Belonging in School Spaces

Annotated Bibliography | urcues.org

Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 72*(1), 5-22.

This study examined students' sense of belonging over their time in a middle school. The population consisted of seven southeastern mostly white (545 white vs. 54 African American) students, in rural and urban settings. Six of the schools contained 45% of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Initial data were collected in the spring of sixth grade and twice during eleventh grade.

Surveys were administered that measured students' sense of school belonging (being respected and personal comfort in the school), perceived classroom task orientation (focus on personal improvement and mastery), academic task values, (students' assessment of individual subjects as valuable and useful), perceptions of teacher support for individual respect, and academic achievement. Data were submitted to a growth curve analysis.

On average, middle school students' sense of school belonging declined over time. However, those students who reported teachers who promoted mutual respect in sixth grade had less negative change than their peers. The findings also suggested that students' sense of school belonging is enhanced as a result of instruction that focuses on personal effort, improvement and mastery, and when they find their tasks interesting, valuable and useful. (GPA and expectations of success were factored out).

This study addresses middle school students and makes no mention of specific implications for high school practices. It does suggest however, that a transition to the next level of schooling is accompanied by a lower sense of school belonging.

Booker, K. C. (2004). Exploring school belonging and academic achievement in African American adolescents. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue, 6*(2), 131.

This study of high school urban students was conducted in two parts. The purpose of the first study was to explore whether there is a relationship between a sense of school belonging and achievement within a group of African American students who attend a school that is 65% white. The second study drew from the previous population and consisted of 7 males and 6 females, sorted into groups according to their achievement and their scores on the school belongingness survey. The researcher interviewed these students using structured questions as well as providing

an opportunity to respond to open ended prompts. In both studies 10th grade students were over represented.

The results of the first study did not find a statistically significant relationship between a sense of school belonging and academic achievement. The results of the second study indicated that students did feel connected by way of athletic and extracurricular involvement and positive social and classroom interactions with teachers and peers. Students who were unable to participate in extracurricular activities (GPA requirement) or chose not to participate had more unenthusiastic views of the school community. However, no relationship was found in this second study between school belonging and academic achievement.

This study would be helpful to those who are looking for tools that help to assess how students feel about their school experience and ways to improve the educational life of students.

Booker, K. C. (2006). School belonging and the African American adolescent: What do \we know and where should we go? *The High School Journal*, *89*(4), 1-7.

In this paper the author reviews current major findings in the literature on studies that explore the relationship between high school African American students' sense of school belonging and achievement. She first compares research results gathered from non-African American students, then discusses studies that focuses on studies of this population. She presents various definitions and cognitive, social and cultural frameworks of "belongingness,." She reviews findings and describes topics for future research, stressing the importance of collecting qualitative data needed to enrich understanding of the dynamics and relationships of students' educational life with achievement.

This paper is useful for those who would like a conceptual framework of "belongingness" or those who want a short review of the research.

Faircloth, B. S., & Hamm, J. V. (2005). Sense of belonging among high school students representing 4 ethnic groups. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 34*(4), 293-309.

Participants for this study were drawn form a larger study of 9th-12th grade students attending 7 ethnically diverse high schools, 6 in the San Francisco Bay area, and 1 in Wisconsin. No criteria were given as to the selection process. This study analyzed 5,494 students' responses on questionnaires that included information on 1) ethnicity: (African American 580, Asian American 948, European American 3,142 and Latino students 860), 2) belonging (friendship nominations, 3) efficacy beliefs, 4.) valuing of school, and 5) academic success.
    The authors conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses, using AMOS 4.0 to assess and correlate the 4 measures of belonging among ethnic groups and academic success.
    All 4 measures of the relationship between belonging and academic success were significant but not uniformly so. For example, all measures were pertinent for European-American and Latino students. For African American and Asian-descent samples, relationship

with teachers, school activity involvement and perceived ethnic-based discrimination, but not friendship nominations were relevant. The authors suggest potential variability in perspectives across ethnic groups. The authors conclude that the belonging construct accounted for much of the relationship between student motivation and success across groups, but caution that students experience school in different ways and that further research is needed to tease out these variables and their correlation to academic success.

This study of high school students is useful to school improvement efforts that focus on improving the educational, social, and emotional aspects of schooling across ethnic groups. The authors had designed a model illustrating the relationship of various factors represented in a sense of belonging and conducted the research with hopes that the factors identified would demonstrate mediation with achievement results. Although significance with achievement was not found, this study is interesting in that it concretizes variables and their relationship and uses a methodology that is rigorous and worthy of more investigation.

Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 62*(1), 60-71.

The purpose of this study of 301 students (African American, White /Anglo, and Hispanic) in two urban junior high schools, was to explore the effect of school belonging and friends' values, i.e. peer influence on academic motivation (expectancy of success and reward) and effort.

The researchers found three significant results; 1) many urban adolescents may have a poor sense of school belonging and low school motivation, 2) students who do have a high sense of belonging in school are also more likely to be motivated and academically engaged than those whose sense of belonging is low, and 3) there are both ethnic and gender differences in the pattern of relationships.

The authors elaborate on the psychological processes involved in the interaction of school belonging, motivation, and peer relationships. For example, the authors stated that students who scored high in motivation expressed relatively weak beliefs that they "belonged" in their school, and that they also did not believe that others in the school cared about them or cared if they were successful. They also believed that their friends did not value school success. Given that these are highly motivated students, the authors conclude that a positive school environment can override peer influences.

This is an early exploration into the "belongingness" theory of schooling by a leading researcher in this community of researchers. The insight into students' psychological process would prove useful to schools that strive to create positive, supportive, and sustaining school environments. In addition schools that would like to measure this concept in their students are given the tools and methods to do so.

Johnson, L. S. (2009). School Contexts and Student Belonging: A Mixed Methods Study of an Innovative High School. *School Community Journal, 19*(1), 99-118.

This research compares students' sense of belongingness between two urban high schools, one that is non-traditional and reports that it is structured on the developmental needs of its students, and the other, a traditional school. Both schools are described in some detail in the study. The differences between levels of education of the parents (non-traditional being higher) and percent of free and reduced lunch (traditional school being higher), are reported as "significant on Chi-square analysis, but did not contribute significantly to the differences found in the HLM (hierarchical linear modeling) analysis" (p.105).

Using interviews and surveys of student belongingness and teachers' support, this paper finds that the students who attended the non-traditional school reported a stronger sense of "belongingness" and a sense that teachers were supportive compared to the students in the traditional school.

This study compares and contrasts the differences in schooling and students' perceptions of learning in two very different schools. School leaders, who are interested in studying the effect of non-traditional schooling, may find this study helpful, especially in reading the student responses to the interview questions.

Ma, X. (2003). Sense of belonging to school: Can schools make a difference? *The Journal of Educational Research, 96*(6), 340-349.

This study contributes to the knowledge base on how school climate affects students' sense of belonging by comparing student responses (recorded 7 years prior) between schools in New Brunswick, Canada. (6,883 Grade 6 students in 148 schools and 6,868 Grade 8 students in 92 schools).

Results showed that in Grades 6 and 8, discrepancies in students' sense of belonging were mainly within schools, rather than between schools. At the student level, sense of belonging in both grades was affected more by students' mental and physical conditions and less by their individual and family characteristics. It is explained that students' feelings about themselves were transferred to the school, that is self-esteem was the single most important predictor of their sense of belonging, followed by their health status. At the school level, school climate identified as stress on high academic achievement in Grade 6 and disciplinary climate in Grade 8 was more important than school context in shaping students' sense of belonging.

Since this is an ex-post facto study, it is pertinent to note that the reason for the original collection of data was in response to an escalation of school violence. No mention of interventions or results was noted. The researcher did note that since there were no major changes in schooling over the past 7 years, the data were still relevant to this study. It may be important for educators to note that students respond in different ways at different age levels and

that belongingness is a very individual and personal response, at least in this study of middle school students.

Neel, C. G. O., & Fuligni, A. (2013). A longitudinal study of school belonging and academic motivation across high school. *Child Development*, *84*(2), 678-692.

This longitudinal study examined how individual students' sense of school belonging changes over their high school years and whether or not it is associated with academic achievement and motivation. Students were from 3 schools in Los Angeles and from Latin American, Asian, and European backgrounds (N = 572; age span = 13.94–19.15 years).

The results showed that ninth grade girls' school belonging was higher than boys' but over the course of high school, girls' school belonging declined 6.9%, whereas boys' remained stable. Within-person longitudinal analyses indicated that years in which students had higher school belonging were also years in which they felt that school was more enjoyable and more useful, regardless of their level of achievement. This suggests that a sense of belonging is important to help students maintain high levels of motivation and academic engagement regardless of their actual level of academic achievement.

It maybe assumed from this study that students, who maintained a strong sense of belonging and a high level of motivation regardless of their level of achievement, remained in school. However, this study did not address the dropout issue or attendance.

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(3), 323-367.

In this paper the author presents a review of the literature on belongingness, focusing on studies that implemented qualitative methodologies. The first line of inquiry focused on belongingness as an individual psychological need, and studies that illuminate how important this need is and how it manifests itself in a school setting were chosen. The second line of inquiry addresses students' experience of belongingness in schools, e.g. to what extent are students' needs for belongingness addressed in the organizational context of schooling and in what ways do schools influence the development of students' sense of community?

The findings reported in this review are comprehensive and complex, dealing with not only individual psychological needs of students but also interpersonal and social relationships, school practices and academic achievement. She argues that community building in schools needs to be on the front burner of research and school improvement practices, especially since schools adopt organizational practices that neglect and may actually undermine students' experience of membership in a supportive community.

High schools that want a deep understanding of the relationship between community and the emotional, social, and cognitive well being of students, will benefit from this review.

Uwah, C., McMahon, H., & Furlow, C. (2008). School belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy among African American male high school students: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 11*(5), 296-305.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceptions of school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations among a sample African American male high school students.

The participants were from a small, predominately (95.62%) African American high school in a large Southeastern city. The school, which was in its second year of operation at the time of the research study, was designed to maintain a smaller student body and has as one of its goals to foster a sense of community. Approximately 80% of the student body received free or reduced lunch. Of the 70 African American males enrolled in the 9th and 10th grade, 40 completed the research packet, resulting in a 62% response rate.

Participants completed a demographic survey, a survey to assess their sense of belongingness, and an Academic Self-Efficacy scale.

This researcher found that although participants valued being liked by others, those feelings do not positively influence participants' academic self-efficacy. It appears that since academic self-efficacy plays an important role in achievement, efforts should be made to provide specific, direct, and authentic interactions with students by members of the school community who believe and communicate to the students that they can perform at a high level.

This article in combination with Johnson's study comparing traditional and non-traditional schools with African American students, and Osterman's review (above) provide some insight into what this kind of secondary schooling may look like.