**Belonging and the Relationship to Whole Schooling:**

**Introduction to themed issue**

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Belongingness is at the core of what it is to be human (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It motivates our daily actions, our fundamental beliefs and values. Throughout our lives, each of us develops understandings of what belonging is and how to negotiate our belonging through the structures of family, friendships, and community. This daily encounter with our own belongings and non-belongings with others makes it seem a simple concept that may easily be taken for granted. Yet belonging is quite complex, involving the social locations in which belonging is constructed along with our individual identifications and emotional attachments to others, as well as our connections with ethical and political value systems used to judge our own and others belongings (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging is, therefore, a very personal experience that can't be forced upon another.

In their closing remarks to their review of literature on belonging, Baumeister and Leary (1995) wrote, "If psychology has erred with regard to the need to belong, in our view, the error has not been to deny the existence of such a motive so much as to underappreciate it" (p. 522). We believe this to be the case in the schooling as well, in part, because we also agree with Block (2008), who said, "The absence of belonging (in society) is so widespread that we might say we are living in an age of isolation, imitating the lament from early in the last century, when life was referred to as an age of anxiety" (p. x). In an age of constant connectivity through technology dominated by such applications as Twitter, Facebook, Google and others that enable us to communicate at an unprecedented scale, we are less connected to each other through a sense of personal membership within a virtual space with virtual belongings that may not replace our need for belonging within authentic interpersonal relationships.

Regardless of the our engagements with virtual or authentic relationships, all stakeholders in education – students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others - will continue to experience the need for belonging with each other and with the physical space and place of the school itself. We must, as members of a community with our schools, ask and attempt to answer these questions: Who are we? *Who belongs with us and who does not? When does someone belong or not belong?* This special themed issue of the International Journal of Whole Schooling focuses upon the role of belonging in the drive to develop more inclusive schools, which create learning spaces for all students. The eight principles of Whole Schooling frame the discourse and helps to contextualize the articles in this themed issue. These principles are

- Create learning spaces for all
- Empower citizens for democracy
- Include all in learning together
- Build a caring community
- Support learning
- Partner with families and the community
- Teach all using authentic, multi-level instruction
- Assess students to promote learning

The issue begins with an article by Joseph Agbenyega, which offers a theoretical framework for understanding the concept of belonging, influenced by Bourdieuian

theory. The article interrogates the quality of belonging from a Bourdieuian perspective by critiquing exclusion generated from psychological or biological discourses. It questions the way that 'belonging' is applied in a technical or an emotional sense within the field of inclusive education. The article works towards offering a new theorization that does not treat the meaning of belonging as deterministic. The paper argues the deepening of a theoretical understanding of belonging adds to how we practice the complexity of inclusive education based on the Whole Schooling perspective. By articulating Bourdieu's framing of belonging, the article posits inclusive professionals and families are able to view conceptions of belonging outside the familiar derivatives applied in everyday discourse.

The second article by Ann Gillies describes how a Teacher Educator teaches her university students (pre-service teachers) about belonging. She leads them in exploring how it feels to belong to a group, why they need to spend their time and energy during the school day working to make K-12 students feel that they belong, what belonging looks like, and how to make it happen in the pre-service teachers' future classrooms with their future K-12 students.

The third article, by Marina Palmgren and her colleagues in Finland, discuss a study that explores seventh grade comprehensive school students' experiences of engaging and disengaging events at school and the points at which these events occur in their school career. All of the students attend general education, while some receive special educational services in the school. The article investigates points in the students' school career at which critical incidents occur and then go onto identify the primary contexts of critical incidents. The results show that critical incidents occurred during the students' entire school career with an increase in sixth grade. Students perceived peer interaction as being the most positive as well as the most problematic part of their school career. The study showed no differences in experiences between general education students and students with students receiving special educational services.

The fourth article, by Christine Robinson, explores the interaction of belonging in relation to the quality of care delivered in childcare settings. The study found that what matters most to both parents and educators are the types of interactions children have with others and their environment; the ways in which children's needs are met; and children's experiences for development and learning. These findings are discussed in relation to the areas of belonging, being and becoming embedded in the nationally mandated early years' document – the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009).

The fifth, and final article, by Richard Rose and Michael Shevlin, focuses on the experiences of children with special educational needs as learners in mainstream classrooms. The researchers present data from 24 schools across Ireland that explores the relationship between acceptance and belonging as critical factors in defining what it means to be included in school. The principles that might inform the ways in which researchers can work with children in order to ensure them fair representation in research that investigates critical aspects of their lives are suggested.

References

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