

Slide 1: Introduction

I am an impact consultant, which means I help organisations to deliver more against their aims, through advice on strategy and fundraising. I help them understand and articulate what would be missing if they weren't here.

Today we're focussing on the impact of *belonging*, and how we can work as institutions to do better around this theme.

My aim for the next hour is to push your thinking and give you some simple tools / questions / starting points to take away with you.

"Belonging" will look different in different places so this can't be a list of perfect ideas to copy. I worked with a school recently who changed the statutory requirement to teach British Values, and turned it into local values instead. This was a year long consultation with the local community, pupils, families, businesses etc. Many were exactly the same, which means they met their statutory duty, but they created a personalised set of values, which they could work with in PSHE lessons, circle time, assemblies, and termly projects. The feedback was that they increased the pupils sense of belonging in the school, and the school's sense of belonging in the community.

You'll leave with more questions than answers, but the aim of those is to give you some easy ways to start doing something.

First of all we're going to have a recap on a really important language distinction in impact practice.

And we're going to do it through the medium of cake.

Output v Outcome.

Slide 2: Output V Outcome

Output = the cake

Outcome = what happens next. Someone has to eat the cake.

- If I made a nice cake, the outcome is happy people eating the cake
- If I made the cake in a filthy kitchen, the outcome is sick people
- If I add poison to the cake, the outcome is dead people.

If I simply state: "I made a cake!" the correct response in impact management is: "So What?"

If we move this to workshops:

Output = the workshops

Outcome = what happens next. What has *changed* for the people taking part in the workshops?

The output, the cake – is not where the story ends. The output is where the story starts.

The outcome will be my happy people, or sick people, or dead people.

Slide 3: Belonging

I wanted to look with you at the fact that sources of belonging double as sources of resilience.

Ideally, children who come to our schools, will already have multiple sources of belonging. Such as:

- Family
- Friends
- Groups / hobbies
- Religion
- Town
- Sports
- Football team
- Music etc

School can be added to this, but not automatically. And we must consider how we create that sense of belonging for the child who has never had one, or if that sense of belonging has changed / disappeared:

- Trauma
 - bereavement
 - domestic violence
 - displacement
 - breakdown of family unit
 - breakdown of friendship groups
- Poverty
- Moving house / town / country
- Moving school (high school)
- Losing a favourite teacher

Exercise:

Write down a list of things that make you, you. This can be qualities you have, or things you love doing (reading, writing, drawing, running, swimming, football, curiosity, tenacity, activist, time with family and friends, cinema etc etc)
You should be able to get 8 or 10 fairly quickly.

Now cross 2 things off your list. These are things you can no longer do. Which 2 will you cross off?

Now cross off 2 more.

Now 2 more.

There were audible groans from the group at this point. It's hard to take away the things you love, and the things you associate with yourself.

You may love a certain toy, and you can no longer bring that to school.

You may enjoy wearing jewellery, and you're not allowed to wear it.

You may love walking around a lot, being active, now you have to sit still for most of the day

You may love to ask questions to help you understand the world, now you are told to be quiet and listen.

Without even thinking about it, we often expect children to leave their loves, likes, and personalities at the door of the school so they can fit in with the school rules. This does not create a sense of belonging. And that groan that you couldn't stifle, is how our kids feel coming in at the gate.

Schools must be proactive in creating a sense of belonging, creating the necessary safety and stability. And this takes effort.

What happens if we don't?

If we don't, children will create their own substitutes, and some of these will be fragile, and at their worst, can be dangerous.

Overly academic – more time in school

Music – Take That anecdote (beware: teenage girls and their interests are often belittled)

Testing behaviour – pushing you away and becoming the 'bad kid' is easier than being rejected

Belonging through exclusion – defining self by what you're not. Seeking approval from uncertain places. Bullying.

Online groups.

Grooming.

Not all of these are damaging. And for the school the overly academic child can be blissful, but none of them create happiness or well-being in our children.

What is the difference between belonging, and fitting in?

Belonging: OK as we are. Secure. Stable.

Fitting in: Becoming what you need to be / think you need to be to be accepted. Change is required, and sometimes this causes discomfort.

Slide 4: Active Steps to Change

I like to use this as a little visual metaphor of the journey we're going on.

You have to be realistic about what your place is like now.

Describe it.

Know it.

We don't go from picture 1 to picture 3 by saying

"Wouldn't it be lovely if there were plants and flowers here"

or by saying

"We're planning on some flowers and plants."

How do we get from picture 1 – 3?

We have to prepare the soil.

Plant the seeds.

Protect them.

Nurture them.

Weed around them.

We have to put the effort in.

So we identify those steps. We look at what our place needs to prepare the soil and the seeds, and that will become our outcome path.

But be careful of confusing outputs with outcomes.

If we'd stop at outputs, instead of looking on far enough to the outcomes, we'll say "I planted some trees!"

Or

"I wrote a policy that says we'll be more inclusive"

"We've sent out letters about uniform being important so we can take pride in our school."

"I've booked some mindfulness lessons for the kids"

SO WHAT?

What happens next?

Slide 5: Shift the Angle

Let's look a little more at how you can plan that journey from picture 1 to picture 3.

1: What are you trying to achieve? You have to be able to define this. No vague statements.

"Excellent CPD"

"Everyone reaches their potential"

These statements don't mean anything because they are not measured against anything, which means that everyone can ignore them.

Be specific. What are you going to achieve. Who is needed, and what do they need to do? Make sure that the steps / actions cannot be ignored.

2. Ignore measures of success for one minute, I know this is counter-intuitive but flip the question on its head first.

What happens if we don't do this?

What happens if we don't achieve?

Turning questions on their heads is great impact practice. And this will help to define your urgency, and your action plan.

It will also help you to communicate it to relevant people. What do you need to tell your governors? What about your staff? Teaching and otherwise. By telling them what you will miss out on, you can make sure you get them to buy into the vision more effectively.

Then you can go back to your measures of success.

A great way to start this piece of work is to change the angle that you're looking at this with. We think of schools as being a place of learning and development. But if we shift the angle of the prism, change the colour, (it's all about the visual metaphors to help you remember) and look instead at place and belonging, how does it measure up? Have we lost some things because of our rigid focus?

If you're relying on things like a smart uniform to make everyone feel part of the place, you're thinking too small. And too passively.

What other things can create a sense of belonging / place?

Newsletters

Communications (with pupils and with parents)

Songs

Cleaning up

Handshakes

Regular celebrations

Celebrate people

Charity days

Show and tell

Routine – predictable, safe, but they also create a shared history among the pupils.

What do they serve to do? For example the Daily Mile – takes mental and physical well-being of the children and adults seriously.

Coping with the unexpected also important.

Solving problems – deeper need / pastoral care.

Period poverty

Clean clothes

Food / Hunger

Understanding the situations of your families. (are your requests reasonable, do they trust you know them?)

Language barriers

Domestic violence witnessing (teddy bears at school) (relax rules during World Cup)

Zero tolerance rules won't work for this.

A word on tolerance; don't set the bar so low. You can do better. Tolerance is literally setting the bar as low as you can get away with. What's more aspirational? Go there instead.

Vital:

When you're problem solving for your pupils not to cause them more shame, or make them do the work.

Eg: If you're solving period poverty, don't make it shameful to get the sanitary products. Make it easy, normal and no stigma. This may cost you more.

Eg: Don't give the kids resilience training to cope with things they shouldn't have to cope with if it's in your power to change those things.

Slide 6: Money and Time

It can feel a bit overwhelming to think about all the changes that might need to take place.

So, start on a positive:

What is unique about your school? (in terms of belonging)

Is it enough?

What can you build on top of this?

Break it down:

What does your governing body need to do?

Ethos

School vision

What does this school want our children to feel when they are at school?

What does this school want our children to have achieved by the time they leave the school?

Are you missing anything by being too focused? Eg Good exam results v enriched curriculum

Are these stated explicitly enough?

Which policies to update / consider

What does your SLT need to do?

Implementation of policies

Discuss pastoral needs

Discuss rules v individual needs; think back to the rules about kids not being allowed to wear make up at school, and some schools forcing them to wipe make up off at the school gates. Is this rule improving learning or behaviour? Is it causing anxiety and hence inhibiting learning? Don't be frightened to get rid of rules that don't work. Are they benefiting their sense of belonging? Is there a need for the rule?

What do your classroom teachers need to do?

You'll need a mixture of whole school initiatives, and targeted interventions, and class-based ideas (teacher with a different handshake for each pupil!)

There are lots of strands that will work together. Like rope = stronger.

What do your TAs need to do?

What do your lunchtime staff need to do?

Are you being brave enough?

Thinking about some of the steps you've come up with, some of them will be long-term. A lot of them can feel too big to deal with straight away.

So think smaller,

You're in school tomorrow: What can you achieve in the next five minutes?

What can you achieve with £5

Is our school a place where all of our children and our adults feel they belong?

Children,

Staff,

Families

If not, do we blame it on them for not feeling like they belong?

I said we'd leave today with more questions than answers, and one of the important things to remember / acknowledge is that we won't have all the answers immediately. You'll need to give your teams some time and space to consider this topic. And you'll need to lead through listening. Your kids will tell you things and show you things that you hadn't thought of. Your response needs to be agile enough to take those on board.