



School belonging: Listening to the voices of secondary school students who have undergone managed moves

Holly Craggs

Educational Psychology Service, Bolton Metropolitan Council,
Manchester, UK

Catherine Kelly

Manchester Institute of Education, The University of Manchester,
Manchester, UK
Educational Psychology Service, Bury Metropolitan Council,
Manchester, UK

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Abstract

A sense of school belonging has a powerful effect on students' emotional, motivational, and academic functioning, yet there have been few attempts to listen to students' views on school belonging, or to seek their opinions on how best to promote it. Managed move protocols to facilitate a move to an alternative school were developed in the UK as a positive alternative to permanently excluding (expelling) students whose place at the school is no longer considered viable by school management. However, the 'success' of these protocols has been defined in a manner which does not take full account of their affective impact on this vulnerable group of children and young people (CYP). Previous research has identified a need for greater personalization of the managed move transition process and fuller incorporation of CYP views. This study sought to understand how secondary school students who have undergone a managed move experience school belonging. Data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). A sense of school belonging resulted from positive relationships with peers and an attendant sense of safety, security, and acceptance. Participants expressed both the desirability and perceived difficulty of forging relationships in a new school and acknowledged the value of sensitive and subtle support.

Corresponding author:

Catherine Kelly, Manchester Institute of Education, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK and Educational Psychology Service, Bury Metropolitan Council, Manchester, UK.
Email: Catherine.kelly@manchester.ac.uk

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This article adds to school belonging literature by qualitatively exploring the way in which belonging is experienced and interpreted by high school students who have undergone a managed move. It aims to offer insight into how this group of young people experience the educationally and emotionally significant phenomenon of school belonging, and seeks to capture participants' views on what might promote a sense of school belonging for other managed move students.

Defining belonging

The affective phenomenon of belonging is 'complex and multi-faceted' (Cartmell & Bond, 2015, p. 92), and has been variously defined within psychological research over a period of decades. Maslow (1943) claimed that an individual whose need to belong is not met 'will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and [...] strive with great intensity to achieve this goal' (p. 381).

A sense of belonging has been hypothesized as a need to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships and a sense of social exclusion is associated with decreases in self-regulation and pro-social behaviour (Baumeister, Dewall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005).

School belonging

Government guidance regarding supporting mental health and behaviour in schools (DfE, 2016) identifies a sense of belonging as a protective factor in building resilience for children, and states that 'school should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems' (DfE, 2016, p. 8). A considerable body of research, accumulated over a period of decades, highlights an association between 'classroom belonging and support' and 'expectancy of academic success', and 'intrinsic academic interest and value' (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, pp. 60–61). More recently, academic attainment, more positive interactions with teachers, and more satisfying peer relations have also been associated with school belonging (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Osterman, 2000).

Dynamic and interacting factors identified as promoting a sense of belonging include adult support, belonging to a positive peer group, commitment to education and a positive school environment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015), other accounts focus explicitly on schools as caring communities

and places of sanctuary for students (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006), while pupils themselves identify peer acceptance and friendships as key factors (Sancho & Cline, 2012).

Although it remains variously defined in the literature, school belonging would seem to be fundamentally predicated on the experience of positive and reciprocal social relationships with staff and peers, and strongly and consistently associated with both the emotional and psychological well-being and the academic achievement motivation of children and young people in school settings. For this reason, Goodenow and Grady's (1993) definition of school belonging as 'students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others [...] in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class' (p. 25) will be adopted for the purposes of this study.

Pupil voice on school belonging

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which advocates the need to consult with children about matters which affect them, prompted a range of initiatives centred on obtaining the views and opinions of CYP (Lewis & Porter, 2007). However, only a very small proportion of the growing body of school belonging research seeks CYP views (Nind, Boorman, & Clarke, 2012). A recent review (Craggs & Kelly, manuscript submitted for publication) synthesizing findings from this small but contextually-diverse body of research produced four main concepts: School belonging and intersubjectivity; school belonging and knowledge, understanding and acceptance of individual identity; school belonging and experiences of in-group membership and school belonging and safety/security. The synthesis generated the higher-order concept of school belonging as 'feeling safe to be yourself in and through relationships with others in the school setting', positioning the experience of school belonging for adolescents as a prerequisite of academic engagement, motivation, and achievement.

Defining managed moves

In England, managed moves are advocated as an alternative to permanent exclusion for CYP whose educational placements are no longer considered viable by school management, providing a 'fresh start' in a new school (DfES, 2008). About one-third of local children's services promote some form of managed move in their schools (Bagley & Hallam, 2015). Managed moves are described as enabling 'a child or young person to make amends and to move on to a new placement or programme in a planned way which satisfies the school, the child and family and any individual who has been aggrieved' (Abdelnoor, 2007, p.11), and as 'a process whereby a collaborating school agrees to accept a pupil at risk of exclusion from another collaborating school', emphasizing a relational and collaborative process at the school level (Vincent, Harris, Thomson, & Toalster, 2007, p. 284). However, Bagley and Hallam (2015) reported that managed moves are perceived by some

parents and students to give schools a licence to move children they consider to be a 'problem', rather than working with them; that the process takes too long to negotiate and instigate; and that moves can cause stress for families and individual children.

Evaluations of the managed move process have generated mixed results, with some positive outcomes reported to be associated with 'tailored support', 'care', and 'commitment' in receiver schools (Vincent, Harris, Thomson, & Toalster, 2007, p. 295). Personalization and listening to CYP and families throughout the process have also been identified as key success factors (Bagley & Hallam, 2015; Chadwick, 2013).

Pupil voice on managed moves

Despite recent legislation, active inclusion of the voice of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) particularly those with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties is underdeveloped (Nind, Boorman, & Clarke, 2012, p. 644). The managed move literature to date has largely focused on perceptions of the process from the position of multiple stakeholders, with some including the perspectives of CYP themselves (Bagley & Hallam, 2015; Chadwick, 2013). Craig (2015) explored the perspectives of four students and found managed moves can leave CYP feeling insecure, different, segregated, and vulnerable.

Previous studies of belonging 'have focused on definition, measurement, and importance of belonging without defining the precursors of the sense of belonging in school settings or its practical implications' (Allen & Bowles, 2012, p. 113). This gap seems particularly significant in relation to managed move students, since the managed move process, potentially involving the disruption of existing social connections and rejections within receiver schools, seems likely to impact on these students' sense of school belonging. This study therefore attempts to address this gap in the literature by investigating the following research questions:

- How do secondary school students who have undergone a managed move experience school belonging?
- What do secondary school students who have experienced a managed move feel would make it easier for other managed move students to experience a sense of school belonging?

Epistemological position and researcher positionality

The focus of the study is on interpretation of the nature of lived experience and it is acknowledged that the researchers are engaged in a process of reflecting on their own meaning-making in relation to the research data, as well as that of the participants. This process is known as the 'double hermeneutic' (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53).

Researcher reflexivity and awareness of one's preconceptions and their potential influence is an essential part of engaging with the double hermeneutic (Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2015). At the time of the research the first author was a trainee school psychologist with experience of working with CYP in a variety of roles within secondary, and higher education and youth justice settings. The second author is a senior school psychologist and tutor on the professional doctoral training programme at the University of Manchester. The decision to investigate students' experiences of belonging in relation to the managed move process arose out of experience of direct work with students who have undertaken managed moves.

Methodology

Participant recruitment

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Manchester. Participants were selected according to predetermined criteria: i) participants experienced integration into a new school environment as part of the local authority's managed move process; ii) participants were attending the receiver school for a period of at least six weeks, and iii) for ethical reasons, it was also stipulated that any potential participants did not have ongoing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) involvement. Senior members of staff from mainstream secondary schools within a children's service in the North West of England supplied names of potential participants. The first four participants who met all stipulations were selected, as fewer participants examined at a greater depth is preferable for interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Verbal and written informed parental consent and participant assent were obtained prior to commencement of the study. The background details of the study participants are presented in Table 1.

Individual phenomenological interviews (collaborative interviews with an unforced flow of questions (Major & Savin-Baden, 2013, p. 221; p. 359) were conducted with each participant. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

Data were subjected to IPA according to the five-stage procedure (see Table 2) outlined by Smith and Osborn (2008, pp. 53–80). Analysis was conducted by hand to enable the researcher to get 'in-amongst' the data, and develop a more embodied awareness of their own role as an interpreter of it. See Table 3, Online Supplemental Material for worked examples of the IPA.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the analysis (Yardley, 2008) was ensured through offering participants the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy, and to make any

Table 1. Participants details.

Participant	Year group/School	Background details
Joe	9 School A	At receiver school six weeks and still 'on trial'. His managed move came about as a result of him getting into a fight following an extended period of time in which he was bullied and did not attend. His parents had received a fine for his non-attendance and, although he had a good relationship with both parents, it had taken him a long time to confide in them that he was the victim of bullying.
Maria	10 School B	At receiver school for almost a year. She had moved because of difficulties with peers and bullying which had triggered deliberate self harm (cutting).
Jack	9 School B	At the receiver school for almost 14 months. He had moved due to being bullied and getting into fights. He had recently been diagnosed with what he described as a social interaction disorder and had had previous input from a school psychologist.
John	9 School C	At the receiver school for approximately 12 weeks. His move had come about as a result of clashes with teachers, as well as failure to comply with school rules regarding the use of camera phones. He reported that his trial period had been extended due to ill health shortly after arriving, and the receiver school wanted to wait to see what he was like when in full health before taking a decision about whether to accept him onto roll.

necessary amendments. Additionally, to ensure rigour and completeness of interpretation a section of coded transcript from Participant 1 was analysed by a colleague also conducting IPA-based research before analysis of data from subsequent participants was conducted; interpretation was also discussed regularly with the second author.

Findings

Findings highlighted some of the key precursors to and components of a sense of school belonging for secondary school students who had undergone a managed move. Figure 1 presents the relevant superordinate themes and sub-themes discussed and gives an indication of their interrelationships. All names used are pseudonyms.

Table 2. Stages of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

Stage of analysis	Action
1	Close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant; identification of emergent patterns (i.e. themes);
2	Development of a 'dialogue' between the researcher, their coded data, and their psychological knowledge, about what it might mean for participants to have these concerns, in this context
3	Development of a structure, frame, or gestalt which illustrates the relationships between themes; the organization of all this material in a format which allows for analysed data to be traced right through the process, from initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes
4	The use of supervision, collaboration, or audit to help test the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation; the development of a full narrative, evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, taking the reader through this interpretation, supported by some form of visual guide (a simple structure, diagram or table)
5	Reflection on one's own perceptions, conceptions and processes

Making friends and feeling safe

I've got better friends [...] it makes me feel safer:

Making friends

Being able to make friends at the receiver school was by far the most prominent theme associated with a sense of school belonging, mentioned by all participants, and was positioned as an essential precursor. Comments highlighting the importance of friendships included 'I wanted to move school where I could get some friends and be more socialised' (Jack) and 'I'm settled in now 'cos I already had friends here' [in receiver school] (John).

Feeling safe

A key way in which making friends in the receiver school appeared to promote belonging was by increasing participants' feelings of safety. The link between forging successful friendships and feeling safe/secure in the receiver school was both

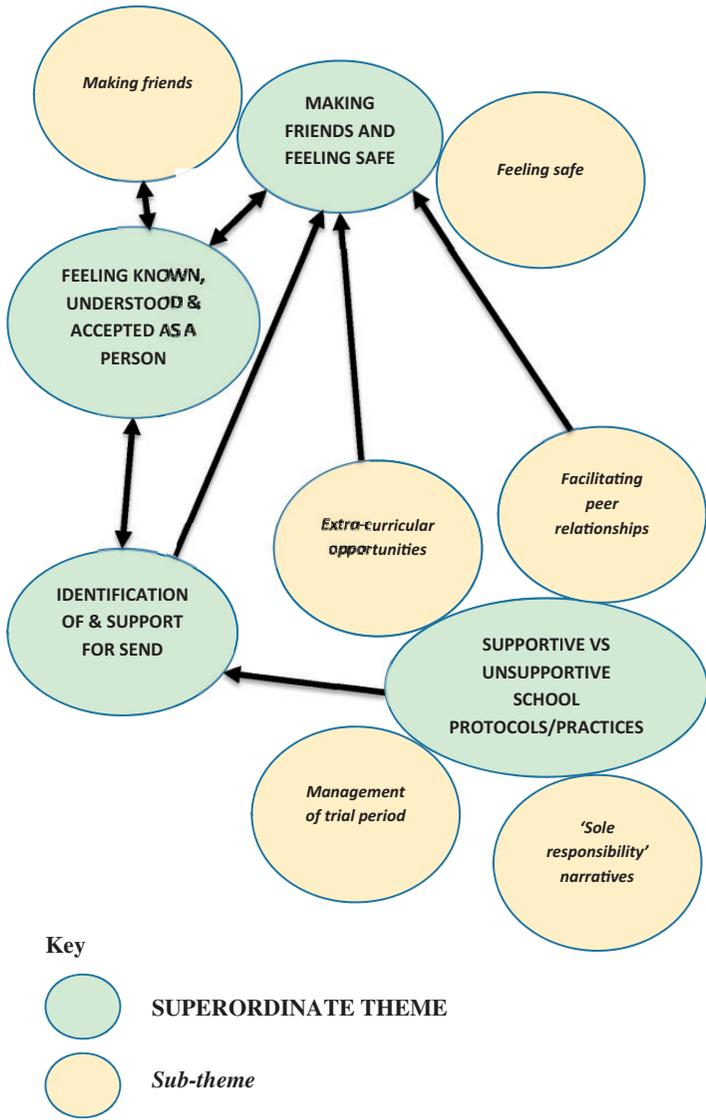


Figure 1. Map of superordinate themes and sub-themes.

explicitly and implicitly made:

Now I don't self-harm... I've got better friends ... most of them [the other students in the receiver school] aint the bullying type ... it makes me feel safer. (Maria)

One of my best friends now ('cos I was already friends with him), he introduced me to, like, all my new friends that I have here, and like, I found it comfortable. (John)

Conversely, a significant barrier to school belonging for managed move participants was fear or doubt about their ability to forge positive peer relationships. All had experienced difficulties with peer-group relationships in previous schools and whilst forging positive friendships was perceived as fundamental to the experience of school belonging, the process was therefore viewed with trepidation:

I thought that, like, loads of the students would be the same – like some of them of the bullying type. (Maria)

I was scared if, like, I didn't meet any new friends or if I would have got bullied. (Jack)

The prospect of making new friends made participants feel 'scared' or 'nervous'. Unsurprisingly, participants feared encountering the same difficulties with peers in their receiver schools as they had experienced in previous settings. One participant used a powerful metaphor to describe his sense that the difficulties he had experienced might not change despite his move:

Well it's sort of like [...] schools are the same ... with different doors [...] so basically ... the things that go on in school are basically the same, like the people in the school, but it's like the building's a bit different, if you know what I mean? (Joe)

Feeling known, understood and accepted as a person in receiver school

Just be yourself:

The theme of 'feeling understood/accepted as a person' described what also seemed to be an important component of school belonging for all managed move participants. This theme was expressed in terms of feeling understood by both friends and staff. Comments included: 'I've got better friends [at receiver school] 'cos they all understand me [...] most of them understand what other people have gone through' and 'the staff here [...] understand people more' (Maria). Jack made an explicit link between feeling understood and accepted and being able to 'be himself'.

However, comments made by Joe and John implied that the pressure of conforming to gender stereotypes involving dominance and aggression made it more difficult for them to 'be themselves' in their receiver schools:

I tried to be someone else, like I tried to be all big and hard to start off with, but then I realised there's no point [...] so it's just better if you do that [be yourself] 'cos then

you'll fit in with the right group better, and you'll fit in with people that you want better. (John)

Well the thing is a few months ago [in the receiver school] or whatever, like one of them [the other students] tried to start a fight with me and . . . I just basically said to him 'I don't fight' . . . and he just . . . basically trying to keep it going, 'cos he was, like, one of these people who just look for fights [. . .] and I'm not a fighter. (Joe)

Identification of and support for SEND

We could get you counselling to help you:

In addition to making friends/feeling safe and feeling understood, participants recognized the contribution to a sense of belonging of appropriate and timely provision of support for any additional difficulties they were facing. One participant, receiving input from the school's link psychologist because of identified difficulties with social communication and interaction, spoke about the positive impact of outside agency support in helping him understand his own behaviour:

Miss [Deputy Head of receiver school] has, erm, invited someone to help me with my behaviour and, erm, to help me, like, ask, like to give me a bit of support and guidance to why, erm, I'm doing this. (Jack)

Maria, who had used deliberate self-harm to cope with the feelings generated by being a victim of bullying in her previous school, stated that she felt she had received 'loads' of help for this from her receiver school. She explained:

'Cos the [previous] school wouldn't put me in for counselling for it and everything so my mum had to go and do that herself and get me counseling . . . but this [receiver] school is like 'if you ever start again we could get you counselling as soon as possible to help you stop before it got worse'. (Maria)

Arranging outside agency support for managed move students who had experienced or were experiencing bullying was cited by another participant as the single most important thing receiver schools could do to help such students to feel they fit in:

Making sure that the child is . . . not getting bullied [. . .] get someone to come in from outside of school and talk to them [about] if you're getting bullied or not. I found it more easier when someone from out of school, like, came in, but it depends on the person's confidence and who they want to tell. (Jack)

Supportive vs unsupportive school protocols/practices

This is your last chance school:

Participants' sense of school belonging was also impacted by an array of school-based factors encompassed by the theme 'supportive vs unsupportive school protocols/practices'. This theme incorporated four sub-themes: 'Extra-curricular opportunities: responding to students' interests/abilities'; 'Promoting belonging through facilitating peer relationships'; 'management of trial period', and 'sole responsibility narratives'.

Extra-curricular opportunities

The opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities and use existing skills to make a positive contribution appeared to facilitate a sense of school belonging for participants. One gave a detailed account of how she had been supported to apply for the role of peer mentor in her receiver school.

Now I'm a peer mentor. Yeah. But I don't think they expected that from me 'cos I was like new and everything [...] They were bringing in applications for it. So I told my form tutor, 'Sir, can you help me do this?' He was like, 'Is that applying for a peer mentor?' He was like 'Oh, that's good!' And he was like ('cos I was one at my old school as well), 'you could put that on [the application form] as well, 'cos that'd help you get the job' [...] Like, I think it's made me a better person because now I know that because I've been through things I could help people not go through it. (Maria)

Joe, seemed to be struggling to experience a sense of belonging in his receiver school, and had resorted to excessive gaming to cope with the social difficulties he had encountered, he described how going to a boxing gym after school offered an opportunity for making friends without having to rely solely on the verbal strategies he found difficult:

Going starting boxing ... it's ... taken away playing on the Xbox ... [...] I'd rather like do a bit of training instead of playing on the Xbox or whatever. [...] I think it ... well ... it helped me out a lot [...] All the other lads that go there...like they won't...they won't mither you. [...] they just don't take ... talking seriously. (Joe)

Promoting belonging through facilitating peer relationships

Joe and Jack's comments acknowledged the value of receiver schools' attempts to promote a sense of belonging by the sensitive facilitation of peer relationships:

Well it's pretty good for them to, like, pair you up with someone 'cos you just get talking a bit. (Joe)

I met, erm, a teacher called [name of teacher] and, erm, she helped me find some new friends; she, erm, she showed me where the place is where other people like stay at break time and lunchtime . . . I had a good day that day. (Jack)

Ways in which schools might help promote a sense of belonging for managed move students were suggested:

They [receiver school staff] could [. . .], like, help them make friends. So, like, put them with people they think they'll blend well with and everything. (Maria)

All the new kids they could, like, have, like, a meeting with them all so then they all get to know each other and everything. So then they've got other new people that are mates rather than just people that've been there for, like, four, five years. (Maria)

However, other participants felt there were limits to the extent to which receiver schools could help to promote a sense of school belonging through facilitating friendships for managed move students:

Interviewer: What do you think schools could do to help students on managed moves feel like they can like fit into a friendship group or belong?

Participant: Erm, well I . . . well first of all I'll say what they probably couldn't do . . . is, err . . . I don't really feel as though they could sort of like push someone into, like, a group of friends. (Joe)

Management of trial period

Participants also spoke about the negative impact on their sense of school belonging of a lack of clarity surrounding the initial 'trial period':

And, err, I was off for a few days so they [receiver school] . . . they err . . . said that it would be another three weeks or something [on trial], 'cos my attendance went down a bit because of that. (Joe)

Being 'on trial' in a receiver school was characterized by John as being a source of anxiety, potentially detrimental to the formation of friendships, and, therefore, to the development of a sense of school belonging:

You probably shouldn't do a long . . . period of trial, 'cos it gives you that kind of [. . .] anxiety, of, like, worrying all the time in your behavior and stuff, and [. . .] if you're worrying about your behaviour [. . .] you probably won't make as many friends. (John)

A counterexample was offered by Jack, whose trial period appeared to have been clearly-communicated and positively-managed:

I had an interview with the Head Teacher first, saying, like, how I've come here and talking about 'is there going to be an improvement on my behaviour and the bullying?' And then I said 'yeah' and then, erm, he said to me, 'you're going on a six week trial', and then after the six weeks had been up, he gave me a card to say 'Congratulations, you're now part of the [name of receiver school] team'. And then, err, I said 'thanks', yeah, and I settled in from there. (Jack)

'Sole responsibility' narratives

Three participants responded to the question 'what could schools do to help managed move students feel like they fit in and belong at their receiver school?' with what could be described as 'sole responsibility' narratives. These were elaborations of the view that there was little or nothing schools could do to help, as responsibility lay solely with the individual pupil. These 'sole-responsibility' narratives were most insistently expressed by John and Joe. These students, who had been at their receiver school the shortest time and whose placements appeared the least securely-established, seemed to be positioning themselves as entirely responsible for the process of settling in.

Well, they [receiver schools] can't really help you with that [fitting in and experiencing a sense of belonging] because it's all about how you present yourself to other people. (John)

I think it's up to you if you've like made a good move. (Joe)

Discussion

How do secondary school students who have undergone a managed move experience school belonging?

The voices of the pupils in this research offer some distinct understandings of school belonging. Belonging for secondary school students who have undergone a managed move emerges from the data as fundamentally associated with positive peer relationships, and with a sense of safety, security, and comfort contingent on having established those positive peer relationships. For these pupils belonging needs and safety needs appeared intertwined, and there was a sense of finding themselves caught between an acute awareness of the need to form protective social affiliations and some doubt or anxiety about their ability to do so. John and Joe managed this by relying on pre-existing friendships with students in the receiver school as a means of entry to their new peer group. Such 'bridging'

friendships served an important function, particularly in cases where other friendship opportunities did not appear to have been facilitated. There was an awareness of John's own role in 'how you present yourself to other people' as being important in establishing friendships and Joe considered that school staff could not force this multifaceted process by 'push(ing) someone into, like, a group of friends'.

The 'trial period' seemed connected to the 'sole responsibility' narrative with a sense of a 'fresh start' being offered only after a trial period had been passed and of pupils bearing responsible for the process of 'settling in'. There seemed to be a circular logic in their assertions that because sole responsibility for settling in/making friends lay with themselves, there was nothing schools could do to make this process easier. On the other hand, Jack highlighted that the head teacher acknowledging he was now part of the receiver school helped him to settle in.

Joe and Jack described how some school staff were able to appreciate and respond to their emotional and social needs with 'light touch' interventions (e.g. introductions to selected peers and information about safe and welcoming places to go at break and lunchtime) and these were described as having a positive impact on their sense of belonging. Maria also mentioned having an effective approach to bullying and a range of channels for reporting it which suggests that a fear of victimhood based on previous experience can hamper the development of school belonging.

In common with other groups of adolescent students, school belonging for these participants was closely associated with a sense of being accepted and able to 'be yourself' in the educational environment. Staff and peer acceptance is an important facet of Goodenow and Grady's (1993) influential definition of school belonging, and is cited as central to school belonging across a range of contexts (Booker, 2007; Cartmell & Bond, 2015; Sancho & Cline, 2012). This study extends this aspect of belonging in considering how for John and Joe feeling able to 'be yourself' was rendered more complicated by tension between individual identity and perceptions of a 'masculine' gender role involving aggression and dominance.

School belonging also appeared to be facilitated by appropriate support for any additional needs, corroborating Bagley and Hallam's (2015) finding that addressing any underlying difficulties is important to young people who have experienced managed moves. In the current study, Maria and Jack who had received actual or offered support for social, emotional, and mental health difficulties described feeling 'safe' and settling in 'quite well' as a result. Conversely, Joe who appeared to be displaying high levels of social anxiety, and who was not in receipt of support, had resorted to 'keeping himself to himself' in his receiver school and avoiding peers rather than attempting to make friends.

What do secondary school students who have experienced a managed move feel would make it easier for other managed move students to experience a sense of school belonging?

The responses of participants who thought it was possible for schools to help managed move students to experience a sense of school belonging were

overwhelmingly focused on support for making friends, underscoring the high value placed by adolescents on peer relationships, but perhaps also the particular social vulnerability of managed move students. The suggestion made by John that a shorter trial period would promote belonging was based on his perception that it is hard to make friends when you are ‘on trial’, as you are ‘worrying all the time’ about your behaviour.

There was relatively little mention of school staff, but where there was it was in relation to commonplace school activities such as arranging a buddy. Other support cited as helping participants to settle in included head teachers and staff showing curiosity about, supporting, and encouraging participants’ individual skills and interests, positively acknowledging the successful completion of the six week ‘trial period’, and acting as advocates for managed move students.

The voices of the pupils in this study illustrate a sense of school belonging as arising from positive relationships with peers and an attendant sense of safety and acceptance. The pupils saw these as largely facilitated by their own endeavours but also acknowledged some enabling aspects of school routines and staff actions. Theron (2016) concludes that while everyday school-based resources and processes are potentially protective, important leverage points for supporting resilience in schools should not be neglected. The voices of these managed move pupils would suggest that an understanding of the possibly counterproductive effects of a trial period is one such factor. Pupils indicated how a trial period was anxiety provoking and a barrier to feeling settled. Additionally, the negative connotations associated with a trial period may influence how school staff perceive managed move pupils and consequently their daily interactions with these pupils (Armstrong, 2014).

Reflections and limitations

Possible limitations of the current study are its small scale and participant numbers, which limit the potential for generalization of findings. Students on managed moves are by nature a transient population, making participant recruitment and retention challenging. As a result, although there was homogeneity of experience (all participants had undergone a managed move), the amount of time participants had been in their receiver schools varied, and whereas some had been accepted onto roll, others had not. Whilst it is likely that this may have impacted students’ sense of belonging, such variation does not constitute a significant limitation in IPA-based research, which is predominantly concerned with the interpretative analysis of individual life-worlds. Nevertheless, it is hoped that, over time, further studies will contribute to a more generalized understanding of the phenomenon of school belonging.

Summary

Findings suggested that a sense of school belonging for these students was a socially-constructed phenomenon dependent upon social interaction of a kind

which the study participants appeared to find especially anxiety-inducing. Schools and school psychologists have a role to play in promoting a sense of belonging in contextually relevant, subtle, everyday ways, to mitigate the potential risk associated with transition and with completion of trial period for this vulnerable population.

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Author biographies

Holly Craggs is employed as an Educational Psychologist at Bolton Council in the North West of England and is a UK Health and Care Professions Council registered practitioner psychologist. She has worked as an educational psychologist and with children and young people in a variety of roles within secondary, further and higher education and youth justice settings. Research interests include belonging, emotional health, and well-being and the voice of the child.

Catherine Kelly is an Academic and Professional Tutor on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the Manchester Institute of Education. She is also a Senior Educational Psychologist with Bury Metropolitan Borough Council Psychological Service. Research interests: Belonging, resilience, and attributions, positive psychology, emotional health and well-being, looked after children, multi-agency working, children and young people's participation, and person-centred planning.