Increasing Elementary School Students’ Sense of Belonging through an Educator’s Training Manual

by

Rachel Batson

A thesis submitted to the School of Community Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology

St. Lawrence College
Kingston, Ontario
Canada
April 1st, 2014

The procedures in this staff training manual are meant to be used by agency staff, as part of the broader service they provide, or under supervision of agency staff.
Abstract

Student sense of belonging has been associated with student academic success and emotional well-being. Moreover, fostering a strong sense of school belonging is particularly important during the elementary years. Through a thorough review of the literature, it was determined that there are four factors that consistently influence student sense of belonging: 1) teacher-student relationship, 2) student engagement and involvement, 3) teacher communication patterns, and 4) interactive teaching and learning. Based on these findings, an elementary school educator’s manual was developed. The purpose of the manual was to inform school personnel of the importance of student sense of belonging in the school environment and to provide a best practices approach to increasing student sense of belonging. The final version of the manual contained six sections. The first section included an overview of student sense of belonging with the purpose and rationale for the manual, the following four sections reviewed and presented strategies and interventions ideas on each of the four factors. The final section of the manual provided school personnel with a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire to help monitor different aspects of student sense of school belonging. The main focus of this thesis was on the creation and development of the manual as opposed to its implementation into the proposed setting. This did generate a limitation as no empirical means of evaluation was produced to evaluate the manual’s efficacy. However, the manual was guided by the empirical literature, and adjustments were made to the manual’s content based on feedback received from an elementary school principal. Strengths, limitations, and multilevel challenges with regards to this area of study are reviewed, and future recommendations for research and applied work are presented.
Acknowledgements

There are many people in my life that I would like to express my sincere gratitude for helping me through this difficult process. The first person I would like to thank is my thesis supervisor Shannon-Dell MacPhee for her constant help and ongoing support, direction, and guidance throughout the development of my thesis. The second person I would like to thank is the second reader of my thesis Shaireen Charania. Thanks for being so precise and critical when looking over my thesis, I would not have had it any other way. Another special person I would like to thank is Sarah Obeidi, for always being my go to writing specialist.

The third, fourth, and fifth persons, I would like to thank are in my wonderful family. I would like to thank them for always being there, supporting me every step of the way, and always encouraging my dreams. These people, especially my dad, are the drive behind my success.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... iii

Chapter I: Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1
Chapter II: Literature Review ........................................................................................... 3

  Theoretical Frameworks ................................................................................................ 3
  Sense of Belonging in the School Environment ................................................................. 5
  Fostering Student Sense of Belonging at School ............................................................... 6
    Teacher-student relationship ....................................................................................... 6
    School engagement/involvement ................................................................................. 8
    Teacher communication patterns .............................................................................. 9
  Interactive teaching and learning methods. ................................................................. 10

Summary .......................................................................................................................... 12

Chapter III: Method ......................................................................................................... 14

  Participants .................................................................................................................... 14
  Design/Format ............................................................................................................... 14
  Confidentiality and Informed Consent ..................................................................... 15
  Procedures .................................................................................................................... 15
    Section 1: Overview of student sense of belonging. ................................................. 15
    Section 2: Teacher-student relationship. ................................................................. 15
    Section 3: Student engagement and involvement. .................................................. 15
    Section 4: Teacher communication patterns. .......................................................... 15
    Section 5: Interactive teaching and learning methods. ............................................ 16
    Section 6: Informal pre- and post-intervention questionnaire. ................................ 16

Evaluation ....................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter IV: Result ........................................................................................................... 17

  Final Product ................................................................................................................ 17
  Feedback Received ....................................................................................................... 17
  Changes to the Manual ................................................................................................. 17

Chapter V: Discussion ...................................................................................................... 18

  Thesis Summary ......................................................................................................... 18
  Strengths ....................................................................................................................... 18
  Limitations and Challenges ....................................................................................... 18
  Multilevel Challenges to Service Implementation .................................................... 19
    Client level. ............................................................................................................... 19
    Program level. ......................................................................................................... 19
    Organizational level. ............................................................................................... 19
    Society level .......................................................................................................... 20

Implications and Contributions to the Behaviour Psychology Field ......................... 20
Recommendations for Future Research and Intervention .......................................... 20
References ........................................................................................................................................21
Appendix: Training Manual .............................................................................................................24
Chapter I: Introduction

Sense of belonging is defined as a feeling of mutual respect, acceptance, and pride (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). Humanity strives for a sense of belonging, which is arguably, essential to survival (Boyd, Bee, & Johnson, 2009). The concept of belonging or sense of belonging has been integrated into many theories throughout history. These theories have paved the way in developments towards understanding humans and how they develop. Maslow proposed that there are five indispensable human needs that individuals cannot live without, one being love and belongingness (Boyd et al., 2009). Erik Erikson also raised the importance of obtaining a strong sense of belonging, in his theory of psychosocial stages, in particular, during the stage of identity versus role confusion from age 12 to 18 (Boyd et al., 2009).

Sense of belonging is particularly vital in the school system and among the elementary age group (Anderman, 2003; Napoli, Marsiglia, & Kulis, 2003). In fact, it is now being recognized as the main contributor to academic achievement (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Children spend approximately 1,316 hours per year in educational institutions (Anderman, 2003; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). During this time they must learn how to adapt successfully in this social environment with their fellow peers (Boyd et al., 2009). It is during the elementary years that students develop values and problem solving skills that will form the basis of their future social engagements (Boyd et al., 2009). If a strong sense of belonging in the school setting is not developed, this can lead to disengaged and disruptive behaviour in the classroom, which in turn may result in lower grades, fewer chances for higher education, and an increased likelihood of school dropout (Reyes et al., 2012). In contrast, a positive sense of school belonging can lead students to participate actively in school, display emotions of happiness and joy, and develop long-lasting patterns of academic stability, resulting in mental, physical, emotional, and behavioural well-being (Anderman, 2003; Osterman, 2000).

Given the research on the importance of student sense of belonging, further exploration on this topic would benefit not only the students but the school as well. The amount of resources available specifically to school personnel on the topic of sense of belonging despite its importance is lacking. Therefore, the objective of the thesis project was to use evidence-based literature to develop a manual that would inform school personnel on the importance of a strong sense of school belonging and as well provide strategies, interventions, and tips on how to increase students’ sense of school belonging. This was completed through creating an educator’s training manual that presented ideas of best practices. Over the past ten years the idea of self-teaching has grown in popularity and most individuals prefer this self-help, step-by-step approach (Bottiroli, Cavallini, Dunlosky, Vecchi, & Hertzog, 2013; Clemes, Haslam, & Haslam, 2010). A manual of this nature would provide school personnel with the tools necessary to target students’ sense of school belonging through enhancing their understanding and insight into the importance and strength of this concept in the school environment. Through creating a manual, teachers will be provided information on how to implement strategies and interventions to improve student sense of belonging.

This thesis first provides a review of the literature in the area of sense of belonging, including defining sense of belonging, relevant theoretical frameworks, the importance of sense of belonging in the school environment, and associated characteristics. Particular attention is paid to the literature on the mechanisms through which sense of belonging can be fostered. There were four dominant areas found to be of significance to student sense of school belonging. The first is a strong teacher-student relationship (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). This
relationship is created by the teacher through practicing practical skills such as respect and care for individuals’ unique views, having knowledge of schooling, providing feedback, and motivating students (Dixie, 2011; Mitchener & Schmidt, 1998). The second area is student engagement and involvement (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010; Wang & Eccles, 2011). Students who are actively involved with their school, for example on a school team, report a stronger feeling of school belonging (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). The third is communication patterns used by teachers with their students (Xin, 2003). One of the most central skills in communication is active listening (Bettez, 2011). Finally, student sense of belonging is also fostered through interactive teaching and learning methods (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012). For example, allowing students to actively participate in lessons and classroom activities inspires student interdependence (Juvonen, 2007).

This thesis, secondly, provides a description of the method section which talks about the development of a training manual while giving descriptions of the participants and their qualifications, consent measures, as well as the manual’s design and procedures. The result section of this thesis is dedicated to the final product, its entirety alongside feedback received from the agency and changes needed to be made to the manual. The proceeding section of this thesis reveals the summary, limitation, and recommendations for the manual. This section is labelled discussion and talks about the manual’s strengths and challenges such as easy-to-read format and organization as well as the manual’s service to implementation at different levels, and importance to this creation to the field of behavioural psychology.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Belongingness is among many of the necessary parts of life; if just one or even all of these necessary parts are missing or are not fulfilled, one might perceive life as empty (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In pursuit to fill the emptiness with a more richer and fulfilling life, individuals seek social bonds and connections with others, meaning belongingness, which acts as a protectant and buffer against hurt, loneliness, and depression (Kitchen, Williams, & Chowhan, 2012; Napoli et al., 2003; May, 2011). This belongingness or sense of belonging from a group of individuals, either as family, friends, peers, or co-workers is achieved when an individual feels welcomed, valued, and supported (Shaunessy, & McHatton, 2009; Singh et al., 2010). Through this the emptiness can be filled and their current perceptions of the world can change due to receiving stability, security, positive regards, and affection from these other individuals (Singh et al., 2010; Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013). This basic underlying idea of belonging is found when an individual feels “personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others” (Singh et al., 2010, p. 163).

Theoretical Frameworks

Many theories throughout history have been developed which pertain to sense of belonging. The theories that are presented in this thesis are from Bowlby on attachment, Maslow on hierarchy of needs, Erik Erikson on eight stages of development, and Bandura on observational learning. These theories were chosen because of their particularly interesting nature and view of sense of belonging. Each, if not all, demonstrate the importance of sense of belonging, relate to development across the lifespan, as well as relate to the adaption of sense of belonging in social environments.

Bowlby was a psychoanalytic psychologist best recognized for his work in the field of attachment, which he first found interest in in the 1970s (Boyd et al., 2009; Engler, 2009). Attachment theory suggests that people need intimate bonds with significant others in order to fully develop; humans need to create and maintain relationships throughout life (Boyd et al., 2009). The quest for interpersonal attachments by individuals is seen by Bowlby as the primary objective of development. He proposed that attachment is created at a very young age and is built on the feeling of security; individuals need to feel secure in their relationships. Once security has formed, individuals learn from this experience which set the foundation for later relationships (Boyd et al., 2009; Engler, 2009).

Maslow is a humanistic psychologist perhaps best known for his development of the hierarchy of needs, the theory of human motivation (Engler, 2009). This hierarchy is displayed in a pyramid-like form and includes five basic needs, humans always desire. They are displayed in ranked order from the most basic needs/wants at the bottom starting with physiological needs, safety, belonging and love, self-esteem to the most desired want at the top, self-actualization (Engler, 2009). All of these needs are different types of needs but seen by Maslow as essential. The needs can be divided into two categories: deficiency needs and being needs. Each of the five basic needs are assigned to one of these categories (Engler, 2009). According to Engler (2009), Maslow defined deficiency needs as internal drives that motivate an individual to maintain their physical and emotional balance and being needs are defined as internal drives that motivate individuals to achieve their full self-actualization potential. He believed that individuals must obtain the deficiency needs as to satisfy their human desire. Sense of belonging is characterized in the category of belonging, and love and is conceptualized as a deficient need (Engler, 2009). Affectionate and intimate relationships held with family, friends, and work
members are represented by this category (Engler, 2009). This basic drive for sense of belonging has long been recognized to influence life. Since the beginning of time, belonging and love, have driven individuals to do extraordinary things. It is a feeling that cannot be fulfilled with the attainment of inanimate objects. But obtaining meaningful relationships with others in today’s society is becoming extremely difficult due to the new technological advancements keeping individuals apart.

Another theory relevant to the study of sense of belonging is Erik Erikson’s eight stages of development, a theory of personality development (Boyd et al., 2009). This theory was built on Freud’s theory of psychosexual internal drive and cultural demands, although, Erikson called his theory Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages. There are eight stages in Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of development that are encountered throughout the lifespan (Boyd et al., 2009). These eight stages are identified as trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and finally integrity versus despair. His psychosocial stages are based on conflicts and emotional encounters an individual faces in each period of his/her life. According to Boyd et al. (2009), Erikson believed that an individual must resolve the conflict in each stage and choose between personal internal drives or cultural demands; the conflict is defined as two opposing opportunities. Also, upon entering each stage an individual will need to adapt to a new environment where new demands are placed on him/her (Boyd et al., 2009). In this thesis a focus is placed on the fifth stage of development, identity versus role confusion or social identity, in relation to sense of belonging (Boyd et al., 2009). During this stage, Erikson believed that a child/adolescence experiences and develops a need for identity, a need for belonging. The need to feel a social bond or connection with others is how children learn about their surrounding world (Boyd et al., 2009). This connection with others is a sense of belonging; children want to make friends and feel safe with others.

Bandura is another well-known psychologist who specialized in social learning theory (Boyd et al., 2009; Engler, 2009). Humans learn through observation of others; this is called observational learning (Boyd et al., 2009; Engler, 2009). Almost all human behaviour is learned through direct observation of a model instead of through constant trial and error. This behaviour being learned occurs accidentally and is almost a perfect match to the structure of the modeled activity. Through constantly observing others’ behaviour, the learner can correctly solve the problem by drawing conclusions based on his/her previous observations. This kind of learning is more than mere imitation; the learner is developing innovations and creating new behaviours that go beyond the actual modeled behaviour. If individuals believe that the observed actions will result in a positive manner, this behaviour is more than likely to be emulated. As well, if individuals lack self-esteem, they are more likely to follow the direction, style, and structure of the modeled behaviour that appears to instill desired qualities/confidence in the model. This theory of observational learning starts at birth; children learn all their basic survival skills through their parents at this age (Boyd et al., 2009; Engler, 2009). This theory unquestionably progresses once the child is placed in school. In this environment the child is given many opportunities to observe his/her fellow peers and learn from their reactions. This, in turn, can relate to the concept of sense of belonging as the main influence on student outcomes. For example, students in school who possess a strong sense of belonging display qualities that are admired by others, persuading them to obtain this feeling in hopes of finding and displaying
similar qualities. The importance of sense of belonging in relation to the observational learning is undoubtedly a major link that influences student sense of belonging.

**Sense of Belonging in the School Environment**

The school environment has been identified as a major contributor to the creation of a sense of belonging (Anderman, 2003). School sense of belonging is reported to be one of the most vital aspects of positive and negative student outcomes, contributing to both academic and social development (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005). Juvonen (2007) believes, that sense of belonging can grow stronger by implementing certain interventions in the classroom geared towards increasing school belonging. Research suggests that upon their entry to school, students strive to feel warmth and a sense of value through social relationships with other students (Xin, 2003). These social relationships are filled with different types of learners and players; once a student creates a social relationship he/she learns from this experience, thus developing their sense of belonging (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Engler, 2009).

Furrer and Skinner (2003) suggest that school belonging is central to the learning environment. They report that students who feel disconnected from their peers often find difficulty becoming productively involved in social academic activities. As well, students often succeed in school due to a strong sense of belonging, which is developed through relatedness to peers (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). According to Singh et al. (2010) school sense of belonging is defined as positive interactions, experienced by students, with their peers, teachers, and staff members. The characteristics most recognized to increase students’ sense of school belonging include being personally recognized, supported, incorporated, and valued by others. These positive experiences of personal relatedness to other school members essentially helps to cultivate a sense of school belonging (Singh et al., 2010).

Positive student outcomes are dependent on a strong sense of school belonging (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Wang & Eccles, 2011). In fact, sense of belonging in the school environment is related to mental, physical, emotional, and behavioural health among students (Osterman, 2000). The factors usually seen in those with a strong sense of school belonging are teacher relationships, student involvement, adequate communication, and strong learning produced through different teachings (Osterman, 2000).

There are a number of positive outcomes associated with a strong sense of belonging in the school environment. One of these outcomes is confident emotional stability; students who possess a strong sense of school belonging often display and maintain positive emotions such as happiness, enthusiasm, containment, and calmness (Osterman, 2000). Students who participate in a variety of school activities are seen to have a strong sense of school belonging and benefit most from this environment (Osterman, 2000). They are more likely to participate in a wide range of school activities, often engage in lower rates of risky behaviour, and develop durable patterns of academic strengths, leading to better grades (Anderman, 2003). By building reliable academic habits, students often aspire to higher education (Reyes et al., 2012). Students who are actively involved in school are presented with additive opportunities to further advance themselves, which results in greater future opportunities (Reyes et al., 2012).

The consequences of a poor sense of belonging at school may impact a student’s academic trajectory, social relationships, and future outcomes. The negative emotions frequently displayed by these students who do not possess a strong sense of school belonging are feelings of rejection, jealousy, grief, and anxiety (Flook et al., 2005). These negative emotions may often lead to disengaged and disruptive classroom behaviour, resulting in lower grades, fewer
opportunities for further education, and an increased probability of school dropout (Reyes et al., 2012). Reyes et al. (2012) stated that students who display lower levels of sense of belonging report being bored and angered in class, anxious to leave, and are frustrated with learning. Failure to possess sense of belonging may also lead to unforeseeable feelings of social isolation, alienation, and seclusion, which are common among students who act out in a negative manner (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Flook et al., 2005). In some cases, an absence of school belonging can lead to mental and physical illnesses, as well as major conduct problems such as delinquency and suicide (Osterman, 2000).

**Fostering Student Sense of Belonging at School**

The literature, in this area of research, focuses on developing and improving student sense of school belonging through highlighting several strategies and interventions in the classroom environment that can help foster and strengthen student relationships in the school (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Juvonen, 2007; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). In sum, the research reinforces four specific mechanisms through which student sense of school belonging is established, maintained, and improved. This includes the teacher-student relationship, school engagement and involvement, teacher communication patterns, and interactive teaching and learning methods (Juvonen, 2007; Reyes et al., 2012; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009; Xin, 2003).

**Teacher-student relationship.** Student learning and success in the 1900s placed enormous focus on classroom and curriculum organization, in other words effective student learning concentrated on what was presented (information) and not how. In recent years, this perception has become obsolete for improving student success (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Research has now shifted focus to the quality of the teacher-student relationship, as this has been identified as the primary contributor to student sense of belonging as well as achievement (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Rathvon, 2008). Positive teacher-student relationships are observed “in schools where learners feel engaged, cared for, respected, and part of the learning community” (Ding & Hall as cited in Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p. 487). This sense of connectedness to fellow peers and teachers leads to higher student achievement (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009).

The quality of teacher-student relationship is perhaps most crucial during the elementary years; children in this environment are said to need consistent positive regard in order to improve academically (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Juvonen, 2007). It has been suggested that the students most affected by low levels of sense of school belonging are elementary students (Juvonen, 2007). Ages six through thirteen is recognized as the critical period during which a sense of school belonging is established, this may be associated to the fact that children at this common age usually develop communication and interpersonal skills (Wang & Eccles, 2011). According to Furrer and Skinner (2003) and Ostroky and Jung (n.d.) teacher-student relationships in elementary school influences students’ sense of relatedness, as well as teaches positive coping methods. Positive teacher-student relationships and sense of connectedness act as a protector against disobedience and decreases drop-out rates across all age groups (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Juvonen, 2007). Additionally, students’ values and expectations are often strengthened due to teacher’s support and personal investment in their students’ lives (Ostroky & Jung, n.d.). In review of the literature on continuity, social connectedness, and engagement, Juvonen (2007) reported that students are more likely to comply with teacher expectations and instructions when they feel their teacher supports and respects them as a person.
In conclusion, student sense of school connectedness is affected by the powerful rapport shared between teacher and student.

Teachers who care for their students are often seen by parents and others as respected individuals who promote their students to honour the unique views of fellow students and their classroom environment (Shaunessy & McHatton 2009). Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) suggested that the teacher-student relationship is one of the utmost factors in student success and may have an indirect effect on sense of school belonging. In their 2009 study, the authors administered 577 questionnaires to students to investigate their perceptions of their classroom teachers. The results indicated that students who hold the certain perceptions of their teachers are more motivation to learn and have more positive attitudes about school. These certain perceptions a teacher can display are: knowledge of school content, retain high expectations, present a caring attitude, provide helpful feedback, and create meaningful relations with students. Through their research, Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) were able to uncover ways to promote the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. Their strategies focused on having teachers strengthen students’ confidence by motivating them to succeed, listening to them with patience, responding in a sensitive manner to their performance, and using positive behaviours such as smiling and using a playful voice. All of these strategies were found to be effective in increasing relationships between students and teachers.

In a longitudinal study, Furrer and Skinner (2003) administered self-report questionnaires to 948 elementary school students in grades three through six to investigate the relationship between sense of relatedness and academic engagement and performance. Student engagement was measured by the teacher and student reports, while relatedness and academic performance was only analyzed by student reports. This questionnaire also placed importance on student perceived control, Furrer and Skinner (2003) defined this as student abilities and beliefs of success and failure in school through performing or not performing certain strategies. They found that the students who felt most connected to the school and their teacher were knowledgeable in school work, vigorously involved in the classroom environment, and consistently achieved grades between B and B-. It was hypothesized that sense of relatedness would increase when engagement and academic performance increased; this hypothesis was confirmed correct after analysis of the data (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). These students also regularly portrayed emotions of enjoyment, enthusiasm, excitement, interest, contentment, and confidence.

Similar results were found in an earlier study conducted by Roeser, Midgley, and Urdan (1996), which included participants from grade six and grade eight. Roeser et al. (1996) hypothesized that teacher-student relationship is directly related to students’ personal perceptions of school belonging and perceived academic goal structures. The latter refers to a school practice of honouring students in public who display strength in academic studies. This helps convey to other students what constitutes success in school. The researchers predicted that students who felt respected, supported, and cared for by their teacher were more likely to perceive a positive teacher-student relationship, and that this in turn would, predict positive student psychological and behavioural outcomes. Their proposed hypothesis was correct; students who perceived a positive relationship with their teacher and perceived academic improvement displayed feelings of school belonging.

In a three-year longitudinal study conducted by Flook et al. (2005), a teacher self-report questionnaire was used to evaluate relationships that influence student academic performance in the school context among a sample of 677 fourth graders. In addition to this questionnaire, data
was collected regarding student behaviour and perceptions (of teachers), and information was obtained from student report cards. The results of this study indicated that students who did not display positive relationships with their peers and teachers demonstrated internalized symptoms of depression and loneliness. The opposite results were found in students who had a positive relationship with their peers and teachers; these students were more likely to feel socially accepted and showed stronger academic performance.

School engagement/involvement. From a social-psychological perspective, school belonging has been defined by emotional engagements (Singh et al., 2010; Wang & Eccles, 2011). Emotional engagement is a positive identification and attitude toward school as well as a feeling of sense of student belonging. According to Singh et al. (2010), this engagement is the most important factor that influences school involvement and school performance. Reports show that students who are on school teams and who are actively involved in their school have higher GPA’s, have stronger stable personal relationships with others, and a stronger feeling of belonging (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). According to Reyes et al. (2012) school participation is vital for creating a strong sense of school belonging. Research indicates that students who are engaged and involved in school activities often display stronger sense of school belonging as well as increased motivation and achievement towards school (Knifsend & Graham, 2012).

Student engagement is defined as an individual’s physical and psychological investment and involvement in an extracurricular task or participation that involves learning and understanding the skill needed (Newmann et al., as cited in Singh et al., 2010). Knifsend and Graham (2012) suggested that student sense of belonging is not fully achieved until students are given school responsibility. This responsibility can be achieved through completing or accomplishing an extracurricular task that instills school representation or pride (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). They proposed that during adolescence students who participate in extracurricular activities are better attuned than their fellow classmates (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). According to Wang and Eccles (2011) school engagement not only affects school belonging but also contributes to student achievement. They report that students who are involved in their school through extracurricular activities display healthier attitudes toward school, are found to seek post-secondary education, and usually achieve higher grades.

Wang and Eccles (2011) conducted a study to investigate potential contributing factors to school engagement through the development of a survey, which was completed by 3197 public middle school students. The survey was designed to examine four areas: academic attainment, educational ambition, school involvement (school engagement, student belonging, and personal-regulation), and socio-demographic demands. The study results indicated that school engagement, student belonging, and personal-regulation was directly related to emotional engagement and was the main motivator of pursuing higher education. These three elements of school involvement were shown to be positively correlated with increased student GPA’s. The results also showed that school involvement decreased as students entered higher grades.

Knifsend and Graham (2012) conducted a longitudinal study into the area of sense of belonging to schools through extracurricular participation, which included over 1000 eighth grade elementary school students. Self-report questionnaires were developed and given to evaluate school belonging over a two-year period. When the students reached grade eleven and twelve, the same written self-report questionnaires were administered again. The analysis of these questionnaires revealed that active participation in the school was consistent and stable across time and was associated with an increased sense of school belonging and academic engagement. Knifsend and Graham (2012) also discovered that students who felt a sense of
school belonging displayed higher self-efficacy towards academic participation and achievement. Therefore, it is concluded from both of these studies conducted by Wang and Eccles (2011) and Knifsend and Graham (2012), that importance should be placed on increasing student school engagement inside and outside the classroom because of the positive student outcomes produced.

School engagement is not only about physical and psychological involvement but also emotional involvement. A study was conducted by Reyes et al. (2012) on the effects of school engagement and classroom emotional climate on academic achievement. The data was collected in the form of self-report questionnaires, videos and student report cards. The study participants included 2,000 fifth and sixth graders and 63 teachers across ninety classrooms. The results of the study showed that high levels of school engagement such as on school teams and completing school chores, and so forth led to higher grades. This then, indirectly led to classroom emotional climate which was defined as “positive relationships, enjoyment, excitement, feelings of comfort, and experiences of appropriate levels of autonomy” (Reyes et al., 2012, p. 704). Therefore, school engagement and positive classroom climate support academic achievement.

Similar results were found by Singh et al. (2010) in their study of 1,157 high-school students. The authors explored how self-concept, origin of birth, and school belonging effect school involvement. The authors defined self-concept as an individual’s relationship with external positive outcomes, an individual’s self-esteem and self-evaluation, as well as an individual’s view of him/herself. The results of the study indicated that ethnicity played an important role in school belonging, school involvement, and self-concept. Singh et al. (2010) found that school belonging had no effect on self-concept. Academic engagement was divided into two different categories; the behavioural aspect (determination and responsibility) and the psychological aspect (interest and enjoyment). Academic engagement was found to have not been affected by the psychological aspect of learning, but results showed a significant difference in the behavioural aspect of learning. This means a student must be determined and show responsibility for his/her own learning in order to improve in school; if the behavioural aspect for learning is not present in the student, no progress will be shown. In conclusion, the results of this study specified that academic determination and responsibility affect school learning.

**Teacher communication patterns.** Communication is defined as the activity of transmitting messages of personal thought, information, and opinions on topics of interest through images, voice, signals, and behaviour; it is essential for human survival (Baum, 2005; Rost & Wilson, 2013). Humans learn to read and interpret interactions and through trial and error respond appropriately. In face-to-face interactions, individuals communicate through verbal language, body posture, and facial expressions (Richards & Burns, 2012). Communication or shared social interactions is the practice of problem solving together, this practice determines whether a relationship is built or discarded (Baum, 2005; Safran, 1991). If a relationship is established, a sense of belonging will start to kindle through continuous communication (Baum, 2005; Young, 2009). Communication is seen as a powerful force used to create and maintain relationships and increase sense of belonging (Xin, 2003). This sense of belonging is created when an individual feels cared for, appreciated, and welcomed (Xin, 2003). The role of communication in sense of belonging is particularly important in the school environment (Osterman, 2000). Students report a strong sense of school belonging when they perceive effective communications between themselves and their teachers (Osterman, 2000). The literature suggests that both verbal and nonverbal forms of language/communication between teacher and student is crucial to building a strong sense of school belonging.
Since the late 1970s, researchers have been interested in communication patterns between teachers and students. Woolfolk (1978) explored the relationship between student learning and performance through classroom teacher verbal and nonverbal communication. She hypothesized that positive verbal voice tone and positive nonverbal communication (smiling and head nodding) would increase student academic performance. She also hypothesized that the delivery and receiving of this communication would change with different genders. The study included 128 arbitrarily selected grade six students. Woolfolk’s hypothesis was supported. Based on an analysis of the study’s results, it was concluded that the tone of voice (positive or negative), facial expressions (smiling), and body postures (open) used by teachers influenced how students performed academically. The results also showed that the female teacher’s verbal and nonverbal communication inspired stronger learners in female students. Whereas, male teacher’s verbal and nonverbal communication showed no significant difference in both student genders. The research shows that there is a relationship between these verbal and nonverbal communication methods and academic achievement, it is perhaps the relationship that Woolfolk helped foster that contributed to this outcome.

Brooks and Wilson (1978) found similar results in their study on teachers’ verbal and nonverbal communication behaviours towards students through observation in the classroom setting. This study which included 12 teachers and 44 students explored how classroom teachers respond to students using verbal and nonverbal communication based on four pre-selected student personality types (accepted, concerned, indifferent, and rejected). The results of this study showed that the teachers consistently used positive verbal behavioural expressions with students classified as having accepted and concerned personality types. This was due to the appropriate behaviours often displayed by these students in the classroom. This pattern of positive verbal behavioural expressions was in contrast to the rejected and indifferent student personality type. The results also indicated that nonverbal communication towards students (all student types) did not change but verbal communication was inconsistent between the all student types. In conclusion, verbal and nonverbal communication behaviours are important in communication and indirectly strengthen belonging.

Bettez (2011) and Rost and Wilson (2013) reported that certain communication skills may help foster a greater sense of community, in particular, active listening. Active listening is one of the many skills used to create an effective and respectful relationship with students. The skill of active listening involves two parts of listening: context and content (Rost & Wilson, 2013). This means an individual needs to understand the underlying background of the others’ messages as well as acknowledge the moods that person is portraying (Bettez, 2011). Active listening is performed when the listener displays non-verbal cues of eye contact and head nodding, as well as reflects back, at an appropriate time, what the speaker has said, and does so while refraining from soliciting advice (Rost & Wilson, 2013). Through practicing active listening the speaker and listener can also learn about verbal engagement and how this process works; through trial and error each person learns how and when to respond to the other. Active listening between teachers and students is the key to building a sense of community in the school setting, but this is rarely practiced and is often not actively present in classroom interactions. Bettez (2011) suggested that promoting the building of a community in the school environment encourages students to practice the skill of interdependence.

**Interactive teaching and learning methods.** The old adage “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” may be applied to the standard approaches to teaching. This system of teaching has worked in the past and has produced many strong learners (Anderman, 2003). Unfortunately, this
previous and conventional style of teaching has not been beneficial for every learner. Many new discoveries have been made with regards to different types of learner and learning disabilities as well as ways in which these individuals learn (Juvonen, 2007). In the current standard curriculum many of these new forms of teaching and learning have not been incorporated (Juvonen, 2007). This standard or conventional way of teaching focuses on students learning from their seats, not interacting with each other or the classroom, and does not emphasize the importance of the teacher-student-relationship (Mitchener & Schmidt, 1998).

Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) have suggested that teachers need to build positive relationships and create a supportive learning environment through consistency, novelty, and commitment (Shaunessy & McHatton 2009). All students, whether high-performing or low-performing need the same reinforcement and reprimand. Teachers need to enforce clear rules, fair discipline, and create a warm environment with a student-centred focus. Moreover, schools need to instill and incorporate a more interactive classroom environment, as research indicates that all students benefit from this approach (Goodenow, 1992). Interactive teaching methods allow the teacher to engage all different types of learners in the classroom. According to Juvonen (2007), through incorporating different teaching approaches that allow for a more interactive classroom, student dropout rates may decrease and sense of school belonging can increase.

There are a number of ways that teachers can make their classroom more interactive. As discovered by Yee (n.d.) the classroom environment is a setting in which many learning activities and structural-based lectures can promote interaction between students and the teacher. After an extensive review of many resources, Yee (n.d.) complied and adapted several techniques that a teacher can implement in the classroom that support different teaching styles with a personalized touch. In Juvonen’s (2007) review of the literature on interactive teaching and learning models suggests that peer interactions and cooperative learning can influence student sense of school belonging, as peer interactions in the classroom encourage school engagement. School engagement is increased when lessons and activities involve students moving around the classroom and talking to each other when trying to solve answers to the teacher’s questions (Juvonen, 2007; Rathvon, 2008). This interactive approach also creates a sense of security and belonging within the classroom as well as a friendly and safe environment for students to learn.

Goodenow (1992) provides a review of the literature on cooperative learning in the area of sense of belonging. In his review, cooperative learning was depicted as an umbrella term for a variety of different teaching and learning strategies and methods. Studies have shown that cooperative learning has been associated with increased student success, motivation, and interpersonal relationships. The basic idea of cooperative learning is the process where two or more students are paired together for a certain task and are rewarded or graded on their performance or presentation as a group (Goodenow 1992; Slavin, 1983). Cooperative learning within the classroom has two primary components: cooperative structure and task structure (Slavin, 1983). Cooperative structure is where all parties benefit or do not benefit from the task or situation if they succeed or fail; task structure is where all parties are responsible for their own parts and are rewarded based on their completion of the task (Slavin, 1983). Another approach Goodenow (1992) reviewed was reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching is where the teacher first explains and then demonstrates the particular task (Hennings, Wallhead, & Byra, 2010). Next, the students are paired together in the classroom and asked to perform the task demonstrated. Each student in the pair has a different role; doer (performer) or observer. The
observer’s job is to watch the doer’s performance of the task, evaluate and give feedback based on the teacher’s demonstration and criteria. The teacher’s job in this learning process is to advise the observer through conversation without providing direct feedback to the doer. In this type of teaching both learners are given equivalent opportunities to change their interactions (behaviour) to benefit their learning (Hennings et al., 2010). A third approach discussed by Goodenow (1992) is group process; the group process was developed to inspire social interaction between students. This approach focuses on making social interactions an overt part of the teaching curriculum. This involves classmates evaluating each other on school engagement in the context of classroom social environment. This intervention can be easily implemented in the classroom environment. Students are asked, as a group in an open discussion, to produce a list of activities and emotions that facilitate student engagement (Goodenow, 1992). All of these methods remove personal differences and increases student sense of school belonging. All students are able to participate without feeling socially isolated.

In a longitudinal study, Anderman (2003) examined academic and social predictors of sense of belonging in 618 grade six children. Data was collected through a survey administered once in grade six and twice in grade seven. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate six components of goal orientation theory. The goal orientation theory is the process where student perceive academic work as meaningful because their teacher has placed importance on this concept within the classroom environment through task-oriented work; these academic tasks encourage student development, effort, and progress (Ames & Archer as cited in Anderman, 2003). This theory focuses on personal improvement, progress, and individual achievement. Goal orientation theory was implemented in the classroom and measured six different components student belonging, student goal orientation, hope for academic victory, academic task ideals, teacher support, and academic attainment (Anderman, 2003). The results of the study, showed that task-oriented work correlated positively with sense of school belonging. As well, the results showed that when students were focused on improving academically through the teachers support, their school sense of belonging increased (Anderman, 2003).

Summary

Student sense of school belonging has been associated with positive student outcomes such as development in academic strengths leading to improved grades and post-secondary education, as well as, display fewer behavioural problems, less risky behaviour, and general well-being in health and attitude (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Boyd et al., 2009; Flook et al., 2005; Juvenile, 2007; Osterman, 2000; Reyes et al., 2012; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009; Singh et al., 2010; Tillery et al., 2013; Wang & Eccles 2011; Xin, 2003). That said, teachers and other school personnel may not be aware of the significance of sense of belonging in the school environment. Moreover, they may not be aware of how they can help to develop and increase a strong sense of belonging among students. A manual that provides teachers with information about the implications of student sense of belonging and how they can increase or develop a greater sense of belonging among student in their school would be highly beneficial to the entire school community. Manuals provide step-by-step, self-teaching approaches and have grown in popularity over the past ten years (Bottiroli et al., 2013; Clemes et al., 2010). Training manuals have proved successful across disciplines and populations. For example, they have been found to be fruitful in speech therapy, and nursing, as well as in therapy (cognitive behaviour therapy), and in treating sexual offenders (Hollin, 2009). To date, a topic that has not been addressed in the form of training manual is student sense of school belonging. In fact, there may be limited resources available to teachers on this topic in general. The purpose
of the current project is to create a training manual for school personnel on the topic of student sense of belonging. The manual is designed to be used by educators and other individuals who work with students or in educational institutions. It contains information and strategies designed to increase student sense of belonging in the school environment. This includes the four mechanisms that help foster sense of belonging as well as an introduction to the topic and a pre-and post-intervention questionnaire provided for school personnel. Each of the four mechanisms contains strategies and interventions designed to be complete by school personnel in the classroom along with tips for influencing student sense of school belonging. The manual, which is based on empirical research and theoretical frameworks, will serve as a best practices resource for fostering student sense of belonging among elementary school children.
Chapter III: Method

Participants

The manual is intended to be used by school personnel such as classroom teachers, principals, and student support workers. The manual will provide school personnel with an understanding that focuses on the significance of increasing students’ feelings of a strong sense of belonging and evidence-based strategies and interventions to do so. The strategies and interventions included in the manual are intended to target male and female students at the elementary school level from full-day kindergarten through grade 8. The manual was designed to inspire personalized delivery due to all school personnel using different teaching styles and methods of classroom management based on different grade levels and curriculums. Therefore, the interpretation and implementation of the manual may alter from one school personnel to another. The manual is intended for all students to benefit, whether poor school belonging or strong school belonging.

Design/Format

The training manual was developed for the applied thesis requirement of the Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology degree program. The purpose of creating the manual was to provide school personnel with insight into the importance of student sense of belonging, and provide evidence-based strategies for increasing student sense of belonging in the school environment. Sense of belonging, for the purpose of this project, was defined as receiving a personal feeling of warmth, acceptance, and security from others (Xin, 2003). A training manual format was chosen due to the efficacy of supplying information, strategies, and interventions of best practices in one suitable arrangement. Through the use of this training manual, teachers can promote student sense of belonging naturally in the classroom through specialized interventions integrated into daily school-based activities. The strategies and interventions presented in the manual create a positive school atmosphere and should not only be implemented temporarily, but rather built into the structure of the classroom and school consistently for best results. Therefore, the delivery of the manual may occur at any time, with no specified time lengths for each intervention to ensure stronger delivery.

School personnel will facilitate the introduction and implementation of each strategy and intervention in the manual. This manual can be introduced in the classrooms and school at any time during the year. The manual is most effective on influencing student sense of belonging when all school personnel are implementing the strategies and interventions inside and outside of their classrooms.

While the manual can be implemented in individual classrooms, it can also be implemented as a school-wide intervention overseen by the school principal. For the best results, all school personnel should use the manual in its entirety in their classrooms and throughout the year or for a given period of time. A meeting should be organized for all school personnel to attend every two months to discuss and monitor as a whole, the progress and roadblocks with the strategies and interventions implemented. Next, school personnel should review, discuss, and prepare for implementing the subsequent strategies and interventions. The key to maximizing the manual effectiveness is for all school personnel to keep performing each strategy or intervention previously implemented while simultaneously every two months adding the new intervention or strategy to their repertoire. These strategies and tips should become part of each school personnel’s personality and become second nature to perform.
Ideally, the manual is intended for the students to feel a greater sense of belonging as a result of school personnel implementing effective interventions related to influencing student sense of school belonging. The strategies and interventions presented are best implemented and show best results if the reader follows the instructions and advice presented in each section.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Formal consent, confidentiality procedures, and measures were unnecessary because no human participants were involved and no study was conducted. The manual includes general strategies and interventions that can be implemented in the classroom informally. However, if school personnel would like to implement them into the form of a structured school program, it is expected that policies and regulations already established will direct proper practice.

Procedures

The information provided in the manual was generated on empirical evidence-based research studies in the area of sense of belonging. After a careful analysis of the literature on this topic and related areas, research suggested several practical and effective approaches to increasing students’ sense of belonging. The rationale for using this method of intervention is based on research of self-teaching effectiveness (Pozdol, 2009). This manual will be given to all school personnel to reference and use in individual classrooms and other school rooms to increase student sense of belonging. Individual school personnel will decide on how to implement and conduct each intervention upon their interpretation of the instructions and notes presented throughout each section in the manual. The manual consists of six sections, the introduction, the four areas influencing sense of belonging (strategies and interventions), and the informal questionnaire.

Section 1: Overview of student sense of belonging. This section presents the purpose and rationale of the use of a manual and brief overview of content presented. School personnel will learn about the theories pertaining to sense of belonging, the importance of sense of belonging in the school environment, and the outcomes of student school belonging. This section will also present strategies on how to obtain best results from using the manual. School personnel will be given a chart that displays the subsequent effects of improving on all of the topics presented in the manual.

Section 2: Teacher-student relationship. In this section school personnel are given the opportunity to learn about different techniques that often are influential to the teacher-student relationship. These techniques will be introduced as strategies and interventions about a teacher’s caring nature and performance in the classroom and school. Finally, school personnel will learn how to support and respect their students not only as leaners but people in the school environment. School personnel will be provided with a conversation between teacher and student that demonstrates the techniques and strategies explored in this relationship.

Section 3: Student engagement and involvement. This section provides school personnel with information on the importance of student engagement and involvement for both inside and outside of the classroom. School personnel will be provided with a rationale for improving student engagement in school. They will be provided with some suggestions for potential activities that motivate students to become involved and given strategies to increase student engagement through creating activities and jobs within the classroom and school.

Section 4: Teacher communication patterns. School personnel are introduced to the value of teacher communication, and emphasis is placed on different strategies for increasing this between student and teacher. School personnel will learn about the importance of verbal and
nonverbal communication and how this affects student learning and sense of school belonging. They will be shown how an open stance with positive facial expressions encourages communication. They will learn about the components of active listening and how to implement them into their classrooms.

Section 5: Interactive teaching and learning methods. This section introduces the concept of different teaching and learning methods that increase student school belonging. The manual will teach school personnel about the significance of and given several techniques on interactive teaching and learning. These interventions will focus on creating a student-centred focus in the natural classroom environment. School personnel will be shown how to perform and incorporate the following methods into their daily teaching routine: cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, and peer interactions within the classroom.

Section 6: Informal pre- and post-intervention questionnaire. This section contains one appendix; the pre- and post-intervention sense of school belonging questionnaire. This questionnaire should be presented to students before and after the delivery of the strategies and interventions presented in the manual for a substantial period of time.

Evaluation

Due to time constraints, no formal empirical means for evaluating the training manual’s effectiveness was developed. However, informal verbal feedback was obtained from local school principals during the development of the manual and appropriate adjustments to the manual were made based on this input. As noted, a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire is provided in the corresponding section of the manual in appendix B. This questionnaire should be delivered to the students once prior to the implementation and twice upon completion of some of the manual’s interventions. It will allow school personnel to receive feedback and determine if the manual is effective in changing student sense of school belonging.
Chapter IV: Result

Final Product
The final product produced for this thesis was a training manual designed for elementary school personnel. This training manual focuses on providing school personnel with the tools necessary for increasing student sense of belonging through evidence-based strategies, tips, and interventions for use in the educational setting. The manual contains four sections specifically dedicated to strengthening school belonging. Each of the topic areas presented in these sections were chosen based on a review of the literature in the area of student belonging.

The manual was designed to be delivered by permanently employed school personnel; this was to ensure consistency and productive implementation. The final product consisted of 49 pages divided into six sections: Overview of Student Sense of Belonging, Teacher-Student Relationship, Student Engagement and Involvement, Teacher Communication Patterns, and Interactive Teaching and Learning Methods, and Informal Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaire. The last section of the manual as mentioned was devoted to the informal pre- and post-intervention questionnaire which was not intended for formal use by the creator for feedback, but rather intended to be used by school personnel as a way to generally monitor aspects of sense of belonging in their students after implementation of the manual’s strategies and interventions.

Feedback Received
The training manual was given to the principal at a local elementary school in order to provide input on the manual’s design, content, and usability. The overall information obtained from this source, indicated that the manual was useful in providing a different point of view on issues presented in the school environment including the importance of student sense of belonging and the four different areas of influence. Several encouraging comments were given on the core content of the manual and its similarity to critical information learned in a teacher’s educational background and continued learning. Additional positive feedback was given on the presentation of the content and its accuracy in portraying adequate skills in the classroom. As well, constructive feedback was received on the delivery and clarity of a few ideas presented in the manual. Furthermore, minimal feedback was provided on proper sentence structure, word clarification, and phrase descriptions.

Changes to the Manual
Based on feedback received from the school principal, minor changes were made to the manual. These changes addressed the content of the intervention ideas presented in the manual with regards to timing (the time limit is impossible in the current setting as a result the intervention was removed), understanding (a certain word needed defining), and one concern about a possible reversal affect (student questions to challenging may decrease sense of belonging). The changes made to the questionnaire resemble modifications to wording (the word “always” may affect the rating scale resulting in below average responses), and one concept (the word “smart” can be defined differently and this notion of intelligence is taught, as not a factor in success). Many of the changes made were in the nature of wording and further explanation of concepts. These changes did not include the core content of the manual, only ways in which it could be made more clear and concise.
Chapter V: Discussion

Thesis Summary
A review of the literature revealed the importance of increasing sense of belonging in students, in particular, among elementary school students because of the associated positive outcomes such as stronger dedication towards school, more stable relationships, positive emotions, and less risky behaviours (Anderman, 2003; Osterman, 2000; Reyes et al., 2012). The purpose of this thesis was to enhance student sense of school belonging by providing school personnel with a resource containing school appropriate empirically established strategies and interventions.

Although the topic of student sense of belonging was discovered to be of great influence on student performance, it lacked sufficient delivery in the school environment. Through the creation of the manual, a bridge was developed between the empirical literature on the topic of sense of belonging and fostering student sense of belonging in the school environment. The content of the manual was derived from an extensive review of the literature in the area of sense of belonging. The four areas determined to be most critical to student sense of belonging based on this review included, teacher-student relationship, student engagement and involvement, teacher communication patterns, and interactive teaching and learning methods. The purpose of this resource was to give school personnel insight and understanding into the importance of student sense of belonging in the school environment and provide them with school appropriate empirically based strategies and interventions. To ensure the appropriateness of the manual’s core content for the school environment, informal verbal feedback was received from the principal of a local elementary school. Upon reflection, necessary and suitable changes were made based on this feedback.

Strengths
The primary strength of this thesis was that the manual was based on empirically validated ideas for increasing student sense of school belonging. To determine what factors promote sense of belonging, an extensive review of the literature was conducted. Many factors were discovered then grouped into four headings which then determined the format, shape, and presentation of the manual. Therefore, the manual is a representation of ‘best practices’ in the area of student sense of belonging.

Additionally, informal feedback from a school interested in fostering student sense of belonging was obtained. The input from this source was helpful in ensuring that the manual was school friendly. This meant that the manual was appropriate and applicable for use in the school environment as well as useful and easy to implement in this setting.

A final strength of the manual is that it provides school personnel with a practical and simple way to increase student sense of belonging through generalized strategies and interventions. The manual is presented in an easy-to-read instructional based format using non-jargon terminology. As well, the strategies and interventions presented can be incorporated into everyday classroom activities without interfering with the presentation of the school curriculum.

Limitations and Challenges
The first limitation was evaluating whether the strategies and interventions contained in the manual were effective at influencing student sense of school belonging. An informal questionnaire was provided in the manual for school personnel to assist them in determining if the strategies and interventions were implemented and if they did increase student sense of
belonging. Consequently, this questionnaire was not statistically validated and could not determine effectiveness. The second limitation was that no informal or formal empirical means of evaluating the manual’s usefulness and helpfulness in the school was obtained from school personnel after implementation. Only informal verbal feedback from local school principal was received.

Two primary challenges were encountered during the development of the manual. The first challenge was the limited amount of resources available on the topic of student sense of belonging. The studies selected to support the development of the manual all provided evidence for the effectiveness of common techniques, however, they did not all directly relate to the elementary school student age level. Accordingly, they were adapted as appropriate and made suitable for this age group. Another challenged presented was providing school personnel with appropriate interventions that could be implemented in the classroom. The manual was intended to be delivered to students in kindergarten through grade 8. With this wide range of ages and developmental levels, the interventions and strategies needed to be general enough to target a variety of students and classrooms, while still portraying one of the four areas being implemented.

Multilevel Challenges to Service Implementation

**Client level.** The purpose of providing school personnel with a training manual is to educate them on strategies and interventions that influence sense of school belonging which create positive student outcomes. However, implementing these strategies and interventions with the students can present challenges as some students may be unwilling to participate in interventions. Another challenge is student absences; the interventions presented are intended to be delivered to the entire class. Student absences are problematic in this environment due to these students not receiving consistent support and being able to actively participate in the process of creating a sense of school belonging.

**Program level.** In order for the manual to be truly effective, school personnel need to integrate these interventions in the school curriculum and continue conducting the interventions as requested throughout the year. Although the manual is time consuming at first, this problem will dissipate as school personnel actively re-read the manual for clarity and consistency in implementation. This becomes a challenge when school personnel become uninterested or invested in implementing strategies anymore. Another challenge anticipated may be the manual’s acceptance or usability. It is common knowledge that school personnel are multi-task workers taking the responsibility of monitoring 25-30 students throughout the day as well as educating them. The delivery of this manual adds another responsibility to their job expectations. Therefore, to overcome this challenge, the manual was made as simple as possible and easy-to-read in order to be integrated into the school curriculum with no difficulty.

**Organizational level.** At an organizational level, a challenge may include the guidelines and policies created by the government for all schools to implement and abide by. These decisions may or may not affect student sense of school belonging in general, the ability for the interventions to improve sense of belonging, and the ability for the manual to be used in the classroom. As required by the government all school must meet the provincial standards and prioritize their academic scores over fostering student social development and belonging. Although school belonging may not be seen by the government as one of the main priorities that affect student learning, it has shown to increase student performance and motivation towards school (Reyes et al., 2012; Shaunessy & McHatton 2009).
**Society level.** The strategies and interventions presented in the training manual are intended to affect society after implementation. A substantial amount of the researched interventions achieve long-term results and future endeavors. Through exploring and implementing this manual in the school environment, students’ skills and behaviours influenced by the interventions may or may not be generalized to other areas of life due to the possible counter-therapeutic component of the student’s home life. Although students spend a substantial amount of time at school, they return home, to where these values and skills learned in school may be not implemented or understood at home. With this said, generalization of skills to other areas of society and/or community may present difficulty. In contrast, generalization of the following skills instilled in elementary school students (strong motivation, student achievement, student involvement, and confidence) may generalize to other educational settings, producing happier and safer school environments.

**Implications and Contributions to the Behaviour Psychology Field**

This thesis will benefit the field of behavioural psychology by bringing more awareness to the topic of student sense of belonging. This resource manual contributes to the field of behavioural psychology as a new creation through drawing conclusions and gathering materials from the research literature and feedback from school personnel to develop a new product. To the author's knowledge, there is no other manual that currently exists that targets student sense of belonging in this way, and which is intended for school personnel. Therefore, the manual provides behavioural therapists with another resource to reference in clinical investigations and further research.

In creating this manual it was discovered that there is currently a lack of research available on student sense of school belonging. The teacher-student relationship, which plays a role in student sense of belonging is now being recognized as one of the main contributors to student success (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). However, through an extensive review of the literature, it became apparent that sense of belonging at school may not be a robust research topic. This thesis may help to bring more awareness to the topic of sense of school belongingness and research targeting this phenomenon in the school setting.

Finally, the field of behavioural psychology is dedicated to increasing an individual’s overall quality of life. The different therapies and approaches used in this field focus on empowering the individual or client through providing them with the skills necessary for overcoming their fears and challenges. Sense of belonging is a major part of life which individuals may deem crucial. Therefore, developing a manual for school personnel to use with their students helps to empower students to experience the enjoyment and achievement school can bring.

**Recommendations for Future Research and Intervention**

Future research should include more investigation into the role of sense of belonging in the elementary school environment. In addition, research concerning how to integrate sense of belonging into the curriculum or perhaps how to integrate this into training for school personnel should be considered. As noted earlier, a manual of this sort would be strengthened by a validated measure to evaluate the efficacy of its ability to increase student sense of belonging. Further clinical interventions need to be conducted to validate and extend the findings presented in this thesis and resource manual.
References


Rost, M., & Wilson, JJ. (2013). *Active Listening: Research and resources in language teaching*. Edinburgh Gate, United Kingdom: Pearson.


Appendix: Training Manual

Increasing Student Sense of Belonging: A Training Manual for Elementary School Personnel

Developed by Rachel Batson
Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology
St. Lawrence College
2014

1 This manual is designed to be used by elementary school personnel. This manual cannot be distributed to other organizations without authors’ permission. Permission must be obtained by the author, Rachel Batson, at rbbatson.25@gmail.com if others wish to use it.

2 All pictures presented in this manual are copyrighted by the artist, Rachel Batson. No further reproduction of these pictures are allowed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: Overview of Student Sense of Belonging ................................................................. 1  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 3  
Section 2: Teacher-Student Relationship ..................................................................................... 9  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 11  
  Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas ................................................................................... 14  
Section 3: Student Engagement and Involvement ...................................................................... 18  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 20  
  Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas ................................................................................... 22  
Section 4: Teacher Communication Patterns .............................................................................. 24  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 26  
  Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas ................................................................................... 28  
Section 5: Interactive Teaching and Learning Methods .............................................................. 32  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 34  
  Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas ................................................................................... 36  
  Appendix A ............................................................................................................................... 40  
Section 6: Informal Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaire .................................................. 41  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 42  
  Appendix B ............................................................................................................................... 43  
References .................................................................................................................................. 44
Section 1: Overview of Student Sense of Belonging
“Sense of belonging or membership in school can be defined as the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment. Belonging is more than technical enrollment—it means students have established a social bond among themselves, teachers, and the norms governing schooling institutions” (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010, p. 163).
Introduction

Theoretical Basis

In the past 200 years, the importance of sense of belonging has gained recognition in history by many noteworthy theorists such as Bowlby, Erikson, Maslow, Bandura who all have touched on this topic and its importance to human kind. Bowlby proposed that belonging came in the form of attachment; thus the attachment theory was born (Engler, 2009). Attachment theory suggests that at a very young age individuals need to feel a sense of security in a relationship, this then sets the pattern for later relationships with others. Another theory similar to this developmental process and growth would be Erik Erikson’s eight stages of development (Boyd, Bee, & Johnson, 2009). He proposed that individuals encounter eight stages of development throughout life time. During the fifth stage of development in particular, Erikson believed that children develop the need for social identity or belonging, and at this age they foster a need to feel social connections with other individuals.

Another theorist such as Bandura focused on social learning, more specifically observational learning (Boyd et al., 2009). He proposed that all humans learn through, observing others perform behaviour. If one observes a behaviour, that they feel will result in a positive manner, the individual is more likely to observe this behaviour to learn, as the model displays a desired quality the learner/observer wants. This theory reflects that the desire of sense of belonging can be learned in school through simple observation. In the earlier parts of history, one of the first humanistic psychologists, took a different approach and proposed that humans could not grow and move towards happiness and satisfaction without achieving ‘self-actualization’ (Engler, 2009). This theorist was Maslow and his theory was called the hierarchy of needs. He proposed that individuals need to achieve each of the four basic needs of physiological needs, safety, belonging and love, and self-esteem in order to attain self-actualization which was described as growth, happiness, and satisfaction in life.

Importance and Effects of Sense of School Belonging

School is one of the areas in life where sense of belonging first develops in children (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). This environment influences student outcomes as well as contributes to student social and academic development. One of the major factors in school shown to increase academic performance is a strong sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is vital to education and seen as fundamental to the student learning atmosphere (Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005). Sense of belonging is developed through creating and maintaining social relationships with peers displaying similar qualities (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Juvonen, 2007). Creating relationships with peers in elementary school is extremely important as these relationships form the foundation for their future sense of belonging. In fact, student success in school may be determined by these social relationships. Students who feel unengaged or disconnected from their peers often display struggles in social academic tasks. According to Juvonen
(2007), there are certain strategies that can be used with students to help develop a stronger sense of belonging at school.

Student sense of belonging has been found to be associated with a number of student outcomes (Anderman, 2003; Juvonen, 2007; Osterman, 2000; Wang, & Eccles, 2012). In behavioural terms, these outcomes are seen in active participation, stable relationships, better grades and less dangerous behaviour. Emotionally, students who report a strong sense of belonging display substantially more positive emotions of happiness, confidence, containment, and contentment with their lives. Students who are involved in their school through social and academic activities and feel a sense of pride to call themselves a student often display safe adolescent behaviours, develop and maintain strong academic work ethics, and desire self-improvement in education. Furthermore, these students display improved overall health. In contrast, students who are not involved in their school and who refuse to participate as an active member inside and outside of the classroom have been found to display below average grades, be less likely to achieve post-secondary education, and more likely to drop out of school (Baker et al., 2008; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Additionally, a lack of belonging to the school may lead to, in some cases, conduct disorder as well as possible mental and physical illness (Demanet, & Van Houtte, 2012).

Sense of belonging is defined as obtaining a feeling of respect, warmth, acceptance, and support from others (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). If one experiences a lack of these feelings, he or she may experience opposite feelings of hurt and loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These feelings of warmth, acceptance, and respect act as buffers and are considered to be part of a more fulfilling and wealthier life (Napoli, Marsiglia, & Kulis, 2003). In order to fill this emptiness one must seek relational bonds with others to gain a sense of belonging (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). The formation of these bonds may help an individual to experience additional feelings of stability, affection, and security.

Student sense of belonging is essentially identical to sense of belonging. Students in school need to feel a connection with their peer or fellow classmates as well as teachers and other school personnel. School belonging is developed when a student feels welcomed, valued, and included in the classroom and school environment (Singh et al., 2010). The social relationships that students develop with peers in elementary school set the foundations for later relationships; the students learn from these relationships and take these experiences with them (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Singh et al., 2010). Social relationships and personal relatedness helps to nurture school belonging in students. Through fostering a positive and strong sense of belonging in students, school personnel may influence the course of a student’s school life. Moreover, a strong sense of school belonging in students is beneficial to society as a whole as it helps to produce stronger learners, desired self-school improvement, and stable relationships, as well as, decrease unsafe adolescent behaviours (Anderman, 2003; Flook et al., 2005; Reyes et al., 2012).
Manual Overview

This manual presents information obtained from an extensive review of the literature on those areas found to increase sense of school belonging in students. These four topics are presented in different sections of the manual in the following order: teacher-student relationship, student engagement and involvement, teacher communication patterns, and interactive teaching and learning methods. Each section provides an introduction to the topic, presents strategies and intervention ideas, and lastly provides some appendices with additional paper work. The final section of the manual contains a questionnaire designed to help evaluate the manual’s effectiveness. The items presented in the questionnaire are single statements that summarize each section of the manual.

This manual includes intervention ideas and strategies for increasing student sense of school belonging in the regular classroom environment. School personnel are able to use this manual any time throughout the school year, as well as incorporate the information presented during the regular school day. The interventions provided in the manual can be used by all school personnel holding a permanent position, such as classroom teachers, student support and success workers, and school principals. To increase the likelihood of positive and more permanent results, it is recommended that the strategies and interventions contained in the manual be integrated into the teaching curriculum and used consistently both inside and outside of the classroom.

The interventions are intended to increase sense of belonging in all students as levels of school belonging will likely vary considerably between classrooms and schools. The manual was designed to be used by school personnel for students in kindergarten through grade 8. The manual provides interventions and strategies that school personnel may use as a basis in the classroom according to the school environment and personal preference.
**Manual Implementation**

When all school personnel use the same strategies and intervention ideas at the same time throughout the school year, the strongest positive results should show. This can be completed through organizing a meeting every two months with all school personnel to discuss and monitor progress of the strategies or interventions previously performed. The last half of the meeting should be dedicated to discussing and preparing for the next manual sections school personnel are wishing to implement.

Another simple way to achieve similar results would be to encourage all school personnel to complete one of the strategies or interventions presented in each of the four sections in this manual. Encourage or challenge each other to perform these strategies and tips across the entire school year or for a substantial period of time. Once a strategy is mastered, consider implementing another or new strategy at the same time throughout the year. These strategies and intervention ideas are encouraged and intended to become second nature to perform.

**Note:** Refer to page 41 before implementing the interventions presented in the manual.
The Chart of Effects

- Teacher-Student Relationship
- Student Engagement and Involvement
- Teacher Communication Patterns
- Interactive Teaching and Learning Methods

Sense of Belonging

Student Achievement

Positive Student Outcomes
- Building academic strengths (habits)
- Achievement of better grades
- Achievement of higher education
- Engage in less risky behaviour
Section 2: Teacher-Student Relationship
“In schools where learners feel engaged, cared for, respected, and part of the learning community, achievement of all students is higher than in schools where students feel disconnected to peers and teachers” (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p. 487).
Introduction

The teacher-student relationship is a relationship held between the teacher and his/her students where both parties display mutual appreciation and acceptance of each other (Baker et al., 2008; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). This relationship entails a leader and a follower, where both individuals embrace the different roles of teacher and learner. Both of these individuals bring unique and similar qualities to the environment; both are learners and teachers at different levels (Flook et al., 2005; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Each individual benefits from this relationship but to a vast degree the learner benefits extensively more. These benefits are only created, however, when this relationship is built.

The teacher-student relationship is critical to student development (Baker et al., 2008). This relationship is created and fostered by the teacher and is crucial to the development of student belonging during the elementary school years (Juvonen, 2007; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Xin, 2003). It is during this time that students’ sense of belonging is at its lowest and is most influential. In the elementary years, children develop communication and interpersonal skills through their interactions with others (Wang & Eccles, 2012). This includes their interactions in school with school personnel such as teachers as well as their interactions outside of school with their family and friends. The teacher-student relationship is a powerful force that encourages all students to try their best (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). When this relationship is seen by parents, the teacher is viewed as a caring teacher. A teacher-student relationship or caring teacher is an individual who places the value and learning of his/her students first.

As shown by Furrer and Skinner (2003) and Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) students who develop a strong teacher-student relationship are often reported as

- Showing high student achievement
- Building positive coping methods
- Fostering a strong sense of relatedness
- Displaying positive attitudes towards school

If students do not have a good relationship with their teachers (are disconnected socially), they are reportedly more likely to have difficulty engaging in academic activities, become bored more easily at school, display worry and frustration, and to be estranged from their fellow peers (Baker et al., 2008; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The effects of the teacher-student relationship not only benefit students’ lives in school but also outside of school. Society also benefits as these students contribute in the community based on what they have learned from their teachers.
There are three characteristics that when displayed by school personnel are said to help increase school sense of belonging as reported by Juvonen (2007)

| 1. Respect | Through displaying these three characteristics and a personal investment in students’ lives, school personnel are reinforcing the students’ values and expectations. |
| 2. Support |
| 3. Care |

According to Shaunessy and McHatton (2009), “a student’s relationship with his or her teacher is one of the most critical facets of learning” (p. 486).

In order to create that teacher-student relationship, one must treat the classroom and all of students in it as a team. This creates an atmosphere where all students are equal and encourages all students to help one another. The purpose of this is to encourage the teacher-student relationship through inspiring care, respect, and support for all students as well as having the students demonstrate these skills. This approach uses a collaboration model, encourages participation, and instills confidence in all students, and finally also uses a student-centred focus.
Conversation between Teacher and Student

Presented below is an example of a conversation between a teacher and a student in which a teacher responds to a student while demonstrating the three main characteristics of respect, support, and care.

• Student: Mrs. Mackey, I don’t understand this question.

• Teacher: Well let’s look at it together. I see now, could you tell me what part you specifically don’t understand.

• Student: The whole thing

• Teacher: Are you sure, the whole thing?

• Student: No, I just don’t understand the last part I think “explain your answer using an additional/final statement.”

• Teacher: What do you think explain your answer means?

• Student: I don’t know, maybe what I think?

• Teacher: Close, you almost got it, it does mean what you think, plus you need to include your evidence, how you know that, what you figured out from doing the work. (Respect)

• Student: Oh, okay.

• Teacher: Do you understand now, because the look you are giving me says otherwise.

• Student: No I still don’t

• Teacher: Okay, well, then let’s do half of it together right now. (Support)

• Student: Okay

• Teacher: Then you have to go to your desk and do the other half, you need to try. But if you still don’t understand after you have attempted it, then you can come back up again for help. (Care)

• Student: Okay

• Teacher: Also once you figure it out, I would like to see if before you move on to the next question, Okay?

• Student: Okay
## Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to Ostroky and Jung (n.d.) the teacher-student relationship involves many dynamics that make this relationship desirable for both the teacher and the student. This relationship essentially looks like this</td>
<td>✓ The teacher engaging in one-on-one, face-to-face interactions with the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Addressing students at their development level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Using simple language with a calm and agreeable voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Providing warmth and appropriate physical contact (hand on shoulder or pat on back)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Redirecting student attention to task at hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Reciting and demonstrating understanding of classroom rules and expectations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Shaunessy and McHatton (2009), the qualities that students report as most admirable and influential (on student learning) in their teachers are:

- Knowledgeable of subject matter
- Promote understanding of school content
- Hold high expectations
- Demonstrate a caring attitude/nature
- Provide helpful feedback

School personnel can promote a teacher-student relationship with their students through demonstrating all of the following behaviours as described by Shaunessy and McHatton (2009):

- Listening with concern
- Responding in a sensitive matter
- Always portraying positive emotions such as smiling and being playful with their students

All of these techniques strengthen the teacher-student relationship as well as support and nurture student success. Due to these techniques being used, students’ desire to work harder to achieve higher education is shown through applying to post-secondary studies (Baker et al., 2008).
As stated by Ostroky and Jung (n.d.) and Shaunessy and McHatton (2009), in order to increase the teacher-student relationship school personnel should perform the following behaviours with their students:

- Listening Attentively and Encouraging Listening
- Acknowledging Positive Behaviour
- Praising Students' Efforts and Corrections
- Engaged through conversation in personal life (hobbies, family, and friends)
- Encouraging Question Asking and Help if Needed

This diagram illustrates how the teacher-student relationship creates something bigger.

### Ideas for Monitoring Progress

- Keep a checklist of the strategies and/or ideas to help you monitor your use of them
- Create several visual aids as reminders and place them in site
- Brainstorm opportunities typical in your classroom where you can use some of these strategies and/or ideas
Steps 1 and 2 in Developing Teacher-Student Relationship

Overview: This intervention involves two steps; first, as a class, discuss with your students what they would like to learn about (related to the school curriculum), then make an executive decision and decide what is best. Develop a lesson plan around this idea, make it fun and spontaneous, and try to involve all of the students in this lesson. Second, provide helpful feedback on students’ work. The purpose of this intervention is to increase the teacher-student relationship by having the teacher demonstrate at least 2 of the 5 qualities (listed below) that students reported they admire in their teachers. This intervention also encourages a student-centred focus and shows respect for student learning.

- Knowledgeable of subject matter
- Promote understanding of school content
- Hold high expectations
- Demonstrate a caring attitude/nature
- Provide helpful feedback
Section 3: Student Engagement and Involvement
“Participating in extracurricular activities becomes increasingly important during adolescence, as youth explore their emerging interests and identities, make friends with others, and strive to fit in with their peers” (Knifsend & Graham, 2012, p. 379).
Introduction

Student engagement and involvement has been defined as an individual’s mental and physical investment and/or participation in a task of either normal or extracurricular effort, in school or out of school, in order to learn, understand, or even master the particular skills and procedures needed to acquire successful practice or completion (Singh et al., 2010; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Student engagement encourages students to display a positive attitude and identification towards their school and feel a sense of belonging. This engagement has been reported to influence student performance and effort towards school.

When students are involved in the classroom or feel a part of the classroom their participation increases. Knifsend and Graham (2012) further state that sense of belonging would not increase until the students were given responsibility. This responsibility could take place inside or outside of the classroom, in the form of completing an extracurricular task or job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Student Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to Reyes et al. (2012)</td>
<td>➢ Enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation in the classroom or school creates a Positive Emotional Environment</td>
<td>➢ Comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Excitement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student engagement and involvement in school should be encouraged as this participation generates a snowball effect (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). Involvement in elementary school leads to a greater chance of involvement and/or participation in high school (Singh et al., 2010). This phenomenon results in long-term positive outcomes such as increased student motivation and attitudes towards school and grades as well as increased sense of belonging (which has positive results of its own) (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Therefore, this sense of belonging created in school through involvement inspires students to pursue post-secondary education. Furthermore, it is critical that engagement be encouraged earlier in school as stronger and more immediate results are produced in students.
Students who engage in extracurricular activities as stated by Knifsend and Graham (2012), Reyes et al. (2012), and Wang and Eccles (2012) are:

- able to establish stable relationships with parents, family, and friends
- better adjusted than their peers
- self-motivated to achieve higher grades
- have stronger self-esteem
- motivated to try new things
- display further positive feelings and emotions
- self-motivated to achieve higher grades
Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas

Engagement in school can involve any extracurricular task that inspires sense of belonging in students. Engagement can be encouraged through assigning students classroom or school duties or encouraging students to join a team or club. School personnel can encourage students by placing value on involvement inside or outside of the classroom by evaluating (grading) students on participation, offering a reward (free-time to earn), or earning points towards a movie afternoon or pizza party. Another way to encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities would be to get involved yourself (get involved with the students). Use a hands-on or mind-on approach, be enthusiastic, and creative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracurricular Activities</th>
<th>School Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Teams</strong></td>
<td><strong>School Jobs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Basketball</td>
<td>❖ Hall-way monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Volleyball</td>
<td>❖ Milk deliverer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Soccer</td>
<td>❖ Hot lunch helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Floor hockey</td>
<td>❖ School gym event helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Hockey</td>
<td>❖ Bus monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Dance club</td>
<td>❖ School Sign helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Glee/Choir Club</td>
<td>❖ Daily food share helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Jump Rope Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developing Student Engagement in the Classroom

Overview: As a class, create a list of school jobs, principal approved. Four students (adjust if needed) each week will be given one of the responsibilities in the classroom to perform every day (appropriate responsibilities ex. floor sweeper, white or chalk board cleaner). This activity will take place over the entire year, and every student will have the opportunity to participate in the classroom chores. This classroom chore will give students responsibility and a feeling of a sense of belonging as they will be contributing to the classroom structure. For students not given a classroom responsibility, create classroom clubs that every student would like to participate in. Once the list is complete, the remaining students (not given a classroom responsibility) must sign up to participate in the club for the upcoming week. Through creating the list together as a class, every individual student will have a chance to present their ideas of engagement and involvement in the school. The purpose of this intervention is to involve students in their classroom, its care by providing them with responsibility, as well as provide them with the opportunity to become actively involved in an activity of their choice. This intervention uses a student-centred focus and allows the classroom to create and experience the positive emotional environment. This intervention also allows students to be actively involved in their school.
Section 4: Teacher Communication Patterns
“One might envision a classroom setting, which likely many of us have experienced, in which the teacher is continually developing individual relationships with each student through conversation in large groups wherein virtually all of the dialogue occurs between each individual student with the instructor and rarely among peers” (Bettez, 2011, p. 7).
Introduction

Communication involves transmitting a message through verbal and nonverbal behaviour to another individual (Baum, 2005). Through this communication and shared social interaction with another individual, a relationship is formed or discarded based on how both individuals influenced the conversation by performing verbal and nonverbal behaviours. There are countless verbal and nonverbal behaviours that fabricate communication, and if executed properly relationships are built.

Once a relationship is created, a sense of belonging is formed and this is extremely important in school to all students (Bettez, 2011; Roeser et al., 1996). A teacher’s communication is essential for creating a student sense of belonging. Through this constant face-to-face daily conversation in school, students are able to perceive an effective communication system with their teachers and therefore, their relationship grows stronger and stronger each day (Osterman, 2000). This form of face-to-face communication is vital in developing a teacher-student bond or connection (Baum, 2005).
Verbal and nonverbal gestures and facial expressions communicated to students inspire a teacher-student relationship (Bettez, 2011; Brooks & Wilson, 1978; Woolfolk, 1978).

Young (2009) reported that the benefit of having a positive social interaction with another individual leads to feelings of Acceptance, Appreciation, and Gratification.

Verbal Communication refers to aspects of communication such as speaker’s Voice and Tone.

Nonverbal Communication is someone's body language, including facial expressions such as a smile or a frown, which can change the speaker's tone of voice. Guestures such as arms crossed or relaxed by your side can influence how the speaker stands.

In school, it is crucial to increase or develop a relationship with students through proper communication as this can lead to positive student outcomes (Safran, 1991). Proper teacher communication can be learned through understanding, learning, and performing the following techniques.
## Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas

### The Verbal and Nonverbal Do’s and Don’ts in Communication
(Bettez, 2011; Richards & Burns, 2012; Rost & Wilson, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do’s</th>
<th>Don’ts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Face the speaker directly</td>
<td>✓ Do not cross your legs or arms, this essentially demonstrates that you have cut-off the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Lean your upper body towards the speaker slightly</td>
<td>✓ Do not look away (turned your head) during the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Use appropriate facial expressions at appropriate times such as smiling, frowning, or neutral</td>
<td>✓ Do not do the opposite of the speaker (speaker stands, listener sits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Nod your head (appropriately - not too much or not too little) to demonstrate active listening</td>
<td>✓ Do not shift the focus of the conversation to oneself by reciting a similar situation, unless the speaker has asked for advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Keep eye contact with the speaker to express your concern of their importance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Paraphrase once or twice, to show understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Give the speaker thoughtful attention when responding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above image the teacher is demonstrating nonverbal communication with her student through using body and facial language. This teacher has an open stance posture with a smile and giving her full attention to the student using her eyes.
Active Listening

Active listening is an art. It not only involves listening to the content of a story but also the context (Bettez, 2011). Content and context are very different and one must understand them before performing them.

- **Content**: the students background (understanding how they communicate), are there other hidden messages within the story?
- **Context**: how they are dealing with it, what emotions are they displaying.

These concepts work hand-in-hand in active listening and become easier to perform once the student is known.

**According to Bettez (2011) and Rost & Wilson (2013) the Core Components involved in Active Listening are:**

- Keep eye contact (encourages communication)
- Body posture (shows willingness)
- Nonverbal indicators (head nod, verbal sounds)
- Communicate to the speaker (height level, if smaller bend bown)
- Mirror speakers facial language (when appropriate)
- Minimize outer surroundings and thought distractions (don't look at clock or worry about time)
- Reflect back with appropriate tone and voice (paraphrase what was said)
- Show openness to ideas
- Avoid giving advice (unless asked)
- Ask for clarification when needed

*Active listening also involves performing the do’s of verbal and nonverbal communication.*
Teaching Active Listening

**Overview:** Teach your students active listening through demonstrating the proper skills. First, teach your students all of the components of active listening through a lesson and demonstration (video, pictures, yourself). Next, turn the lesson into a game to encourage motivation to participate and learn. Demonstrate verbal and nonverbal active listening skills to the class and have them identify the components. Then have the students do the same thing (demonstrate to the class and have the class identify). Make this lesson fun by splitting the class in half and having them race against each other (race: see which side of the classroom (team) can identify the skill first). After this lesson, encourage proper listening in the classroom (weekly). The purpose of this intervention is to encourage active listening in the classroom between teacher and student, and student and student. This intervention places importance on the skills of active listening and how important this is in communication.
Section 5: Interactive Teaching and Learning Methods
“Schools can offer a secure and personally meaningful environment which facilitates self development, as well as academic and social competence” (Mitchener & Schmidt, 1998, p. 335).
Introduction

Classroom, learning, and recess, are all words often thought of when the concept of school is uttered. Teaching and learning are very different terms but when combined together contribute to something much greater, knowledge.

- Teaching: the ideas and principles of the world taught by someone in professional position (Mish, 2007).
- Learning: the knowledge and skills gained through teaching, study, and experience (Mish, 2007).

The one area most common for teaching and learning to occur is in the school system. In this environment, the classroom teacher teaches his/her students of the standard school curriculum and the students learn (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). This conventional style of teaching focused on reduced peer or classroom interactions as well as teacher-student relationship and student learning at desks (Mitchener & Schmidt, 1998). This method of teaching has produced many strong learners but unfortunately is not beneficial for all students (Anderman, 2003; Juvonen, 2007). In recent years this model has changed to incorporate a student-centred focus and placed importance on building a stronger teacher-student relationship (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). This model is referred to as an umbrella term for interactive teaching and learning. Many different teaching approaches exist inside this umbrella term that encourage and involve many different learners in the classroom (Goodenow, 1992).

Using more interactive approaches in the classroom has been said to **Decrease** Drop-Out Rates (Juvonen, 2007).
Interactive learning is the idea of student discovered learning (Juvonen, 2007). Through allowing students to interact with the classroom and peers through sharing personal experiences, their learning and student sense of belonging may increase (Mitchener & Schmidt, 1998). This learning redirects the focus of teaching toward the student, making learning, student-centred (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). These methods allow individual student learning to come first and tries to include all types of learners in one classroom.

| Benefits from using Interactive Teaching and Learning are shown in the following: (Anderman, 2003; Goodenow, 1992; Juvonen, 2007; Rathvon, 2008) |
| Teacher-Student Relationship | Learning Environment | Student Learning | Student Cooperation | Student Outcomes | School Engagement | Communication |

Student sense of belonging has shown to increase through students feeling encouraged in the classroom due to their teacher using different teaching and learning strategies (Juvonen, 2007). All students can benefit from these types of teaching and learning methods presented in this resources manual.
# Strategies, Tips, and Intervention Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things You Can Do</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desk Orientations</strong></td>
<td>According to Rathvon (2008) to increase peer interactions in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Rearrange desks into a semicircle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Rearrange desks every week (so students can eventually sit beside everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Rearrange desks into a horseshoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Rules</strong></td>
<td>In order to create sense of belonging through interactive teaching and learning methods, classroom rules as research by Goodenow (1992) should be:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Clear (laid out in the classroom for everyone to see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Consistent (do not change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Fair (same consequences for everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transitional Activities</strong></td>
<td>In order to increase interactions in the classroom during transition times, Yee (n.d.) suggests playing a game such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ <strong>Hangman</strong>: fill in the blank letters without hanging the man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ <strong>Heads up seven up</strong>: student guess who pick their thumb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ <strong>What am I thinking</strong>: the teacher describes something and the students guess what it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ <strong>Name game</strong>: recite name with an alliterative action while performing the action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ <strong>1 lie and 1 truth</strong>: each student must tell one lie and one truth about themselves, while others must guess which one is the lie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ <strong>Introduce the person to your right</strong>: introduce the non-obvious traits about this person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive Lessons</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two Half’s</strong></td>
<td>Divide the students into two equal groups, present a problem to the class as a whole, have each group (as a group) answer the question on one piece of paper (Yee, n.d.). Once this is complete have both groups trade answers and evaluate what the other group said. Which answer is more correct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definitions</strong></td>
<td>Each person writes down a definition on a piece of paper, then recite it to the class (Yee, n.d.). The class must guess the answer within 1 minute of the question being read.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Switch It:** The teacher gives each student a paper then instructs students to leave the piece of paper blank (Yee, n.d.). Next, a math question is written on the board and the students are asked to write it out on the piece of paper. After this, each student is given one minute to write what they think the answer is, after the minute is up they are asked to switch their papers with another student (even if they were not done). This process happens every minute to encourage group work. The idea behind this strategy is to encourage students to learn from each other and work together.

**Cooperative Learning:** In this intervention students are given responsibility for their own learning (Goodenow, 1992; Slavin, 1983). The classroom teacher assigns a group project then assigns each student into a group of five. The group project will consist of five parts; all parts are equal in amount of work but differ in difficulty. All five parts must be complete in order for the project to be done. Each student in the group will choose a part or be assigned a part by classroom teacher. Students within each group are responsible for completing their own part but all group members can help and give tips to each other on how to complete their own parts.

**Reciprocal Learning:** In reciprocal learning the teacher explains and demonstrates a task to students and then instructs the students to perform the task with a partner (Hennings, Wallhead, & Byra, 2010). In this pair, both students have different roles; one student is assigned the role of the performer and the other student is assigned the role of the observer (these roles can be chosen by the students themselves). Once the classroom teacher has finished their instructions he/she leaves the students to work. While the performer is performing the task the observer watches closely. The observer then gives feedback to the performer on their performance of the activity based on the classroom teacher instructions. The classroom teacher walks around the classroom during this time and instructs the student observers of any further feedback they have missed giving to the performer.

**Groupings:** Divide the class into homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. The number of groups will depend on the activity given and the difficulty of the task. Choosing when and which grouping to use will depend on the learning environment and lesson, as well as the intended outcomes you wish to see.

---

**Students Verses Teacher & The Timer**

**Overview:** This intervention reinforces students to work as a team. The students are put on one team and the teacher and timer are put on another team. Each week the teacher presents six questions to the class including one bonus question. The students must work together to get the correct answer in a limited amount of time. If the students get the correct answer they will receive a point. The students must rely on each other and their own knowledge (previous learning) for the answer. If the students are not communicating with each other, the classroom teacher will receive a point. The students need to receive more points than their teacher (each Friday) in order for the points to be added to the Points Earned Chart (Appendix A). This activity will be performed every Friday in the
afternoon across the entire school year. The points from each week will add up and give the students a chance to earn a free afternoon once a month (adjust if needed). The free afternoon would start at 2:00 p.m. after the second recess. The purpose of this intervention is to increase peer interaction, student success, and student belonging in the classroom through using interactive teaching and learning methods.

Note: Remember to make the questions simple and fun while still challenging your students.
Appendix A:

Points Earned Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time &amp; Date</th>
<th>Points Earned</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five Questions (work already taught) = 5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One Bonus Question (not taught yet) = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Points = 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This chart is only for one month.
Section 6: Informal Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaire
Introduction

This informal questionnaire (Appendix B) will be used to monitor student sense of belonging before and after the implementation of the strategies and interventions ideas listed in this resource manual. This questionnaire should be given to students in their regular elementary school classroom setting on three occasions (the beginning, middle, and end of the school year). If possible, the questionnaire should initially be given to students prior to implementing any of the strategies and interventions. The second and third administrations of the questionnaire should be given after a time has been devoted to learning and implementing the strategies and intervention ideas provided in the manual.

Instructions: Instruct all students that this is not a test and will not take very long. Provide students with the questionnaire and read-a-loud the instructions presented. As well, based on the grade level, each question may need to be read aloud to the class. Repeat this process for the second and third administrations of the questionnaire.

Results

To keep track of sense of belonging in students, record the total score (all questionnaires) for each administrations and keep this on record. To calculate the total scores for each questionnaire, add up the number values circled (4-very true = 4 points) for the four questioned answered, then complete this for every questionnaire. After, add together all student questionnaires to get a total for that administration (first, second or third). This way, school personnel are able to compare all total scores (3) from the three administrations to see if the strategies and interventions were actually implemented inside and outside the classroom by school personnel and potentially increased student sense of belonging. This can give school personnel insight into some of indicators of sense of belonging that are affected.
Appendix B:

Informal Student Sense of School Belonging Questionnaire

Grade: _________  Age: _________

Instructions: Please provide a response to each question in all honesty and to the best of your ability. Rate your responses on the scales below by circling the answer that best fits your situation.

1. I have a good relationship with my teacher (Examples: I have one-on-one talks with my teacher, my teacher listens to me, my teacher uses a calm voice, my teacher provides helpful feedback, my teacher smiles and has a positive attitude).

   1  2  3  4
   Not True  Somewhat True  Mostly True  Very True

2. I am involved in my school (Examples: I am on a school team, I am in a school club, I have a classroom responsibility, I have a school duty/job).

   1  2  3  4
   Not True  Somewhat True  Mostly True  Very True

3. My teacher is a good listener (Examples: my teacher looks at me when I am talking, my teacher gives me his/her full-attention when I am talking, I feel comfortable talking to my teacher).

   1  2  3  4
   Not True  Somewhat True  Mostly True  Very True

4. I feel engaged in the lesson and classroom (Examples: there are fair rules in the classroom, I pay attention, I am excited to learn, I participate in the lessons, I get to move around in the classroom while learning, I work together with other classmates, the desks are arranged so I can see my peers).

   1  2  3  4
   Not True  Somewhat True  Mostly True  Very True
References


Rost, M., & Wilson, J. J. (2013). *Active Listening: Research and resources in language teaching*. Edinburgh Gate, United Kingdom: Pearson.


The End

Image used with permission from Microsoft.