Promoting School Connectedness: Planning and Evaluating Practice in Educational Settings

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Declaration

This thesis is being submitted for the award of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. I declare that this work is my own and has not been previously submitted for any other purpose. I have acknowledged where material used is the work of others.

Overarching Abstract

This thesis explores school connectedness and ways in which this might be promoted. It contains four chapters: a systematic literature review, a critical consideration of research methodology and ethics, an empirical research project and a reflexive chapter, which considers the personal and professional implications of the thesis.

Chapter 1: The systematic literature review explores the features of wider-school initiatives which have been suggested to promote school connectedness. Thematic synthesis was used to analyse five key papers, following a detailed process of searching and selecting. The features were grouped into three analytical themes: Practical Features, Features of the Relational Climate and Process Features. A theoretical framework about how school connectedness could be promoted was developed from the findings. This could be argued to begin to address comments within the literature about a research-practice gap in this area.

Chapter 2: This chapter includes the rationale for the empirical research question following the systematic literature review. It also details how and why particular decisions were made about the research focus and design. Ethical considerations and the importance of reflexivity within this context are also explored.

Chapter 3: The empirical report explores the relationship between school connectedness and staff and students eating lunch together. The project was undertaken in an Alternative Provision setting, where this practice was already in place. A qualitative approach to the research project was adopted. A focus group with staff members and two dyadic interviews with students were transcribed and analysed using a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive Thematic Analysis. The data was analysed using the findings of the Systematic Literature Review, which were constructed to form a theoretical framework about how school connectedness might be promoted. Findings are discussed with regards to the relationship between school connectedness and staff and students eating together. The use of the theoretical framework to evaluate practice and explore how school connectedness might be promoted is also discussed.

Chapter 4: This chapter provides a reflective account about the research process and outcomes. It allows a space for consideration about what has changed for me as a result of engaging in this project and how this might shape my future practice and research. It also summarises the implications for further research and wider practice.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Wider-School Initiatives and School Connectedness

What are the Features of Wider-School Initiatives that have been suggested to Promote School Connectedness for Children and Young People?

Abstract

The present review reports on features of initiatives which have been suggested to promote school connectedness. School connectedness has been associated with a range of positive outcomes for children and young people. To address the question, literature about terminology and what works in promoting school connectedness is reviewed. The processes of searching, selecting and synthesising are described. Thematic synthesis was used to analyse five papers, following a detailed process of searching and selecting. The features of wider-school initiatives which have been suggested to promote school connectedness are grouped into three analytical themes: Practical Features, Features of the Relational Climate and Process Features. These are contextualised within the wider literature. These findings provide some guidance on how school connectedness might be promoted. They could be used to design initiatives, highlight areas to consider when promoting school connectedness and evaluate practices already in place.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Context and Rationale for the Review

Literature suggests that for children and young people (CYP) to thrive socially, achieve positive emotional wellbeing and learn well, they need to feel they belong and are connected to school (Allen & Kern, 2017; Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009). It could be reasoned, therefore, that promoting school connectedness (SC) should take precedence over almost all other concerns. Allen and Bowles (2013) suggested school belonging (SB) has been given less attention than academic success, despite it being found to play a key role in determining academic outcomes (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005).

It has been argued that positive action is necessary for schools to promote SB (Allen, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2018). This has relevance to the current context in which education providers are being encouraged to take whole-school approaches to wellbeing (Public Health England, 2015). The British Psychological Society (BPS; 2020) recently argued that supporting SC following the potential effects of national lockdowns should be prioritised in schools. I chose to explore SC further as Educational Psychologists (EPs) work with evidence-based practice and could become involved systemically in schools and Local Authorities to support planning and promote SC (Roffey, 2013).

This section will grapple with terminology, explore relevant literature, then conclude with the review question and aims.

1.1.2 Terminology

Although there appears to be a general consensus regarding the importance of SC and SB, the complexity behind these constructs becomes apparent when reviewing the literature (Gowing & Jackson, 2018).

Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, and Collier's definition of belonging referred to an experience of being involved, which leads to feelings of being part of an environment (1992, p. 172). Goodenow (1993, p. 80) defined SB as 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment'. These definitions appear to reinforce the view that SB is a subjective experience (Anderman, 2003), which might make it challenging to define (Shaw, 2019).

The concept of SC has been argued to possess 'chameleon-like characteristics', taking on different forms over time (Whitlock, 2006, p. 14). Libbey (2004) suggested SC can have different meanings depending on who is using the phrase. SC is widely referred to as something which occurs in the interactions between individuals and their social ecologies (Rowe & Stewart, 2011; Waters et al., 2009). Students have explained their connection to school as experienced through relational, learning and extracurricular opportunities (Gowing & Jackson, 2018).

SB and SC appear to be used most interchangeably; the links between them have been argued to be particularly complex (García-Moya, Bunn, Jiménez-Iglesias, Paniagua, & Brooks, 2019). García-Moya et al. (2019) proposed that they appear very close in meaning and may even be seen as synonyms.

For this review, I define SC as 'a student's relationship with school which is a multi-dimensional, relational and reciprocal process and a function of dynamic interactions between individuals within their social and ecological contexts' (drawing on definitions from Gowing & Jackson (2018) and Whitlock (2006)). I have conceptualised SB as being a part of SC (Libbey, 2004; McKenzie & Smead, 2018) and define SB as a subjective feeling or perception about personal involvement in a social environment (Hagerty et al., 1992). While referring to SC throughout, this review includes literature that uses other terms (mostly SB). Occasionally, I will refer to the language used by authors which might not reflect my conceptualisations of the terms.

1.1.3 Why is SC Important?

Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, Shochet, and Romaniuk (2011) suggested that despite a range of terminology used, research has highlighted relationships between SC and key outcomes.

Associations have been made between SC and concepts which might enhance academic success. For example, significant positive associations have been found between levels of SC and feelings of safety in school (Ethier, Harper, & Dittus, 2018). This suggests that SC might enhance readiness to learn, which could indirectly explain links found between SC and academic achievement (Nasir, Jones, & McLaughlin, 2011; Waters et al., 2009).

Research shows psychological benefits that arise from SC and SB, including enhanced self-esteem (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Pre-eminence of constructs and outcomes appears difficult to distinguish, as Roffey and Boyle (2018) argue that much

like Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (2005), relationships within school are bi-directional: SC influences psychological factors and vice versa.

A sense of belonging has been argued to be a prerequisite for creating a community (Allen & Kern, 2017) and Booth and Ainscow (2002) recognised building community as a distinctive feature of inclusion. Warnock and Norwich (2005, p. 15) argued that the concept of inclusion must involve a sense of belonging. Considering this alongside the rich links between connectedness and community (McKenzie & Smead, 2018; Osterman, 2000), promoting SC appears key to inclusion (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007).

1.1.4 Promoting SC

Allen and Kern (2017) argued SC does not easily happen; it must be encouraged through approaches which develop climates wherein CYP can develop relationships with others. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC; 2009) reported that four factors can increase SC: adult support, belonging to a positive peer group, commitment to education and school environment. Other consistent themes have appeared across the literature, such as involvement in extra-curricular activities (Libbey, 2004; Whitlock, 2006).

In Allen and Kern's (2017) review of studies into SB and SC, teacher support was found to have the strongest impact on SB; students felt more connected to school when they felt their teachers cared about them and supported them. This relates to the Wingspread Declaration for School Connections (2004, p. 233) statement that 'positive adult-student relationships' are a 'critical requirement' for SC. Literature indicates reminding students how much they are valued, being willing to provide time, support and building rapport appear to enhance SC (Anderson, Kerr-Roubicek, & Rowling, 2006; Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, & Shochet, 2014).

Peer relationships also appear to influence SC (Coker, Martinez, McMahon, Cohen, & Thapa, 2018). Blum, McNeely, and Rinehart (2002) found the more friendships students reported having from different social groups, the higher their SC. Similarly, Craggs and Kelly's meta-synthesis (2018) highlighted that positive peer interactions alongside acceptance of individual identity appear key to developing SB. These findings support Roffey's (2013) concept of inclusive belonging - belonging regardless of in-group membership.

4

Allen and Kern (2017) used the results of their review to create a multi-level framework of SB which included the factors mentioned above, for example, social factors included peer, teacher and parent support. They identified strategies which could support SB through targeting the salient themes within their model, for example, using cooperative learning to promote peer support and maintaining regular form groups to promote teacher support.

1.1.5 Review Question and Outline

Despite a growing body of literature on this topic, it has been argued that the focus is mainly on outcomes of SC and there is less emphasis on interventions aimed specifically at promoting SC (Andersen, Rønningen, & Løhre, 2019; Leonard, 2016). Allen and Kern (2017, p. 21) argued there is a research-practice gap, suggesting that this might be because 'there is no clear guidance on the best approaches' for promoting SB. They began to address this, providing practical guidance for schools following a quantitative review. Still, there appears to be a lack of research exploring what it is about existing initiatives that might affect SC.

Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, and Shochet (2013) reviewed literature on programs targeted at increasing SC to reduce risk-taking behaviour. They acknowledged that their review revealed limited evaluations on the program features that might be most effective at increasing SC (such as target age group). It could be argued that qualitative data would be helpful, to identify some of the common features of initiatives suggested to promote SC, to develop further understanding about practical strategies schools could adopt.

Research exploring how individuals conceptualise SC and how they believe it to be promoted provides a starting point for developing early intervention opportunities (Allen & Boyle, 2018). This review aims to move beyond this to provide exploration of initiatives already used, identifying features of these and exploring relationships between them. The review therefore addresses the question:

What are the features of wider-school initiatives that have been suggested to promote school connectedness for CYP?

I chose the language 'wider-school initiatives' as I will explore initiatives that have been used preventatively and more collectively, as opposed to discreet interventions carried out with targeted groups or one class. I chose this because of previous comments about SC and inclusion (Frederickson et al., 2007), Roffey's notion of

inclusive belonging (2013) and governmental guidance on whole-school approaches to wellbeing (Department for Education, 2015).

The aim is to provide further insights into how SC might be fostered using specific initiatives at a wider-school level. This could be used to inform recommendations for new strategies to target SC that build on existing initiatives, which Slaten, Allen, Ferguson, Vella-Brodrick, and Waters (2018) argued would be helpful in future research.

It is hoped this review will provide EPs with evidence to inform practice in schools, perhaps by delivering training on how SC could be fostered for all individuals (Roffey, 2013). Certainly, one of the evidence-based practices for supporting SB identified by Allen et al. (2018) was creating opportunities for teachers to access professional development sessions about the concept.

To answer the review question, I will outline methods taken to select and synthesise research data and explain my justification for this. Stages of the process will be described, and I will present my synthesis of the research. The findings will be contextualised within the literature on SC; limitations and implications will be discussed.

1.2 Method

1.2.1 Searching and Selecting

Searching took place between May 2019 and December 2019. Three electronic databases were searched to identify relevant articles: ERIC, PsycInfo and Scopus. Educational and Child Psychology was searched by hand. Figure 1 shows the search terms. These were developed considering: a wider review of terms used in the literature, the review question and the searching and selecting process.

Review Question
'What are the features of wider-school initiatives that have been suggested to promote school connectedness for children and young people?'

⬇

Search Terms
("child*" or "young people" or "student*" or "pupil*" or "adolescen*" or "teenage*" or "youth") AND ("school connectedness" or "school belonging") AND ("intervention" or "strategy" or "program*" or "approach*" or "method" or "technique" or "initiative")

⬇   ⬇   ⬇

PsycInfo	ERIC	Scopus
374 hits **(233 peer-reviewed)**	*516 hits* **(366 peer-reviewed)**	*239 hits* **(239 peer-reviewed)**

Excluded titles not related to topic area

⬇   ⬇   ⬇

PsycInfo	ERIC	Scopus
97 peer-reviewed articles	**162 peer-reviewed articles**	**81 peer-reviewed articles**

Excluded titles not relevant for review question, excluded duplicates and review articles

⬇

28 peer-reviewed articles

Applied Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (reading some Abstracts, some Full Text)

⬇

8 peer-reviewed articles

Appraised for Quality and Relevance (with key focus on relevance)

⬇

5 peer-reviewed articles

Figure 1 - Flowchart to show Searching and Selecting Process

1.2.2 Applying Inclusion Criteria

After the initial screening of titles and abstracts for relevance to the review question, 28 papers remained. These were assessed according to the criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Inclusion Criteria and Rationale

Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Published, peer-reviewed journal article	Quality control
Published between 2011 and 2019	To ensure the most recent and relevant papers were selected and to ensure I was focusing on papers since a review by Chapman et al. (2013) into school-based programs for increasing connectedness and reducing risk-taking behaviour (the most recent paper in their review was from 2011)
Written in English	Accessibility
Empirical Study (qualitative or quantitative methods)	Considering that the review question focussed on features of initiatives, it became clear that the study methodologies were not a focus for selection in initial screening. In some papers, features of initiatives formed the research findings and in others they were in the main body of text (usually where the research paper focussed on outcomes of an initiative). Assessing for relevance was helpful here (see 1.2.3 Appraising Quality and Relevance).
Initiative involved CYP of primary or secondary school age	Relevance to review question
Initiative implemented at wider school level (with more than one class of CYP) rather than focusing on/targeting one group	To ensure the studies involved proactive initiatives rather than reactive (considering guidance which emphasises the importance of whole-school approaches to wellbeing (Department for Education, 2018) and literature which highlights the importance of promoting SC as a protective factor (Roffey, 2016)
	To ensure studies involving initiatives implemented at transition points only were not included
Initiative was suggested to promote SC or SB as one of key outcomes (initiative found to be effective either through use of quantitative or qualitative measures)	Relevance to review question

1.2.3 Appraising Quality and Relevance

After applying the inclusion criteria, eight papers remained (see Figure 1). Some focussed on the outcomes of an initiative but described the initiative's features in the main body.

Gough (2007) suggested quality and relevance appraisal can help assess what each study contributes towards answering the review question. He argued that a study could be of high quality in design yet provide irrelevant answers for a review question. Considering this, I focused primarily on relevance; a paper was only eliminated from the review if it did not contribute to the review question.

Gough's Weight of Evidence (WoE) tool (2007) and Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, Long and Barnes' (2003) seven dimensions to assess research provided a framework for this process (see Appendix A). A decision-making tool (see Appendix B) was adapted from Harden and Gough (2012) to support in developing criteria for the judgements made. These tools offered some rigour to the process as they provided criteria to base judgements on; however, I acknowledge the subjectivity of these judgements as I made them alone.

Table 2 summarises the judgements made. Three papers were eliminated based on their lack of relevance to this review question. The final papers included in the review were evaluated as relevant in answering the review question and being of at least medium quality research, even though papers were not excluded based on design quality. This process provided an opportunity for me to acquaint myself with the papers through a process of reading and re-reading.

Table 2 - WoE Judgements

Paper	WoE A (Quality of the study)	WoE B (Appropriateness of the study in addressing the review question)	WoE C (Relevance of the study for the review question)	WoE D (Overall judgement)
Dobia, Parade, Roffey and Smith (2019)	High	Medium	High	**High**
Neely, Walton and Stephens (2015)	High	High	High	**High**
Chung-Do et al (2013)	Medium	High	High	**High**

Dunleavy and Burke (2019)	High	Medium	Medium	**Medium**
Rowe and Stewart (2011)	Medium	Medium	Medium	**Medium**
Diebel, Woodcock, Cooper and Brignall (2016)	High	Low	Low	**Medium**
Angus and Hughes (2017)	Low	Low	Low	**Low**
Carney (2019)	Medium	Low	Low	**Low**

1.2.4 Overview of the Key Research Papers

The final five papers were mapped to provide an overview of the studies (see Table 3). All papers claimed the initiative used had some positive impact on connectedness. All studies involved implementation of a specific initiative at a group level and in one study the initiative involved widespread whole-school system change (Rowe & Stewart, 2011). The studies took place in three secondary/high schools, eight primary schools (one of which was an international school) and one specialist provision. Two papers focussed on the outcomes of an initiative, explaining the features in the main body of the text, whereas the others focussed on the process of the initiative, exploring features and perceptions of participants in the findings.

Table 3 - Overview of Papers

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
Understanding Students' Perceptions of a High School Course Designed to Enhance School Connectedness *(Chung-Do et al, 2013)*	- To evaluate a 4-year high school course implemented to enhance students' SC - To identify how the course might impact SC (outcomes) and identify factors important in course effectiveness (features)	- Refers to SC as 'multidimensional construct that includes behavioural (e.g. participation in activities and attendance), affective (e.g. students' sense of belonging to the school and feelings toward their relationships to peers and teachers) and cognitive (e.g. how much students value learning and relevance of schoolwork for future	- High School in Hawaii – school has primarily Asian and Pacific Islander student body - Students participated in initiative from Freshman to Senior Year (ages 14 to 18)	Universal program called Personal Transition Plan/Leadership (PTP/L) with aims to: - Prepare students for post-secondary education and/or career plans - Enhance students' sense of SC Weekly lessons throughout the year (in small classes of about 10-13 students)	- Focus groups developed between teachers and University staff (semi-structured guide to examine school connectedness as a construct) - 67 students in focus groups (mixed age and conducted a chi-square test which showed that the sample was statistically similar to student body)	- Students recognised course as valuable opportunity to build personal relationships essential to their sense of SC - Viewed teachers as playing an essential role in this – most reported that they had developed a close relationship with their PTP/L teacher - Mixed outcomes for sense of

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
		endeavours) components' - Links to Social Control Theory, Attachment Theory and Social Development Model		Classroom teachers, school counsellors and administrators also teach the course	- Themed discussions	connectedness to peers - Increased academic motivation
Social and emotional learning: From individual skills to class cohesion *Dobia et al (2019)*	- To evaluate the impact and process of introducing Circle Solutions in six primary schools: impact on belonging and inclusion	- Refers to belonging 'through participation as a valued member of the group' as well as 'inclusive belonging' - Refers to children's sense of connectedness and relational	- Initiative took place in six UK primary schools with all pupils in Years 5 and 6 (157) - Schools were identified by EP working in the area – who was trained in Circle Solutions	Circle Solutions: - Focus is on learning together (collective focus), discussing feelings and views that might affect how individuals behave, while fostering an inclusive climate	Mixed methods design: - 157 children completed California Healthy Kids Survey and two open-ended questions (pre- and post-initiative) - Teachers completed Teacher	Quantitative data showed no statistically significant differences Qualitative data indicated staff and students' sense of connectedness increased

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
		classroom climates		- Approach aims to directly enhance belonging - Underpinned by principles: agency, safety, positivity, inclusion, respect and equity. - Teachers trained in Circle Solutions - Ran intervention once a week (30-45 minutes) for up to six months	Attitudes to Social and Emotional Learning Survey (with qualitative component) prior to initiative and 4 completed following initiative - Post-initiative, one in-depth interview held with a teacher and four focus group interviews with pupils - SPSS used for quantitative and Content Analysis for qualitative data	Children's responses indicated initiative: - increased inclusiveness and valuing of others -developed emotional awareness and enhanced positive sense of self - stimulated engagement Teacher responses suggested: - increased sense of efficacy for teaching social and emotional skills - improvements in teacher-student relationships as

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
						well as in student confidence, peer relationships, empathy, kindness and student engagement
Fostering a sense of belonging at an international school in France: An experimental study *Dunleavy and Burke (2019)*	- To examine the impact of a classroom-based, peer intervention to enhance students' sense of belonging	- Define sense of belonging as 'a multi-faceted construct that incorporates: (i) subjectivity; (ii) groundedness; (iii) reciprocity; (iv) dynamism; and (v) self-determination (Maher, 2013) - Define SB using Goodenow's (1993) definition and refer to SB building a shared identity	- International school in France (children of 30 nationalities) - 55 fourth and fifth grade students (aged 9-11)	- Intervention created following a review exploring belonging and what supports a sense of connection with others (Maher, 2013) - Experimental group participated in four classes - Included activities: 'Someone Like Me', 'Find Me	- Data collected from experimental and control group before, immediately after the intervention and a month later - Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale used to measure students' sense of belonging and Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS)	- Statistically significant increase in mean values for both PSSM scale and MSLSS measure

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
				Out', 'Values Bingo'	to evaluate life satisfaction	
Building school connectedness through shared lunches *Neely, Walton and Stephens (2015)*	- To explore the promotion of school connectedness through the practice of shared lunches - RQs about whether and how shared lunches impact on SC	- Refer to both SC and sense of belonging - SC as 'the quality of social relationships within a school community' characterised by commitment, involvement and attachment' (Resnick et al., 1997; Rowe & Stewart, 2009) - Take ecological perspective – acknowledges interaction between different	- A large, urban girls' secondary school in New Zealand - Year 13 girls (5 classes, 16-18 year-old students) but some of the shared lunches included different years and other classes	- Shared lunches (meals) happened at different occasions: beginning or end of term, birthday, farewell celebrations, finishing off a learning unit or tied into curriculum content (most happened in school lessons with some during lunch break or before school) - Most organised in 'potluck' way,	- Ethnographic methodology used to explore mechanisms by which food practices include indicators of SC - Fieldwork carried out over a full school year - Interviews (focus on perspectives of participants' views on shared lunches) and observations (of food events) with teachers and students	Six key mechanisms by which shared lunches fostered connectedness (contributed to increased social interactions, getting to know people better, establish and strengthen relationships): - showing common humanity - creating an informal setting - encouraging sharing - enabling inclusive participation

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
		levels of school community		where everyone contributed to the meal that the group ate together - In most cases, teachers joined in and sat with students	- 18 student and 21 teacher interviews (interview guide used) - 600 hours of participant observations carried out	- demonstrating sacrifice for the communal good - facilitating experiences of diversity
Promoting connectedness through whole-school approaches: key elements and pathways of influence *Rowe and Stewart (2011)*	- Examine the influence of a whole-school approach (Health-Promoting School Model) on SC - Analyse the structural and process mechanisms of the health-	- Explain that SC is often used to conceptualise and describe sense of belonging - 'the bonds that individual students develop within school' (Libbey, 2004; Resnick et al., 1997)	- All pupils in three schools in southeast Queensland, Australia (one secondary, one primary and one specialist provision)	- 'Western Gateway Health Promoting School Grant Scheme' – used the Health-Promoting School model to promote SC - All schools involved employed the Health-	- Qualitative case study methodology - 38 interviews (programme co-ordinators, range of staff, parents, studies, health service representatives, community agency workers and parent	- Key elements of model that facilitated interactions: positive, social, celebratory events with no financial cost, as well as informal gatherings or events that involved food where individuals could learn about each other

Journal Article	Aims	Concept Definitions	Information about Participants of Initiative and Context	Details and Focus of Initiative Used	Design and Data Collection	Reported Outcomes of Initiative (where included)
	promoting schools model (exploring the key elements and pathways that influence SC)	- Highlights links to cohesiveness between diverse groups and social capital		Promoting School model (involves whole-school and class-based activities, aspects and structures)	liaison officer), 12 focus groups with students, 16 informal interviews with students, observations and documentary evidence (e.g. school progress reports) - Used Thematic Analysis and a conceptual framework to theme and categorise the data in order to build a theoretical model	- Also supported by informal teaching, reinforcement, adequate time for relationships to develop and being embedded within whole-school orientation - Mechanisms that influenced SC included knowing others, mutual reciprocity and perceptions of value

1.2.5 Synthesis

Synthesis has been described as the point at which primary data is analysed to create a 'connected whole' (Thomas, Harden, & Newman, 2013, p. 180). A Thematic Synthesis approach (Harden & Thomas, 2008) was used to analyse the content of the papers relevant to the review question. This involved coding data line-by-line, developing descriptive themes (steps 1 and 2) and interpreting these to create analytical themes (step 3). Harden and Thomas (2008) argued this provides a method of synthesising qualitative research to create higher-order themes and 'go beyond' the content of the studies to produce new understandings.

The studies included in this synthesis used a variety of research methods for the purpose of answering their research questions; however, the difference in research methods was irrelevant in terms of answering this review question. The data I took from the studies was not always in the findings: some studies aimed to find out about the outcomes of the initiatives but described the features in other sections of the paper. Lucas, Baird, Arai, Law, and Roberts (2007) suggested methods such as Thematic Synthesis allow conclusions to be drawn based on the shared elements of otherwise diverse studies. These common themes can be used to outline a possible structure for future research (Lucas et al., 2007).

Initially, I read and coded the data line-by-line. Data was considered to be any part of the text which described how the intervention was carried out or what it involved. Codes were generated inductively (Thomas, 2013). I created a bank of codes as I constructed them from the papers. Codes generated were applied to subsequent papers where relevant and any new codes were added to the bank. After coding the final paper, I re-read each one to check whether any new codes applied to data from those read earlier in the process. This was to ensure consistency in coding across papers. Twenty-eight codes were generated. These were grouped according to similarities and differences. Descriptive themes captured the meaning of grouped, similar codes. Fourteen descriptive themes were created, each of which were contributed to by data from two or more of the studies. Table 4 demonstrates an overview the relative contribution of the six studies to the themes.

Table 4 - Contributions of each Paper to Descriptive Themes

Theme	Research Paper					Number of Papers Contributing to this Theme
	Chung-Do et al (2013)	Dobia, Parada, Roffey and Smith (2019)	Dunleavy and Burke (2019)	Neely, Walton and Stephens (2015)	Rowe and Stewart (2011)	
Students sharing personal stories/feelings/values	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Staff sharing personal stories	✓			✓		2
Finding commonalities and differences		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Reflection	✓	✓	✓			3
Equal, active participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Interaction between students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Interaction between staff and students	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Playfulness		✓	✓		✓	3
Value and acceptance		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Safe space	✓	✓		✓		3
Informal, relaxed environment	✓			✓	✓	3
Clearly structured activities	✓	✓	✓			3
Dedicated lessons or events	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Routine occurrence over time	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Contributions by each Research Paper	11	12	9	11	10	

The next stage involved analysing the relationships between descriptive themes, to create new concepts and understandings (Harden & Thomas, 2008). Descriptive themes were organised into groups, which formed three analytical themes: Practical Features, Features of the Relational Climate and Process Features. A detailed description of the findings from the synthesis is provided in the following section, alongside a thematic map to illustrate the themes (Figure 2).

1.3 Findings and Discussion

This section explores the themes constructed through the Thematic Synthesis. These describe the features of wider-school initiatives which have been suggested to promote SC. Figure 2 presents the descriptive themes, organised into analytical themes.

Themes grouped as 'Practical Features' were created from codes referring to details about the logistics of the initiative, such as how often activities took place. 'Features of the Relational Climate' refers to themes which describe subjective perceptions or planned expectations about the environment in which the activities took place. 'Process Features' refers to what the activities involved, either as planned elements or as retrospective reflection.
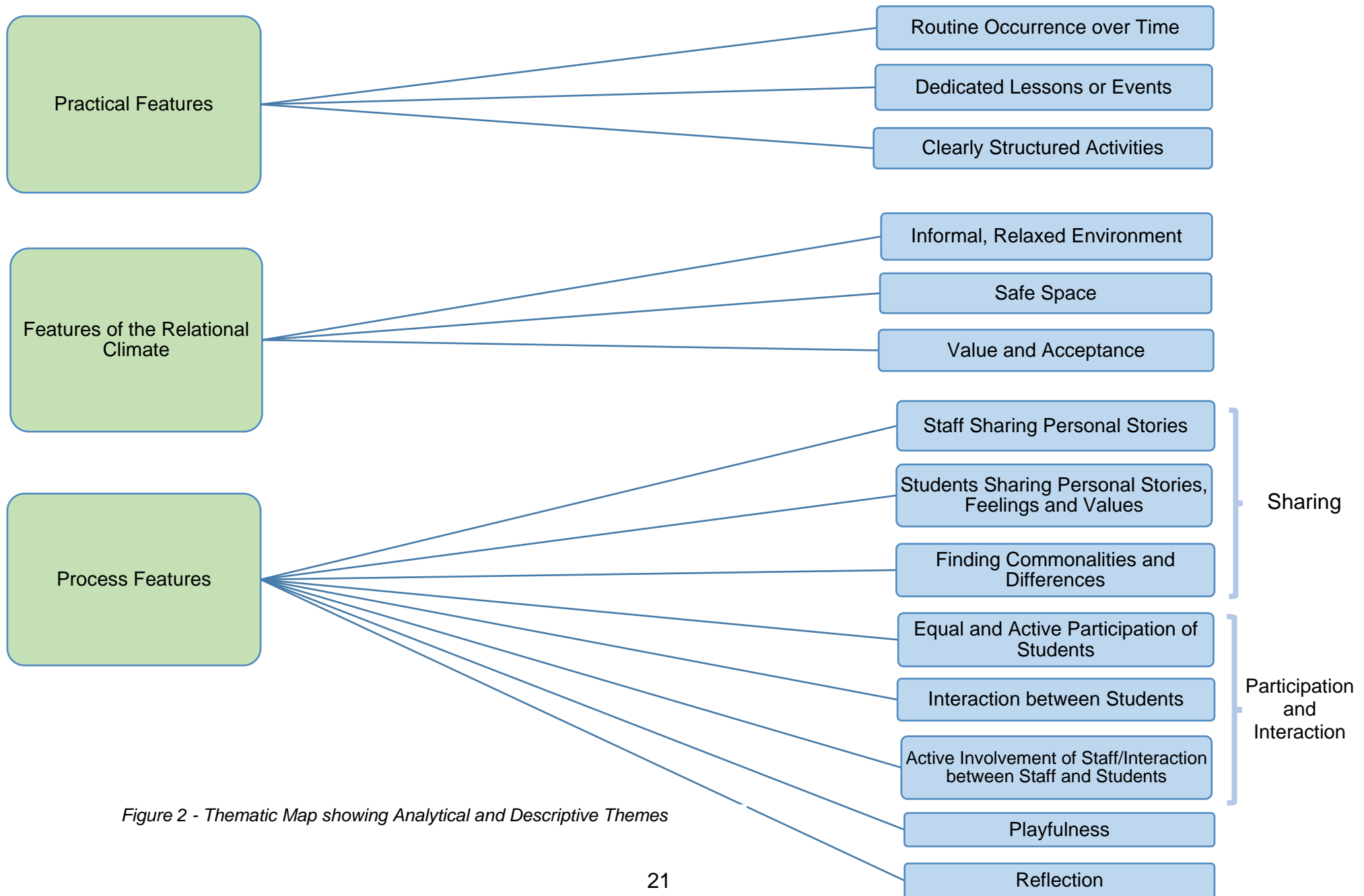
Figure 2 - Thematic Map showing Analytical and Descriptive Themes

1.3.1 Practical Features

Three descriptive themes were grouped as practical features of the initiatives.

Dedicated Lessons or Events

All initiatives described in the papers involved dedicated lessons or events. Some were timetabled weekly (Chung-Do et al., 2013; Dobia, Parada, Roffey, & Smith, 2019) whereas others were carried out less routinely. In Neely, Walton and Stephen's (2015, p. 554) paper, staff and students were involved in shared lunches, which were defined as 'non-habitual, organised events', indicating that although they were dedicated sessions, they were not formally timetabled. These shared lunches were often for celebrations such as birthdays or were carried out during or at the end of a curriculum topic. In most cases, teachers were part of the shared meal with students, with these events happening during lessons, lunch breaks or before school. In New Zealand, where the study was carried out, students typically bring their lunches from home, and in the study, everyone usually contributed to the meal. Occasionally, teachers or the school provided the food.

Routine Occurrence over Time

In all but one of the papers, the initiatives lasted over time, rather than being a 'one-off' occurrence in school. The initiative in Dunleavy and Burke's (2019) paper, which had been created following a literature review about establishing connectedness, took place over a shorter period of time than the others. It involved four lessons, after which Dunleavy and Burke (2019) measured the impact of the initiative on SC. Other papers took place over longer periods of time, with some being part of school routine for many years (Chung-Do et al., 2013; Rowe & Stewart, 2011). In Chung-Do et al.'s (2013) study, the initiative was a weekly course, where students returned to the same staff member and classmates throughout their time at school. The aim was to strengthen positive relationships with other students and one key adult in school over time. This relates to one of Allen and Kern's (2017) identified strategies which could be used to support SB: maintaining regular form groups to promote teacher support.

Structured Activities

Three of the initiatives involved structured activities; however, only one provided detailed descriptions of what these activities specifically entailed (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019). A possible explanation for this could be that the outlined aims of the other

papers was not to discuss the features of the initiative but to measure the outcomes of them. This meant that the focus of the paper was on detailing the measures used and outcomes rather than the specifics of activities. This has implications regarding replicability: perhaps the focus on outcomes provides evidence for the usefulness of the initiative but without detailed description of the initiative itself, future replication or implementation might prove challenging.

<u>Summary of Practical Features</u>

The practical features constructed from this review might provide some further guidance on approaches to promote SC. Most initiatives in the review papers appeared to be continuous over time and involved dedicated lessons or events. This reflects comments that SB does not 'simply happen' and needs to be promoted through strategies in which students can feel supported and develop relationships (Allen & Kern, 2017).

1.3.2 Features of the Relational Climate

This analytical theme includes three descriptive themes which refer to the relational environment in which the activities took place. Existing literature has emphasised the importance of a supportive psychosocial climate for SC (Waters, Cross, & Shaw, 2010) and this analytical theme provides further support for this.

<u>Safety and Informal, Relaxed Environments</u>

Comments were made relating to the initiatives taking place in informal, relaxed environments in three of the papers, with two also referring to safety (either reflections on feelings of safety being promoted or the encouragement of a safe space). In Chung-Do et al.'s (2013, p. 481) study, students reflected on the lessons being a place of safety, describing the staff member as their *"mom"* or the group as *"family".* Students in Neely et al.'s (2015, p. 560) study commented, *"You can just be yourself…".* Teacher comments reflected this, as they suggested that individuals could be more *"natural"* and that the sharing of food *"put everyone at ease"* (2015, p. 559). These papers indicated safety and informality through retrospective reflections, whereas Dobia et al. (2019) referred to safety in the underpinning principles of the Circle Solutions initiative. Training for staff emphasised creating a safe space for the sessions and this was addressed through strategies such as encouraging groups to work together rather than setting individual tasks.

<u>Value and Acceptance</u>

Most prevalent within this analytical theme - across four papers - was 'Value and Acceptance'. This was reflected by data which suggested students were encouraged to value and accept others regardless of difference. In one paper, the final session of the initiative involved students developing a wallchart of their class values and experiences, after sharing these with each other (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019). This was planned to promote acceptance of others' values and experiences. Similarly, one of the principles of the Circle Solutions initiative was 'Respect', which was addressed by encouraging behaviours such as no pre-judgement (Dobia et al., 2019). In Neely et al.'s (2015) study, shared lunches involved experiencing diversity through eating a variety of foods from different cultures and finding out more about customs of students. Neely et al. (2015, p. 563) commented that this provided opportunities for students to 'be more accepting of other ways of being and doing'. This descriptive theme appeared to be both a feature and an outcome of some of these initiatives.

<u>Summary of Features of the Relational Climate</u>

The features of the relational climate appear to relate to previous literature about how SC is defined and how it is promoted. 'Value and Acceptance' links closely to Roffey's (2013) comments about inclusive belonging and students being provided with opportunities to develop SB regardless of 'fit'. Many conceptualisations of SC and SB refer to feelings of being known and accepted as an individual (Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Sancho & Cline, 2012). The initiatives taking place in safe, informal environments relates to previous associations made between perceived safety and SC (Libbey, 2004; Whitlock, 2006) and links to government guidance about school being a safe place in which SB can develop (Department for Education, 2015). It appears that, in these studies, places of safety and informality in which students were encouraged to value each other supported feelings of inclusion and community, as well as enhanced SC.

1.3.3 Process Features

Eight descriptive themes were constructed relating to what happened within the initiatives, either as planned elements or unplanned features identified on reflection.

<u>Sharing</u>

Three of the descriptive themes can be grouped into the concept of 'Sharing' (see Figure 2). Analysis showed that all initiatives involved sharing feelings, values or experiences with others. This sometimes occurred as part of planned activities to find commonalities and differences with others (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019). In Neely et al.'s (2015) paper, this feature of finding commonalities was identified as occurring more organically through the process of sharing food. Staff and students commented on shared lunches being a space in which they recognised their 'common humanity' through eating together (2015, p. 559).

In two papers, staff shared personal stories with students. This appeared to be an unplanned feature and seemed dependent on the member of staff facilitating the lessons (Chung-Do et al., 2013). In Chung-Do et al.'s (2013, p. 481) study, students reflected that when teachers personalised the sessions by sharing their own experiences, the lessons felt more meaningful. One student commented that teachers should *"share more examples from their own lives".* Findings from this study indicated that when teachers saw this initiative as an opportunity to build relationships and share personal stories, the initiative would be more successful in meeting its goals (Chung-Do et al., 2013). This sharing of personal stories might feel like a trivial, insignificant act to adults yet feel meaningful and poignant to students (Whitlock, 2006). In Neely et al.'s (2015, p. 559) study, eating together helped develop relationships as teachers said food helped them to *"break down the professional façade and let out the personal one".* One teacher commented that students asked them more personal questions whilst eating together and they, in turn, felt willing to share stories. No specific links were made between teachers sharing personal stories and SC in either study; however, considering links between SC and building rapport and caring relationships between staff and students (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019), it could be assumed that this feature was helpful in developing relationships and promoting SC.

<u>Participation and Interaction</u>

All initiatives involved encouragement of equal, active participation of all students and interaction between students. The word encouragement is used here as it is unclear if this espoused aim came to fruition in all cases. It is possible that this was a planned hope for all initiatives, yet some students felt they could not participate equally. Nevertheless, analysis of what was reported shows that inclusive participation, in which all students had equal opportunity to take part, was evident in all initiatives.

Some papers refer to 'collective' conversations or experiences (Chung-Do et al., 2013; Neely et al., 2015) while others highlight the importance of teamwork (Rowe & Stewart, 2011). In Circle Solutions, activities usually occurred in pairs, small or larger groups. Students were also mixed up regularly, with the aim of them getting to know different children. This might support the development of SC as the more friendships students report having from different groups, the higher their SC (Blum et al., 2002).

Four out of the five papers referred to interaction between staff and students or the involvement of staff in activities. In Circle Solutions, members of staff were encouraged to engage in all activities with the students (Dobia et al., 2019). The strongest positive outcome reported by teachers following this initiative was student-teacher relationships. Despite the authors' recognised limitations of low teacher response numbers, this supports comments made previously about using these initiatives as opportunities to build staff-student relationships.

Playfulness

Three of the papers included data which related to playfulness, fun or games. In one, activities were in the form of games to be played together (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019). Dobia et al. (2019) found the theme 'Activities/Games/Fun' was mentioned most by students when asked what they had enjoyed about Circle Solutions. One of the principles of this initiative is 'Positivity' and many of the tasks are planned as games, as this has been found to support engagement and connection (Dobia et al., 2013).

Reflection

Three of the initiatives involved activities which provided opportunity for personal reflection and in two of the three, students commented on the helpfulness of this. In Chung-Do et al.'s (2013) study, lessons encouraged students to consider future aspirations and discuss these with others; participants commented on how useful they had found this dedicated time. Dobia et al. (2019) commented that Circle Solutions encompassed activities which supported reflection and one of the themes generated from student responses about what they had enjoyed was named 'Personal Insights'.

This descriptive theme links closely to the themes outlined in the 'Sharing' sub-group, as this time for reflection formed part of a collective experience in which students shared values and feelings with others.

Summary of Process Features

The features within this analytical theme relate to previous literature about relationship-building and SC, both between students and between staff and students (Allen & Kern, 2017; Anderson et al., 2006). All initiatives involved interaction between students and sharing of personal values, stories and feelings. These interactions provided opportunity to find out more about others and they could be argued to develop social capital and SC within the setting (Roffey, 2013). The prominence of these features in the initiatives, in particular 'Equal and Active Participation', implies a mutuality between students (and sometimes students and staff) which relates to Whitlock's (2006, p. 15) comments as connectedness being reciprocated and received. These process features all involve some form of interaction with others. This gives support to the notion that SC is a relational construct, which can be developed through opportunities for connection (Gowing & Jackson, 2018).

1.4 Overall Summary of Findings and Implications for Practice

The findings show that the features of these initiatives can be grouped into three analytical themes: Practical Features, Features of the Relational Climate and Process Features. The initiatives appeared to involve interaction, sharing and finding out about others in a safe, informal environment where all were encouraged to value and accept differences. In most cases, this happened during a dedicated time and space for developing SC. In some cases, members of staff actively took part in the initiative, sometimes sharing personal stories. This differed both between initiatives and within initiatives. From the papers selected, it is not possible to know the impact of wider contexts on SC and the conceptualisation of SC as multi-faceted and dynamic is important to bear in mind. Despite this, support for the review's findings comes from conceptualisations of SC discussed earlier as well as literature and guidance about how SC can be promoted. They provide a framework showing possible features of environments in which SC was suggested to be promoted. This further strengthens the potential use of the review's findings for the implications below.

The findings could be argued to further address Allen and Kern's (2017) comments about a research-practice gap in this area. They begin to provide some clearer guidance on approaches to promote SC, by building on what works in what is already being done. This approach could arguably move the literature forwards in this field, taking it further from the knowledge and understanding of SC to provide more practical guidance on how to promote it. As set out in the review's aims, the features discussed

could be used to design and inform new strategies to promote SC (Slaten et al., 2018). At this stage, they are intended to highlight areas for consideration when implementing initiatives to promote SC, rather than to generate a prescriptive framework. They could provide EPs with evidence to inform practice at various levels within settings, perhaps through advocating the importance of SC and making recommendations about effective ways to promote SC (Allen et al., 2018; Roffey, 2013).

1.5 Limitations of this Review

It is important to acknowledge that a high level of inference was required throughout this review as researching the initiatives' features was not the explicit aim of any the papers. Two of the papers concentrated on outcomes of an initiative whereas the other three focussed on the process. Some data were planned features that were outlined in the main body of the text and some were retrospective reflections of features, taken from the findings. This meant I drew data from different parts of each paper and features were sometimes not explicitly or fully described. This means it is necessary to exercise caution with the findings of the review; however, I would argue that this level of inference helped in extending the synthesis beyond the original papers.

As I conducted this as a single researcher, I acknowledge that identified findings might have been affected by my assumptions and beliefs about this topic area. It is possible that others might have generated different interpretations due to different judgements. To account for this, I have been transparent about the process and provided details about the steps taken to select papers and synthesise data.

Finally, although all studies suggested the initiative had a positive impact on SC, there was not always clarity about what features contributed to these outcomes. This reflects limitations of previous reviews in this field (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). This review provides an overall picture of the initiatives' features; however, the relationships between these features and their effects on outcomes were not the focus here. Many of the features identified were present across most of the initiatives and all the initiatives were suggested to promote SC. Thus, it can be cautiously assumed that, much like the concept of SC itself, these features interacted in a dynamic way to promote SC within these cases. This also relates to Gestalt theory, in which the whole is said to be greater than the sum of the parts

(Korb, 1989). It is challenging to distinguish between the features that are more influential than others because of the experience of the 'whole'.

1.6 Conclusions and Future Research

The aims of the review were to move beyond conceptualisations of SC and generate qualitative data to develop further understanding about how SC might be fostered at a wider-school level. The findings provide a framework of features that might promote SC; however, as discussed, these are challenging to unpick and are likely to be interactive and dynamic. Despite this, support for the findings comes from literature about how SC can be promoted, discussed throughout the review, and they provide a starting point for further investigation to develop practice.

Further research could explore whether and how the identified features are in place in educational settings through the use of other strategies, wider-school initiatives or everyday practices. The findings could be used as a framework to evaluate these practices. Action research could be used to explore how the identified features could be implemented in schools to promote SC. This could involve staff and EPs working together to implement and/or evaluate initiatives using features identified in this review. This could have an overall aim of promoting SC and implementation would be dependent on context and what worked best for a specific setting.

Chapter 2: Critical Considerations of Research Methodology and Ethics

2.1 Aims of the Chapter

The aim of this chapter is to provide further rationale for the decisions I have made during this research process. I drew on Maxwell's (2012) Interactive Model of Research Design to guide decision-making processes and articulate my justification for the decisions I made (see Figure 3). This model has five elements; each one supports thinking and planning about issues that are integral to designing a research study. In the model, the components interact and are integrated (Maxwell, 2012). This resonated with me as decision-making throughout this process has been iterative and was challenging to consider as a linear sequence. I will use the components to structure this chapter, as well as some adapted versions of questions Maxwell (2012) posed for each, to support my thinking and writing.
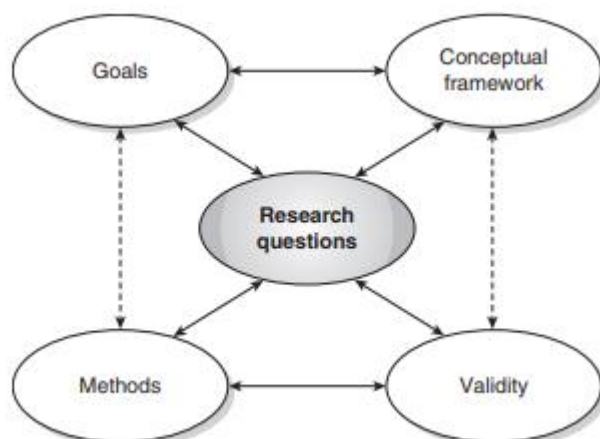
Figure 3 - Maxwell's Interactive Model of Research Design (2012, p. 5)

After summarising the systematic literature review (SLR) findings and introducing the research question to provide initial context, I will explore goals and the conceptual framework, detailing why I chose this particular focus and methodology. This will lead into discussion about the chosen methods and how I strived to ensure validity throughout the process. Ethical matters will then be considered.

2.2 Research Questions – From SLR to Empirical Research

Through the SLR process, I constructed the common features of initiatives that have been suggested to promote school connectedness (SC). It was noted that although there is a wealth of research highlighting positive associations between SC, learning and concepts related to wellbeing, there is a research-practice gap regarding ways in

which SC might be promoted (Allen & Kern, 2017). In the SLR, it was argued that the findings could provide further indication of how SC might be promoted for children and young people (CYP).

One of the key papers analysed in the SLR focused on a setting where staff and students engaged in shared lunches - mealtimes where students ate together usually with staff as part of a celebration or topic - and explored how this could promote SC (Neely et al., 2015). This study was conducted in New Zealand with 16-18 year olds; moreover, Neely et al. (2015) commented that future research could explore whether their observed benefits of shared lunches and the relationship with SC are present in other settings.

The aim of the current empirical research is to add to the emerging literature base regarding practical ways to promote SC. More specifically, it aims to explore the relationship between SC and staff and students' experiences of sharing lunchtimes, by using a theoretical framework developed from the SLR. It is hoped that this will provide insight into how this might affect SC; also, it gives an opportunity for the framework developed in the SLR to be used to evaluate practice.

The research question to be studied is:

How might the experience of staff and students sharing lunchtimes at an Alternative Provision in the North East of England promote School Connectedness?

I believe that a qualitative methodology would be most effective in answering this research question as it aims to explore experiences and their relationship with the concept of SC (Willig, 2013). I will now detail the influences on this focus and the methodology adopted for this project.

2.3 Goals and Conceptual Framework

2.3.1 Why am I doing this? What personal experiences will I draw on?

My initial decision to explore the wider topic of SC came from a long-standing interest which was established during my role as a teacher. The setting I taught at used Cooperative Learning Structures (Kagan, 2009), where children were encouraged to learn collaboratively in teams, and Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2015), which focussed on fostering and maintaining positive relationships within school and class families. I was intrigued by how these initiatives might have affected staff and

students' sense of belonging. My interest developed further whilst writing an assignment on within-class grouping, school belonging (SB) and participation in the first year of doctoral training. Whilst scoping the literature for the SLR, I began to read more about SC and its links with SB.

Both professionally and personally, I value being part of communities, as well as learning and working in collaboration with others. Throughout my day-to-day interactions, I place high importance on developing relationships to promote my own and others' feelings of connectedness. It is likely that this led me to explore this concept and is also likely to have influenced my decision to approach this research using a qualitative methodological paradigm, whereby I can play more of a collaborative role with others in the process. Further to this, I value sharing food and eating with friends and family; it is a way I find I can connect with others, both in familiar relationships and in forming new friendships. This also steered me towards focusing in on this initiative in particular, and its relationship with SC. These reflections provide initial indications of how my values and experience might have influenced this research focus and design.

2.3.2 Why is this worth doing? Why should others care about the results?

SC has been suggested to be critical to wellbeing (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002) and the concept has been linked to relatedness, which is seen as vital for growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although much of the research about this topic explores outcomes of SC and suggests components of environments and relations that appear to enhance SC, researchers have commented there is limited understanding of how SC is already fostered in schools, indicating that future research should focus on developing and evaluating initiatives (Andersen et al., 2019; Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013).

Government guidance argues that schools should be a place of safety where young people can develop a sense of belonging (Department for Education, 2015). At the time of writing, many CYP have not attended school for significant periods of time over the past year, due to COVID-19 national lockdowns. It has been argued that supporting connection on the return to school for all should be prioritised (British Psychological Society, 2020). This suggests that this topic is relevant, now more than ever before, as it aims to provide suggestions about how SC might be promoted and could support the development and evaluation of processes in school to do so.

This research has implications for educational settings, education professionals and CYP. There is also scope for Educational Psychologists' (EPs) roles in working systematically through supporting continuous professional development and the development of practice and policy in educational settings (Roffey, 2013).

2.3.3 What issues do I want to clarify and what do I think is happening? What theories, beliefs and prior research findings will guide or inform my research?

The thematic synthesis in the SLR acknowledged the significance of features of initiatives that were suggested to promote SC. As mentioned, it included a study where the relationship between shared lunches and SC was explored. I noticed that many of the common features of initiatives that promoted SC were prevalent in this paper and I was drawn to this initiative, possibly due to my values mentioned previously. I hoped to explore an initiative that was already in place in school and its relationship with SC, drawing on solution-oriented principles and considering 'what works' (Rees, 2017). This led me to explore whether staff and students eating together as a whole-school approach could promote SC in a UK setting.

Maxwell (2009) argued that a literature review can help generate theory, rather than borrowing theory from others. I planned to use the formulation from the SLR as a theoretical framework which outlined what appears to help in promoting SC. I intended to use this theory to investigate the relationship between the experience of staff and students eating together and SC. I have chosen to use the language 'relationship' when discussing hypotheses as I am conscious it can be challenging to derive any causal explanations from a qualitative study (Maxwell, 2009). Despite this, Maxwell (2004) argued that qualitative methods are increasingly being used for causal inference and this requires thinking more about processes and mechanisms rather than consistencies in relationships between variables .

I aimed to produce knowledge-for-understanding and knowledge-for-action (Wallace & Wray, 2016), as I hoped to understand more about this relationship as well as help improve existing practice to promote SC, rather than simply to outline outcomes of practices (Scriven, 1991).

2.4 Summary of Rationale for Methodological Paradigm

In summary, the thinking articulated in the previous sections influenced my decision to take a qualitative approach. Table 5 summarises this rationale.

Table 5 - Rationale for Methodological Paradigm

This decision was informed by:	Why?
My research question, research goals and conceptual framework (constructed through the SLR process)	• The research question focuses on the experiences of individuals which I believed would be best explored through a qualitative methodology. • The research goal involved the investigation of a qualitative hypothesis about the relationship between staff and students eating together and SC. • The goal was to use the qualitative SLR findings to analyse the data from this empirical research, which I believed would best be achieved using qualitative methodology. • The SLR helped to develop further justification for using qualitative methodology, as it identified a need for further research to explore how SC could be promoted and a focus on processes, rather than outcomes.
Axiology	My values of working with others and being part of situations meant I was drawn to a methodological paradigm in which I could play more of an active part in the research process.
Assumptions	The type of knowledge I was aiming to produce in carrying out the research and the assumptions the project focus makes about what can be known and how it can be known align with a qualitative methodology (Maxwell, 2012; Willig, 2013).

2.5 Method

Maxwell (2012) suggested there are four key elements of qualitative methods; these have been adapted and used to structure this section.

2.5.1 Sampling

Both convenience sampling and purposive sampling were used to recruit participants for data collection (Howitt & Cramer, 2020). To answer the research question, I needed to select a setting where participants would be able to discuss the practice of staff and students eating together. I sent emails to colleagues in the Local Authority where I am on placement, asking if anyone knew of settings where this happened. There were only a few where this practice occurred in the Local Authority that EPs were aware of, one of which was an Alternative Provision (AP) for secondary-aged pupils who had been permanently excluded from mainstream education. Figure 4 shows the process taken to recruit a sample for data collection. Five members of staff and four students provided consent to be part of the study.

Initial Queries within EP Service to find out about appropriate settings for the research	→	Made contact with Senior Leadership Team at an identified setting (AP) after permission given from school to Link EP	→	Initial conversation/sharing of research proposal with Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) at the AP
Decisions about methods made in collaboration with staff	→	Staff recruitment with support from the SENCo (information sheets and consent forms sent to all staff)	→	Support from staff with student recruitment

Figure 4 - Recruitment Process

2.5.2 Data Collection

Figure 5 illustrates how different factors interacted dynamically to inform my decisions about methods. I considered using individual, semi-structured interviews for both staff and students; however, the decision to use a focus group with staff and dyadic interviews with students was informed by:

- **Conversations and working with staff** which highlighted that it might be best to interview students in pairs rather than conducting a focus group with students in this particular setting;
- **Time constraints** and needing to consider what the most effective yet efficient way to collect my data would be;
- **Values** of working with others and valuing dialogue between and with others: playing more of an active role of a moderator in the conversations and focus

groups generating data which is the product of a group situation (Howitt & Cramer, 2020).
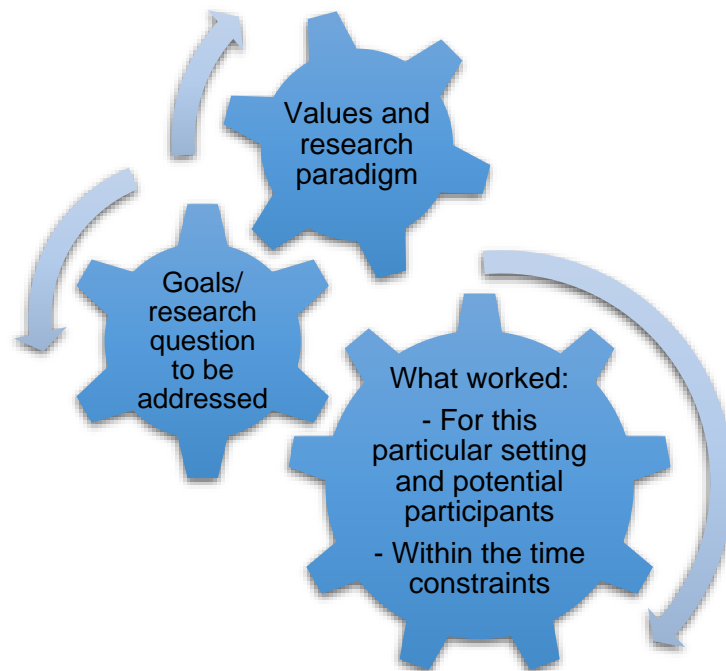
Figure 5 - Values, Pragmatics and Research Aims Interacting Dynamically to Influence Decisions about Methods

2.5.3 Research Relationships

Maxwell (2012) argued that as part of research design, it is crucial to consider the kinds of relationships you plan to have with participants and what you need to do to establish those relationships. I planned to form a relationship and have ongoing contact with a staff member in school who could facilitate recruitment and planning of data collection. Maxwell (2012) commented these relationships are more than just about gatekeeping or gaining access to participants, as they require ongoing negotiation to enable you to ethically carry out your study to answer your research question. This resonated with me as I was in contact with the SENCo at the setting over the course of the project to plan recruitment and data collection in a way that worked best for the setting and the participants.

I built relationships with the SENCo and the participants drawing on the way in which I practice day-to-day. Principles of 'warmth', 'unconditional positive regard' and 'genuineness' help to describe the manner in which I believe I formed and maintained these relationships (Rogers, 1951). I found it helpful to give time to informal conversations when liaising with the SENCo and before the focus group and dyadic

interviews, as I have found this allows for a more relaxed atmosphere to develop. These conversations provided space for finding a shared interest or showing genuine interest, which seemed to help form rapport with participants and allowed for moments of connection and humour.

Data collection was carried out at the AP: the focus group and one dyadic interview took place in classrooms and the other dyadic interview took place in a smaller intervention room. As far as possible, I ensured we were sat in a circular formation. This decision was made after drawing on previous reading about circles encouraging collaboration and equal participation in a non-hierarchical group (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015).

I was conscious not to see these relationships simply as a tool for gaining access to data and remained aware of literature about forming relationships for the purpose of obtaining information (Willig, 2013). I placed value on building connections with these students and staff members to ensure that, as much as possible, everyone felt they had been part of a positive interaction and the relationships had a wider purpose. I recognise that conducting research with young people highlights issues of power relationships (Barbour, 2008) and aimed to compensate for this by initially building rapport with the students and taking a relational approach to these interactions. Despite these efforts, Barbour (2008, p. 94) argues there are some 'defining characteristics of the research relationship that concentrate power in the hands of the researcher rather than the participants'. Remaining aware of this and thinking reflexively throughout the data collection and analysis process was key to ensure rigour.

2.5.4 Data Analysis

I adopted Thematic Analysis as a method because my research questions and goals meant I needed to be able to identify themes and patterns across the data and use the data as a collective whole (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The flexibility this method of analysis offers allowed me to take a hybrid approach of deductive/theoretical and inductive analysis, as this complemented the aims of the research (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Analysis was initially guided by the theoretical framework developed from my SLR.

Thematic Analysis allows for flexibility in its approach to data analysis due to its 'theoretical freedom'; however, Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 78, 84) argued that this

does not mean researchers can 'free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments'. Willig (2013) claimed researchers have to consider these commitments to make research meaningful. This method of analysis encouraged me to spend a significant amount of time considering why I made particular research decisions, which has supported a thorough and rigorous reflexive process. Willig (2013) suggested this is a benefit to the freedom offered by this approach to data analysis.

2.6 Validity

It was important to remain reflexive throughout this process, as I am aware that my axiology and prior experience was likely to influence methodological choices (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reflexivity supports reflection of the assumptions I made during the research project and the implications of this (Willig, 2013). Conducting a literature review, as mentioned, provided me with a theoretical framework that would have influenced my expectations of this project (Maxwell, 2009). As I played a relatively active role in the data collection process, this prior knowledge could have supported or hindered particular topics of conversation. I tried to remain curious as much as possible during my questioning, using open-ended questions to support participant discussion and minimise researcher bias (Maxwell, 2012). Despite this, I understand that the data transcripts were a co-construction of data between me and the participants and I was 'part of the researched world' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 247; Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002). I have been transparent about this in order to ensure rigour and validity throughout this research process. I have also kept a research diary and process notes throughout the research project, which has created a thorough evidential source (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

When recruiting a sample, I searched for a setting where staff and students ate together and selected the sample on the basis that they would be able to provide rich data to analyse. This has implications for my data as Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 59) stated, 'the pond that you fish in determines the fish that you will catch'. This suggests my choice of sample could provide support to my initial hypotheses from the literature review (that there is a relationship to be explored between SC and eating together). It is important to note that my theoretical framework could have also easily been challenged, as I focussed primarily on SC in the SLR, not food practices and

relationships. This meant I was entering into the data collection process with limited prior knowledge about food practices and their relationship with connectedness.

Validity of the research methods will be further discussed in Chapter 3, when considering possible limitations of the study.

2.7 Other Ethical Considerations

The research received ethical approval from Newcastle University and I used ethical codes to make decisions throughout the process (British Psychological Society, 2014, 2018). Validity, transparency and relationships have already been discussed in this chapter; therefore, this section will focus on 'Respect for the Autonomy, Privacy and Dignity of Individuals and Communities' and 'Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm' (British Psychological Society, 2014).

I sought informed, written consent from staff members, parents/carers and young people prior to data collection (see Appendices C, D and E for forms). Before the focus group and dyadic interviews, I reminded the participants about the process of data storage and deletion and asked them if they still consented to be part of the project. Throughout the data collection process, I checked with the participants whether they were comfortable to continue. Viewing consent as a process - not something that is concluded by the completion of a form - was done with the aim of ensuring participants were as comfortable as possible (Renold, Holland, Ross, & Hillman, 2008). Deception was avoided by ensuring participants were aware of the purpose of the research project (Willig, 2013).

During data collection, I reminded participants that there was no obligation to answer any questions. When providing initial information and before data collection, I informed participants of their right to withdraw and explained how they could do so. This information was also provided in the debrief sheet and participants were made aware that they could request for their data to be destroyed up to the point of writing up the study. I also agreed with the participants that I would share the research findings with them at the earliest date possible.

Although the conversation topics were deemed to pose a low risk of harm to participants, I reminded them of who they could talk to if they had any queries or concerns. Debrief information was provided to staff and the young people who were involved in the study with contact details of myself and my supervisor being made available.

I drew on recent GDPR training throughout the research process and when making decisions about how to keep and when to destroy data. I followed Braun and Clarke's methods of transcription (2013) to ensure nothing identifiable was written in the data. Pseudonyms were used for the participants to minimise the risk of their identification and ensure their privacy. I gave the students the option to choose their own pseudonym to ensure they were as much involved in this process as possible (Renold et al., 2008).

2.8 Summary

This chapter has provided an opportunity for me to articulate the thought processes and decisions that lead to my research focus and design. I have considered how theory, literature and values influenced the methodology, methods of data collection and analysis, and have reflected on ethical considerations. The following chapter will detail the empirical research.

Chapter 3: Lunchtimes and School Connectedness in an Alternative Provision Setting

How might the experience of staff and students sharing lunchtimes at an Alternative Provision in the North East of England promote School Connectedness?

Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore the relationship between school connectedness and staff and students sharing lunchtimes. This provided an opportunity for a theoretical framework, outlining how school connectedness might be promoted, to be used to analyse findings. The framework was developed from a systematic literature review. A focus group was conducted with five staff members and semi-structured dyadic interviews were carried out with two pairs of students at an Alternative Provision. Data was analysed using a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive Thematic Analysis and four overarching themes were used to group sub-themes constructed from the data: Process Features, Practical Features, Features of the Relational Climate and Factors to Consider. Possible limitations of the methods are discussed. The findings suggest that in this context, staff and students eating together involves processes and features that could support the promotion of school connectedness. The research provides an example of how practice can be planned and evaluated to promote school connectedness, using a theoretical framework.

3.1 Introduction

In this section, terminology is explored, then salient background literature is considered. The rationale for the empirical research aims is then presented.

3.1.1 Terminology

A variety of terms are referred to in literature about school connectedness (SC), such as belonging and engagement (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003; McKenzie & Smead, 2018). Allen and Kern (2017) identified consistent themes between these related terms: having a place within school, feelings of inclusion, and an emotional attachment to others. There appear to be many similarities between the constructs of SC and school belonging (SB) and García-Moya et al. (2019) suggested they might be seen as synonyms. Both appear to be multi-dimensional, relational constructs that are influenced by many factors (Gowing & Jackson, 2018).

Gowing and Jackson (2018, p. 40) suggested SC is a process that is primarily facilitated through the 'individual's relational experience of school'. Whitlock (2006, p. 15) explained connectedness as reciprocated and received; it could involve the extent to which someone feels cared for at school as well as how much they care about school. Strong relationships are often viewed as integral to SC; peer relations and teacher support appear to be salient constructs relating to this concept (Libbey, 2004).

Allen and Boyle (2018, p. 223) commented that research in this field has suffered due to the many ways in which the constructs have been described. They suggested researchers need to take time to define the constructs they use. I have conceptualised SC as 'a student's relationship with school which is a multi-dimensional, relational and reciprocal process and a function of dynamic interactions between individuals within their social and ecological contexts' (drawing on definitions from Gowing and Jackson, 2018 and Whitlock, 2006). I conceptualise SB as being part of SC (McKenzie & Smead, 2018) and define SB as a 'subjective feeling or perception about personal involvement in a social environment' (Hagerty et al., 1992).

3.1.2 Why is School Connectedness Important and How might this be Understood by Applying Relevant Psychological Theory?

<u>Academic Outcomes</u>

SC has been argued to promote children and young people's (CYP) academic success; many positive associations have been found between SC and outcomes

such as higher grades (Wingspread Conference, 2004). SC has been suggested to support these outcomes through its effect on motivation and self-efficacy (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013). SC has also been found to lower the prevalence of factors not conducive to positive educational outcomes, such as school drop-out (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2008).

Psychological theories of motivation could provide some explanation for the relationships between SC and academic outcomes. One theory suggested to underpin the concept of SC is Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), where feelings of connectedness are described as an essential prerequisite for growth and development (Tillery et al., 2013). In the more recent 'Human Givens' Approach (Tyrell & Griffin, 2013), connection and community are suggested vital for individuals to thrive. Although both vary in terms of their theoretical basis, they could provide some explanation for these findings.

Wellbeing and Resilience

SC has been identified as a protective factor against a range of health risk behaviours and in wider resilience research (Gowing & Jackson, 2016). Having positive, caring relationships in school and feelings of contributing something of value have been argued to serve as resilience factors and promote wellbeing (Roffey, 2016). SC and SB have been positively associated with a range of constructs related to wellbeing, such as hopefulness (Van Ryzin et al., 2009).

It is challenging to identify precursors here and relationships between SC, wellbeing and academic outcomes are complex and likely to be bidirectional (Roffey & Boyle, 2018). Nevertheless, the wealth of literature highlighting the relationships between these concepts emphasise the importance of promoting SC.

It has been suggested that SB and SC are conceptualised as relational phenomena, underpinned by need for attachment and intersubjectivity with others (Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Einberg, Lidell, & Clausson, 2015). This might provide indication of the theoretical basis for SC with regards to wellbeing and support.

Inclusion and Community

Building communities within schools has been argued to be key to inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Roffey (2013, p. 40) discussed a definition of community from a psychological perspective, which involves 'a sense of emotional connection, shared

values and inter-dependence' between members. Moreover, the key elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory, 'Psychological Sense of Community', outline the importance of feelings of relatedness and positive interactions. It could be argued that there are significant links between this theory and the definitions of SC discussed in this chapter. Developing stronger communities through fostering care and promoting SC could therefore be argued important to inclusion (Frederickson et al., 2007).

Putnam's (2000) work on social capital has been argued to have relevance to SC and inclusion, particularly the notion of 'bridging social capital', which involves the promotion of relationships across social groups. Roffey (2013) suggested that for bridging social capital to be promoted in schools, there needs to be a focus on relational values, which could be argued to link closely with literature on SC. Although Putnam's work is not psychological theory, it could provide some explanation for the positive associations noted between SC (as being influenced by a CYP's relational experience of school), learning and wellbeing.

Importance of SC in the Current Context

There has been growing interest in SC, with a recent surge in academic papers on this topic (Allen, Boyle, & Roffey, 2019). There has also been a recent focus on whole-school approaches to emotional wellbeing (Department for Education, 2016). This highlights the importance of SC currently and in this context.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Roffey, Boyle, and Allen (2019, p. 6) commented on the importance of SC for combating the 'loneliness epidemic' in adolescents (Goossens, 2018). This topic is perhaps even more relevant at the time of writing, as CYP have been out of school for significant periods of time over the past year due to COVID-19 restrictions (British Psychological Society, 2020).

Who is School Connectedness Important for and to?

As discussed, SC has been argued to be important for all; however, suggestions have been made about it being particularly critical during adolescence (Anderman, 2003). Due to changing priorities at this time, young people might be more likely to seek support from a non-parental adult (Werner & Smith, 2001) and might have more of a need to be accepted socially by peers (Roffey, 2013)

It has also been suggested that SC and SB are particularly important for marginalised groups and students who might be classified as 'at-risk' for a number of reasons

(Cartmell & Bond, 2015; Ozer, Wolf, & Kong, 2008). Ozer et al. (2008) argued that these connections help CYP to expand their personal resources.

3.1.3 How might School Connectedness be Promoted? Presenting a Theoretical Framework Constructed from the Systematic Literature Review Findings

Responsive teacher-student relationships and having opportunities to develop peer relationships have been argued to promote SC in several studies (Ellerbrock, Kiefer, & Alley, 2014; Gowing, 2019; Ozer et al., 2008). In Gowing and Jackson's (2016) study, staff and students' responses indicated that opportunities for relational experiences across school were vital for promoting SC. Further, Tillery et al. (2013) suggested future research on SC could consider initiatives which provide opportunities for teacher-student relationships to develop.

Much of the research has highlighted the importance of a supportive psychosocial climate for SC (Waters et al., 2010; Wilson, 2004). Greenwood and Kelly (2019, p. 10) reviewed staff perceptions of how a sense of SB is created for pupils. One of the themes constructed was 'a sense of school community'; one staff member commented, 'we try and see this place as a family' (Anderson et al., 2006, p. 10). Further, Sancho and Cline (2012) found that participants linked a sense of SB with feeling known and accepted as an individual by both peers and staff.

The findings from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which explored the features of wider-school initiatives that have been suggested to promote SC, could be argued to provide some further understanding about how SC might be promoted. The synthesis from this SLR was used to develop the theoretical framework shown in Figure 6. The review highlighted patterns in features of initiatives which were suggested to promote SC; therefore, it is plausible to suggest that they might provide some indication about how SC can be promoted.

In the reviewed papers, school connectedness appeared to be promoted…

…when there were opportunities for:
- Staff to share personal stories;
- Students to share personal stories, feelings and values;
- Finding commonalities and differences;
- Equal and active participation;
- Interaction between students;
- Active involvement of staff/interaction between staff and students;
- Playfulness;
- Reflection.

…in a space where:
- An informal and relaxed environment was developed;
- Feelings of safety, value and acceptance of others were encouraged and promoted.

…when initiatives took place:
- Routinely over time;
- As dedicated lessons or events;
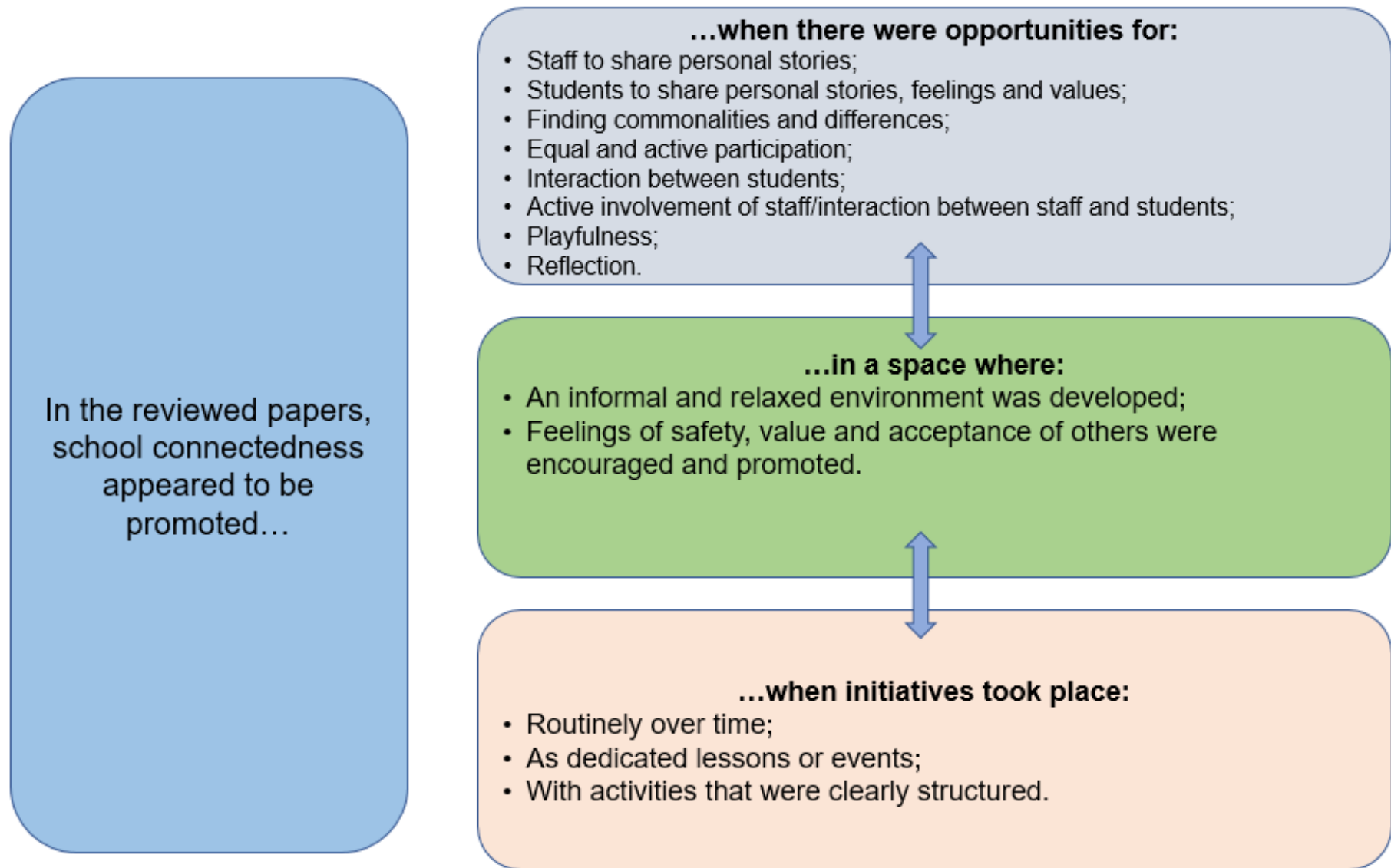- With activities that were clearly structured.

Figure 6 - A Theoretical Framework showing how SC might have been Promoted in the Reviewed Studies from the SLR

3.1.4 Food and School Connectedness

<u>Food, Young People and Relationships</u>

In the field of sociology, mealtimes have been argued to have more meaningful purposes than meeting the physiological need of nourishment (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Delormier, Frohlich, & Potvin, 2009). Keller et al. (2010) suggested that eating together can promote connectedness and provide opportunities for social relationships to be nurtured through psychological participation and mutual support.

For young people, mealtimes can provide opportunities for social interaction such as discussing experiences, expressing care, and practical sharing with others, which can support the development of relationships (Absolom & Roberts, 2011; Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014). Neely et al. (2014, p. 50) analysed qualitative studies that explored young peoples' food practices and found young people use food to 'foster connections, show their agency, and manage relationships'. Food practices were defined as 'any activity in which food is involved, ranging from food preparation, gifting food, sharing meals, or cleaning up' (2014, p. 50). Neely et al. (2014) constructed eight themes to explain the ways in which food practices influenced relationships for young people: caring, talking, sharing, integrating, trusting, reciprocating, negotiating and belonging. In the reviewed studies, eating together provided opportunities for young people to share their feelings and concerns and talk about previous experiences (Absolom & Roberts, 2011; Hunt, Fazio, MacKenzie, & Moloney, 2011).

<u>Food Practices and SC</u>

Many previous studies exploring lunchtimes as a social experience have focused on the influence of the social nature of these experiences on food choices and eating habits (for example, Wills, Backett-Milburn, Gregory, & Lawton, 2005). Janhonen, Mäkelä, and Palojoki (2016) found that students' need to belong affected their behaviours around others and food choices; however, they also highlighted the importance of lunchtimes as a time for developing and maintaining relationships with peers.

One of the key papers selected for the SLR was Neely et al.'s (2015) study, which was conducted in New Zealand with 16-18 year olds. This research project explored the relationship between food practices and SC. Neely et al. (2015, p. 559) found that shared lunches (where staff and students usually ate together as part of celebrations or events) promoted SC through a number of mechanisms, including 'showing

common humanity' and 'creating an informal environment'. Studies have also explored how the 'health-promoting schools' approach, where shared lunches are held with students and staff across school, can promote SC through a focus on food practices (Rowe & Stewart, 2011). Mason (2020, pp. 10-11) explored children's perspectives of social participation during lunchtimes and detailed three themes which demonstrated how this social participation occurred: 'creating social spaces', 'engaging in social interaction', and 'reinforcing/modifying relationships'. These findings all suggest that there is a relationship to be explored between eating together and SC.

Neely et al. (2014; 2015) commented that future research could explore the relationship between SC and food practices in other settings and explore how food acts as a vehicle in social relationships (between students and between staff and students). This supports the aims of the current research project, which are described in the next section.

3.1.5 Research Question, Aims and Outline

The aim of the project was to investigate the relationship between SC and staff and students eating lunch together in an Alternative Provision (AP). This research aims to answer the question:

> ***How might the experience of staff and students sharing lunchtimes at an Alternative Provision in the North East of England promote School Connectedness?***

Researchers in the field have suggested that SC research should seek CYP's accounts of their relationship to school and that staff and student views should be combined to support further understanding about how SC might be promoted (Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Greenwood & Kelly, 2019). This empirical research explored both staff and students' experiences of food practices in school through a focus group and dyadic interviews. It offered an opportunity for a theoretical framework developed from the SLR (see Figure 6) to be used to analyse the data.

This chapter will outline the methods taken to address the research question. The findings will then be discussed and contextualised within the literature shared in this Introduction. Some implications for research and practice will be explored. Limitations will be highlighted and conclusions will be tentatively drawn.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Context and Participants

The research was conducted in an AP in the North East of England. The setting is for secondary aged pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream provisions. At the setting, staff and students eat lunch together. Most staff join the students for lunch as part of their role; however, some staff join as a voluntary lunch duty.

Convenience sampling and purposive sampling were used to recruit participants for data collection (Howitt & Cramer, 2020). A member of the Senior Leadership Team passed information sheets and consent forms to all staff (See Appendix C). Five staff members provided consent to be part of the study. This included two teachers, two teaching assistants and one member of the Senior Leadership Team. One of the staff participants joined lunches voluntarily, whereas the rest had a daily lunch duty as part of their role.

For student recruitment, the SENCo suggested some young people who might be interested in taking part in the research: information sheets and consent forms were passed on to the students and their parent/s/carers (See Appendices D and E). Four students and their parents/carers responded and took part. The student participants were from across Key Stage 3 and 4.

3.2.2 Ethical Considerations

The research was granted full ethical approval from Newcastle University, and it adhered to BPS ethical guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2014, 2018). Informed, written consent was obtained from staff members, parents/carers and young people (see Appendices C, D and E) and participants were notified and reminded of their right to withdraw. Pseudonyms have been used to minimise the risk of participants' identification and protect their privacy.

3.2.3 Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with five members of staff to explore their experiences of lunchtimes. The aim of a focus group is for participants to share their thoughts and experiences on a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 2006). Wilkinson (1998) argued that focus groups involve making collective sense of a topic, through the process of social interaction. Here, the participants were sharing thoughts and

memories about their experiences of lunchtimes at the provision, to support in constructing an overall understanding of these shared experiences. It has been argued that focus groups are helpful for individuals to explore perspectives and experiences of issues that they have previously not thought explicitly about (Barbour, 2008; Morgan, 1997). Staff members commented that they had never had space to consider this topic before; discussion with familiar others appeared to support them in talking about common experiences and sharing memories (Wilkinson, 1998).

Krueger (2015, p. 4) argued that focus groups work best when 'participants feel comfortable, respected, and free to give their opinions without being judged'. I aimed to support participants to feel comfortable by spending time building rapport with them and striving to moderate impartially (Hennink, 2013). My role as moderator also involved encouraging interaction between the group and ensuring that participants interacted with each other rather than just with me (Barbour, 2008). To moderate the discussion in these ways, I applied skills also used in my consultation work as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, such as active listening and using non-verbal cues (Hennink, 2013).

3.2.4 Dyadic Interviews

Dyadic interviews were used to collect data from four student participants. Dyadic interviews involve interaction between two participants, in response to open questions posed by a researcher (Morgan, Eliot, Lowe, & Gorman, 2016). During initial conversations with the setting, it was agreed that dyadic interviews would be the most appropriate method to encourage students' participation whilst ensuring they felt safe and comfortable to share their views. Certainly, Morgan, Ataie, Carder, and Hoffman (2013) suggested that this method promoted feelings of safety and openness for participants in his research, which allowed for richer discussion of topics than he found were discussed in individual interviews.

Mellor, Slaymaker, and Cleland (2013) used dyadic interviews – referred to in their study as 'joint interviews' – to explore people's experiences of living with illness and noted individuals would remind the other about events and memories, which then led to richer story-telling between the two. In this study, both dyads were peers and were from the same Key Stage. Similar to Mellor et al.'s (2013) observations, this appeared to be really helpful in supporting dialogue between the pairs, as comments about shared experiences of memories from one appeared to encourage responses from

another (Morgan et al., 2013). The students often compared their different experiences (Morgan, 1997), which added to a richer picture of the topic.

3.2.5 Context and Guides for Discussions

I met the staff group at the end of a school day; we sat around a large table in a classroom. After spending time conversing informally, we began the discussion, which lasted fifty minutes. I met the student dyads at the setting on a different day, in two different rooms, where we sat in circular arrangements. The dyadic interviews lasted between fifteen and twenty-five minutes.

The questions I used with both the focus group and the dyadic interviews were created applying Krueger's questioning route (2015, p. 47; See Appendix F). Follow-up prompts were planned to encourage individuals to consider specific memories or events which would help illustrate their thoughts. The planned questions acted as a flexible guide, as I was conscious to allow for discussion to be taken in different directions based on the group/dyad dialogue (Morgan, 1997). The guide also supported my role in focusing the discussion back to the topic being studied when necessary during the focus group. With consent, both the focus group and interviews were audio-recorded to allow for the conversation to flow without a need for notetaking.

3.2.6 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using a hybrid approach of theory-driven, deductive and data-driven inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), using Braun and Clarke's checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis to ensure quality and rigour (2006). The process also drew on Braun and Clarke's six-phase process (2006). Figure 7 shows steps taken to analyse the data; however, these steps were not always taken in a linear manner, as I moved recursively through the steps as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A codebook was developed to support the analysis process (see Appendix G). When creating the codebook, I initially defined codes from the theoretical framework developed through the SLR (see Figure 6) and used guidance from DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) and Mihas and Odum Institute (2019). The codebook acted as a working document throughout analysis: codes were revised and any new codes that were constructed from the empirical data were added to the codebook. This

use of a codebook, as well as following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point checklist helped to ensure rigour and integrity (Roberts, Dowell, & Nie, 2019).

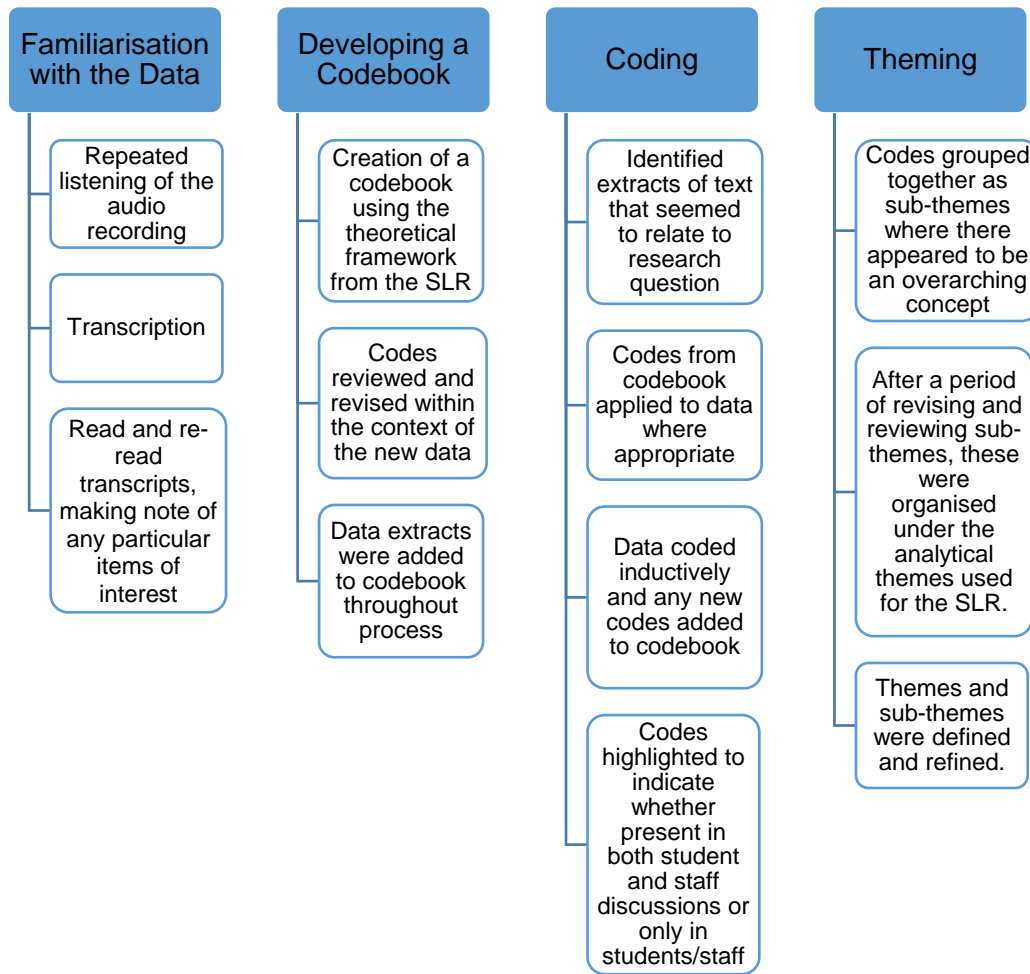| Familiarisation with the Data	Developing a Codebook	Coding	Theming
Repeated listening of the audio recording	Creation of a codebook using the theoretical framework from the SLR	Identified extracts of text that seemed to relate to research question	Codes grouped together as sub-themes where there appeared to be an overarching concept
Transcription	Codes reviewed and revised within the context of the new data	Codes from codebook applied to data where appropriate	After a period of revising and reviewing sub-themes, these were organised under the analytical themes used for the SLR.
Read and re-read transcripts, making note of any particular items of interest	Data extracts were added to codebook throughout process	Data coded inductively and any new codes added to codebook	Themes and sub-themes were defined and refined.
		Codes highlighted to indicate whether present in both student and staff discussions or only in students/staff	

Figure 7 – Data Analysis Processes

Using a deductive approach allowed for a theoretical framework developed from the SLR to be used to explore the relationship between SC and staff and students eating together. It also allowed for additional themes to be developed based on novel findings from the data. This does not mean the process was free from interpretation as I was selecting relevant data based on my prior knowledge and assumptions. Creating a codebook has been suggested to benefit from a 'team effort' and has been described as 'time intensive' (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 151). I recognise that as a solo researcher with time constraints, I was unable to work alongside others to support this process; however, I aimed to follow steps from previous literature to ensure rigour and used the supervision process to support this process.

3.3 Findings and Discussion

The analysis detailed above lead to the sub-themes being grouped into the following themes: Practical Features, Process Features, Features of the Relational Climate and Factors to Consider. These were applied from the analytical themes used for the SLR and they group the ways in which staff and students eating together might promote SC.

Extracts of tables showing the themes and sub-themes with relevant codes and extracts of data can be found in Appendix H and I. The findings will now be outlined, discussed and contextualised within the wider literature.

3.3.1 Practical Features

Sub-themes that were grouped as 'Practical Features' were developed from codes that indicated how the logistics and physical nature of eating together might affect SC. Analysis led to the development of three sub-themes, as shown in Figure 8.
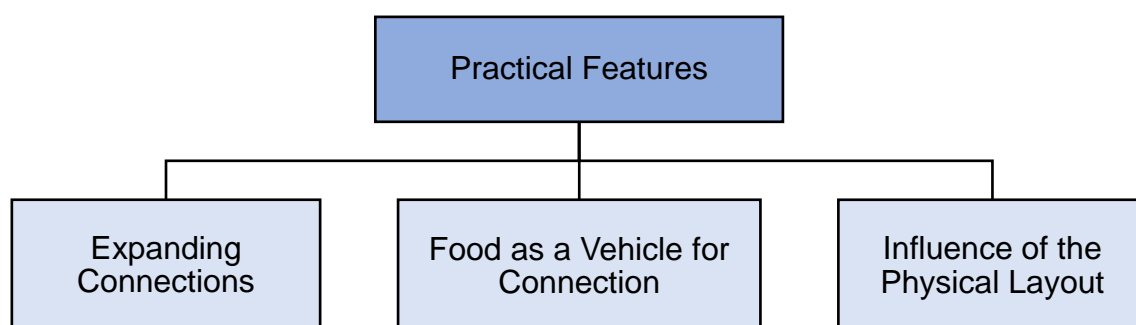

Figure 8 - Thematic Map for Practical Features

<u>Expanding Connections</u>

This sub-theme referred to staff and student comments about having a wider variety of people to talk to at lunchtimes and staff taking the opportunity to talk to different groups of students. Nick seemed to value having the opportunity to talk to different people and his comment also suggests that he has found staff can offer more to the conversation than his peers.

> *Nick (Student): You're not talking to the same people all the time it's like teachers you get to like they've been obviously they've been on Earth longer than us so they've got more stories to tell*

<u>Food as a Vehicle for Connection</u>

Staff spoke of food as a conversation starter and of staff and students taking interest in each other's meals.

> *Erin (Staff): … you know if you and the child are both having the same meal you can say "Oh what do you think of the sausages today?" or "What do you think of the flapjack textures?"*

Influence of the Physical Layout

Participants spoke of the influence of being on the same physical level on relationship-building and conversations with others. There were comments about *"sitting on the same level"* and this influencing the formality of the environment. One staff member appeared to refer to the influence of physically sitting around a table on communication.

> *Tim (Staff): You know whether it's a boardroom business table or right down to you know to this group…you know there's business can be done round the table (.) any communal table…I think it's a powerful tool for them to commune socially like that*

Practical Features: Summary and Discussion

The sub-theme 'Expanding Connections' relates to Mason's (2020) findings that social participation occurred through the reinforcing and modifying of relationships and creation of social spaces during lunchtimes. Considering suggestions that SC is promoted through opportunities to develop relationships with others (Gowing, 2019), it could be reasoned that this opportunity to 'expand connections' could support SC for these CYP. These connections could be argued to support the bridging of social capital and expanding of personal resources, which has been suggested more important for CYP who might be classified as being part of a marginalised group (Cartmell & Bond, 2015; Ozer et al., 2008).

In Neely et al.'s (2015) study, food was also found to be a conversation starter; however, this was in a context where students brought in their own food from home to share with the class. Neely et al. (2015) commented that this prompted conversations about the similar and different ways in which others ate at home or experienced celebrations. Although in the current research, staff and students were often eating the same foods provided by school, this appeared to provide a common experience on which to build conversation (e.g. staff members spoke of rating the food with

students). Again, this opportunity for conversation and relational experience could be argued to promote SC (Gowing & Jackson, 2016).

Considering SC has been conceptualised (in this paper) as a 'reciprocal process', something that is experienced through both giving and receiving (Whitlock, 2006), it could be argued that the physical layout of sitting round a table promotes SC possibly through enhancing feelings of equality and a shared experience. This will be discussed further, as it relates closely to another sub-theme: 'Shared Human Experience'. The sub-theme 'Influence of the Physical Layout' also links to Neely et al.'s (2015) findings that physically sitting around a table to eat altogether was key in promoting a greater sense of belonging for students.

3.3.2 Process Features

Sub-themes that were grouped as 'Process Features' were drawn from codes that referred to actions during lunchtimes which might influence SC. Figure 9 shows the sub-themes for this theme.
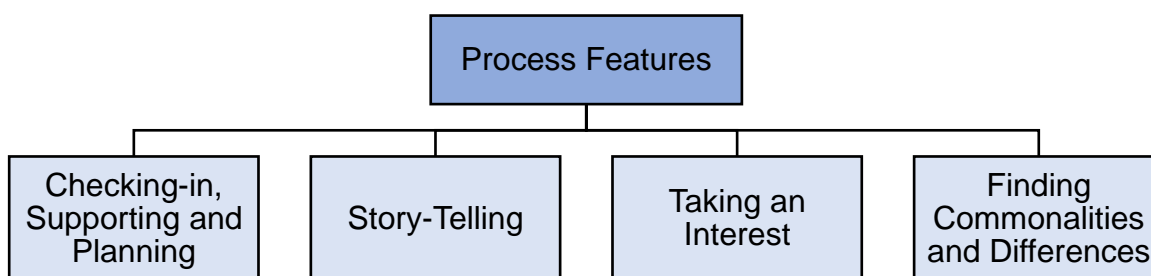
Figure 9 - Thematic Map for Process Features

Checking in, Supporting and Planning

This sub-theme was constructed from data which referred to eating together as providing opportunities for guidance, resolving conflict and planning for next steps. Staff commented on lunchtime providing a space to *"defuse the situation"* after a difficult morning and students commented on staff supporting students who might be having a *"bad day"*.

This sub-theme also related to staff and students' comments about lunchtimes being used as a time to support transitions, often to inform students about the afternoon activities.

Guidance was also a code within this sub-theme, as students discussed how they were supported with concerns and appreciated advice from staff during lunchtime. The interaction between Julius and Chloe below illustrates this.

Julius (Student): … you get a bit of advice as well (.) like one of them little morals like Pinocchio or you know like stuff like that

Chloe (Student): They're more like mentors than teachers like they guide ya (.) like they tell you right from wrong

<u>Storytelling and Taking an Interest</u>

These two sub-themes relate to comments made by staff and students about the sharing of personal stories during lunchtimes and showing an interest in each other by asking questions. The students gave specific examples of stories staff had shared with them during lunchtime and spoke about sharing their own experiences with other students and staff too. The stories often involved talking about their past experiences, families or what they do outside of school.

Callum (Student): They tell w about like what they've been doing their whole life like sports or like Nick said like Sir with his last job and all that

<u>Finding Commonalities and Differences</u>

Students spoke about eating together providing opportunities to find commonalities and differences with each other.

Chloe (Student): It just depends on what the conversations on really so say they were like talkin' about like their dad who's done this and that and I could say well like "Ahh well my cousin's done that"

Staff also spoke of finding ways to relate to the students and discussed this being a vehicle for relationship-building and developing trust and respect between them and the students.

Erin (Staff): …I can get a little bit of on a par you know with them (.) I wouldn't do it in a classroom as such but I might do over the lunchtime (.) Kids I've never got on well with in the classroom…if I sort of talk to them at lunchtime and mention "Ah yes I used to play football all the time" erm I've then I've got a little hook erm…one of the lads didn't want anything to do with my lesson until he found out one lunchtime that I used to play football and now he's coming in "Ohhh Miss,

(mumbling)" very sort of erm you know just a little bit of respect just from mentioning that one thing at a lunchtime

Process Features: Summary and Discussion

These sub-themes appear to relate to actions and experiences which might support the development and maintenance of relationships. At times, it appears unclear whether these experiences are specific to lunchtimes or are more representative of wider school experiences. For example, it could be argued that Chloe's comment about teachers as *"mentors"* might refer to the role of staff in the wider context of this setting. It could be argued challenging to distinguish whether these comments would be made whether staff and students ate together at this setting or not, which also reflects the multi-dimensional, dynamic construct of SC (Gowing & Jackson, 2018; Whitlock, 2006). Nevertheless, students' comments indicated that lunchtimes provided a dedicated space for this guidance and checking-in to occur and Erin's comment specifically refers to the difference between interactions at lunchtime and in the classroom. This links to previous findings that eating with others gives an opportunity for young people to share their feelings and concerns (Hunt et al., 2011).

Considering that adolescents might be more prone to seek out support from a non-parental adult (Werner & Smith, 2001), staff and students eating together could offer an important time and space for the checking-in and guidance to occur and SC to be promoted for these CYP.

Some comments which led to the development of the sub-theme 'Checking in, Supporting and Planning' link to Anderson, Kerr-Roubicek and Rowling's (2006) findings that staff thought offering pupils a fresh start each day and supporting with transitions were helpful in promoting SC. Staff and students mentioned lunchtimes as being a place to either reflect on the morning and help to make things right, or a time at which planning for the afternoon occurred in conversation. This support for transitions, as well as having opportunities for guidance from staff, could help promote students' SC.

'Storytelling', 'Taking an Interest' and 'Finding Commonalities and Differences' link closely to findings of the SLR. Sharing personal stories and finding commonalities and differences were key elements of some of the initiatives in the SLR, which were suggested to promote SC (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019; Neely et al., 2015). In Neely et al.'s (2015, p. 559) study, teachers commented that eating together enabled them to

57

"break down the professional façade and let out the personal one". This appears to relate to Erin's comments about using lunchtimes as a space to share personal stories to find commonalities with students. In the reviewed papers for the SLR (see Figure 6), SC appeared to be promoted when there were opportunities for staff and students to share personal stories and find commonalities and differences. It is therefore plausible to suggest that in this study, the time and space lunchtimes provides for these experiences could help to promote SC.

3.3.3 Features of the Relational Climate

'Features of the Relational Climate' includes sub-themes which illustrate data that referred to subjective, relational experiences or feelings about eating together.
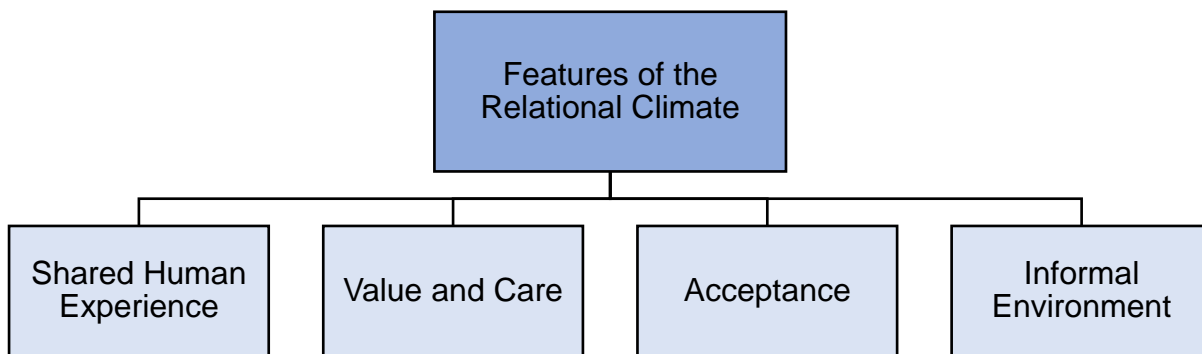

Figure 10 - Thematic Map for Features of the Relational Climate

<u>Shared Human Experience</u>

Staff spoke about seeing students and students seeing them in a different context during lunchtime and the implications this has for relationship-building, as illustrated by Daniel's comment below.

> *Daniel (Staff): It gives the child the opportunity to see us in a non-educational (.) and I mean it still is educational but…covertly education…so they see a little bit more of <u>us</u> you know like the real person that I am…so that does help to build relationships*

Some comments made by staff and students indicated they felt lunchtimes together are a valuable, shared experience. There was an interaction where staff discussed their view that people eat together less as communities now (e.g. at home). Erin's comment below illustrates this sub-theme.

Erin (Staff): I think it's a gift to them because they haven't had that human sharing of food experience sometimes (.) not enough (.) not in a community situation whether it's a family or a group of people or whatever (.) it's something they should have in their lives (.) so…it's almost a spiritual thing in my opinion…it's a sort of spiritual and wellness tool eating together…

<u>Value and Care</u>

This sub-theme was constructed from codes which represented text where students felt valued and cared for. Callum's comment could be interpreted to suggest he feels valued and listened to by staff at lunchtimes. Another student (when referring to staff members), commented, *"They want to understand you."*

Callum (Student): … like if somethin' has to go on…they'll say like "Ah sorry I'll quickly deal wi this" and then they'll come back and they'll go like ask you what you were sayin'

<u>Acceptance</u>

Both staff and students referred to respect, often with comments that appeared to suggest this was a dynamic, reciprocal feeling. One student commented, *"They're paying respect to you so you pay respect to them they're gonna pay even more respect to you."* Staff spoke about wanting to gain students' respect and students spoke of feeling *"equal"*. There were discussions which indicated students felt accepted, with one student commenting, *"You can just speak because there's no judgement."* There were other comments, however, which appeared to contradict this view. This will be discussed later.

<u>Informal Environment</u>

This sub-theme pertains to the comments staff and students made about the informal, open nature of the environment at lunchtimes. When participants were asked what advice they would give to a setting that was going to implement the practice of staff and students eating together, one staff member commented as below.

Paul (Staff): I'd say like don't try and overthink it as well like if you think 'What do I say?' 'What do you talk about?'…try to be a teacher but also try and be a bit of a friend as well…keep it relaxed you know (.) ask questions (.) let them talk as well yeah

There were some concerns about finding and navigating the boundaries of this informal environment and staff felt that the informality of lunchtime can lead to difficulties with relationships. This is illustrated by the comment below.

Paul (Staff): I quite like…having the boundaries (.) and I think sometimes it can overstep the mark of like 'Oh Sir he's like my mate' and it is important to have that relationship but also it's really hard to find the lines of when I'm not your mate and when we sort of (.) I am sort of (.) your teacher

Features of the Relational Climate: Summary and Discussion

These sub-themes relate closely to some of the findings of the SLR, where SC appeared to be promoted when an informal, relaxed environment was created and feelings of value and acceptance were promoted. This might further suggest that eating together can provide space for SC to be promoted, when these relational features are present.

The sub-themes 'Shared Human Experience' and 'Informal Environment' relate closely to Neely et al.'s (2015) finding that shared lunches promoted SC through a number of mechanisms, including 'showing common humanity' and 'creating an informal environment'. There were concerns raised about identifying boundaries in this informal environment, which will be further considered below.

Erin's comments and the discussion between staff about families eating together less than before has links to research that suggests 'traditional' family meals might be occurring less and eating patterns for some families have changed, possibly due to changes in family structure and employment (Hunt et al., 2011). This could suggest having a dedicated time and space at school for eating together might be of value in the current context, as CYP might be having fewer experiences of this elsewhere.

These findings suggest that lunchtimes, for these participants, provide a relational experience, in which students feel valued and accepted. The sub-theme 'Acceptance' relates to Allen and Kern's (2017) comments that definitions of SC and related constructs appear to refer to feelings of inclusion. Considering students have explained their connection to school as experienced through relational opportunities and opportunities for these experiences have been deemed vital for promoting SC (Gowing & Jackson, 2016, 2018), it could be further reasoned that eating together provides a space in which SC can develop. This is supported by

Sancho and Cline's (2012) findings that participants linked a sense of SB with being known and accepted.

3.3.4 Factors to Consider

'Factors to Consider' was conceptualised to include data that was clearly important to staff and students about the wider ethical and contextual considerations of eating together.
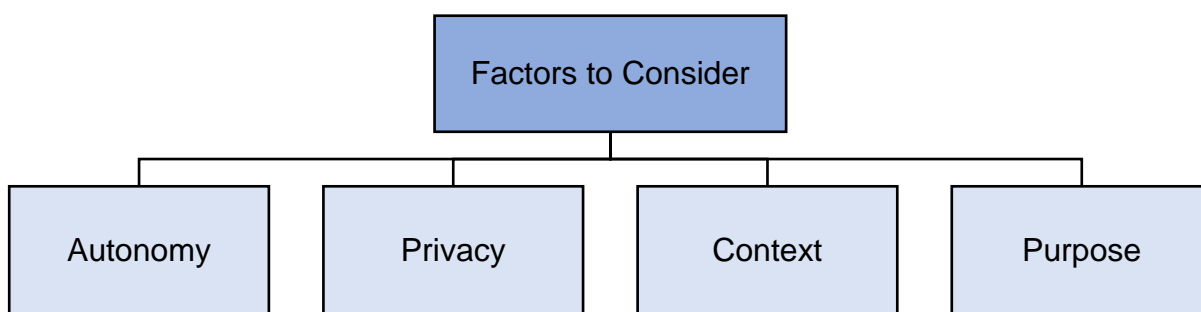

Figure 11 - Thematic Map for Factors to Consider

Autonomy

This sub-theme relates to comments made by both staff and students about choice in participation at lunchtime. Staff spoke of students having the choice to be part of lunchtimes with the group or to sit away from the group in another room. They also spoke of the importance of choice for staff, with one staff member commenting, *"I don't think it should be something that should be forced upon staff."* Both staff and students also spoke of how staff members become involved in conversations with students and who invites whom to be part of conversation.

Privacy

Both staff and students were aware of each other's privacy. This is reflected in the comments below. Callum appeared aware of not asking too many personal questions of staff members at lunchtime.

> *Callum (Student): Yeah…like we've asked like some questions and… sometimes we've like we've said to them like, "Aw well you don't have to tell w if you don't wanna" and like, "Ah it's okay" and then they'll tell w*

Staff members discussed the challenges of wanting to be a part of conversations but also not wanting to invade students' space.

Paul (Staff): Yeah you dunno what to ((pause)) challenge and what to get involved with cos you do wanna take an interest as well with some stuff

One dyad of students spoke about lack of privacy at lunchtimes, stating, *"It's just like you feel like you can't speak around them."* This appeared to contradict some other comments made by this dyad, illustrated in the sub-theme 'Acceptance'.

Context

This sub-theme relates to comments made about the different context in which these lunchtimes are taking place, often in comparison to mainstream settings. Chloe's comment below illustrates this.

Chloe (Student): I think if it was in a mainstream school it would be really awkward because…it's obviously…like bigger groups and talkin' about like your personal life in front of teachers would be a bit like (.) naff

Staff also commented on the *"informal"* nature of the environment in this setting, with one mentioning, *"We major on relationship-building so therefore when we go out there ((pointed to lunch space)) it can be very similar."*

Comments were also made by staff about the different nature of working in a mainstream setting, often referring to other demands on time and needing time to plan at lunchtime.

Purpose

Students spoke of views that the purpose of eating together with staff was for behaviour management, as well as to try and build relationships. The below quotes illustrate students' responses when they were asked why they thought lunchtimes are planned in this way at their setting.

Chloe (Student): Cos we have behavioural issues

Julius (Student): Er behavioural issues (.) monitorin' the students er formin' some sort of relationship so like the student doesn't wanna like fight the teacher every five minutes

Chloe (Student): I think they try and like form bonds with ya so it doesn't look like a set up but like we understand

Staff discussed safety and behaviour throughout the focus group and they also spoke about one of the purposes of eating together being a learning experience, where habits could be modelled and direct teaching about food could occur.

Other Factors to Consider: Summary and Discussion

Although this theme and related sub-themes included codes that did not directly address the research question, it felt important to include them, as they appeared important to the participants and might help to provide further context for the other findings. Staff and students discussed choice in participation, privacy and the intended or believed purposes of eating together, as well as the differences between the AP context and mainstream provision and the effects this might have on eating together. It is not within the focus of this thesis to explore these further, as they do not directly address the research question; however, they might provide some focus for future research into SC and eating together.

3.4 Limitations

It could be argued that analysing data deductively poses a threat to the validity of the research findings, as I was searching for particular codes within the data (Cohen et al., 2018). Maxwell (2009) argued that using theory in qualitative research has both benefits and drawbacks. It helps to organise data, find relevant connections to your research question and can draw your attention to particular relationships that might otherwise not be noted or understood. Conversely, the danger of using prior literature and the assumptions this brings is that you can overlook other ways of interpreting the data and miss other implications of your findings (Becker, 2007). Becker (2007, p. 149) suggested that exploring what happens when you abandon assumptions is helpful here, stating, 'Use the literature, don't let it use you'. I was cautious to remain open and generate inductive codes based on the data too, rather than being fixed in my approach. Coding deductively and using a codebook allowed for the application of my own theoretical interpretation of the existing literature, as well as reflexivity and transparency about how my prior reading could have affected interpretation of the data. Transparency allows the reader to be explicitly informed about the processes involved in interpretation of this data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Cohen et al. (2018, p. 249) commented that qualitative research is more concerned with the particular phenomenon in question rather than generalisability. They suggest that what is known as 'generalisability' in quantitative research as a basis of validity

can be regarded as 'uniqueness' in qualitative research. This particular research project was carried out in a particular educational provision, where relationships and processes are context-specific. I suggest that although there is some scope for generalising the findings within that specific community (due to the richness of the data and selection of a variety of staff members and students from across the setting), the findings will not be easily generalised to other settings.

Using focus groups and dyadic interviews could have posed threats to validity as this might have increased socially desirable responses from the participants, which might not reflect their opinions (Barbour, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). Although using a pre-existing group could have led to more coherent responses, participants in focus groups have been suggested to tell stories to confirm their common experiences, which can promote consensus in discussion (Barbour, 2008). To minimise these risks, when setting out 'ground rules', I encouraged participants to share their opinions and experiences whether they were similar or different to what others had said (Krueger, 2015).

3.5 Implications for Research and Practice

The findings suggest that in this context, eating together might be a practical way in which SC could be promoted. Although this is not generalisable to other contexts, it gives an indication about how SC might be promoted and might provide ideas about how food practices could help develop relationships in other settings. There were, however, many other factors that were discussed regarding ethical considerations, particularly with regards to choice and privacy. Future research in this setting could further explore these topics from both staff and student perspectives, and how they might affect SC for these CYP. Another topic which was discussed was the influence of the context on relationships and the purpose of eating together. There is scope for future research to explore differences with this practice and its relationship with SC in other settings.

Many of the comments that led to the development of the sub-themes appeared to focus mainly on experiences which occurred between staff and students, and less so on interactions between students. This could be explained by the research focus being framed as finding out more about the practice of staff and students eating together, which might have led to discussions focussing on this. Future research in Educational Psychology could explore whether and how interactions between

64

students at lunchtime promote SC. Mason's (2020) study began to address this, but with a focus on social occupation, not on SC, and from an Occupational Science perspective.

This project has demonstrated the use of a theoretical framework in evaluating a practice that was already in place. Considering that EPs work with schools on a systemic level and they have opportunities for discussions about wellbeing at all levels, this framework could be used to support conversations about SC at wider-school level, to develop and evaluate practice and policy (Roffey, 2015). One of the strategies recommended by the CDC (2009) in enhancing SC was to provide professional development for teachers. This research could be used by EPs and other professionals to plan and facilitate training about ways in which SC might be promoted.

EPs are likely to work with CYP who might be described as vulnerable (Fallon, Woods, & Rooney, 2010) and SC has been suggested to be particularly important for excluded or marginalised groups (Cumming, Marsh, & Higgins, 2017; Ozer et al., 2008). This research has implications for the EP role in supporting those students and advocating for them to consider relationships with staff and students and promote their SC. This also might involve using the theoretical framework with key adults who could act as a catalyst for increasing SC, to plan what might help to foster this. This could be carried out as action research with a setting or group of staff and CYP.

3.6 Conclusions

The aim of the project was to consider how SC might be promoted and particularly to explore the relationship between SC and staff and students eating together. The experience of staff and students eating together in this setting has been suggested to promote SC through practical features, process features and features of the relational climate. Other factors to consider were also addressed, as these provided further context for the findings.

The project provided an opportunity for a theoretical framework about how SC might be promoted to be used to evaluate practice. SC has been argued to be important for academic outcomes, wellbeing and inclusion and suggestions have been made that future research in this area should focus on developing and evaluating ways to promote SC (Andersen et al., 2019; Slaten et al., 2018). The research provides an

example of how theory can be used to evaluate and develop practice in settings to promote SC.

Chapter 4: Reflective Synthesis

This chapter will provide a reflective account of implications for my practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and as a researcher. It will detail the influence conducting the thesis has had on my professional development and will conclude with a summary of implications for wider practice and future research.

4.1 Professional Learning and Implications for Practice

To consider how my practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) has developed through carrying out this thesis, I began by reflecting on the skills I have learnt and used through the process that are relevant to my placement experiences. One of the key roles in Educational Psychology (EP) practice according to Gersch (2004, p. 144) is 'applying research to real-life problems'; therefore, I hoped to consider any application of research skills, knowledge and understanding to practice on placement.

4.1.1 Applying Research Skills to Assessment Processes

Establishing Questions to be Addressed

At different points during the thesis process, I established a question to be addressed. I continually referred to this whilst planning and undertaking data collection and analysis (or searching, selecting and synthesising for the Systematic Literature Review (SLR)). This helped to ensure I remained focussed on addressing the question and matched methods to the question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This has many similarities to a focus on my practice placement, where I have established hopes and expectations for my involvement with service users and planned assessment processes based on these. This has often involved clarifying questions that service users have to help in knowing what might be helpful to explore further about a situation and drawing on frameworks and literature, for example, solution-oriented models (Harker, Dean, & Monsen, 2017) and process consultation (Nolan & Moreland, 2014; Wagner, 2017).

Willig (2013, p. 180) argued there must be a clear research question guiding any research venture and that approaches to research need to be carefully planned and based on a thorough rationale. She explained that once these are in place, a 'quest for knowledge can be pursued in contexts other than those formally identified as 'research settings''. Skills learnt during the thesis of establishing questions and deciding what

methods would best address these have been helpful to apply to these similar processes during casework.

Selecting and Synthesising Information from a Number of Sources

Carrying out the SLR and empirical research required selecting and synthesising information from several sources to construct an integrated whole (Howitt & Cramer, 2020; Thomas et al., 2013). Identifying data that might help to address the review or research question and drawing this together to form findings and conclusions mirrors many day-to-day processes on placement. During assessment, I synthesise information from a range of sources and analyse and interpret this with others to create formulations about potential hypotheses. This reflects Phase 3 of Woolfson's (2017) Integrated Framework: Joint Problem-Analysis and was done with the aim of better understanding the situation to know what might be helpful to do next. Skills learnt and practised during the process of analysis throughout this project have been applicable to this exploration and interpretation of stories and observations during casework.

Willig (2013, p. 180) argued that although psychologist practitioners will not be considering client accounts as 'data' and are not conducting 'research' in a formal sense, their interactions with clients will create novel understanding and ideas, supported by their interpretation and analysis. She suggested the separation of 'research' and 'practice' might not be helpful, as there are many new understandings that have been identified through reflection on practice. Reading this resonated with me, considering my experiences over the past three years both carrying out formal 'research' and using research skills in practice.

4.1.2 Applying Evidence-Based Research in Practice

Carrying out this project has increased my awareness of the importance of school connectedness (SC) for children and young people (CYP) and understanding of ways in which SC might be promoted. Knowing about the evidence-base for this topic has supported my understanding of some casework on placement and helped me to consider possible futures with CYP and those who support them. This year, I have worked with several CYP at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream education. I have been able to draw on my reading and writing in practice, both throughout consultation with CYP and the adults supporting them, as well as in recommendations to settings. Having this secure understanding of the evidence base has encouraged

me to talk about this topic with service users and it has supported explanations to school staff about the importance of SC for CYP. It has also meant I have been able to 'raise the profile' of SC, particularly for CYP who are marginalised or 'at-risk' for a number of reasons (Cartmell & Bond, 2015).

Understanding more about this topic was particularly helpful on placement when I carried out a project for the Local Authority (LA) last year. Alongside an Educational Psychologist, I worked with the School Improvement Team and a Social Worker. We were asked to produce a literature review about factors that might affect academic outcomes and what settings can do to minimise the risks of these leading to poor outcomes for CYP. Reading and writing about SC formed a large part of discussions with stakeholders and was included in the review for the LA.

These reflections of applying knowledge and understanding about SC to practice relate to Cameron's (2006) arguments about the distinct aspects of EP practice. He argued that two of these are: using psychological research and theory to recommend evidence-based strategies and promoting 'big ideas' which are grounded in psychological research and theory, both to support positive change (2006, p. 293). This has been highlighted again in a recent review into Educational Psychology Services in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2019), which identified that a strength of most of the Services inspected was their application of academic research to practice.

4.2 Academic Learning and Implications for Practice as a Researcher

This section will detail the wider implications of carrying out this thesis for my practice as a researcher.

4.2.1 Applying Research Skills for Research in Practice

There have been some occasions this year where I have drawn on acquired research skills to support formal research work on placement. Most recently, as part of some traded work with a multi-disciplinary team, I was asked to facilitate a training session on visual comprehension. This involved using research skills developed through the SLR to use databases for searching and selecting relevant literature to read. As mentioned, I have also been part of a wider project for the LA, which again involved drawing on these skills to select and synthesise literature and disseminate this to a range of audiences (for example, writing a more formal literature review and creating a more accessible, succinct Executive Summary). These research skills will be helpful to

take forward into my career when exploring current research and literature to support practice.

4.2.2 Flexibility and Adaptability in the Research Process

Reflecting on experiences throughout the process of the project has made me realise how important flexibility and adaptability have been. Throughout planning of the empirical research, I liaised with school staff to ensure the data collection processes worked well for their context. This involved beginning the process with fluid plans and being open to preparing and negotiating with others. Approaching the research in this way closely reflects my core values in practice: I strive to work flexibly and adaptively and consider each situation individually. This is something I will continue to do in future work as a researcher, as it felt most comfortable to me and enabled the research to be carried out in a way that the setting was happy with. It felt as if I was doing the research *with* the setting and not *to* them.

On ending one dyadic interview, I realised the recorder had not worked and after conversation with the participants, we decided to record a brief discussion of us clarifying and summarising the initial interview content. This required keeping calm and working with the students to see what they felt would be the best solution. This allowed for some informal, early member-checking of themes that had occurred in the conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and allowed for the CYP to participate in a meaning-making process, clarifying and interpreting their own responses (Thomson, 2011). Again, this felt to be collaborative and required adapting to the situation. It reminded me of Willig's (2013, p. 4) comments about research as an 'adventure' and again, affirmed that being flexible and open when conducting future research will be important and will often be necessary.

4.2.3 Applying Psychological Skills and Knowledge to Support Data Collection

Looking back at the data collection processes, I realised I applied psychological skills and knowledge learnt during my time on the doctorate to facilitate participation. I found it helpful to consider and apply my understanding of adult learning theories to support collaboration and dialogue in the staff focus group. Knowles (2014) highlighted the importance of collaboration in adult learning and argued that the psychological climate needs to involve adults feeling supported, respected and in a mutual process of enquiry with others. Moreover, Boud and Griffin (1987) suggested that promoting a supportive climate in which collaboration can occur needs deliberate efforts through,

for example, developing an informal tone through manner and approach to learners. Although these comments were made about situations where adults learn alongside each other and from a teacher, I found them to be relevant here as the focus group involved adults constructing ideas together and finding out more from each other.

I found it helpful to develop an informal environment by being open and using a light tone. I was conscious not to make notes as I wanted to actively facilitate the discussion as much as possible and wanted to be seen as a part of the mutual process of enquiry. This application of theory to support the psychosocial climate appeared helpful, as staff were passionate and enthusiastic in their interactions and reflected that they had enjoyed having space to discuss their thoughts. Puchta and Potter (2004) highlighted that many researchers have transferable skills to use in moderating discussions, especially those who regularly work in groups. I found it useful to apply process consultation skills in both the focus group and the dyadic interviews by asking clarifying questions, summarising and using active listening skills (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). This appeared to support the participants' engagement in constructing ideas together and supporting each other to be actively involved in the conversation, for example, one commented, "Building on what you said before…" In future research, I aim to apply this understanding of theory and the psychological skills to support collaborative dialogue.

4.3 Implications of the Research for Wider Practice in Education

This thesis highlights the importance of SC for CYP and provides some further understanding about how SC might be promoted. The theoretical framework developed from the SLR could be used by educational professionals to plan and evaluate practice in settings to promote SC. Weare (2010) suggested high-quality interventions and practices have a sound theory base. The theoretical framework could be used by educational professionals to plan and implement wider-school initiatives and interventions. This theoretical basis could then help to provide staff and CYP with more of an understanding of why they are doing something.

The empirical research highlighted how eating together might be a vehicle by which SC could be promoted. Although the findings from this are not generalisable, they give some indication about how food practices in school might be used to support the promotion of SC. Future research could consider the relationship between SC and eating practices in other settings.

4.4 Summary and Next Steps

This chapter has detailed the implications of carrying out this research for my future work as a practitioner and as a researcher. It has encouraged reflexivity and enabled me to consider the learning I will take from this experience into my future practice. My next steps are to publish the SLR and empirical research to develop further understanding in education about how SC might be promoted. The research has highlighted some opportunities for further research which I aim to consider following submission of the thesis, particularly with regards to exploring the relationship between SC and food practices in different settings, as well as using the theoretical framework to plan wider-school initiatives to promote SC.

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Appendices

4.1 Appendix A – An Example of Appraising Quality and Relevance

Dunleavy and Burke (2019) Fostering a sense of belonging at an international school in France: An experimental study								
Weight of Evidence A – Quality of the study				**Weight of Evidence B – Appropriateness of the study's design and analysis in addressing this review question**	**Weight of Evidence C – Relevance of the study's focus and aims for the review question**			**Weight of Evidence D - Overall judgement**
Transparency	**Accuracy**	**Accessibility**	**Specificity**	**Purposivity**	**Utility**	**Propriety**	**=**	
Aims and purpose made clear

Initiative described in detail and focus of initiative made clear

Details of study and measures used described thoroughly | Knowledge claims offered with warrant throughout

'Voice' not represented but this was not a focus of the study – used quantitative measures to explore | Accessible and structured well with clear sub-headings throughout

Tables well-referenced, explained and clearly labelled | Method and procedures of initiative explained thoroughly and theoretical underpinnings also explored in some parts

Measures explained clearly and method followed University's | Procedures of initiative fit for purpose and aim of study fit for purpose of review (despite focus on outcomes/impact) the focus meets the objectives of my review as the procedures (initiative) are clearly explained | Provides relevant 'answers' in thorough descriptions of initiative | University ethical guidelines followed

Parents and students given information about study, were informed about right to | | |

83

Concepts explored and authors define SB Criticality shown throughout and claims made tentatively Implications explored and discussed tentatively	impact of initiative		ethical guidelines *Journal – Educational and Child Psychology (Cite Score 2018 = 0.68)* *Main Author – Grainne Dunleavy* *(h-index = 0)*			withdraw and opt-out procedure explained and used	
High				Medium	Medium		Medium

4.2 Appendix B – Criteria for making Weight of Evidence Judgements

Weight of Evidence	Criteria for Judgements		
	High	**Medium**	**Low**
WoE A - Quality of study (Transparency, Accuracy, Accessibility, Specificity)	• Clear aims and purpose • Rationale and context for the study provided • Full details of how the study was conducted, who was involved and methods of analysis • Intervention/initiative explained clearly and in detail • Techniques used in analysis outlined and described • Any limitations of the study design, method or analysis described • Knowledge claims supported with relevant and appropriate information (warrant) • Theoretical perspectives that have influenced the study explored • Alternative perspectives explained or claims made tentatively • Participant voice clearly reported in data (where relevant) • Understandable and clear, accessible presentation style (be aware of the 'knowledge seekers' of the research – accessibility might look different) • Method quality discussed and described (e.g. validity and reliability of measures used)	• Aims mentioned but not described in detail • Some detail of methods, participants and analysis but some information not provided/apparent • Intervention/initiative named and some details given • Limitations mentioned but not explored in detail • Warrant offered but perhaps historic or use of similar references repeatedly • Alternative perspectives explored in parts but some assumptions made without alternative perspectives/criticality • Accessible presentation style but perhaps unclear in places • Method quality mentioned but no mention of measures of reliability or thorough critique of method	*Medium* not satisfied

WoE B – Appropriateness of the study's design and analysis in addressing this review question (Purposivity)	• Wider-school initiative or intervention (used with more than one class) with an aim to promote connectedness or a sense of belonging • Quantitative or qualitative research design to explore features of the intervention • Provides relevant answers to the review question in the findings of the study	• Intervention/initiative appropriate for my review question • If the main aim of the research was to explore the outcomes of the intervention, the features/process of the intervention are described in detail elsewhere in the text	*Medium* not satisfied
WoE C – Relevance of the study's focus and aims for the review question (Utility, Propriety)	• Central focus of the study was to explore features of wider-school initiatives that have aimed to promote belonging or connectedness for CYP • Provides full and thorough details of the initiative	• A central research question/aim that focuses on the outcomes of the initiative/intervention but explores the features elsewhere in the text • Provides some description of the features within the findings or wider body of the text	*Medium* not satisfied
WoE D – Overall judgement	• *High* in every category • *High* in two categories and *medium* in one	• Medium in all categories • A *low-high* spread across all three categories • *Medium* in two categories	*Low* in all categories *Low* in two categories and *medium* in one

4.3 Appendix C – Information and Consent Form for Staff

Staff Participant Information Sheet

Who is the researcher and what is the purpose of the research?

My name is Lucy and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at Newcastle University. I am currently on placement at -- Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am carrying out a research project and my interest lies in the practice of staff and students eating lunch together. I am particularly interested in your school as I have heard that you regularly eat lunch with the students. The purpose of the research is to find out more about what happens at lunchtimes, what you enjoy/don't enjoy about this time and what you find helpful/unhelpful about having lunch in this way.

What type of data is being collected? What will participation involve?

I will be collecting data using a focus group discussion. The focus group is to last approximately 45 minutes and will involve questions to guide discussion such as, 'What kinds of discussions do you have with students during these times?' A focus group is a group discussion 'focussed' on a particular topic or theme – in this instance, shared lunchtimes. One of the purposes of a focus group is to closely replicate how people express views in real-life conversation. The idea is that participants will talk to each other, as well as to the moderator (me) about their views. I am hoping that the focus group can be held in person, whilst following school policy and procedures relating to COVID guidance. This will be reviewed over the coming weeks and if necessary, the focus group will take place via video platform. Teams is a video conferencing platform approved by the University for research use.

Are there any risks involved? Will I be identifiable?

There are no particular risks involved in this project. The information that I gather will be analysed and written-up, and to ensure anonymity, no names or other identifying features will be used (when using direct quotes, pseudonyms will be used instead). All information will be kept anonymous unless something is disclosed which might be regarded as a safeguarding issue.

In order to analyse the data appropriately, I will need to audio record the focus group conversation or record the video interview using the record facility on Teams to transcribe it afterwards. Any information collected during the focus group will be

anonymised and the recording will be deleted after transcription. An electronic copy of your consent form and the anonymised transcription from the focus group will be kept on the University's Microsoft Office 365 Cloud and will be password-protected. I am the only person who knows the password and this data will be destroyed after viva (presentation of the research). Newcastle University will act as a data controller for this study. You can find out more about the Data Protection Policy at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection.

Can I withdraw from the research?

If you decide to give consent and you are part of the focus group, you can withdraw from this study at any time during data collection. You do not need to give a reason, you can just simply leave the room or leave the virtual meeting. You also don't have to answer any questions in the focus group. You may also request for your data to be withdrawn from the study up until the point of data analysis (by contacting me on the email below).

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will have the opportunity to participate in a research project and experience the research process, which can help with learning more about what research entails. You will also have the opportunity to participate in an interesting discussion about staff and students sharing lunchtimes, and to share and develop your own views on this practice.

What are the next steps?

At this stage, please indicate whether you are interested in being part of the study by completing the details below and emailing this form back to me on the email address below. A random selection will be made from those who have shown interest. From there, we can arrange a date and time for the focus group which suits all participants. Consent forms will either be provided at the beginning of the focus group for you to read and sign or, if we are carrying out the focus group virtually, these will be emailed over to you if you are selected to take part.

If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me at --. If you are concerned about any aspect of the research, please contact my supervisor Dave Lumsdon at --.

--- ------------------

☐

Please tick or fill this box to express initial interest in being part of the research

Signature: ……………………………………………………

Date:……………………………………………………………

<u>Staff Consent Form</u>

Dear Staff Member,

Thank you for providing an expression of interest in the research exploring shared lunches at your school. If you are still happy to take part in the study, please provide written consent below. As mentioned, if you provide consent, you will be part of a focus group to explore what happens at your school lunchtimes. Each focus group is to last approximately 45 minutes and will involve questions such as, 'What happens during lunchtimes at your school?' 'What kinds of discussions do you have with students during these lunches?'

In order to analyse the data appropriately, I will need to audio record the focus group to transcribe it afterwards. Any information collected during the focus group will be anonymised and the recording will be deleted after transcription. A scanned copy of your consent form (to be shredded after scanning) and the typed-up conversation from the focus group will be kept on the University's Microsoft Office 365 Cloud and will be password-protected. I am the only person who knows the password and this data will be destroyed after viva (presentation of the research). Newcastle University will act as a data controller for this study. You can find out more about the Data Protection Policy at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection.

The information that I gather will be analysed and written-up, and to ensure anonymity, no names or other identifying features will be used (pseudonyms will be used instead). All information will be kept anonymous unless something is disclosed which might be regarded as a safeguarding issue.

If you decide to give consent and you are part of the focus group, you can withdraw from this study at any time during data collection. You do not need to give a reason, you can just simply leave the room. You also don't have to answer any question in the focus group. You may request for your data to be withdrawn up until the point of data analysis (by contacting via email).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at --. If you are concerned about any aspect of the research, please contact my supervisor Dave Lumsdon at --.

Please tick the boxes to show you have understood the information provided.

I have understood all the information and have been able to ask questions if needed.	
I understand that I can leave the focus group at any time by leaving the room and I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to.	
I understand that a voice-recorder will be used and the transcription of the focus group conversation will be anonymised and saved securely.	
I understand that I can request that my data is deleted by contacting Lucy via the email above.	
I understand that the data will be used for research and publication purposes (anonymously).	
I give consent to take part in this study on the above terms.	

Signature: …………………………………….   Print Name:

……………………………………………

Date:…………………………..

4.4 Appendix D – Information and Consent Form for Students

I am writing to find out if you would like to be part of my research study and I thought it would be helpful to first give you some information about me and what the research is about.

Who am I and what am I doing?

Name: Lucy Hicks

Studying at: Newcastle University

Job: Trainee Educational Psychologist

What is that? This means I work mainly in schools with children and young people, their families and staff to support with learning and wellbeing.

Task: As part of my training, I am carrying out some research. I hope to find out more about staff and students eating lunch together.

More about the research…

I am interested in your school as you eat lunch with members of staff and I want to find out a bit more about this. I have spoken to some staff members about their views and I am hoping to speak to some students too. It would be good to find out more about:

➢ What you enjoy/don't enjoy about this time
➢ What you find helpful/unhelpful about having lunch in this way.

What will happen if I choose to be part of the research?

You will be part of an interview that will:

➢ Be held at school
➢ Involve me asking you and another student from your Key Stage some questions about lunchtimes such as 'What happens during lunchtimes at your school?' 'Why do you think lunchtimes are planned like this in your school?' 'What kind of things do you talk to staff members about during these lunches?'

In line with guidance, we will be sat socially-distanced and I will wear a face mask.

What else do I need to know?

➢ You can always change your mind about being part of the interview. You do not need to give a reason you can just leave the room. If you decide after the interview that you don't want your recording to be kept, you can tell your parent/carer and they will contact me.
➢ You don't need to answer anything that you don't want to.
➢ I will use a voice recorder so that I remember all the things we talk about! After I have written this up, I will delete the recording.
➢ I will not use your real name when writing up the recording. If I write any quotes that you have said, I will use a false name so no one knows it is you.
➢ The only time I would have to tell someone something you have said using your name is if I need to do so to keep you safe.

What are the next steps?

If you have any questions, ask your parent/carer to contact me on my email address.

If you and your parent/carer agree to you being interviewed, I will be in touch with -- and we will arrange a time for me to come into school. -- will let you know when this is going to happen.

If you would like to be part of the research, please tick the boxes to show you have understood:

I have understood all the information and have been able to ask questions if needed.	
I understand that I can leave the interview at any time and I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to.	
I understand that a voice-recorder will be used and the typed-up conversation will be saved securely (with no names written on it).	
I understand that I can request my data is deleted by asking my parent/carer.	
I understand that the data will be used for research (without my real name).	
I would like to be part of this study.	

Name:

Date:

4.5 Appendix E – Information and Consent Form for Parents/Carers
Who is the researcher and what is the purpose of the research?

My name is Lucy and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at Newcastle University. I am on placement at -- Educational Psychology Service. I am carrying out a research project and my interest lies in the practice of staff and students eating lunch together. I am interested in your child's school as staff and students regularly eat lunch together. The purpose of the research is to find out more about what happens at lunchtimes, what the students and staff enjoy/don't enjoy about this time and they find helpful/unhelpful about having lunch in this way.

What type of data is being collected? What will my child's participation involve?

I have already held a focus group discussion with staff and am now planning to conduct interviews with up to four students at school asking them about their experiences of lunchtimes. The interviews will be held in pairs where possible, so your child would be speaking with me alongside a peer from their Key Stage. In line with guidance, we will be sat socially-distanced and I will wear a face mask. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will involve questions such as 'Why do you think lunchtimes are planned like this in your school?' 'What kinds of discussions do you have with teachers during these lunches?' An information sheet is enclosed for your child, so that they are fully informed about the research and its aims. This means they can also indicate whether they give consent to be part of the research. They will be asked again before the focus group.

Are there any risks involved? Will my child be identifiable?

There are no particular risks involved in this project. The information that I gather will be analysed and written-up, and to ensure anonymity, no names or other identifying features will be used (when using direct quotes, pseudonyms will be used instead). All information will be kept anonymous unless something is disclosed which might be regarded as a safeguarding issue.

In order to remember as much information as possible, I will need to audio record the interview conversation so that I can type it up afterwards. Once I have listened to the recording and written it up, the recording will be deleted. An electronic copy of your consent form and the anonymised transcription from the interview will be kept on the University's Microsoft Office 365 Cloud and will be password protected. I am the only

person who knows the password and this data will be destroyed after viva (presentation of the research).

Can I withdraw from the research?

If you and your child decide to give consent and your child is interviewed, they can withdraw from this study at any time during data collection. They do not need to give a reason, they can just simply leave the room. They also don't have to answer any questions in the focus group. You or your child may also request for the interview data to be withdrawn from the study up until the point of data analysis (by contacting me on the email below).

What are the next steps?

If you are happy for your child to be interviewed by me at school for this research project, please tick the boxes below to indicate you have understood the information and sign below. If you and your child both give consent, I will be in touch with -- to arrange a date for me to come into school.

If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me at --. If you are concerned about any aspect of the research, please contact my supervisor Dave Lumsdon at --.

I have understood all the information and have been able to ask questions if needed.	
I understand that my child can leave the focus group at any time by leaving the room and that they do not have to answer any questions if they do not want to.	
I understand that a voice-recorder will be used and the transcription will anonymised and saved securely.	
I understand that I can request that my child's data is deleted by contacting Lucy via the email above.	
I understand that the data will be used for research and publication purposes (anonymously).	
I give consent for my child to take part in this study on the above terms.	

Child's Name: …………………………………………

Parents' Signature: …………………………………………

Date:…………………………………………………

4.6 Appendix F – Examples of Planned Questions

Examples of Planned Question to Guide Focus Group and Dyadic Interviews using Krueger and Casey's Questioning Route (2015):

1) General **Discussion**, **Welcome, Overview** and **Ground Rules**		
2) **Opening/Introduction** Questions	What happens at lunchtimes at your school?	
3) **Transition** Questions	Think back to the conversations you have had over the years with students/staff members during lunchtime. What can you tell us about these conversations?	
4) Key Questions	- Why do you think lunchtimes are planned like this in your school? - What do you think is helpful or important about having lunch in this way? - What do you not find as enjoyable or helpful about having lunch in this way? - What do you think the students/staff think about having lunch in this way? - How else is food used at school at other times/in other ways?	
5) **Ending** Questions	- If another school were to start having lunches like this, with staff and students eating together, what advice would you give them when they are planning? *For students:* Suppose you were in charge of lunchtimes at your school, what one thing would you change about lunchtimes?	
6) **Summarise** some of the themes that have run through the discussion and what others have mentioned. "Does that summarise the discussion for you?" "Have we missed anything?" "Is there anything that's not been discussed that you thought might have been?"		

4.7 Appendix G – Extract from Codebook

Code	Description	Origin (Deductive/Inductive)	Example
Staff sharing personal stories	Staff recall experiences where they have told stories about lives outside of school or their previous experiences. Students recall experiences where they have heard stories about staff members' lives outside of school or their previous experiences.	Deductive – process feature (from SLR findings)	**Transcript 2: Lines 129 – 131** *Chloe: [Staff Member Name] is a musician and he tells us loads of stories about how he like goes and makes music in [Other Country] and stuff like that*
Students showing interest in staff	Students or staff mention students asking staff about them and their lives.	Inductive – first constructed from Transcript 1	**Transcript 1: Lines 31 – 36** *Callum: Yeah like sometimes when you ask like questions like like a few times it's like we've asked like some questions and they've like sometimes they've like stopped to like tell w and sometimes we've like we've said to them like, "Aw well you don't have to tell w if you don't wanna" and like, "Ah it's okay" and then they'll tell w*

Seeing each other 'in a different light'	Staff or students talk about lunchtime as an opportunity to see others in a different way to in the classroom/talk about seeing the 'real' them or it being a humanising experience.	Inductive – first constructed from Transcript 3	**Transcript 3: Lines 292-297** *Daniel: It gives the child the opportunity to see us in a non-educational (.) and I mean it still is educational but ((pause)) overtly education (.) covertly education sorry not overtly so they see a little bit more of <u>us</u> you know like the real person that I am and my colleagues as well so that does help to build relationships*
Students sharing personal stories, feelings, values	Students recall experiences where they have told either staff or students stories about their lives outside of school or their previous experiences, how they are feeling about a current or past situation, or what is important to them. Staff recall observing/being part of these conversations.	Deductive – process feature (from SLR findings)	**Transcript 2: Lines 215-220** *Chloe: Erm well it's just like you can speak to them about anything so if somethin' was going on at home you could speak to them erm if someone had said somethin' to you like you could speak to them about that but it's more or less just like "Ah what you doin' on the weekend?" like kinda conversation*

4.8 Appendix H – Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Practical Features	Expanding Connections	Staff talking to a wider variety Having a wider variety of people to talk to
	Food as a Vehicle for Connection	Food as a vehicle for conversation
	Influence of the Physical Layout	Physically being on around a table together at the same level
Process Features	Checking-in, Supporting and Planning	Guidance Resolving/managing conflict Planning for next steps/transitions
	Storytelling	Staff sharing personal stories Students sharing personal stories
	Taking an Interest	Staff showing interest in students Students showing interest in staff
	Finding Commonalities and Differences	Finding commonalities and differences
Features of the Relational Climate	Shared Human Experience	Seeing each other 'in a different light' Valued time
	Value and Care	Staff showing care and wanting to help Students feeling heard (listened to, valued)
	Acceptance	No judgement from staff Feeling equal Respect
	Informal Environment	Openness Finding a balance/aware of boundaries
Factors to Consider	Autonomy	Choice in participation
	Privacy	Feeling heard (lack of privacy) Ownership and initiation – who invites whom? Finding a balance/aware of boundaries
	Context	Setting-specific Conversations dependent on number of students

	Purpose	Awareness of purpose Safety and behaviour

4.9 Appendix I – Extract from Table of Themes, Codes and Extracts

Practical Features		
Sub-theme	**Codes**	**Extracts**
Expanding Connections	Having a wider variety of people to talk to	Transcript 1: Lines 98-101 *Nick: ((In overlap)) You're not talking to the same people all the time it's like teachers you get to like they've been obviously they've been on Earth longer than us so they've got more stories to tell* Transcript 3: Line 487 *Helen: It's a change of face as well isn't it cos we're all there*
	Staff talking to a wider variety of people	Transcript 1: Lines 68 – 71 *Moderator: And you said that the teachers (.) do the teachers erm sit with the same people or different people?* *Callum: They can sit erm with different people* *Nick: ((In overlap)) Anyone* Transcript 3: Lines 30 - 43 *Moderator: Yeah and when you erm eat with the students do you ((pause)) this might sound a bit of a strange question but, do you always sit like next to the same person or does it just totally* *Erin; Daniel; Tim: ((in overlap)) All different, yeah* *Moderator: Totally random, yeah? And yeah ok that's really helpful*