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PLACE & BELONGING IN SCHOOLS
UNLOCKING POSSIBILITIES

Kathryn Riley, Max Coates
& Sol Perez Martinez, 2018

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UCL Institute of Education, 2018

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WELCOME TO

PLACE AND BELONGING IN SCHOOLS: UNLOCKING POSSIBILITIES

This booklet is about how to create schools which are places of well-being, belonging and creative endeavour. A school is just a building. What happens in any school is down to the people in and around it. What makes a school a place are the relationships. What makes a school a place where young people and adults want to be is whether the spaces in the school are transformed into places of belonging and learning.

'Belonging' is that sense of being somewhere where you can be confident that you will fit in, and be safe in your identity. In our volatile world, a sense of belonging provides young people with a springboard which enables them to be and become their best possible selves.

Every school has responsibility for the children and young people who enter their gates. They also influence how those youngsters view the world. Schools are ever-changing kaleidoscopes of people, ideas and attitudes which have the potential to coalesce around shared beliefs and understandings. In today's world - where new ideas can as easily be built on quicksand as on solid foundations - schools are not only important conduits of information but also one of the few shared social institutions which can create a sense of belonging or exclusion.

In this booklet we share something of the stories from research and practice which have led us to conclude that schools need to be places of belonging. Whether you are a leader, teacher, support staff member, researcher, parent, community member, governor or policy-maker – and wherever you are in the world – we hope this booklet will help you make your contribution towards creating schools – characterised by a sense of place and belonging – which open up pathways to possibilities for young people.

Kathryn Riley

Professor of Urban Education

UCL Institute of Education (IOE)

CONTRIBUTORS

Kathryn Riley, Professor of Urban Education, (IOE) is an international scholar whose work bridges policy and practice. Born in Manchester, she began her work in education as a volunteer teacher in Eritrea. She has taught in inner-city schools, held political office - as an elected member of the Inner London Education Authority (the ILEA) - and been a local authority Chief Officer. Her international experience includes heading up the World Bank's Effective Schools and Teachers Group, and projects with UNICEF and the OECD. She has published widely.

Kathryn's current research and development focus is on leadership of place, and the importance - in our volatile world - of creating a sense of place and belonging for young people. She is co-founder of the Art of Possibilities and is developing new forms of community collaboration around place and belonging which are designed to harness the creativity and energy of stakeholders around common purpose.

Dr Max Coates, author, university academic, international trainer, and one time secondary headteacher, has worked for the Institute of Education for 15 years, lecturing on leadership, coaching and team development in a variety of countries, including Colombia, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Pakistan and the Netherlands. His work has enabled him to identify how the demands placed on leaders can distort their thinking around strategy, creating purposeful cultures and well-being.

Max's books include Personalising Learning (2005), The Constant Leader (2008), and Shaping a New Educational Landscape (2010). He has also contributed to other publications, including research into pupil underachievement, the shaping of culture and, most recently, into the emerging role of Chief Executive Officers of Multi-Academy Trusts.

Sol Perez Martinez is an architect, researcher and educator. Before living in London, Sol lectured at the Universidad Catolica de Chile and ran an architectural practice where she, and her firm partners, developed projects for private clients and the Chilean government. Their last public building was a school that encouraged Sol's research about environment, education and engagement. Her long-term goal is to create awareness of how spaces affect the way people live, so that more citizens engage in the construction of the environments that surround them.

Sol holds an architecture professional degree, a Masters in architecture and a Masters in architectural history. Currently, she is a PhD candidate at the Bartlett School of Architecture and the Institute of Education, UCL.

Additional contributor

Dr Dina Mehmedbegovic is a lecturer at UCL Institute of Education. She co-leads the MA TESOL pre-service programme and lectures on a range of postgraduate programmes. Her research focuses on attitudes to bilingualism/ multilingualism, minority languages and positioning of languages in relation to dominance, political power and language disappearance.

Dina's previous roles include deputy director of LERU, the London Education Research Unit (2009 -11) and editor of the IOE publication the London Digest, which had the brief of generating and sharing knowledge on key educational issues in London, and across global cities generally. She has also worked as a consultant for the City of Westminster Local Authority and as a teacher in inner-London schools.

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Underpinning Research: This booklet draws on a growing body of research on place and belonging carried out over a number of years. The foundation work was undertaken by Professor Kathryn Riley in a cross-national study:

K. Riley (2013) Leadership of Place: Stories from the US, UK & South Africa, London: Bloomsbury.

Findings from Leadership of Place led to an exploration of how belonging is experienced and generated in schools, and to a research and development project School: A Place where I belong? This innovatory project was undertaken by a UCL, Institute of Education team (Professor Riley, Dr Max Coates, Dr Dina Mehmedbegovic and Rhoda Furniss) in partnership with London schools. Our thanks to Corelli College, Elizabeth Garret Anderson School, Mulberry School, St Paul's Way Trust School, Upton Cross Primary School and schools involved in the Newly Qualified Teachers' Network led by Newport School. You can find out more about this research and development project in:

K. Riley (2017) Place, Belonging & School Leadership: Researching to make the difference, London: Bloomsbury.

The Art of Possibilities: The ideas presented in the booklet have also been influenced by on-going development work with schools and communities - The Art of Possibilities - undertaken by Professor Riley and DancePoet TioMolina. TioMolina is a choreographer, poet, dancer and artistic director who trained in Cuba. His work embraces Cuban popular dance, Contemporary, Ballet and Afro-Cuban folk dance. His many collaborations include events with the Barbican, the Royal Festival Hall and the Round House and workshops for the Royal Opera House, Hampstead School of Performing Arts and Greenwich Dance Agency. With Professor Kathryn Riley, TioMolina is co-founder of The Art of Possibilities which draws together Education with Art, to help develop the talents and skills of staff and students, and create a sense of place and belonging (www.theartofpossiblities.org.uk).

Exploratory Research: The booklet also draws on exploratory research and development work on place, space and belonging with schools leaders which set out to test the robustness and validity of previous findings. The IOE team for this study was Professor Kathryn Riley, Dr Max Coates, Sol Perez Martinez and Tariq Khan, and the work was funded by a 2017 UCL Institute of Education Award, for which we are very grateful. Many thanks to participants from the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) programme and MA Leadership Students who contributed to the UCL, IoE Conference 'Schools as Places of Possibility and Belonging' in July 2017, and to the school leaders who shared their leadership journeys with us:

Lorna White (Headteacher) and Claudet Hedman (Deputy Headteacher) St. Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Bromley;

Guy Holloway (Headmaster) – Hampton Court House, London;

David Todd (Headteacher) – St. Peter's Primary and Secondary Catholic School, Bournemouth.

Video materials: The ideas discussed in the booklet are supported by linked videos in the Art of Possibilities Series (details at the end of the booklet). Many thanks indeed to Frank Huang DIDA MEDIA for his work on the first set of videos in the Series and to SpectreCom Films for their work on Series II.

Additional thanks: Many others have contributed to this programme of work in different ways: administrative and academic colleagues at the (IOE) and academic colleagues across the globe, including in Chile and Jamaica. Particular thanks to leading educator David Porritt for his creative feedback on the booklet, and to Professor Karen Seashore Louis (University of Minnesota), Professor Helen Wildy (University of Western Australia) and Professor Gus John (International Educator) for their ongoing responses to the ideas which underpin the booklet.

FINDING YOUR WAY

The ideas put forward in Place and Belonging in Schools: Unlocking Possibilities have emerged from well-grounded research and extensive practice, underpinned by systematic tracking of evidence of impact. The booklet offers findings from research and development work; key concepts about space, place and belonging,all of which are backed up by tools and approaches and a model for change designed to provide a fresh perspective on school life. The tools and approaches have been 'road-tested' - with leaders, practitioners, community members, young people and other academics.

The booklet:

- Demonstrates the power of transformative questions such as, 'Is this schools a place where everybody feels they belong? And if not, what are we going to do about it?
- Offers tools and approaches (about place and belonging, space, well-being) which can help schools look afresh at the challenges they face in their context, and identify new possibilities;
- Introduces new and powerful concepts, such as the notion of 'agency' - identifying what this means for leaders, staff and young people;
- Offers a model for change which puts belonging at the heart of school life, and a signposted trail designed to help schools move their ideas forward.

Place and Belonging in Schools: Unlocking Possibilities is organised as follows:

The Prologue … touches on our volatile and uncertain world and the importance of place and belonging for young people.

Act I: Exploring the Stories tracks key elements of the research and development stories which have contributed to a deeper understanding of the importance of schools as places of belonging.

Act II: A Sense of Belonging takes the learning forward, drawing on the perspectives of teachers, young people and school leaders to explore how a sense of place and belonging is experienced and generated in schools.

Act III: Stepping into Leadership examines what happens when school leaders step into the place and belonging space. How do they can develop their own sense of 'agency' to become place-makers: leaders of place? How do they harness the agency of others in the school community?

Act IV: Crafting the Belonging Spaces offers some of the tools, approaches and perspectives which have emerged from the research and development work described in the previous Acts, and which have been designed to help educators see the world of the school in a different light.

ACT V: Constructing a New Reality offers a conceptual model which puts belonging at the heart of school life. This model is supported by a signposted trial for change: an Educational Design Research Model for Creating a Sense of Place and Belonging – the Art of Possibilities.

Additional resources and references

The booklet concludes with links to supporting web and video information and offers references to support further reading and reflection.

PROLOGUE - A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

Our World is an exciting place – a world of boundless opportunities and possibilities. Yet it is also a world of rage and 'untruth', a world on the move. Half the world's refugees are children. In a world in which we all struggle to make sense of what will come next, social divisions are widening: it can no longer be business as usual for schools.

Every few hundred years throughout history, Peter Drucker – thinker, philosopher and educator – concluded a sharp 'transformation' occurs, and in a relatively short space of time society 'rearranges' itself in such a way that new generations cannot comprehend the world of their parents or grandparents (Drucker, 1994). Our world is at one of these turning-points, those moments of transformation, and it is the children and young people in our schools who will shape that new world order. In this uncertain, volatile and fragile world, where the political talk, the 'discourse', is increasingly about the 'alien', the 'other', the 'outsider', schools need to be more than institutions - and become places of belonging.

We live in a national context in which the demands on school leaders and teachers are increasing. There is a growing culture of what Stephen Ball (2013) has described as 'survivalism', a process which pits schools against each other. Concerns about children's well-being continue to hit the headlines. According to the Children's Society, the happiness of young people in the UK is at its lowest since 2010, with almost 1 in 5 children having seven or more serious problems in their lives, a number of which are school related (Good Childhood Report, 2017).

Globally, around 535 million children are living in countries affected by emergencies - one out of every four children in the world today. These emergencies include conflicts and displacement crises, the impacts of El Niño or La Niña, the devastation of seasonal storms and other disasters. According to UNICEF, these humanitarian crises are 'threatening' the lives and futures of more children today than perhaps at any other time in history (Unicef, 2017).

Unlocking the Possibilities

In this national and global 'vortex', schools hold the key. As central educational and social institutions in the lives of children and young people, they can help them develop that sense of belonging which will unlock a world of possibilities. Schools come into their own when they:

- Recognise that each child, each young person, each adult who passes through the school gates brings their own story into the life of the school, as part of the rich mosaic of society;
- Reach out beyond the school gates to the wider archipelago, harnessing the wisdom of families and communities;
- Appreciate that a sense of belonging is not fixed but is enacted and re-enacted every day, through the small things that happen, such as how children and adults talk to each other, and how the physical and emotional spaces within the school are used.

Act I goes on to explain why we've come to this set of conclusions.

> **Our world is at one of these turning-points, those moments of transformation, and it is the children and young people in our schools who will shape that new world order**
>
> *(Professor Kathryn Riley, drawing on the work of Peter Drucker, Philosopher)*

ACT I: EXPLORING THE STORIES

TELLING TALES

Kathryn Riley writes

Issues about place first emerged for me about a decade and a half ago. I wanted to gain greater understanding about what it meant to be a school leader in some of the most disadvantaged urban areas. A four year research and development project (Leadership on the Front-line) took me to Belfast, Birmingham, London, Londonderry, Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Dublin, Paris) where I dipped into the world of some 70 plus school leaders (Riley, 2008a & b).

I drew on their insights to create a framework - Taking the Leadership Pulse - which identified the four elements that influence schools leaders' ability to manage the four realities of leadership - the physical, the social or political, the emotional and the spiritual (Riley, 2013a). I also developed a research tool (a drawing exercise) which generated insights into children's lives and experiences, inside and outside school. Illustration I highlights the importance of schools as places of belonging.

Top half of the drawing: A locality divided and separated;
Bottom half of the drawing: A school which has drawn communities together.

Illustration I: Schools bringing communities together

> **Belonging is about feeling that you have a place, that you matter. If you matter to people, it gives you a sense of who you are. In a school, there only have to be one or two people who know you. It holds you.**
>
> *(Headteacher, Riley 2017 p.63)*

THE 'PLACE AND BELONGING' STORY

In 2010-2012, I took the 'place' story further in a research study, Leadership of Place (Riley 2013a) which explored the lives and experiences of young people growing up in impoverished communities in three countries and localities: the US (Brooklyn, New York), the UK (London's East End) and South Africa (the Eastern Cape). I later extended this work to Chile (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2016).

As a prompt for the 100 plus young people who contributed to the inquiry, I used a drawing tool based on my earlier work, with two linked questions: 'What's it like living round here?' and 'What's it like being in this school?' The illustrations from this exercise showed many stark and competing realities: areas which were safe and welcoming and others which were 'no go' areas. However, this was only one side of the story. The realities of everyday life could also encompass love and warmth, friendship and caring: the dreams of the young people and their families, the beauty of nature. These contrasts are shown in Illustration 2.

Illustration 2: Life in contrast

[1]You can access the booklet which emerged from this work *Surviving and Thriving as an Urban Leader* at *www.theartofpossibilites.org.uk*

Meanwhile, school life offered opposing sets of experiences...

- You could meet your friends … or you could be bullied.
- The physical environment could be conducive to your learning … or taxing on you as a learner.
- The ecology of relationships could be healthy and caring … or depressing and sapping of your energy.
- The narrative of everyday school life could contribute to the development of your emotional map … or rattle your self-confidence.

The Leadership of Place research helped me to see beneath the surface of everyday school life, and beyond the boundaries which can divide schools from communities. It also led me to recognise the importance of the wider archipelago - the 'islands' of life and experience which need to be connected in a locality - particularly for young people living in areas of high need, or social discord (2013b).

The research findings highlighted the ways in which those schools which were working to support their young people created spaces within the school where the youngsters could feel safe and confident in who they are: places of well-being and belonging. My next step was to explore more deeply about how schools did this, both as an 'enabler' working directly with schools, and as a researcher.

THE 'ART OF POSSIBILITIES' STORY

In 2013, I began to develop a new strand of work in my enabling role - The Art of Possibilities. Through a process of creative engagement which brings together Education with Art and incorporates music, DancePoet TioMolina and I work with young people to help develop their talents and skills, and with school staff, school leaders and communities to encourage innovative thinking and practice. The aim is to help generate a sense of well-being and belonging within schools and build strong community partnerships.

Our work has taken us to Australia, Canada, Cuba, Chile, Jamaica, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the USA and the UK and draws on the lessons from research, as well as practice. Two brief examples are included in Box 1 to illustrate how the process of collaborative engagement with young people, teachers and school leaders helps generate a sense of well-being and belonging. The two examples derive from long-standing partnerships: an International School in Europe and a primary school in London. Both schools have diverse student bodies and families on the move: in the International School, largely for professional reasons, in the London school for a range of factors, including economic and social factors, such as being arrivals to the UK as refugees, or economic migrants.

Box 1: Design Elements of Creative Engagement with Students on Place and Belonging

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Conceptual work on place and belonging was used to frame a series of workshops for Year 5 children. The workshops – which incorporated poetry and music - aimed to encourage the young people to think about what place and belonging meant for them. They were invited to explore whether there were any parts of the school where children might feel unhappy or excluded, and to develop strategies for generating a greater sense of belonging in their school.

Students wrote and performed poetry; created collages about belonging; embarked on research inquiry on place and belonging; reviewed the work of student council members and international ambassadors; and developed school-wide activities designed to create a sense of connectedness and inclusion.

The culmination of the students' work included a performance of the poem 'Everybody's Doing it', by Benjamin Zephaniah, and a song written and performed by all the Year 5 students, entitled, 'When I Belong'.

LONDON SCHOOL

A student-researchers' group was formed, 'the knowledge quest team', and introduced to research inquiry. They carried out their research on place and belonging with children across the school, presenting their findings to their families at a packed International Day Event. As parents arrived, student-researchers interviewed them asking, 'What does belonging mean to you?' and adding the parents' responses to their own research findings, using Wordle.

At the Event, Year 3 children who had been introduced to poetry and music, as a way of developing their talents and skills and their own sense of belonging, performed the poem 'We Refugees' by Benjamin Zephaniah. It includes the line, 'we can all be refugees, all it takes is….'.

The power of both sets of presentations at the School's International Day, a celebration of cultures, beliefs (symbolised in food and national dress), expanded the appreciation of community. As it embraced the beliefs and experiences of families and their children, it helped generate a shared sense of belonging.

Activities undertaken on both sites have been theory driven, iterative and collaborative, and have incorporated music, poetry and research.

The key learning from this development work has been about the process. When teachers and young people work together, in a process of engaged inquiry and creative collaboration, a sense of place and belonging is generated which opens up pathways to new possibilities.

Act II introduces you to the next stage of the place and belonging story.

ACT II: A SENSE OF BELONGING

> **If belonging makes you feel more confident, and confidence makes you a better learner, students need to feel like they belong in school in order to learn most effectively.**
>
> *(Nusrat, Student-researcher, Riley, 2017a, p 27)*

In 2014, as an IOE team (Professor Riley, Dr Max Coates, Dr Dina Mehmedbegovic and Rhoda Furniss) we set up a two-year project 'School: A Place where I belong? with London schools. The project – which was based within the traditions of what is known as collaborative inquiry (e.g. Timperley & Earl, 2011) - aimed to generate greater understanding about how a sense of place and belonging is created and experienced in schools. Thirty-five primary and secondary school student-researchers and thirty-six teacher-researchers (newly qualified teachers) from thirteen London schools, all located in challenging urban contexts, joined us to ask:

> Is 'our' school a place where everyone feels they belong?
> If not what are we going to do about it?

The project was organised into three strands, and a synthesis is provide here.
For a fuller explanation go to Riley 2017a.

Strand 1 explored the views and perceptions of the headteachers. We used informal dialogue, extensive interviews and a range of focused activities, such as a mapping exercise about place and belonging. By dint of electing to be part of the research inquiry, this group of leaders had already stepped into a different leadership space. Involvement in the project provided them with an opportunity to take their objectives for the school forward, as is illustrated in the comments of one participant.

> So when this project was first discussed, it just seemed like it met exactly what we're trying to do. We're trying to help our (students) find their own identity, we're trying to find ways in which we can relate on a much more meaningful level with communities, and so that we can be mutually supportive; so the school becomes an agent in change in the community, and the community itself become an agent of change within the school. The (students) are representative of that community, so they are in this research and participating…not only benefiting themselves, they're actually benefiting the school.
>
> (Headteacher, Riley, 2017 p.69)

Strand II involved working alongside teacher-researchers (newly qualified teachers) in a process of research inquiry. We discussed what place and belonging meant to them (personally and professionally) and using the first video in the Art of Possibilities Series presented the notion of the Prism of Place and Belonging (a concept which is explained more fully in Act IV). We introduced the teacher-researchers to systematic tools for research inquiry. To begin with, they were hesitant. As fledgling teachers, they had books to mark, forms to fill in. We encouraged them to look at the children in their own classrooms, asking them:

- Who are the insiders and the outsiders?
- Where do the children feel good about themselves and less good?
- What do they experience in their daily lives? / their classroom?/ the playground? / the community?

By the end of the research process, the teacher-researchers were great enthusiasts telling us:

Research …allows you to ask children some questions that …you certainly haven't thought about. That throws so much light onto their feelings (Riley, 2017a, p 71).

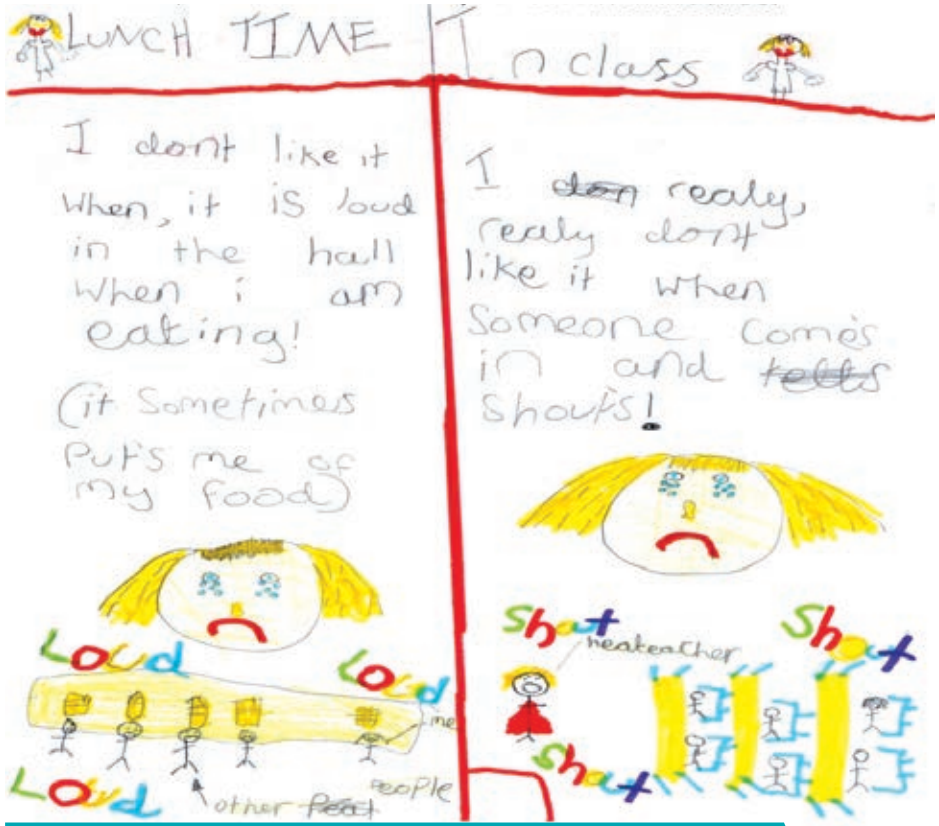


Illustration 3 'How do you feel when you are in school?' is from a piece of research undertaken by one of the teacher-researchers who used this drawing exercise to understand the daily world of the children in her Year 3 class, and to respond to what she had found.

[2]Collaborative inquiry is an approach which has been used to foster greater equity (Ainscow et al., 2016), and strengthen children's rights (Osler, 2010) and their sense of engagement (MacBeath et al., 2001; Pollard et al., 2000).

[3]See details at the end of the booklet.

Strand III focused on the student-researchers drawing on a range of research methodologies for student engagement (e.g. Kellet, 2010; Murphy & Torre 2015; Riley & Docking 2004; Ruddock, 2007). The student-researchers were enthusiasts from the beginning, understanding the importance of place and belonging for themselves and their classmate. We outlined the project and discussed our shared goal of making schools great places for learning and belonging. We told them that, although our fast changing world can feel unsafe and uncertain, it is also an exciting world: and one that they could help shape and change, starting with their own school.

They told us what motivated them to become student-researchers:

- If children don't belong in schools, they don't belong anywhere.
- When you come from somewhere very different, it's important to feel welcomed.
- We want to create a community where everyone feels they belong: staff, students and parents.

Within the framework of the project's shared question – is this school a place where everyone feels they belong?' - each of the five student-researcher teams carried out their own research, developing a more nuanced question that related to their context. For example, the members of one team, who were all recent arrivals to the UK asked:

'How good is our school at welcoming newcomers? '

The Wordle exercise in Box 2 represents how another team brought together what belonging meant for the students in their school.

Box 2: Wordle excercise

The research findings from School: A Place where I belong? have not only contributed to a broader understanding about place and belonging in schools is generated but the process of research engagement has also had a powerful impact on those involved (Riley, 2017a & b).

For the **fledgling teachers**, engagement in the research process led to a recognition that they were part of a school - part of a place - and that through their own personal and professional actions, as well as their relationships with young people and colleagues, they could shape the nature of what that place meant to others. A new form of agency emerged for them, as they helped reshape how the playgrounds in their schools were organised; the children grouped; individual children supported and acknowledged. They were 'on track' to becoming the outstanding professionals they would wish to be.

For the **student-researchers** research engagement developed their reflective and analytical skills, and built their confidence and sense of belonging and agency, individually and as research-team members. They had found their voice. They were part of a 'place', their school, not only commenting on how things were but how they could be. The process of engagement harnessed their energy and released their creative potential to explore, reflect, act and change – themselves and their school.

You can 'meet' many of the teacher and student-researchers in the five videos in the Art of Possibilities Series I, detailed at the end of the booklet.

For the **school leaders** – the headteachers - involvement in the project enabled them to reflect on their own practice and to make more explicit their own lexicon of leadership: the language which mirrors their values and articulates their aspirations. It encouraged them to recognise the degree to which, as place leaders and place-makers, they could influence the 'belonging' relationship within school, and between schools and communities.

ACT III: STEPPING INTO LEADERSHIP

> **In a context of alienation and disengagement, and the possibilities of radicalisation, belonging is about providing a safe and secure context for young people…(they) need to be able to find their voice.**
>
> *(Headteacher, Riley, 2017a, p 65)*

CHOOSING A PATHWAY

School leaders today face many pressures. The demands on their time and energy are growing. Yet how leaders think, decide, act and reflect, and draw on their knowledge to create a roadmap of possibilities is critical to the well-being of the children and adults in their schools. Act III shines a spotlight on school leaders, drawing out some of the implications of the ideas presented in the booklet for them, and highlighting positive options and leadership possibilities.

The research for Leadership of Place (Riley, 2013a) had revealed a cohort of leaders who are 'place leaders'. The ongoing development work on place and belonging (The Art of Possibilities) continues to throw light on the importance of leadership as a place-making activity. Leaders who are place-makers seek to understand young peoples' lives and experiences, connect to the wider archipelago of surrounding communities and foster young people's talents.

Whether schools step into the 'belonging' space is dependent on how leaders perceive their role, chose to enact their own 'agency' - a key concept which we will return to in Act VI - and draw out the 'agency' of others. There are a number of possible leadership pathways, including the two shown in Illustration 4.

[3]The images were taken from earlier research (Riley & MacBeath, 1998).

PLACE, SPACE AND BELONGING

To test our thinking further about place and space, and to explore the leadership options, we developed a small project 'Place, Space and Belonging' and worked with a group of school leaders to try and capture elements of how they thought about, and enacted, their leadership. These experienced leaders shared their thinking with a wider group of aspirant leaders: from the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) Programme and the UCL, Institute of Education's MA in Leadership. You can dip into some of the discussion in The Art of Possibilities, Video Series II.

We were particularly keen to explore the strategies which were likely to encourage leaders to see themselves as place leaders and place-makers, and to highlight those tools and approaches which would help them do this. We offer three vignettes from leaders from very different schools - an independent school in the leafy suburbs, a coastal strip secondary, an urban primary - which give a flavour of their leadership stories.

HAMPTON COURT HOUSE

An ‘all through’ independent school with 240 pupils, occupying an 18th century Manor House adjoining Bushy Park. Headteacher **Guy Holloway** has a background in film production, acting, music, journalism and education. He ‘grew’ Hampton Court House and was always likely to produce - a ‘school’ less ordinary. ‘Meet’ Guy (as everybody calls him, children and adults) in Video Series II. ‘We made the decision not to call Hampton House a school’, he says. He’s very clear that Hampton Court House needs to be a ‘place’ where things happen.

As you enter Hampton Court House, the central atrium is dominated by sofas and easy chairs occupied by adolescents spread-eagled in the way that only they are so good at. What are they doing? Closer inspection reveals that these youngsters are engrossed in their studies; completing and extending work and revising for their forthcoming examinations. Hampton Court House is famed for its advocacy of a later start to the day for sixth formers. The circadian rhythms of adolescents, Guy tell us, run on a different time frame and high-quality learning needs to accommodate this.

There is little doubt that the central atrium is the beating heart of the school. Daily Assemblies are held here. The space reverberates with the sound of lunch-time recitals and ad hoc musical ‘happenings’. It’s the space where people and ideas converge.

Hampton Court House seeks to ensure that people are at the centre of everything it does. Young people are encouraged to be themselves. There’s recognition that staff have lives too. They have children: and so child care provision has been developed to support them as parents. It is not uncommon to see sixth formers walking alongside toddlers, or staff speaking to pupils whilst holding their own child.

On the surface, it might seem that the leadership at Hampton Court House has torn up the educational rule book. However, beneath the surface, there is a real sense that they have rediscovered it. The emphasis on achieving fluency in other languages and developing a strong appreciation of the aesthetic, opens new horizons for young people. The determination to use the external, spaces and vistas which surround the school generates a sense of connectedness. It’s all about the young people: values of respect and tolerance, Guy insists and quoting Wordsworth - joy,

‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.
But to be young was very heaven!’

‘The best thing about this school’, a young person told us ‘is that it’s not like a school at all.’ The children and young people at Hampton Court House clearly feel that they belong in this educational home from home.

ST. PETER’S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

An all through non-selective primary and secondary school in Bournemouth. When headteacher **David Todd** first took up his job, it was to lead a large secondary school. St. Peter’s had been a provider of education in the Bournemouth area since 1936. Coming under the banner of the De La Salle brothers in 1947, Catholic values are the fulcrum of school life. The school has long been held in high regard in the area: probably perceived by many as somewhat traditional in style, even though its focus is as a performing arts college.

In 2014 change was in the air. The school was already located on two sites, with younger pupils being taught some three miles away. Pressure on school places in the area led to all of the secondary pupils being moved to the main site and to the development of a new primary section on the former lower school site. These structural changes had a major impact on the life of the school and what it meant to be a part of St. Peter’s. Bringing the younger secondary pupils and the staff to the main site had generated problems about whole school identity and cohesion. Suddenly, the school had a cohort of ‘evacuees’ (nearly half the school population) who were unfamiliar with the protocols of the main school and clearly did not feel that they fitted in.

Faced with these disconnections, David decided that something radically different was needed: an event which would bring people together in a sense of shared endeavour - an event about belonging to St Peter’s. The symbol of the De La Salle Brothers is a star. David planned a collective exercise. Over a period of some forty minutes, the whole school community would come together on the school’s playing field; primary, secondary students and staff. The goal was to form that star.

Despite the forebodings of some staff, the event went well. Nobody misbehaved. The sun shone. The human star formation even managed to create a 3D effect. Everybody thoroughly enjoyed themselves. And the evidence of the impact of the event is all in the film footage - filmed with the help of a drone.

Tokenism? - No. A Symbol of possibilities? – Yes.

Coming together to create the star generated a feeling of shared Identity. Everybody participated and, by so doing, the whole school embarked on a journey which aims to create a community based on enacting common values. As David wrote, it’s all about ‘working with families to support young people as they make that miraculous transition from childhood to adulthood’.

ST. ANTHONY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

A one form entry school on the edge of Bromley in south London.

Headteacher **Lorna White** has been in the school for 30 years. **Claudet Hedman**, her deputy, was seconded to the school eight years ago and never left. Lorna and Claudet have a symbiotic relationship as leaders, sharing a passion for inclusion – in the widest sense – and excellence for their pupils. They have developed a strong sense of 'agency', a belief that what they can do to make a difference – although they probably wouldn't use that term.

Their ambitions for their pupils are boundless. Their commitment to the school, profound and personal. Nothing will stop them – or their pupils. The school is diverse with a wide range of ethnic groups. Lorna and Claudet have a deep affection for families and the local community, and the many pressures they face. The challenge of inclusion is compounded by the transient stay of many of these pupils.

St Anthony's is housed in an unprepossessing building: no great architectural gems here. Nevertheless, there is a visual sense of shared compatibility. Over a period of time, the school has made extensive use of the many 'spaces', not only to capture the work of pupils but also to display cultural artefacts and share important messages about what it means to belong at St Anthony's.

Staff and pupils have worked in partnership with Professor Kathryn Riley and DancePoet TioMolina through the Art of Possibilities. Poetry performance is just one example of how children can make their own unique contribution and be heard and valued: a process which develops their talents and skills and their sense of belonging – as you can see in the videos in series I and II of The Art of Possibilities.

Children have a clear sense of belonging, and personal identity is not simply left at the door when you enter the school. Children see and experience 'people like me'; have quiet places to pray or reflect. A covered stage in the playground is a venue for a creative performance about the nature of belonging.

The beating heart of this school is embedded in the communications and the relationships, and held in trust by the transforming nature of the leadership.

These leaders hold five commitments in common:

A commitment to 'service'	A passion for learning and a deep commitment to going well beyond what is commonly expected of school leaders;
A commitment to 'a wider view' (of what schools are about)	A focus on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their children and young people;
A commitment to 'partnership' (with families and communities)	A recognition of how precious our children and young people are, particularly in this uncertain world;
A commitment to 'act'	A determination to exert their 'agency' as leaders in a positive and purposeful way;
A commitment for 'joy'	An appreciation of the joy and wonder of life.

Leaders have choices. They can choose to use their agency for positive growth and possibilities, or to exert their power and control. Toxic leadership can be a destructive force - as Jean Lipman-Blumen (2004) wrote some time ago - and is not unknown in the world of education.

Leaders undoubtedly have a positive impact on the life of the school when their leadership is of place, about belonging, and based on an appreciation of positive agency. What we have unpacked about leadership through the research and development work presented in this booklet has a strong resonance with the findings of leading US Academic Karen Seashore Louis and colleagues. They describe what they have found as 'caring leadership': an approach which makes a difference to school performance, to young people's socio-emotional learning and to staff and student well-being (Louis, Smylie, & Murphy, 2016).

ACT IV: CRAFTING THE BELONGING SPACES

Act IV is by way of a pause: a chance to think, reflect and take stock. It offers distinctive tools, approaches and perspectives which provide different ways of seeing, or thinking about place and belonging, space and well-being, and about what these mean for schools and their communities. We encourage you to:

SEE THINGS AFRESH - Kathryn Riley

TRANSFORM THE SPACES INTO PLACES - Sol Perez Martinez

LOOKING THROUGH THE WELL-BEING FILTER - Max Coates

INTRODUCE A HEALTHY LINGUISTIC DIET - Dina Mehmedbegovic

SEEING THINGS AFRESH

Kathryn Riley writes

My work both as a researcher and as an enabler has been with varied audiences (young people, school staff and community members), different sectors (nursery, primary, secondary, further education, health and social services, voluntary organisations and social enterprises), and undertaken in a range of countries and contexts. The aim is a constant:

> *How to harness the creativity of young people - and their teachers and school leaders - and draw on the wisdom of families and communities, to create that sense of place and belonging which fosters community collaboration around common purpose.*

To support this, I have developed a number of tools designed to help generate fresh insights into the realities of school life, two included here are interlinked: the Prism of Place and Belonging, and Belonging as a Dynamic Concept.

The Prism of Place and Belonging

In the busy world of school life, school leaders need to take time to come up for air. The concept of the Prism of Place and Belonging was designed to help them do just that.

A prism refracts the light, or breaks it into different parts. The 'big picture' becomes separated out so that we can see the elements that are included within it. Prisms can also do the opposite. They take different wavelengths and condense them into white light – akin to taking the elements of the school and connecting them into one big narrative. You could also think of the prism as a substitute for a fair-ground mirror, a looking-glass which enables you to see things in a very different way – and just look where it took 'Alice'!

The 'Prism' concept is a conceptual tool for understanding the world young people inhabit. When you look at schools through the Prism of Place and Belonging, you begin to understand how school life is experienced, who feels included who feels an outsider and what can be done to increase engagement and reduce disaffection. The beam of light is dispersed.

> **When you look through the 'Prism of Place and Belonging', the light changes, you see things afresh.**
>
> *(Riley)*

Looking through the 'Prism' encourages you take account of where the light falls, and to make links and connections with the wider community. Have a look at the first of our Videos in The Art of Possibilities Series to see more about the Prism of Place and Belonging:

Questions for You:

When you look at your school through the Prism of Place and Belonging, what do you see?

Who are the insiders and outsiders?

Belonging as a Dynamic Concept

A sense of belonging is both a highly individual experience and a social construct. Understanding more about the dynamics of belonging enables both staff and leaders to take stock of the factors which combine to shape belonging in schools. 'Belonging as a Dynamic Concept' (Box 3 and Figure 1) is a tool which identifies five sets of factors which shape a young person's experience of belonging in schools:

1. What individuals bring; 2. External realities; 3. Relationships; 4. Language; and 5. Leadership.

Box 3: Belonging as a Dynamic Concept What shapes the nature of belonging in schools?

Factors	Implications	Questions for you to think about and note in Figure 1
1. What individuals bring	Personal histories, identities and experiences influence what adults and young people bring into the life of the school.	Think about one group of children: what are the range of identities, histories and experiences that they bring to your school?
2. External realities	External events, expectations and beliefs permeate through the walls of the school, shaping the nature of belonging. These external factors can include acts of extreme violence, day-to-day social, economic and environmental realities, as well as policy expectations about how or what schools should teach, or what counts as success.	Which particular external events or Contextual realities are significant for your school?
3. Relationships	Relationships and their built-in expectations and assumptions are a third important factor in shaping a child's sense of belonging in school. Relationship are with peers, teachers and other staff members, and play out in the dining room, the corridors, the playground, as well as the class-room.	What might a child or young person, new to the school, say about the relationships in the school after their first week?
4. Language	Language is critical: the lexicon of belonging or exclusion. Schools reveal their attitudes to young people, their families and communities in subtle, and sometimes not-so subtle ways: judgemental or accepting of difference. Attitudes are transmitted through relationships, as well as the language – and tone - used by staff and young people themselves.	What might a parent hear said about their own child during a visit to the school for a parents' evening?
5. Leadership	Leadership is the mediating force which holds all of this together, which has the power, the influence, the opportunity to shape the culture of the school.	What might the teachers say, in the staff-room, about the leadership of the school?

Look at Figure I 'Belonging as a Dynamic Concept' and fill in the circles

Questions for You:

Where are the 'belonging' gaps in your school?

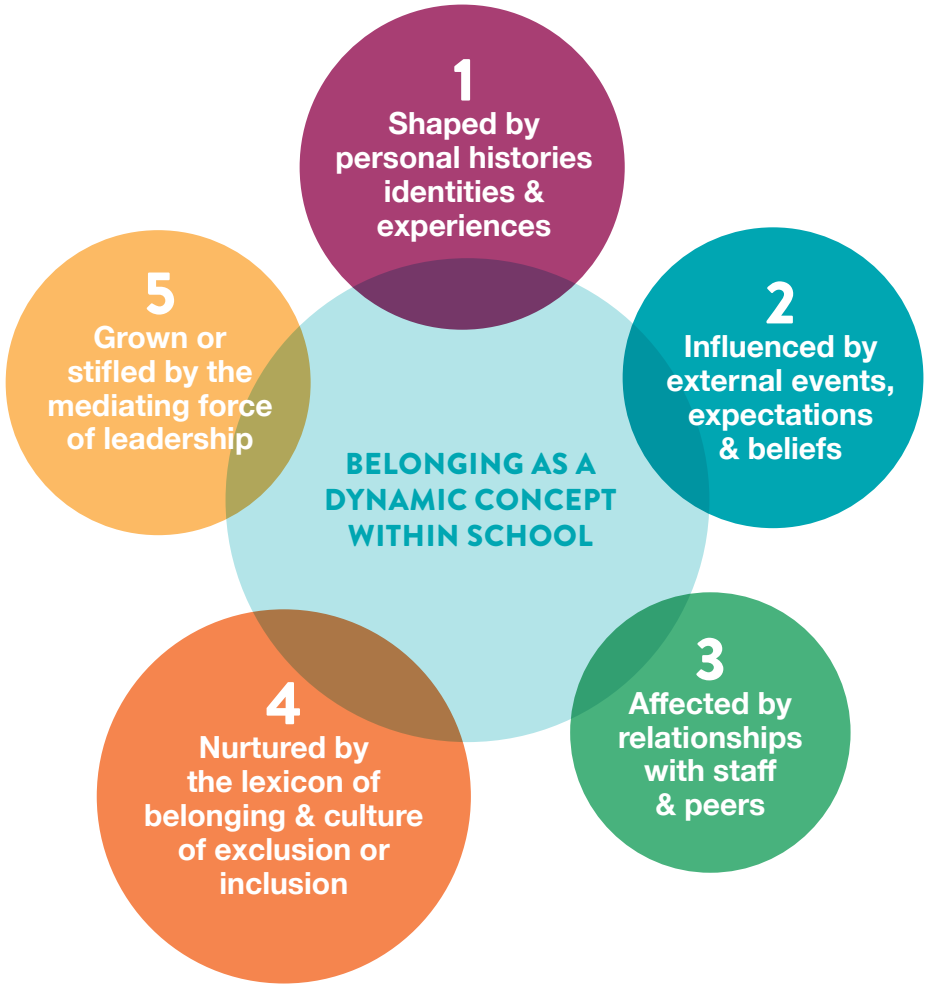


Figure 1: Belonging as a Dynamic Concept

TRANSFORMING THE SPACES INTO PLACES

Sol Perez Martinez writes

Place is space activated by human interaction.

Every school has the potential to transform their school spaces into places of learning and of healthy identity development for children and young people. Each wall and staircase can be transformed into the setting for engaged human interaction; places where people feel they belong because they understand how to engage with them. It's down to the school, their leaders and the young people.

According to UNICEF, children are increasingly growing up in an urban world and the day when the majority of children will grow up in towns and cities is coming soon (Unicef, 2012). But even though life in urban environments for children is mostly considered better than in rural areas (due to access to basic rights like sanitation or health), one of the downturns is that the urban child has lost his or her independence and mobility because of security issues and traffic.

For Margaret Kernan, this has provoked what she has described as the 'insularisation' of children who are being transported by adults from one island, or child-specific institution, to another (Kernan, 2010). The result is the limitation of the children's agency to explore and learn from the places and spaces that surround them.

This issue is not new. In 1979, the architect and educator Colin Ward addressed the environmental loss of children in the inner city and their lack of freedom outdoors to learn from space on their own terms, compared to previous generations. He argued that children "unfold as individuals through creatively manipulating their surroundings" (Ward, 1979:210) but in order for that to happen, he encouraged adults to explore ways to make the city more accessible for young people, more negotiable.

However, if the city is no longer available to explore, the spaces of the school acquire an emphasised relevance for the child's identity and spatial learning. As explained by Main and Sandoval, places are not vessels in which identity is embedded but an active part of its construction (Main & Sandoval, 2015). According to Proshansky, our sense of self is not only defined by our relation to others "but also by the physical settings that define and structure day-to-day life" (Proshansky et al., 1983:57). Adults by choosing those spaces have an active role in shaping the children's identity, apart from their own actions. Then, how do we create places for young people to learn, develop their identity and extract lessons from their environment?

A first step is understanding the differences between 'spaces' and 'places' in order to identify them in the school environment. Place is space activated by human action. It can also be understood as a collection of factors that create the setting for people's interaction, including location, physical environment, cultural background, and people's psychological engagement (Davis et al, 2012). Space, on the other hand, is an abstract, three-dimensional area that is defined by elements that enclose it. As explained by Escobar, the perception of space is "absolute, unlimited and universal" while the notion of place is "particular, local and bound" (Escobar, 2001). Place is something we appropriate with our actions.

"Place, as distinct from space, provides a profound centre of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties and is part of the complex processes through which individuals and groups define themselves" (Davis et al, 2012:1).

If belonging is defined as feeling at home in a place (Yuval-Davis, 2006), then the environment of a person is a key component. However, Antonsich argues that this notion of belonging as related to a physical setting is not often analysed by scholars, overlooking the notion of place "as if feelings, discourses, and practices of belonging exist in a geographical vacuum" (Antonsich, 2010). According to Hay (1998), research can underplay the relevance of life domains for rootedness and attachment beyond the residential setting. Hay (ibid.) also argues that all physical environments play a role in an individual's life - including schools. Here lies an opportunity to consider school environments as an active part of young people's sense of belonging. Creating a sense of place, an emotional, rooted attachment to the learning environment, is an accessible tool to improving learning and well-being for every school community.

Questions for You:

What do staff and young people respond to the different spaces in your school?

How could you transform them into places of belonging and well-being?

> **Place, as distinct from space, provides a profound centre of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties and is part of the complex processes through which individuals and groups define themselves**
>
> *(Davis et al, 2012:1).*

LOOKING THROUGH THE WELL-BEING FILTER

Max Coates writes

We need to provide well-constructed, emotional scaffolding throughout a child's time at school.

There is much in the media these days about children's well-being, or its lack. Schools are being encouraged to address well-being, yet many of the strategies being deployed seem fragmented and perhaps even tokenistic. One academy I visited has created a 'well-being' corridor. This seems to be a reactive response to problems which - potentially - inhibits strategic thinking around the big picture: how to provide a wholesome 'seedbed' in which children can learn and mature.

We need to provide, well-constructed, emotional scaffolding throughout a child's time at school. For children, the phases of their schooling embrace a crucial time of personal formation. The younger child engages with others in a process of socialisation. The adolescent goes through a period of neural meltdown and then explores and develops their own self-identity.

Psychologists have argued that everyone has 'needs'. Abraham Maslow (1943) presented his 'hierarchy' of needs during a critical point in history – the 1939-45 World War - arguing that our requirement to feel fed, dry and safe takes precedence over our engagement with higher order cognitive activity. Some sixty years later, Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrell (2003) took this further by cataloguing eleven primal needs. These include having a sense of...

- safety;
- being attended to and being able to give attention;
- some control and influence over events in life;
- feeling of belonging to a wider community;
- status and a reasonably defined role in life;
- meaning and purpose.

These needs can be met when 'spaces' evolve into 'place'. If a child does not feel that they belong, then he or she will experience a sense of alienation. They are also likely to dissociate from the schools' aims, and their well-being will be detrimentally affected.

Through my own research around well-being in schools – which was inspired by the research on place and belonging - it has become clear to me that there is a preoccupation with symptoms and little conceptualisation of the underlying pathology: why do children feel alienated? This reflection has led me to create a whole school audit for well-being in schools which is currently being used in some 2500 schools. In partnership with Bluewavemosaic, we have developed an online platform which enables schools to audit the well-being of both staff and pupils. The idea of using the Prism of Place and Belonging stands centrally within this instrument. The well-being audit is a tool which uses questionnaires and interviews to explore how individuals identify with their school community. This exploration leads to an action plan which brings focus and reflection to leadership agency.
The audit is on line and is accessible through Bluewavemosaic via this link:

https://www.bluewavemosaic.com/wellbeing-cover

A Question for You:

How do I know that 'this' school is a safe place in which to learn and grow?

A HEALTHY LINGUISTIC DIET

Dina Mehmedbegovic writes

A Healthy Linguistic Diet is based on the principle that all languages used by school children need to be supported and maintained.

My involvement in the research on place and belonging re-enforced the importance of understanding the relationship between languages spoken and a sense of belonging. What had struck me from my own earlier research was the realisation that 14 year old bilingual children were not given opportunities to learn about the benefits of bilingualism. Indeed, some children had internalised a deficit model of bilingualism, through a lack of any other model or explicit information on what it means to be bilingual (Mehmedbegovic 2011). Those who looked to gain knowledge about bilingualism had to do their own research about the benefits.

This led me to work on developing principles and strategies which can be used for an approach conceptualised as similar to thinking about a healthy diet – in this case it is a linguistic diet. My concept of a Healthy Linguistic Diet is based on the principle that all languages used by school children need to be supported and maintained for their purposes of cognitive benefits. These benefits are not only needed by individuals from bilingual backgrounds, they are needed by schools, as well as governments. For schools they mean better results in league tables: for governments they mean billions of savings in later life care.

I envisage my Healthy Linguistic Diet as a strategy which - in the first instance - provides structured 'spaces' for children and adults to discuss 'being bilingual', with the aim or raising awareness of bilingualism and its benefits.

Given the big push for healthy lifestyles and healthy eating under the umbrella initiative Healthy Schools, the concept of a Healthy Linguistic Diet could be integrated into this Healthy Schools initiative. A Healthy Linguistic Diet has real potential to contribute to the aims outlined by the UK Government: raising achievement across the curriculum, improving long-term health, enhancing well-being and improving inclusion. Promoting language learning is also a way to maintain a healthy brain. Indeed, parallels can easily be drawn between physical activity and keeping our heart strong and healthy, and the mental engagement of language learning that can stave off dementia for a few years longer.

Bilingual children and their parents need to be given clear, affirmative and consistent messages by schools and their teachers, in terms of the benefits of bilingualism and home language support. Students (and parents) should also be given advice on what they can do to support their own bilingual development. Such messages help raise awareness about the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. Providing teachers and school leaders with a consistent flow of affirmative messages which aim to eliminate misconceptions about bilingualism as a 'problem' is not only vital for young people's well-being but is also a way of recognising who are young people are – and encouraging them to feel they belong.

Questions for You:

What are the verbal and non-verbal messages in your school about A Healthy Linguistic Diet?

When you look at the classrooms, displays and books what messages are you giving about languages and multilingual learners?

> **...a Healthy Linguistic Diet is based on the principle that all languages used by school children need to be supported and maintained for their purposes of cognitive benefits.**
>
> *Dina Mehmedbegovic*

ACT V: CONSTRUCTING A NEW REALITY

In this final Act we build on the research and development stories presented earlier to offer a model for change, Putting Belonging into the Heart of School Life which emphasises the central clues (stages and phases), designed to help schools take their ideas forward. We have called this An Educational Design Research Model for Creating a Sense of Place and Belonging – the Art of Possibilities.

PUTTING BELONGING INTO THE HEART OF SCHOOL LIFE

Our sense of belonging in any organization or institution is shaped by what we bring to it, as well as by the actualities of school life: the relationships and the encounters; the expectations and the leadership; the pedagogical experiences; the environment for learning. The conceptual model, 'Putting Belonging into the Heart of School Life': Figure 2 begins by acknowledging the contradictory global realities: a world of hope and possibilities, and a world of uncertainty and 'untruth. These are embedded in the model because schools have choices to make in how they respond to these external realities, and how they represent them to young people.

Belonging is at the heart of this model of school life and lies at the intersection between space and place, agency and relationships. 'Belonging', as we described earlier:

> is that sense of being somewhere where you can be confident that you will fit in and safe in your identity. Schools are one of the few shared social institutions – one of the few places - which can create a sense of belonging, or exclusion.

A sense of safety and well-being are essential ingredients in the belonging mix.

Space and place are strongly connected. The 'spaces' each young person or staff member inhabits or passes through have a profound impact on their sense of self, and on their sense of place. The school is both a physical and an emotional 'space': the 'friendship bench' in the playground which offers a safe haven for children on the margins of school life who struggle not to be an outsider; the hidden spaces at the back of the Sports Hall which can feel unsafe and uncertain. The school is also a liminal space, a place of transition and uncertainty, particularly for new arrivals, and yet also a space which offers the possibility of transformation (Rohr, 2011).

Relationships are key. Children, young people – and adults – all want to be known and seen for who they are. Young people's relationship are with their peers, teachers and other staff members and play out in the dining room, the corridors, the classrooms. Relationships are reinforced through encounters and expectations.
As one of our student-researchers told us, in response to the experience of a younger child who had been reduced to tears in the playground by an older boy, 'I was thinking if the little one came in from play time….. and people had been shouting at her, so she comes into the classroom - How would she feel?' (Riley, 2017a, p 94).

Agency: At different points in the booklet we have touched on the notion of 'agency'- an idea well developed in the literature. The sociologist Anthony Giddens defined it as an ability to 'intervene in the world' to 'make a difference' (Giddens 1984 p. 14). Agency, for Giddens, was about purpose, knowledge and competence.

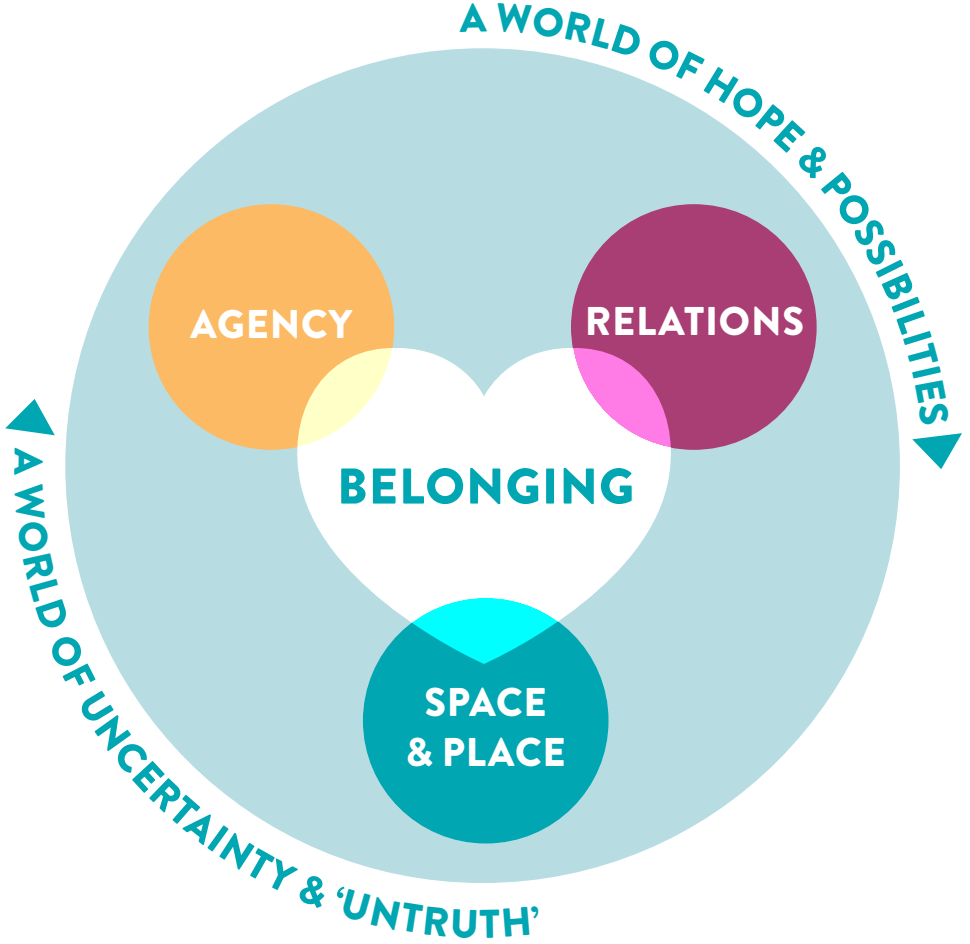


Figure 2: Putting Belonging into the Heart of School Life

A key finding from the research presented in this booklet has been the importance of agency: as a belief that if you act, what you do – on your own and with others – makes a difference. However, agency is more than belief. It is also about having the 'tools' to act (through cultivating your skills, talents and capacities to make that difference) and having the 'opportunities' to act. In the research School: A Place where I belong? agency was experienced by...

> Teachers as 'a mindset of possibilities';
>
> Young people, as 'a belief that they could influence their school and shape the world around them, and had the skills to do this';
>
> Leaders as 'a recognition of their role as place leaders and place-makers who could help make belonging work for many different people' (Riley, 2017).

The school as a place of belonging is work in progress. Adults and young people move in and out, ideas and relationships intersect. Young people are more than consumers of education, products of a system, they contribute to creating what is and are keen to leave their legacy: something which is often overlooked. Another of our young student-researchers told us:

> I'd like to change things because when you leave school, you are going somewhere new but you want to feel proud of where you've been as well.
>
> *(Video I: Art of Possibilities, Series I)*

In the final section we offer a framework - an Educational Design Research Model - for making the kinds of changes that can help create a 'place' called school that children can be proud of.

> **"I'd like to change things because when you leave school, you are going somewhere new but you want to feel proud of where you've been as well."**
>
> *Student*

[4]The literature on the importance of school leaders' sense of agency is well-developed (see for example, Clarke and Wildy 2011; Lovett at al., 2015). The concept of teacher agency has also been examined (e.g. Pantic, 2015). The notion of student agency – empowered student voice – has also been explored on moral, physiological, social, educational, pragmatic and democratic grounds (MacBeath et al., 2001; Levin 2000; Pollard et al., 2000), and has been linked to issues about children's rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Osler 2010). Agency is undoubtedly a key element in generating a sense of belonging in schools.

AN EDUCATIONAL DESIGN RESEARCH MODEL FOR CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE AND BELONGING – THE ART OF POSSIBILITIES

The research and development design activities described in this booklet have been undertaken in a number of sites and have involved a process of systematic, collaborative and creative inquiry which has strong conceptual underpinnings. The common focus has been on place and belonging – how it is experienced and created. In the different research and development activities, we have tracked evidence about changes in beliefs, attitudes and practices in real settings. We have given you a flavour of some of these outcomes in this booklet and in the video footage in the two Art of Possibilities Series.

The knowledge gains from this work have led us to develop a broad but systematic approach for developing a sense of place and belonging in schools. We have located this process of design and engagement within what has been described as Educational design research.

Educational design research has been described as a strategy for developing and refining school-based interventions that draw on theory (Cobb 2001) and seek to track and build on knowledge gains over time.

The particular model we have developed is anchored in the notion of place and belonging. It has the label 'the Art of Possibilities' attached to it as a recognition of what can be achieved through a process of engagement based on research inquiry, or collaborative development. The process we offer is a methodology which is grounded in research and practice and has been 'road tested' by practitioners.

The model recognises the role and agency of school leaders in enabling this process to take place. There are five phases in the process, each located within the notion of place and belonging: **situate, inquire, take stock, theorise and apply** (Box 4).

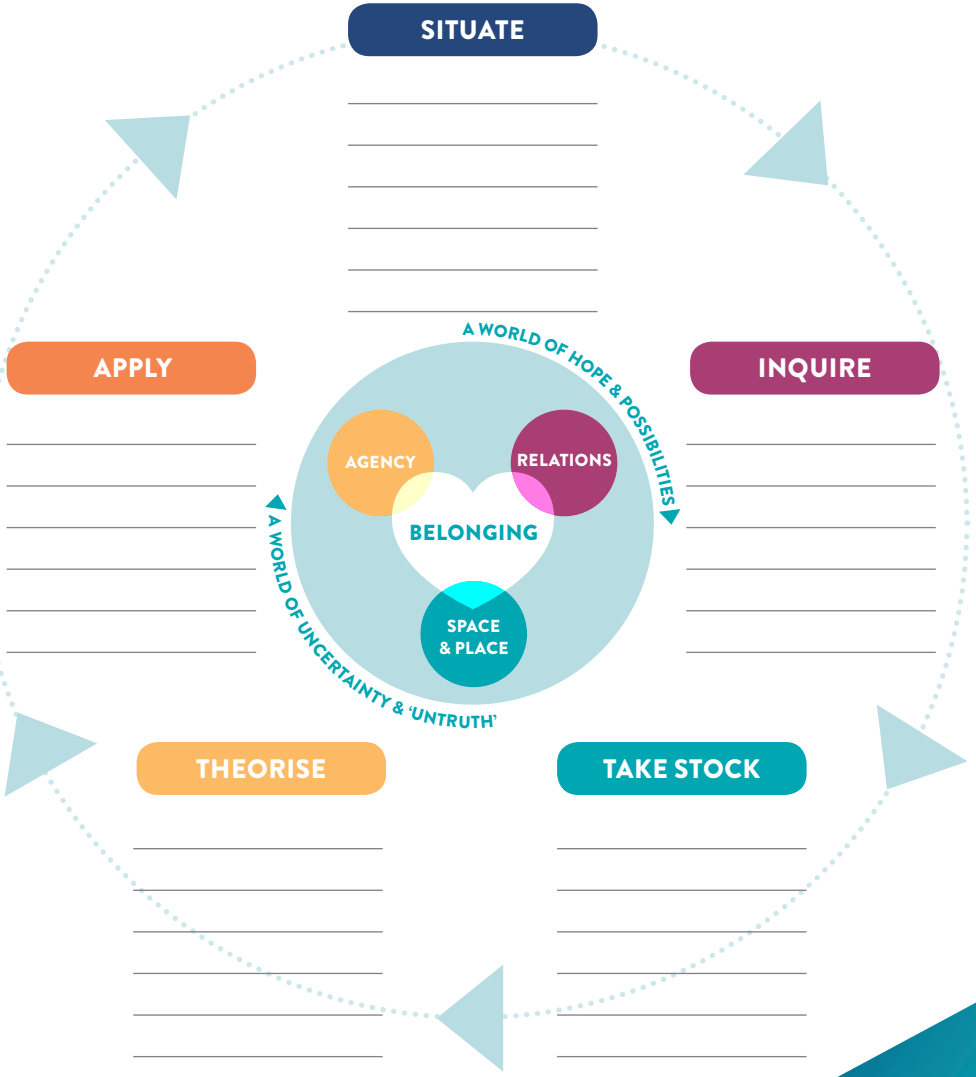
Box 4: An Educational Design Research Model for Creating a Sense of Place and Belonging – the Art of Possibilities

Stages in the Process		
Phase	**Key elements**	**Questions for you to think about**
Situate	Contextualise, design, engage	• What are the main issues in our school context about place and belonging? • Who are we going to engage in this inquiry process – and how? • Are we taking a research or a development focus? • How can we involve staff?/ Young people? / Community in the process of engagement?
Inquire	Collect data, analyse and interpret	• Audit: What do we know so far about how staff/ young people/ families feel? • Who are the insiders? / outsiders in the school community? • What do we need to find out? • How are we going to do this?
Take Stock	Evaluate and reflect	• What have we learned? • What does a school look like where belonging is at the centre of school life? • How near are we to that model? • How robust are our conclusions about the evidence we have?
Theorise	Build on conceptual knowledge	• How does our experience relate to that of other schools? • What have we learned about key concepts, such as space, place, well-being and agency? • What have been the benefits of engagement for those involved?
Apply	Share and encourage implementation	• How can we share what we've learned about place and belonging in our own school? • With the wider community? • With other schools?

Use the process framework shown in Box 4 as a prompt for thinking about your school context and Figure 3 to map your reflections.

[5]Educational design research has witnessed many developments over the last decade or so (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012), with growing interest in how this approach can be used as a knowledge-building tool, part of a process of engagement which involves young people from the time they first enter school (Bodong & Huang-Yao, 2016); and to target specific 'problems', discover and share new knowledge (McKenney & Reeves, 2012).

Figure 3: An Educational Design Research Model for Creating a Sense of Place and Belonging – the Art of Possibilities



Although there are many challenges for schools in carrying out the process of inquiry and engagement described in this booklet, the rewards are significant. A systematic focus on place and belonging not only builds a bridge between research, development work and practice but also generates usable knowledge, and a sense of creative engagement and ownership within schools.

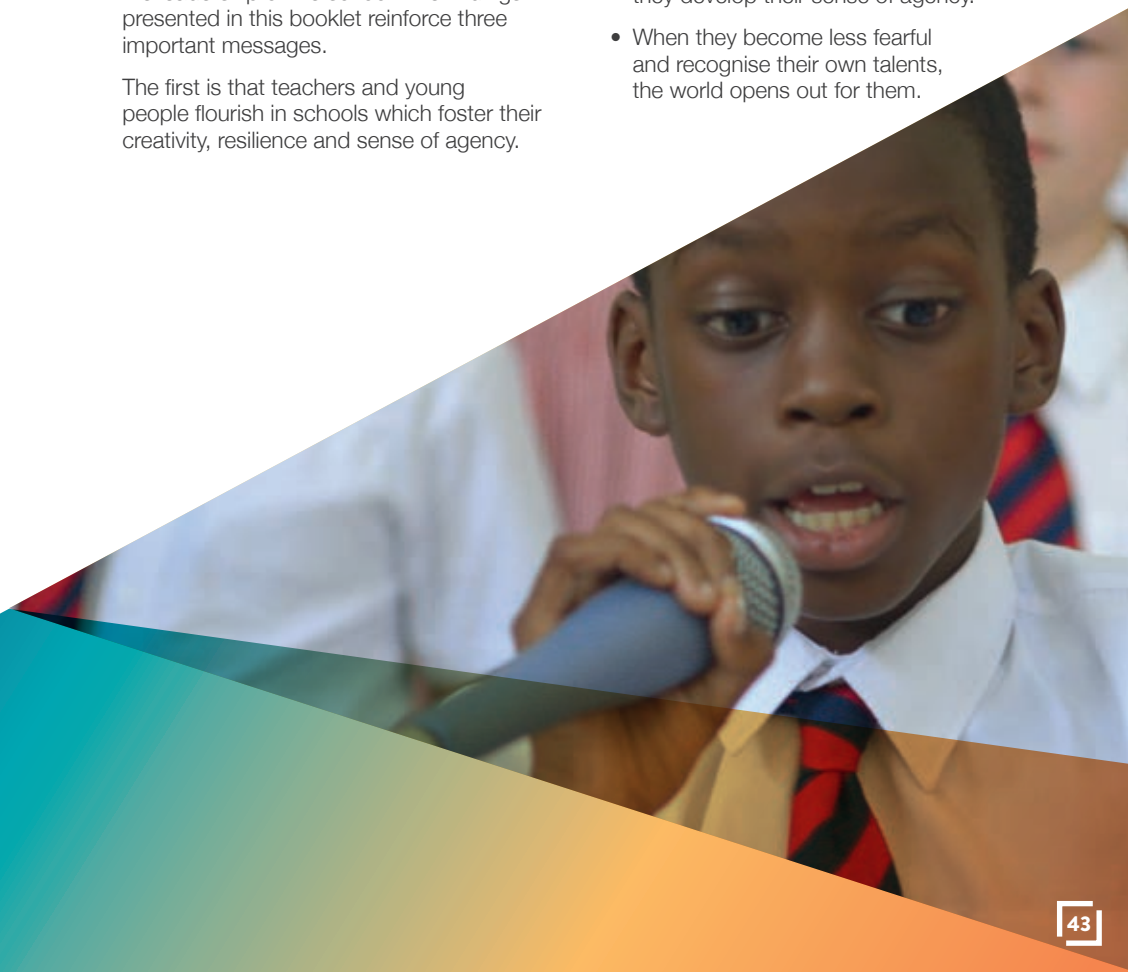
Whether young people are given the opportunity to develop and exercise their agency, whether staff are encouraged to help shape the learning environment and grow and contribute their knowledge and skills, is down to the leadership of the school. The findings presented in this booklet reinforce three important messages.

The first is that teachers and young people flourish in schools which foster their creativity, resilience and sense of agency.

The second is that when school leaders draw upon their wisdom to make a difference, the results are inspiring. They spring from a sense of hope, a sense of possibilities, a belief in young people and a recognition of the power of place and belonging.

The third important message is that the rewards of developing such an approach are significant not only for young people but also for their families and communities:

- When young people feel safe, rooted and that they belong, they become open to learning and they succeed at every level.
- When they know they are listened to, they develop their sense of agency.
- When they become less fearful and recognise their own talents, the world opens out for them.



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