 'good', suggesting an overall positive view or feeling of school as a whole, fostering belonging. Belongingness is said to contribute to students' motivation regarding interest, value and the importance of academic work (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018). It could be summarised from participants' interviews that there is a developing sense of belonging which may lead to valuing the learning and general school experience.

The participation of school, friendships, groups and hobbies all contribute to a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). The recent COVID-19 pandemic led to school closures across the UK and social distancing measures in place for periods of time, challenging this participation. School attendance has been suggested to be important for students to foster a sense of belonging with their education setting (Akar-Vural et al., 2013; Bowles & Scull, 2019). During the Covid 19 pandemic, school attendance varied for children who were on the SEN register, had an EHCP or were classed as vulnerable depending on national guidance for those groups (Holt & Murray, 2022; La Velle et al., 2020). This is particularly pertinent for young people with physical disabilities who were ‘shielding’ (NHS, 2023). This can be seen within findings of the current research as participants discussed their experiences of home learning and returning to school, an experience that would not often happen in normal circumstances. It may be that participants’ general feeling of school as a whole, and therefore their belonging to the setting, was impacted by the pandemic. This is evidenced by Laura’s description of home being more ‘fun’ than being in school. In lieu of physical opportunities to connect with communities, young people may turn to online activities which can be said to fulfil a need for belonging within friendships (Allen et al., 2014; Davis, 2012; Delahunty et al., 2014). However, less research exists yet exploring the virtual learning with which participants during these school closures and its relationship to belonging.

3.4.6 Transition

The theme of transition includes the subthemes of year group transition and school transition. This theme refers to young people’s experiences of transitions within their education setting including between their year groups and between different settings.

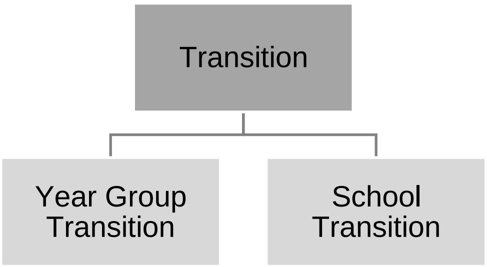

Figure 8. Thematic Map for Transition

<u>Year Group Transition</u>

Participants shared apprehensive experiences of year group transitions that take place within the same setting. They were concerned with knowing what to expect and knowing who their new teacher would be.

> *Lucas: "I was worried if I didn't know where the things were"*
>
> *Laura: "Year 5 I mean annoying because I didn't like Miss L it was annoying because she wasn't strict at all …then I moved into year 5 … the first day was really boring the practice to go in and see what it was like it was really boring I didn't like that"*
>
> *Oliver: "It felt like exciting and a little scary because I was because I was scared if I wasn't getting the teacher and I'm happy because it was Miss P the teacher I've wanted to work with"*

Although Lucas was concerned with knowing where things might be, the preparation period where participants 'practice' going into their new class was described as 'boring' by Laura. The existing relationships participants had with their new class teachers or their anticipation of what the teacher might be like seemed to impact their experiences of transition.

School Transition

Participants' experiences of transition between education settings highlighted the importance of relationships during this period.

> *Laura: "I could see my brother in school I could see my cousins in year 6 I could see him he'd just be one year ahead I could see him"*
>
> *Tom: "feels better yep because it feels like I've moved up the school like to secondary school but at least ill know someone at my secondary school"*
>
> *Tom: "getting used to moving like classrooms and like different teachers support it was getting used to like having my own planner… getting used to like the building as well a bit more erm navigating around the building"*
>
> *Oliver: "just scared if I don't like get friends like my friends aren't there and like don't get if I don't meet any new friends"*

These existing relationships with adults and peers appeared supportive during the transition period. Tom was the only participant interviewed who had recently moved from a primary to secondary setting and highlighted the importance of knowing the routine and being able to navigate the space.

Summary and Discussion: Transition

The theme of transition encompasses both between and within school transitions. Both are likely to affect young people's belonging as they adjust to and begin to connect to a new class/teacher or to a completely new environment. This process of change likely means participants consider the "extent to which they feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported" in their new environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 80). Further, age is said to contribute to a sense of belonging as young people experience changes throughout their development and likely will be affected by periods of transition (Allen & Kern, 2017). This is not necessarily represented in current research as most participants were of the same year group.

The importance of relationships again featured within this theme. Research by Furrer and Skinner (2003) highlights a relationship to a 'social partner', which could be a peer or teacher, to school transition. Further, students who felt appreciated by school staff were more likely to report feeling happy in school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003) which, by definition, would increase their sense of belonging. This is supported by current findings as the participants described engaging with teachers as part of the transition and this appeared to directly affect their feelings toward the transition. At a time of change, school staff should consider how to foster students' sense of belonging in the new setting or community (Anderson et al., 2000).

3.5 Overall Discussion

The thematic map found in figure 9 shows the six overall themes and each of their subthemes that were explored within this research. All themes included relate to the way in which the young people with physical disabilities who took part in this research experience sense of belonging within their mainstream education setting.

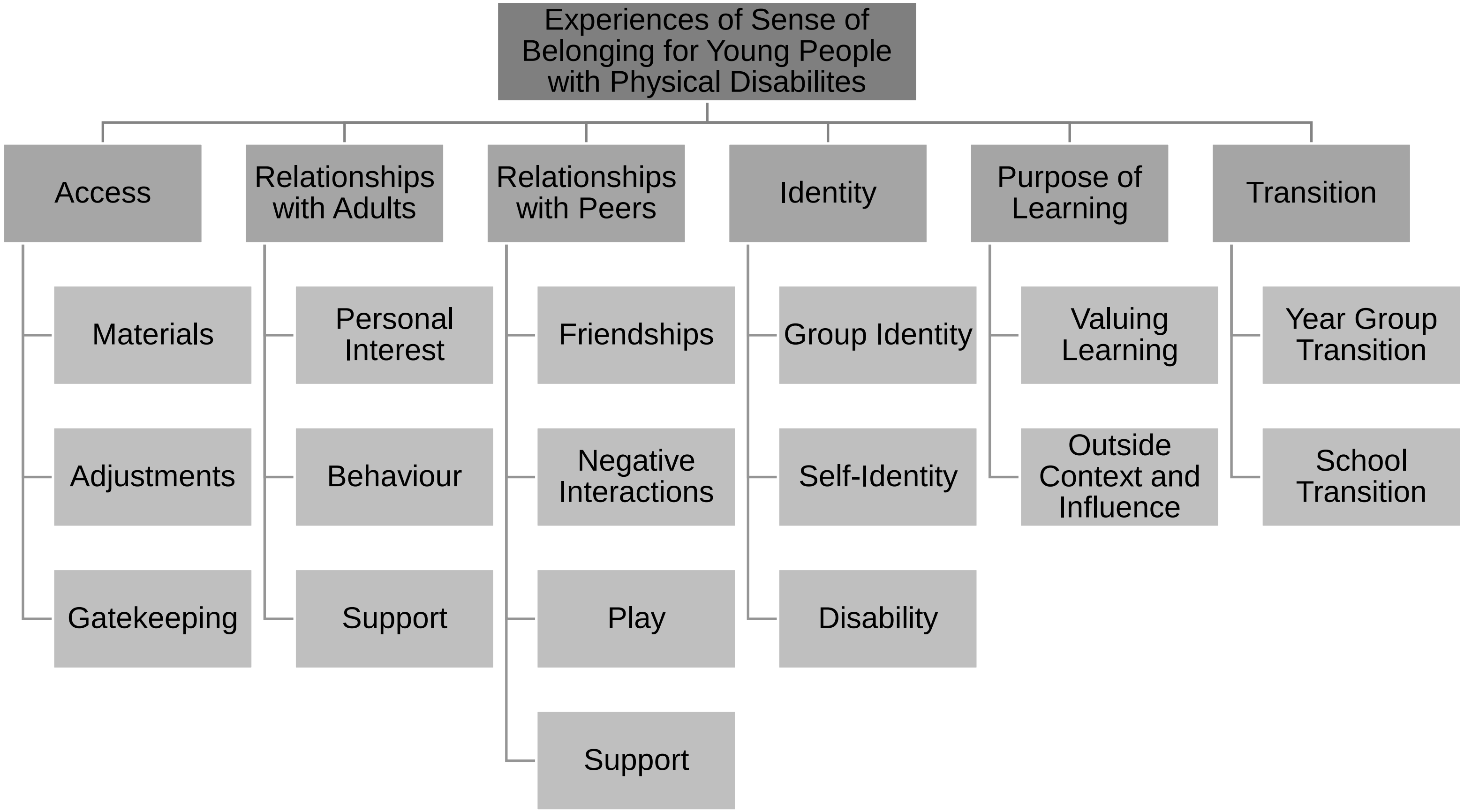

Figure 9. An Overall Thematic Map to show Young People with Physical Disabilities Experiences of Sense of Belonging

All themes contribute to the way in which these young people experience sense of belonging in their education setting. This research offers a unique perspective of young people with physical disabilities which may vary from existing research. For example, the inclusion of access and the disabled identity explored here could be considered unique to this population. Access can lead to opportunities for young people to be involved within their education setting, contributing to a sense of belonging. However, this can be dependent upon the gatekeeping role that adults play within school. Ways in which relationships with school staff and peers are experienced by participants and can be supported should be considered in fostering a sense of belonging. Further, consideration of the way in which self-identity and group identity can affect a young person's belonging should be prioritised. This research highlights the positive effects of a smaller community within school, such as the VI base, on young people's belonging. Further, the wider system existing around the school environment should be accounted for as experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequential school closures appear to have impacted belonging.

Many of these wider themes interlink and future research could be carried out to explore the relationships between them in future. For example, the peer relationships young people experience appear closely linked to their group identity, experience of transition and the peer support they receive in school. Similarly, the relationships with adults could be said to impact the access to resources they have, largely due to gatekeeping. These findings need to be considered together when considering how best to support the development of sense of belonging for this group of young people.

3.6 Limitations

It is important to recognise that individuals' sense of belonging can change frequently and over time depending on the variability of the settings or situations they are in (Allen et al., 2021). Therefore, this research can be considered to focus on a snapshot in time for the belonging of participants. Further, all participants had their physical disability from birth. Literature suggests differences in those with disability from birth and acquired disability in relation to the stigma, marginalisation

(Bogart et al., 2019) and identity (Bogart, 2014). All of these factors could directly impact young people’s sense of belonging and were not accounted for in this research.

Teachers’ views are often focused on across literature on belonging while there is less research on parent/carers perspectives. As the adults around young people are important to fostering belonging (Osterman, 2000), it may have been beneficial to include the voices of these two groups to further understanding of belonging in school settings. However, the focus of this research was on the experiences of young people as this is also underrepresented in literature.

I recognise that using a semi-structured interview methodology in gathering the experiences of young people may have affected what is shared, as the conversation is driven by the research question that the interview is focused on (Willig, 2013). A narrative methodology may have allowed for promotion of the participant’s voice, focusing on their first-hand accounts as opposed to the voice of the researcher (Gergen, 2015). By approaching the interview process and schedule with flexibility I hoped to address this potential limitation.

These interviews took place within school and participants were given information sheets initially by school staff. This, and that interviews took place in person, may have led to participants responding in a way that is socially desirable rather than in line with their own feelings (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). However, I hoped to address this by remaining vigilant and responsive to any signs of discomfort, reiterating that involvement is voluntary and adjusting the interview schedule where appropriate.

Generalisability of data is often discussed within quantitative research. Conversely, generalisability is not advocated for within qualitative research, instead the focus is placed on ‘transferability’ (Cohen et al., 2018). Transferability suggests ‘that findings gained in a particular context can offer valuable lessons to other similar settings’ (Daniel, 2019, p. 104). In this case findings can be used to inform those supporting young people with physical disabilities’ belonging. Transferability is said to require details of participants, including demographic information (Hannes et al., 2011) which was provided in table 7. However, exact age, list of diagnoses and geographic locations were not provided to protect anonymity, challenging transferability. Qualitative research is said to be concerned with the ‘uniqueness’ of findings (Cohen et al., 2018). These findings can be considered unique as each young person’s experiences are dependent upon their individual context, particularly as their disabilities and school settings varied. Although these findings were gained within a specific context, they offer new insight into young peoples’ experiences that can be valuable in furthering the understanding of others, including those who support them. In line with critical realism, this study makes no claims in finding an ultimate ‘truth’ but rather offers the experiences of young people (Willig, 2013).

3.7 Implications

This research has highlighted six areas important to the way in which young people with physical disabilities experience belonging; these include Access, Relationships with Adults, Relationships with Peers, Identity, Purpose of Learning and Transition. Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support the fostering of sense of belonging for students, particularly when they support students at risk of exclusion or social isolation through working with adults around these young people (McGrath & Noble, 2010). They aim to support others to work toward positive change for young people (Cameron, 2006), which are often associated with sense of belonging. When working with CYP with physical disabilities, EPs should support schools to consider: relationships, identity, access, purpose of learning and transitions, all of which could be considered within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979).

Literature suggests that Psychologists should account for the cultural and contextual factors surrounding each education setting when considering belonging (Allen, Kern, et al., 2018). It is likely EPs adopt a holistic view of a young person as part of their practice, following Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) highlighting the importance of considering the complex systems surrounding an individual including their school, family and wider community (Leonard, 2011). Allen, Vella-Brodrick, et al. (2018, p. 192) apply Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological systems theory (1979) to belonging in schools to understand the ‘multi-layered socio-ecological phenomena’. They suggest that this framework can be applied when considering school sense of belonging (see figure 10) as it calls attention to the importance of social relationships, the physical environment and resources (Allen, Vella-Brodrick, et al., 2018).

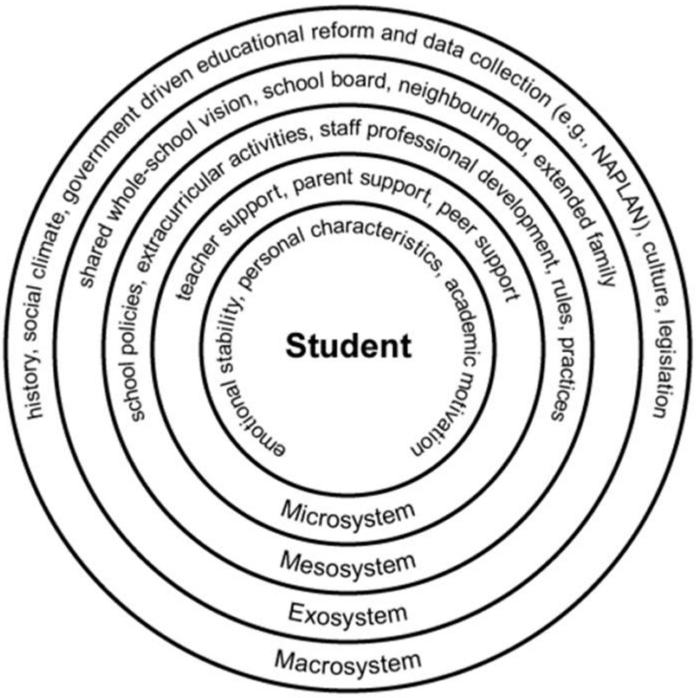

Figure 10. A Socio-ecological Framework of School Belonging (Allen et al., 2018)

This model (see figure 10) encompasses the themes identified within the current research as important to belonging and therefore provides a framework for schools to use to foster belonging in their setting (Waters et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2009). As the theme of transition was highlighted in current research and as there is said to be a responsibility of EPs to support this process, the framework could also be used when considering creation of belonging in a new setting or year group (Sancho & Cline, 2012).

All themes found within this research can be mapped onto this framework. For example, this specific population would likely benefit from access to materials and reasonable adjustments which would fit within the mesosystem as it relates to policy, rules and practices. The peer and school staff relationships would likely sit within the microsystem as it relates to the support that students received. The theme of identity may be considered in a number of these systems as the group identity can relate to the smaller communities, such as the VI base, experienced by young people. The VI base could relate to the support received by others, the rules and practices introduced within the base and the whole school vision. It would therefore be beneficial to consider the development of a collective identity across the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem. Further, wider impacts of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, existing within the macrosystem are likely to have an impact on the way young people feel about school as a whole, affecting their sense of belonging within school.

Overall, this framework could be utilised by EPs in their practice when working at the individual, group and systemic levels in understanding and promoting belonging for students with physical disabilities and for wider groups of young people.

3.8 Conclusion

Findings from this research are consistent with existing literature surrounding young people's sense of belonging within mainstream education. In particular, peer relationships have been highlighted by existing literature as important to belonging, and this finding is supported by the current research. However, this research offers a new perspective, highlighting the experiences of young people with physical disabilities and how this identity interacts with their belonging. Considering these new insights, alongside the socioecological framework suggested by Allen et al., (2018) settings and professionals who support young people with physical disabilities should consider the significance of access to materials and reasonable adjustments, not only to learning but also to fostering a sense of belonging. Specifically, access to materials and reasonable adjustments, alongside consideration of young people's positive identity in relation to their disability, were highlighted as important for this specific population's belonging. Participants' experiences offer insight into their sense of belonging and factors that should be considered when promoting belonging for young people in mainstream education settings.

Chapter 4. Reflective Synthesis

Within the following chapter I offer a reflection on the skills and experience gained as part of this research process. I have reflected upon how this thesis has affected my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), including the research skills I have learnt, and how I plan to carry this forward into my practice as an Educational Psychologist (EP). Further, I aim to offer further insights as to my role as an ally within research, the dissemination of my findings and the implication of this project on future research and wider practice.

4.1 Allyship

Striving to act as a reflective researcher, this process has led me to consistently question why I should be the person to conduct research when I identify as an able-bodied individual. I then began a journey of exploring allyship and identifying the ways in which I can act as an ally within my research, practice and day-to-day life. Allies 'act in solidarity with persons and groups who are the recipients of unearned disadvantaging' (McDonald-Morken, 2014, p. 54). The allyship within research aims for richer outcomes for young people that are grounded in their lived experience. Researchers have been criticised by those within disability research, as discourse arises whereby participants are positioned as symbols that are pitied or relate to tragedy (Mitchell & Snyder, 2013). I hoped to address this by adopting the affirmative model of disability which affirms a positive identity and challenges presumptions of tragedy (Swain & French, 2000).

Co-production is important within allyship (Lambley, 2021). Whilst I recognise that a limitation of this research is the lack of co-production due to time constraints, I hope that this research acts as a platform for the experiences of these young people to be seen, heard and considered. This platform can help to inform the adults supporting them. For example, I had not expected young people describing a clear sense of belonging to a smaller, pre-made group of the 'VI Base' and the positive associations with their disability.

I also acknowledge that 'allies of convenience' are described in literature as those that align themselves with different groups for professional benefit without long-term engagement with individuals (Hadley, 2019). I hope to address this, particularly within my work as a qualified EP, which will lead to development of further research in this area and my general practice, striving for co-construction with young people in the long-term. Further, I hope that, by considering allyship as an important aspect of this research, ultimately the participants will benefit (Lambley, 2021).

4.2 The Affirmative Model of Disability

Throughout this research, I hoped by adopting the affirmative model of disability (Swain & French, 2000) I could address the discourse of 'personal tragedy' existing within research and wider policy. Due to my relationships with family and friends with physical disabilities, I feel I had adopted aspects of this model in my everyday life prior to this piece of research, influencing my choice of model for this project. This research challenges the medical model of disability, suggesting disability exists within the individual, and instead focuses on the wider systems influencing the young person's sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2018; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The 'experiences of disabled people demonstrate that, far from being tragic, being disabled can have benefits' (Swain & French, 2000, p. 574). This is evidenced within this research and young people shared positive experiences of school and how this relates to their identity. Specifically, experiences of the VI base were viewed positively by young people, alongside Sophie's description of her disabled identity. Further, an affirmative model hopes for experiences to be recognised, which I hope to have demonstrated by providing a platform for young people's voices (Swain & French, 2000).

Overall, I feel this experience has re-affirmed my confidence in adopting the affirmative model of disability as part of my practice and wider everyday life. Further, it has caused me to consider how this model could be applied to other young people, for example those with a diagnosis of Autism. By focussing on the systems surrounding a young person, and wider societal influences, the discourse of a 'personal tragedy' can be challenged and young people can be further empowered by those supporting them.

4.3 The voices of young people in practice

As the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015, p. 20) highlights, young people have a right 'to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them’. Further, research suggests a beneficial effect from young people taking an active role when working in a collaborative way with adults to plan any support in school (O'Hagan et al., 2022). It therefore continues to be important to consider how to ensure the voices of young people are captured and amplified in practice and in research. This is particularly important for young people with disabilities as they are sometimes described as ‘hard to reach’ and are underrepresented in research as compared to young people who attend school regularly (Curtis et al., 2004). I hope that this research highlights the experiences of young people to further others' understanding and to inform the actions of schools.

4.4 Applying research skills to my practice

The EP profession is described as a practitioner-researcher role, and therefore often involves consuming new research to inform practice, evaluating interventions carried out and reporting new findings or practice in a variety of contexts including academic journals and training (Greig, 2001; Robins, 1993).

There are opportunities within this role to combine the research skills I have learnt, and the knowledge of the systems in which EPs practice, to carry out research within the Local Authority (LA). As a TEP and a newly qualified EP I will work within an LA which utilises a consultation model of service delivery. The research experience and skills gained throughout this process will contribute directly to this service delivery model. The frameworks of consultation I utilise, and which inform my practice include the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (MacKay et al., 2016). The processes underpinning this framework, amongst others, including the Monsen Problem solving Model (MacKay et al., 2016), refer to skills such as reviewing of the consultation process, evaluation of change(s) and reflection. These are skills I have developed throughout the course of engaging with research and striving to behave as a reflective researcher which will directly support my practice. Additionally, on a more systemic level, EP services within LA’s are often asked to measure and provide details as to the impact of the service delivery. This is often done using contextual information, activity measures, statistical data and qualitative evaluations (Beaver, 2011). All of these measures require the same skills described above which I feel I have further developed as a result of engaging with this research project.

4.5 Future research

Due to the time constraints referred to previously, this research project explored the experiences of young people but did not contain aspects of co-production that would ensure inclusive research practice. Research is said to have the potential to empower those who are its subjects (Liddiard et al., 2019). According to Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Participation' for young people, this research project acted in a way that was participatory as participants were assigned but informed. However, the ladder suggests decision making that is shared with the child and any child-initiated and directed research to be more participatory in approach (Hart, 1992). 'Nothing about us without us' is a phrase often used within the literature surrounding disability and in future research I would strive to ensure co-productivity was key in ensuring that young people were involved in the entire process.

The recruitment for participants was challenging and restricted by the time constraints of this thesis. As such, I carried out interviews with a group of children of the same age range. In future research I would like to expand upon this research, exploring the experiences of young people in secondary settings, particularly as they approach the time to leave their education settings and explore how these upcoming changes affect their sense of belonging. Further, regarding the participants of the current research, all five had physical disabilities from birth or infancy and therefore my findings represent this. It would be interesting to hear the experiences of those who acquired their disability or chronic conditions into their later childhood and adolescence. Research suggests a difference between those who have a disability from birth and individuals with an acquired disability in how they incorporate disability into their self-concept (Beagan & Landry, 2002). As self-concept is likely to be closely related to sense of belonging, it would be interesting to explore the experiences of sense of belonging for these young people.

4.6 Dissemination of my findings

This thesis highlights the importance of relationships - both with peers and adults - to young people's sense of belonging. These relationships also affect aspects of young people's experiences such as their identity, transition, access and school experiences. It offers insight as to barriers and supports for these aspects and therefore what can help to foster young people's sense of belonging in school. The LA in which I practise as a TEP (and in which I will work as a qualified EP) works closely with the children with disabilities team in practice, to which this research may be of interest. I intend to share the findings of this research with my colleagues within the EP services and with wider SEN professionals at a regularly held inclusion meeting. This inclusion meeting works to consider good practice within the LA and has a focus on improving inclusion for the area. As sense of belonging is often raised in schools within practice, I hope that this will be useful for informing EP service delivery, specifically for this group of young people.

Following the sharing of my findings with professionals within the LA, and considering any feedback, I plan to disseminate this to the three schools that have taken part. I hope that feedback given from other professionals within the LA may support me to further consider the local context, which may influence the way in which I share findings with schools to ensure its usefulness, effectiveness, and practicality. This dissemination is to be negotiated with school staff, but I plan to create a one-page profile of these findings and to offer a session whereby I share and discuss these in more depth. I hope that this will raise awareness as to sense of belonging and its importance, particularly for young people who are often marginalised, such as those with disabilities (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). Further, I hope to share the findings with the participants in a way that is accessible, whether this is a short poster or sound bite. When carrying out future research on this area, I would hope to adopt an iterative process whereby young people could be further consulted on findings and that any output would be co-constructed. This would most closely align with the concept ‘nothing about us without us’ that is key in disability politics (Hadley, 2019).

4.7 Implications for wider practice

Two key themes highlighted within my findings from the meta-ethnography and empirical project were relationships with both peers and adults. I hope to use these findings to collaborate with schools to consider how better to foster the relationships between students, school staff and their peers. A barrier to this may be the current behaviour policies adopted by education settings across the UK. Current policy follows a ‘one size fits all’ approach to behaviour and employs a behaviourist approach whereby sanctions and rewards are provided. This has been challenged by the relational policy which aims to replace a behaviourist approach by focusing on developing relationships and working in a relationship

(Dunnett & Jones, 2020). This policy specifically focuses on fostering a sense of belonging for children and young people through relationships, supported by the findings within this research. As a qualified EP I hope to promote the formation and development of school-based relationships for children and young people with disabilities, with the aim of supporting sense-of-belonging within their education setting.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined areas for future research and development that I will consider moving forward. I plan to publish the systematic literature review (Chapter One) and empirical research (Chapter Three) to further others' understanding of the experiences of belonging for children and young people with physical disabilities. I hope to further achieve this through continued work with children, young people and the adults that support them. By taking a greater focus on the voice of young people as to relationships, accessibility, identity and transition we, as both EPs and members of wider society, have real opportunities to support young people with disabilities to foster their sense of belonging in schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A – First, Second and Third Order Constructs

Paper	Participant words (1st order)	Key concepts (2nd order)	Key concepts (3rd order)
Stories about Physical Education from Young People with Disabilities **(Fitzgerald & Stride 2012)**	*I don't want to wake up, I don't want to get up, I don't want to go there, I don't want to be me today.* *Today is the worst day, a terrible day, I hate today. I don't want to get out of bed. I don't want to go to school.* *Across the kitchen floor the bag stares at me….I move slowly to the front door, feeling lighter, feeling brighter, I'm sorted. Then Mum shouts, "Don't forget your PE kit. Honestly you can be so forgetful at times. Go on, have a good day". My heart sinks, how can I possibly enjoy school now? It's like my whole body is dreading school today* *I don't know what we've just done in English but I know what's coming next. PE! I'm not a PE person. I hate PE. Why do they make me do PE? PE is for them. You know the ones, the sporty boys, the tough guys, the ones that have loads of mates, the ones the girls like, 'cause they're fit and fast, with muscles that'll get bigger and better; the guys that can get into fights and come away battered and bruised and the winners. Yeah, that's what they are, winners. What does that make me?* *When I get to the changing room I'm numb. I'm there, but I'm not…I move to the corner, to the safety of my locker. They can't see me here, can they? I'm*	• Anxiety • Physical Education • Decision-making • Consequences • Pre-occupation • Feeling of exclusion • No recognition • Marginal involvement • Inclusion • Alternative participation • PE setting • Role of support workers	• Avoidance • Negative thought patterns • Dread • Self-image/self-esteem • Comparison with peers • Masculinity/gender stereotypes • Anxious thoughts • Feelings of hopelessness • Reference directly to body • A bodies ability • Feeling small • Family expectations • Family dynamics • Comparison between siblings

	invisible. Mr. Evans gives a loud shout, "Boys it's ten past, you should be in the sports hall by now". Oh no, he's looking for me, please don't pick on me. "Dave, is that you hiding behind the coats? You can't stay there. Just what do you expect your school report to say if you don't bother with PE? Are you a man or a mouse?" *I'm so hot, my fingers, hands and face are burning. This isn't a friendly place to be. Not for me, not for the mouse* *It's not that I don't want to try but I just know I won't be able to do it right. My body won't do it like that. My body moves in different ways. Why's it so crap? Why won't it work like it should, like the others?* *I'm on my own. No one wants to be with me. When Josh is put with me he's so not happy and lets everyone know, "Why me? It's not fair".* *With my unwilling partner and unruly body I have a go. I'm like a clown, a spectacle to be watched and laughed at and the centre of attention for all the wrong reasons. All lions are staring at me again and there's nowhere to go and hide. I hate being me.* *I look out the window knowing they won't pick on me, I can't hit back…. I close my eyes and wish I could punch, and kick, and fight, and run, and be like my brothers.* *I spot three kids, chasing their dog with a half deflated ball in its mouth, their dad laughing. That could almost be me, Kev and Ben, five years ago, if I could keep up with them. I'd be like half a mile behind, what with these legs* *It's been hidden since we got them, every day beckoning me, taunting me, reminding me that Dad still hasn't seen it. I hate it, hate it… But I don't forget "The Report". It's the one thing I really hate about school. I can remember*		• Feeling toward school subjects • Teacher-student relationships • Feeling disappointed • School expectations and grading • Frustration • Friendships • Feeling included • Support from adults • Lessons away from others • Feeling singled out/different • Being laughed at/teased • Decision making • Anticipating others reactions

	every grade I get in every subject, but only one matters. English B, Maths B, Science B, Art A, RE C, attendance 100%, works hard, likeable young man, popular amongst peers, blah de blah de blah. And then the mark that counts, PE, C….mixes well, tries hard, but that’s not enough, never good enough. Why? ‘Cause my brothers always get A⁄s in PE…. And PE’s the most important subject for dad. *Last term I tried ripping out the PE page, but it’s always the first one he goes to. And he’s already seen my brothers’ reports, proudly presented to him teatime on Monday….No, I couldn’t face it. I couldn’t face him knowing I’ve had another term of not meeting the high standards of my brothers.* *“What’s the point? You don’t need them. What do you need shin pads for?” he’ll say. Doesn’t he see? Just ‘cause I don’t play in the important games, I still play. I still kick around with my mates and brothers. Aren’t shin pads needed in those games?* *I could be with her and the others next if I wanted to, but I like doing this class on my own, with my helper. It’s fun, I get more stuff done. But I don’t want her falling out with me* *The big netball posts, nets swaying in the breeze, too high for me. Can’t get the ball to go anywhere near them. Not that 288 H. Fitzgerald and A. Stride I get a chance. I’m always Goal Keeper and hardly ever touch the ball. I just sit there, cold and bored, wondering why I’m there* *They just play around me, until I get in the way. I mean how am I supposed to move so quickly in my chair? There’s not enough room to wheel around and by the time I get to the ball someone else has picked it up.* *Clare is always my partner and Jenny and Sarah join with us. It doesn’t matter if I miss the ball when I’m with them. I don’t like doing stuff as a whole group*		

	though, like in a game. Then I just hide at the back and hope the ball doesn't come near me. But I get bored, I want to touch the ball but I daren't in case I miss it and some people groan, or laugh, or whisper. *I look carefully, Centre, Wing Attack, Goal Shooter, yep, all the best positions have gone. I wonder what's left? Goal Keeper? Well, not today. I'm gonna do my own thing, I'm gonna do what I want to do. I get to choose….I can do what I want! Peace descends as their voices get further away as they make their way to the courts* *Think that's what I'll do 'cause I've got tons better at that and that'll help me in the other lesson. We can set a challenge like we did last week.*		
Narrative accounts of university education: socio-cultural perspectives of students with disabilities **(Gibson, 2012)**	*after every essay or something they would set us I would always go to my teacher and she would always know I would be coming to her… it was the same with other teachers especially English and the Principal, they would always know that I would be coming to see them they were always really happy to sit with me and talk about it and sometimes my English teacher would always bring something like tea and coffee* *I remember one English lesson, I was mortified really, it was so horrible, the teachers were picking us to do reading and obviously I never put my hand up… she asked me and I was like no please don't so obviously I had to stand up, start reading and I got really nervous and I was bright red…. she asked me and I was like no please don't so obviously I had to stand up, start reading and I got really nervous and I was bright red* *they told me that I had work overload and stuff but they didn't understand my frustrations that it took me so long to get to where I was and the only way I managed to get through my GCSE's and get really high grades was because I went to all the extra curricula classes*	• Relationship and learning experiences with teacher/tutor • Relationship and learning experience with peers • Relationship and learning experiences with educational institutions and institutional practices • Friendships • Peer support networks • Significant education contacts	• Relationships with staff • Support • Discussion • Spending time with staff • Embarrassment • Peer perceptions • Working hard • Difference in university • Becoming older and its impact • Having key relationships with staff • Self-esteem • Bullying • Connectedness • Friendships

	Yeah, and because one of the science technicians was also my tutor, I used to see him every lunchtime just to have discussions with him over lunch, I mean it was literally like constantly, I never had any socialisation or play, it use to be constantly interacting, I mean I must have really annoyed the teachers because it was like, whenever they had 5 minutes I just had to discuss it with them *At University it helped with having a contact, a key contact on the course, a personal tutor or a tutor that you felt was approachable someone that you could actually share your concerns with, somebody you felt understood therefore someone who responded positively to your needs.* *I suppose I don't really know anyone else who had any disability in my year at school, just me and my friend and we were together all the time* *but I can't say I know anybody else with this disability and I suppose if I talked to anyone else outside of my close friends I probably wouldn't of mentioned it, I wouldn't like to,* *we banded together to help each other and that was nice because you felt a bit more relaxed, but anyone outside of my group I probably wouldn't have said anything to, I don't think I ever did. I would probably have felt a bit embarrassed; I didn't know really how they would react* *my friends because they were like, they all helped me but people who weren't really my friends weren't very nice. They just use to say that BTec's are dumb and that I was thick and stuff which obviously made me, I didn't feel very good about myself then and stuff* *At college when other students found out everyone was really nice and helped me a lot more.*	• Studying in an environment where the culture/practice understand diverse learning • Socio-cultural process • Exclusion • Inclusion	• Feeling secure and safe • Learning experiences with peers • Feeling supported • Support when starting university • The offer of support • Relating to others with a disability • Health professionals • Early intervention • Access to information for university

	I do feel a lot more easier about it at University, it is a lot more easier to talk to or obviously because everyone is new and everyone is coming together and no-one knows anybody it was really easy to talk to people *I think everyone is more grown up about things and they wouldn't have the same reactions, and I knew they wouldn't laugh at me…because everyone is a bit more grown up it is a bit easier to handle and especially the course that I am doing and modules on Inclusion, that helps me as well. It made me understand it a bit more and other people's views towards it as well especially the discussions.* *In the small groups at University there is this connectedness with other students and you get to know them as friends almost and therefore you feel more secure perhaps in sharing things or asking questions* *I found it hard and nobody would listen because the teachers kept saying either I was lazy… I had a lot of time off ill as well* *A personal tutor or a tutor that you felt was approachable someone that you could actually share your concerns with, somebody you felt understood therefore someone who responded positively to your needs* *but in this smaller course it's easier … but here you even know what floor they [tutors] are on, they have given you their office telephone number … I have not really needed it but just knowing that they are there… helps with your confidence and without getting too stressed.* *it was quite a shock to see how much help there was available, my secondary school didn't have, I mean there was help but they didn't really focus on it, so when I came here it was quite, it was quite nice to see everything available and it made me feel better just to know that there was help there if I ever needed it*		

	some of the student reps…one of them had a disability – and she always said that if I had any problems or anyone else that I knew about then just to e-mail her and she would be able to help as well, so I thought that was really nice of her *I can arrange one to one support so that you get taught how to use your equipment before you even start…that was a huge bonus, second of all I had a technician come round to make sure it was all up and running* *I think I had meetings with people. I did bring my physio and stuff in, but I had a few problems and stuff from what I can remember about that, but I have been to university before. So basically all the support that they gave I should have had at the age of 4 not when I am 20, 20 is too late.* *when you're writing down in the lectures you don't quite get all the information down you can always go and find the presentation and that actually does help me a lot as well…if I miss something I can always go back to it…it is definitely helpful.*		
Experiences of higher education for students with chronic illnesses **(Hamilton et al., 2021)**	*'…some thought it was an excuse not to turn up to lectures… I felt that people seemed to view invisible and visible illnesses completely differently. Those with clear disabilities were treated with more understanding than those with invisible from my point of view.'* *'I think that if I start to think of myself as a disabled person, I will truly become a disabled person and lose my ability to achieve my dreams and goals independently.'* *'I just want to be judged as me and not as disabled'* *'Some people have been embarrassed to walk with me whilst I am in my wheelchair'*	• Perceptions of chronic illness compared to other disabilities • 'disabled' as a negative identity • 'owning' the chronic illness identity to educate others • Students with chronic illnesses are under-prioritised and	• Perception of chronic illness and disability • Allies who understand chronic illness • Education staff policing actions • Others perceptions • Self-worth • Employability • Access to support • Accessibility • Feeling valued • Identity

	‘Apprehensive, mostly because fibromyalgia isn’t seen as a legitimate illness, even though it is… I recently decided I was going to start telling people in hopes of educating them on the importance of recognising invisible illnesses’ *‘I would train the lecturers on chronic and invisible illness. I would set up a system for all course notes to be available for students who cannot attend due to chronic illness so they do not miss anything. I would make a standardized system for informing about health with centralised accessible info for lecturers so you don’t have to have a repeated conversation’* *‘This is such an important subject to investigate. Thank you so much for giving us a voice, it means so much.’* *‘I can’t access the SU because the nearest disabled parking bays are hundreds of metres away… It may make the uni more aesthetically pleasing, but it presents a huge accessibility challenge and basic provisions like gentle slopes and disabled bays are completely ignored.’* *‘The university has the budget to pay him [Head of Department] a salary so he can buy a Porsche, but they won’t provide wheelchair accessible desks because apparently we don’t have the budget.’* *‘I have noticed that there is a disparity between different types of disability/illness - for example blind students, students with a learning difficulty… are offered more support… it can contribute to a feeling that you are less important - there should be the same level of general support offered to all with chronic illnesses/disabilities according to their needs.’* *‘I feel as though I am looked at as less than the other students even if this isn’t true… Only 3% of qualified English lawyers have a disability as the profession is so inaccessible so that is also over my head.’*	undervalued at university • Universities not prioritising disability accessibility • Chronic illness not prioritised for disability support • Students’ worth prescribed by graduate employability • ‘police’ vs ‘allies’ • Staff as ‘police’ who lacked understanding • Allies who understand chronic illness	• Illness or disability legitimacy • Wider systems to support • Having a voice • Inequality • Financial inequality • Technical equipment • Understanding from others • Friendships • Discrimination

	‘staff openly discriminated, at interview I was told “we don’t want to give a place to someone with your type of disability because you might not be able to do the work post qualification”’ *‘The further into uni I got the less I believed I had potential to get a good job’* *‘I’m going through this with no guarantee I’ll be able to even undertake full-time employment (like most grad jobs are) upon graduation’* *‘My department refused to record lectures despite having the equipment installed in all the department teaching rooms. They said they did so to encourage attendance but in my opinion it’s not fair on people who can’t come in for health reasons.’* *‘I feel like I have so much potential but the unwillingness of my uni to help make adjustments and the judgements of my lecturers are holding me back from actually what I could achieve.* *‘If I need something in a lecture or seminar I have to bug people to get it.’* *‘I got extensions sometimes and was allowed these if I had a flare up but apparently there was a limit… I was told I wouldn’t be allowed anymore – not sure how this is right as it’s not my fault when I have a flare up and can’t do my work as quickly as someone else… Then to catch up I worked hard and then subsequently relapsed because of this.’* *‘There is not enough flexibility for those with chronic conditions - administration doesn’t understand the concept of a flare’*		

	'People assume it's fake or an excuse'; 'Some tried to understand but I think some thought it was an excuse not to turn up to lectures'; 'Some tutors thought it was an excuse I think, and didn't understand properly.' *'My disability adviser is really understanding and does his best to put support in place'* *'A society for disabled students where they can talk with no pressure to turn up and arrange meetups and off campus activities to encourage socialising with people who understand.'* *'I do think it's difficult to maintain friendships when chronically ill because some people do not understand the need to cancel or for them to come to you rather than the pub some* days'		
Growing up in a Mainstream World: A Retrospective Enquiry into the Childhood Experiences of Young Adults with a Physical Disability **(Lumsdaine & Thurston, 2017)**	*When I was younger I wasn't really aware I had a disability – well I was but it didn't hit me until I was about 13 or 14 and I realised – wait, I can't do that! (P4)* *When I was young I didn't view myself as disabled – when I thought of myself then I thought I looked like everyone else. (P5)* *At Primary School I knew I was different but I chose to ignore it. (P2)* *In Primary kids were great cos no one knew any differently – no one had a problem cos no one understood, they were just accepting. But as soon as I moved to High School people treated me differently. (P4)* *I would say that I saw myself as the same as my Primary school peers but the older I got the more I realised, no there is a bit of us and them. (P6)*	• Awareness and identity • Social integration • The school system • Societal reactions • The emotional impact of disability • What helps • Disability sport	• Transition from primary to secondary school • Disability as an identity • Others perceptions • Self-esteem and confidence • View of self • Mental health • Feeling difference • Physical differences • Isolation and loneliness • A mainstream vs disabled world

	I hated myself and my moods and when I saw myself I just saw the chair and no good parts. (P5) *When I was about 13 years old I got depressed a lot about my disability. I started to resent my wheelchair and everything that was involved in my disability. (P8)* *Through my childhood I had a lot of sadness and self-loathing. As I got older I came to realise how my disability made my physical appearance different from others and I got to the point in High School where I'd cry myself to sleep almost every night. (P9)* *isolated myself – I withdrew socially from my school friends because it was easier than being around people who could walk – I removed myself cos I felt too different – there was too big a divide. (P1) I didn't want to be around people who were not like me. (P5)* *People just kept asking me if I was going to go to the Prom – and I thought – really – like I am going to go to an event and watch the one thing I can't do – I mean the whole thing – I didn't like myself – and there was no way I was going to go to something where there would be dancing and photos. (P1)* *kind of discovered that I was too disabled to properly fit into the mainstream world but not disabled enough to comfortably fit into the disabled world. (P1)* *I was separately part of both worlds. (P2)* *I knew I had a disability but I didn't see myself like the others with a disability – I knew my disability was different – I didn't belong in that group. (P3)* *At school I had a few friends but my disability made it difficult to be with children my age at home. (P9)*		• Accessibility • Being left out • Mental health • Independence • Autonomy • Hopelessness • Overactive/over cautious provisions • Not able to access skills due to risk restrictions • Aspirations • Future plans • Others causing people to feel disables

	I was part of the conversation for the first couple of years – but then people just slowly and slowly isolated me – almost day by day and it got to the point where I didn't want to go see my 'so called' friends if they were just going to exclude me. (P3) *My friendships started to decrease as I wasn't able to keep up with everything they were doing. (P8)* *There was this group and I wanted to be part of it and I tried and tried – then I thought what is the point – it went on the whole way through school. (P4)* *I mean I used to get angry cos I was different but I was a fool as well – I would like beg them – well instead of them meeting my needs I'd try my best to fit in with them. To be with them and to please them – like part of me now regrets this cos at that point I was very unhappy about what I was doing and where I was. (P3)* *At the start they were fine, then they got annoyed that I was slower than them, then they got bored and didn't want to help me and then they ditched me and I was on my own…They said I'll wait for you – but they didn't…I would go sit on my own–I even ate my lunch in the cubicle of the toilet. (P10)* *I'd say you wanna come out (to my friends) and they would say, oh but there are stairs…and that was their way of telling me they couldn't be bothered. If you had a real mate you wouldn't care you would just help. (P4)* *I didn't think about my disability until I was in Secondary when I slowly started getting isolated. Then I felt crap and I felt worthless and I felt like I was doing something wrong. (P3)*		

	At school I had no self-esteem, I didn't think I was good at anything, I didn't think I had any friends – I didn't think anyone wanted to be around me and I didn't want to be around anybody. (P5) *your job with someone who needs you…it was annoying cos I couldn't even have a private conversation. (P8) I did feel like I was under surveillance – like I had the KGB on me or something. (P6)* *My teachers always tried to do things for me and tried to push my chair around even when I was perfectly able to do it myself. (P5)* *I did feel different from my peers as I was a lot more protected as the adults around me were scared I'd be hurt. (P8)* *I wasn't allowed to go in the lift by myself – I just had to laugh…I mean I would of got further along if I wasn't babied in that way. (P2)* *It was hard to feel part of school – I was treated like I was fragile and in terms of PE and things – these were either adapted to the point where it was insulting or I was sent to sit at the side. (P9)* *I always knew I was different – you always had to sit out or do something differently. (P10)* *In school they always had me do something in P.E. like put out the cones or play the music – I mean at least I was doing something compared to doing nothing – but that only started after my mum complaining that I was doing nothing in PE. (P3)* *I couldn't do things the same way as everyone else or I couldn't do things at all and I kept being told you can't do that, you can't do that and I had it in my head – I can't do it, I can't do it! (P10)*		

	There has sometimes been that feeling of being left out or being left to the side because of something I can't change. (P6) *Sometimes I did need a hand but often I was perfectly capable of doing things for myself. (P4)* *I didn't know how to stand up for myself at school – I tried to but it just didn't come across the way I meant it to. (P9) At school I wasn't allowed to use the life skills I was taught. (P6)* *it was hard to be aspirational about my future when the important aspiration – to live an independent life always felt completely out of reach. (P9)* *Having a classroom assistant – they were always there and that was pointing out that I was different all the time. (P2) I had some support through school – well they babied me and did everything for me (P3)* *I didn't feel positive being spoken to like I couldn't make my own decisions or take care of myself…my teachers made me feel disabled.(P9)* *I didn't want to spend my life being pushed around. Like being a passenger in my own chair…the chair is my legs – and I'll use them the way I want. (P6) Let me go out and make my own mistakes. (P8)* *Most people see the chair before they see me as a person. (P3)* *People just saw the chair and nothing else – and cos of this they treat you like you are below them – you don't do that – I mean, that is not right. (P9)*		

	Day to day I worried about people staring at me – I mean that happened all the time especially with kids – but then I got more confident and before I got annoyed but I have grown out of that. (P4) *Most of the time I don't leave the house cos if I leave I am scared – I don't want people to stare and I am fed up of just smiling and pretending. (P10)* *All people see is your disability – they just see the chair and they think you have a learning difficulty – they don't see you, your personality. (P8)* *People just assume I can't do something because I'm in a wheelchair. People just come up and assume they are going to help me, without me asking them – that really really annoys me. (P3)* *Getting help packing a bag – or help off a bus – I will go out of my way to say no. I suppose it goes back to that feeling more disabled – if you accept help you feel more disabled. (P1)* *I had got to that point without telling anyone how I feel and well I just had to – well explode – as much as I could bottle it up until that point I just had to go into a room and scream. (P1)* *I was very lonely. (P3)* *When I was younger I felt different and I wished I could walk and be normal but at secondary I started accepting it more and just getting on with it – sort of trying to ignore it. (P2*		

Voice, vlogs and visibility: the experiences of young people with SEND engaging in the school games **(Sharpe et al., 2021)**	*There aren't really any afterschool or lunch time clubs at our school it's only these events where we get to go and do these sports. (Connor, School A* *What makes today special is so many different people taking part in different events instead of just normal events, so everyone gets a chance. (Luke, School B)* *Anyone with a disability can play sport here, no matter whether they're sitting in a wheelchair or if they can stand by themselves. (Molly, School B* *There should be an option if you want to have a wheelchair or not. So that people could stand as well as wheel. (Connor, School A)* *It could be for everyone not just disabled people. (Richard, School C)* *I think it should be good for both, like for disability and not disability because with like not disability they can still join in the fun and they can still do boccia and the ones with disability could do exactly the same. (Emily, School B)* *I think there is a bit of a stigma around like disability because, like disability, means like your disabled, so like, is like on a phone. So, if you disable the settings it means like it's turned off, so disabled means that you can't do something. (Russell, School A)* *There isn't much knowledge of in terms of what sort of types of disabilities or what sports are actually out there for people. (James, School A)* *watched The Great British Bake Off and Country file and I didn't realise until now because she was the girl. I thought that she was sitting down, and she wasn't, she was in her wheelchair and I'm actually quite shocked. (Joanne, School B)*	• Opportunities for inclusive school sport • Challenging perceptions of inclusive school sport • Meaningful school games for young people with SEND	• Access to activities provided by education setting • Variety in activities • Inclusion • Accessibility • Meeting various abilities • Autonomy in decision making • Equality • Disabled and able bodied peers • Knowledge of activities • Representation • Role models • Access to activities at the right age • Time • Feeling bored • Wanting a voice • Having a voice •

	She did see us. She did let us see all of her medals and I hope I'll be like her one day. (Joanne, School B *I enjoy to win, but its more taking part not, winning. (Stefan, School C)* *Taking part because if you winning it doesn't seem fair, it's not fair for the other team. If you win it means the other team going to be hurting, you don't want to be hurt, you want to be taking part, not winning. (Shawn, School C* *Being out of school, that's more fun. Free from English, from Maths, from History, everything free. (Stefan, School C)* *I think what you could do better if the timing was right, because we had to wait, like how long for key stage four and key stage three to play their round in boccia. (Emily, School B)* *You could change like waiting around and all the waiting because it's been like hours waiting to get started. (Russell, School A)* *More activities to do in between so not just sitting around doing, nothing basically. (James, School A)* *Yeah, like doing activities, like even before we start or like speaking to us and telling us what happens and maybe a timetable of what actually to do. (Russell, School A)*		

"They Think They Know What's Best for Me": An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Inclusion and Support in High School for Vision-Impaired Students with Albinism **(Thurston, 2014)**	*There are parts of work that I feel … would be easier, like fractions or decimals or stuff like that. I feel that … if I had better sight, I'd be able to cope better with them. (John)* *I'll have to sit, like, really close to the board, or use, like, binoculars. (Kate)* *I feel that, as I've got older, I've started to … get used to it and like, I can … I know more about what I can see and can't see so I don't … put myself in awkward si … I know what situations I can put myself into and ones that I can't. (John* *If I can't see something I feel a bit left out … no-one really treats me any differently so … just like a personal thing. (Kate)* *I do try and tell myself that I am the same, I'm not different from the person next to me, that's … there's always been that … inside you there's always that just little bit that's like, you feel that you're just a bit different than everyone else, and like you're not quite part … you're not just quite … when you're with your friends you're just like "I'm not … right with them" like I feel different from what they're like … I feel like I'm … having a different experience … like, I'm going through different things that my friends are … erm, seeing school in a different way. (John)* *My hair being very light, I've kind of stood out more and you can see me from … a long distance … I was quite tall as well. I've started to have to shave a bit. I've had a lot of comments on that …, 'cause I feel like I can't help it, so I don't see why people have to … make it hard … They said … "Oh, erm, when you're looking at me why are your eyes moving" stuff like that and stuff like that and I'm like "I can't help it, they're just like that". (John)* *I try to … blend in and just act like anyone would in my school … I don't want to do things that draw attention to myself. (John)*	• Experiencing low vision in school • Experiencing additional support tin school • Consequences of not using low-vision aids • Support from a person with visual impairment • Blending in • Draw backs of using visual aids • Experiencing others • Negative expectations of school • Feels of external difference • Feelings of internal difference • Functional difficulties due to sight	• Access to work • Provision in school • Growing up • Loneliness • Difference between others • Interaction with others • Questions about diagnosis • Feeling embarrassed • Friendships • Acceptance • Being known • Having others that understand • Feeling have to use aids • Independence • Others making decisions for them • Knowing others in same position • Teacher relationships •

	When I get up and I go to school I just feel … that I know at some point along the lines someone's gonna make a remark or … I'm gonna make a fool out of myself 'cos I can't see something in front of someone or … I'll be … I'll get made, like, the teacher will make something very apparent in class and I'll feel really embarrassed. And I always have that in my head every day I go to school. (John) *When I'm in my … group of friends and in my year at school, everyone's accepting, I mean, my year's really great and they … a lot of people make comments, but it's like I'd go along with it and it's just a joke, but when it's kind of like, when I'm out … when I'm out with friends and then, we meet another group of people and I'm kind of out of my comfort zone when they make comments, 'cause I'm not … they haven't … they don't know me as my friends do, so they'll make … remarks that, I'm a bit like "well, like, wait a minute" I'm not … I'm not comfortable with it. (John* *They … they've moved on past that and my friends are really good 'cos they've all just accepted me and they don't … and they know … I've told them how I've felt and they were like "well that's … that's not your fault, the way you are"* *Well, I used to have … when I was … kind of, kind of, like, three years ago, I had, like, a laptop and a stand with a camera on, so I could see the board, but I didn't really use it because it was just too big and too heavy and too complicated to set up, it just, kind of, annoyed me and I didn't really like it so, I just kind of ditched it … I thought it was like "oh yeah, great" but then, like, when you're actually use it, it's like, really, kind of … lots of, like, effort to, like, use it … really complicated, really heavy. (Kate) I've not used my magnifiers in a while … 'cause they're like, big block things you put on your desk and … it didn't really help me a lot* *You don't really want to use it. You don't want to, like, stand out by using it, 'cos one of the things is, I just want to, like, fit in … it's sort of difficult, erm, …*		

	so you've got to be kind of up for it, to be using your … low vision aids … I would, like, never admit it. (Kate) Getting different things. It makes … it makes me feel ridiculous, it makes me feel like I'm apart from the school when I'm reading stuff like that … I've been told "no-one cares, noone's gonna look at you", all that kind of stuff … it's more like a … it's a personal thing that you feel that everyone's gonna be watching you … I got really upset 'cause my teacher, he handed out the sheets and then he started talking and went "oh, er, I've forgot this is yours" and he handed this thing, this huge piece of paper, and it didn't fit on my desk and I had to go off to the side and I felt really stupid and everyone's like "whoa that's big" and stuff like that. It didn't make me feel good … they'll think that I'm different … and they might look at me differently, outside the classroom. (John *Erm … I don't really like to [use low-vision aids] … but I … when … when I do use it, I see better, so … it depends … depends on my mood really. (Kate) That's why I'm scared, 'cos I feel if I use it, I'm gonna being watched, but if I don't use it, then I'll get told off and people will watch me anyway and … and I'll just get in trouble. Right so, one way or another, I'll feel … silly. (John* *They think they know what's best for me … They say "It's like best for you, it's gonna help you", I'm like "yeah". (Kate) I hate being, like, made to stand out when I'm in class and in front of everyone, especially when the teacher goes like "put on your glasses" I just feel like humiliated. I've been told loads of times by my parents "stop being stupid" and "you've … you've just got to do it", it's like, "well it's not really that easy 'cos you're not … you're not in my situation". (John)* *Everyone was like "no, use it, it's really good" and I was just like "no!" I think I annoyed some people. (Kate) Usually … they make a big deal out of it, in front of a lot of people, or they'll pull me up and all … or they'll er … I'll get, I think, or I'll get in big trouble or they'll report me to Guidance or they'll tell my Regi*		

	teacher and then, after Regi I'll get told to stay behind and then … my Regi teacher will tell me off. (John) *Erm … I just kind of … well, don't argue. I just … I wouldn't have the guts to speak up. (Kate) The next year I didn't get it [preferred low-vision aids] and I didn't want to make a big thing out of it, so I didn't say. (John* *You could … you know, have someone who can actually, like, see kind of what you see so … they could, like, relate to you more, rather than like, be someone from, like, the outside just thinking, like, they know best. So yeah, that would be really helpful. (Kate) I just… really like having someone that's in the same situation. (John*		
Making friends and fitting in: a social-relational understanding of disability at school **(Worth, 2013)**	*My friends have been extremely important to me really. You know they've [sigh] I don't know, they've been my friends for like seven years, as I've said. And not one has ever complained about reading a word off a board or you know. If I can't see something they just tell me what it says, they've never, never ever complained. To be honest, they've just been really good. The people that I'm at school with, like will go and sit next to you, that you don't really know, they'll do the same. You just have to say, 'What does that say?' And they'll just do the same for you. It's not, they won't find it a big issue. Most of them do know. (Age 17, 6th form* *Um [sigh] people sort of noticed—when you're kids people don't really mind if you can't see something. They're just, they're more understanding. But as you get older it's kind of, you start forming into social circles and that's when it's all changed. Their views changed straightaway and you meet new people and they're not always nice. [...]—I didn't actually want to go to the school. Knew it was a rough school, fights... Straightaway target and it was pretty much like that. So I went with it for a while. Year Eight, after a lot of building up of anger over the past sort of six years, and teachers just ignoring the problem, saying*	• Negotiating societal in mainstream school • Peer relationships • Teacher and learning support assistants • Social life at specialist school • Mainstream v specialist • Carers	• Friendships • Friends helping in class • Being similar • Getting older • Transition into teenage years • People being mean • Feeling noticed • Feeling angry • Bullying • Others perceptions • Relationships with teachers • Fitting in with others • Having support in lessons • Feeling different

	that I was causing a lot—although I wasn't doing anything—I lost my temper, and solved my own problems, basically. [...] I got into a fight with the lad that was doing a lot of the hassle, and came off better [chuckles] *Y: So you confronted him about it? ARRAN: Yeah. Uh but I feel that sort of, I didn't get as much attention from bullies and other kids [after that] as it was kind of 'Ooh' ... it was a learning curve for him as much as myself. And I actually made a lot of friends after that. It was kind of proving myself to the school that I could sort of be the same. And they did see me a lot differently. (Age 18, college)* *Well you had, like, people taking the mick out of you and I couldn't, couldn't handle it. Cause the school I was in, you know, it's like, it's like, in [Smithills] you had to like, you went in the main building, and if you turned right, you had like a visual impairment team, and as soon as you people saw you going right, you had mick took out of you. So ..* *I guess just in a weird way just being picked on by my art teacher continuously giving really low grades, when I knew I deserved better. So that pushed me to do it at uni* *: It's just cause [pause] obviously with a sight problem I can't do observational drawing. Like I can't represent anything. So, my teacher was very old-fashioned—and that's all she did in her lessons. And like basically didn't make it very interesting, like modern abstract stuff or even colour work or anything like that—and the fact that I had to always be at the front with the naughty kids just so I could see the board, when there were like two words written on the board in lesson, which didn't make sense. So yeah, that was rather annoying to say the least. (Age 22, working full time)* *I always had support all the time, like every single lesson. And when we got to Year Eleven I wanted to be able to turn around and talk, and maybe I didn't*		• Special school • Access to activities • Feeling isolated • A want to be normal • Moving on in life • Mental health • Encouragement • Understanding

	want to work one lesson. All the sighted kids kind of have the option, a little bit. [NANCY Yeah.] I mean you get told off by the teacher. But I saw that as fitting in [laughs] and that I couldn't. *Oh, he was—very unassuming. He could be very black book, very clever, but he never, you know. He was never obvious to everybody else in the class, because when he used to come into certain classes... I remember him coming into science when we were doing stuff with Bunsen burners and, you know [laughs], and he used to come into technology when we were using cells and thing like that, which obviously, you know, was quite helpful. But he was never blatantly obvious, to me at least, that he was there to look out for me. And I don't think it was that obvious to the rest of the kids in the class as well. Because, while he did spent obviously most of the time with me, he would, you know, talk to the other kids in the class, and like, he was really friendly, a nice, nice man. And uh, awesome. (Age 23, working full time* *I actually think coming to specialist school was one of the best decisions Mum and Dad ever made because I always say, you know, if I was at home now, I wouldn't have the opportunity of going to dancing on Tuesday, horse riding Wednesday, cooking Thursday, something else on Friday, and swimming on Monday! You know? [NANCY Yeah]* *: I went through quite a difficult time at boarding school because I was quite clever I suppose, and a lot of the other people there in my year weren't as academic and they didn't like it, so they were jealous, and they were quite horrible— they were bullying or whatever, but nothing major. I also hated watching them bully other people, I just found it really, really, horrible. And it made me realize just how horrible humans are sometimes, and I went through a bit of a teenage, you know, feeling miserable about everything, and really wondering who I was and what the world was and stuff. [...] I was quite on my own, and I didn't have anyone to talk to. And so, I was very isolated, and I didn't have anyone, and it made me realize that I could deal with anything,*		

	because I don't need anyone—I might feel like I do, but actually I don't. (Age 24, working full time *It's amazing how very uncool and out of it I was at school and how everybody wanted to drink and sleep with each other and be very 'cool' in that way. And how they thought that I was a bit of loser and a bit of a waste of space.* *I want to get away from all that VI stuff now. [...] There were a lot of very emotionally, psychologically screwed-up people at school who didn't do half as well as some, there were a couple of us who just sailed through really. And I just needed to get away from all that, all those horrible memories and, you know, in people who are VI who are just so embarrassingly disabled in their approach that it's just too embarrassing [laughs] and it sounds really harsh, doesn't it? But, you know ...* *s just hard, it's not that I don't care about people who are struggling, I really do, but you know, it's um, I myself have psychologically had enough of all that stigma and just want to be normal and get on with normal things that normal people do. (Age 24, at university)* *Y: I could stay on for another two years, but I don't think I will cause I do want to move on. And that ties into becoming an adult because when you go to college you get treated more as an adult, and you get more freedom. And that's not always good for everybody because I've heard stories lots of stories about people going from this school into college and getting involved with drugs and being expelled or suspended. And, but I think it's a good if you're mature enough it's a good thing. And maybe it's the sudden freedom because you haven't been able to do something for a long time and then you're suddenly able to do it. Then you're going to do it. So maybe that's why we need to relax some of the health and safety things because you're going to get hurt in life first of all. And I think you need some freedom sort of to get used to*		

	the idea of uh rights and responsibilities that you're going to need as an adult. (Age 16, high school) *: The only good thing is the, well there's two things actually, the staff pupil relationship in all our areas is excellent. Like after-school, you know, we have care staff on each residential group and they are more like, sort of, friends than anything. Cause they're there encouraging, helping, you know, or if you want five minutes peace and quiet, just leaving you alone, you know? [NANCY: Yeah] They help you as much as they can. As well with the teachers, it's a lot more, I would say, informal, than most mainstream teachers because in mainstream schools, they're so big and there is so many pupils that, you know, it's hard for the staff to remember everything about each pupil. But here, they do— they know everything about you, everything about your family, so that's really good cause that makes it so much more comfortable when you're learning things[...] you can just really relax around them, you know, so that's really good as well. (Age 16, 6th form*		

Appendix B – Reciprocal and Refutational Translations

Concept	**Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012**	**Gibson, 2012**	**Hamilton, Hulme & Harrison, 2021**	**Lumsdaine & Thurston, 2017**	**Sharpe, Coates & Mason, 2022**	**Thurston, 2014**	**Worth 2013**
School staff relationships	Teacher-student relationships School expectations and grading Support from adults Role of support workers	Relationships with staff Support Spending time with staff Having key relationships with staff The offer of support	Education staff policing actions Staff as 'police' who lacked understanding Allies who understand chronic illness			Teacher relationships Experiencing additional support tin school Support from a person with visual impairment	Relationships with teachers Teacher and learning support assistants
Peer relationships	Comparison with peers Friendships	Peer perceptions Friendships Learning experiences with peers Relating to others with a disability	Understanding from others Friendships		Disabled and able-bodied peers Representation Role models	Difference between others Interaction with others Friendships Acceptance	Friendships Friends helping in class Being similar Peer relationships Social life at specialist school

Family	Family expectations Family dynamics Comparison between siblings						
Self-image/self-esteem/self-confidence	Avoidance Negative thought patterns Dread Self-image/self-esteem Masculinity/gender stereotypes Anxious thoughts Feelings of hopelessness Reference directly to body A bodies ability Feeling small Anxiety	Feeling secure and safe	Self-worth Feeling valued Identity Students’ worth prescribed by graduate employability	Disability as an identity Self-esteem and confidence View of self Mental health Feeling difference Physical differences Mental health Independence Autonomy Hopelessness Awareness and identity The emotional impact of disability		Loneliness Feeling embarrassed Feels of external difference Feelings of internal difference Functional difficulties due to sight	Feeling different Feeling isolated A want to be normal Mental health
Transition over time/impact of time/changing over time		Difference in university Becoming older and its impact		Transition from primary to secondary school Aspirations Future plans	Access to activities at the right age Time	Growing up	Getting older Transition into teenage years Moving on in life

Others' perceptions	Being laughed at/teased Anticipating others reactions		Perception of chronic illness and disability Allies who understand chronic illness Illness or disability legitimacy 'owning' the chronic illness identity to educate others	Others perceptions Others causing people to feel disabled Societal reactions	Challenging perceptions of inclusive school sport	Questions about diagnosis Having others that understand	People being mean Feeling noticed Bullying Others perceptions Encouragement Understanding
Access to support/accessibility	Decision making Alternative provision	Health professionals Early intervention Access to information for university Support when starting university Learning environment with a culture/practice understanding diverse learning	Access to support Accessibility Wider systems to support Technical equipment Students with chronic illnesses are under-prioritised and undervalued at university	Accessibility Overactive/over cautious provisions Not able to access skills due to risk restrictions Social integration The school system	Access to activities provided by education setting Accessibility Knowledge of activities Opportunities for inclusive school sport Meaningful school games	Access to work Provision in school Feeling have to use aids Blending in Draw backs of using visual aids	Having support in lessons Special school Access to activities Mainstream v specialist

			Chronic illness not prioritised for disability support		for young people with SEND		
Feeling included	Feeling included Lessons away from others Feeling singled out/different Feelings of exclusion Marginal involvement	Connectedness Feeling supported Inclusion Exclusion	Having a voice Inequality Financial inequality Discrimination Students with chronic illnesses are under-prioritised and undervalued at university	Isolation and loneliness A mainstream vs disabled world Being left out	Variety in activities Inclusion Meeting various abilities Autonomy in decision making Equality Wanting a voice Having a voice	Being known Independence Others making decisions for them Knowing others in same position	Fitting in with others

Appendix C – Interview Schedule

Welcome, Introduction Ground Rules	
Areas of Belonging	Related Questions
-Accessibility -Feeling included -Being provided with opportunities to be involved in aspects of school life	• How would you describe this school to other people? • What is school like for you? • How do you know you are part of this school? • What is important to you about being part of this school? • Can you be involved with all things in school? o What kind of things? o What helps with this? • Do you take part in all aspects of school? • Do you feel safe and secure in school? o What helps you to feel safe in school?
-Relationships -Others' perceptions	• Do you enjoy spending time with people at this school? • What are your relationships with friends/peers like in school? • What are your relationships with teachers like in school? • Have you had these relationships for a long time?
-Transition (settings and future plans)	• How do you feel about changes in school? – secondary or plans after secondary or like changing between year groups • Does school support you think about what you want to be when you are older/a career?
-Belonging generally -Student's general feeling of school as a whole -Valuing school as a concept Self-esteem	• Do you feel you belong in this school? • Are there things that help you feel you do belong? • What does school give you? What benefits (good things) do you get from being in this school?

Appendix D – Participant Information and Consent Sheet

Exploring the Sense of Belonging of Students with a Physical Disability in School

I am a student at Newcastle University, training to be an Educational Psychologist. Educational Psychologists are interested in how children and young people learn, think and experience things.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project about what young people with physical disabilities think of school. This might mean we talk about things like your lessons, friends and school as a whole.

We would meet to talk one to one and I would ask you about your experiences of school and what school has been like for you. I hope our conversations would help us to understand young people with disabilities' thoughts and feelings about school.

I really hope that you would be interested in taking part in this research project. I am looking forward to hearing your views!

Thank you for reading this!

Charlotte

Researcher contact details:

Charlotte Lambert
Email: c.lambert1@newcastle.ac.uk

Research supervisor: Emma Miller

Email:
Emma.Miller@newcastle.ac.uk

Exploring the Sense of Belonging of Students with a Physical Disability in School

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study.

2. I know what the research is about and what is involved.

3. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions.

4. I understand that I do not have to take part and that I am volunteering to take part in the project.

5. I know I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason.

6. I will use a Dictaphone to record our discussions. All the voice recordings will be kept confidential and will be anonymised so we will not use any names that will identify you. Once these audio recordings have been typed up, they will be deleted. Until then the recordings will be saved in a private and secure computer drive.

7. I am happy to take part in this research and give my informed consent.

8. Print your name: ____

9. Your signature: ____

10. Date: ____

Researcher contact details: Charlotte Lambert
Email: c.lambert1@newcastle.ac.uk
Research supervisor: Emma Miller

Email: Emma.Miller@newcastle.ac.uk

Appendix E – Parent/Carer Information and Consent Form

Exploring the Sense of Belonging of Students with a Physical Disability in School

Dear Parent/Carer

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Newcastle University. I am carrying out a research project to explore the sense of belonging of students with physical disabilities in school. I hope to recruit young people from schools in Middlesbrough and was wondering if your child may be interested in taking part.

The research aims to find out what young people think of their relationships within school, their experiences of school, how much they value these experiences and being involved in different areas of school life. The research would involve your child speaking with me about their school experiences. We may also think about what they might like to make better or change in school to support their sense of belonging within school. I hope that the research will help to highlight the importance of promoting sense of belonging within education settings for children and young people with physical disabilities and explore young people's experiences.

The research would include a short 30-minute interview with your child on an individual basis. This would be recorded and later transcribed, anonymised to protect your child's identified and will later be analysed.

The benefits for taking part are that schools may learn more about students with physical disabilities experiences of belonging in education. If you are happy for your child to take part, I would be grateful for you to get in touch with me via the email below for further discussions.

If at any point you would like to contact me or my supervisor about the research to find out more information, please get in touch. I have included my contact details below, and those of my supervisor, Emma Miller, who is based at Newcastle University.

I am available via email at c.lambert1@newcastle.ac.uk

My supervisor is available at emma.miller@newcastle.ac.uk

Best Wishes,

Charlotte Lambert

Exploring the Sense of Belonging of Students with a Physical Disability in School

Dear Parent/Carer

1. I agree for my child to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to explore the school views of children and young people who have physical disabilities
2. I declare that myself and my child have understood the nature and purpose of the research.
3. I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
4. I have been informed that my child may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without any questions.
5. I have been informed that all my child's responses will be kept confidential and secure, and they will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
6. I have been informed that the researcher will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures.
7. I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Print your name: ____

Your signature: ____

Date: _______________________________________

Best Wishes,

Charlotte Lambert

Appendix F – Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes

Data Quotes	**Codes**	**Subthemes**	**Themes**
I was worried if I didn’t know where the things were It was getting used to moving like classrooms and like different teachers support it was getting used to like having my own planner and stuff and it was getting used to like the building as well a bit more erm navigating around the building they didn’t have any other staff that had VI they only had one teacher but I think its really good because there was only my brother this other girl called XX and there was me so it feels better yep because it feels like ive moved up the school like to secondary	Moving schools Moving to secondary school Being prepared Feeling worried Support from others	School transition	**Transition**

school but at least ill know someone at my secondary school why would you want to go there? Just everything cause I could see my brother in school I could see my cousins in year6 I could see him hed just be one year ahead I could see him and I could also just like play and like in X its not like this school you barely get new students don’t ya but at X youre always getting new students like theres some you can make new friends dunno how im going to feel about high school but my brother says its really good my brother just gets dinners on like Fridays because on Fridays they have like really nice good apparently they do like fish and chips			

Erm just scared if I don’t like get friends like my friends aren’t there and like don’t get if I don’t meet any new friends is there anything else apart from friends you’d be nervous about? Child E: Erm getting bullied not graduating I guess I just had never been to school so I thought it was going to be really really scary			
It felt like exciting and a little scary because I was because I was scared if I wasn’t getting the teacher and im happy because it was Miss X the teacher ive wanted to work with the whole	Moving year groups	Year Groups	
because if im off school like when I had covid when I was off school I actually wanted to go back for a bit but when im back at school I don’t want to be there	Parents COVID 19 Comparison of school v home	Outside and Contextual Influences	**Purpose of Learning**

Boring I could be doing funner things at home id rather be learning at home than at school its funner at home whats the point of doing it in school you can go and facetime your teachers at home Is that what you did over covid? Yeha and that was a lot better like it made it way funner ya know you had frapichino and hot chocolate and you cant get them in school when we had to do like covid meeting because someone had covid and you know what I did I just stayed home I used to go meetings at home with pop like then I ignored them all and I just looked at the work and mum would say have you seen how much work and I wouldn’t do it			

he thing I really want to do in school I cant cause at home I have a trampoline I wish that I could do more things that I do outside of school inside of school feel like you have too many days at school like ya barely see my parents I think I see my teachers more than my parents yesterday we did a school museum that was really fun the parents were able to come but my mum was at work so she couldn’t come my dad didn’t know It was happening so he didn’t come but I was able to show X’s mum around			
How does school make you feel when you’re here? Child B: Happy if someone didn’t belong in school? How would they feel?	Wanting to attend school Liking school Enjoying learning	Valuing learning	

If you just like not really bothered about it Erm sort of fun cause you can watch football sometimes when it’s the world cup school is in the middle yeah Sort of fun cause you can do baking if you’re like learning about that subject so fun could be a bit boring at times I mean it depends because if im off school like when I had covid when I was off school I actually wanted to go back for a bit but when im back at school I don’t want to be			
So when we’re doing some piece of work they always type it up in big font and print It out so we can see it that they had big books like we do here which was really helpful they had big sheets	Resources Materials VI Base	Materials	**Access**

we’ve got a lot of room and we’ve got a big room where we sit and theres also a lot of room with lots of machines that spell braille and everything its got lots of cabinets in with like books in for us like in the PE department and stuff they have like bell balls and stuff so if we get put into groups or we’re playing something like they have bell balls so we all use the bell balls so I know where it is			
I appreciate how they spent a long time doing our assessment and like our work and I think that they do a good job Definitely the fun stuff we do with the VI	Different activities Assessments VI Base	Adjustments	

he VI base has less tables and theres only VI people and theres only VI teachers and people who go in there			
or example I beat the rush of people coming out the classrooms because I come out I come five minutes early for every lesson and leave 5 minutes early and lunchtime and im allowed my friends my two friends I can come in with me about five minutes Not really not too much because I can still do things but say for example energy drinks you can drink those at my age cant ya? Like nine? You can drink lucazde cant ya? But like cause of my heart I couldn’t have it but I tried it because the doctor said that I could now as I got into year 5 erm miss P like let me so in my classroom we have a comfy chair and	Given permission to access Being allowed	Gatekeeping	

she started letting me go on that every day but then we stooped and then now I only go on it when I need to calm down			
sometimes the teachers help me like now Interviewer: In what ways? Child E: Like they ask me about how ive been doing ah ok so you said you were excited to join her class what was exciting? Child E: Because I like doing computers and she likes doing computers too and she usually and she's just usually fun like learning in the computer suite and she used to let me on pivat if I was finished early so I could finish it what else makes them good teachers?	Shared interests	Personal Interest	**Relationships with Adults**

Child C: Because they’re always talking they always talk			
Its just that the teachers shout at me really loud main teacher who is really funny but sometimes hes a bit strict but its fine It can be alright because like sometimes im literally like so annoyed at her because like if she shouts at me I think shes so annoying and like yeah so I can get annoyed really easily Well the good thing about it is she is kind the bad thing about it is sometimes she can just like shout like she shoutins and it gets annoying because I don’t like strict teachers Miss X sometimes she shouts at me because im struggling		Behaviour	

but then sometimes she tried to help me Miss X a bit because sometimes she shouts at me a bit like in this maths test I didn't want to show how I did my answer because I just did it and she shouted at me and didn't let me go on because of that			
if we cant see our pens or so they help us and get felt tips and do it for us if it gets a bit struggling I find it really good that they help us and stuff they show me where to write and what to write They like read the things out on the board and stuff and they like tell me the questions that I have to do	Support from external professionals Support from school staff Getting help from others	Support	

before I moved to XX academy my mobility teacher used to take me out with my cane but before I came here I have tried my cane twice to try and like navigate myself around the lunch hall for getting lunch and erm and I like I came around I came around and erm like the building with my mobility teacher as well and I came for the open evening with my mam and we had a look around I do like how we have got lots of teachers and we've got like X and X X X and got some more people that are VI and I like how we have got more staff because it makes it easier like because mrs A helps X and Mrs B kind of helps X Miss X she was my first ever favourite teacher because she helped me with my work			

Its got nice teachers who are helpful erm the head of VI in school taught me how to use my I first got it but she showed me what it was for and I started using it in lessons like learn a bit of tricks and learn how use it properly and then I got it and used it for the last 5 weeks or something like yeah in year six and then I came to this school and I managed to get along with it and used it in my lessons			
I do parkcour but I just forget about my box when I do parcore because I have a good friend do you feel like you belong at school? Child A: Yeah because ive got all my friends	Length of time friends Friends being belonging	Friendships	**Peer Relationships**

how do you know that you are part of this school X? Child C: Because erm all the other children like talk to me Ah fab so are friends a bit part of belonging in school? Child C: Yeah Interviewer: Yeah ok is there anything else that is a big part of belonging? Child C: Just friends My mum has talked to me about moving before to a different school but like I say no because I my friends like ive got a lot of friends here and like say for example X I barely even know where she lives so I couldn't come call for her or anything like that's why I wouldn't move school So is belonging to school a lot about friendship? Yeah like if I want to be friends with like X and all that I have to stay in this school is there anything else that lets you know you're part of this			

school apart from your badge? Child E: Mm my friends s there anything you might change in school to make people feel they belong in school? Child E: Erm maybe make sure people can play games stop being ignored give them more encourage to make friends we used to play together all the time in year one but then when I moved to a different school and when I came into year 4 and 5 we didn't used to talk as much I did make quite a lot of friends but what was helpful			
Yeah some people some friends have like a little bit fights I mainly just try and help but sometimes if its still going	Loneliness Jealousy Bullying	Negative interactions	

on after a long time I just let them sort it out and tell the teacher and let the teacher sort it out because I don’t know what to do It does effect because I had someone who im not naming but they did say go away or ill get a magnet which would kill me like the person who did she hates me but like we used to be best friends like literally we made BFF books and everything but then as like other people came into the school we started to fall out and like she threatened me twice but one in school and one out of school Alright iffy cause like if X is playing with somebody else like I have got X which is like a really really good friend and I can play with X and stuff but is X and X are both off with somebody then I can play with V but if hes off with somebody	Being alone means not belonging		

I cant play with anybody because M has just become friends with the person that threatened me so and X was like my literally we were good friends but then X started to like to like talk to her and make her hate me so like if I'm friends with somebody X sometimes shes like im getting more popular how about I just take all her friends away so like they just kept saying you look like a banana and I just walked off because no one wanted to play with me and then in the line I was walking back and then someone said that I was involved with it Erm I feel like erm if I didn't belong in school I wouldn't have like I wouldn't know all of my friends that I do now because some of my friends don't live near me but and like I play xbox asell with them			

I’m looking forward to going home because I get to play out and then we’re going to go on scooters you can find a really fun game to play with people at break I play with my friends Child B: Yeah so they’re fun and I like playing with them Child C: There were some all my friends are mostly from primary my old school so I er came up with them a bit and like was friends with them and stuff I met them because I was playing football hen we played a game called run away from the zombies but you can only use parkour so like if you’re running then the xombies would be coming	Play with peers Play at home and in school Clubs taking part in	Play	

Like someones coming through they will move out the way and erm they all like for example if my support goes to the toilet or something then they would stand next to me and sometimes they read out whats on the board and stuff like my friend carries my tray and does that for me and eats with my and plays with me and stuff outside like for example if they’re passing out the books they’ll remember that like I have a folder they’ll pass out to me made a few friends in my tutor group and they like helped me and talked to me and stuff Well last year it was just me X X X but now X is in this class which I really like because me and X have a good bond and I like helping him	Helping others Receiving help	Support	

Reference 2 - 2.13% Coverage Because sometimes it would just be good because we have got X who is who has hearing aids and she cant see and I think it would be really good for her to go in and like feel all the stuff and like for X and X and us it would be really good I just think its better			
we've got bad eyes erm the VI base has less tables and theres only VI people and theres only VI teachers and people who go in there Well if you've got awards you're definitely in XXX school Yeah ive got an X school badge	Community Uniform Non VI vs VI kids 'VI kids'	Group Identity	**Identity**

heres lots of VI children which are all really nice and all of them are mainly my friends Yes AA and BB aren’t in the VI base ive got im trying to think theres X X X and they I talk to X isn’t in there and the boys aren’t in there and they’re all my friends Definitely the fun stuff we do with the VI Because it inspired me to do stuff like inspires me to do stuff that other people can do aswell Interviewer: Ah what do you mean by that? Child C: So for example like erm I take part in stuff that other people can do so I don’t feel left out Ah that makes sense and how do you know you’re part of this school?			

Child E: You can tell by the badge Interviewer: Ah ok so the badge on your chest? Child E: Yeah I wear the jacket			
when I was little I didn't like having bad eyes because I thought id get bullied for it but I don't I really like how other people have it and its just me because I think its really good having bad eyes now because it just makes you feel unique and special Because it inspired me to do stuff like inspires me to do stuff that other people can do aswell in this school you cant eat sweet like you can but you cant if its int eh prize box you can eat it so like I got a prize	Inspiration Confidence Autonomy Receiving awards	Self-Identity	

out the prize box today for my drawing I can show you it when we go back I got two headteacher awards for it too because it was really detailed and really good			
we've got bad eyes here's also a lot of younger children in the VI and I just like how they are like really strong even though they've got bad eyes that's what I think I like about them I really like how other people have it and its just me because I think its really good having bad eyes now because it just makes you feel unique and special Because all people have got other needs like hearing like cant hear or cant see and I just think that it makes them		Disability	

unique and the other children that don’t have anything wrong with them erm its still they are unique in another way but I think that being like you cant hear or cant see just makes you feel unique Not really not too much because I can still do things but say for example energy drinks you can drink those at my age cant ya? Like nine? You can drink lucazde cant ya? But like cause of my heart I couldn’t have it but I tried it because the doctor said that I could now It does effect because I had someone who im not naming but they did say go away or ill get a magnet which would kill me yeah like it can effect because people can like threaten me a bit more			