Belonging amongst National Committee students at The United World College of South East Asia: A new model of belonging for students in international high schools

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Statement of Authenticity

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Date: 12/12/20 Signed: Ellen Heyting

Abstract

A sense of belonging to one's educational institution has been linked to many positive academic, health and social benefits and could potentially be utilised as a tool to close gaps in academic completion between populations. In elite educational settings, not all students fare the same. There are established patterns of students from elite backgrounds experiencing school positively and graduating with high levels of academic completion compared to students from non-elite backgrounds at the same institutions. One of the commonly asserted explanations for this gap is the differences experienced by students from elite and non-elite backgrounds is what has been broadly named 'sense of belonging'. One such elite educational institution is the United World College of South East Asia (UWCSEA), which educates the children of the global elite as well as 'National Committee' students, who come from diverse backgrounds from around the globe on a scholarship programme for the final two years of their high school education. Given this identified gap, the current study aims to address the research question of 'how do National Committee students experience belonging at UWCSEA?'

An extensive critical literature review was conducted around three key themes: the psychological construct of belonging, the international schools' context, and what is known about students from non-elite backgrounds in elite institutions. While all three silos of research were vast, there seemed little overlap. This study brings these three key themes together into a study that has identified a significant knowledge gap.

Based on the aim of the current study, to investigate the experiences of

belonging by National Committee students at UWCSEA, a standpoint theoretical approach to research was adopted to try to investigate these lived experiences from "behind," "beneath," and "from outside" (Harding, 2003, p. 297) the international school context. After consulting a range of perspectives and sources, a mixed-methods approach was chosen, comprising a questionnaire using Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Scale of School Membership (PSSM), which has been used in the current study to measure a sense of belonging, and face to face interviews.

My analysis of the quantitative results suggests that there is no significant difference in a sense of belonging between National Committee and non-National Committee students at UWCSEA and that overall levels of belonging are low amongst all participants. The qualitative results suggest enablers and inhibitors to a sense of belonging amongst National Committee students were grouped under the themes of relationships and school culture. These findings give confidence to the claim that there are many components to the complex construct of belonging in educational institutions experienced by students living in international and liminal spaces like UWCSEA. The results from this study suggest previous models of belonging fail to capture the experiences of National Committee students of belonging at UWCSEA and other populations like them. To address this, a new model of belonging in schools is proposed, the Expectations / Reality Model of Belonging, which centres students' subjective experiences and the congruence of their expectations and reality as a key to establishing a sense of belonging.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The research was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 16430).

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. The Research Problem

The current study aims to investigate the research question: 'How do National Committee students experience belonging at The United World College of South East Asia?' The United World College of South East Asia (UWCSEA) is a large, K-12 international school in Singapore which has both a day and boarding component. Students study the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) in their final two years and the school has a focus on the value of education as a tool to promote peace and development. The school is part of the United World Colleges (UWC) Movement, which includes 18 colleges around the world which operate under a common mission and share many characteristics. The UWC Movement's mission, which is, according to many accounts, lived by the majority of community members, not just words on the wall at reception, is to make "education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future" (UWC, 2018). This mission is partially fulfilled by including what are called 'National Committee' students in the community. National Committee students are provided with full or partial scholarships to attend this prestigious international school. The selection criteria for these National Committee places are not only based on strong academic achievement but also alignment with the UWC ethos, targeting students who have a high drive and demonstrated commitment to "become leaders in social responsibility, inspiring them to effect change personally, locally, nationally and internationally" (UWC, 2018).

These students often hail from a wide range of nationalities, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds, spanning more than 155 countries and including a special category for refugees and survivors of conflict. On average around 5% of UWC students in the IBDP years come from a refugee, displaced or persecuted background and benefit from full scholarship provision at one of the 18 UWC schools and colleges (UWC, 2018). At UWCSEA, 108 students who attend the college are National Committee students, out of 1,173 students who attend the college for their final two years of schooling or 9% (UWCSEA, 2018). The remaining 91% of students who attend this international school pay the full fees of AUD$45,000 per annum with an additional AUD$35,000 per annum if the student is a boarder.

The term 'National Committee' student was chosen as all other terms seemed inappropriate (Goldstein, 1974; Statzner, 1995; Goyette, 2008). This was an intentional choice on my part to use the language of the college and the UWC movement, rather than a broader term that appears in the literature as I aim in this study to capture the experiences of students who may find themselves outside of the dominant elite culture, but for different forms of exclusion (for example, different nationality, social class, political ideology, ethnicity, gender identity or religion). It was also chosen as the more traditional terms of working-class, non-elite and scholarship do not seem to fit this setting. The National Committee students in the current study may very well come from upper or middle-class families in their own countries, but when they arrive at these institutions made for the children of the ultra-wealthy global elite, they will inevitably feel in the minority. Useem and Miller (1975) demonstrate a similar trend at university level stating that "access to elite institutions tends to exhibit a non-linear dependence on

social class" (p. 122).

This research question was investigated by exploring the sense, or lack thereof, of belonging that National Committee (United World College 2017) students feel and by investigating the factors that lead to the development or impingement of a sense of belonging for these students. Based on this aim, to understand the experiences of a non-elite group, a standpoint theoretical approach to research was adopted to try to investigate these experiences from "behind," "beneath," and "from outside" (Harding, 2003, p. 297) the international school context. A mixed-methods approach was used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to give both breadth and depth to the understanding of belonging experienced by students in an international school. This methodology was used to examine "real people and real situations … [and] illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Willis, 2007, p. 239). Mixed-methods allows quantitative and qualitative data to be used together to clarify and complement each other and result in a more complete analysis of the research context (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The current project employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to generate data from student participants at a large international school in Singapore.

1.2. Background to Study

The current project was inspired by my personal experience of working at UWCSEA in Singapore from 2013-2017. I taught International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Psychology and was a deputy house parent, living and working in the boarding house. During my time in these roles, I interacted closely with National Committee students and was both inspired by their stories and drive while also becoming despondent at their adjustment struggles, lack of belonging and higher

than average rates of dropping out. As a house parent, caring for National Committee students' socio-emotional wellbeing was part of my job description so together with another house parent, we went looking for literature and interventions to help support our National Committee students in undertaking this transition from their home cultures into the fast-paced, high-stress world of UWCSEA and the IB. However, after a few weeks of searching, we were dismayed with the lack of resources and research out there that was useful and relevant to supporting our National Committee students. The closest research we could find was looking at psychological interventions to foster belonging amongst Latino and Black freshmen in US universities (Walton & Cohen, 2007). While this was a useful place for us to start, and gave us ideas to implement in the boarding house immediately, we were shocked at the emptiness of the research space of fostering belonging amongst non-majority students in international schools. The term 'non-majority student' here is used to describe National Committee students, as they are all of extremely diverse backgrounds, classes, nationalities and races, so other terms delineating them on these grounds seem inappropriate. What they do share in common is their separation from the majority of the student body of UWCSEA who are fee paying students of expatriate parents. This thesis aims to address this gap in the literature and provide information that can spark improvements in practice in international school settings.

1.3. Contribution to Scholarship

The current project was inspired by my personal experience of witnessing my students from non-elite backgrounds in international schools and their lack of belonging. However, formal research in this field is lacking. While there is

extensive literature on the power of a sense of belonging for young people (Halse, 2018; Hausmann et al., 2009; Allen & Kern, 2017; Baumeister & Learly, 1995), the lessons from this field have not been widely applied to international schools and in particular, students from non-elite backgrounds in international schools. The current study aims to investigate and inform participants and stakeholders of the current experiences of belonging in international schools among students from non-elite backgrounds as well as the catalysts and barriers to developing a sense of belonging, with the goal of providing information that can spark change and improvement.

This research is relevant and meaningful as the number of international schools has more than doubled in the last decade and continues to increase (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013). Adopting a very broad definition of international schooling, where English is the Medium of instruction in a non-English speaking country, it is asserted by Speck (2019) that there are over 11,000 international schools, with much of the growth coming from Asia. Siong (2012) suggests that international schools in Singapore are 'a necessary part of the infrastructure' in order to attract inward investment and produce a globally ready workforce.

This research will provide insights into a neglected population of students in international schools and will be valuable not only for the international school community but for any educational institution which accepts students from both elite and non-elite backgrounds, such as elite schools with Indigenous scholarship opportunities or affirmative action programs. Furthermore, with the spread of the International Baccalaureate (IB), the rapid pace of globalisation and the acceptance of the bidirectional value in providing scholarship opportunities to

elite educational institutions, more and more schools in a national context are resembling international schools, making this study relevant to a wide, and increasingly widening, range of educational settings.

The current study aimed to bridge the divide between research conducted in international schools, which largely focuses on the shared international culture of third-culture kids (Fail et al., 2004; Kano Podolsky, 2004; Pollock et al., 2010), research on why students from non-elite backgrounds tend to experience lower rates of education completion than their peers from elite backgrounds (Thomson, 2007; Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Steele, 2010), which has largely been conducted in the US context, and research on fostering a sense of belonging as a way to close this gap in education completion between students from elite and non-elite backgrounds (Santos, 2014; Finn, 1989; Hausmann et al., 2009). While there is also literature on students of colour at elite boarding schools, again this work tends to be focused on the US context (Gaztambide-Fernandez and DiAquoi, 2010). The plight of students from working class backgrounds in elite universities is also becoming well documented and researched (Jack, 2019). Many programs and funds have been set up to allow disadvantaged students access to these elite educational institutions, yet they are struggling to thrive once they arrive (Jack, 2019). The current study aims to examine if this is also true at the high school level in an international context. There is also literature looking at how students from working-class backgrounds fair in elite universities in the UK (Reay et al., 2009). Research in the UK context suggests rather than students being able to transform their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) to match that of the elite university, these students from working-class backgrounds instead come up with a range of creative adaptations and multi-faceted responses to the everyday challenges of

unfamiliar environments and codes and are constantly re-fashioning of the self (Reay et al., 2009)

While there is literature in these three silos, minimal research has been conducted examining the intersection of these variables. Addressing the current research question, 'how do National Committee students experience belonging at UWCSEA?' will hopefully begin to bridge these independent silos of research.

1.4. Research Question

How do National Committee students experience belonging at The United World College of South East Asia?

1.5. The Argument

This thesis argues that National Committee students experience belonging at UWCSEA in complex and individual ways. Each participant offered their own 'belonging profile' and while there were commonalities in their stories, they were really looking for different things to help them feel a sense of belonging and spoke of different inhibitors which prevented them from feeling like they belong. In this thesis I will argue that what is needed is an individualised model of belonging, where schools and educators can use different tools to foster a sense of belonging amongst different students, depending on their need. This is especially important in heterogeneous international school environments and with students from non-majority backgrounds. I suggest the Expectation / Reality Model of Belonging (ERMB) to better explain these students' experiences of belonging and as a more appropriate model of belonging for international populations. The ERMB is unlike any other models of belonging in the literature as it includes the presence of congruence or incongruence between students' expectations of their

school experience, and the reality of their school experience, keeping the focus on individual students' lived experiences.

1.6. Introduction to the UWC Movement and UWCSEA

The United World Colleges (UWC) Movement is a 'global education movement that makes education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future' (UWC, 2018) and does so by bringing students mostly aged 16-19 from over 155 countries together in 18 schools over 4 continents. Most of these students receive means-based scholarships to live and study together for two years while completing their International Baccalaureate Diploma. The movement started with the founding of Atlantic College in the UK in 1962 based on the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn and is exemplified in a quote from Nobel Peace Prize lecturer Lester B Pearson who was the main driving force behind turning Atlantic College into the global UWC movement we see today: "How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can this be if they don't know each other?" (McElligott, 1982, p. 9).

The UWC Movement believes that education can be a force for social change by bringing together a "deliberately diverse group of young people, inspiring them to become agents of positive change in line with UWC's core values" (UWC, 2018) some of which include: the celebration of difference, compassion and service and a sense of idealism. UWC schools do this by combining teaching the IB Diploma programme as the formal curriculum while also emphasising the importance of "experiential learning, community service and outdoor activities" (UWC, 2018).

When UWC was founded at the height of the Cold War, the aim was to

"bring together young people from different nations to act as champions of peace through an education based on shared learning, collaboration and understanding" (UWC, 2018). UWC was based on the ideas of the German educationalist Kurt Hahn, who had already set up other educational institutions such as the Salem school in Germany, Gordonstoun School in Scotland, Outward Bound and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and believed schooling should prepare students for life, not just university (UWC, 2018). Hahn was inspired by a visit to the NATO Defence College in Paris during 1955 where he saw students collaborating cooperating who just a few years earlier would have been enemies during WWII. After the founding of the first UWC school, Atlantic College in Wales in 1962, Lord Mountbatten drove the expansion of the movement beyond its Western European origin, establishing an international office and council during his Presidency of UWC International from 1968-1977. Since then the UWC movement has been growing, adding more schools and educating more students with the vision of "providing students with a challenging and transformational educational experience to inspire them to become agents of positive change and to create a more peaceful and sustainable future" (UWC, 2018).

First opened in 1971 and officially a part of the UWC Movement in 1975, The United World College of South East Asia (UWCSEA) is unlike many of the other schools in the UWC Movement. Most UWC colleges only educate students 16-19 years of age, but UWCSEA is a K-12 institution. Most UWC schools are entirely or largely boarding schools, whereas UWCSEA only offers boarding for its older students, and only around 20% of any one cohort is comprised of boarding students. Most UWC colleges have between 200-400 students, whereas UWCSEA has over 5000 spread over two campuses.

Most UWC colleges are made up of majority 'National Committee' students, students who have been chosen to attend the college by a committee from their home nation, whereas only around 10% of students in the older grades at UWCSEA are National Committee students. National Committee students are provided with full or partial scholarships to attend this prestigious international school. These scholarships are funded by various foundations to allow students to receive a level of education unattainable in their home communities. The selection criteria for these National Committee places are not only based on strong academic achievement but also in alignment with the UWC ethos, targeting students who have a high drive and demonstrated commitment to "become leaders in social responsibility, inspiring them to effect change personally, locally, nationally and internationally" (UWC, 2018).

UWCSEA's place within the UWC Movement, as well as its characteristics, make it a unique context to conduct research in. Some researchers (Hayden and Thompson, 2008; Marshall, 2007; Peterson, 1987) would suggest that UWCs are not traditional international schools, as they are not designed to service expatriate families. Instead, their mission is to bring together young adults from many different cultures and nationalities, between the ages of 16 and 20, for two years of experiential, values-based learning in an English-medium educational setting which aims to destroy ignorance, prejudice and build understanding and unity as well as provide pathways to further studies that would be unattainable for students coming from a multitude of backgrounds.

1.7.Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the thesis in

terms of how it is structured, contextual background information, its purpose and contribution to scholarship. This chapter outlines the research problem and the wider United World College (UWC) movement as the setting of this study was at a UWC school. Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature around the three key themes of belonging, international schools and students from non-elite backgrounds. This chapter finds that research is largely siloed in these three areas but looks for points of intersection where they exist. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study. It discusses the rationale for using a mixed-method approach and the benefits brought by using multiple sources of data. Chapter 3 also outlines the steps taken to conduct this research project as well as the techniques used to analyse the data. Chapter 4 presents the results of my study. It begins with outlining the quantitative results found from the administration of a questionnaire to the whole grade 11 cohort of students and then moves on to present the results from qualitative interviews with 10 National Committee students. Chapter 4 concludes with a synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative results and calls for a new conceptualisation of belonging in international schools. Chapter 5 discusses the results of my study in relation to the literature. It suggests there are some commonalities in my findings that are present in the literature, some results that are predicted from the literature but are absent in my study, and some findings of my study that were unexpected based on the literature. It also points to the failure of current understandings of belonging to encapsulate the experiences of National Committee students at UWCSEA and suggests the need for a new model of belonging to help address this. I propose The Expectation / Reality Model of Belonging (ERMB) is suggested to better explain these students' experiences of belonging and may find applicability with similar populations.

ERMB is unlike any other models of belonging in the literature as it includes the presence of congruence or incongruence between students' expectations of their school experience, and the reality of their school experience. Chapter 6 is dedicated to conclusions and recommendations for future research. It discusses the key findings of the study, limitations of the study, possible directions for future research and advice for practitioners looking to honour student voice when building belonging in international schools.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Chapter Outline

This chapter explores the three main bodies of work that informed the current study. The first section examines the literature on the effect of a sense of belonging in school. The second section examines the special circumstances and experiences of students from non-majority or non-elite backgrounds. The third section explores the literature on the context of international schools. This chapter ends with an attempt to tie these three sections together and situate the current study within the literature.

This study aims to make a contribution to the field of research in an international school context, and particularly around students from non-elite backgrounds attending these institutions and their experiences of belonging. This thesis aims to bridge the divide between research conducted in international schools, which largely focuses on the shared international culture of third-culture kids (Fail et al., 2004; Kano Podolsky, 2004; Pollock et al., 2010), research on why students from non-elite backgrounds tend to experience lower rates of educational attainment and completion than their peers from elite backgrounds (Thomson, 2007; Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Steele, 2010), which has largely been conducted in the US context, and research on fostering a sense of belonging as a way to close this gap in education completion between students from elite and non-elite backgrounds (Santos, 2014; Finn, 1989; Hausmann et al., 2009). While there is literature in these three silos, minimal research has been conducted examining the intersection of these variables.

2.2.Sense of Belonging

One factor which drives students' disengagement with school and poor academic performance is a lack of belonging. The importance of this issue is highlighted by Willms (2003), who writes: "Meeting the needs of youths who have become disaffected from school is perhaps the biggest challenge facing teachers and school administrators" (p. 76). A lack of belonging can lead to disaffection from school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). PISA data suggests that one in four students feel like they don't belong at school and on average across OECD countries, students' sense of belonging has shrunk between 2015 and 2018 (OECD, 2019). Although the importance of belonging has been established, the role that school belonging and academic motivation plays in academic success has been acknowledged as being under-researched (Santos, 2014). A recent study in Australia found that around 50% of schools studied made some reference to belonging in their school's guiding documents such as their mission statements or values (Allen & Kern, 2017), suggesting that around half of the schools studied had either not considered including belonging as a central value of the school, or had considered it, but rejected it in favour of other priorities.

Youkhana (2015) has called belonging 'still a rather new theoretical term' (p. 12). Yet the questions belonging or not belonging raise are of even more importance in an age of increasing transnationalism, international mobility and flow of refugees and migrants fleeing poverty and danger. Yuval-Davis (2011) suggests 'questions of belonging and the politics of belonging constitute some of the most difficult issues that are confronting all of us these days' (p. 1).

2.2.1. Definitions of Belonging

Although the construct of belonging is used widely in mainstream culture as well as the academic literature, this deceptively simple term represents a contested, multifaceted space where researchers are only beginning to understand what it means to be able to say, 'I belong here'. This concept is often implicit, and involves many characteristics, including place, space and time, leading this field to be described as vaguely defined (Crowley, 1999) and under-theorised (Antonsich 2010; Mee & Wright 2009), particularly as the pace of change in the way young people live and build connections is rapidly increasing. These factors make it increasingly important to continue to refine what is meant by a sense of belonging and continue to research how feelings of belonging can be established and what effects such feelings can have.

Halse (2018) suggests the concept of belonging is more complex than it appears, particularly in this increasingly interconnected world:

> What belonging involves, however, is not straightforward in a world of increasing racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and language diversity in schools, cities, societies and nations; growing digital connectedness that distributes values, ideas, practices and cultures across diverse local, national and transnational groups; and accelerating global interconnectedness of economies, businesses, education policy and systems. Each of these conditions constructs new social solidarities and fields of social interaction that find expression in the lives of individuals and their connectedness and belonging to specific social groups, collectivities and solidarities and particular places, spaces and times. (Halse, 2018, p. 4).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) define belongingness as "frequent, affectively pleasant interactions in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern" (p. 497). More recently, belonging has been

conceptualised as students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by teachers and peers, and feeling that they are an important part of the life and activity of the classroom, and has been closely associated with engagement (Thomas, 2012).

Although a sense of belonging is a fundamental human drive, as outlined extensively in psychological research pertaining to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 2010), this need to belong and be accepted is particularly strong during adolescence. Adolescence is a period of students' lives characterised by figuring out who they are, who they wish to become and with whom they belong. As Erikson (1994) suggests, this period of life involves exploring aspects of personal identity and stepping out on one's own, away from parents and family to create one's own separate identity. This causes the influence of the family to wane and the influence of peers and non-kin role models, such as teachers, to increase (Cauce, 1986). During this period, Goodenow (1993) has suggested an adolescents' sense of personal "place" is still largely malleable and "susceptible to influence in both positive and negative directions, a fact that makes student social integration in schools and classes at this age an especially important concern for educators" (p. 80). Robards (2015) also suggests that belonging among young people is a complex system of many different social identities. Robards (2015) explains how young people are constantly integrating "everyday belongings" that young people have to multiple and often contradictory group affiliations in everyday life into "systems of belonging" (p. 125) rather than belonging to mutually exclusive groups.

Halse (2018) asks many important questions about what belonging, or not belonging, means and what implications it has on people's lives: what criteria are

deployed to mark particular individuals and groups as belonging or not belonging? Who has the authority and power to decide who is entitled and not entitled to 'belong'? What technologies, strategies, processes and social institutions are mobilised to enforce inclusion and exclusion? What privileges does belonging confer? (Halse, 2018, p. 1).

Another useful way to think of belonging is how comfortable an individual is in their surroundings. Miller (2003, p. 218) suggests that belonging is "the quintessential mode of being human [...] in which all aspects of the self, as human, are perfectly integrated—a mode of being in which we are as we ought to be: fully ourselves". While Miller (2003, p. 217) believes belonging is a vital part of being human, that it is 'fundamental to who and what we are', Leach (2002, p. 287) suggests it is the process "of recognising—or misrecognising—the self in the other".

Felski (2002) believes that belonging is for the most part unconscious and lives in our everyday activities. This behavioural view of belonging suggests when we can go about our lives without having to pay much conscious thought to what or how we do things, a feeling of belonging will emerge. Jackson (1983) suggests the opposite of this is also true when the society we find ourselves in makes it hard to go about our everyday activities, we can feel disrupted and untethered, and we can become consciously aware of how our individual views, preferences and behaviours do not fit with that of society. This version of belonging draws from Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Bourdieu (1984, p. 171) suggests our habitus encapsulates a given social field, which feels "natural" to us when we are within it, and even outside of our awareness. However, how belonging may extend Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus is that it allows us to describe situations in which individuals know all the social scripts, can function

on a day-to-day level, live within a given culture yet still feel like outsiders who do not belong in that social world. Mere exposure or familiarity does not automatically foster a sense of belonging.

Shaw (2019) aimed to bridge the gap between adults' construction of a sense of belonging that appears frequently in the literature and that of students' sense of belonging. She obtained students' views of belonging using the PSSM and semi-structured interviews and found the average PSSM scores were surprisingly homogeneous (between 3.7 and 4.0) and that themes of familiarity, identification with others and with the school, and reciprocity of relationships were associated with a sense of belonging from the semi-structured interviews. Shaw (2019) found definitions of school belonging appeared to be largely homogeneous across the year groups, reaffirming the value of listening to young people's views.

In early research, students' sense of belonging in educational institutions was largely theorised as a behavioural measure, for example how integrated students were in social and extracurricular aspects of campus life and how much they participated in campus activities (Spady, 1971). However, Hausmann et al. (2009) argue that this behavioural measure of belonging misses a founding element of the development of a sense of belonging, psychological affiliation with the educational institution. Hausmann et al. (2009) argue "that when students become integrated into the social and academic systems of the university, they develop a psychological sense of belonging to the university community, which is an important precursor to desirable outcomes such as increased commitment and persistence" (p. 650). Recent models of student involvement and identification with institutions have largely ignored or blurred any distinction between

psychological measures of belonging and behavioural manifestations (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993).

Two of the most prominent models in the literature on students' engagement with educational institutions, Tinto's (1987) student integration model and Astin's (1984) model of student involvement, illuminate the lack of investigation around the psychological mechanisms of belonging involved with students feeling affiliated with educational institutions. Tinto's (1987) model predicts that integration into academic and social aspects of university life will be associated with a lower attrition rate from the university. While this is a worthy motivating force to investigate how to promote students' feelings of integration, most of the evidence for Tinto's (1987) model comes from measures of behavioural integration, not psychological measures of belonging (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Similarly, Astin's (1984) model suggests that behaviours which signal a higher level of integration and affiliation with an educational institution lead to higher levels of learning and development, as well as lower levels of dropping out. Berger and Milem (1999) studied university freshmen participants and have found that students who report more behaviours associated with integration into the educational institution also report more social integration, for example, development of close relationships with peers and/or faculty. This has in turn been associated with a higher level of commitment to the university and intentions to enrol for a second year and actual re-enrolment (Berger & Milem 1999). However, Berger and Milem (1999) again only studied behavioural measures of integration and did not measure students' psychological sense of belonging.

Another way to conceptualise belonging is Finn's (1989) notion of school

membership, which is defined by feelings of acceptance and belonging within school. Finn (1989) also suggests a behavioural component of school membership whereby students actively engage in the academic community and participate in extracurricular activities and events which in turn breeds an emotional connection with school and leads students to appreciate school values and motivates them to achieve. In a meta-analysis of research on school dropouts, Finn (1989) highlights the lack of research on the factors which lead to dropping out and suggests a "participation-identification" model to fill this gap. Finn's (1989) model suggests students who feel attached to school develop a sense of belonging and participate more in school life.

One useful model of school personalisation, school membership and school belonging is Wehlage's et al. (1989) model of school drop-out prevention. Their model states that school belonging plays a key role in reducing drop-out rates. School belonging, or school membership, is comprised of four components according to Wehlage et al. (1989): Attachment (positive student-teacher relationships), commitment (complying with the demands and rules of school), involvement (participating actively in school programs and activities) and belief (trusting and valuing the educational institution).

Okilwa (2016) suggests the concept of school community implies the ability of the school to satisfy the psychosocial needs of its members. The concept of the school community has been portrayed in the literature largely in terms of student perceptions on school belonging (Goodenow, 1993), connectedness (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009), school membership (Williams & Downing, 1998), identification (Voelkl, 1997), and relatedness (Conchas, 2001). These different variations of school community all share a common sense

of relationship between the educational institution and the individual student and are all linked with a number of positive psychological and academic achievement outcomes such as motivation, engagement, commitment and positive interpersonal relationships. One useful way to encapsulate the concept of a school community is to apply the lens of belonging. Belonging can be defined as the extent to which students "feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 61).

The fundamental importance of belonging has long been understood in psychological circles as a basic human need (Maslow, 1970). A sense of belonging is considered one of the five major needs in Maslow's (1962) Hierarchy of Needs Theory. More precisely, Maslow defines this part of his hierarchy as love and belonging. Humans have a desire to connect and belong to groups. We need to feel loved and accepted by others, and the school environment is no different. According to Maslow (1962), until this need is satisfied, no true learning will ever occur. Until a school is able to establish in its students a sense of belonging and community, maximization of the learning potential of students will never be achieved. According to Phelan et al. (1992), students desire more than academic instruction from their teachers, students are longing for a sense of community and bonding in their classroom.

2.2.2. Societal Factors

Past research has largely focused on individual characteristics through programs such as attributional retraining, or improving minority students' self-efficacy, rather than focusing on group-based traits like social belonging (Wilson et al., 2002). However, recent research focused on social belonging promises to

reduce group-based inequality as it expects to benefit minority students or all students who suffer from a lack of belonging at elite academic institutions, more so than students of the dominant social group, who presumably already feel a sense of belonging at such institutions (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

There are many societal forces that influence students' sense of belonging to academic institutions. Given that a sense of belonging may be a particularly important issue for students from non-dominant or at-risk backgrounds (Hurtado & Carter 1997; Kember et al., 2001; Walton & Cohen, 2007), it is particularly important to examine the sociocultural barriers to belonging.

Belonging can be thought of as a relational construct, where an individual needs to feel like they belong to a specific group, whether this is a school community, a specific class or a group of friends. This is a bidirectional relationship between the individual and the group, in which both provide positive feedback to each other to strengthen feelings of attachment and belonging. Dunleavy and Burke (2019, p. 35) stress "the fluidity and dynamism of one's sense of belonging, whereby social environments may contribute to the changes in an individual's level of belonging." When a sense of belonging is developed towards a school community, it allows students to build a shared identity that helps motivate students to pursue positive goals (Lambert et al., 2013). When there is alignment between the school's values and individual students' values, and students are surrounded by like-minded peers, Sanders and Munford (2016) have found they develop a school success narrative as part of their self-identity.

2.2.3. Place's Influence on Belonging

One factor that is seminal in building a sense of belonging is the role of

place, particularly for youth from non-elite, rural or Indigenous communities (Wyn, 2015). Cuervo et al. (2015) suggest a version of the construct of belonging as a relational, multi-dimensional concept, with "spatial, relationships and temporal dimensions, interconnected and at play at a particular space and time" (p. 25). Building on this, but adding emphasis to the spatial dimension, Cuervo and Wyn (2017) suggest a space-based theory of belonging has the potential to offer a "rich account of the ways in which young people navigate their lives through relationships with people and places across time" (p. 228).

Cuervo and Wyn (2017) argue for the importance of everyday practices performed over time that build a sense of belonging. Cuervo and Wyn (2017) suggest that in the performance and maintenance of these everyday routines, patterns of meaning, connection and belonging are built to places and communities, even as life for young people becomes increasingly mobile and unstable. This is in line with Bell's (1999) idea of viewing 'belonging' as an effect, instead of something that can be won or achieved, it is something that is performed or done. Bell (1999) suggests that everyday acts such as sharing a meal or texting, as well as rituals like birthday celebrations or religious ceremonies are what build belonging.

Much sociological theorising around social relations and the modernisation of the western world has focused on the urban environment (Farrugia, 2014). Farrugia (2014) describes how not only some of the classic theorists in sociology such as Durkheim or Marx, but also more recent theorists like Giddens (1996), see social power relationships as placeless and suggest the forces at work have the same degree of influence no matter what the societal setting. The implicit assumption here is that these theorists are talking about urban

societies; however, other theorists have challenged this assumption and suggested social relationships play out differently in different places and different spaces and perhaps a relational framework of belonging, to both place as well as the communities which inhabit those places, is more appropriate (Massey, 1994; Cuervo and Wyn, 2017).

The concept of belonging has many different registers and dimensions, including relationships to people, spaces and places. One model which focuses on the place aspect of belonging is Yuval-Davis' (2006) model in which belonging occurs across the dimensions of (i) social location, (ii) identification and emotional attachment and (iii) ethics and political values. Yuval-Davis (2006) includes both aspects of the sociology of power in society and the individual psychology of emotions and social identities. One unique aspect of her model is the ethics of care to belonging—or to view the construction of self not as an isolated being but as part of a relational network to others.

As our world becomes more integrated and globalised, understanding the forces of belonging is becoming increasingly important. A sense of belonging can be used to foster social identity and maintain 'us' vs 'them' boundaries between groups (Tajfel, 2010). In a European context, Vieten (2006) argues, belonging is increasingly important as large numbers of young people are migrating to escape persecution, conflict and poverty. Speaking to yet a different register of belonging in the context of youthful mobilities, Beck and Levy (2013) use the concept of belonging to move away from the notion of belonging to one's nation-state. Beck and Levy (2013) see this national ontology of belonging as fraught with limitations in today's cosmopolitan world and draw attention to the dialectical relationship between the global and local in people's experiences in the world

today. Beck and Levy (2013) suggest that belonging rises above national borders and is constructed on the political and cultural contexts people find themselves in, and the range of choices these contexts make possible. This moving beyond the nation-state to find a sense of belonging is in line with other research by Bell and de-Shalit (2011), which suggests that residents of the world's powerhouse cities share a collective identity and connectedness that transcends nationality, even as governments continue to stoke the flames of nationalism through nation-state boundary maintaining projects.

The importance of place to a sense of belonging can be seen by examining heterogeneous communities living in the same place. Savage et al. (2005) offer the notion of 'elective belonging' when explaining that feelings of belonging are not solely based on one's past or homelands, but are driven by choice. By looking at a population of middle-class, suburban residents in Manchester, Savage et al. (2005) suggest a sense of belonging can link people's place of "residence to their biographical life history", their capital accumulation, sense of aesthetic and their "sense of being at home" through their accounts of "how they come to live where they do" (p. 29).

The influence of place on belonging becomes even more complicated in today's world with high levels of mobility in terms of geography and class. Fallov et al. (2013) studied the paradox that peoples' potential for mobility and actual mobility influence their sense of place and belonging in everyday life. Fallov et al. (2013) support the notion of a relational model of belonging and suggest that a sense of belonging is the result of the relationships among people, place and mobility, moving the emphasis towards movement rather than the traditional focus on the individual psychological processes involved in conceptualising

belonging.

The role of mobility in belonging is important to study as Bauman (2004) has suggested the norm for youth is to become increasingly mobile, flexible and liquid, even though access to the resources that allow one to be mobile is increasingly unequal between young people (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008).

2.2.4. Cultural Dissonance

One suggested reason for the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for students who have undergone academic transitions into elite educational institutions is the dissonance experienced by students when their home culture is at odds with the culture of the new educational institution (Bourdieu, 2011). Bourdieu's view of the role of elite schools in society is useful to understanding UWCSEA's place in Singapore. In his less famous work, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, Bourdieu (1996) addresses the role of elite schools in maintaining the status quo in terms of distribution of power among the classes and the acts of symbolic violence perpetrated by dominant, elite groups on the masses. Bourdieu (1996) more explicitly outlines the links between education, culture and class and lays bare the hidden tools that elite groups use to maintain dominance over non-elites. Although developed with the Grandes Ecoles in France in mind, Bourdieu (1996) believes his theoretical framework for studying elite schools is universal and can be applied with equal merit in other contexts to provide a way to analyse contemporary fields of power. Working in France, Bourdieu (1996) sees the Grandes Ecoles as unmeritocratic, much like Ivy League schools in the United States or Oxbridge in England. These elite institutions and the processes of recruitment through selective and expensive preparatory schools

serve to guarantee accreditation for students from prestigious families with the right social connections and cultural capital, which sets these individuals up for occupational entry into the state bureaucracy and prominent positions in the economic elite (Bourdieu, 1996). Bourdieu (1996) suggests the rigours of these preparatory schools and the competitive system of entrance exams serve to identify "an elite that is not only distinct and separate, but also recognised by others and by itself as worthy of being so" (p. 102). Bourdieu (1996) suggests that passage through these elite educational institutions is serving the same purpose as knighthood served in feudal times to create a class of nobility, stating that elitist educational institutions give "a seemingly rational justification to the ceremonies of consecration through which societies claiming to be rational produce their nobility" (p. 73).

Bourdieu (1996, p. 74) outlines the "ritual exclusion" and producers of "distinction" that allow these elite schools to perform what he coins "operation of social alchemy" involved in cementing social hierarchies and class divides. For example, Bourdieu (1996) presents the adjectives professors use in their evaluations of students' work; creative, elegant and brilliant vs earnest, pedestrian and bookish. The use of these different cognitive structures for students from different class backgrounds demonstrates the mechanisms used to reproduce existing social classifications. Bourdieu (1996) believes these mechanisms are a form of symbolic violence which are 'hidden from view', as professors believe their judgements of student work to be balanced, neutral and objective, rather than influenced by societal structures. Bourdieu (1996, p. 32) describes elite educational institutions functioning "like an immense cognitive machine, operating classifications that, although apparently completely neutral, reproduce

existing classifications".

Bourdieu (1977) aims to synthesise social theories investigating the relative power of deterministic structural forces and individual agency and free will, and occupies the space between the extremes of either position. By suggesting the idea of habitus as an automatic, mediating mechanism that explains how behavioural practice can be influenced by structural factors in the field, Bourdieu (1971) is situated in the middle ground between structuralist and intentionalist accounts of the social world. Bourdieu's (1971) ideas remain relevant in the contemporary educational landscape and researchers such as Charlesworth (2000) suggest that the school remains a conservative force in today's society and retains its reproductive function, which Bourdieu (1971) originally observed. Although it is most certainly an extremist view, Charlesworth (2000) extends Bourdieu's (1971) concepts to suggest that working class people "are, in a very real sense, only partly alive" who go through the motions of life as "the zombies that British culture has created by condemning them to the living death of a stigmatised, abject, being" (p. 160).

In a series of studies, Stephens et al. (2012) have gathered empirical evidence for such cultural dissonance between students' home cultures and university cultures. The researchers assessed the university culture by surveying a sample of university administrators, including asking their institutions' expectations of students. As hypothesized by Stephens et al. (2012), the surveyed administrators described their institutions' culture as focused on individualistic cultural norms such as exploring personal interests, working independently, and paving one's pathways. The researchers then surveyed incoming freshmen and found that students from working-class backgrounds were more likely to be

motivated to attend college because of collective reasons, such as giving back to their communities and helping their family, compared to their middle and upper-class peers, who were in turn more motivated by individualistic reasons. Stephens et al. (2012) then correlated these differences in academic motivations, between the individualistic middle and upper class students and the collectivist working class students, with GPA over the first two years of school. The researchers found those students with a cultural match (the middle and upper class students) with the institution they were attending, that is, both with individualistic expectations predicted higher GPAs than a cultural difference. Steele (1992) suggests that school administrators and teachers contribute to this cultural dissonance and a lack of belonging felt by students in non-dominant groups by pressuring these students to assimilate into the mainstream culture rather than taking the more difficult path of acknowledging their distinctive backgrounds and contributions. One reason students from non-dominant backgrounds may lack a sense of belonging in educational institutions is because modern educational institutions continue to reproduce the dominant status quo.

Another setting where this cultural dissonance is seen is when students who grow up in poorer neighbourhoods begin to attend schools in affluent suburbs. It is well documented that students who grow up in poorer neighbourhoods are less likely to graduate from high school (Wodtke et al., 2011). Coming from a neighbourhood with high rates of unemployment and poverty decreases graduation rates from 96% to as low as 76% (Wodtke et al., 2011). These effects have also been found to be cumulative; the longer a student lives in poverty, the lower the chances of graduating high school (Wodtke et al., 2011). Steele (1992) has suggested that the mechanism involved in the effect of poverty

on graduation rates is the low level of support received by these students and the fragile or lacking sense of belonging these students develop. Santos (2014) has suggested that establishing a sense of belonging in a school environment could be a key tool to "assist in either breaking the cycle of dropping out of school or lead to an opportunity of educational advancement" (p. 6). While the challenges associated with transitioning from one form of educational institution to another are difficult for all students, there is evidence to suggest that students from non-dominant groups in elite institutions may encounter extra barriers which make them more at risk to dropping out (Santos, 2014). Goodenow and Grady (1993) have suggested that students of non-dominant groups find this transition so tough because when compared to the general population, these students have a lack of cultural proficiency with teachers, shortages of role models and come from a lower socioeconomic status and/or poverty.

This cultural dissonance is also seen among Latino students. When researching in the United States, Spindler and Spindler (1990) found that Latino students' first language, behaviours, and learning styles differ greatly from those expected by Eurocentric educational institutions, and school structures were designed to exclude non-European curriculum and cultures. Asante (1991) suggested that non-denominational education should promote pluralism and not embody one culture. Zirkel and Cantor (2004) also suggest that as the world becomes more globalised, and cultural and ethnic diversity expands in Western societies, traditional, Eurocentric models are out-dated and no longer meeting the identity-based and psychological needs of their incoming student populations. One proposed reason for this difference amongst Latino students compared to Caucasian students in US schools is the importance of community and collectivist

values in many Latino cultures, compared with the individualistic values of educational institutions (Goodenow, 1992). Garza and Santos (1991) support this claim and have found that Latino students preferred to cooperate on tasks in small groups when compared to Caucasian peers. Abi-Nader (1990) has suggested that Latino students are much more motivated by collectivist goals rather than individualistic goals and encourages the building of a supportive, caring school community as a strategy to increase Latino students' connectedness and school achievement. Santos (2014) has suggested that "Solidarity within the group and participation with others are characteristics that are highly valued amongst Latinos" (p. 35).

2.2.5. Positive Outcomes Associated with a Sense of Belonging

Cuervo et al. (2017) argue that school belonging merits further research because "schools are the major institutions where young people spend most of their time outside their families" (p. 5). There is a growing body of research that suggests developing a sense of belonging to one's educational institution can lead to a range of positive outcomes. Hausmann et al. (2009) found that a sense of belonging had direct effects on the sense of commitment to their educational institutions that students felt and indirect effects on intentions to persist and actual persistence behaviour for both white and African-American students. Furthermore, feeling a sense of belonging to one's ingroup has been shown to be associated with certain favourable cognitive and behavioural patterns such as preferential attitudes toward and treatment of in-group members over out-group members, as well as increased altruism and cooperation between ingroup members (Turner 1987).

School belonging has also been associated with higher levels of attainment, achievement, motivation and completion of higher education (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Arslan (2019) has found that belonging had a strong predictive effect on school achievement as well as internalising and externalising behaviours amongst adolescent students. Arslan's (2019) results also provide further evidence supporting the impacts of school belonging in promoting youth academic functioning and mental health. Goodenow (1992) found that students' sense of belonging to a school had a significant impact on motivation and the effort that they put into their academic work as well as their overall academic achievement. Similar findings of the importance of a sense of belonging to academic success have been found in a variety of populations and age groups of students. Zeichner (1980) tested the importance of group membership in elementary-aged children and found it was correlated with academic engagement, whereas Tinto (1987) reported similar findings in college-age students.

As well as academic measures, students' sense of belonging has also been associated with many psychological advantages such as higher levels of empathy, self-esteem, and general optimism (Anderman, 2003; Battistich et al., 1995). There is also research suggesting that the positive outcomes of establishing a sense of belonging translate across ethnic and cultural differences in students (Sanchez et al., 2005). These findings are not just limited to higher education transitions. There is evidence to suggest a relationship between academic achievement and a sense of belonging at school for middle school students too (Juvonen, 2007).

Perhaps one of the most ingenious investigations of the effect of belonging on academic achievement to date was conducted by Walton and Cohen (2007),

who designed an intervention to foster a sense of belonging among African-American students enrolled in computer science degrees. The researchers told students in the treatment condition that it is normal to have doubts about whether they belong in college, particularly after recently undergoing an educational transition like that from high school to university. Walton and Cohen (2007) found that students in the treatment condition maintained a high sense of belonging over time when compared to participants in the control condition, not to mention other positive outcomes like spending more time studying, communicating with professors more frequently, expressing more confidence in their academic potential, and experiencing greater improvement in their GPA over time. A qualitative study by Kember et al. (2001) of part-time students concluded that "A sense of belonging can make the difference between completing the programme or dropping out" (p. 340). Hausmann et al. (2009) also conducted a larger, empirical study to validate Kember's et al. (2001) findings. Hausmann et al. (2009) aimed "to examine whether subjective sense of belonging is positively related to student persistence in white and African-American first-year college students" (p. 652). Participants in the treatment condition were sent letters from university administrators as valued members of the community that included several small gifts, such as stickers and ID cardholders with college insignia; both interventions were aimed at fostering a sense of belonging. Hausmann et al. (2009) "found evidence to support the inclusion of students' subjective sense of belonging as a unique factor in a complex model of student persistence" (p. 665). This study provides evidence that a sense of belonging can be fostered by a university quite easily and cheaply and can have positive benefits for students, including increasing their persistence.

2.2.6. Negative outcomes associated with a lack of a sense of belonging

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that not developing a sense of belonging to one's educational institution can lead to a range of negative consequences. To lose, or indeed, never possess in the first place, what Giddens (1991) calls "ontological security" makes individuals feel like they don't fit in their society and the world a less predictable place. Shotter (1993) suggests that not knowing the codes, norms or language of society "is to live in a world not one's own" (p. 195).

Finn and Voelkl (1993) point out that students drop out because they do not feel they belong or identify with the school. When interviewed about why they dropped out, one in four young people said they felt that they did not belong in their educational institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Even if students do not drop out, failing to establish a sense of belonging can lead to higher levels of stress, poorer mental and physical health, and even increased risk of suicide (Baumeister & Leary 1995). Finn's (1989) meta-analysis of the literature investigating school leaving argues that unless students identify with the school, establish a sense of belonging, and are welcomed, respected and valued (at least to a minimal extent), they will become disengaged from the process of education and eventually drop out. Similarly, Cuervo and Wyn (2017) suggest "decisions to leave school, study, get a job and to enter a partnership with another person are often nuanced by a striving to belong or to escape a place where one does not belong" (p. 225).

Educators and researchers alike have come to appreciate that high levels of meaningful participation in school reduce involvement in high-risk behaviours and enhance developmental outcomes (Appleton et al., 2008). Pittman and

Richmond (2007) have also found that amongst young people, a weak sense of school belonging is associated with negative behaviours like violence, smoking, alcohol consumption and marijuana use. Pertinent to the current study, Wehlage et al. (1989) have also suggested that a student's perception that they are a member of the school was a central aspect of engagement and the prevention of dropping out. A sense of belonging at school can also have positive externalities for the rest of the school community. Chapman et al. (2014) have found that among high school students, school connectedness was positively correlated with their willingness to protect friends from injury-risk behaviours such as alcohol use and violence.

2.3. International Schools Context

2.3.1. Defining International Schools and International Education

While there is much debate in the literature around how to define international schools and international education, perhaps the unifying factor that most schools that identify as international schools would share is that they offer students a curriculum that is different from the host country's national curriculum; this is the definition adopted for the current study. Hayden and Thompson (2011) have argued for a second characteristic that all international schools share—that teaching staff employed by the school are largely not from the host country; however, as this dynamic sector of education is changing, they have argued that this characteristic no longer holds true (Hayden and Thompson, 2013).

Hayden and Thompson (1996) have aimed to identify the universals of international education and place emphasis on cultural diversity amongst the student body and teaching staff as exemplars of international education. However,

attempting to construct a set of values and beliefs that cut across cultural backgrounds, as international schools do, is littered with dangers and difficulties. Hofstede (1986) noted that values are rarely acknowledged as culturally relative and, therefore, "cross-cultural learning situations are rife with premature judgements" (p. 305).

International schools and international education are somewhat of an enigma to educational researchers, policymakers and the general population at large. Even with a groundswell of researchers dedicating their careers to the international school context such as Tristan Bunnell, Mary Hayden and Alec Peterson, there is an acknowledged shortage of research being conducted in this context. Hayden and Thompson (2008) call international schools a well-kept secret. Perhaps it is no surprise that the majority of the world is completely unaware of international schools' existence, as education is usually a national, or even more localised to a state level, affair. International education has been gaining traction in settings that used to be the sole domain of national systems, and internationalism can be found in many national curriculums. Peterson (1987) defines an international education as one which

> being liberal and general, goes well beyond information and includes an appreciation of the art of other cultures and a discussion of the basis of morality in other cultures, is inevitably involved in the development of attitudes… its intention is not simply to help the next generation to know better their enemies or rivals, but to understand and cooperate better with their fellow human beings across frontiers (p. 194).

A great deal of the confusion and enigmatic nature of international education comes from the numerous related terms and concepts and inconsistencies in their use—terms such as international education, global

citizenship education, education for international understanding, international-mindedness, comparative education, world studies and development education. Researchers contest the use, definitions, overlap and relationship between these concepts in what Marshall (2007) called the 'big terminology debate'. Adding to the complexity of conducting research in this setting is the fact that what it means to be an international school is a contested construct, with researchers in the field unable to agree on the characteristics of an institution that make it an international school. This contention is explained by Allen (as cited in Pearce, 2013) as follows: '"international education' is a floating signifier, a phrase without a circumscribed meaning which is invoked by a variety of users who feel that it gives a valuable impression of their projects" (p. xii). Different stakeholders tend to use the term 'international school' to denote different aspects of education to fit their different purposes. Some use it to signify an ideological allegiance to fostering internationalism, some use it to denote a nationally diverse community and others use it as a status symbol to signal an education beyond a national curriculum.

Even decades ago, researchers were struggling to define what it meant to be an international school. Terwilliger (1972), suggests there are four main prerequisites for a school to be considered an international one: enrolment of a significant number of students who are not citizens of the country in which the school is located; a Board of Directors made up of foreigners and nationals in roughly the same proportions as the student body; a staffing policy, which favours teachers who have themselves experienced cultural adaptation, and will thus be better attuned to counsel students; and a curriculum which should be "a distillation of the best content and the most effective instructional practices of

each of the national systems" (p. 361).

Rather than try to define international schools in their entirety, Hayden and Thompson (2013, p. 5) have suggested a model that classifies international schools into three categories:

> 'Type A' 'traditional' international schools established principally to cater for globally mobile expatriate families for whom the local education system is not considered appropriate.
> 'Type B' 'ideological' international schools established principally on an ideological basis bringing together young people from different parts of the world to be educated together with a view to promoting global peace and understanding.
> 'Type C' 'non-traditional' international schools established principally to cater for Host Country Nationals—the socio-economic advantaged elite of the host country who seek for their children a form of education different from and perceived to be a higher quality than that available in the National Education System.

The 'ideological' international schools sub-group is much smaller in number than the other two sub-groups with the most well-known of them being part of the United World Colleges Movement (UWC, 2018) or Think Global School (TGS, 2018). As an example, the UWC movement is driven by the mission to make "education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future" (UWC, 2018) and does so by bringing students aged 16-19 from over 155 countries together in 17 schools over 4 continents.

Even if one separates out 'ideological' international schools, many other international schools retain an ideological dimension. Many international schools feature concepts such as international-mindedness in their mission, vision or values documents. This ideological dimension of international schools has been present as early as 1951, when the Conference of Internationally Minded Schools

(CIMS) was founded, which was later merged with the International Schools Association (ISA).

Defining and studying international schools is becoming increasingly important as the sector is growing at a rapid pace. In a report commissioned by the International School Council, Brummit and Keeling (2013) found that between 2000 and 2013 the number of international schools grew from 2584 to 6400. However, this growth has not been equal across all sectors of the international school system. As expatriate salary and benefits packages decline in a globalised world that can increase supply high-quality local talent and sophisticated global communications infrastructure, the demand for 'traditional' international schools has declined. At the same time as new elite classes emerge in developing nations, the demand for 'non-traditional' international schools has been growing. Hayden and Thompson (2013) hypothesise that the majority of the growth in international schools over the period from 2000-2013 comes from 'non-traditional' international schools, although at this point there is no data to confirm this assumption. Resnik (2008) suggests 'Not only mobile families, but also the national elites, are demanding international education for their children, which shows that international education is largely perceived as a prerequisite for the best jobs in the global market.' (p. 148).

It is becoming increasingly important to study international schools, not only because they are rapidly growing in number, but also because they are a disproportionately important force in twenty-first century education. Hayden and Thompson (2008) suggest that international schools, on "the basis of their experience and achievements to date, they have much to offer to private schools, to national or 'state' schools, and to education systems more widely" (p. 15).

Resnik (2012) suggests traditional tools of sociological inquiry such as social identity, habitus and social reproduction will be useful to help understand the field of international education and believes 'international education points to a new research area and new research objects that include a large array of instituions and agents such as ISs [international schools], international curriculum and international students' (p. 292)

Not only is defining what is meant by international schools difficult but researching education in this context comes with its own set of challenges as well. If we consider the diverse application of the term 'international school', the vast and varied geographical distribution, the presence of outlier schools and diversity of social settings present in these schools, the issues with data collection become apparent. Pearce (2013) argues that a related issue is the lack of a membership or organisational body to create and uphold normative standards of legislating, sponsoring, funding, training and inspecting that a national system provides. Given this diversity in setting in international schools, Pearce (2013) suggests that all research conducted in these settings is in effect opportunity samples and in turn demand a rigorous analysis of the characteristics of the sample before drawing conclusions. Pearce (2013) suggests "In discussing the history of the discourse of international education one must examine exactly what group is yielding the data" (p. 67).

UNESCO outlined the aims of international education in 1996 in a declaration by member states' Ministers for Education. The document states the aims of international education are to develop:

- a sense of universal values for a culture of peace,

- the ability to value freedom and the civic responsibility that goes with it,
- intercultural understanding which encourages the convergence of ideas and solutions to strengthen peace,
- skills of non-violent conflict resolution,
- skills for making informed choices,
- respect for cultural heritage and protection of the environment, and
- feelings of solidarity and equity at the national and international levels. (p. 6).

However, Ministers of Education are working within the context of national education systems, so while this declaration may share many common features with education in an international school, it is directed towards fostering international-mindedness within national systems. Interestingly, Hill (2006) points out the use of the words 'respect' and 'feelings'—which imply educational systems developing attitudinal traits within their students and a values based educational program.

2.3.2. History of International Schools

International schools are a relatively recent phenomenon in terms of education and can trace their roots back to institutions such as the Maseru English Medium Preparatory School (MEMPS) in Lesotho, which is still in operation today. Employing only one teacher, MEMPS opened its doors in 1890 to the children of English-speaking missionaries, British administration officials of the then-named Basutoland and traders. However the desire to foster a sense of international-mindedness finds its roots stretching back even further, and Sylvester (2002), suggests that the international schools movement, particularly 'ideological' international schools, stems from the International College at Spring Grove, London, which should be considered the first

international school. International College was in operation between 1866-1889 and was founded by a group of outwardly looking like-minded individuals (including famous British novelist Charles Dickens) who suggested a model of schooling where a movement of international schools across Europe could admit students from different countries so that "the pupils, in passing from one language and nation to another, would find no notable change in the course of study to retard the progress of their education" (Dickens, 1864 in Sylvester, 2002).

Hayden and Thompson (2008) suggest that the modern day traditional international school might find its roots in a school like the International School of Geneva, which was founded as a bilingual school in 1924 with English and French instruction, with eight students and three teachers to serve the children of the recently established League of Nations and International Labour Office as well as expatriate employees. In the same year, Yokohama International School was also founded with six children and one teacher, to cater for the children of the city's non-Japanese community.

2.3.3. The International Baccalaureate Organisation

Developed in the 1960s as a pre-university programme for 16-18-year-olds, with input from experts from many parts of the world, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is the most well-established of the international programmes offered in international schools. Increasingly widely-offered in international schools worldwide, and with curriculum content developed deliberately to be international rather than having any particular national affiliation, the IBDP curriculum and its formal external examinations are available in the three working languages of English, French and Spanish.

Examinations can be taken in November by southern-hemisphere schools as an alternative to the May examinations taken by students in most international schools which follow a northern hemisphere timetable (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2018).

Even though the rhetoric in international schools relies heavily on the concept of international-mindedness, it must be acknowledged that the main influence on international education today and throughout its history is primarily the values and beliefs of a culturally Western education (Pearce, 2013). Perhaps one of the organisations to profit the most from the spread of international education, the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), which originates in international schools and holds up international-mindedness as one of its core values, has been described by a former Director General as characterised by a "Western liberal humanist culture" (Walker, 2000, p. 12). Hofstede (1986) has characterised many Western cultures as sharing a common trait of individualism which is often in direct conflict with students from non-Western backgrounds' more collectivist world views. However, as Walker (2000) suggests, the international school market is a dynamic system that is constantly changing and in the future we may see a new paradigm emerge in international education when the leading sponsor of international schools could be China. Evidence for the predominance of a western educational philosophy in international schools is more than anecdotal. Hayden and Thompson (1996) cite an international student who suggested she had not experienced an international education at all but rather "a Western education, because everything I was taught was delivered in a Western point of view since all the teachers were from the West" (p. 51).

The International Baccalaureate Organisation's (IBO) mission statement is

a call to arms which hopes that its programmes "encourage students… [to] understand that other people with their differences, can also be right" (IBO, 2018). While this is a noble aim, and vital if IBDP graduates are to make a constructive contribution in a globally interconnected world, Wilber (2000, quoted in Skelton, 2002) suggests it is not enough: "if we remain merely at the stage of celebrating diversity, we are ultimately promoting fragmentation, separation and despair" (p. 44). The challenge facing international schools then is outlined by Wilkinson and Wilkinson (2013) as creating a community which allows students to develop and value their own identities and cultures while respecting "the diversity of cultures that love of humanity requires: to transcend the parochial, not only in feeling, but also with a clear intellectual objectivity" (p. 112).

International educators then face a dilemma, if they wish to foster a sense of international-mindedness within their student bodies while fostering a healthy connection to students' home cultures as well. The IBO argues that this is possible, and that developing feelings of acceptance and patriotism to one's own culture is an important part of fostering a multicultural perspective. Indeed, former Director General of the IBO, Roger Peel (1988) wrote when the IBO was in its infancy and only consisted of the diploma programme:

> The honesty of the IB stems from the fact that we require all students to relate first to their own national identity—their own language, literature, history and cultural heritage, no matter where in the world this may be. Beyond that we ask that they identify with the corresponding traditions of others. It is not expected that they adopt alien points of view, merely that they are exposed to them and encouraged to respond intelligently. The end result, we hope, is a more compassionate population, a welcome manifestation of national diversity within an international framework of

> tolerant respect. Ideally, at the end of the IB experience, students should know themselves better than when they started while acknowledging that others can be right in being different.

Paris (2003) has gone so far as to argue that the IB diploma program is a tool of globalisation, spreading a message of the importance of global mindedness at the detriment to national or local cultures, norms and values. Paris (2003) believes that the IBDP, with its divided silos of subjects, runs counter to more holistic models of education "as experienced by many cultures, even indigenous cultures" (p. 235). Paris (2003) juxtaposes internationalisation with globalisation. He defines globalisation as an inflicting "of ideas involving a dominant-recessive relationship. Internationalisation occurs when there is a sharing of ideas, where ideas are utilised, agreed upon, and mutually accepted" (p. 235). Similarly, Vidovich (2004), suggests that 'internationalisation' involves multilateral, multidirectional connections between states, cultures and nations, whereas 'globalisation' transcends relationships between nation states and instead focuses on privileging the ideologically neoliberal focus on free trade and the global capitalist market place when making public policy decisions (p. 444).

Another way to theorise the distinction between globalisation and internationalisation in education comes from Gough (2003) who suggests:

> Producing a global knowledge economy in/for an internationalised curriculum field can be understood as creating transnational spaces in which local knowledge traditions can be performed together, rather than trying to create a global common market in which representations of local knowledge must be translated into (or exchanged for) the terms of a universal discourse. (p. 54)

As a remedy to international schools being used as a tool to prop up the global world economic order, Bartlett (1993) argues for a "deeper

internationalism… that more profound empathy with other cultures and concern with international issues which would characterize a global concern" (p. 36). When coupled with Cambridge and Thompson's (2004) ideas around an internationalism that "celebrates cultural diversity and promotes an international-minded outlook" (p. 173), one can see the attraction of this deeper internationalism.

However, other theorists have argued that this deeper internationalism is merely another form of neo-colonialism. McLaren (1997) argues "In parading before people the virtues of diversity, liberal multiculturalists have displaced the contextual specificity of difference, recycling colonialism under the guise of democracy" (p. ix). This criticism harks back to the notion of deficit theories, and Allan (2013) points out how in international schools the discourse is often centred around pedagogies to make curriculum accessible to non-elite students, and "does not recognise the cultural specificity of its educational philosophy, or takes as granted that it is the superior model, removing this hidden assumption from discussion or criticism" (p. 157). This deficit view of non-dominant cultures also emerges in the languages department, and Edwards (2004) suggests "the heritage languages associated with minority groups are regularly marginalised" (p. 143). Fishman (2004) poses the question: "how long must languages and cultures be trivialised if they are learned at home, and only respected if they are acquired later when they are usually learned less well?" (p. 417). This criticism is not new, nor isolated to the international context; Pearce (2013) points out how in:

> recent decades the Hispanic minority has shown more inclination to remain distinct, but nevertheless the traditional question still dominates, and teachers from the US predominantly approach cultural matters in

> terms of minimizing difference, with social uniformity as a prime aspiration. (p. 65)

Neo-Marxism offers a useful paradigm to evaluate the rise of 'non-traditional' international schools and their role in maintaining the global hegemony. Todaro (1993) like other neo-Marxists suggests an international dependence model to describe the global economy, whereby the chronic co-existence of the poor and the rich (on both a national and global scale) are developing upon different trajectories. Todaro (1993) points to the establishment of rich elites, who are served by non-traditional international schools, and the poor majority in many nations as evidence of neo-colonial dependence. These small elite classes in developing nations who enjoy relatively high incomes, political power and social status have a vested interest in perpetuating the global capitalist system which has brought them their increased wealth and power at the cost of equality. Allan (2013) suggests that the international system is not defined by international interdependence, but rather the rich, dominant countries expand and develop, as they get to make the rules and set terms in their favour, while the poorer, dependent nations can only grow and develop as a reflection of this. When viewed through this lens, it is easy to become critical of international schools as merely a tool used "to perpetuate the dualism" (Allan, 2013, p. 158).

2.3.4. International Schools as Elite Institutions

International schools, particularly 'traditional' ones and international education more generally, have their roots in institutions founded to serve the children of diplomats, UN personnel, NGO workers, and employees of international companies as they move around the world, and because of this, international education has often been described as elitist (Hill, 2007). Even

among ‘non-traditional’ international schools, cries of elitism can be heard. Almost 40% of IB schools are in the world’s richest nation, the US, while nearly 60% are in G8 countries (IBO, 2018). In less developed nations, schools offering international education largely serve the better off in society. Roberts (2013) suggests that international schools serve a privileged community of students and that international educators have the opportunity and responsibility to help encourage these students to take meaningful paths once they leave their institutions.

International schools show all the hallmarks of being elite educational institutions. They operate as distinct, insular bodies, outside the surrounding mainstream educational and cultural contexts. They prize their legacies and traditions, yet paradoxically embrace innovation and technology. Fahey et al. (2015) suggest several elite schools in non-Western countries all share several characteristics: They are influenced by the local context where they are located, yet also feel the weight of globalised market forces, they draw heavily on their alumni network and histories to maintain and propagate their institutional identities and they all leave a “distinctive material signature” (MacDougall, 1999, p. 96) that stays with graduates throughout their lives, and they all strive to be exceptional. In the contemporary era of globalisation, Kenway and Fahey (2014) believe elite schools are well poised to continue to consolidate cultural and economic capital and thrive. Using this framework, it is plausible to consider international schools, and UWCSEA, as elite educational institutions. Kreckel (2018) argues that elite internationally-minded institutions are able to choose their students from an oversubscribed pool of applications, but also attract high quality teachers and administrators from around the world as their reputation carries

weight in the increasingly globalised world of education.

Lee et al. (2016) argue that the IB has branded itself well as an elite school leaving qualification, recognised by universities around the world and a rigorous preparatory course for students with tertiary study ambitions. This image of the IB as an elite qualification has been widely accepted by a range of stakeholders including the mass media, universities, parents, teachers and students themselves in Asia and beyond (Doherty, 2009). Lee et al. (2014) suggest that this image of the IBDP and international schools as elite institutions and an elite qualification is more than just a mirage, sighting recent evidence that three out of four of IBDP graduates in China between 2002-2012 were admitted to one of the world's top 500 university as well as 30% being admitted to one of the world's top 50 ranked universities. Lee et al. (2016) argue that the presence of so many elite international schools in China is leading to 'skyboxification' (p. 51) a term used to describe 'the polarisation of americal life caused by marketization of public and civic spheres where people of diverse backgrounds rarely interact' (p. 51), making those who attend these elite international schools more and more removed from local schools and communities.

What elite education means is changing with time. While traditionally, social class barriers were more rigid, written into law or passed down family trees, these days the educational hierarchy is being set by the market, and increasingly high demand for places at established elite schools is compounded by the lack of new elite educational institutions. However, Baker (2018) argues elite educational institutions are moving with the times by taking actions to counteract their impression of elitist and unattainable. One example of this is setting up scholarship programs with the explicit aim to admit students from outside elite

strata of society. Baker (2018) comments: “in recent years this trend has grown in size from a token to a significant commitment to distinguish themselves as schools and universities in the business of creating, not reproducing, an elite” (p. 34). This is also true in the international sector and UWCSEA specifically.

2.3.5. Cultural Dissonance in International Schools

Festinger’s (1957) well-known theory of cognitive dissonance states that humans experience distress when we are forced to hold two or more beliefs, values or ideas that contradict each other. There are many applications of Festinger’s (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory to international school settings but one pertinent to this discussion is how newly arrived students may react to culture shock. Festinger (1957) proposed that when people experience cultural dissonance, they tend to withdraw from the situations which cause their emotional discomfort; in this case, students may withdraw from settings and events which promote internationalism or the school’s ethos in favour of retreating to the safety of their own known cultural environment.

The educational impact this cultural dissonance can have on learning is outlined by Wertsch (1985), who uses Vygotsky’s language. Wertsch (1985) argues that it is imperative in educational settings that teachers and learners should use a common set of mediational means, including a shared common language, understandings of roles, responsibilities and perceptions of the world. The difficulty in international schools comes when students who have grown up with one set of cultural norms and practices around their roles and responsibilities and tools of communication come into contact with international school teachers with a different set of cultural norms and practices. Students at international

schools are coming from a diverse set of backgrounds, yet even with the loftiness of the language around international-mindedness in international schools, Leach (1969) argues that the vast majority of the teachers in these schools have domestic, Western, elite backgrounds, qualifications and training, which form the normative basis of their pedagogy. Minimizing cultural dissonance and fostering a sense of belonging among students from diverse backgrounds will be imperative for the success of these students in international school settings. Many international school teachers are ignorant about the rich and divergent histories, politics and bodies of knowledge that their students bring to the classroom, which becomes deeply problematic "when teachers refrain gingerly from not teaching in these areas" (MacGill, 2016, p. 242).

Similarly, another issue which may lead to cultural dissonance in international school settings is a lack of professional development around international education for international school teachers. With an estimated 6400 international schools, it could be hypothesized that there are approximately 300,000 international school teachers (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013), yet professional development tailored to the issues faced in international education are scarce. Pearce (2013) argues that when entering the international arena, often the professional development priorities of the teacher and institution is curriculum orientation, and centred on the syllabus of International Baccalaureate courses rather than international education in general. Although the trend line is increasing, Pearce (2013) argues that the amount of international school teachers who are or who have taken part in specialist postgraduate or undergraduate courses is rare. Tate (2012) outlines the need for professional development around these issues by suggesting that international educators

> work in 'international' education, teach in 'international' schools and talk about 'internationalism', the relations between nations—which is an inadequate term for the complexity of what we are trying to do to prepare young people for a rapidly changing and culturally diverse world (p. 214).

Pearce (2013) has asked whether it is worth considering "to what extent there is an actual discursive community in international education. Where do teachers or other levels of practitioners converse professionally?" (p. 67).

Allan (2002) argues that there is potential for dissonance and conflict on cultural boundaries in international schools, particularly where the dominant, usually Western, culture in the school and the host country culture impacts the school's culture. This idea can be extended to help explain the complex interplay between various subcultures, departments and individuals that leads to the development of cultural identities in international schools. Caffyn (2013) argues that individual identity in international schools is not with one culture or national group but is characterised by different backgrounds, cultural interaction, experience and familial structures colliding to create immense cultural diversity.

2.3.6. The role of International Schools in Identity Construction

Gunter (2006) argues that international schools have a huge impact on the identities of the students that pass through their doors, not just in terms of cultural identity but in terms of factors like race, age, sexuality and class, which:

> do not exist as normalised truths about who we are but are created classifications and as such are used to systemise and hence control sharing and staring across boundaries. This is evident in how typing is used by the self and others to include or exclude individuals and groups from particular social, political, cultural and economic practices. The challenge for educational organisations is how they may replicate or

> resist such structures that do harm to human beings through the actions of human beings (p. 257).

Allan (2002) suggests international schools serve diverse parental bodies with often contradictory interests and goals. International schools have such diverse backgrounds and situations and cultures, which by their loosely defined nature (Bush, 1995) makes their cultures open to different perceptions, interpretation and challenges. Caffyn (2013) argues that international schools are a place of political and social discourse, "a focal point where emotions, views, philosophy, needs, identity and insecurity thrive" (p. 210). While these issues may be present in any school community to some degree, in an international school context, these kinds of issues can thrive, especially where the school becomes the dominant *de facto* community organisation or even a surrogate family. However, Marshall (2003) asks "with globalization and the ideological premise of an international school as a borderless structure, is it, like modern organisations, to be regarded as more a network of relationships, systems and social interactions" (p. 63)?

Pearce (2013) suggests the third-culture kid paradigm (Useem & Downie, 1976), as a tool that can be utilized to foster collective identity among international students from diverse backgrounds as it provides a group in which any student living outside their home culture can claim membership. Although it is uncontested that a group of expatriate children thrown together through circumstances does not have the history, traditions, stability or uniformity of an authentic cultural community, Tajfel's work on minimal group paradigms (Brewer 1979) demonstrates that sameness is not a requirement for group loyalty, which is in line with many expatriate experiences. As Pearce (2013) states,

"Companionship on a desert island does not demand many shared interests but it does lead to rapid learning" (p. xiii).

International schools provide a unique social and cultural context worthy of future investigation (Pearce, 1998). They have the potential to provide a positive experience for expatriate children as they are acknowledged as having high standards and being frequently attended by children of the internationally mobile elite—personnel who are chosen for international assignments usually because they are the best and brightest within their organisations (Shortland, 2013). Shortland (2013) suggests some of the benefits students can gain from attending international schools include exposure to multilingual and multicultural experiences, helping to broaden the possible identities they could imagine for themselves. Seeing a variety of cultural and behavioural norms helps students to develop a new cultural frame of reference, outside of their native cultures and the host culture, often dubbed a 'third culture' which affects their perceptions of their internationalism Selmer and Lam (2004) suggest this international frame of reference gives these third-culture kids a competitive advantage over non-internationally mobile students, whether from the home or host nation, when they finally enter the global job market, or indeed, when they are competing for university places at elite institutions. Wigford and Higgins (2019) suggest international schools provide a unique perspective on wellbeing, possibly due to the multicultural, multilingual staff and student body as well as the relatively high frequency of transition between schools. Their research stresses the importance of teacher appreciation, relationships and belonging in international schools to maintain both staff and student wellbeing. However, Shortland (2013) suggest that this internationalism certainly comes with its set of drawbacks as well. Shortland

(2013) suggest children's reintegration into home-country schools after repatriation can be difficult. Shortland (2013) argues that "local, state systems may appear (or be) inferior, friendships need to be built/rebuilt and readjustment is required to the educational system and culture" (p. 40). The relative instability of their upbringing may lead to "confused loyalties, a sense of rootlessness and restlessness, a lack of true identity, and unresolved grief" (Rader & Sittig, 2003, p. 3), which can result from the many separations experienced, as well as a reluctance to form close emotional bonds. Indeed, a student quoted in a report by the University of Westminster (1993) described repatriation as having been "a bitter-sweet experience". Older age group children are reported as having "difficulty in letting go of their 'internationalness' and settling back in" (p. 18).

Pearce (2013) argues for some other factors that can promote positive identity construction in international schools. He suggests Mother Tongue (MT) programmes offer students emotionally and linguistically safe and positive frames for learning, and Williams (2012) suggests MT programs give students confidence which is transferable to mainstream classes and provides a brief respite from the additional demands of working in English-medium classes, allowing students to work to the best of their abilities. Pearce (2013) also highlights the benefit of neutral, novel locations as tools for helping to forge connections between diverse populations and encourages the use of residential experiences and trips, just as diplomats concerned with international relations might value the use of Camp David or Oslo.

2.4.Students from Non-Elite Backgrounds

It has been well established that students from non-elite backgrounds face

a number of extra hurdles in their academic careers when compared with students from elite backgrounds. Thomson (2007, p. 116) refers to the experience of children from non-elite backgrounds as "the paradox of visibility and invisibility" with which many young people from non-elite backgrounds struggle on a daily basis as they feel they are highly visible in their school and classrooms, mostly for the reputation that they have acquired as 'bad kids', but also that they feel neither heard nor supported in ways that would help them with their education. This has left many of these students in a state of confusion as to how they can overcome their normative categorization and its exclusionary consequences. By focusing on the standpoints (Harding, 2004) of these students from non-elite backgrounds, the current study aims to investigate a "politics of possibility that can be used to rewrite the narratives of subordinate groups not merely in reaction to the forces of domination but in response to the construction of alternative visions and futures" (Giroux, 2005, p. 59).

One may envision the division between students from elite and non-elite backgrounds eroding as the education sector resembles a more traditional marketplace and less of a publicly provided good. To some degree this is true, elite institutions such as UWCSEA, the school focused on in this study, often have policies and programmes to admit students from non-elite backgrounds and provide them with needs basis financial aid. However, Baker (2018) suggests this is to allow these elite educational institutions to "distinguish themselves as schools and universities in the business of creating, not reproducing, an elite" (p. 34).

With the ever-widening inequalities in today's world, both in terms of education and power, the bulk of research has been on disadvantaged institutions

and pathways of reform. The other end of the continuum, elite schools, is systematically studied to a far lesser extent. As Baker (2018) states,

> The educational transformation of elites and elitism is a phenomenon ripe for future sociological investigation, and particularly given the global nature of the processes outlined here, a special emphasis should be placed on the growing internationalisation of education and elitism. (p. 37)

This study adds to this growing body of literature.

Many researchers (Alatas, 2006; Bhambra, 2007; Chen, 2010; Connell, 2007; Hall, 1992; Sakai, 2000; Smith, 1999) have pointed out the historical tendency of educational research, and social science more generally, of taking the experiences of white, middle-class, European males and applying these findings to explain the experiences of the rest of humanity. This has often resulted in viewing any model that differs from the Eurocentric norm to be deficient (Chen, 2010; Hall, 1992). In education, researchers (Nozaki, 2009; Rizvi, 1997; Singh, 2010) have shown how this colonial legacy persists in Western academia by the reductionist practice of comparing 'the West and the rest', discounting both the value of non-Western systems of education as well as "powerfully erasing the presence of 'internal others' both in the West and in the Rest and cross-national cultural and institutional hybridization" (Takayama, 2016, p. 71). The study of intermixing of knowledge production systems across cultural and national boundaries remains underexplored (Saki, 2000). However, Connell (2007) suggests that "every significant development in the social sciences in the periphery makes some use of concepts or techniques from the metropole" (p. 223), suggesting that it is not good enough to adopt "a mosaic theory of multiple knowledges—a mosaic of distinct knowledge systems" (Connell, 2007, p. 223),

but instead by valuing the intrinsically hybrid nature of knowledge production, in the formation of "indigenous knowledge, that helps us dismantle the colonial discourse of the West and the Rest" (Takayama, 2016, p. 81).

Another reason offered for why students from non-elite backgrounds often face more barriers to reach the levels of academic success achieved by their peers from elite backgrounds is the effects of stereotype threat, which suggests some students feel the pressure to perform more than others (Steele, 1988). The concept of stereotype threat, where individuals' behaviour conforms to stereotypes about their social groups, even if the individual does not believe the stereotype themselves, has long been shown to influence individuals' behaviour around academic performance and has been well documented by Aaron Steele (Steele, 2010; Steele et al., 2002; Steele, 1988). There is evidence that stereotype threat reduces the performance of individuals if they are part of a group who suffers from a negative stereotype, such as African-American students on tests of verbal abilities, and it has been hypothesized that this is because the negative stereotype generates anxiety and increases the cognitive load on students (Steele et al., 2002). These students face the added burden of knowing that their individual performance may be viewed through the lens of the stereotype associated with their group (Cohen & Garcia, 2008). As humans derive a great deal of self-worth from group membership (Tajfel, 2010), we are also vulnerable to collective threats. Cohen and Garcia (2008) suggest that because this threat involves other group members and situations in which one is not personally evaluated, it can be more pervasive and chronic than other ego threats.

Students who are members of negatively stereotyped groups, such as students from non-elite backgrounds, sometimes experience attributional

ambiguity—mistrust of the motives behind other people's treatment of them (Crocker et al., 2003). Coupled with stereotype threat in evaluative contexts, belonging uncertainty may take the form not of a belief, but of a hypothesis (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Taken together with Darley and Gross' (1983) seminal research on confirmation bias and expectancy effects, these negatively stereotyped students' perceptions and interpretations of events are biased towards seeking evidence which confirms the hypothesis 'I do not belong'. Given this context, a minor negative academic experience, such as receiving a low grade on a test, or critical feedback on an essay can confirm the hypothesis and imply a lack of social belonging, whereas the same event may be interpreted in more positive ways, such as a motivational push or advice on how to succeed, by non-stereotyped students, or students from more elite backgrounds (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The current study wishes to investigate if developing a sense of belonging amongst students from non-elite backgrounds in international schools could bolster their academic self-concept and shield them from these negative effects of stereotype threat, such as lower academic success rates.

Jin and Ball (2019) argue that the accepted wisdom of students from working-class backgrounds being able to learn and assimilate into elite codes and behavioural patterns when they enter elite educational institutions is not played out in reality. In their three year life history study, Jin and Ball (2019) found that students' working-class habitus constrained the transformative effects of attending an elite educational institution. They found that working-class students instead were able to compartmentalise their ways of being and focused primarily on the academic aspects of university life while ignoring the social aspects.

2.5. Intersection of the Bodies of Literature

Although there are strong traditions of research in the fields of belonging, international schools and students from non-elite backgrounds, there is very little research where these constructs overlap.

For students from non-elite backgrounds, international schools can be isolating and alienating places, dredging up issues of social identity and standing (Caffyn, 2010). Ogbu (1992) provides an interesting discussion of cultural boundary problems between US students and students from other nations. Ogbu (1992) suggests that when students from the dominant group 'orientalise' or rhapsodise other cultures, it serves to deepen the boundaries between them. Caffyn (2013) has argued that these boundaries between dominant and minority groups face more pressure when faced with an alien host country location and culture, as in the context of international schools.

International schools run the risk of alienating and isolating students who come from non-elite backgrounds. The processes of social categorisation and social comparison move swiftly (Tajfel, 2010), and it is not long before students figure out to which groups they belong and from which groups they are excluded. In school the 'other' becomes categorized and disempowered, a victim of discourses of diversity. Caffyn (2013) argues people, whether they are teachers, students or parents, risk social alienation and isolation by moving into an international school, they risk losing aspects of their identity, diffusion of their culture, dominance by others and future insecurity. Caffyn (2007) suggests that these threats and risks amplify emotion and fear which can easily affect relationships and politics at an international school, resulting in organisations, communities and relationships breaking apart due to issues of expectations,

experiences and vulnerability, hardening people's original identities.

Festinger (1957) proposed that when people experience cultural dissonance, they tend to withdraw from the situations which cause their emotional discomfort; in this case, students may withdraw from settings and events which promote internationalism or the school's ethos in favour of retreating to the safety of their own known cultural environment. One can imagine that students from non-elite backgrounds arriving at prestigious international schools would experience a form of this culture shock and it would be interesting to investigate if fostering a sense of belonging can help alleviate such shock.

The educational impact this cultural dissonance can have on learning is outlined by Wertsch (1985), who argues that it is imperative in educational settings that teachers and learners should use a common set of mediational means, including a shared common language, understandings of roles, responsibilities, and perceptions of the world. For students from non-elite backgrounds, international schools can be isolating and estranging places, dredging up issues of social identity and standing (Caffyn, 2010). Currently there is a lack of research investigating the effect of belonging on the experiences of students from non-elite backgrounds in the international school context. The current research project aims to address this shortfall.

There is evidence that minority students may lack a sense of belonging in elite academic institutions (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2004). Walton and Cohen (2007) suggest that minority students who are uncertain about their social belonging in academic institutions suffer when confronted with "subtle events that confirm a lack of social connectedness and have disproportionately large impacts. They may do so even in the absence of

prejudice, fears of confirming the stereotype, or an anticipated intellectual evaluation" (p. 86).

2.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the three silos of research relevant to this thesis. It began with a discussion of belonging, what it is, how to foster it and why it is important in educational settings. This chapter then discussed literature relevant to international schools, what they are, why they are elite educational institutions, the complexities and challenges of researching within this unique setting and their role in identity construction for the globally nomadic young people who attend them. This chapter then discussed the sensitivities and intricacies of researching students from non-elite backgrounds, including ethical and theoretical implications. This chapter concluded with an examination of where these bodies of literature overlap and share commonalities. In the next chapter I will outline the methodology employed in my study and my rationale behind choosing this methodological approach.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In the current study, I examine National Committee students' experiences of a sense of belonging at UWCSEA. Based on this aim, I adopted a standpoint theoretical approach to research to try to investigate these lived experiences from "behind," "beneath," and "from outside" (Harding, 2003, p. 297) the international school context. I used a mixed-method approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to give both breadth and depth to the understanding of belonging in an international school experienced by National Committee students. I administered questionnaires and conducted qualitative interviews to generate data from student participants at this large international school in Singapore. I then applied a range of descriptive and inferential statistics to the quantitative data and used discourse analysis to analyse the qualitative data.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Mixed-Method Rationale

I utilised a concurrent, mixed-methods research design for this study; quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, merged, and analysed to better understand the topics of focus (Creswell, 2008). According to Creswell (2008), mixed-methods research collects both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously during the study, where "quantitative data provide for generalizability… qualitative data offer information about the context or setting" (p. 558). Mills (2007) writes in favour of mixed-method approaches,

stating that "it is generally accepted that researchers should not rely on any single source of data, interview, observation or instrument" (p. 56). I aimed to meet this criterion in the current study, gathering qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Theorists have supported the strengths of adopting this mixed-method approach such as Punch (1998, p. 241) who suggests "Both (quantitative and qualitative) are needed in social research" as both aid in the understanding of complex phenomena by bringing different empirical strategies for examining research questions. The type of questions being investigated should drive the selection of the research methodology, and Morse and Richards (2002) advise that qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined to help to address different research questions. More specifically, quantitative methods can address "how much?" result of any change, as opposed to the qualitative method which addresses the "how?" and "why?" questions about change (Morse and Richards, 2002, p. 25-26). However, the use of mixed-methods designs are not without their detractors. Flick (2002) suggests the problems raised by combining qualitative and quantitative research "have not been solved in a satisfying way… To develop really integrated qualitative/quantitative methods of data collection or data analysis remains an unresolved problem" (pp. 267, 269).

Morse (2003) makes the point that mixed-methods discourse has been largely shaped by postpositivist scholars who utilize a range of methods such as ethnography, surveys, narrative interviews, statistical analysis, biographical methodologies, experimental methods, and case studies. These researchers combine these methods as they see fit to most holistically address their research question, even though they often only have training in the quantitative methodologies (Morse, 2003). As Denzin (2010) states, "Unlike the poaching of

animals, there is nothing illegal about methodological poaching, but it does have some negative consequences. Persons who are less familiar with the rich traditions of qualitative inquiry are telling others with the same lack of experience how to do qualitative work" (p. 420). Indeed, given my own background in and familiarity with quantitative and experimental methods and lack of experience in qualitative methodologies, this observation rang true about the current research project, motivating me to seek understanding and support when designing and implementing the qualitative portion of the current study.

When thinking about how to address my research question, I concluded that a mixed-methods study was the only appropriate research method, given my need to collect data from a wide sample as well as deep data from a smaller sub-sample. By adopting a mixed-method approach, I decided that using each method with its own distinct advantages offered the best methodological approach for the current study. The quantitative component, put into practice by administering a questionnaire, helped inform me as I developed the in-depth qualitative component of qualitative interviews. For example, the responses to the questionnaires may have suggested support or a lack of support for an individual participant's response in an interview. This allowed me to delve deeper into the 'why' there would be this lack of internal consistency. The questionnaire responses also allowed me to gain a wider range of experiences of students from the target population, beyond the scope of the selected few individuals chosen for follow-up interviews. In the current study, where the context is so unique, collecting quantitative data would not have been enough to offer a rich understanding of the enablers and inhibitors of belonging. However, by gathering quantitative data by the administration of the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993)

questionnaire and demographic data, I was able to situate my qualitative findings within a richer understanding of the school-wide context.

The combination of two or more methods was not done haphazardly. Careful analysis and evaluation of how different research methods can complement and inform each other were planned and designed into my study. Just as poorly justified and planned research using a single method will lead to weak, invalid and untrustworthy outcomes, researchers combining methods indiscriminately merely for the sake of adding an additional research method will also lead to suboptimal research outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As Silverman (2005) states, "It should not be naively presumed that combining methods and aggregating data leads to an overall truth, or to a more complete picture, or to increased validity" (p. 122).

Mixed-methods research can help alleviate the weaknesses of each individual method used in a study. Pek and MacCallum (2011) advocate for the use of mixed-method research to alleviate the problem of outliers having too much influence on the results in quantitative research, leaving researchers in a conundrum of whether or not to include outliers in their statistical analysis. However by adopting a mixed-methods approach, researchers can qualitatively analyse these outlying cases and include an analysis of their meaning into the final understanding generated by a study (Klassen et al., 2012). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2012) have called mixed-methods a 'third paradigm' in research methodologies. Indeed, it seems essential to view mixed-methods research as a third paradigm given that many researchers hold the view that "compatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods is impossible due to incompatibility of paradigms that underlie the methods" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, pp. 14-15).

Tashakkori et al. (2010) advocate for mixed-methods research particularly for looking at the relationship between psychological constructs within a given environment, just as I am looking at the relationship between the construct of belonging in the environment of an international school. In the current study, Cloninger (2009) would point out this tension in the desire to study a sense of belonging amongst all Grade 11 students, adopting a nomothetic approach (i.e., the study of interindividual variation), with the interest in understanding elements that inhibit or enable belonging for some students, using an idiographic (i.e., the study of intraindividual variation) approach.

Mixed-methods research is finding popularity in many contemporary social sciences as it lends itself to critical inquiry and is being embraced by researchers from both qualitative and quantitative backgrounds. Denzin (2010) calls the emergence of mixed-methods research "bold, innovative, energizing, and disruptive… [representing] a challenge to the broader qualitative interpretive community. It can be read as an invitation to rethink terms that even a decade ago were settled, from validity to design, from praxis to reform" (p. 420).

Perhaps the subtype of mixed-methods research that best describes the approach taken in the current study is what Howe (2011) calls mixed-methods interpretivism, where the focus of the research becomes the qualitative dimension and understanding participants' stories and experiences is central, and data from more quantitative methods plays an auxiliary role. Denzin (2010) describes mixed-methods interpretivism as an approach that "emphasizes understanding persons on their own terms. It engages stakeholder's participation through the principles of inclusion and dialogue. The principle of inclusion has a democratic dimension, ensuring that insofar as it is possible, all relevant voices are heard" (p.

423).

What is clear is that there is no sure fire way to design a study to keep it free from bias or manipulation. The generation of evidence and knowledge always has been and always will be political. Whether it is "Presidential assistants [who] manufacture data to support war efforts" (Denzin, 2009, p. 39) or government bureaucrats requiring random control trials before considering changing policy or market research firms producing findings they "deem relevant for controlling the behaviours of consumers" (Kyale, 2008, p. 5), education researchers should not be so naïve as to assume we will be immune to such political pressures. Yet this does not mean we should succumb to the cynicism of critics of such educational research as lacking validity (Flick, 2002; Silverman, 2005).

The use of mixed-methods approaches can channel transgressive and emergent methodologies under a spirit of collaboration and cooperation amongst researchers and it "rests on standpoint and decolonizing epistemologies; it establishes links between paradigms, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity (Denzin, 2010, p. 420). As Denzin (2010) states "Inquiry has always been and will always be a moral, political, value-laden enterprise. We seek only a politics of hopes, models of social justice to lead us forward" (p. 424).

3.2.2. Qualitative Rationale

I draw largely on qualitative research methodologies in the current study. Qualitative research allows narrative, descriptive approaches to collect data (Mills, 2007). Qualitative data can "help explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). In the current study, qualitative data were collected from interviews

with National Committee students. The qualitative approach is the primary approach to research as it allows for a "complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). I hope that by adopting this approach the current study will have high levels of credibility by allowing the participants' voices to be heard. This approach is buttressed by the addition of quantitative findings from Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Scale of School Membership (PSSM) and demographic data, adding data triangulation and increasing the credibility of the study's findings.

Influential support of qualitative research methodologies can be found in the writings of Bourdieu (1973) who called qualitative data 'phenomenological knowledge'. Bourdieu (1973) considered phenomenological knowledge essential to understanding how individuals interact with their social word and believed individuals could not be studied outside of their contexts and social relationships, what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) have called "thinking relationally" (p. 228). However, Bourdieu (1990) could also be seen as a supporter of mixed-method research, suggesting

> Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism. The very fact that this division constantly reappears in virtually the same form would suffice to indicate that the modes of knowledge which it distinguishes are equally indispensable to a science of the social world (p. 25).

Morse and Richards (2002) suggest five reasons why researchers may wish to engage in qualitative research including to understand something that is not known, to clarify complex data, to experience the phenomena from the

participants' viewpoint, to construct a theoretical framework and to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation. Indeed, all five reasons contributed to my motivation to undertake the current study. Some topics and areas of research are more suited to qualitative methods than others. Areas that have largely been neglected from study can be especially aided by a qualitative approach and qualitative research methods. As Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 19) state, "qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known". The current research question sits in this field of neglected phenomena, and I hope this study will generate more research in this field in the future.

3.2.3. Context and Sampling

The selected school, UWCSEA, is a large international school in Singapore which has both a day and boarding component. I previously worked at the school for four years, and my personal friendship with many of the administrators of the school meant that I was welcomed onto campus as a researcher. Students study the IBDP in their final two years and the school has a focus on the value of education as a tool to promote peace and development. Indeed the school's mission, which is, according to many accounts, lived by the majority of community members, not just words on the wall at reception, is to make "education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future" (UWC, 2018). This mission is partially fulfilled by including what are called 'National Committee' students in the community. National Committee students are provided with full or partial scholarships to attend this prestigious international school. These scholarships are funded by various foundations to allow students to receive a more signposted pathway to higher

education after completing high school and support to get there. The selection criteria for these National Committee places are not only based on strong academic achievement but also on alignment with the UWC ethos, targeting students who have a high drive and demonstrated commitment to "become leaders in social responsibility, inspiring them to effect change personally, locally, nationally and internationally" (UWC, 2018).

These students often hail from a wide range of nationalities, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds, spanning more than 155 countries and including a special category for refugees and survivors of conflict. On average around 5% of UWC students in the IBDP years come from a refugee, displaced or persecuted background and benefit from full scholarship provision at one of the 18 UWC schools and colleges (UWC, 2018). Some of the backgrounds of students accepted in this program include the daughter of Ethiopian subsistence farmers who set up a shelter for women suffering from fistula in her village. Another student is a gender non-conforming teen from Ecuador who organised protests for LGBTQ+ rights in Quito even after being imprisoned and beaten. One student is an orphan from Fiji whose village is a day's journey from Suva. At the sampled school in Singapore, 108 students who attend the college are National Committee students, out of 1,173 students who attend the college for their final two years of schooling or 9% (UWCSEA, 2018). The remaining 91% of students who attend this international school pay the full fees of AUD$45,000 per annum with an additional AUD$35,000 per annum if the student is a boarder. Students attending the international school as National Committee students would not be able to attend this institution without these scholarships. Given their minority status in this institution, they are the target population for the current study, which aimed to

investigate their feelings of belonging at this institution.

I took a sample of opportunity of the grade 11 students in one cohort who were sent the PSSM questionnaire (approximately 250 students). A sample of opportunity is a study of participants taken from a group that is already convening and easily accessible to a researcher (Plano & Creswell, 2010). As part of the questionnaire, I asked students if they consented to being contacted for a follow-up interview. I also collected demographic data from the PSSM questionnaire. From the G11 Cohort, I chose a purposive sample of students based on their National Committee status. Purposive sampling uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind in order to further understand a phenomenon and to ensure a variation of perspectives and experiences are represented in the data (Gall et al., 2003).

I regarded the High School Principal of the school as the primary gatekeeper to this study, as well as other figures in the administration such as the Head of Residential Life. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) state, the researcher "will be channelled in line with existing networks of friendship and enmity, territory and equivalent boundaries" (p. 73). This qualification on research holds true for the current study as I am a former employee of the institution and have a friendly relationship with the administrators in question. However, as Neuman (2003) points out, it is imperative that "the researcher must set non-negotiable limits to protect research integrity" (p. 227). The target sample school has a public commitment to educational research and self-study, so I anticipated the project would be embraced and I would be granted permission to report on my findings without restrictions from the school, even when the findings might be critical of the institution. I expected my findings would be received in

the spirit of self-study and because of the evidence-based school improvement potential of my study.

I contacted the Principal with a brief outline of the study and the goals for the research project and asked for consent to disseminate the questionnaire and to visit campus to conduct the interviews. Anderson and Herr (2009) state that administrators "may also have to decide how comfortable they are with controversy as action research often makes visible those dark corners of the organization in which power and privilege hide" (p. 164). Although this quote is about action research, I believe it applies to all research where an outsider enters an institution with the explicit goal of uncovering members' of minority groups perspectives. I discussed the prospect of developmental findings with the Principal before beginning this research, and established that any findings would be welcomed. I acknowledge this puts me in a privileged position and that this is not always the case in educational research.

3.3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

I bring a standpoint theory (Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1983; Harding and Hintikka, 1983) approach to this research project. Standpoint theory suggests that less powerful members of a society experience the world in a different way than members of the dominant group as a consequence of their oppression. This turns members of marginalised groups into social chameleons who must learn to navigate the norms and codes of their own group as well as those of the dominant group. A by-product of this is that members of marginalised groups have the potential to have a more complete world view of their social reality as they can experience mainstream culture as both an insider and outsider, whereas members

of the dominant group only know the social reality from the perspective of an insider and remain blind to the structural forces and biases which protect the status quo.

While the roots of standpoint theory can be traced back to Hegel's writings on the standpoint of slaves or Marx's writings on the standpoint of the proletariat, contemporary standpoint theory has been developed by feminist writers (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983). Modern qualitative research has been shaped by feminist research, which aims to "capture women's lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 775). In feminist standpoint theory, the standpoint adopted is that of women; however, other researchers have suggested that this theory can be used more broadly and to help illuminate the experiences of members of other oppressed groups as well as well as combined and used to give an intersectional account of oppression. Collins (1986), for example, looks at the experience of African-American women, while Nakata (2007) uses people's lived experiences as a starting point for examining what he terms "the Cultural Interface" where Indigenous and Western knowledge systems intersect, making the Indigenous standpoint capable of producing "more objective knowledge" (p. 213). I believe this is a useful framework for the current project as National Committee students at UWCSEA and students from non-elite backgrounds may represent a marginalised and minority group in international schools, and so by studying their lived experiences a more robust view of this context can be obtained.

Harding (2003) argues that as an epistemology, standpoint theory states that research beginning from the standpoint of marginalised groups will result in a less distorted and more holistic understanding of reality and social relations,

leading to what she labels a "strong objectivism" (p. 297) by seeing reality beyond and including insights hidden from the limited scope imposed by the Western, male dominated, positivist lens of the scientific method. Swigonski (1994) echoes this call, stating that "Research must begin from concrete experience, rather than abstract concepts. The life experiences of members of marginalized groups have been erroneously devalued as starting points for scientific research and as generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims" (p. 390).

The aim of standpoint theory research is to 'study up' (Nader, 1974), meaning to begin the research process on the ground with participants' lived experiences and chronicle the mechanisms of power and ways in which dominant institutions and paradigms create and maintain inequality among social groups. Part of this process involves articulating the experience of members of marginalised groups, in a similar approach to researchers coming from an interpretive social science perspective; however, standpoint theory requires the researcher to go further and acknowledge that there may be social structures in place maintaining power relations outside of the oppressed groups' conscious awareness. As Harding (2004) states, "Oppressed groups frequently believe the distorted representations of social relations produced by dominant groups" (p. 31). Standpoint theory can be employed as a useful tool to raise group consciousness around their oppression and can lead to pathways to end that oppression. Harding (2004) believes that:

> creation of group consciousnesses occurs (always and only?) through the liberators political struggles it takes to get access to and arrive at the best conception of research for women or other oppressed groups, among the other goals of such struggles. Thus, feminist standpoint projects are

> always socially situated and politically engaged in pro-democratic ways. (p. 31)

Alcoff (1988) argued that standpoint theory offers educational researchers insights into complex positionalities such as the dependency between teachers and students, students and teachers' capacity to code-switch (Giroux, 2005) and the ways in which educational systems lead to social reproduction and maintain hegemonic practices (MacGill, 2016). Standpoint theory informs educational research when understood in the context of power relations between different community members. Stakeholders in education are "filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 19). My use of standpoint theory in the current study provides a lens to view how dominant school cultures are privileged in the educational context being investigated. This "view from below" (MacGill, 2016, p. 242) gathered from National Committee students can provide understandings of marginalised voices and challenge what Thompson (1998) calls the "privilege of ignorance" (p. 523) that reigns in the absence of divergent standpoints. Bringing a standpoint perspective to educational research requires the researcher to adopt a "strong reflexivity" (Olesen, 2000, p. 229) and be aware of one's location in the educational context being studied, as well as the broader socio-cultural hegemony. This allows researchers from a standpoint perspective to capture a "wide angle" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 262) view of students' experiences.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

3.4.1. Questionnaires

I measured the construct of belonging using the Psychological Scale of

School Membership (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993). The quantitative component of the current study utilised various statistical techniques to interrogate the data. Plano and Creswell (2010) define a quantitative design as one which uses numerical data to measure a human phenomenon and the questionnaire component of this study fits this definition. Quantitative data from the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993) derived from a questionnaire administered to a larger sample will help to add reliability to data gathered from interviews.

Questionnaires are used to gather information from a large number of people in a limited time and acquire people's perspectives on a topic (Stringer, 2008). McKinney (2007) suggests questionnaires provide a useful tool to gather feedback from a select population—in this case grade 11 students at UWCSEA. A strength of using questionnaires as a research method is that they allow for anonymity and efficiency (Anderson & Herr, 2009). I considered a questionnaire to be the most appropriate method of collecting data for the cohort of G11 students due to the large sample size. Wiersma (1995) suggests that when designing a questionnaire, the questions and statements should be kept as simple as possible to obtain the required data.

The questionnaire used included the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993). There has been considerable debate on how exactly to measure a sense of belonging at school. One attempt to do just that is Goodenow's (1993) PSSM (see Appendix A), which she claims measures the "extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment" (p. 80). Goodenow (1993) used data from previous research to generate items examining students' perceptions of liking school, personal acceptance, and inclusion, respect, and encouragement at school. After running pilot studies of a

28-item scale to a diverse sample of close to one thousand students, Goodenow (1993) reduced the scale to 18 items. Of the 18 items that made the final measure, five were reverse scored to maintain internal consistency. The Inventory contains three stop scales that measure feelings of belonging, rejection and acceptance in the school community (Hagborg, 1994). An example of items included in the PSSM is: 'I am included in lots of activities at the school'. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale 1 = never, 5 = always. The 18 questions in the survey were answered on a 5-point Likert scale, with choices including: never 1), sometimes 2), about half the time 3), most of the time 4), or always 5); these were then averaged to produce a scaled score mean. The Psychological Sense of School Membership includes items that involve not only perceived liking, personal acceptance, and inclusions but also respect and encouragement for participation. Goodenow's (1993) PSSM is perhaps the most widely used quantitative measure of school belonging in the educational literature.

The PSSM has come under a high level of scrutiny and retained its validity. One such investigation by You et al. (2011) found the PSSM to be a multidimensional instrument from the results from exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Using factor analysis, You et al. (2011) identified three factors representing related aspects of students' perceptions of their school membership: caring relationships, acceptance, and rejection. Akar-Vural et al. (2013) believe the PSSM can be considered a valid and reliable tool for measuring primary students' belongingness to school. They claim this is important as school represents a sociocultural group and group identities shape our behaviour (Akar-Vural, et al., 2013).

The Cronbach alpha test-retest reliability for the PSSM ranges from .78 to

.95 when used with samples of primary and high school students from diverse backgrounds (You et al., 2011). Additionally, the internal consistency of the PSSM has been shown to be high for high school students and samples of minority students, with values ranging from .77 to .88 (Goodenow, 1993; Hagborg, 1994).

The PSSM has been used cross-culturally and to investigate gender differences with interesting results. In one study looking at gender differences in African-American students, Adelabu (2007) found that female African-American high school students had significantly lower scores for school rejection than their male counterparts. More recently, this result has been extended to a more representative sample of all American high school students, as Sari (2013) found that when administering the PSSM, female students gave significantly higher scores than male students on school connectedness. However, this gender difference disappeared when Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) examined scores on the PSSM among a sample of Somali refugee students. Similarly, Sanchez et al. (2005) examined a sample of Latino and African-American students and found no significant gender differences in their PSSM scores. The PSSM has also been translated into Chinese (C-PSSM) by Cheung and Hui (2003) and the C-PSSM scale has been validated by further study (Teo et al., 2016).

Although this scale has been widely used in many settings and with many populations, more research is required to extend findings on educational outcomes of groups with different measures of school belongingness and the validity of the PSSM in different contexts, such as international schools. Indeed, in Goodenow's (1993) own study, she suggests that a

> potential "tipping point" is the PSSM scale midpoint of 3.0, below which students were more negative than positive in their responses regarding the school. It will be important in future research to conduct more extensive investigations of the effects of psychological membership with students whose commitment to education and whose social integration in the school setting place them at risk. Interventions aimed at increasing adolescent students' sense of belonging in school can be focused at both the individual and the organizational level (p. 89).

The use of the PSSM in the current study adds to the body of research investigating its validity and reliability in multiple settings as well as the intended outcome of its use illuminating a range of experiences of belonging in international schools.

3.4.2. Qualitative Interviews

I conducted qualitative interviews as the main tool for data collection for this study. Van Dalen (1973) suggests that sometimes people communicate information more willingly orally than in writing and therefore interviews provide data more fully and readily. Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe qualitative interviewing as a tool to find "out what others feel and think about their worlds" (p. 1) and this is in line with the aims of the current study. I believe that interviews were more suitable to the current research question than other research methods as the topics being discussed were sensitive, and as Oppenheim (1992) suggests, "the larger, the more difficult and the more open-ended the question schedule is, the more we should prefer to use interviewers" (p. 82). Stringer (2008) states that "interviews not only provide a record of…views and perspectives, but also symbolically recognize the legitimacy of…points of view" (p. 56).

I used an interview guide in the current study to maintain some reliability

between interviews while still allowing for some flexibility and the natural flow of conversation. This use of an interview guide aimed to establish rapport with participants and create a relaxed environment where they felt comfortable to disclose pertinent information.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe a qualitative interview to be like a conversation but with a few important differences in that it leads to research and is a deliberate way to examine experiences, that it is occurring between strangers, not acquaintances, and that an interview is intentional rather than casual in that it aims to derive certain conclusions. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest qualitative interviewing assumes "that understanding is achieved by encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own terms" (p. 3). Interviews can provide information about the "worldview of a single individual" (James et al., 2008, p. 69); however, they can be a time-consuming research method for data collection.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) posit that the ideal type of interaction in an interview is amicable collaboration between interviewee and interviewer, but they caution that while establishing a warm rapport is important, the interviewer must not be overly friendly in case this leads to the establishment of a "draining obligation" (p. 39) on the participant. In the current study, I tried to establish a welcoming, friendly and warm environment in a comfortable, neutral environment, such as a common room or lounge. Interviews took place in open public spaces to follow guidelines for child protection, and confidentiality and anonymity were reiterated.

Standpoint theory positions the role of the interview as a collaborative construction of meaning based on the participants' view of reality (Sprague, 2005). Standpoint theorists encourage the use of qualitative interviews to unearth

individual stories (DeVault & Gross, 2007; Sprague, 2005). Riessman (1987) argues that interviewers should "listen with a minimum of interruptions...letting our subjects' voices speak for themselves" (p. 191). Oppenheim (1992) suggests that to be an effective interviewer, a researcher should be permissive, non-judgemental, and receptive. I assumed that participants may not always interpret the questions I asked in the way they were intended, so a vital skill for me was to be able to re-formulate questions to help participants understand what was being asked of them. All interviews were conducted in English although it was noted that students had varying levels of English fluency. At each interview I asked participants' permission to audiotape the exchange, although I also took notes, as suggested by Creswell (1998).

Gillham (2000) emphasises the role of contextualization in qualitative research and minimises the importance of following a strict, rigid procedure, suggesting maintaining rapport and a naturalistic environment is more important. Gillham (2000) suggests researchers should not feel obligated to conduct an interview exactly the same manner with each participant, as long as the interview arrives at the targeted topics of conversation eventually.

3.4.2.1. Interview Guide

I designed an interview guide to address the research question of this study. The interview guide comprised five categories, with a total of 20 questions constructed from themes raised in the PSSM (see Appendix A). The categories were: sense of belonging, inhibitors to belonging, enablers of belonging, student life, and school identity. These five categories helped me to address the aim of the research question for this study.

I conducted open-ended interviews using the interview guide. I built rapport and adopted an informal conversational tone to encourage participants' to share their true perceptions (Patton, 2005) and to capture meaningful data against each identified category. According to Patton (2005), the combination of the conversational and interview guide approaches allow the researcher to attain more data and allow for greater flexibility and individualization.

I asked slightly different questions and in different orders based on the flow of conversation with each participant. Although the themes explored remained the same, the paths to the questions were different for each participant. Questions were constructed based on Patton's (2005) advice that focus on the how and why of human interaction while being mindful that I would be representing the lives of individuals and so should be reflexive about the ethical implications of the impact the questions I asked may have on participants and their answers. I elicited respondent validation after each answer by offering quick paraphrases of participants' answers to clarify misunderstandings, validate their experiences, and encourage correction. As all participants were in the same place, conducting the interviews face-to-face at their convenience seemed the most appropriate option.

3.5. Procedure

An application to the Human Research Ethics Committee at Monash University (Project ID#16430) was submitted and approval was granted. I contacted the principal of United World College of South East Asia via email with a short outline of the study and the aims of the research to obtain permission to conduct the study. Consent to collect data were approved by the principal, who sent questionnaires to the entire cohort of G11 students. Students were asked to

self-identify if they consented to being contacted for follow-up interviews. Questionnaires were sent during a Theory of Knowledge class and were used as a stimulus piece to discuss the construction of knowledge in the Human Sciences. Students were supervised by their class teacher. After the questionnaire phase of the research I attended campus for a week to conduct qualitative interviews with National Committee students who had elected to be contacted for follow-up interviews.

The data collection took place in Singapore in March 2019. I conducted all the interviews and made contact with participants to set them up. All interviews were conducted on the school campus in a time and space convenient to the participant. Some students chose the coffee shop on campus during a free period, others chose an empty classroom at lunchtime and others chose to use a study room in the boarding house after school. At the start of each interview I provided participants with a second copy of the explanatory statement and gave them a brief verbal summary of the study. I told them to take their time reading it and then asked to sign a new consent form if they felt comfortable. They were reminded of their rights to stop the interview at any time. I also asked if they minded being audio recorded to help with transcription, which they all agreed to. Nine out of ten students showed up for their interviews when and where they had elected, and the one no-show participant apologised and rescheduled to do their interview later in the week. Interviews lasted 50-75 minutes and often included some rapport-building exchanges around topics not pertinent to the current study.

3.6.Data Analysis Methods

3.6.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

For the quantitative portion of this study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25 (SPSS) and the data analysis tools provided by Qualtrics version XM. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the useful features of the data in a way that allows a simple summary of the data (Plano & Creswell, 2010). I expected that frequencies and percentages could be useful to profile participants while means and standard deviations would be helpful to summarize scores on the PSSM. Beyond describing the data, I used inferential statistics to try to draw conclusions that go beyond the sampled data. Inferential statistics aim to make inferences from the sample to what the population might look like by testing hypotheses and deriving estimates (Plano & Creswell, 2010). In the current study, the results of the PSSM for different groups will be compared using unrelated t-tests (Plano & Creswell, 2010). The data will be displayed using graphs and tables and a $p<0.05$ level of significance will be adopted.

The student questionnaire was sent to 265 students, the entire G11 cohort. There were 178 questionnaires with at least partial answers that were valid for analysis, giving a response rate of 67%. Of the completed questionnaires 14 came from National Committee students, which is all National Committees enrolled in this cohort, or 100% of the population. This means that 7.87% of the sample were National Committee students. I began my quantitative data analysis by looking for any interesting characteristics of my sample in the demographic data. I looked for

differences both between National Committee and non-National Committee students and at the sample as a whole. I analysed gender, age, boarding status, years at the college, parental education levels and region considered home.

I then used a range of descriptive statistics, including measures of dispersion and central tendency, to look for differences in PSSM scores amongst National Committee and non-National Committee students, as well as compared to the overall sample. I then looked for significant differences in scores on any of the individual items on the PSSM between National Committee and non-National Committee students using a chi-squared test.

After exploring the data with descriptive statistics, I then used an independent t-test to look for differences between groups. I began with looking for a difference in scores on the PSSM between National Committee and non-National Committee students; I also looked for significant differences between gender, age, residential status, years at the college, parental education level and region considered home.

Although the PSSM is a highly reliable and valid measure of school belonging across diverse samples, I was interested in if there were any trends within the PSSM. Goodenow (1993) suggests the scale measures the construct of school membership and cannot be broken down into any subfactors. To increase the reliability of this claim, I performed a principal component analysis to see if any items' responses displayed similar patterns in my sample, or if there were underlying factors which make up participants results on the PSSM. After conducting this analysis, I thought it would be interesting to investigate if there were any differences on measures of relationships with other students, relationships with teachers or feelings of inclusion that were captured by the

PSSM between National Committee and non-National Committee students. To do this I grouped the 18 items of the PSSM into three categories, based on if they were focused on student-student relationships, student-adult relationships or measured school inclusivity. Although I knew there was no theoretical or statistical basis for conducting this analysis, using the principles of standpoint theory (Harding, 2003), sometimes those experiencing an environment as minority group members will have a clearer view than those of us observing from the majority, and so I deemed it a worthwhile investigation. Once I had established my three subscales for belonging (student relationships, teacher relationships and school inclusion), I then conducted more independent t-tests to investigate if there were any differences between National Committee and non-National Committee students.

I then became interested in the presence of any other relationships between variables in my study. The relationship between scores on the PSSM, its submeasures (teacher relationships, student relationships and school inclusion) and other demographic variables were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. I was also interested to see if there were any differences in these correlation coefficients between different groups, so I investigated the difference in correlation coefficient between National Committees and Non-National Committees based on the place they considered home. I wished to examine if controlling for the variable of region of the world participants considered home, age and parental education would reveal any interesting relationships between being an National Committee student and feelings of belonging, which I accomplished by conducting a series of partial correlation analyses.

3.6.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Before the qualitative data from this study were analysed, the transcripts of the interviews were coded to make the analysis more efficient (Pine, 2009). Wiersma (1995) describes coding as the process of reorganizing and reducing data. Wiersma (1995) suggests categories often emerge from the data when the researcher is looking for "patterns of thinking or behavior, words or phrases, and events that appear with regularity or for some reason appear noteworthy" (p. 217). In the current study, I completed transcription of the interviews and then coded them into major themes.

Wiesma (1995) suggests data analysis in qualitative studies can be thought of as the process of moving from raw data to evidence-based interpretations of the data. Another way to think of qualitative data analysis is as a process of successive approximations toward an accurate description and interpretation of the phenomenon being studied. Wiersma (1995) place the emphasis in qualitative research on describing the phenomenon in its context and interpreting the data within that context.

Morse and Richards (2002) assert "Qualitative research helps us make sense of the world in a particular way" (p. 5). To accomplish this, researchers must organise and analyse the data gathered in the research process. Different methods of data analysis can be applied to qualitative data and will affect the different interpretations of the data and conclusions drawn. To maintain the validity and integrity of the research, the same method of data analysis should be applied to all the data from the study (Morse & Richards, 2002).

The data generated from qualitative research "do not speak for

themselves" but must be "described and interpreted" (Gillham, 2000, p. 10).Qualitative research including interviews creates a "mountains of words" (Johnson et al., 2010, p. 648). In the current study, this "mountain of words" came from the transcription of interviews with ten National Committee students at UWCSEA. Qualitative research methods such as interviews

> require transparency to ensure the 'trustworthiness' of the data analysis. The intricate processes of organizing, coding and analyzing the data are often rendered invisible in the presentation of the research findings, which requires a 'leap of faith' for the reader (Ryan, 2009, p. 142).

Bergin (2011) suggests that "One of the central requirements in qualitative analysis is clear thinking on the part of the analyst" (p. 7). Originally I intended to use NVivo to analyse the transcripts of the interviews to maintain a high level of 'clear thinking'. However, after a brief exploration of the program, it became clear that it would be more useful as a tool of record keeping and organisation rather than a tool for data analysis. Instead, the transcriptions were manually coded, organised and classified into themes. Even though Morse and Richards (2002) state that the technology used for data analysis can be useful in qualitative research if it is "in the context of tasks and techniques" (p. xiv), Van Rooy (1998) argues it is more useful if researchers "remain intellectually close to the data" (p. 11), which may be easier to maintain when doing qualitative data analysis manually. By its very nature, qualitative research such as interviews is designed to generate data that is not easily quantified (Johnson et al., 2010). This makes it all the more imperative that the researcher be completely immersed in the data. One way I enhanced the credibility of this study's coding procedure was by keeping a reflexivity journal and noting how I made decisions and interpreted and analysed data throughout the process.

Schutz (1972) advises that the language of everyday interaction requires interpretation to be analysed and comprehended and it is not enough to take the words used by participants at their face value, but instead, "meaning-establishment and meaning-interpretation are both pragmatically determined in the intersubjective sphere" (p. 74). People express their experiences through symbols, culturally loaded language and metaphors, and researchers must decode this symbolic language to find the intended interpretations of participants' experiences. In the current study, my insider perspective aided this work as I am already familiar with much of the institutional knowledge. However, as an outsider, there was much to learn in the way these young people describe their experiences; the meaning given to particular phrases or words in certain contexts had to be studied to understand and ascribe the correct interpretations to them and understand their importance, and as Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 15) state, "stripping away context is stripping away meaning". When interviewing multiple participants, I also had to accept that multiple explanations or experiences for the same phenomena could arise and that all could be equally accurate based on the individual perspective of each participant. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that interviewers engage with participants as "conversational partners" (p. 11) that are embarking on a journey together with the same goal to understand the phenomena of interest in detail and with clarity. However, while it is nice to think of participants as partners in the research process, I had to be wary of disclosing my own perspectives or hypothesises from the outset in case it may have caused participants to respond in socially desirable ways.

I also had to remain reflexive throughout the interview process. Gillham (2000) highlights the importance for interviewers to refrain from assuming their

interviewee will have a similar cognitive context or worldview. Although participants in the current study and I may have shared some understanding of the institution being investigated, we have experienced the institution from different roles and in different time periods leading to different perspectives.

3.6.2.1. Steps of Data Analysis

Based on suggestions from Miles et al. (2014) and Harding (2013), the following methodology of data analysis was employed to make sense of the interview recordings.

Initial Interpretations. I listened to the audio file of each interview and took memos on my initial thoughts and interpretations with a particular focus on looking for emerging themes.

Transcription. A verbatim transcription technique was adopted. Transcription took place in the four weeks after I had left campus. Having this distance between the interview event itself and the transcription allowed "a process of understanding that moves back and forth between wholes and parts" (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 331).

Data Saturation. I read and re-read each interview transcript along with the recording to maximise the likelihood that participants' meaning had been captured and to catch any errors in transcription. This process was repeated until a point of data saturation had been achieved and no new data emerged during a re-reading.

Coding (Level 1). As I began the process of coding, I set my theoretical predictions aside and approached the data with a sense of curiosity and in an inductive manner to document codes as they emerged from the data (Moran,

2004). This approach to coding can be considered appropriate as the population in the current study has not been widely studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I generated a 'word cloud' by running the transcripts of the interviews through NVivo 12 and excluding words of 3 or less characters. After discounting filler words popular with teenagers such as 'like' and 'really', the most common 20 words were adopted as codes to look for in the transcriptions, for example 'school', 'students', 'different' and 'community'. The coding procedure that followed was similar to 'thematic coding' as discussed by Creswell (2008) and Roulston (2010).

Once the initial coding had been completed, it became apparent which themes were present across the majority of interviews as well as which comments sat outside the norm of findings. Coding is the "formal representation of analytic thinking" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 160) and "a process by which a researcher goes through her data and attaches a code…that represents something that she sees happening in the data'"(Buch & Staller, 2007, p. 213).

Categorising (Level 2). Coding can take many forms and follow many systems, but Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that researchers use a system that is both appropriate for the data generated and that they are most comfortable with. Once sections of text had been coded, categories of codes were grouped together to establish clusters of codes around higher order themes that emerged from the analysis as suggested by Miles et al. (2014). By employing thematic analysis, the researcher was able to identify "how similar processes or worldviews recur repeatedly in the data" (Buch & Staller, 2007, p. 213), based on the words of the participants.

Connections (Level 3). Themes were examined for connections to other

themes and data memos were taken to explain decisions of groupings of related themes. Once codes had been clustered around higher order themes, patterns between them began to emerge. It was possible to observe when two or more codes consistently appeared together. These patterns of responses are called "naturalistic generalizations" by Creswell (2008, p. 201). For example, every participant spoke about their relationships with their boarding house peers as an enabler to developing a sense of belonging. This allowed the data to be reduced from over 50 categories of codes, down to four key themes.

Data Analysis. The themes that emerged were then analysed in terms of the research question, and less relevant themes and information were removed.

3.6.3. Ethical and Methodological Considerations

3.6.3.1. Ethical Considerations

I am acutely aware of the ethical issues involved in qualitative research in the field. Even with a theoretical understanding of such issues, as outlined in Neuman (2003), I acknowledge that ethical issues can also arise unexpectedly during the research process and ethical decisions must sometimes be made under time pressure without the consultation of supervisors. By undertaking a solid study of common ethical issues such as deception, confidentiality, sensitive populations, disclosure and protection from harm, I felt equipped to treat participants with respect and ethical concern. According to Mack et al. (2005), "Whenever we conduct research on people, the well-being of research participants must be our top priority" (p. 9). I aimed to carefully consider all ethical considerations during the development, implementation and analysis of this study.

The questionnaire sent to participants included a cover page with information and a physical consent form was collected by students' teachers once signed. Questionnaires remained anonymous unless participants self-identified as wishing to be contacted for a follow-up interview. In that case, participants' identities were securely coded to uphold their confidentiality and participant numbers were assigned and are used in this report to further enhance their confidentiality. Participants who consented to longer follow-up interview were briefed in more detail on their rights and the ethical guidelines that were followed during the study and were asked to sign an informed consent form before the interview began. Any documentation that could identify individual participants, for example consent forms, has been stored separately from materials that contain data. Data has been kept securely in a locked location at all times. The reporting of these findings has not identified any participants and participants will retain the right to withdraw their data or from the research process at any stage without needing to explain why.

3.6.3.2. Pilot Study

I piloted my questionnaire and interview questions on a group of participants from another international school, as Oppenheim (1992) and Bryman (2001) both suggest pilot studies are most useful if participants share similar knowledge and ways of thinking to participants in the main study. I contacted the head of the International School of Helsinki, where I am a current employee, and asked for his permission to administer the questionnaire and conduct pilot interviews with any students who consented on a volunteer basis. The piloting context shares the international component with the target population school as well as the presence of students who were on scholarship and who were not, and

runs the same curriculum, the IBDP. The benefits of conducting a pilot study are also highlighted by Bryman (2001) as including giving the researcher some experience and self-efficacy around the skills involved in interviewing and determining the comprehensibility of the instructions given to participants.

3.6.3.3. Credibility and Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers have been criticised for what Potter (1996) calls a potpourri of definitions of tools to check a study's validity. Terms such as validity, authenticity, understanding, credibility and trustworthiness are used interchangeably in the literature and Potter suggests there are serious issues when "the practices of the two approaches are surprisingly similar" (p. 299). However, the main goal of providing validation of a study's findings by checking it against previously established findings or theory remains as critical in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research, and Eisner (1991) suggests perhaps the best term to adopt is credibility.

When subjective personal narratives are considered as evidence addressing a research question, issues of credibility are raised for the qualitative researcher. Eisner (1991) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest to address such challenges to qualitative research's credibility, evidence which substantiate its findings should be sought. This is considered especially important to Silverman (2006) in guarding against the perceived limited scientific or anecdotal nature of qualitative research methodologies.

Mertler (2009) believes credibility and trustworthiness to be the most important considerations in qualitative research and state

> Trustworthiness is established by examining the credibility and dependability of qualitative data. Credibility involves establishing that the results of the research are believable from the perspective of the participant in the research…the concept of dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs (pp. 114-115).

Similar to notions of validity in quantitative research, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) believe credible research reflects the world being described. One method I employed in the current study to increase both credibility and trustworthiness of the results is that of triangulation (Mertler, 2009) as discussed in the following section.

3.6.3.4. Triangulation

Researchers adopting qualitative methods are acutely aware of the impact their own standpoint has on the generation of meaning in research and impact on the narrative of participants who are telling their stories (Wertz et al., 2011). To allow for this impact and the assigned meaning to individual's narratives by qualitative researchers, triangulation has been encouraged as a tool to maintain credibility by giving voice to a range of different viewpoints that can lead to a more holistic understanding of reality (Cools & Rayner, 2011). The process of generating data from multiple participants is labelled a consensual qualitative approach by Hill et al. (2005), who suggests it allows researchers to validate research results where agreement between participants exists.

Stringer (2007, p. 58) states that "the credibility of a study is enhanced when multiple sources of information are incorporated". Yin (2003) has outlined multiple forms of triangulation and the benefits they bring to research. The forms of triangulation used in the current study include the use of a multi-method

approach; this form of method triangulation will help temper the weaknesses of any one research method, interviewing multiple participants, giving data triangulation, and approaching the data generated from various theoretical positions, giving theory triangulation. Another benefit of triangulation, suggested by Stake (1995), is that it helps researchers remain open to different outcomes of their research. By compiling data from multiple sources through triangulation, emergent themes appeared from the data, as well as gaps in the research and areas of interest that were not explored by the current study were uncovered, adding another layer of reflexivity as well as suggesting directions for future research.

However, the use of triangulation to increase the credibility of a study is criticised by some theorists (Denzin, 2012; Fielding, 2012) as it may lead to marginalised or excluded voices being even more ignored as they can be classified as an outlier and eliminated from final reports. A strength to qualitative research is its ability and space to include all voices, no matter how ostracised, and while triangulation is an important tool, Tufford and Newman (2012) suggest it should not be used by researchers to silence dissenting views of the world.

3.6.3.5. Confounding Variables

A confounding factor for this piece of research is participants' variable English levels. It was to be expected given the international nature of the sample that some participants may wish to contribute responses on issues, but may struggle to express their ideas in spoken English, therefore I took care to ensure the correct understanding of what is said is conveyed and that participants may be using words that are the nearest approximations of what they wish to express. Here, interview techniques such as active listening, probing and feigning ignorance were important to help participants verbalise their thoughts and

experiences.

Field studies such as the current project operate under varied and constantly changing conditions and environments. Unlike the tightly controlled settings of laboratory work, field studies are high in ecological validity however they are subject to many confounding variables. In the current study issues included the participants having rich and busy lives with their own academic schedules during the demanding last two years of high school. Thought was given to balance the desire to generate rich, deep data from open-ended interviews with participants' other demands on their time. Yin (2003) highlights this by reminding researchers that participants are taking part in an activity that benefits the researcher, not the individual participant, and so researchers have an obligation not to squander this good will.

3.6.3.6. Generalisability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) suggest the very design of the current project to be a methodological constraint in that qualitative researchers often do not aim to have their findings generalised or transferred beyond the context of their sample. Given the small sample size of National Committee students in the current study, my findings are not intended to be generalisable in a nomothetic sense; however, lessons can be learned from the current study that apply to other international schools. I also hope that as national systems take on more characteristics of international schools as the world becomes more and more integrated, lessons from this study can be applied to national schools as well.

3.6.3.7. Insider-Outsider Perspective

I am aware of the confounding issues of my insider-outsider perspective.

As a former employee of the educational institution, part of my social identity is connected to the school, and indeed the values and mission of the school have affected my educational philosophy and worldview. To account for this insider perspective, I aimed to remain reflexive throughout the research process, and I accept the collaborative nature of the construction of meaning by the researcher and participant in qualitative research. I agree with Neuman (2003) about the value added by personal experiences with the field when he states that "personal, subjective experiences are part of field data. They are valuable both in themselves and for interpreting events in the field. Instead of trying to be objective and eliminate personal reactions, field researchers treat their feelings toward field events as data" (p. 341). I further agree with Richards' (2005) advice that this agentic role of the researcher in qualitative research is "not something requiring apology and it is certainly not in your power to rectify. It is not bad (or good) for the project, just central to it" (p. 42). The dangers of researching social situations from an insider's perspective is well documented and Yin (2003) alludes to the likelihood of participants living in a close community giving socially desirable answers. This is one of the reasons that individual interviews are a preferred research method over focus groups.

In other regards I am an outsider. I have not worked at the current school for years, all the participants were strangers to me and I approached all scenarios and interactions with my researcher hat on, not my practitioner or educator hat. It was expected that this could lead to some tension with both the gatekeepers at the school, and internally for me, as there could be instances where the priorities for the research and priorities for the institution's reputation come into conflict. However, by remaining reflexive throughout the research process and through

close consultation with my supervisors, I was able to make decisions based on maintaining the integrity of the research.

As a former employee of the institution studied and friend of many of the teachers, house parents and administrators still working there, neutralising this influence during the interview process was hard. As an individual who straddles the insider/outsider divide in the studied setting, this is both an advantage (in that I was able to gain access to this vulnerable population and understand a lot of the institutional knowledge) and a limitation, as I still feel attachment to the institution and many of the people who work there. In the current study I hoped that this effect of participant expectations was minimized by the use of an interview guide and the reading of a standardized briefing script at the start of each interview. During the interviews I kept Rubin and Rubin's (1995) words in the forefront of my mind, hoping that participants would "actually leaves them (the participants) somewhat better off for having talked with you" (p. 40). It is hoped the current study will foster a sense of self-reflection and curiosity in the interview participants.

3.7. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have introduced the mixed-method methodology used in this study and explained why it was the most appropriate choice to address the current research question. I have outlined the context of UWCSEA where the sample was taken and justified the use of standpoint theory as a theoretical framework. I outlined how I developed my questionnaire as a tool of quantitative data gathering and how I interviewed National Committee students to generate qualitative data. I illustrated the quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods

employed to find meaning in the data and discussed ethical and methodological considerations for my study. In the next chapter I will present my quantitative and qualitative results.

Chapter 4. Results and Data Analysis

4.1. Overview of Chapter

This chapter is separated out into a description of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of my data that are then synthesized in the final section of the chapter. Before presenting the main qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews with National Committee students, a summary of the quantitative questionnaire responses from the whole cohort of G11 students will be provided for context to place the qualitative findings into.

4.2. Quantitative Findings

4.2.1. Demographic Data

The student questionnaire was sent to 265 students, the entire G11 cohort. There were 178 questionnaires with at least partial answers that were valid for analysis, giving a response rate of 67%. However, some questionnaires were only partially filled in or participants had skipped questions, therefore when appropriate, cases have been excluded on a pairwise basis, meaning that partial responses have been included in the analyses if the required data to perform that analysis is present. Of the completed questionnaires, 14 came from National Committee students, which is all National Committees enrolled in this cohort, or 100% of the population. This means that 7.87% of the sample were National Committee students.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Sample

	National Committee		Non-National Committee		Total	
	Raw	**%**	**Raw**	**%**	**Raw**	**%**
N	14	7.87%	164	92.1%	178	100%
Males	5	35.7%	66	44.6%	71	43.8%
Female	9	64.3%	77	52.0%	86	53.1%
Gender NS	0	0%	5	3.4%	5	3.08%
Ave Age	17.6		16.2		16.56	
Ave Years at School	1.79		4.83		4.57	
Boarders	14	100%	16	10.8%	30	18.5%
Parents Edu 0 Degrees	6	42.9%	1	0.70%	7	4.9%
At least 1 with Degree	8	57.1%	147	99.2%	136	95.1%
Home SG	1	7.1%	48	32.4%	49	30.4%
Home SEA	3	21.4%	21	14.2%	24	14.9%
Home Asia	1	7.1%	39	26.4%	40	24.8%
Home Oce	1	7.1%	7	4.7%	8	5%
Home Eur	4	28.6%	19	12.8%	23	14.3%
Home ME	1	7.1%	3	2%	4	2.5%
Home Afr	2	14.3%	0	0%	2	1.2%
Home NA	0	0%	8	5.4%	8	5%
Home LA	1	7.1%	2	1.4%	3	1.9%

**Note:* Some values do not add up to 100% due to missing cases and/or rounding.

From the table above it can be seen that there were more female (n = 86) than male (n = 71) respondents, with a number of participants of other gender (n = 5) and sixteen respondents choosing not to identify their gender. The average age

of participants was 16.56 years old. Participants had been at the school for an average of 4.57 years and 10.8% (n = 30) of the sample were boarders. The vast majority, or 95.1% of the sample's parents had at least one tertiary degree between them (n = 136). When asked to identify what part of the world they consider home, the largest proportion of the sample chose Singapore (n = 49) with 30.4%, with the second most popular choice being Asia (n = 40) or 24.8%. South East Asia (n = 24) was also a common selection with 14.9% selecting it as home followed closely by Europe (n = 23) with 14.3%. The remaining options; Oceania, North America, Latin America, Africa and The Middle East (n = 25) made up 15.6% of the sample combined.

An interesting trend to note from the demographic data is that National Committees (x= 17.6) are on average over a year older than their non-National Committee peers (x = 16.2). This is because often National Committee students complete secondary schooling in their home countries before beginning G11 at the studied school. A confounding variable in this study may therefore be the extra maturity that comes with being a year older during the turbulent times of adolescence. This possibility is explored with partial correlations below. It is also worth noting that while the majority of National Committee students had started at the school this year, with just a few being at the school for an additional year, the average number of years their non-National Committee peers had spent at the school was 4.57 years. While this may seem like a short amount of time to spend in a K-12 institution, it is an international school with a largely transient population. Another difference worth noting is that while 43% of National Committee (n = 6) sample has no parent with a tertiary degree, less than 1% of non-National Committee students (n = 1) had both parents without a degree. This

is to be expected at a school with such high fees as to make it out of reach for any families below the professional class. From the region students have identified as their home, it can be seen that many more non-National Committee students (30.4%) consider Singapore home than National Committee students (7.1%), and indeed Asia in general is much more widely represented in the non-National Committee (70.1%) sample than in the National Committee (35.6%) sample. These demographic differences can be explored further by comparing means between groups and partial correlations.

4.2.2. Psychological Scale for School Membership (PSSM)

The questionnaire was completed by students on the Qualtrics XM platform after they were sent a link by their Theory of Knowledge teacher during this class. Once completed, the data were then exported into an SPSS file. SPSS version 25 was used to analyse all quantitative results. Scores from individual items from the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993) were combined and averaged to give each participant an overall PSSM score (once items that had been reverse coded had been reversed and coded into new variables). Cronbach's alpha was used to check the reliability of the PSSM in this study. According to Goodenow (1993), the PSSM has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .803. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .836, indicating good internal consistency of this scale with this sample.

4.3. Descriptive Data

Once the PSSM variable had been calculated and its internal consistency checked, descriptive statistics were used to provide a summary of the data, focusing on the measures of central tendency and dispersion. A summary of

measures of central tendency and dispersion can be found below for the entire sample and separated out based on students' National Committee or non-National Committee status.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of PSSM for National Committee and non-National Committee students

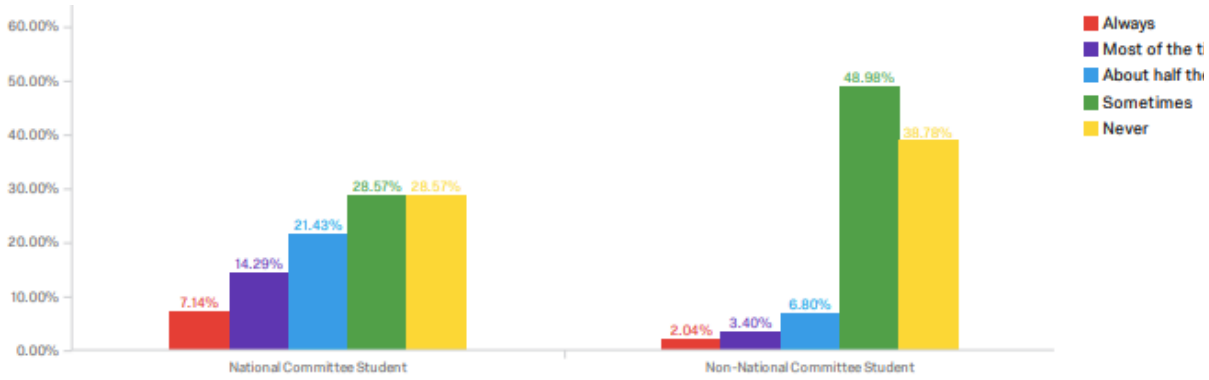
	National Committee Students	Non-National Committee Students	Sample Total
Valid Responses	14	164	178
PSSM Mean	2.17	2.05	2.06
PSSM Median	2.14	2.00	2.06
PSSM Mode	2.06	2.06	2.06
PSSM Standard Deviation	0.411	0.46	0.45
Variance	0.169	0.210	0.206
Minimum	1.33	1.11	1.11
Maximum	2.94	3.33	3.33
25%	1.94	1.67	1.71
50%	2.14	2.00	2.06
75%	2.46	2.38	2.39

In the current study, participant (n = 164) scores were below the mid-point level on the PSSM (x = 2.06, SD = .45), suggesting an overall low level of belonging amongst this sample. Surprisingly, the mean of the PSSM calculated for National Committee students (x = 2.17) was higher than for non-National Committee students (x = 2.05), going against my prediction. When looking at the dispersion of the data, the generated curve is close to normal and the calculated measure of kurtosis was .368, within the recommended guidelines of skewness values of -1.0 to +1.0.

4.3.1. Frequencies on Individual Items

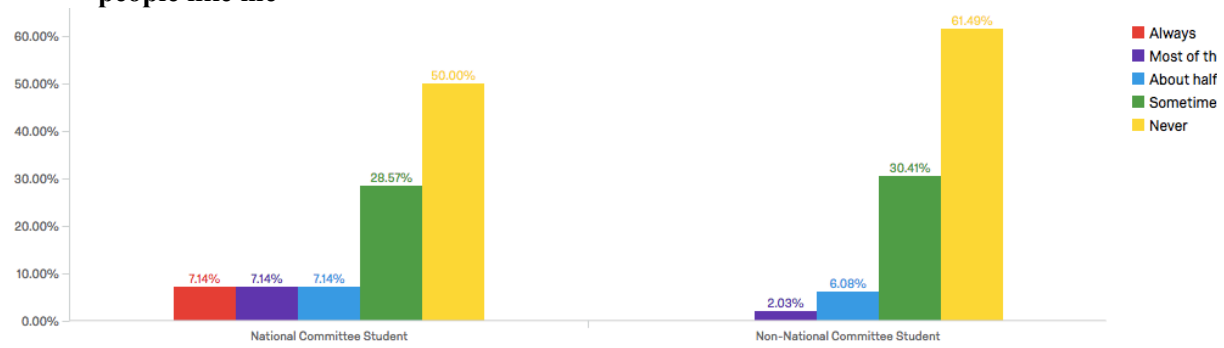
There were some individual items with interesting results when comparing National Committee and non-National Committee students. Frequencies and bar charts were calculated and created using Qualtrics XM for ease of interpretation. When analysing the results from the PSSM, only three of the eighteen items returned a significant difference in results from National Committee participants and non-National Committee participants. Significance was calculated using a chi-squared test at the $p<0.05$ level.

Figure 1: Percentages of responses from National Committee and Non-National Committee students to the question: It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school



For the question above we see 21.4% of National Committee students responded to the statement, 'it is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school' as 'always' or 'most of the time', compared to only 5.4% of non-National Committee students. This difference was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level with a calculated chi-squared value of 9.69.

Figure 2: Percentages of responses from National Committee and Non-National Committee students to the question: Teachers here are not interested in people like me



For the question above, 'teachers here are not interested in people like me' we see National Committee students responding as 'always' or 'most of the time' as 14.3% compared to 2% of non-National Committee students. This result is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level with a calculated chi-squared value of 12.24.

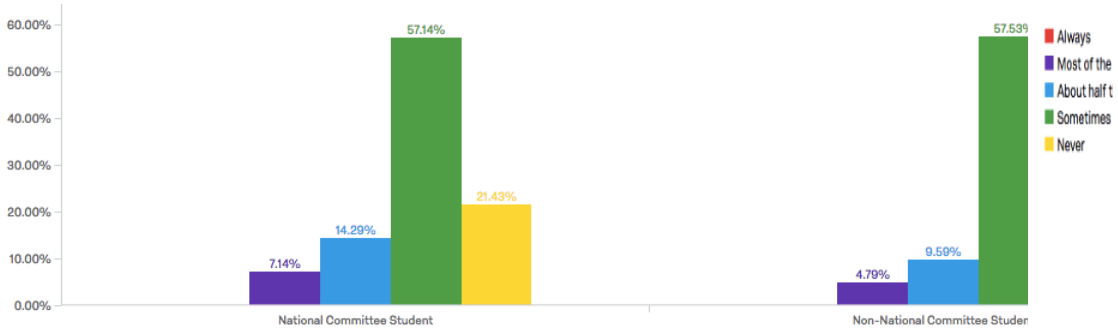
Figure 3: Percentages of responses from National Committee and Non-National Committee students to the question: I feel very different from most other students at my school

For the question above, 'I feel very different from most other students at my school' we see National Committee students responding as 'always' or 'most of the time' as 42.9% compared to 18.3% of non-National Committee students. This result is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level with a calculated chi squared value of 11.59.

Interestingly, the item which most closely and directly addresses the current study's research question showed no significant difference between National Committee and non-National Committee students with a calculated chi

square value of 0.63. Not one student responded ‘always’ to the question ‘sometimes I feel as if I don’t belong in my school’ and there were no significant differences between how National Committee and non-National Committee students answered this question.

Figure 4: Percentages of responses from National Committee and Non-National Committee students to the question: Sometimes I feel as if I don’t belong in my school



4.4. Inferential Statistics

4.4.1. Research Question

Although the research question in the current study predicted National Committee students to experience lower rates of belonging than their non-National Committee peers, it can be seen from the descriptive statistics above that the mean of the PSSM for National Committee students (x = 2.17) was actually higher than the mean of the PSSM for non-National Committee students (x = 2.05). I still thought it interesting to see if this difference in means was significant, so an independent t-test was calculated to see if there were any differences in belonging scores between National Committee and non-National Committee students. For the purposes of this test, and all t-tests run in this study, it is assumed the sample investigated fulfils the requirements for a parametric test, namely:

(1) The variance of the dependent variable in the two populations are equal.

(2) The dependent variable is normally distributed within each population.

(3) The data are independent (Coolican, 2017).

In the current study, the independent variable was the students National Committee or non-National Committee status and the dependent variable was the score on the PSSM scale. The results of the independent t-test for the current study can be seen in Table 3 below. The calculated value of $t(156) = 2.12$ is insignificant at the $p<0.05$ level for a two-tailed test, with a calculated p-value of 0.301 and 95% confidence intervals (-0.12,0.37). There appears to be no significant difference between levels of belonging amongst National Committee and non-National Committee students in the studied international school.

Table 3: Independent t-test of PSSM for National Committee and Non-National Committee students

Statistic	Calculated Value
Calculated t	2.12
p-value	0.301
95% Confidence Interval	-0.12,0.37

A reason for this non-significant finding may be due to the small sample size of National Committee students. Unbeknown to the researcher, this year the school took in half of their regular National Committee students due to financial reasons. I only discovered this when arriving on campus, reducing my National Committee pool from 26 to 14. It would be interesting to do the study again with a larger sample of National Committees. Indeed, this low sample size of National Committee students was a confounding factor for the entire quantitative component of the current study and may have led to a false negative result or a

type II error.

4.4.2. Comparing Groups

After finding this non-significant result, I was interested to see if there were any significant findings between other groups of participants. I conducted more independent sample t-tests with the dependent variable remaining as scores on the PSSM, and investigated differences in the independent variables of gender, age, years at the school, region considered home, possession of one or more tertiary degree by parents and boarding status of students. The results of these t-tests can be seen in the table below. It was necessary to collapse some of the categories in some of the categorical variables examined. After analysing the descriptive demographic data presented in table 1, I decided to collapse information about parental education into two categories, that the parents of the student had at least one tertiary degree between them, or that neither parent had a tertiary degree. I also decided to collapse information around the place considered home by students from 9 separate geographic regions into two: Singapore and South East Asia (SSEA) or Rest of the World (World). I also decided to look for an age difference between students aged 15 or 16 compared with students aged 17 or 18. I also wished to examine any differences between students who identified as the traditional genders (Male or Female) compared to students who identified as another gender or who left the gender question blank, so I computed a new variable to analyse where MF represents students who identified as male or Female and Other represents all other responses.

Table 4: Comparisons of means for various groups on the PSSM

Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Gender						
Male	70	2.07	0.445	0.149	151	0.882
Female	83	2.06	0.468			
Age						
15&16	76	2.08	0.469	0.503	151	0.616
17&18	77	2.05	0.446			
Residential						
Boarding	30	2.21	0.459	-2.06	156	.041*
Day	128	2.02	0.447			
Years in UWC						
First Year	43	2.06	0.489	0.588	57	0.59
Second Year	16	2.14	0.325			
Of First Years Who are						
National Committees	10	2.22	0.448	1.178	41	0.246
NonNational Committees	33	2.02	0.498			
Home Region						
SSEA	72	2.14	0.448	2.037	155	0.043*
World	85	1.99	0.453			
Parents Edu						
1+ Degree	132	2.03	0.451	1.186	137	0.238
0 Degree	7	2.24	0.621			
Gender Ot						
MF	153	2.06	0.456	1.122	156	0.264

Other	5	1.83	0.351

Note: *p<0.05

It can be seen from the table above that there are no significant differences based on parental education levels, years at the school, age or gender. However, significant findings between groups were found for region students consider home and whether or not they were a boarding student.

4.4.3. Principal Component Analysis

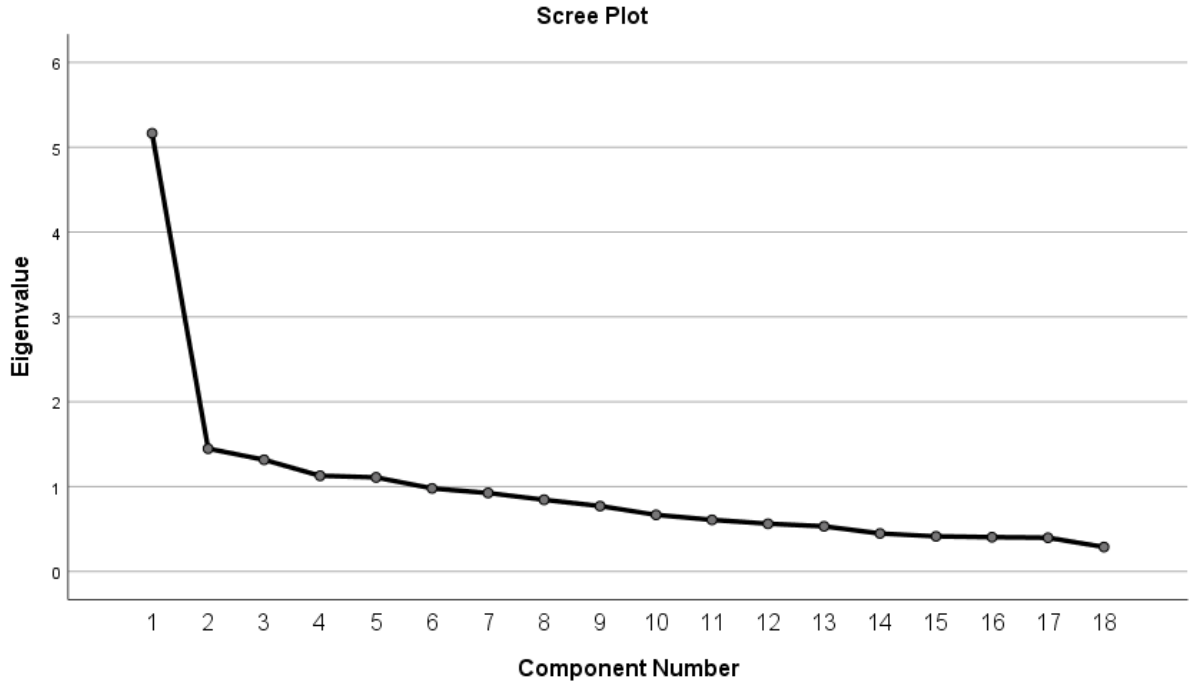
Although the PSSM is a highly reliable and valid measure of school belonging across diverse samples, the researcher was interested in if there were any trends within the PSSM. Goodenow (1993) suggests the scale measures the construct of school membership and cannot be broken down into any more factors. To increase the reliability of this claim, I performed a principal component analysis (PCA) to see if any items' responses displayed similar patterns in my sample, or if there were underlying factors that make up participants results on the PSSM. Although Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggest it is necessary to have at least 300 cases for factor analysis, Stevens (1996) believes sample size prerequisites have been declining as more research is conducted in each field and suggests samples as low as 150 may be acceptable. Other authors suggest rather than fixating on the number of cases, the ration between participants and items is more important and Nunnally (1978) recommends a ratio of 10:1, or ten participants for each item tested. With 178 participants and 18 items, the current study broadly meets these requirements.

The 18 items from the PSSM scale were investigated using a PCA. Prior to conducting the analysis, I assessed the suitability of the data for factor analysis

and from the correlation matrix, many coefficients of .3 and above were found. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .837, higher than the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's (1954) Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

The PCA revealed five components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 28.7%, 8.04%, 7.31%, 6.26% and 6.16% of the variance respectively. From the scree plot generated from the PCA below, it can be seen that the elbow of the plot occurs after the first component. Using Cattell's (1966) scree test, it can be suggested that component 1 captures much more of the variance than the remaining components and it was therefore decided that only one component should be retained. Looking at the component matrix, all but two items load onto the first component at or above .4, with the remaining two items both loading above .3. Although there is a substantial drop off in Eigenvalues from component 1 to component two, four items load onto the second component at .4 or above. On component two, three of the four items which load at or above .4 happen to be about students relationships with teachers, perhaps suggesting a second component around student-teacher relationships influencing belonging. However, as all of these items are already captured by component 1, a single factor solution was considered more appropriate. These results are consistent with previous research that suggest the PSSM measures the one factor of school membership (Goodenow, 1993; Akar-Vural et al., 2013).

Figure 5: Results from principal component analysis plotting eigenvalue against component number



Although the PCA suggested only one underlying factor is measured by the PSSM, results from the qualitative interviews suggested that students felt experiences in their school influenced their sense of belonging. It became clear that one strong element that enhanced belonging was the relationships with and efforts from their teachers, as Participant 7 states:

> the teachers are always there to help and they're always trying to make us like stick together and share our ideas and everything we have and that really helps you stay in our community. There are people here that care a lot about their students and I have a real connection with some of my teachers who care about who I am as a person.

Another agent of belonging that came through from participant interviews was the value placed on inclusion in the school. Participant 9 explains,

> I see that the school is making a really really huge try to encourage the diversity. For example this year was the 10 year anniversary so they allow us to make different dances from different parts of the world, and

> that makes me feel comfortable and I see that the school is making us feel like home and show our diversity. Here everybody is able to shine.

However, it became clear from analysing participant interviews that one negative influence on students' sense of belonging was their relationship with non-National Committee students. Participant 2 comments on their experiences:

> I mean the first thing is here people are here since grade 2 or grade 5 and they have really strong friendship groups and it's really hard to break that or break through into that, they've known each other for so long. They don't want to have any other friends in their group. They may say hi to you, but they can't make you as a friend, they don't want to be friends with you. It's hard to make friends when they already have their established groups.

These three themes are discussed here briefly as they are somewhat captured by items on the PSSM. I thought it would be interesting to investigate if there were any differences on measures of relationships with other students, teachers or feelings of inclusion that were captured by the PSSM between National Committee and non-National Committee students. To do this I grouped the 18 items of the PSSM into three categories, based on if they were focused on student-student relationships, student-adult relationships or measured school inclusivity. Although I acknowledge there is no theoretical or statistical basis for conducting this analysis, using the principles of standpoint theory (Harding, 2003), sometimes those experiencing an environment as minority group members will have a clearer view than those of us observing from the majority. The breakdown of items can be seen in the table below.

Table 5: Suggested components extracted from qualitative interviews.

Student-Student Relationships	Student-Teacher Relationships	School Inclusivity
Other students in my school take my opinions seriously	People at my school notice when I am good at something	I feel like a part of my school
It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school	Most teachers at my school are interested in me	Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in my school
People at my school are friendly to me	There is at least one teacher or adult I can talk to in my school if I have a problem	I am included in lots of activities at my school
I feel very different from most other students at my school	Teachers here are not interested in people like me	I can really be myself at my school
Other students at my school like me the way that I am	I am treated with as much respect as other students in my school	I wish I were in a different school
	Teachers at my school respect me	I feel proud to belong to my school
	People at my school know that I can do good work	

Once divided into three new subscales, more independent sample t-tests could be run to investigate any differences between the means of National Committee and non-National Committee students. The results of these t-tests can be seen in the table below.

Table 6: Independent sample t-tests between National Committee and non-National Committee students on three subscales extracted based on qualitative interviews: student-student relationships, student-teacher relationships and inclusion.

Subscale	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Teacher						
National Committee	14	2.13	0.334	0.052	159	0.959
Non-National Committee	147	2.13	0.442			
Student						
National Committee	14	2.21	0.434	1.01	160	0.316
Non-National Committee	148	2.34	0.477			
Inclusion						
National Committee	14	2.28	0.550	2.00	157	0.047*
Non-National Committee	145	1.97	0.548			

Note: *$p<0.05$

It appears that there are no significant differences amongst student-student relationships amongst National Committee and non-National Committee students at the $p<0.05$ level. This could be because as disenfranchising as participants found their relationships with their elite peers, they also found their relationships with their boarding house peers as strong protective factors and enhancers of their sense of belonging. As Participant 2 states:

> The main times when I'm really aware that I belong are whenever I feel sad I talk with my roommates and my friends that makes me feel like I'm at home. I love my corridor, I don't know how to express it, it is the most place I can get my peace my love here in the boarding house, to be honest, everyone is so caring and respectful, I mean sometimes we spend all night after curfew talking.

It can also be seen that there is no difference in scores on teacher-student relationships amongst National Committee and non-National Committee participants at the $p<0.05$ level. This could suggest that teachers at this school work their hardest to ensure all students feel valued and like they belong, not just the National Committee students.

There was however a significant difference in scores on the inclusion subscale of the PSSM amongst National Committee and non-National Committee students, with calculated t value of $t(157)=2.28$ which was significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

4.4.4. Correlational Analysis

The relationship between scores on the PSSM, it's submeasures 'Teacher Relationships, Student Relationships and School Inclusion) and other demographic variables was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. It can be seen from the table below that there are strong relationships between the PSSM and it's submeasures, as to be expected with correlation coefficients of $r = .728$, $n = 158$, $p < 0.01$ (Teacher Relationships), $r = .783$, $n = 158$, $p < 0.01$ (Student Relationships), and $r = .889$, $n = 158$, $p < 0.01$ (School Inclusion). There also appears to be a weak relationship between the PSSM and region students consider home (SEA vs Rest of World) with $r = -.161$, $n = 158$, $p < 0.05$. The direction of the relationship is that students from SEA experience a stronger sense of belonging than those from the rest of the world. There also appears to be a weak relationship between the PSSM and whether or not the student is a boarder, with r

= -.163, n = 158, $p < 0.05$. The direction of the relationship is that students who board experience a stronger sense of belonging than day students.

It also seems, from the correlational analysis, that students who consider Singapore or SE Asia home feel a stronger sense of belonging generated from their teacher relationships, r = -.226, n = 160, $p < 0.01$. Other findings from the correlational analysis include strong relationships between being a boarder and being an National Committee student, as all National Committees are boarders and they make up almost half the boarders in the sample as well as being a boarder and the amount of years at the school. This is because the majority of National Committees have only been at the school one year, and that the boarding house has a large intake of students in their 11th grade year. This high percentage of boarders being National Committees also helps explain the moderate relationship between being a boarder and parents having at least one tertiary degree, r = -.387, n = 143, $p < 0.01$. There was a moderate relationship between being a boarder and measures of school inclusion, r = -.226, n = 159, $p < 0.01$ and there was also a moderate relationship between being a boarder and feelings of belonging related to student relationships, r = .184, n = 162, $p < 0.05$. There was also a very strong correlation between National Committee status and parental holding of at least one degree, r = .580, n = 143, $p < 0.01$. There was also a relationship between years students have spent at the school and the presence of a degree amongst a students' parents, r = .169, n = 143, $p < .05$. While the effect of gender was investigated, it was not correlated with any other variables.

Table 7: Correlations between variables of interest

		PSSM	Home	Board	National Committe	Years	Gend	ParED	TEA	STU	INational Committe
PSSM	P	1	-.161*	.163*	-0.078	0.017	-0.012	-0.101	.728**	.783**	.889**
	Sig		0.043	0.041	0.33	0.833	0.882	0.238	0	0	0
	N	158	157	158	158	158	153	139	158	158	158
Home	P	-.161*	1	0.083	-0.104	-.157*	0.018	-0.018	-.226**	-0.112	-0.096
	Sig	0.043		0.293	0.189	0.046	0.826	0.829	0.004	0.156	0.229
	N	157	161	161	161	161	156	143	160	161	158
Board	P	.163*	0.083	1	-.589**	-.434**	0.022	-.387**	0.018	.184*	.216**
	Sig	0.041	0.293		0	0	0.783	0	0.824	0.019	0.006
	N	158	161	162	162	162	157	143	161	162	159
National Committee	P	-0.078	-0.104	-.589**	1	.262**	-0.06	.580**	-0.004	-0.079	-.158*
	Sig	0.33	0.189	0		0.001	0.457	0	0.959	0.316	0.047
	N	158	161	162	162	162	157	143	161	162	159
Years	P	0.017	-.157*	-.434**	.262**	1	-0.057	.169*	0.044	0.047	-0.036
	Sig.	0.833	0.046	0	0.001		0.479	0.044	0.579	0.553	0.651
	N	158	161	162	162	162	157	143	161	162	159
Gend	P	-0.012	0.018	0.022	-0.06	-0.057	1	0.128	-0.019	-0.074	0.068

	Sig.	0.882	0.826	0.783	0.457	0.479		0.134	0.818	0.357	0.405
	N	153	156	157	157	157	157	139	156	157	154
ParED	P	-0.101	-0.018	-.387**	.580**	.169*	0.128	1	-0.082	-0.09	-0.14
	Sig	0.238	0.829	0	0	0.044	0.134		0.33	0.285	0.1
	N	139	143	143	143	143	139	143	142	143	140
BEL-T	P	.728**	-.226**	0.018	-0.004	0.044	-0.019	-0.082	1	.423**	.497**
	Sig	0	0.004	0.824	0.959	0.579	0.818	0.33		0	0
	N	158	160	161	161	161	156	142	161	161	158
BelST	P	.783**	-0.112	.184*	-0.079	0.047	-0.074	-0.09	.423**	1	.629**
	Sig	0	0.156	0.019	0.316	0.553	0.357	0.285	0		0
	N	158	161	162	162	162	157	143	161	162	159
BelNational Committee	P	.889**	-0.096	.216**	-.158*	-0.036	0.068	-0.14	.497**	.629**	1
	Sig.	0	0.229	0.006	0.047	0.651	0.405	0.1	0	0	
	N	158	158	159	159	159	154	140	158	159	159

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4.5. Comparing Correlational Coefficients between two groups

I was also interested to see if there were any differences in these correlation coefficients between different groups. I investigated the difference in correlation coefficient between National Committees and non-National Committees based on the place they considered home, SEA vs Rest of the world. These results can be seen in the table below. From the output given below we can see that for students from SE Asia the correlation between belonging and being an

National Committee was r = -.024, n = 72, while for students from the rest of the world it was slightly larger, r = -.143, n = 85. Using the Fisher r-to-z transformation, to calculate a value of z that can be applied to check the significance of the difference between the correlation coefficients, the calculated z was -0.73, which was insignificant at the $p < 0.05$ level ($p = 0.465$ for a two-tailed test).

Table 8: Comparison of Correlation coefficients from students who consider SE Asia home compared with the rest of the world.

Home			**BelongingPSSM**	**National Committee**
SE Asia	BelongingPSSM	P	1	-0.024
		Sig		0.844
		N	72	72
	National Committee	Pearson Correlation	-0.024	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.844	
		N	72	73
Rest of World	BelongingPSSM	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.143
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.192
		N	85	85
	National Committee	Pearson Correlation	-0.143	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.192	
		N	85	88

After conducting the correlational analysis, many interesting relationships surfaced. I further explored these relationships using independent sample t-tests.

Table 9: Independent sample t-tests generated from correlational results from measure of Teacher Relationships.

Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Home						
SEA	72	2.23	0.422	2.92	158	.004**
Rest of W	88	2.04	0.426			

Note: ** Indicates results significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Table 10: Independent sample t-tests generated from correlational results from measure of School Inclusion

Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Resident						
Day	129	1.94	0.540	-2.77	157	.006**
Boarding	30	2.24	0.555			

Note: ** Indicates results significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Table 11: Independent sample t-tests generated from correlational results from measure of Student Relationships

Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Resident						
Day	132	2.18	0.467	-2.37	160	0.019*
Boarding	30	2.40	0.467			

Note: * Indicates results significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

4.4.6. Partial Correlations

I wished to examine if controlling for the variable of region of the world participants considered home would reveal any interesting relationships between being a National Committee student and feelings of belonging. A partial correlation analysis was conducted which found a very weak relationship, $r = -.097$, $df = 154$, $p > 0.05$ between PSSM scores and National Committee status when region considered home was controlled for. An inspection of the zero-order

correlation (r = -.078, df = 156, p > 0.05), suggested that controlling for region considered home had very little effect on the strength of the relationship between these two variables.

Table 12: Partial correlation of belonging scores and National Committee status while controlling for place considered home.

Control Variables			BelongingPSSM	I am a(n)	Home
None	BelongingPSSM	Correlation	1	-0.078	-0.161
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.33	0.043
		df	0	156	155
	I am a(n)	Correlation	-0.078	1	-0.104
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.33		0.189
		df	156	0	159
	Home	Correlation	-0.161	-0.104	1
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.043	0.189	
		df	155	159	0
Home	BelongingPSSM	Correlation	1	-0.097	
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.23	
		df	0	154	
	I am a(n)	Correlation	-0.097	1	
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.23		
		df	154	0	

I also wished to examine if controlling for the variable of age would reveal any interesting relationships between being an National Committee student and feelings of belonging. A partial correlation analysis was conducted which found a very weak relationship, r = -.112, df = 150, p > 0.05 between PSSM scores and National Committee status when age was controlled for. An inspection of the zero-order correlation (r = -.078, df = 156, p > 0.05), suggested that controlling

for region considered home had very little effect on the strength of the relationship between these two variables.

Table 13: Partial correlation of belonging scores and National Committee status while controlling for age.

Control Variables			BelongingPSSM	I am a(n)	Select your age group
None	BelongingPSSM	Correlation	1	-0.078	-0.031
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.33	0.7
		df	0	156	151
	I am a(n)	Correlation	-0.078	1	-0.529
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.33		0
		df	156	0	154
	Select your age group	Correlation	-0.031	-0.529	1
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.7	0	
		df	151	154	0
Age	BelongingPSSM	Correlation	1	-0.112	
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.171	
		df	0	150	
	I am a(n)	Correlation	-0.112	1	
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.171		
		df	150	0	

Finally, I wanted to examine if controlling for the variable of parental education would reveal any interesting relationships between being an National Committee student and feelings of belonging. I conducted a partial correlation analysis which found a very weak relationship, $r = -.024$, $df = 136$, $p > 0.05$

between PSSM scores and National Committee status when age was controlled for. An inspection of the zero-order correlation ($r = -.078$, $df = 156$, $p > 0.05$) suggested that controlling for region considered home had very little effect on the strength of the relationship between these two variables.

Table 14: Partial correlation of belonging scores and National Committee status while controlling for parental education

Control Variables			BelongingPSSM	I am a(n)	One Parent with a degree
None	BelongingPSSM	Correlation	1	-0.078	-0.101
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.33	0.238
		df	0	156	137
	I am a(n)	Correlation	-0.078	1	0.58
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.33		0
		df	156	0	141
	One Parent with a degree	Correlation	-0.101	0.58	1
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.238	0	
		df	137	141	0
One Parent with a degree	BelongingPSSM	Correlation	1	-0.024	
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.778	
		df	0	136	
	I am a(n)	Correlation	-0.024	1	
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.778	.	
		df	136	0	

4.4.7. Summary of Quantitative Findings

The average age of participants was 16.56 years old. Participants had been at the school for an average of 4.57 years and 10.8% (n = 30) of the sample were boarders. The vast majority, or 95.1% of the sample's parents had at least one tertiary degree between them (n = 136). The largest proportion of the sample identified Singapore (n = 49) with 30.4% as home with the second most popular choice being Asia (n = 40) or 24.8%. National Committee students (x = 17.6) are on average over a year older than their non-National Committee peers (x = 16.2). Forty-three of National Committees (n = 6) had no parent with a tertiary degree, whereas less than 1% of non-National Committees (n = 1) did.

Participant (n = 164) scores were below the mid-point level on the PSSM (x = 2.06, SD = .45), suggesting an overall low level of belonging amongst this sample. The mean of the PSSM for National Committee students (x = 2.17) was higher than the mean of the PSSM for non-National Committee students (x = 2.05). The calculated value of $t(156) = 2.12$ is insignificant at the $p<0.05$ level for a two-tailed test, with a calculated p-value of 0.301 and 95% confidence intervals (-0.12,0.37). There appears to be no significant difference between levels of belonging amongst National Committee and non-National Committee students at UWCSEA. There was a significant difference in scores on the inclusion subscale of the PSSM amongst National Committee and non-National Committee students, with calculated t value of $t(157) = 2.28$ which was significant at the $p<0.05$ level, suggesting National Committee students feel more included than their non-National Committee peers. There appears to be a weak relationship between the PSSM and region students consider home (SEA vs Rest of World) with $r = -.161$, $n = 158$, $p < 0.05$. The direction of the relationship is that students from SEA

experience a stronger sense of belonging than those from the rest of the world. There also appears to be a weak relationship between the PSSM and whether or not the student is a boarder with $r = -.163$, $n = 158$, $p < 0.05$. The direction of the relationship is that students who board experience a stronger sense of belonging than day students. Students who consider Singapore or SE Asia home also feel a stronger sense of belonging generated from their teacher relationships, $r = -.226$, $n = 160$, $p < 0.01$ than students from the rest of the world.

4.5. Qualitative Data Analysis

Based on suggestions from Miles et al., (2014), the following methodology of data analysis, which is detailed in Chapter III, was employed to make sense of the interview recordings:

(1) Initial interpretations
(2) Transcription
(3) Data saturation
(4) Coding (level I)
(5) Categorising (level II)
(6) Connections (level III)
(7) Data analysis
(8) Triangulation

4.5.1. Confidentiality and a Composite Participant

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the vulnerability of the population being studied, measures have been taken to maintain a high level of confidentiality for participants. I decided not to give individual profiles of each participant as the number of National Committee students at UWCSEA is small,

and individual profiles could potentially reveal the identity of the participants. Instead, data are presented through a thematic, holistic lens. Quotes from participants are attributed to participants' assigned participant number. As identified by the coding and categorising process, there were enough similarities among participants' responses that the salient quotes included in this thesis could have been attributed to multiple participants. This technique provides characteristic experiences of participants without revealing individually identifying information. As well as employing this technique, I developed a composite archetype of a National Committee student studying at this elite educational institution to give readers with no familiarity of the context an overview of the population being investigated.

The following description is of a typical 'National Committee' student attending UWCSEA. This composite example student is by no means exhaustive or restrictive, as all National Committee students are unique and bring their own personal identities and traits to their experiences at this school. The typical National Committee student is just as likely to be a female as a male, as the school sets a gender quota to ensure a gender balance. The school also employs set quotas for regions of the world, so it is hard to generalise across nationalities; however, in the current sample, students were from Bhutan, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Hungary, Italy, Peru and Spain. The typical National Committee student enters this school in their penultimate year of high school and stays for two years. They are often a significant degree older than the rest of the students in their year level, as it is not uncommon for students to finish their high school in their home countries and then apply to this elite educational institution to redo their last two years of high school. The typical National Committee student is

motivated by a desire to broaden their horizons, experience new things, meet new people, discuss new ways of doing things and to change the world. The selection criteria for these National Committee places are not only based on strong academic achievement but also on alignment with the UWC ethos, targeting students who have a high drive and demonstrated commitment to "become leaders in social responsibility, inspiring them to effect change personally, locally, nationally and internationally" (UWC, 2018).

The typical National Committee student is highly ideological and can be critical of others who they do not see as living up to their lofty ideals. They speak English as a second or additional language but are not shy about expressing their opinion or convictions in any medium or tongue. They have plans to attend university after their time at UWC, although not at a rate as high as their non-National Committee peers; more diversity in post-compulsory schooling opportunities is considered acceptable by National Committee students, including gap year programs, volunteering, returning to their home country, and joining the workforce. The typical National Committee student wishes to do well at school, but not at any cost, as their motivations and interests often lie elsewhere. This means that they can often be found spending more time involved in other activities than their non-National Committee peers, and spending less time studying. The typical National Committee member also tends to be highly involved in school life, particularly in the service program, doing more than the required hours, and being involved in activities that go beyond baseline expectations. They are often the leaders in celebrations of diversity and cultural expressions. All National Committee students live in the boarding house and have a non-National Committee roommate for year 11 and their own room for year 12.

The composite of the typical National Committee student described above took into account the ten students in the current study's sample. To build this profile I analysed data from the rapport building section of each interview, the main body of the interview as well as my memos during data analysis.

In addition to using a composite of the typical National Committee student, I have applied small changes to mask identifying features of participants' responses, for example, when participants identified their home countries, I have used the term 'home country' instead of the actual place, as often participants are the only students from their home country.

4.5.2. The Lived Experiences of National Committee Students at UWC

Though each participant was an intrinsically unique individual and shared their stories of their lived experiences at this elite educational institution, there were many similarities and commonalities amongst their stories. The use of standpoint theory (Harding, 2004) as the conceptual framework for this study allowed the research to record the lived experiences of these students which shed light on the "stereotypes and biases" (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4) that participants faced on a daily basis. Standpoint theory also helped the researcher to see the studied educational institution through participants' eyes, with the hope of making this knowledge available to prompt institutional change (Brooks, 2007). This study investigated the experiences and stories of these students in their day-to-day lives in an attempt to build new knowledge (Brooks, 2007). The participants extrapolated on their feelings of belonging and the enablers and inhibitors to a sense of belonging in their education institution. They eloquently described what factors helped them and what factors hindered them feeling like

they fit in and feel at home.

4.6. Qualitative Findings

4.6.1. Summary

The current study found support for several factors that can inhibit and enable National Committee students feeling a sense of belonging at UWCSEA. The following enablers were found to increase a sense of belonging amongst National Committee students in an elite international school:

1. Relationships

A. Peer relationships

B. Teacher relationships

2. School Culture

A. Boarding house environment

B. Opportunities, activities and service

The following inhibitors were found to decrease a sense of belonging amongst National Committee students in an elite international school:

1. Relationships

A. Lack of confiding relationship

B. Relationships with elite students

C. Being treated differently because of National Committee status

2. School Culture

A. Competition, stress and structure

B. Reality vs expectations incongruity

4.6.2. Enablers

4.6.2.1. Relationships

Peer relationships. A key factor many students mentioned in feeling that they belong was the relationships they developed with other students or their peers at the school. The most common relationships participants discussed were with those in the boarding house. The layout of the boarding house is a 14-story building with two 'corridors' on each floor leading out from the central lift well area. Each floor and corridor is comprised of students of the same gender and year level at school. Participants talked about their roommates, corridor mates and people in the boarding house with great reverence:

> Everyone is very supportive of what everyone else does. Even if they're not really our friends or you like don't really know them that well, people are very supportive of each other here. Especially of like academic performance or sports or arts performance, everyone is very supportive and celebrate each other a lot. (Participant 1)

When faced with challenging issues, Participant 6 states: "I would go straight to my corridor mates. I have two other friends and we call each other the triangle and we sort everything out. I trust them completely." It became clear that the proximity and mere exposure of participants to their roommates and corridor mates led to the development of close bonds and trusting relationships. Participants' corridor mates are the first people they see in the morning and the last person they see at night. They are the people who will be around when participants find out about selection in a sports team or hear about sad news from home or are involved in shower order diplomacy. Navigating such shared intimate

experiences as well as the mundane realities of communal living, clearly helps build stronger relationships and participants' corridors seemed to be the place where they felt that they belonged the most and felt most at home.

However it was not only in the boarding house where participants had found strong bonds amongst their peers. Participants noticed many members of the wider student body were extremely supportive which enabled a sense of belonging. Participant 9 talks about his close friends:

> Some of my friends they know my subjects, they know what I'm doing, they know my goals, for example Culturama, they know my activities. For example I have close friends in my activities, they know what I'm doing and in Culturama, they come up to me and they say how much they love it. (Participant 9)

While they may not have formed as intimate bonds with students outside the boarding house, it seems clear that many participants felt they were valued and respected within the wider student body and that the school climate was one of support, admiration and celebration. This sense of valuing what each individual brings to a community enhanced a sense of belonging amongst participants.

Participants were realistic about the extent they could form relationships in this institution. They know they are only going to be here for two years, whereas a lot of their relationships with people in their home countries they've had all their lives. Participant 7 states:

> Here you still have friends. It's true that maybe it's not as deep as some friends I have before but we've only spent like 7 months. With my other friends at home I spend like 8 years or something. But here you don't feel uncomfortable, you feel like you can speak about a lot of things like problems and for academics it's the same. (Participant 7)

Participant 9 is very pragmatic when talking about friendships, and accepts not everybody is going to be friends with everyone else:

> Yeah there is some popular group but I never notice about them, so yeah there's a lot of people and I'm not really friends with everyone. I have my specific group and some people I talk to and some people I don't talk to because I don't have anything to do with them and they don't have anything to do with me. I end up with my friend group because I remember when I first met them and we were talking about how IB is so hard and I'm failing, and then someone else was like 'I'm failing too', and then someone else said 'hey hello, I failed this test too'. So my group is like the failures. We sometimes we go to school and we complain. Maybe we should get T-shirts. (Participant 9)

These shared interests or shared experiences allowed participants to navigate the vastness of the institution to find people they connect with and can build relationships with. Participants seemed unfazed by the fact that there were vast swaths of other students that they didn't know and were happy to form deeper relationships with a smaller number of students with common experiences and interests rather than try to reach out to more students in their orbit. It seems it is the deepness of the relationship rather than the amount of relationships that enhances participants' sense of belonging.

Teacher relationships. Another common enabler of a sense of belonging mentioned by participants was the relationships developed with their academic teachers. Participants could see the effort their teachers were making to know them as people and take an interest in their academic development but also in their wellbeing. In regards to their teachers, participants spent much more time talking about their teachers' personalities, senses of humour and interests outside of academics than they did about their role in their studies. Participants knew that

their teachers were extremely competent in their fields and pedagogy, but they seemed to value the importance their teachers' placed on knowing them as individuals as well. A common theme that emerged was that teachers at UWCSEA saw the value in building relationships with students and invested time in getting to know them as people as well as learners. Participants clearly appreciated this and explicitly linked it to their sense of belonging.

Participant 10 acknowledged all of his teachers do this in different ways, and with different degrees of success, but he appreciated the effort all of them put in and acknowledged it helped him feel like he belonged. He stated:

> What helps me feel like I belong are the teachers, they do try. I think it does matter because most of your work and things you're supposed to do are in relation to other people so I think it does count and you have to go outside your comfort zone. If I was left on my own I would probably be a loner. Just come to class and get my work done and leave. Not know anyone and not let anyone know me. But the teachers don't allow this. They keep asking us questions and getting us to share. Both about ourselves and who we are and also what we think. At the start I found it really like annoying. It really pissed me off. But now I am glad, they know who I am now and what I mean when I speak. We can discuss more openly now because of it. They're great. (Participant 10)

However, participants also appreciated their teachers' mastery and craftsmanship at their profession, and knew they were receiving a world class education from them. They noticed how teachers took an interest in their studies as individuals and always followed up to offer help and support however each individual student needed it. Teachers' willingness to give up their free time to help students and offer them every opportunity to succeed was noted by multiple participants. Participant 7 speaks of a similar experience: "with the teachers as well they empower and give you some sort of positive feedback and you can see

how was it before and how was it now. They make the path to doing better clear for you."

Participants spoke positively about their relationships with their teachers. They credited their teachers' effort, availability and openness with enhancing their sense of belonging at the school. Participants praised their teachers' mastery of their academic disciplines but were more grateful for their interest in them as individuals and supporting them in different ways.

4.6.2.2. School Culture

Boarding House Environment. It became clear during these interviews that the place the participants felt like they most belonged in Singapore was in the boarding house. This is called Tampines House and it is a boarding community on the UWCSEA campus. It is a 14-storey tower with each floor divided into two 'corridors' with a communal space in between. There are many communal common rooms with facilities like a movie room, a full kitchen, a pool table, an x-box, a football table, a music room and multiple study rooms. 147 students live in Tampines House as well as four House Parents and their families, a Deputy House Parent, a Boarding Intern and the Director of Residential Life. Residential house parents' apartments are on every second floor of the house. There are many other adults who work in the boarding house as either Assistant House Parents or Boarding House Executives, but they do not live on site. Assistant House Parents are teachers at the school who work an evening shift in the boarding house each week. Boarding House Executives are locally hired staff who work in the boarding house during the day and focus on a lot of the administrative and logistical tasks required to run a community of this size and complexity. Students come from over 40 countries and the boarding staff come from 15. Twenty-nine

languages are spoken in the house. Around two thirds of boarding students are in their final two years of high school, while the remaining third come from Grades 8-10. Students have a roommate in Grade 11 and their own room in their senior year. Students are assigned to a boarding 'family' and at the head of each family is an assigned boarding houseparent and boarding executive who work as a team to support the boarding students in their families. Each family is named after a species of tree native to Singapore, for example the Karachi family. Each family has an assigned houseparent that is an expatriate teacher with a half-time teaching load, and a boarding house executive. These two adults, the house parent and boarding house executive, are largely responsible for each individual boarder's welfare and act *in loco parentis*. Forty-two students, or around one third of the boarding house, are National Committee students.

Boarding House Parents. Participants listed many factors that made the boarding house an enabler to their sense of belonging; however, the most salient factor was the relationships they established with the house parents and other staff. Participants appreciated the balance house parents offered between compassion and problem solving. They were comfortable reaching out when they needed an empathetic arm around their shoulders but also when they had an issue they did not know how to go about solving. Participant 7 spoke fondly of his relationship with his houseparent:

> The houseparent thing makes you feel really comfortable and that someone is actually taking care of you and helping you. Like my house parent, I sometimes talk about stuff with her that I normally talk with my parents so I really feel that connection. Like the house parents are always helping for problems and I've already asked for like problems and minor things and also about the really big important things too. They're great people. (Participant 7)

This idea that there is more support and care available to participants at UWCSEA than there would be in their home countries was a common thread in interviews. While many participants spoke of missing their families and those close kinship connections, many appreciated that the support network they were in at UWCSEA was wider and deeper than in their home communities. While many participants showed mild surface annoyance at just how many adults were in their lives and their business at UWCSEA, it was clear that they also appreciated having so many people interested and concerned about their wellbeing. This knowledge that there was a web of adults around them wanting them to be well, happy and healthy was often referred to by participants as an enabler of belonging.

Boarding House Activities. Another aspect of boarding house life which participants said added to their sense of belonging was all the activities organised by boarding house staff. From a thorough orientation program, to weekends away at beach resorts for the whole house, to themed dinners, to birthday celebrations, to 'my story' presentations where boarders take turns telling tales of how they came to be in Tampines House, to learning dances from each other's cultures to weekend bike rides exploring Singapore to 'tea time' coffee house chats after study time or 'night owl' late night discussions. Different activities resonated with different participants, but what was clear throughout was that they appreciated the effort involved in organising such a rich diversity of experiences for them and that they really did help them feel like they belonged. Participant 4 for example states that:

> In boarding house I love that we are celebrating each other's birthdays and I love tea time. It's really good, it's a great initiative. And also we

> have the night owl discussions. A houseparent just initiated it, and you can stay until 11:15, and it's after curfew. As an 18 year old, *I can't imagine staying up so late [*emphasis added to indicate sarcasm]. But it's really good, like we initiate some topics via email and then we are discussing for more than an hour. And it's like wow, like the perspectives from the people. And most of the time I am observing but sometimes I am contributing and I just like to observe the way that other students are changing and sometimes you can see their changing mindset in front of your eyes, it's so interesting. (Participant 4)

Participants also loved the effort boarding staff put into making them feel included in the community from orientation day one, and how the boarding community celebrated the diversity of the boarding house. Participant 3 talked about how the boarding staff helped her form connections with other students:

> The house parents do encourage us to make bonds. They have the orientation week which is really good and through that we make many friends. But like in the orientation week the person and the people I met I am really close to.

Another participant mentioned the special dinners and activities that highlight the diversity of the house:

> The boarding house would encourage lots of types of celebrations of regions in the world and activities. For example, we have sometimes African food or Latin American Dances, so I feel really involved in that because I love to dance and I love my food (Participant 9).

Participant 7 builds on this idea, finding a community in the boarding house:

> It's different from feeling at home than it is to feeling in a community, because of the activities that we make. I do feel like I'm at home, but it's not the same feeling, it's more, it's something else. It's better.

Many participants also talked of how the sense of community and

camaraderie developed amongst all members of the boarding house made them feel like they belonged. The deeper levels of disclosure and intimacy associated with living together built community and belonging for participants. Participant 7 talks of how the sense of community makes him feel like he belongs:

> I feel there is a lot of sharing of your opinion and your daily struggles and boarding house life. And I feel like that's great and that's how I feel comfortable. Sharing stuff with people. Like whenever I'm with my family we just speak about my topic and there's no bad opinion, we just share, and I feel like there's a lot of this at UWC and especially in the boarding house, and I think this is the thing that makes me feel at home, that people are so open and you feel like stronger ties with people that you share things with. (Participant 7)

Participants spend more hours of the day in the boarding house than they do in the main school, so it seems natural that the boarding house feels like a place where participants should belong. It is perhaps an unfair comparison to contrast the high school's approach to building a sense of belonging and the boarding house's. However, participants acknowledged that it is hard work running a diverse adolescent community and that there is time, effort and planning that goes into building relationships and making the community operate in a functional manner. Participants saw the lengths boarding house staff went to help students build healthy relationships and foster a sense of belonging in what will be their home for two years. Above all other enablers, it was the relationships and experiences students had in the boarding house that made them feel like they belong at UWCSEA.

Opportunities, Activities and Service. One factor many participants mentioned which helped them feel like they belonged was the incredible variety and amount of learning opportunities available to them at UWCSEA. Participants

appreciated that they were having experiences beyond what would ever be possible in their home countries and knew they were growing more because of it. Participant 3 states:

> I'm not just here for academic benefits but I have learned a lot. I have learned how to survive. I have learned how to go through the good times and the downfall of my life and how to get back up. If I compare myself now to the first day at this school, I am completely different now. The way I think has changed and I really want the people of my hometown to know this and how this school is. If I have a chance I will take time to forward a message and awareness to help practice something like the curriculum at this school in my home country. The way they communicate the differences here and make you bond and come together. It's amazing. (Participant 3)

This sentiment was mirrored by Participant 2 who values the opportunity to develop skills not tied to any one academic discipline and the opportunity to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds:

> I mean there's a lot of strengths to coming here because the kind of study it gives and provides is really holistic. We have a combination of everything, from this school students will know how to communicate. Because people from everywhere is coming here and from here you'll get a sense of what life is actually. Because it offers many things, in IfP [Initiative for Peace] we learn about communication, individuals and identities. That kind of thing isn't in the curriculum of my country. And also balancing all the other works and learning about new cultures from other students. You wouldn't get that in my country because everyone is from one country. And there's only one or two or a few cultures. But here you get to learn how to communicate with people from different places and you learn how to like respect them and the norms of their cultures and how you are different and how you should communicate and what makes you, you. (Participant 2)

Participants were clear to point out that they were talking about learning

opportunities beyond their classrooms as well. They valued the opportunities in terms of activities, service projects, trips, types of people they got to interact with and skills they could develop. Participants also saw any celebration of diversity as an enabler of belonging. Participant 9 states:

> I see that the school is making a really really huge try to encourage the diversity. For example this year was the 10 year anniversary so they allow us to make different dances from different parts of the world, and that makes me feel comfortable and I see that the school is making us feel like home and show our diversity. Here everybody is able to shine. So from the beginning I was thinking differently and when I came here I saw that the school was looking for some values, things like diversity and respect and people who have these aspects are accepted, and the other parts of their personality is their own parts, I would say this school respects what people can be. People are really conscious of the diversity and they respect that. They may be thinking something else, something not respectful, but they don't say it because they try to respect it. (Participant 9)

Participant 2 talks of the incredible bonding power of sports:

> for season one I did football and we had a group chat and we talked everyday about everything we did. It was really nice. I mean some of them were from grade 9 and grade 10 but we were so close, they were so friendly, we were so close.

A common event which sparked joy and a sense of community was the dance showcase event, Culturama, where students volunteer to teach their peers a dance and some background knowledge from their home culture, and all the dances are put together for a showcase performance for the whole community. Participant 6 states:

> Culturama was another beautiful aspect of UWC that I'll hold dear to my heart. Having the experience to learn someone else's culture and

> learn their form of dances, those were positive changes and makes me think 'oh this is what UWC is through a positive medium'.

Students often explicitly linked their experiences in their service groups to a sense of belonging. At UWCSEA, all G11 students must join a local service group and do an hour and a half of service per week for the whole year. Experiences involve things like teaching computer skills to abused migrant workers, giving massages to HIV patients, visiting nursing homes to read and play games with dementia patients, helping disabled people with horseback riding lessons and teaching English in Bahasa Melayu primary schools. While all students do their required amount of service, many students, including most of the participants in this study, opt to do more than the required minimum, and often join service groups that require more commitment, or join 2 or more service groups. One service group with an exceptionally high commitment, including weekends and holiday break commitments, is Initiative for Peace (IfP). In this service group, students train to become peace-builders and conference facilitators. They spend half a year learning about peace, conflict and how to plan and run a peace conference. They then spend the second half of the year planning a peace conference for youth from both sides of a conflict in a post conflict zone. In the first week of their summer break, they travel to that post conflict zone and run their peace building conference. Conferences have been held in Kashmir, Timor Leste, at a refugee camp on the Thai/Myanmar border, Sri Lanka and Cambodia. Participant 6 talks of his experience in IfP:

> I think that some things that have directly bonded me with other people are IfP. IfP is one notable thing where I can share my experiences of peace building and that's not necessarily another person's view but we can argue and bond through that argument.

This is echoed by Participant 8: “I’m going to IfP because I see that as very UWC, but you really have to look for it, it's not easy to access these UWC values, you have to find them, they don’t find you.”

Participants were also realistic about the commitments they could make to activities and service while also completing the rigorous demands of the IB Diploma. Many participants expressed the desire to do more activities and service, but just could not find the hours in the day. Participant 10 states:

> I do ‘empowerment through music’ group and RDA [horseback riding lessons for individuals with a disability] and I also played football. There are enough opportunities here for me to enjoy and have an impact. But you focus more on the point in time and what is relevant so when you try to get into everything it can mess everything up. So I try to focus on what’s important to me. There are people who have been doing this music or sports since childhood so there’s no point trying to catch up. Service I do for me. It's one thing that I really find that I connect with the school and with people. It makes me feel good about my place in the world and being able to contribute. But other activities there’s not much time for it. It’s an opportunity cost, there are only so many hours in the day. (Participant 10)

Participants found outlets to express their own identities through activities and service. They found opportunities to bond with like-minded peers and to meet new people. They developed feelings of self-efficacy and mastery of new skills as well as a sense of self-worth and understanding of the value they could bring to the world and other people in the wider community. They found their identities celebrated and enjoyed learning about and celebrating others. Taking part in activities and service was mentioned by every participant as a key enabler in building a sense of belonging in their school.

4.6.3. Inhibitors to Belonging

The results indicate that there were several elements that prevented students from feeling a sense of belonging in their educational institution. These can largely be grouped under the categories of unfulfilling relationships, elements of school culture and an incongruence between students expectations of the school and their experiences. All participants acknowledged that it was their decision to take up the opportunity to study at this school, even though they may have preferred to study at one of the college's sister schools, they seemed to understand that they were making a choice to stay. Student narratives all featured a tension between enjoying some aspects of their time at UWCSEA, with the feeling of being an outsider and not fully integrated into the community. Participants were also mature enough to realise that all transitions take time and have an adjustment period. Participant 4 states she's still feeling like she's in a state of transition:

> If I really want to be bluntly honest, then I don't feel like I belong. I kind of have a hard time here. I like this place and I appreciate it because it gives us so many things, particularly as a scholar, I could never imagine this much wealth around me. I remember in my first days being so shocked by just looking at how much money was in it and I was ok. I thought 'ok the first period is hard for anyone and it takes time'. But now we're in the 7th or 8th month now and I am still kind of feeling like it's not the right place to be, even though it has its advantages. (Participant 4)

Other participants also talked about their issues transitioning into the new elite environment as a barrier to developing a sense of belonging. For many participants, this has been their first move, let alone international move. Many had attended school with the same peer group their whole lives and had never had to make new friends or integrate into new cultures or ways of doing things.

Participant 3 talks of hear early struggles with the transition:

> When I first came here, it was really hard for me to adjust because I was completely different. It was hard to get adjusted to my life over here and the new people in my corridor. I didn't know them and I didn't know how to form bonds with them and start conversations with them. Even my roommate, I had problems with her at first because she was not talking to me and just crying all the time and I didn't know what to do. It was really hard to adjust so first I had to solve the problems with my roommate and get to know other people and then being able to communicate. (Participant 3)

Participants expressed almost a feeling of guilt at having anything negative to say about their experiences at UWCSEA, as the quotes above captures. They acknowledge that on the surface they are having all their needs met and are provided with every opportunity and support to succeed, yet something still makes them uneasy. This section explores components of this unease and inhibitors to a sense of belonging.

4.6.3.1. Relationships

Lack of Confiding Relationships and Community. A recurring theme mentioned by participants as an inhibiting factor to developing a sense of belonging was the lack of a confiding relationship. These students are often on the other side of the world from their friends and families with minimal chances to return home over the two-year period and can become disconnected from their home communities and feel distance in their close relationships. At the same time it can be hard to establish deep relationships in such diverse settings.

In terms of forming bonds with other students, Participant 2 compared her relationships at school to those back home:

> The first thing I'm going to mention again is friendship, when I have my friends back home, whenever I shout or whenever I cry, they can listen me, but I don't have anyone like that here. I don't have anyone to be honest with. I mean I'm not saying everyone here is judging us, but I'm scared to tell my feelings to others, I'd rather cry by myself. (Participant 2)

Students also lamented the lack of community feeling at their school. Factors which exacerbate this feeling of a lack of community include the size of the school, being almost 3000 students, the large number of students that teachers teach and the low amount of contact hours. For example Participant 5 states:

> My standard level subject teachers, I only see them twice a week and so I don't have the opportunity to build this relationship and even though the classes are really small but still like in some we're like 15 so my teacher needs to be conscious about everyone and some teachers don't even know my name and still get my name wrong or say 'but are you in my SL [standard level] class or my HL [higher level] class?' And I mean it's been like eight months. C'mon guys. (Participant 5)

One could argue that it is the role of a house parent to establish and develop a relationship with students so they feel safe, known and able to reach out for help when they need it. Participants were extremely positive about their relationships with their house parents and noticed and appreciated the great extent that they went to try to build these relationships. However, some participants acknowledged the gap between a houseparent and a true confiding relationship:

> Yeah my boarding house parents are really nice but I'm scared to tell them what I really think. I mean last week we had a student teacher conference and I was so upset by some of my teachers' comments and my houseparent came to my room and tried to tell me 'everything was going to be fine', and at that moment I felt like she was my mum, like she was hugging me and about to cry with me, but I don't know, I'm not

> feeling confident to talk with anyone about anything real here. (Participant 2)

Participants felt an uneasy tension when talking about their relationships at UWCSEA. On the one hand they acknowledged the great lengths the adults and many of the students around them were going to build bridges and get to know them, but at the same time they knew something was not quite right. Participants struggled to articulate exactly what this was or why they had not been able to find deep enough levels of connection, and while it is to be expected that nobody will feel the same sense of belonging in a foreign land without their friends and family, participants clearly felt something was blocking them in their quest to build confiding relationships.

Non-National Committee Students. Perhaps the most common inhibitor to feeling a sense of belonging discussed by participants was the attitudes and behaviours of their non-National Committee peers. Although part of the mission of UWC schools is to bridge the divide between students from different backgrounds and to see "education as a force to unite people, nations and cultures" (UWC, 2019), this rift seemed too vast for participants in the current study.

To the participants in this study, it was apparent from their first days of school who were the established elite and it was up to everyone else to figure out their place in the hierarchy. Some students saw this hierarchy more as a result of time spent in the institution and a familiarity with the community and habitus. Participants therefore saw their place inevitably as an outsider, as they had only joined the institution eight months ago and would only stay less than two years. Participant 10 states:

> This school has this institution where people have been here for 5 or 6 years and people build such strong friendships and you know that as friendships grow they get saturated and there's no more room for new people so if you're new it's hard to break in. You don't just go to people and like just be friends with them. People you truly connect to are friends of others who are they are friends for years so it's quite frustrating for outsiders. There's no way in. (Participant 10)

Again this inhibitor to a sense of belonging was exacerbated for participants by social media contact with other National Committee Students at sister UWC colleges, which are mainly institutions where students attend only for two years, so everybody is new at the start of G11 (as opposed to UWCSEA, which is a K-12 institution).

Participants also pointed to the indirect social pressure which alerted them to their other status. Not all students talked about explicitly exclusive behaviour from their elite peers, but they all mentioned the systemic barriers and differences that inhibited their ability to establish a sense of belonging. Given the elite structure of the school, participants felt included, but not that they belonged. Participant 2 used her experiences with wanting to help with the organisation of the prom as an example:

> Yeah I mean first they make everything inclusive and you can sign up and join anything, but then once you sign up, you realise you don't belong there. I mean I signed up for the prom committee when they sent out a Google form, but then when I went to the first meeting I realised I didn't know any of the fancy hotels in the city or all the right shops so I couldn't help so it was meaningless spending my lunchtime with them so I dropped out. (Participant 2)

However, participants also pointed out explicit behaviours that made them feel like they did not belong, such as elite students talking behind their backs and

pointing out their differences. This tendency of elite students to be quick to judge their non-elite peers was a consistent theme participants returned to. Participant 1 states:

> I think it's just a certain group that makes it hard, kind of like the more, I don't know, popular group of students, day students because I don't know, they have like such a big group and they do lots of, I don't know what they do but sometimes when you're just like, If you just walk by and you have this feeling, like you know, they're talking about you so I feel like that kind of makes it hard to feel like you belong. Like because for me I'm so like different to anyone else, I don't want to be like anyone else, I just want to be my own person right? And um when you do something that they would never be able to do they sort of look at you in a funny way, so I think in terms of like um things that people wear or their style or the way they talk or all that it makes the popular people so quick to judge and everything because they think that because they're popular they don't really need to care about others. (Participant 1)

Another mechanical failure which makes it hard for National Committee students to develop a sense of belonging in these elite institutions includes the wealth gap. Although steps are taken to limit the effect of different consumer habits in the school, wealth and status are pervasive and seep through. National Committee students are given $40 Australian dollars a week in pocket money, which is enough for one or two modest outings a week. However other students at the school often have access to enormous wealth and their leisure time reflects this. The participants talked about differences from their elite peers in everything from appearance to leisure activities to revision support. Participant 8 discusses her feelings towards her elite peers:

> There are popular kids, I mean I'm sorry to say it but this is basically like an American high school. I feel like it's just like, the popular kids

> are the kids who seem, I think they're the most closed off group and it's hard to get in, and lots of kids want to get in, which is so annoying. I think it might be that they're the kids who have their rich parents who wear the best clothes and go out of the way to push the line with the uniform things. There's a girl in the boarding house who it's really interesting to look at because I've never seen in my life such a socially awkward person because she's been brought up in a bubble, so everything she does, it's like watching a young kid experiment with what she can say, wear and do and what she can get away with. In the last few months she's been trying to become more popular meaning like she's buying the ear buds, going shopping with new pants and new shoes and a new bag basically every day and also coming out with all this gym wear. It kind of feels like you have to look a certain way, especially clothes wise, It just seems to be if you want to fit in there's this one style you have to follow. (Participant 8)

While conforming to group norms of appearance is a regular fixture of many high school experiences, when there is a large financial burden on fitting in, it can weigh negatively on those whose spending limits cannot keep up. Pressure to look a certain way or spend money on certain items wasn't limited to clothes. Many participants talked of how the experiences their elite peers engaged in for fun were exclusive to their situation, both in terms of financial and time constraints. Participant 4 explains:

> Most of the students are pretty nice, but I think that we have some financial problems because even if you are friends with them you maybe can't go to the places that they want to go. They like to go to places where they can eat expensive food and drink expensive drinks and do expensive things. I mean we get some pocket money which is great, and it's enough for how we want to live, but to join in on one of these popular kids' nights out, we'd have to save up our pocket money for like months. And also the rules, if you have to be back at 10 or 11 for curfew, and you have to leave an hour before to make curfew because we're so far out from the city here, and we only have enough money for

> public transport or sharing a taxi. And for your social life, leaving a party one hour before curfew on Saturday night, at 10, for teenagers, I mean, it's shaky, it's hard. (Participant 4)

Other students pointed to sports, and specifically the elite sports teams which travel to compete in regional conferences with other international schools. In this context, the conference UWCSEA competes in is called South East Asia Student Activities Conference, or SEASAC, and the trips to compete are often discouragingly expensive. Participant 6 discusses social hierarchies at school:

> There is sort of a hierarchy of the cool kids and the geeks somewhat. Some of the geeks that are connected to the jocks at the top but most of the time the kids who do a lot of SEASAC and sports are at the top. My view is narrow but being sporty makes you part of the cool kids. A lot of the students have no interest in getting to know about me. The ones who do not want to connect, I don't mean no disrespect, but they seem primarily to go into this school because of the sports or because the words IB and UWC will look good on their university applications. (Participant 6)

Another participant told a story of multiple peers thinking that Peru was part of Mexico. Participants wished parents of their peers and their peers themselves took the mission more seriously before applying to UWC:

> A positive suggestion would be that stating clearly what the mission stands for before being accepted here at UWC because some people are not here for the mission, they're here just because this school will get you IB. But I think they should think more about their decision because it's two years of your life and if it doesn't align with what you want to do, it is going to be a negative experience for all of us. When students don't participate in anything, it just makes me think, why are you here? Why are you wasting your life? (Participant 7)

However all participants acknowledge that they had many wonderful peers

who fully embraced the UWC spirit. As it is such a large school with so many events and activities, some students commented on how students self-selected into like-minded groups, and it was almost as if there were two parallel schools, operating side by side; one which they attended with their community-minded peers, living and breathing the UWC mission, and the other where their elite peers studied, revised and played sports, with eyes constantly on the end prize of entry to an elite university. This self-selective mechanism was articulated by Participant 9:

> Maybe because most of these activities are for volunteers, like you don't need to know, and you don't need to go. For example for the [school campus] anniversary it was a volunteer event, where we danced every dances from different parts of the world so there weren't many students there, only students who were interested in learning about new cultures. So other students I would say they really don't care, I can see some students don't even know where my country is on a map and they don't ask, because it's not part of their interest, so you get the students volunteering for these events who already know and who are already open-minded and interested in things and the ones who it maybe good for, the ones who might grow and change and learn about new things and places and people, they're not interested and they don't come. (Participant 9)

Being Treated Differently as a Scholar. Another inhibitor to feeling a sense of belonging that surfaced from all participants was being treated differently by different sections of the school community for being an National Committee student. Participant 1 describes what it feels like to be looked down on by other students:

> Sometimes I feel like I've been treated differently to other people. I think it's just that I'm a scholar and this is in general but other students tend to look down at scholars and think 'oh you're a scholar you're not

> like that smart or you don't have any money', and all that but in general we're all just the same, we're here for the same reason and all that, but yeah sometimes I do feel like I'm being looked down on, especially as a person of colour or all that, and sometimes it's really frustrating but I've come to accept it. (Participant 1)

This participant's mention of race as an additional element which made them feel looked down upon is especially interesting as the dominant ethnic group amongst the student population is students of Indian descent followed by students of Chinese descent. Perhaps the best way to characterise the dominant identity of students at UWCSEA is as global mobile bourgeoisies rather than from any specific background or place. The Western cultural influence is so strong in the school, that participants felt othered even by students who are people of colour, but have just been at the school for much longer than they have.

The National Committee programme is one of the core foundations of UWCSEA, and the school derives some of its elite status and social capital from the presence of National Committee students. However it seems National Committee students feel like they are allowed to be included in the school, but the elite structural nature of the school means they can never truly belong. Participant 4 describes an experience where an elite student was actively hostile to her, based on her identity as a National Committee student:

> We have an interesting situation with day students, I got in my face this year that I was a waste of money. A day student was just sitting there and he hadn't even met me and he just said that 'scholars are a waste of money', and he knew I was a scholar. There are mentalities and there are prejudices against us and I heard in TOK [Theory of Knowledge] class from another day student that 'I came here for the reputation, not because it's a UWC. Yeah they are pushing me towards these values and yeah I'm doing these things and service but it's ticking boxes, it's what

> universities want'. Their purpose is to get into Harvard or Yale and this school is going to provide them that. (Participant 4)

Participants also felt they were occasionally given special treatment for being National Committee students, and while they appreciated the good faith of these gestures, the end result was to widen the divide between them and their elite peers. Participant 5 discusses a celebratory event for National Committee students:

> For the celebration for scholars, we have like assembly, we have like scholars and day students and they're all equal, we should not consider one more better than the other one. But for the celebrations with scholars, we have just scholars, and we didn't involve the school or the day students, so if we're the same, and we have special dinners for scholars, and we don't do special dinners for day students, and we don't invite day students to celebrate, how can they be the same? So I was just thinking on maybe these occasions, and I know it's really hard, and they'd need to spend so much money on it, cause the school is really big and if they need to invite everyone it would be really hard, but I dunno I think that it celebrates everyone, not just scholars with scholars, because we are part of this community. (Participant 5)

4.6.3.2. School Culture

Competition. Another inhibiting factor to developing a sense of belonging that came up for multiple participants was the highly competitive academic culture in the school. This individualistic view of academic success as a zero sum game and people only feeling successful if they were outperforming their peers seemed to really grate with participants' views on seeing academics as just one part of how they defined a successful UWC experience and a more collectivist view of everyone being able to succeed together. As Participant 1 explains:

> One thing that like that pulls people backwards is the school. Like how hard the school is and like how hard the subjects is and some people like just try to give up because we all know school is really hard and we try our best to succeed and all that but sometimes I feel like I don't belong here because everyone here has different mindsets. It seems like not everyone comes from the same background and it's really hard because most of the students here take the academics very seriously and it's kind of like a competition for them so and I feel like I don't belong here because I'm not used to having competitions with others over academics, so that's one thing that really makes me feel like I don't belong here—having competitions with others over academics. They value me based on my grade, not on all the other cool things I can do. (Participant 1)

This focus on grades is felt by participants inside their classrooms too. Although all participants were extremely positive about the education they were receiving, acknowledging the strength of their courses was well and above anything they would be able to learn in their home countries, they resented the narrow focus on exams and grades and regretted the lack of flexibility to dive deeper into areas of student interest which may fall adjacent to the syllabi. Participant 10 states:

> Here at UWC we learn things beyond what we could have learned back home, but I don't think there's enough room for deep learning opportunities. So let's say a particular subject, like you are expected to pick subjects that you've never studied before and you're in a class with 20 or more students and there's other people apart from you in the class and you can't keep pulling the class down just because you want to have this discussion. It's not the best, although it's not something explicit, it's just implicit, you can't really do much about it. Everyone is so focused on exams and doing well. There's a box of things you have to learn and an invisible trend that you have to follow, but there's no time and space to go around and look at the interesting stuff. (Participant 10)

Stress. Another theme that ran through participants responses regarding

the inhibitors to a sense of belonging were the challenging academic standards at UWCSEA and the rigorous demands of the IBDP. Although all National Committee students are expected to have a highly competent baseline level of academic proficiency, their home systems are often very different from the types of demands the IBDP makes on students and shifting from a lot of rote memorisation to critical thinking skills can be a shock. Participant 6 spoke of his feelings of being overwhelmed by the IB:

> Before coming here there was all the excitement of spending life by yourself away from your family in a foreign country, learning to look what's outside home, what's life like outside of your walls and it was exciting in that part and having come here it feels good, but the IB is overwhelming. I think there's definitely a bit of adaptation you have to go through, especially when you're talking with your friends cause they may not share the same sense of humour or lack of language proficiency especially as a scholar having not used English in my previous community, I think there's major follow ups that I need to know, and I was a complete foreigner to IB, like what do all these letters and acronyms mean, like what is IA? what is EE? What is CAS? It's like learning a new language. (Participant 6)

Structure. A common gripe from participants that they claim inhibits their ability to belong at this school was the presence of what they described as an oppressive regime of rules and structure. All participants lived in the boarding house, alongside students who were up to six years younger than them. They also attend the school that is a K-12 institution. Singapore is a conservative nation and many of the families who choose to send their students to this school come from conservative backgrounds. These factors taken together mean that the boarding house and the school at large are set up to serve the needs of the many, even if this impinges on the freedoms of a few. By their very nature of seeking out

opportunities to spend some of their formative years abroad, away from friends and family and the safety net of home, and the fact that their families allow them to go, National Committee students are on the whole more autonomous, independent and integrated into the wider world than their elite peers. Many National Committee students also come from cultures and backgrounds where they have been treated like adults, including the rights and responsibilities that comes with being an adult, for many years already before joining UWCSEA.

As much as participants resented being treated like children sometimes and not given trust, they were mature enough to understand why this must be the case, and they could see that it was coming from a place of care and concern from their house parents. Participant 4 continues:

> The hardest part and the biggest challenge is the boarding house, and this is a really good thing that our house parents are really active and they care about us a lot and I really appreciate this—that this is one thing helps us to be involved and be here, it's great that they care about us. But for me there are just some things that I can't get along with. The rules are about some kind of mistrust, that you can't be able to earn here. If there was a pathway to earn their trust it would be different, but there's not. You can be the best student they could dream of and they still won't allow you to do certain things that wouldn't harm yourself but because they can't trust everybody. I had many clashes about it.
>
> R: Can you give me an example?
>
> P4: Like 10pm curfew. It sounds childish and ridiculous, but I'm not really staying out to do stupid things, If I'm staying out, I'm staying out to do work, and I try to not be in the middle of the attention so that nobody really sees me, but the house parents still get upset with me. But yes sometimes I'm staying out just to talk to my friends and oh yeah they caught us and oh my god but then nothing happens but my real fights are when I really need to study and I don't want to go into my corridor because my roommate sleeps really early or she talks to her parents so there are numerous times when I had to study in the toilet,

> which I don't really feel like it's a good thing. And I just remember sitting next to the toilet with my books until 2am and I don't really think that's a good thing. And I'm not procrastinating, that's the thing, they can see that I'm doing my work on time. But I need the time sometimes and not always. And I like to sleep, that's the thing. I'm just not my own worst enemy and they know but they can't notice because they should require a more individualist approach to students, but they can't or they think that they're not able to. We all have to follow the same schedule and the same rules like drones. (Participant 4)

Along with this perceived abundance of rules and structure comes a lack of freedom. Participants were particularly concerned about how they were supposed to learn and grow if no space was made for them, or indeed their elite peers, to fail in a safe space. Participant 8 discusses her disappointment in this lack of freedom:

> Yes this is an excellent school, but I feel like there's not enough space to grow. I mean we have G12s who are scared to go to uni because you do not form your good behaviours here, the school forms them for you and you will like never be sure if like will you continue these good behaviours when you leave here because you only had them here because they were the rules, or will they disappear because they are developed for you by the school and you follow the rules so you don't get punished, which isn't growth in any way shape or form. We need to have more of this freedom of space so that people can figure out their own way, because right now parents don't want their kids to fail, but we need some safe space to fail. (Participant 8)

Another bone of contention for participants, as it is for many teenagers, was how the uniform of the school restricted participants' individuality. Again, students saw the reasoning behind the uniform policy and understood it came from good intentions, but they still found it inhibited their sense of belonging. Participant 8 explains:

> I mean take the uniforms right, only 3 or 4 UWCs have uniforms, and we have such vast differences in socioeconomic backgrounds here, and we say 'we're doing it right, uniforms mean we'll all look the same, rich or poor'. But as I see it, if you're a huge rich person, who has the need to flaunt your wealth, then are you sure you're in the right school? And even if you are, it's also a state of mind because it's so hard to live in a way that doesn't offend anyone, because there's so many kids so it's just living in a way that's kind of planned right. It's like we're all in Mao suits back in communist China rather than risking offending anyone. I would have no problem right, like let the rich kids wear their Gucci, and whatever, I mean they already wear their Gucci shoes and carry Gucci bags, we still know who's rich and who's poor. I would be happier if I don't have to wear this tacky shirt, do you know how hot these are? I would much rather see them wear that. I don't care, it's just that there are so many people and such diverse age range and we have to think of kids and you're treated as a kid all the time and it's so frustrating all the time because even my parents are laughing because the school accepts to treat me as a kid even though I'm 18, but the school needs to cater to the lowest common denominator to make sure nobody gets hurt. But I feel like in doing that we're taking away something that is important and part of the UWC experience. (Participant 8)

Expectations vs Experience Incongruity. Participants rarely spoke of concrete, precipitating events that led to their lack of belonging, instead they talked more of abstract, subtle institutional cultural nuances which led to this feeling. A common gripe expressed by participants was that UWCSEA was not a real UWC, and that their expectations of what it meant to have a 'UWC experience' were incongruous with the reality of their experiences at UWCSEA. UWCSEA is one of 18 schools around the world which are part of the UWC network, all with a shared mission and set of values. Unlike most other UWCs, UWCSEA is large, K-12 institution and accepts fee-paying students as well as National Committee students, changing the dynamics of the school environment.

Participants were keen to point out their gratitude for all the perks that they get and wonderful experiences that are open to them at UWCSEA; however, they also mourned their loss of an 'authentic' UWC experience.

Participants in the study expressed their desire for their educational institution to be more than just a school and to offer them horizon-expanding opportunities, not just a path to college. When participants encounter elite students trying to minimise the impact of the unique mission of UWC and focus on the path of least resistance to an elite university, this made them feel like they did not belong. The National Committee programme rests on an ideology of global colonialism, removing students from their local context and educating them in the Western IB system, and holds up as an epistemological truth that the United Nations idealism of international belonging is both attainable and something to strive for. However, there is little critical reflection on the unintended negative consequences of assuming such a position or indeed of other forms of belonging. Participant 8 explains:

> I think that the school is very cliquey and that a lot of people who have been here for a long time and are not here for the values but are just here for school and getting good grades. And I also think there's this thing here at SEA that because of the way the school is, kids can take it just as a school, but for me and other National Committees, we don't see it just as a school. I didn't move away to the other side of the world just for school, so I think that creates another level of divide and pickiness as well. Sure there are day students that are here for the mission, but for every day student that's here for the mission, there's three who's just here to get into the best colleges because it's the best school in South East Asia. So there's a balance, it's just tipped too far towards going to a prize college. Of course there are amazing kids and I have a fair amount of day student friends who are really interested and friendly and then

> there's the people that, it's not that people are mean, it's just that people fake smile and ignore you. (Participant 8)

One inhibiting factor to students feeling known and like they belong that many participants brought up was the size of the institution. The school has approximately 3,000 students, and participants lamented their anonymity around campus. Some participants talked about the struggles in finding friendships in such a large institution, but also mentioned that when they do find them, the bonds can often be stronger and relationships deeper. Participant 5 states:

> We're a big community, there's like 3,000 kids here, so the good thing about this big community is you can really find who you want to be friends with and who you belong with and who you can be yourself with and have normal conversations with like your classmates but you can choose to have your own group of friends to stay with a group of people who you belong with. Sometimes I feel with my friends back home some of them you can talk about superficial stuff and when you start talking about politics or important things they're like 'this is boring' and when you try to explain, they say 'this is boring and I don't care'. So I really feel that the people here are like good to talk to because you can learn from them and get some ideas and get some points of view, and this is what I was looking for in a UWC like to develop my critical thinking and get different experiences and point of views, so yeah I'm happy with my experience. (Participant 5)

Participant 6 agreed and commented on how he finds he has become friends with people with similar interests in service and the UWC values: "Generally the ones who do want to interact seem to take a lot of services and are in GCs [Global Concerns] and things like IfP. They seem to align with UWC values and want to get to know diverse people." Participant 5 also appreciated the abundance of opportunities she had been afforded at this school, but believed they came at an opportunity cost:

> The list of like 60 pages of projects you can do in the school and how you can travel from the school and the support you get in the school and you have like choices at this school so if you want to sacrifice a bit of your social life and community to have more opportunities, then you should come here. If you're looking for a stronger sense of community, you should go somewhere else. (Participant 5)

Participants struggled to articulate what is was about their experiences that were so different from what they had imagined a UWC experience to be. It seemed to be a much more abstract lacking of a feeling of community or belonging than any concrete object or formal procedure. Participant 8 attempts to explain:

> I was so hurt about coming here, me and my best friend, we met because we were both crying in our bathroom because we were so hurt. So there's this thing: you can never make a UWC, a UWC is made out of all these little experiments and it's the same thing that makes up all these little disappointments. And I think it's the premise that this school is set on makes way for all these disappointments, so maybe it's these disappointments that add up to make this school not what UWC is said to be and all these little disappointments that make me feel like I don't fit in here and this can never be my home. (Participant 8)

4.7. Summary of Qualitative Findings

The current study found support for several factors that can inhibit and enable National Committee students feeling a sense of belonging at UWCSEA. The following enablers were found to increase a sense of belonging amongst National Committee students in an elite international school:

1. Relationships

A. Peer relationships

B. Teacher relationships

2. School Culture

A. Boarding house environment

B. Opportunities, activities and service

The following inhibitors were found to decrease a sense of belonging amongst National Committee students in an elite international school:

1. Relationships

A. Lack of confiding relationship

B. Relationships with elite students

C. Being treated differently because of National Committee status

2. School Culture

A. Competition, stress and structure

B. Reality vs expectations incongruity ratio

4.8. Summary of Chapter

This chapter has analysed the quantitative data gathered from questionnaires from the entire grade 11 cohort using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. This chapter then analysed the qualitative data gathered through qualitative interviews with 10 National Committee students about the enablers and inhibitors of developing a sense of belonging at UWCSEA. In the next chapter I will discuss these findings in relation to the existing literature and their implications.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1. Overview of Study

The current study investigated the research question: How do National Committee Students experience belonging at The United World College of South East Asia? Results from my study suggest National Committee students experience very low levels of belonging at UWCSEA. However, these low levels are the same for National Committee students as they are for non-National Committee students. Participant (n=164) scores were below the midpoint level on the PSSM (x = 2.06, SD = .45), suggesting an overall low level of belonging amongst this sample.

Other results suggest there is a significant relationship between scores of belonging and the region students consider home (South East Asia vs Rest of World), with students from SEA experiencing a stronger sense of belonging than those from the rest of the world. There is also a significant relationship between scores of belonging and whether or not the student is a boarder, with students who board experiencing a stronger sense of belonging than day students. Students who consider Singapore or South East Asia home also felt a stronger sense of belonging generated from their teacher relationships than students from the rest of the world.

The current study found support for several factors which can inhibit and enable National Committee students feeling a sense of belonging at UWCSEA. The factors that enabled a sense of belonging can broadly be grouped under the categories of ‘relationships’ and ‘school culture’. The category of relationships

that enable a sense of belonging can further be broken down into 'peer relationships' and 'teacher relationships', while the category of school culture can further be broken down into 'boarding house environment' and 'opportunities, activities and service'. Factors that participants identified as inhibiting their sense of belonging can also be broadly grouped under the categories of 'relationships and 'school culture'. The category of relationships that inhibit a sense of belonging can be grouped into 'lack of confiding relationship', 'relationships with elite students' and 'being treated differently because of National Committee status', while the category of school culture includes 'competition, stress and structure and 'reality vs. expectations incongruity'.

5.2. Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will argue that traditional notions of belonging fall short when attempting to explain the experiences of belonging of National Committee students at UWCSEA. I argue that the participants in my study do not see developing a sense of belonging at school as a priority and are instead more focused on the symbolic exchange value of their presence at UWCSEA and where it may take them in their futures beyond school. I will present evidence that demonstrates these National Committee students have a strong sense of self and are not looking for psychological connection from their educational institution. I will problematize widely accepted notions of belonging in relation to their applicability in international schools and call for the adoption of a new way of thinking about belonging that is more appropriate for these students who undergo many educational transitions. I will suggest UWCSEA, and many other educational institutions, have a romanticised notion of what it means to belong and, guided by the vast body of literature purporting the positive benefits

associated with a sense of belonging, have pursued fostering a sense of belonging amongst its students as a means to an end of achieving a range of other social, academic and psychological benefits. I will conclude this chapter with a new conceptualisation of the construct of belonging that has arisen from the data from my study and better addresses the needs of students in international schools.

5.3. Section 1: A Relational View of Place in Belonging

> The teachers are always there to help and they're always trying to make us like stick together and share our ideas and everything we have and that really helps you stay in our community. There are people here that care a lot about their students and I have a real connection with some of my teachers who care about who I am as a person. (Participant 7)

5.3.1. Imagined Geographies: Place, Relationships and Belonging

The findings of my study regarding belonging are not monolithic, and participants describe many factors that influence their sense of belonging and talk of belonging meaning different things to each of them. Similarly, the literature describes belonging in many different ways, including behavioural measures (Spady, 1971), psychological affiliation with the educational institution (Hausmann et al., 2009), relational (Fallov et al., 2013) and place (Wyn, 2015). Some conceptualisations of belonging accept that belonging is multifaceted and is influenced by many of these factors (Cuervo et al., 2015). This section looks at the role of place and relationships on belonging found in my study, which support previous findings in the literature.

5.3.1.1. Place

Prospective students are often attracted to UWCs because their mission is placeless. The model underpinning the UWC movement suggests that students

should get a similar experience—living and learning together with a diverse set of peers to enact social change, regardless of whether they attend UWC Nordic in remote, northern Norway, UWC Waterford Kamhlaba in Swaziland or UWCSEA in Singapore. However, participants did not feel like they were getting this experience at UWCSEA. Participant 8 expresses their frustrations:

> Because this school isn't what UWC is shown as. This is a big school with 2000 kids in the middle of the city where we can't even talk about certain topics like gay rights [teaching of sexuality outside of traditional marriage is banned in Singapore] or we can't have students from some places because of the immigration rules and it's just about studying, studying, studying, because even if we want to do something, we can't because the school is so stuck in the IB because the school cares about it so much. Of course you can do your own thing, but the social pressure to study and people telling you that you're throwing your life away is so strong. Your UAC [University Admissions Counsellor] and your teachers really push you to succeed and score higher than you care about, even if you don't want to because your values are elsewhere. I am ok with a 5 in some of my subjects because I know to do better I would need to spend many extra hours a week studying, but I don't want to. I'd rather do another service activity, or have discussions. Here you have to look and claw to get a UWC experience. (Participant 8)

In this quote above, Participant 8 highlights the role the school culture and geographical placing in Singapore has over their feelings of belonging and experiences of life at the school. However, in their last sentence, they do speak to the UWC experience being available at UWCSEA: all the ingredients are there, service opportunities, like-minded young people, passionate educators; it is just that one must wade through the tall grasses of the IB, competition and local rules and regulations to make it happen.

The geographical placement of the college in Singapore only confounded

these feelings of alienation for National Committee students. Singapore is in many regards a very conservative culture, with a one-party state, strict often race-based immigration policies and homosexuality classed as illegal activity. These values are not necessarily in line with the UWC ethos of "the belief that education can bring together young people from all backgrounds on the basis of their shared humanity, to engage with the possibility of social change through courageous action, personal example and selfless leadership" (UWC, 2020) that students sign up to when they decide to apply to a UWC.

Geographical place also featured in students' understanding of belonging at UWCSEA. Allan (2002) argues that there is potential for dissonance and conflict on cultural boundaries in international schools, particularly where the dominant, usually Western, culture in the school and the host country culture impacts the school's culture. This idea can be extended to help explain the complex interplay between various subcultures, departments and individuals that leads to the development of cultural identities in international schools. Caffyn (2013) argues that individual identity in international schools is not with one culture or national group but is characterised by different backgrounds, cultural interaction, experience and familial structures colliding to create immense cultural diversity. Many participants saw the competitiveness and conservativeness of the school culture as a function of its geographical location to be in conflict with UWC values and an inhibiting factor to developing a sense of belonging. Participants sought out admission to this institution because they were searching for a place to meet new people, develop their critical thinking, engage in political debate and think about how to change the world, and completing the IB programme was meant to be a vehicle to do so, not the main end goal in and of

itself.

Yosso (2005) has argued that in multicultural settings, students' lack of belonging can find its foundations in structural factors and school practices that privilege Eurocentric values and norms while discounting the cultural knowledge students from other backgrounds bring to the classroom. As expressed by Participant 8 above, these National Committee students are not so much suffering from cultural dissonance, as they are angry. As demonstrated in the qualitative findings, the National Committee students interviewed in my study know how they could play the game of school, and give the school culture what it is demanding of them, but it is not the type of experience they were looking for these two years of their lives and they want to bring about structural change in the school culture to make it reflect the UWC values more than it does presently.

As important as geographical space seems to be in terms of belonging, it is important to note that belonging is not static. A sense of belonging comes from being and doing in the world and is a set of dynamic practices. So while Heidegger (2002, p. 286) argues that an individual's ideas of "dwellings and territory is important to fostering a sense of belonging", in reality it is perhaps more fluid and transitory, changing over time, geographical space and in response to our own growth as individuals.

Massey (1994) offers a sociocultural conceptualisation of place when she describes it as a set of "constructions out of the intersections and interactions of concrete social relations and social processes in a situation of copresence" (p. 277). This broadens our definition of place from a concrete geographically bounded region to an abstract process or dynamic system where many forces meet. When we re-envision place in these terms, it becomes clear how students

could have conflicting feelings of belonging or identity in the melting pot of place that is UWCSEA. In this discussion of what Massey (1994, p. 232) terms "a global sense of the local" there is the acceptance of multiple versions of a location belonging to all those who inhabit a space and their own situated knowledges and positionalities. This conceptualisation takes the power of place construction away from cartographers and redistributes it to people inhabiting particular places. In this view of place, it is also true that 'place' exists as an abstract concept, or cognitive map, in our imaginations, and is actively manufactured to help us construct or exert influence on our identity, view of self and others. While critical human geographers may accept the existence of multiple versions of place, Castree (2004, p. 139) asks "rather than asking whose geographical imaginations are 'correct', we need instead to ask: who has the power to construct what geographical imaginations and with what effects?" This can be applied to the current study by examining whose geographical imagination is dominant in the place and space of UWCSEA.

Massey's work uses Harvey's (1973, p. 24) term "geographical imagination", which he argues "allows the individual to recognise the role of place and space in [their] ... own biography". In our world of globalisation and transnationalism this version of place is just as relevant as it was almost fifty years ago in Harvey's writings. Massey (1999) has outlined two traditional views of place and offers her view as an alternative third conceptualisation. The first version of place imagines places in a "classically Newtonian, billiard-ball view" (Massey, 1999, p. 36) where places are discretely bound by borders until one billiard ball intrudes, invades or exerts force or pressure on another billiard ball, sometimes up to the point of enveloping a given ball entirely. This view is in line

with our Western conception of nation states and the colonisation of the non-Western world. The second traditional view of place which Massey (1999) outlines is relational and based on the principles of free-market globalisation and supported by multilateral organisations like the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, where place is "immense, unstructured, free, unbounded space" (p. 15). In this version of place, the world is without barriers and is an ideal envisioned by the decision makers in G8 meetings, Davos and Washington constructed to further consolidate their power over the lives of billions. Massey (1999, p. 17) suggests it "is not so much a description of how the world is, as an image in which the world is being made". Massey (1999, p. 19) is quick to point out these decision makers are happy to resort to the billiard-ball version of place when it suits their political objective: "In one breath the[y] ... assume that 'free trade' is ... some moral virtue, ... in the next they pour venom [on] ... asylum seekers in the name of defensible places".

In contrast to both of these theories of place, Massey (1999) argues for an imagination of place that is

> as the sphere of juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives, as the product of power-filled social relations ... This is place as open, porous, hybrid ... where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of relative isolation—now to be disrupted by globalisation—but by the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there. (Massey, 1999, pp. 21–22)

This third conceptualisation of place allows different versions of the same place to be imagined. Place is not something out there in the world waiting to be discovered, but the product of complex forces interacting. It also offers a theory of

how inequalities are produced, seeing as not all views of a place are equally accepted or dominant. When Massey (1999, p. 17) argues that all "imaginative geographies legitimise", she is suggesting this view of place can be used as a tool to confront the hegemonic view of a certain place in a positive way to make them more inclusive. This view of place is anti-essentialist in that it states that place is relationally based and constantly changing. Castree (2004) suggests this means that "There is, then, no ontological 'essence' to place that can be held stable—either objectively (in terms of the built environment) or subjectively (in terms of local identities)" (p. 145).

This third way of viewing place offered by Massey (1999) is a useful tool for researchers of international school environments. It much better encompasses the diversity of experiences and views of those students, staff and community members who inhabit these spaces and allows for a richer understanding of what belonging to these places and communities could look like. Almost by definition of attending an international school, students have outgrown the traditional billiard-ball model of place, as they are learning from a curriculum separate from their home cultures', yet no individual is fully able to embrace the free market 'unbound space' view of Massey's (1999) second view of place. While students at international schools often have more complex answers to the question, 'where do you come from?' than their nationally schooled peers, they do still have an answer, unable to completely sever ties from home cultures or local influences on their identity. Massey's (1999) third view of place as a unique mix of forces fits with the anti-essentialist view of identity most students in international schools possess and fits their experiences of place being a dynamic system bound more to social relationships than the physical or geographical environment.

5.3.2. The Boarding House as a Place to Belong

Perhaps the most obvious role of place in the results of the current study is how participants talk of their time spent in the boarding house and its effect on their sense of belonging. It was easiest to see the admiration the participants had for the boarding house and the efforts undertaken to build a sense of belonging when contrasted against the academic high school. While participants acknowledged the great work done by the boarding house to enable a sense of belonging at Tampines House, they commented on a rift between the atmosphere and attitude in the boarding house and in the high school more widely. Participant 6 stated: "I feel like the boarding house has created a place for me, that I belong here, but maybe not specifically with the whole high school". This sentiment was expanded on by Participant 8:

> I think the school doesn't do much to help us feel like we belong, but I think the boarding house does. I think there's a distinction there. I feel that the boarding house takes creating community very seriously, I mean I guess the school does a bit, there are like these Grade 11 things, but it isn't really as if you're pushed out at all. Examples in the boarding house like we have those boarding families, and we have family days and there might be Karanchi family [students in the boarding house are divided up into 4 'families' named after trees native to Singapore] events, where our houseparent makes us tea or ice cream or games or question cards where we get together and talk about things, like we did one before EEs [extended essays] started off, so kind of the pressure of thinking up questions was taken off because the cards had questions you could start off with and then everyone was just in general about questions about coming in the boarding house and what you would tell yourself if you were in 11th grade again. And then there's the whole house activities where all of us sign up to go somewhere, like we did Dragon boating, and also there's like the big trip in September, where we all go somewhere, like we went to Bintan this year and one morning

> we had beach games families against families. I think my family lost but we had the most fun. (Participant 8)

It seems logical to suggest that the pastoral figures in the boarding house, the house parents, are more interconnected with school life than parents of day students would be. The boarding house inhabits the same geographical space as the school, and boarding parents are also classroom teachers. Being a boarding house parent is clearly the main part of these professionals' role and they work hard to separate their roles and responsibilities in the day high school, and their roles, responsibilities and lives in the boarding house. This includes symbolic differences like changing clothes and using different titles as well as more substantive differences like organising social activities and accompanying students to health/immigration/academic appointments.

There is evidence in the literature that the more intertwined students' home and school support networks are, the more students feel a sense of belonging at school. In a study that utilised longitudinal data beginning from 1998/99 from the nationally representative US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten, Okilwa (2016) found that school belonging consistently emerged as a significant predictor of academic achievement. This was found to be true even in the face of the significant negative effects of developmental changes and school transition associated with middle school age groups and even helped to moderate the known effects of poverty and lower SES backgrounds on mitigating school success for some middle school students from non-elite backgrounds (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002).

Okilwa (2016) discusses the relatedness of these variables in terms of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) and Epstein's (2001) sociocultural theories of holistic

development where the interconnectedness of the family and school contexts are considered intertwined and bidirectional. There is a vast body of literature supporting the influence of parental involvement in school and school belonging with academic achievement (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Juvonen et al., 2004). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of nested connections and Epstein's (2001) theory of overlapping spheres of influence offer a paradigm for understanding the role of protective factors such as school belonging and family involvement in opposition to cumulative risk factors such as poverty and discrimination. Okilwa (2016) describes how the two theories see the relationship between the school and home environments: "In essence, school, home, and community settings exist in a symbiotic relationship" (p. 35). Okilwa (2016) argues that because of this interconnected nature, school belonging and parental involvement should be taken together when attempting to address gaps in academic achievement, rather than considering these factors independently.

Cuervo et al. (2015) build on this relational model of belonging by adding the dimension of space to suggest the construct of belonging as a relational, multi-dimensional concept, with "spatial, relationships and temporal dimensions, interconnected and at play at a particular space and time" (p. 25). Building on this, but adding emphasis to the spatial dimension, Cuervo and Wyn (2017) suggest that a space-based theory of belonging has the potential to offer a "rich account of the ways in which young people navigate their lives through relationships with people and places across time" (p. 228).

This convolution of space, relationships and time links back to Anderson's (1983) concept of 'imagined communities' and the notion that the communities we feel we belong to are manufactured and built through shared experiences and

narratives rather than actual physical proximity or shared origin from a particular place. Anderson (1983) suggests that as part of imagined communities, we imagine spaces that are of importance to us and assign them meaning and value. The students in my study do this with the boarding house. Although very physically still on the academic day school campus of UWCSEA, it takes on a completely different meaning and rules, norms and expectations that apply in other areas of the school cease to permeate the imagined space of the boarding house.

The current study's context of an international boarding school adds an interesting layer to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory where the micro and meso systems become fused and indistinguishable; in the UWC context teachers are also house parents and school is also home for National Committee students. In some cases, this context may lead to students having more support than the traditional family structure that participants are used to in their home countries. Participants were grateful for the houseparents' sensitivity and warmth as well as their ability to troubleshoot their problems, no matter how big or small, and noticed how sometimes they sensed they were needed before students themselves knew they needed help. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 9 who, while not reaching out to his houseparent much himself, knew that they would be there if he needed them:

> I have some friends who are unwell, and there's actually a huge amount of help here in the boarding house when they have these bad situations. I heard about many times people trying to commit suicide or thinking about that because they have a really big depression but they got really a lot of people helping them in the boarding house. They maybe have more people caring and in their business than they do in their own homes back in their countries. (Participant 9)

These results are in line with other research conducted at a UWC boarding house. In one study, Wilkinson (2006) investigated to what extent graduates of the IB Diploma had internalised elements of the IBO's mission statement and outcomes. In relation to the outcome of valuing 'other people with their differences', Wilkinson (2006) found that only students who had experienced a residential living situation or lived in a boarding school while completing their studies had internalised this IBO outcome, demonstrating the power of residential learning for students. This is also supported by Massey's (1991, p. 275) understanding of place:

> localities, as I see them, are not just about physical buildings, nor even about capital momentarily imprisoned; they are about the intersection of social activities and social relations and, crucially, activities and relations which are necessarily, by definition, dynamic, changing. There is no stable moment, in the sense of stasis, if we define our world, or our localities, ab initio in terms of change.

In the quote from Participant 9 above as well as from Massey (1991) we see that it is nothing about the physical nature of the boarding house that makes students feel like they belong, but it is the relationships forged within these walls that have the biggest effect. By organising endless social activities and layers of social connections for students, the National Committee students interviewed in my study know that they are known and even as the tumultuous waters of the IB and high school continue to churn around them, they have a port of safe harbour in the boarding house and the relationships with the people within it.

5.3.2.1. House Parent Relationships

Belonging is a multifaceted concept influenced by factors including social relationships and place. Fallov et al. (2013) support the notion of a relational

model of belonging and suggest that a sense of belonging is the result of the relationships among people, place and mobility, shifting the emphasis towards movement rather than the traditional focus on the individual psychological processes involved in conceptualising belonging. In the quote from Participant 9 above, it is clear that it is the relationship between the participant and the house parent that is adding to a sense of belonging. The student mentions how the house parents fill the relational void left from being so far away from their actual parents. Students talked in a similar vein about the geographical divide between the boarding house and the rest of the school campus, which they often referred to as the 'high school'. Participants saw the shared time spent with members of the boarding community as important for building belonging, but also noticed the structural measures put in place to ensure every National Committee student had multiple people watching out for them. From assigned house parents and boarding house executives to Grade 12 buddies to boarding house counsellors to assistant house parents, participants knew the collective culture of the boarding house would make it hard to feel unknown. This sense of belonging built by systematically assigned relationships and spending time with one another in the day-to-day struggles of life was reiterated by Participant 6:

> In the boarding community there's specific house parents that you're designated to that you can reach out and talk to, and even there's G12 buddies that you can talk to and for me that having the G12 buddy from my own country makes it even more comforting to talk to. We can really be ourselves together. I think it's not even what they do, it's just that we spend so much time there and together that you just know everyone and you just feel a sense of belonging there rather than school when you just don't see everyone very much. I mean in school they try, we have things like mentor groups, but it is first thing in the morning and nobody is really awake and it is really just part of academic school life. You don't

> know those people so well, you can't know them that well, so everyone is pretty guarded and doesn't show the real them you know? (Participant 6)

It was clear that participants could just 'let go' and be themselves in the physical space of the boarding house, while they had to constantly adjust and change their behaviours in the high school. While the boarding house is a building on the school grounds, it felt like a completely separate place and space to participants, with different sets of relationships, expectations and feelings of belonging.

5.3.2.2. Teacher Relationships

There is evidence for this strong role of teachers in fostering a sense of belonging in the results from my study as well as the many positive benefits that come along with a sense of belonging at school as predicted by the literature (Anderman, 2003; Battistich et al., 1995; Tinto, 1987; Hausmann et al., 2009; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). It was clear that participants viewed their teachers with admiration, respect and fondness. Common amongst all participants was the knowledge that their teachers cared about them as people and not just students. For example, Participant 10 commented:

> Yes they [teachers] make an effort to get to know you and UWC has the best teachers. They all do some form of trying to get to know you and show some interest in your life outside of class, it's really cool.

Participants understood that this took time and effort from their teachers and they felt the benefit of this relational work their teachers were putting in. Participant 6 was especially appreciative of the relational work their teachers did to make them feel comfortable in this new school and new system after undergoing such a huge educational and social transition:

> I feel like specifically it's just that if you're new, the teachers know that you're new so they always try to follow up and ask if you're having any problems and give you these opportunities and even if it's that you do bad on a assessment, they ask if you need any further advice or tuition. (Participant 6)

This appreciation and veneration for their teachers was clearly not only the majority opinion held by participants, but it was clear that they were not just talking about one or two of their favourite ones, but the overwhelming majority of teachers at the college. High praises were even offered about random teachers who crossed participants' line of site during the interviews. While I was interviewing Participant 8, they commented on a teacher sitting across from us in the school café doing some marking:

> There's teachers as well here, I mean there's Ms X [name omitted for confidentiality] sitting right there right, and she's amazing and she's always so amazing about giving positive feedback. They spend so much time, they really care, it's not just a show. I mean in my home country there wasn't even a show, they didn't care, that wasn't their jobs, but here it's real, they do care, we can feel it. I think there's this thing, that if you put in effort yourself, then the teachers make the effort too. (Participant 8)

From the findings of the current study and in both the historical and recent literature, it is clear that educators are not powerless over students' sense of belonging. Connell and Wellborn (1991) found that a sense of relatedness to a school contributes to students adopting goals defined by the social group and that when students feel a lack of relatedness, they reject the goals of the school. Connell and Wellborn (1991) suggest that even when schools and systems are alienating and isolating structures in students' lives, the warmth, connection and relationships that can develop in individual classrooms with individual teachers

can be a humanising force that fosters belonging amongst students. Casey (2011, p. 85) states that "Schools may well be a failed project for those seeking the abolition of capitalism, but classrooms remain as sites where transformation remains possible and where dedicated individuals can and do affect change."

It is possible that teachers have rose-tinted glasses when it comes to levels of belonging amongst students. Capps (2004) found that teachers believe students have a stronger sense of belonging than they actually do. This was true of all schools; however, it was more pronounced in low-performing schools than in high performing schools. Capps (2004) suggests students of minority descent that go to a low-performing school will tend to have an even lower sense of belonging than their counterparts at high performing schools. The same can be said for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. It is interesting to see how the findings of the current study can be viewed compared to Capps' (2004) research. In the current study we have students from minority backgrounds in a high performing school, a combination Capps (2004) did not address. In my study, all participants reported low levels of belonging, both National Committee students and non-National Committee students. This suggests there is something unique in nature about UWCSEA that differentiates it from other high performing schools in national settings. It would be interesting to conduct similar research in other international schools to see if these low levels of belonging are associated with international schools in general or limited to the present study.

Researchers believe that a lack of belonging stemming from weak student-teacher relationships was associated with negative academic outcomes for minority students. Positive student-teacher relationships have been found to be associated with increases in student autonomy, competency and motivation as

well as peer-to-peer relationships (Hagay & Baram-Tsabari, 2015). Buxton (2006) argues that this is especially true when teaching students from marginalised backgrounds. Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that enhanced adaptive academic functioning was associated with a good relationship between teacher and student. Students believe they learn more when they believe their teacher is caring (Teven & McCroskey, 1997) and feelings of acceptance by teachers are associated with higher levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement in class (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Wang and Holcombe (2010) suggest that students participate more and connect to the school when teachers create a caring and supportive atmosphere. This caring and supportive atmosphere can be seen in Participants' responses when talking about their teachers. Taking an individualised approach to teaching was mentioned from many participants as an enabler to feeling like they belong. Participant 9 expands on this personalised approach his teachers take:

> When I came here and meeting with many teachers at 3 way conferences and we were really talking about new ways I can learn and how I can improve and study and the teachers are always willing to help you. That's the best part, that they allow you to find a way to learn more and they will improve that, and they will help you. In my home country these conferences or communication from teachers was always about how bad you were doing or what was wrong with you or why you are in trouble. But here it is about to improve and it sounds weird but it is almost like the teachers think they are in trouble if you are not doing well. Like they want to know from you how they can help you do better. It is weird because they are already so good but it does make me feel like we are on the same team trying to defeat the evil enemy of the IB. (Participant 9)

Capps (2004) believes teachers play an important role in fostering a sense of belonging in their students, particularly in students of minority groups. Capps

(2004) suggests that many minority students have a poor sense of school belonging and school motivation that ranks lower than their counterparts from the majority culture. Groome and Hamilton (1995) have suggested several vital parts of the teacher-student relationship including actively listening to students' views, allowing student input into decisions that affect them, getting to know the students, showing no favouritism and affirming all students, accepting students' individuality, and having positive but attainable expectations for students. They differentiate this interpersonal relationship from a 'pedagogical relationship' which they suggest should include maximising opportunities for students to succeed and develop competence, providing clear feedback to students focusing on how they can improve and clearly demonstrating to students how schoolwork is relevant and/or meaningful (Groome & Hamilton, 1995).

Capps (2004) claims that students who do have a strong sense of belonging and strong bonds with teachers are more likely to be academically motivated and engaged in learning than those who have a weak sense of belonging. Steele (1992) suggests that the lack of belonging among African-American students develops from a psychological alienation or defence, which is heightened with a lack of teacher role models to observe and model and which serves to prevent academic achievement outcomes from affecting their self-view. This undervaluing of school achievement as a basis of self-esteem and preference instead to peer group relations suggests students from minority backgrounds find greater self-worth in their group membership rather than their academic achievement or valuing the student-teacher relationship (Steele, 1992).

5.3.3. Standpoint Theory and Belonging

The use of standpoint theory (Harding, 2004) in my study to investigate belonging allows me to centre the voices of National Committee students. National Committee students are an underrepresented and minority group and the use of standpoint theory to study marginalised groups of participants like these is consistent with the literature. Belonging is a multifaceted construct, and each individual will feel a pull to belong to multiple groups at the same time (Tajfel, 2010).

Standpoint theory allows for the intersectional forces of these social categories and systems of power to be examined, alongside the ways these forces shape students' experiences and the roles available for them (Lykke, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This imagining of intersectional perspectives of belonging overcomes the reductionist notion of national, ethnic, class or gender-based belonging and acknowledges the heterogeneity and fluidity of these categories and the processes involved in the construction of a sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). The ability of students to navigate these murky waters of belonging could promote or restrict participation in their academic community (Kaukko, 2015), having a sizeable impact on students' academic success. What united participants in my study the most was their individuality. Unlike other broad categories of people, National Committee students fail to fit into a mould or a succinct stereotype. They are from different places, with different passions and different motivations for being at UWCSEA, and are defined by their uniqueness rather than their shared traits. This is unsurprising given that one of the purposes of inviting National Committee students on campus is to increase the diversity of the college (UWC, 2020). The implication this diversity of backgrounds, expectations

and values amongst my National Committee participants had on my results was to suggest different participants are looking for different types of belonging from UWCSEA, and would like to see different measures taken to foster belonging. For example, consider the two contrasting views of the challenging academics of the IB and high standards of UWCSEA presented by Participants 2 and 4:

> I mean sometimes in my older school I was the top student, I always get the first rank and I get really really good results but here now I get lower marks and that makes me ask why I'm here, because if I keep getting these lower marks I can't achieve my goal of becoming a doctor. Especially when I know if I kept getting those good marks in my country I could become a doctor I know that. So sometimes I wonder why I'm here and if it's the right decision. (Participant 2)

> I know what areas of this school frustrate me the most and It's not IB. IB is hard but we are over dramatizing it most of the time, let's be honest. It is a convenient thing to complain about, it is our shared common enemy, but it is only as hard as you make it, and it only really gets you down if you are constantly comparing yourself to others. I don't care about the IB and my grades being lower than they could be. I'm more concerned with the school's hypocrisy over social justice issues. They say one thing but do another and parade us around like we excuse any other ethical corners they want to cut. (Participant 4)

In these two quotes we see two very differing standpoints on what is stopping participants from feeling like they belong at UWCSEA. Participant 2 is concerned with academic achievement, both overall and in relation to their peers, as well as what this might mean for their future. They clearly view their relationship with UWCSEA as a transactional one: they bring diversity to the college for a few years and in return the college will help them secure a spot at an international university where they can begin their journey to studying medicine to become a doctor and improve lives in their home country. Contrast this with

Participant 4 who has no qualms expressing their lack of interest in their academic achievement. Instead this participant feels disconnected from UWCSEA as they were looking for a value affirming experience from the time at the college but instead have been met with a large institution which must cater to the needs of almost 3000 other students as well as their own.

This diversity of experience within a minority group is common in other literature adopting a standpoint approach. Harding (1992, p. 175) writes that minority groups:

> are increasingly forced to recognize that the logic of each of these critiques also undermines the legitimacy of generalizations from the speaker's situation to all women, or workers, or people of colour, or lesbians/gays, as the case may be. If there is no universal or even typical man and his transcendental reason, then there also can be no universal or typical woman, worker, person of colour, lesbian or gay person and her or his unified and uniquely legitimate reason either.

According to standpoint theory, articulating individuals' experiences is a vital tool in the creation of knowledge, and this is especially true for minority and marginalised groups.

A standpoint perspective was appropriate for the current study as the participants concerned are constructing their identities during these liminal stages of development and migration, as they are moving from one cultural context to another and from childhood into young adulthood. The National Committee participants in my study seem caught in a constant state of transition since they only attend the college for 21 months, usually after completing their home country's high school diploma and before attending university. These students are caught between two defining periods of their lives. For National Committee

students it is clear that UWCSEA is a space 'on the threshold'; however, what was surprising from these results is that it appears also to be a liminal space for non-National Committee students. This existence on the periphery of UWCSEA was captured by Participant 3, who spoke about how others at the school confused aspects of her identity and her issues with her roommate who was expecting a different type of roommate and experience:

> I had a hard time at first because I was not a pure [Nationality 1], and I was not a pure [Nationality 2], I was part [Nationality 1] and part [Nationality 2] and I was not from [Nationality 2]. People confuse me from [Nationality 2] and I don't like that because I am somebody else I got to thinking like what have I done coming here? Is this a huge mistake? They don't understand who I am or where I come from and I am making people cry just by being in the same room as them [referencing previous comments about problems with her roommate], maybe this is not the place for me. Should I leave now and go home or just get tough and study hard and accept I will have no friends. It is only two years and then I can get on with my life. (Participant 3)

Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991) suggests that members of a society or institution with less power experience multiple realities due to their marginalised status. Oppressed people need to learn the codes, schemas and perspectives not only of their own groups but of the dominant group as well and as a result, end up with multiple views of reality. Swigonski (1994, p. 390) suggests that "As a result, members of subordinate groups have the potential for a more complete view of social reality".

It was not just National Committee students who struggled with the competing demands placed on them during their final years at UWCSEA. National Committee participants expressed a certain amount of pity for their non-National Committee peers due to the pressure they are under to succeed

academically from their families. Participant 5 describes this implicit social pressure to do well:

> Even though it's not shown, in this school between students there is like lots and lots of competition, like it's like hidden, so even though the teacher are like 'you shouldn't take 7s in every exam.' But at the same time, if you don't take 7s your classmates are like 'what did you get on your exam? Why did you not get 7s?' And other types of questions like this, so the competition is not created by the school itself, it's created by the students. And certain groups of students, mainly the rich day students, and pressure from their families because like everyone here wants to go to like really really really competitive universities so they need to be really competitive in order to be selected to one of these universities. They think their life will be over if they don't get into Harvard or Oxford, which is so dumb because they'll have a nice life wherever they go. Their grades and the universities they get into are just another thing for their parents to show off to each other about. (Participant 5)

Further research is required to decipher if this phenomenon is local to UWCSEA or a wider feature of the international school experience. It would also be interesting to canvas non-National Committee students and their experiences of belonging at UWCSEA.

To conclude this section, even though a sense of belonging features prominently in the literature and my results, Cuervo and Wyn (2017) argue that school belonging merits further research because "schools are the major institutions where young people spend most of their time outside their families" (p. 5). While my study finds a lack of belonging amongst all students, both National Committee and non-National Committee students, surveyed, there have been some studies conducted around constructs related to belonging in schools and the positive correlations between a sense of belonging and academic

completion and academic success (Hausmann et al., 2009; Gottfredson et al., 1994; Hawkins et al., 2001; Goodenow & Grady, 1993); however, Santos (2014) suggests there are gaps in the literature and more work to be done. My study illuminates one of these gaps, a lack of belonging in international schools that is not associated with many of the negative outcomes the literature would suggest. This is expanded upon in the following section.

The findings of my study regarding belonging are not universal, and participants describe many factors that influence their sense of belonging and talk of belonging meaning different things to each of them. This is reflected in the conceptualisation of belonging in the literature as multifaceted (Spady, 1971; Hausmann et al., 2009; Fallov et al., 2013; Wyn, 2015; Cuervo et al., 2015). This section has discussed the role of relationships and place on belonging found in my study, which support previous findings in the literature. Belonging appears to be influenced by a variety of factors, including relationships, space, and place.

5.4. Section 2: Cultural dissonance and the role of belonging in identity construction

> One thing that like that pulls people backwards is the school. Like how hard the school is and like how hard the subjects is and some people like just try to give up because we all know school is really hard and we try our best to succeed and all that but sometimes I feel like I don't belong here because everyone here has different mind sets. It seems like not everyone comes from the same background and it's really hard because most of the students here take the academics very seriously and it's kind of like a competition for them so and I feel like I don't belong here because I'm not used to having competitions with others over academics, so that's one thing that really makes me feel like I don't belong here—having competitions with others over academics. They

> value me based on my grade, not on all the other cool things I can do. (Participant 1)

When researching belonging in multicultural settings and amongst students who have undergone educational transitions, a consistent theme in the literature is the presence of cultural dissonance as a key factor to why students struggle to belong in their new host educational institutions (Baudrillard, 1994; Bernstein, 2000; Stephens et al., 2012; Santos, 2014). Cultural dissonance is experienced when the values, schemas and expectations from students' home culture do not align with the values, schemas and expectations they encounter when they enter their new educational institution. The following sections introduce the role of cultural dissonance as a barrier to belonging, examine its presence in international schools and discuss the potential of international schools to be both a positive and negative factor in students' identity formation. While the literature predicts that high levels of cultural dissonance, as were experienced by the National Committee students in my study, should be associated with low levels of belonging, this hypothesis was unsupported by my findings. In fact, National Committee students, while still reporting cultural dissonance at UWCSEA, actually reported marginally higher rates of belonging than their non-National Committee peers.

5.4.1. Cultural Dissonance

My findings suggest that all participants had low levels of belonging at UWCSEA. This can be made sense of through the lens of Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. Festinger's (1957) well-known theory of cognitive dissonance states that humans experience distress when we are forced to hold two or more beliefs, values or ideas that contradict each other. Festinger (1957) argued

we are motivated to change our behaviours or our beliefs to regain a state of internal consistency or equilibrium. Festinger (1957) proposed that when people experience cultural dissonance, they tend to withdraw from the situations which cause their emotional discomfort; in this case, students may withdraw from settings and events which promote internationalism or the school's ethos in favour of retreating to the safety of their own known cultural environment. One can imagine that students from diverse backgrounds arriving at prestigious international schools would experience a form of this cultural dissonance. This is further supported by my finding that students who consider South East Asia home had significantly higher scores of belonging than students who considered other parts of the world home.

One suggested reason for the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for students who have undergone academic transitions into elite educational institutions is the dissonance experienced by students when their home culture is at odds with the culture of the new educational institution (Bourdieu, 2011). In a series of studies, Stephens et al. (2012) have gathered empirical evidence for such cultural dissonance between students' home cultures and university cultures, finding that incoming freshmen from working-class backgrounds were more likely to be motivated to attend college because of collective reasons, such as giving back to their communities and helping their family, compared to their middle and upper class peers, who were in turn more motivated by individualistic reasons. Stephens et al. (2012) then correlated these differences in academic motivations with GPA over the first two years of school. The researchers found those students with a cultural match with the institution they were attending, that is, both with individualistic expectations, predicted higher GPAs than a cultural

difference. These results are mirrored in the quote above by Participant 1, who is looking for acceptance and belonging based on "all the other cool things I can do" (Participant 1), instead of purely their academic success, but finds instead that the school culture and students are judging merit and worth solely on academic success. Steele (1992) suggests that school administrators and teachers contribute to this cultural dissonance and lack of belonging felt by students in non-dominant groups by pressuring these students to assimilate into the mainstream culture rather than taking the more difficult path of acknowledging their distinctive backgrounds and contributions. Students from non-dominant backgrounds lack a sense of belonging in elite educational institutions because modern educational institutions continue to reproduce the dominant status quo rather than incorporating the wisdom and experiences brought to the school by students from non-dominant backgrounds.

These findings also echo the work by Jin and Ball (2019) in their life history study of students from working-class backgrounds in elite educational institutions. Just as Jin and Ball (2009) suggest students in their study compartmentalised their ways of being and focused on the academic aspects of university life at the expense of the social, National Committee students in my study were able to see the immense academic and extra-curricular advantages and opportunities that accompanied a UWCSEA education, even if it was at the expense of the social reality they were expecting. Jin and Ball (2019) found that students' working-class habitus constrained the transformative effects of attending an elite educational institution, whereas in my study it could be argued National Committee students' expectations of what a UWC education was going to be made their experience more transactional and less transformative.

My findings support the literature in that there seems to be cultural dissonance experienced by National Committee students attending UWCSEA, just as there is in students from non-dominant groups who attend elite educational institutions. Where my findings diverge from the literature on the relationship between cultural dissonance and belonging is that the literature predicts that those who feel cultural dissonance will have low levels of belonging, whereas my findings suggest National Committee students in fact report marginally higher levels of belonging compared to non-National Committee students.

Another setting where this cultural dissonance is seen is when students who grow up in poorer neighbourhoods begin to attend schools in affluent suburbs. While the challenges associated with transitioning from one form of educational institution to another are difficult for all students, there is evidence to suggest that students from non-dominant groups in elite institutions may encounter extra barriers which make them more at risk of dropping out (Santos, 2014). Santos (2014) has suggested that establishing a sense of belonging in a school environment could be a key tool to "assist in either breaking the cycle of dropping out of school or lead to an opportunity of educational advancement" (p. 6). Goodenow and Grady (1993) have suggested that students of non-dominant groups find this transition so difficult because, when compared to the general population, these students have a lack of cultural proficiency with teachers, shortages of role models and come from a lower socio-economic status and/or poverty. However these findings are not consistent with my results. Many of the National Committee participants spoke fondly of their teachers and clearly saw them as caring, professional role models. For example, Participant 3 comments on

her teachers' demeanours:

> The adults I think are really nice. The way the teachers communicate with us really shows us they care for us and they want the best for us and for us to progress in our studies. They come and ask a lot of questions about how I'm doing in my studies and if I'm feeling ok or not and they come and help and they tell me to ask for help from them. Also in school when I got low marks in one of the subjects the teacher sit and suggested me to come to her in my free time and come and work through some of the problems and do better. (Participant 3)

While the curriculum taught at UWCSEA, The International Baccalaureate, is by its very definition an international curriculum, it has been widely criticised as promoting primarily the values and beliefs of a culturally Western education (Pearce, 2013). One of the key principles espoused by the International Baccalaureate is international-mindedness, which has been described by a former Director General as characterised by a 'Western liberal humanist culture' (Walker, 2000). The IBO's mission statement is a call to arms which hopes that its programmes "encourage students… (to) understand that other people with their differences, can also be right" (IBO, 2018). While this is a noble aim, and vital if IBDP graduates are to make a constructive contribution in a globally interconnected world, Wilber (2000, quoted in Skelton, 2002) suggests it is not enough: "if we remain merely at the stage of celebrating diversity, we are ultimately promoting fragmentation, separation and despair" (p. 44). The challenge facing international schools then is outlined by Wilkinson and Wilkinson (2013) as creating a community which allows students to develop and value their own identities and cultures while respecting "the diversity of cultures that love of humanity requires: to transcend the parochial, not only in feeling, but also with a clear intellectual objectivity" (p. 112). It has been suggested by Asante

(1991) that non-denominational education should promote pluralism and not embody one culture. Zirkel and Cantor (2004) also suggest that as the world becomes more globalised, and cultural and ethnic diversity expands in Western societies, traditional, Eurocentric models are out dated and no longer meeting the identity-based and psychological needs of their incoming student populations.

Participants in my study believed they were not receiving the UWC dream experience they were sold and resented their elite peers for diluting it. Participant 4 explains:

> I'm trying really hard to do the things that connect with the UWC mission, and I remember I was so enthusiastic about it at the beginning and as time passed I start to realise that I'm not really the best version of myself here, it might be my own mistakes of course, but something just went missing during this process. All the other people here, their cynicism, it kind of like rubbed off on me. It just makes me mad that we worked and fought so hard to be here and know we have the opportunities to do amazing things here, but all anyone else really cares about is grades and academics and going to Harvard. I look hard for the UWC experience here, but it is drowned out by the IB experience or more the 40 plus IB experience [40 marks out of a possible 45 is considered a very high IB score]. Yes I lost things and I lost my interest in some things, which would not really be a goal of this school.

Part of this seems to be the realisation that the IB is a rigorous, elite academic diploma that requires immense time, effort and dedication, which on paper places the non-academic aspects of the diploma (creativity, action and service) at the core of the programme (IBO, 2019), while in reality, participants felt it to be only a tokenistic aspect of the programme. Participant 10 reinforces this view:

> I kind of had this expectation of something more than academics. When you read about UWC and things that UWC does are usually things that are cool to have in your life, like when you go to the mission and values it looks cool, to have and experience in your life based on these principles. And when you read it you think 'yes! This is the place for me!' And the same with the IB! I was so full of hope to study all these exciting subjects and spend time doing meaningful CAS [creativity, action, service] activities. But when you get here it's quite different. The reality doesn't quite fit the webpage. We are pushed to just study, study study and CAS becomes an afterthought. I have been to other UWCs and although I can't speak for many others, it does show that there are some forms of other ways of doing it. (Participant 10)

Research in the UK context suggests there is cultural dissonance between students from working-class backgrounds and elite educational institutions as well. In their case study of nine working-class students at an elite university in the UK, Reay et al. (2009) found that rather than students being able to transform their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) to match that of the elite university, these students from working-class backgrounds instead come up with a range of creative adaptations and multi-faceted responses to the everyday challenges of unfamiliar environments and codes and are constantly re-fashioning of the self (Reay et al., 2009). Reay et al. (2009) suggest even though these tensions exist between students from working-class backgrounds and the habitus of elite institutions, there are still very evident and concrete gains for working-class students who attend these institutions. This is indeed similar to the National committee students in my study. Even though there are strains and ambivalences in the relationships National Committee students have towards UWCSEA, they acknowledge the immense advantages and privileges attending the school brings them.

Another example of cultural dissonance is outlined by Ogbu's location of "blacks in the American system" and "the exclusion of blacks from the more desirable social and occupational positions because of their caste like status" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 4). Ogbu (1978) ignited a discussion of the factors inhibiting the academic success of young people from non-dominant backgrounds and disadvantaged groups. Bhatti (2006) suggests Ogbu's (1974) contributions remain relevant in today's world where schools are continuing to deal with the fallout of centuries of colonialism and exploitation of marginalised groups. Bhatti (2006) and Giddens (2002) outline the role globalisation has played in stitching together a diverse quilt of nations and cultures at a surface level, while further entrenching inequalities and reinforcing Western hegemony.

Bhatti's (2006) view of globalisation and Ogbu's (1978) view of the caste like structure of race relations in the United States is echoed in some of my participants' experiences of life at UWCSEA and could only act as barriers to belonging. Participants struggled with some of their elite peers' lack of interest in the wider world and with their closed-mindedness. They thought they were entering an international and accepting place of like-minded individuals who wanted to learn about the world and grow together and instead they perceived their new community as judgemental, prejudiced and racist. Participant 10 explains:

> When I first came, most people thought that Africans were all the same, it really like pissed me off. And everyone says it's open-minded here, but people still have these weird perceptions about people here and that was the first example when I first had to shift what I thought UWC was. That is just one example and I don't like to keep these thoughts but it kind of

> messed the whole experience for me. I do my best not to let it colour my experiences. I do my best to select people who don't think like that, but it's hard. The majority are definitely not interested in changing their views or perceptions. (Participant 10)

The educational impact this cultural dissonance can have on learning is outlined by Wertsch (1985). Wertsch (1985) argues that it is imperative in educational settings that teachers and learners should have a shared common language, understandings of roles, responsibilities and perceptions of the world. The difficulty in international schools comes when students who have grown up with one set of cultural norms and practices around their roles and responsibilities and tools of communication come into contact with international school teachers with a different set of cultural norms and practices. Students at international schools are coming from a diverse set of backgrounds, yet even with the loftiness of the language around international-mindedness in international schools, Leach (1969) argues that the vast majority of the teachers in these schools have domestic, Western, elite backgrounds, qualifications and training, which form the normative basis of their pedagogy.

This mismatch between the adult's view of cultural norms and practices and National Committee students' view of cultural norms and practices is perhaps most obvious when students are talking about social trust and independence. Many National Committee students are already 18 and have had a great deal of autonomy and responsibility for years before attending UWCSEA. When they arrive in Singapore, they are asked to live and learn following the same social norms and practices set up in a boarding school catering to a K-12 population. Participant 4 explains how disheartening this lack of independence and autonomy made them feel:

> I think because I was so independent in my past, and I was never treated as a child, not in the previous years because my parents know that I am trustworthy. But here because we have so many kids, they can't say that they can trust us and it's sometimes kind of a hard thing. And just the way that I am viewed as a child, sometimes I just don't like it. (Participant 4)

Similarly, another issue which may lead to cultural dissonance in international school settings is a lack of professional development around international education for international school teachers. Pearce (2013) argues that when entering the international arena, often the professional development priorities of the teacher and institution is curriculum orientation, and centred on the syllabus of International Baccalaureate courses rather than international education in general. Although the trend line is increasing, Pearce (2013) argues that the amount of international school teachers who are or who have taken part in specialist postgraduate or undergraduate courses is rare.

A clear need for professional development that was pointed out by multiple participants was for the adults at UWCSEA not to see scholars as purely a marketing tool for the college. Many participants spoke of resentment at having to attend fundraising events and tell their stories as well as being treated differently because of their National Committee status. Some participants expressed this concern about being used as a marketing tool in response to receiving accolades or opportunities, doubting whether they'd truly earned them, or received them to create a good photo opportunity. Participant 4 explains:

> I thought that it might not even be my skills but the fact that I'm a scholar. And this school advertising the fact that they have scholars, it sometimes makes me question things. 'Oh did I get this because I'm good and deserve it, or did I get it so they can put "oh look at the

> scholars, they are so successful" on their marketing'. In other UWCs we wouldn't get anything like these second thoughts because we are all equal. Everyone is a scholar. These questions wouldn't even emerge. (Participant 4).

Allan (2002) suggests international schools serve diverse parental and student bodies with often-contradictory interests and goals. International schools have such diverse backgrounds and situations and cultures, which by their loosely defined nature (Bush, 1995) makes their cultures open to different perceptions, interpretation and challenges. While these issues may be present in any school community to some degree, in an international school context, these kinds of issues can flourish, especially where the school becomes the dominant defacto community organisation or even a surrogate family. However, Marshall (2003) asks :"with globalization and the ideological premise of an international school as a borderless structure, is it, like modern organisations, to be regarded as more a network of relationships, systems and social interactions" (p. 63)?

Data from the current study showed that National Committee participants felt distinct social identities when compared to their non-National Committee peers. They had different values, interests and amounts of disposable income. Every participant expressed that they had different values or at least interests to their elite, non-National Committee, fee-paying peers. Even if the participants in the current study could be included in the activities of their elite peers, it was not always clear that they wanted to be. Participant 5 used the example of prom to discuss her feelings of distance from her peers:

> In some cases when I like can feel my peers talking and discussing about things that don't like interest me in a way I feel like I'm not really part of this school because they're talking about things that I wouldn't expect. The example I have is that we have prom this year and these

> girls created a group about prom dresses and it became the only thing they can speak about and I'm like there are more important things than just prom dresses. I want to talk about politics and changing the world and helping people and philosophy and they want to talk about necklines and fabrics and fittings and shoes. So sometimes I'm part of the school but sometimes I'm like still, is this what I want? (Participant 5)

One strategy that has been suggested by Pearce (2013) to help overcome feelings of otherness expressed by students from non-dominant backgrounds is the use of mother tongue (MT) programmes. Pearce (2013) argues that particularly in international schools, strong MT programmes can promote positive identity and can offer students emotionally and linguistically safe and positive frames for learning. Williams (2012) suggests MT programs give students confidence that is transferable to mainstream classes and provides a brief respite from the additional demands of working in English-medium classes, allowing students to work to the best of their abilities.

In my study, some participants expressed frustrations around their newness to the English language and studying in their second, third or fourth language for the first time. Although all National Committee students must demonstrate a baseline level of English to be admitted to the programme, it is a huge jump to go from conversational English to academic, technical English in new subjects you have never studied before. Participant 2 expressed her feelings of irritation at her lack of ability to express herself in class:

> I'm taking Chem and Bio HL with students who are taking English A HL [English Literature Mother Tongue], and I mean I don't think students should be examined by their English level, and I mean I have the ideas in science and I understand but I can't express it in the same way that people who do English A HL can and I really believe success is

> not only writing or talking in the class, but success is not only about that thing. (Participant 2)

To conclude this section, my study has found that the presence of cultural dissonance is a consistent feature of international schools including UWCSEA and that international schools are well-positioned to help students construct positive self and social identities. When researching belonging in multicultural settings and amongst students who have undergone educational transitions, a consistent theme in the literature is the presence of cultural dissonance as a key factor to why students struggle to belong in their new host educational institutions (Baudrillard, 1994; Bernstein, 2000; Stephens et al., 2012; Santos, 2014). The previous sections introduced the role of cultural dissonance as a barrier to belonging, examined its presence in international schools and discussed the potential of international schools to be both a positive and negative factor in students' identity formation. While the literature predicted high levels of cultural dissonance, as experienced by the National Committee students in my study, should be associated with low levels of belonging, this hypothesis was unsupported by my research. In fact National Committee students, while still reporting cultural dissonance at UWCSEA, actually reported marginally higher rates of belonging than their non-National Committee peers. This could be due to the fact that National Committee students are voluntary migrants who have actively sought out an experience in a multicultural setting, far from their home cultures. While participants in my study do speak of their own values, schemas and expectations grating against those of UWCSEA, this has not resulted in a lack of belonging. In fact for many participants it has seemed to produce a productive tension, helping them refine their own positions and aspects of their own identities as global citizens.

5.5.Section 3: A Space to be but not to Belong

> If it was a different UWC it might be different. It's so huge here that there's this anonymous identity that you have here, that's so different at other UWCs. We're like 3,000 students here. I feel like this vast amount of people makes it like you don't know everyone, and you will never know all of them, so yes there's potential to know their stories and things but you all kind of fall into these little groups that we have and we maybe don't branch out. Because if there's so many there's this facade and how do you go and like break in? I think there's this human aspect to it, if there's a lot of people then we just clump together. We hang out with whoever it is easiest to hang out with. Those on my corridor, those in my classes, those in my service. And it's not because I particularly like them or find community with them that we hang out, we hang out because it is easiest. I have no time or ways to meet other people. I think if there was less people we would branch out more. (Participant 8)

This section examines belonging as a political construct and discusses the power dynamics that influence whether students can feel a sense of belonging in school. It also addresses the unique nature of international schools that purport to offer a place where everyone can belong, which in fact may be an unrealistic claim. The findings of my study seem to suggest participants are not particularly interested in developing a strong sense of belonging at UWCSEA. They understand the transactional nature of their presence at the school and have different priorities, relegating belonging down their list. This section suggests that academic assumptions about belonging break down when applied to the international education sector. This discussion suggests belonging in international schools is not theorised and is under researched. More attention to the field is needed to develop a transnational theory of belonging that better explains the results of my study that confound traditional notions of belonging. I suggest what I am calling an *Expectations / Reality Model of Belonging* (ERMB) that centres

the individual student's experience of congruence or incongruence between what they are expecting from their school and the reality of the school environment they are confronted with. My findings from the analysis of my data suggests that this model better encapsulates the experiences of belonging by National Committee students at UWCSEA unearthed in my study and may be more applicable to other transient populations living in liminal spaces like international schools than current propositions about the relative importance of a focus on certain aspects of belonging. I argue that belonging amongst these transnational National Committee students can be fostered by allowing them to voice their priorities and expectations from their time at UWCSEA and making efforts to meet these desires, rather than imposing the school's version of what it means to belong onto National Committee students.

5.5.1. Belonging as a Political Construct

While international schools offer globally nomadic families a place to be, they may not be capable of offering a place to belong. Levitt and Schiller (2004) highlight the difference between ways of being and ways of belonging. They use the term 'ways of being' to reference the everyday activities and communications that people have in an institution that can be separated from their identities. In contrast, 'ways of belonging' is used to signpost activities and instances of communication with others in a shared institution that reflect or build on one's identities (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Macartney (2012) makes a similar distinction between the concepts of inclusion, or the tolerance of one's physical presence, to one of belonging, where schools cater to and support all students in their participation at school. Using this distinction, it can be seen how international schools offer many outlets for students to be included, such as clubs, activities and

sports, but might not provide outlets for students to belong, actively shying away from forming groups around aspects of students' identities which may be seen as exclusive to others or divisive.

Participant reports in my study more closely align with Macartney's (2012) view of tolerance and inclusion rather than belonging. It is clear from my analysis of the results of the current study that participants felt the dividing forces of social class amongst the student body. This hierarchical habitus (Bourdieu, 1996), sometimes based around years at the institution or institutional knowledge, left the only role for National Committee students to fill as the less knowledgeable, peripheral transient, a sojourner, because they generally spend less than two years at the college. Participant 2 recounted that:

> Yeah there are really elite groups in the class and they're more popular in the school. They are here since Grade 5 or something like that and they know everything and everyone in the school and they participate in all the things. And I mean most of the school community knows them. I mean the first thing is here people are here since grade 2 or grade 5 and they have really strong friendship groups and it's really hard to break that or break through into that, they've known each other for so long. They don't want to have any other friends in their group. They may say hi to you, but they can't make you as a friend, they don't want to be friends with you. It's hard to make friends when they already have their established groups. (Participant 2)

There is evidence to suggest that focusing on marginalised aspects of students' identities can increase belonging in schools. Zine (2008) has looked at the impact of Muslim Student Associations for Muslim young people in Canadian schools. Zine (2008) found that these organisations in schools supported the psychological process of positive identity formation and provided students with a safe space to develop strategies for coping with the mundane realities of facing a

school day as a member of a marginalised group. Zine (2008) and previous work (Zine, 2008; Gilliat, 1997) have suggested that these student associations not only provide a familiar environment but also a systematic, structured support system. There is evidence that these grassroots identity-based student associations can not only increase students' feeling of belonging, but also increase student agency (Ginwright et al., 2006).

A danger in this approach is the implied exclusion a sense of belonging brings to those who are on the outside. By definition, if one belongs to a group based on aspects of their identity, then others must not belong. As Yuval-Davis (as cited in Abu El-Haj, 2015) states, school belonging involves, "not only constructions of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories, and groupings within these boundaries by those who have power to do this" (p. 5). This demarcating groups into 'us' and 'them' categories harks back to the issues surfaced by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 2010) and the political issue of who gets to decide who belongs. Nagel (2011, p. 120) suggests, "belonging is, above all, a political process through which different groups continuously produce and reproduce the boundaries of membership".

Beyond the threats to wellbeing that come with feelings of exclusion, this form of belonging based on shared identity may also be dangerous in international schools which subscribe to the dominant, neoliberal Western view of education. Any aspects of identity which deviate from this hegemonic paradigm may be seen by the school community as a deficit. Warikoo and Carter (2009) have shown how when the majority of a school community see students' ethnic and racial identities as deficit when compared to the dominant culture, students from these minority backgrounds' academic success rates decrease, defeating one of the major

objectives for trying to enhance belonging from the start.

My results show this deficit view of other cultures. Participant 5 talks about how her peers stereotyped people in English B (English language learning) classes, even when English was their third, fourth or fifth language:

> The people taking English B [English as an additional language] are not seen as good people in this school because sometimes they're like 'oh you're taking English B, you don't know anything, you don't know English' blah blah blah. Now it's a bit better but sometimes in the beginning it was really hurting me and the people around me, and I wasn't expecting this type of behaviour at a UWC, I thought the people were a bit more at level and they could think a bit more about the reaction they were making in other people. (Participant 5)

While identification as an English B student is a form of belonging built on shared identity, it is obviously problematic, privileging some aspects of students' identities over others and denying the fluidity and multifaceted nature of students' identities. As Burnett (2007) states, people, particularly the globally mobile elite of this study, "move in and out of contexts, at times on a moment by moment basis, so too does their sense change of who they are" (p. 268). These students have many competing identities, as students, children and friends, and are extremely adept at code switching depending on the context they find themselves in. As Ellsworth (1997, p. 261) suggests, "we are always more than one thing and never the same thing twice". This form of belonging focusing on one aspect of identity has the danger of viewing students through a reductionist lens as being one-dimensional rather than the multi-dimensional complex individuals they are in reality. Particularly for this international population, who might have experienced many migration and/or relocation events and found themselves living in multiple dominant cultures, the dynamic nature of individual and group

identities are fluid, as these identities are reshaped and the "distinctions between 'marginal' people and those at the 'centre' become problematic" (Bhatti, 2006, p. 134). The lines of inclusion are constantly being redrawn and renegotiated by the people with the power to do so.

What is clear from this view of belonging as a political construct is that it is not fixed or everlasting once gained, but instead a dynamic process with constantly changing boundaries (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Probyn (1996) argues that belonging is actually an impossibility, and as we fluctuate from inside to outside the desired group, the wish to belong always keeps us in a state of longing, on the outside. Stratigos et al. (2014, p. 178) suggest that "belonging, therefore, is not something that is achieved with any kind of finality; it is constantly in process, being enacted, contested and negotiated in the various times, places and groups in which we live our daily lives."

The concept of belonging is worth investigating beyond its effect in individual measures of wellbeing. The political ramifications and group dynamics involved in who belongs require further research from a sociological perspective as well as an individual psychological perspective. The concept of belonging becomes meaningless without the concept of not belonging. Probyn (1996, p. 14) puts it bluntly, "belonging hinges on not belonging". Nagel (2011, p. 120) explains belonging as a tool that "excludes as much as it includes, and ... disciplines as much as it sustains and nurtures". By striving to help some belong, we are replicating and reproducing the borders and boundaries that keep others out.

It seems traditional notions offered by the literature on belonging as being either behavioural, relational, spatial or place based (Spady, 1971; Hausmann et

al., 2009; Fallov et al., 2013; Wyn, 2015; Cuervo et al., 2015) are insufficient to describe the experiences of National Committee students at UWCSEA. Indeed, these traditional notions of belonging may be out-dated for other populations as well, as 2015 PISA data suggests, with 27% of Australian students disagreeing with the statement "I belong at school", a finding with a consistent trend across 72 nations. While this lack of belonging in educational institutions is worrying, it also presents an opportunity to address this issue. Young people spend most of their waking day in schools, making schools well placed to be agents of change in young people's lives during the vulnerable period of adolescence. Adolescence has long been known as a period of intense identity formation, where young people try to find a sense of self and how they fit into the world around them (Erikson, 1963). Schools are uniquely placed to support students in their journey of identity construction and provide structures to foster belonging to a group or institutions as well as structures for them to push back on, reject and find constructive conflict with in a safe and nurturing environment as well.

The National Committee participants in my study are a unique population, attending UWCSEA in Singapore for only 20 months as a stepping stone onto their post-secondary lives and are often a year or two older than their non-National Committee peers. It is understandable and perhaps even preferable that they do not develop a strong sense of belonging, given their transient nature. Perhaps for this population it is not so important for educators or researchers to focus on developing a traditional sense of belonging, associated with engagement, connectedness and attachment to school, but rather to focus on avoiding a severe lack of belonging associated with feelings of alienation, disaffection and ostracism. While this population may not need the strong sense of school pride

and acceptance often associated with high levels of belonging, they do wish to avoid intense feelings of not belonging.

5.5.2. Understandings of the Gift: Incongruence Between Student and Institutional Expectations

One area participants in my study identified as being an inhibitor to developing a sense of belonging was when the reality of their school experience at UWCSEA did not align with their expectations of what they thought a 'UWC experience' should be. In Chapter 4 of this thesis participants discussed how disappointed they were with the school not living up to their lofty ideals of what a UWC should be. I believe this inhibitor to belonging stems from an incongruence of what being a National Committee student means to individual students and UWCSEA, which can ultimately be traced back to different interpretations of 'the gift' (Mauss, 1990) of a National Committee scholarship.

Mauss (1990, p. 4) believed the gift was "one of the bases of social life" and helped to establish solidarity amongst members of a group and a sense of community. However, Mauss (1990) believed that gifting was a more complex process than it seemed, and gifts inherently came with an expectation of exchange and have an economy surrounding them. The underlying principle to gift giving according to Mauss (1990) is reciprocity, where people can expect to receive something in return for giving their gift. Derrida (1992) expanded on Mauss' (1990) ideas by stating that gift-giving triggers multiple social obligations including "reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt" (p. 12).

Gift-giving in the context of my study, where National Committee students from non-elite backgrounds have been given scholarships to attend an

elite international boarding school in Singapore which would otherwise have been outside of their financial reach, has multiple layers of complexity beyond the simple exchange based on reciprocity as described by Mauss (1990). There are unequal power relations between the gifter and the giftee, with National Committee selection committees usually made up of privileged members of a local community including "UWC alumni, parents of alumni, educational professionals and community leaders who have embraced UWC's mission and values" (UWC, 2020), whereas the recipient of the scholarship is a young person in their final years of schooling in their home country. When such imbalances of power and privilege are present in a gifting relationship, it may lead to a counterintuitive and unproductive outcome. While the noble goal of the National Committee system is to be "providing students with a challenging and transformational educational experience to inspire them to become agents of positive change and to create a more peaceful and sustainable future" (UWC, 2020), the system may actually reinforce the imbalance in power relations between those financing and administering National Committee scholarships and those receiving them. By selecting a few promising and excelling students from non-elite backgrounds around the world for scholarships that are fiercely competitive, the National Committee system may be degrading faith in local educational systems, removing top talent from local contexts, and providing examples of successful individual social mobility which may discount the effects of structural global inequalities and cement colonial power structures. Derrida (1992) alluded to this contradiction:

> If giving is spontaneously evaluated as good ... it remains the case that this 'good' can easily be reversed. We know that as good, it can also be

> bad, poisonous, and from this moment the gift puts the other in debt (p. 12).

Turner (1960) is critical of this kind of 'sponsored mobility' where a group of elites (in the case of my study, National Committee selection committees) are judged to be most suitably qualified to choose the recipients of entry into elite chambers of society (in my case a scholarship to a UWC and access to higher education). Turner (1960) contrasts this sponsored mobility with 'contested mobility', where access to elite status is fought over and won through competitive individualised means.

Another confounding factor when studying the National Committee programme is the inherent vagueness in selection criteria and contexts. Each country operates its own National Committee programme and selects its scholars using different methods. While this can be seen as most appropriate given the global nature of the programmes, and strategies used to select scholars in Finland would not work in Sierra Leone for example, it does imply a certain level of ambiguity around the selection process. The only guidance UWC gives on its website in how these National Committee selection processes are conducted is: "Our committees operate in vastly different contexts and circumstances and are uniquely situated to seek out the most promising and diverse students in each country, making them one of the standout features of the UWC movement" (UWC, 2020). Turner (1960) suggests this indecisive or indefinable process of granting access to the elite class is actually a tool used to maintain class divides, writing that "a sense of mystery about the elite is a common device for supporting in the masses the illusion of a much greater hiatus of competence than in fact exists" (p. 859). This point is further echoed by Bourdieu (1996), who explains

how elite institutions rely on similarly vague notions of 'originality' and 'personality' when deciding who to admit to the elite, rather than acknowledging the role of economic, cultural and educational capital. Participants alluded to their National Committee status as reinforcing class boundaries and othering themselves when they arrived at UWCSEA. Participant 5 explains:

> Because as scholars we are saying these things since before we came into this school, we know and want to live the UWC mission. We were so excited when we got here because we would think things like 'imagine what we can do with all these people together who want to improve the world and all these resources and money'. But nobody here actually listens to us, everyone is more obsessed by grades and I feel like they want us scholars here to be talking about these things like human rights and sustainability so that they don't have to. If we do all the campaigning and speaking up for these issues, that lets everyone else focus on going to ivy league colleges. So I know they value us being here, but maybe it's just not in the way I want to be valued. And I know it works both ways, when I see the other students so disengaged with the issues that matter to me, it like really pisses me off and makes me less want to put effort into working and talking with them. So I'm like, do we really need this Harvard study to say this? Or can we just listen to scholars and their lived experiences? (Participant 5)

The negative effect of the gift of a National Committee scholarship in terms of students' sense of belonging is articulated by Hyde (2012). Hyde (2012) suggests that gifts serve to reinforce class boundaries and set up an economy of trade between the classes, but without ever actually granting membership to the elite to the receivers of the gift. Hyde (2012, p. 140) refers to the "tyranny of gift", which harnesses the power of the generosity of the elite to manipulate people outside the elite. Strands of this view of gift are seen throughout my study. National Committee students feel lucky to be at UWCSEA, but are stuck on the

peripheral, a sojourner through a foreign place, allowed 'to be' in the school community, but never 'to belong' to the school community. This indeterminacy of belonging reinforces the system, keeping National Committee students around, but not involved. Participant 1 echoes these sentiments:

> It's like just the rich kids who are here for the school brand name and to get into a good university. They are at UWC because they know Oxford takes more UWC kids than they do Tanglin [A competing international school in Singapore] kids. And they know the reason for this is the UWC values, and part of that is me, or us, being here. Us being here helps them think they are living UWC values. Or maybe they don't even think that, maybe they think we're kind of like the presence of the new solar panels. Like us being here tells university what kind of school we are and what type of students come from here, so that the actual students here have to do less work convincing these famous unis that they should be accepted. I know I am lucky to be here but I think it's just like a lot of things that happen in school it's just mainly to do with the other students. They are about as glad we are here and have about as much interest in us as in the solar panels. (Participant 1)

The quote from Participant 1 above demonstrates that they see their role at UWCSEA as helping their elite peers access prestigious universities. At best, it could be argued that by their elite peers seeing the product of their acts of altruism in classrooms with them each day, they could reflect on how fortunate their own positions of privilege make them and encourage them to grateful. Hyde (2012, p. 46) calls this a "lesson in living", which is part of the exchange received by the giver from the gift. However a more cynical interpretation of Participant 1's perspective is that they are merely another feature of the school that makes its students attractive to universities, just as the school's commitment to sustainability and 'solar panels' is another feature. However, Participant 1 also states: 'I know I am lucky to be here' (Participant 1) in the quote above,

suggesting they understand the exchange value they are both giving to and receiving from the college. They bring the currency of progressivism and social justice to the UWCSEA as an institution and to other non-National Committee students, and in return, participants know they are lucky to be gaining the experiences available to them at college and the post-secondary pathways that attending UWCSEA will unlock for them. This is a mutually beneficial relationship and this student understands this, there are parasitic tendencies from both the student and the college (Goodin, 2002).

While the intricacies of the National Committee students are unique to UWCs, scholarships to elite educational institutions have a long history stretching back to the Victorian era. Kenway and Fahey (2015) describe a similar scholarship program at a school closely aligned with UWC values, "There are shades here of the 'lords of human kind' mentality, not so much in terms of the white colonial saviour but in terms of the global elite saviour—a contemporary 'moral aristocracy'" (p. 107).

The National Committee system of scholarship gifting has indeed outgrown the 'white savior industrial complex' (Cole, 2012) and the gifting economy of the colonial period and Victorian Britain. The gifting practices of privileged benevolence that defined elite social relations of bygone eras have been replaced with view of the gift as an investment, whereby the gift giver can accumulate social capital by giving the most. Kenway and Fahey (2015, p. 108) suggest:

> Prestige accrues in proportion to the comparative value of the goods given away. Such conspicuous philanthropy also involves the capacity to

> ‘waste’ money on glittering and high-profile events; money that could otherwise be used by those in need (p. 108).

This view of the gift resonates with participants in my study, with them describing instances when they see themselves being showcased as evidence of benefactors’ good deeds. A common experience discussed by participants which made them feel uncomfortable was the perception that they were being used as a marketing tool to placate donors and encourage higher donations. National Committee students have their education financed largely through donations to the UWC Foundation, the charitable body associated with the school that enables the extensive and rich National Committee programme. While never forced, National Committee students are expected to take part in donor events throughout the school year. Participant 8 describes her impressions of one of these events:

> I feel like from a scholar point of view, we have all these donor events and things and I’ve often said that I feel like it’s a marketing tool. And yes I’m fine with writing those letters thanking them and talking with them because I get all this money to come here. And they’re really very generous people. But when I talk to those people, half of them are amazing people, but half of them are just there because they get a power kick out of giving the money. Then we have these donor events themselves where the school just blows so much money on the event itself and I’m like, ‘are you sure this is the way you want to spend this money?’ Like I’m pretty sure for the cost of this ice sculpture we could have afforded another solar panel right? (Participant 8)

It was clear that it wasn’t just one participant that felt this way. Many participants had experiences where they felt like their experiences were being used to market the school. Although participants understand the concept of scholarships being an exchange relationship, it was clear they thought the institution was gaining more in social capital than they were comfortable in

giving. Participant 5 talked about her experience at a donor event:

> I was on a panel of National Committees at a donor event and I was the only one who talked about that this experience is hard. But it's ok that is hard because this is a growing process, and if it's hard it means we're learning and growing... After the event I had another scholar who came up to me afterwards and said that he didn't realise that anyone else was feeling like he did and I wanted to tell him of course we do. We're told that it's so good all the time, and that we should just be happy about it all the time, but it is hard, and it's not supposed to be just good, because where is the growing in it if it's just good? And it's just bizarre to me if we think that the donors don't want to hear that, and this idea that if we dare to say that things aren't perfect, that the donors would go away. The marketing aspect is kind of annoying to me and in the event, we were put into different teams and I was a 'roving conversationalist' so basically I went around to talk with lonely people who didn't seem like they were having a good time so this in itself seemed like I was pimping myself out to rich people but then there were these kids who were in the Sodexho team who were serving food to people and I hated seeing that. And why are you putting kids in this position of rank and hierarchy, you don't do that. I'm happy to talk about my experience, but I'm not happy to sugar coat it into something it's not. (Participant 5)

Again here we see participants contrasting their experience with their imagined experience of life at other UWCs. It is true that photos of National Committee students are overrepresented in marketing documents on the school's website (UWCSEA, 2019); however, the National Committee program is a fundamental part of what makes UWCSEA a unique international school, particularly in the competitive market of Singapore. The National Committee program adds an element of diversity to the school, which other schools do not have, and it embodies the UWC mission. It is one of the most expensive schools on the island and does not hide that some of the school fees go towards maintaining the scholars programme. It is a fine balancing line for the school to

want to showcase all that the National Committee students bring to the school community, without leaving them feeling exploited for financial gain.

This accumulation of social capital through philanthropic giving is an especially useful strategy for new members of elite classes who do not have the privilege and prestige of old money, established names or titles to rely on. Ong (1999) has argued that philanthropy has been a useful strategy for new members of the global elite from the global south when "strategies of cultural accumulation run up against regimes of racial difference and hierarchy" (p. 93). This concept of doing well by doing good is present at UWCSEA, both in the newer and the more established members of the global elite present in the UWCSEA community. Hours spent volunteering, money donated to causes and founding of charitable organisations are all worn as badges of honour amongst members of the UWCSEA community and carry as much cultural capital as any other metric.

The topic of scholarships and gift-giving in international education is complex. There is no doubt the stakeholder who gains the most from receiving scholarships to prestigious institutions like UWCSEA via the National Committee programme are the students selected for these scholarships themselves. They are given the gift of a world-class education, a stepping-stone to the next stage of their career path, social mobility and cultural capital. However, what is much less examined is the exchange value of what the schools that offer such programmes receive themselves. Scholarships to elite educational institutions are rarely handed out randomly or solely based on need. They usually target specific traits, characteristics or talents such as academics, sports or the arts. The National Committee system is no different in this regard, except the characteristics targeted are "promise and potential… [and] a demonstrated commitment to UWC values"

(UWC, 2020). The National Committee programme, like other scholarship programmes to elite institutions, is fiercely competitive, and attracts incredible young people from around the world. The whole school and UWC movement benefit from having these National Committee students on campus, providing diversity in thought and role modelling UWC values for other students as well as often going on to achieve incredible success in their lives beyond UWC. The Alumni section of the UWC Impact Stories website is another impressive marketing tool that the National Committee programme enhances for UWCs (UWC, 2020). Elite schools also benefit from scholarship programmes such as the National Committee programme at UWCSEA as it allows the school to promote themselves as pro-social actors, living their missions and values of social responsibility while removing the spotlight from elite educational institutions' highly established role in the reproduction of the class divide's status quo, distribution of privilege and even acts of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1996; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013). The role of scholarship programmes in elite schools reinforces power and privilege relations and largely escapes critique and challenge, as it is often viewed solely as a benevolent and charitable force.

Just because there are issues with scholarship programmes like the National Committee programme and notions of the gift are problematic in elite schools like international schools doesn't mean these programmes should cease to exist. They clearly bring many positives to the individual recipients of the scholarships, the wider school community, and National Committee students' home communities, as many return after completing further study to help better their home communities with their newly acquired skills. However, even though there is clear good that comes out of these programmes, it does not mean they

should escape a critical evaluation to better understand both the positive and negative impacts these programmes have on different stakeholders.

Derrida (1992) argued that for there to be a true gift, there can be no reciprocity, exchange, counter-gift, return or debt:

> If the other gives me back or owes me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or difference (p. 12).

One could argue this makes the notion of a true gift lack construct validity in the same way that the presence of true altruism has been questioned. It is contestable whether any true gifting situation between an elite school and a recipient of a scholarship could ever exist. This does not mean that the notion of the gift is unhelpful in understanding social and power relations in scholarship programmes. Rather it may lead us to examine scholarship programmes like the National Committee programme with a more critical lens, raising issues of what elite educational institutions are expecting in return, what their incentives are in creating the programmes and how they go about collecting their debts. While I suggest that all involved in the National Committee programme, including National Committee students themselves, UWC staff, non-National Committee students and the wider school community, would see the presence of the programme and these incredible young people on campus as a positive overall and that the benefits outweigh the individual and systemic downsides, it is a programme within a wider field that is yearning for future research and theorization.

5.5.3. International Schools: An Emerging Field of Research

International Schools continue to be an emerging context for educational research (Resnik, 2012) and my findings help to shed light on this largely overlooked field of education. Even with a cohort of researchers dedicating their careers to the international school context such as Tristan Bunnell, Mary Hayden and Alec Peterson, international schools and international education are largely hidden from the general population as well as educational researchers. Hayden and Thompson (2008, p. 15) call international schools "a well-kept secret". As the number of international schools has more than doubled in the last decade and continues to increase (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013), this is an educational context that cannot continue to be overlooked by researchers. Research in international schools also offers lessons for any educational institution that accepts students from diverse backgrounds, such as elite schools with Indigenous scholarship opportunities or affirmative action programs. Furthermore, with the spread of the International Baccalaureate (IB), the rapid pace of globalisation and the acceptance of the bidirectional value in providing scholarship opportunities to elite educational institutions, more and more schools in a national context are resembling international schools, making research in this setting relevant to a wide, and increasingly widening, range of educational contexts.

My study found low levels of belonging amongst all Grade 11 students sampled at UWCSEA. It would be interesting to investigate if levels of belonging are low amongst students at other international schools, and if this is the case, what are the contributors to these low levels of belonging in the international school context? While the sampled cohort reported low levels of belonging, they did not want to 'not belong'. Further research could investigate what minimum

requirements are needed to ensure a group of individual students do not fall into a state of 'not belonging'.

If students are unable to develop a place-based identity, it can lead to a range of negative outcomes including feelings of disorientation, desolation and depression or what Casey (1993, p. x) calls "a sense of unbearable emptiness". Casey (1993, p. x) even gives this feeling of estrangement from one's surroundings a word, 'placepanic', where "we confront the imminent possibility of there being no place to be or to go". Casey (1993, p. x) expands on this feeling of placepanic as follows:

> The prospect of no-place is dismaying not only when pulling up stakes or in wartime (part of the horror of nuclear war is it's annihilation of places as well as persons) but at many other times: indeed, every time we are out of place, whether we are lost in a snowstorm, or our house has burned down, or we are simply without lodging for the night. In such situations we find ourselves entering into a special form of panic: place-panic. For we confront the imminent possibility of there being no place to be or to go. We feel not so much displaced as *without place*.

Casey (1993) believes this is not only a concern for globally mobile individuals, but in today's globally connected world, we will all at some time feel placepanic in terms of our local culture, city, region, nation or the world.

The participants in my study alluded to their beliefs that it was possible to foster belonging in international schools. Many had visited other UWC sister schools and spoke fondly of their experiences there. Many other schools in the UWC network are much smaller, and it is possible on these campuses for everybody to know everybody's name. With social media and the sharing of information amongst National Committees at different schools in the UWC network, it is natural for students to compare experiences. Participants were

mature in their understanding that each UWC experience would come with its own set of advantages and drawbacks, and were fully aware of the benefits of being at UWCSEA; yet, they still believed the sense of community would have been stronger if they attended a different UWC. Participant 4 visited a different UWC in one of her breaks and states:

> I just loved the community feeling there and I was totally shocked and yes they had way less money and like oh my god yeah, our school is so much better in that way, but that community feel was stronger there and that's what I feel that I'm missing here. A sense of community. So what's our excuse not to have that sense of community? What's missing from us? (Participant 4)

Corson (1998) offers a scathing critique of international education, suggesting that the outcome of receiving an international school education will be the erosion of cultural diversity and a boost to the pace and virality of globalisation. Corson (1998) argues as international education is set firmly within capitalist social relations; it is "the most assimilatory cultural force that the world has ever seen" (p. 3). Corson (1998) believes these institutions foster a market-based view of the world where connections and relationships are not based on cultural understandings or social interactions but economic imperatives, resulting in a global drive for sameness when students leave these schools rather than the diversity that exists when they enter them. Smith (2003, p. 36) argues that globalization is responsible for "eroding senses of national identity to unprecedented losses of Indigenous languages and cultures under the homogenising pressure of global capital". Allan (2013) suggests the main criticism of international schools by discourse theorists seems to be that they are primarily Western schools, promoting Western cultural norms, values and

behaviours under the cloak of internationalism.

For participants in my study, the tension between internationalism and globalism manifested through this friction between the mission of UWC, for education to be "a force to unite for a sustainable future" (UWC, 2019), and the day-to-day realities of school work and academic pressure to prepare for the global job market. Again, the comparisons to other UWCs amplified this experience amongst participants:

> When I look at the student body here, it doesn't align so well, not everyone is the UWC student, maybe some kids just want to get a good IB score at the end and there's certain talks that I've had with other students at other UWCs scattered across the world and it seems that maybe the student body here is more focused on studies as compared to other UWCs. It seems at other UWCs students have the CAS [Creativity, Action, Service] values tattooed over their hearts. (Participant 6)

Hayden and Thompson (2008) suggest most international schools employ a type of pedagogy based on individualistic, child-centred, western liberal philosophy. The researchers allude to the unresolved questions this raises about what is really meant by 'internationalism' in education and "whether it is, in this context at least, a synonym for 'western liberalism'" (p. 40). In a perhaps related backlash against the narrow view of 'internationalism' in many international schools and the IBDP in particular, the UWC movement has developed and created a 'UWC Project Diploma' at the movement's Mahindra campus which has now been widely adopted throughout the movement. This alternative diploma focuses more on experiential, project, service and outdoor aspects of a student's education at a UWC, and less so on the strict academic criteria set by the IBDP (UWC Mahindra College, 2018).

In the Australian context, Doherty (2010, p. 6) suggests the introduction of IB programmes in Australia as an "ironic marriage of neo-conservatism (re-asserting centralised power) and neoliberalism (divesting power from the centre to the market)", whereby the IB Diploma "thrives in this ideological space of being both a market/choice strategy and a fashionably conservative solution at the same time".

One example of where we see this cultural divide between the desire to excel academically at any cost and the desire to engage in new and challenging hands-on learning experiences in my study is through the attitudes towards tutoring centres. Private tutoring is a AU$1.2 billion-dollar industry in Singapore and many of the participants' non-National Committee classmates attended private tuition on weekends and after school for one-on-one tutoring with professional tutors. Middle- and upper-class Singaporean and Southeast Asian parents are also caught up in the intense competition in the education system and turn to these tutoring centres which have become another system of streaming students based on who can pay. Indeed, this educational qualification race or 'diploma disease' (Dore, 1976) is so pervasive in Singaporean society that it has led to a new colloquialism, 'kiasuism', which captures the high-stakes education system and the fear of their child slipping behind (Bedford & Chua, 2017). Participants felt this really added to the competitive nature of the academics at school and made revision yet another category to compete in. Participant 5 discusses one student in her Physics class:

> So it just happened today in my Physics class just now. So some of the people in my school go to extra classes in a tutoring centre and this one boy in my Physics class goes to tutoring because he wants to learn so he's like a support to his studies. Our teacher told us today that we have

> a test on Friday and the boy said 'oh it's too soon and can we move it to later so we have time to study', but everyone in the class was saying 'oh yeah you need time to go to tutoring', and everyone was laughing, even the teacher, and I saw his face and his reaction and yes of course he was laughing because everyone was doing it but his internal expression was different, he was really hurting. And it's not the first time. They all feel that if they don't go to tutoring, other students will get 7s and they won't and then they will be a disappointment to their parents. (Participant 5)

Bourdieu's (1996) critique of elite universities in France in *The State Nobility* could also be applied to elite schools in Singapore and International Schools more broadly. Bourdieu (1996) argues elite schools cement and reproduce societal social hierarchies and boundaries through "ritual exclusion" (p. 74). Bourdieu (1996) claims this is a form of "symbolic violence" against the working class and happening outside of public discourse. As this system is reproduced and individuals with large amounts of symbolic capital tend to cluster in neighbourhoods with good schools or good tutoring centres, Bourdieu (1996, p. 75) suggests this leads to "symbolic confinement", or the point where social and financial barriers have become so impermeable that those in the elite become increasingly homogenised to the point where the group with the monopoly on symbolic capital "is converted into a nobility" (p. 79). Bourdieu (1996) argues that as this reproduction happens over generations, those who excel in this habitus due to their access to symbolic capital are "not only distinctive and separate but also recognized by others and by itself as worthy of being so. Students are distinguished from the commonplace and come to know and feel that they are destined for greatness" (p. 103). This could apply to elite schools in Singapore, which although on the surface is a meritocracy, the educational arms race and 'kiasuism' of the education system leave those from non-elite backgrounds at an

immense disadvantage.

Participant 8 gave an example of one of her classmates who was suffering from this implicit social pressure and different familial cultural norms to take subjects that lead to a specific career path and to achieve highly in those subjects:

> I think there is competition and pressure here, especially with the kids who are here just for the IB in the school. We have talked about it at tea time in the boarding house. Well you know the Indian Boy Package? HL Math, HL Physics, HL Computer Science. We had a boy who dropped CS [Computer Science] and picked up Theatre instead. I mean the amount of students who went up to him and told him legitimately he was throwing away his future was very high. He had this idea that it wasn't even from the system, like from the teachers, mentors or advisors or anything, they were all quite supportive, it was from the students themselves. The social pressure comes from students and the parents. Even in the boarding house, when we try to change the preferences for subjects or the rules, it's that the parents of the other kids that won't allow it. When I ask my friends 'why aren't you happy with this subject?' And they say they have to take that subject. I ask 'what do you mean you had to take it?' For me as a kid who has grown up where the only rule in the house is trust, and we talk about things, it's really weird. I mean my parents are like 'we're here to support you, and as long as you don't think you're being stupid, you do you.' I feel like I'm past that stage too, because I'm already 18, and my parents haven't taken me as a kid for like 3 years so. At times I definitely feel more mature, maybe not everyday all the time, but there are some moments for sure. (Participant 8)

Bourdieu (1996, p. 110) called this "an academic struggle for one's life", and so it makes sense that students and families from elite backgrounds are so invested in the system. Kenway and Koh (2013) found similar results at another elite school in Singapore and alluded to the bidirectional relationship between the students' reputations and achievements, and the schools' which constantly feed

off each other. They state that at the studied elite school "Constant competition is clearly the name of the game" (Kenway & Koh, 2013, p. 284). As is true in the context of UWCSEA and Singapore, as McCarthy and Kenway (2014, p. 166) point out, "the production of elites, elitism, eliteness is enmeshed in complex historical, economic and cultural dynamics and pressures articulated through globalisation and its variable and generative impact upon educational and social stratification".

Singapore has a clear strategy to produce each generation of elites also through a gift of a scholarship not unlike the National Committee scholarship at UWC. The Public Service Commission (PSC) scholarship is "the premier government scholarship. It is awarded on the basis of merit to outstanding young men and women" (Public Service Commission, 2020). PSC recipients and Singaporean high schools produce a plethora of elite level graduates, with Singapore being the ninth-largest source of graduating international students at Oxford (Oxford, 2020), quite an achievement given that Singapore is the world's 114th most populous country. Singaporean students with the nation's top A-Level and IB results are selected each year and have their full tuition and living expenses paid while they complete their studies at elite overseas universities. Uncannily, the recipients of these rewards are also known as 'scholars' just as National Committee students are colloquially around campus. Ye and Nylander (2015) outline the transnational institution matching and elite pipeline that exists in Singapore, from a select few high schools, to Oxbridge universities via the PSC scholarship programme, and then into the upper strata of the Singaporean civil service. Through in-depth interviews conducted with Singaporean undergraduates studying at Oxbridge universities, Ye and Nylander (2015) explore the role of

state-sponsored scholarships as political tools used to select and groom the next generation of party elite.

However, a clear difference between the PSC and National Committee programme is the explicitness of the exchange in the PSC. Recipients of the PSC are required to sign a contract that binds them to five years of public service in Singapore after their graduation. Once having entered the public service these scholars are often fast-tracked into elite careers and positions in the highly sought after Administrative Services, which aims to "develop leaders with whole-of-government perspectives and capabilities, to formulate and implement policies that will improve the lives of Singaporeans" (PSC, 2020).

Just as accepting a National Committee scholarship to study at UWCSEA would increase a students' social, educational and cultural capital, Singaporean students and PSC recipients can expect to amass social and cultural capital that will be assets to them in the global marketplace. For both National Committee and PSC scholars, this global exposure is a way to differentiate themselves in both domestic markets at home and the global jobs market. Another similarity between the PSC and National Committee programmes is the former colonial ties between Singapore and Britain (where the desired destination universities of the PSC recipients reside, and where the UWC movement was founded and its head office remains today). Altbach (1989) suggests this is a lingering form of colonialism yet the contemporary relationship is more complex, with many British students choosing to study in former colonies to increase their global capital, for much the same reason that many students in former colonies may choose to study in Britain.

5.6. Chapter Conclusion: Belonging in International Schools

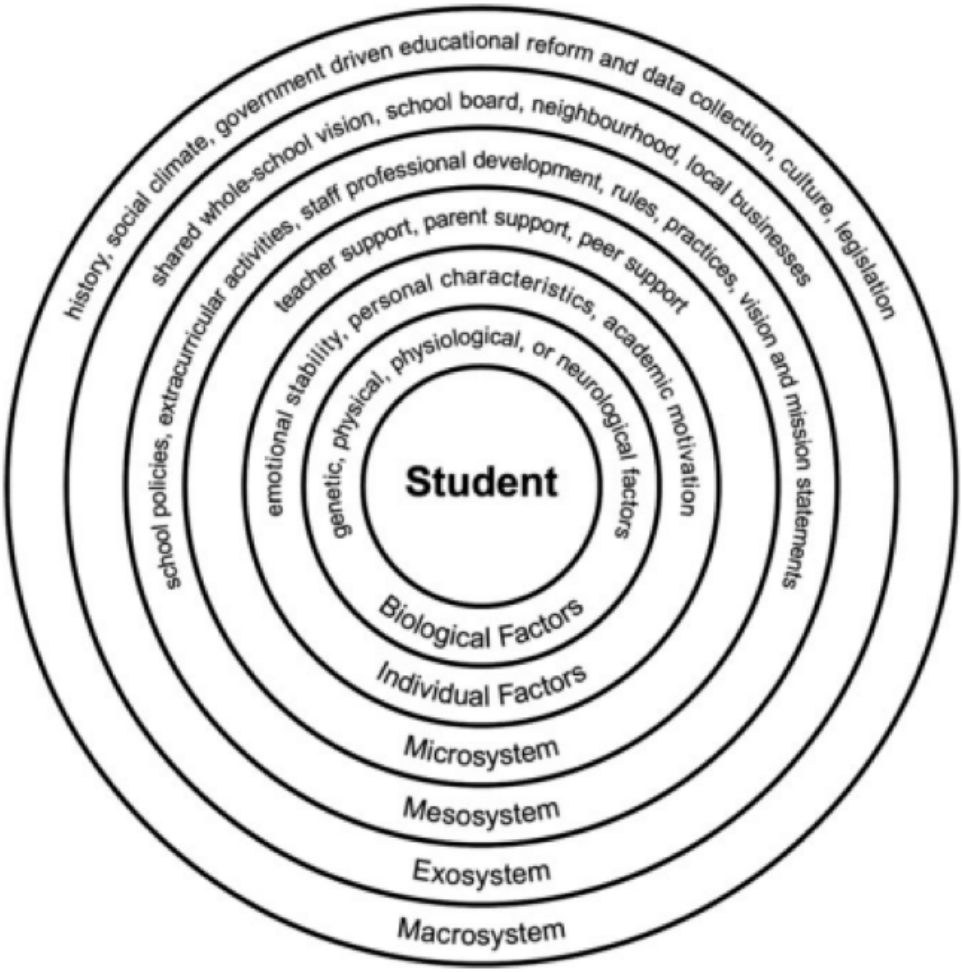
This section examined belonging as a political construct and discussed the power dynamics that influence whether students can feel a sense of belonging in school. It also addressed the unique nature of international schools that purport to offer a place where everyone can belong, which in fact may be an unrealistic claim. The findings of my study suggest participants are not particularly interested in developing a strong sense of belonging at UWCSEA. They understand the transactional nature of their presence at the school and have different priorities, forcing belonging down their list. This section suggested traditional notions of belonging break down when applied to the international sector that more research is needed to develop an international theory of belonging that better explains the results of my study that confound traditional notions of belonging. I suggest that belonging for these transnational National Committee students can be fostered by allowing them to voice their priorities and expectations from their time at UWCSEA and making efforts to meet these desires, rather than imposing the school's version of what it means to belong onto National Committee students.

In terms of belonging, my findings of low levels of belonging amongst all students is absent from the literature. Many studies have reported much higher levels of belonging amongst students in a wide variety of samples and contexts (You et al., 2011; Adelabu, 2007; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Sanchez et al., 2005; Sari, 2013). Akar-Vural et al. (2013) found high levels of belonging amongst Turkish primary students using the PSSM. They claim this is important as school represents a sociocultural group and group identities shape our behaviour; "Just as an individual's sense of belonging to social groups and society brings along the feeling of protecting and improving this structure, a student's

feeling as a part of the school is crucial in terms of his/her protecting and improving it" (p. 216). The PSSM has also been translated into Chinese (C-PSSM) by Cheung and Hui (2003) and this C-PSSM scale has also been validated by further study. Teo et al. (2016) found that different samples of Chinese students also reported high levels of belonging. This raises the question of why students in my study have reported such low levels of belonging? Is it something specific to International schools? UWCs? Or UWCSEA? Or is it that traditional notions and models of belonging do not transfer from national contexts into the international school environment?

One model of belonging that is useful in discussing National Committee students' complex relationship to belonging at UWCSEA is Allen and Kern's (2017) Bio-psycho-socio-ecological model of school belonging (BPSEM) as illustrated in figure 2 below. This model draws heavily on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model of schooling and applies it to school belonging.

Figure 6: Allen and Kern's (2017) Bio-psycho-socio-ecological model of school belonging



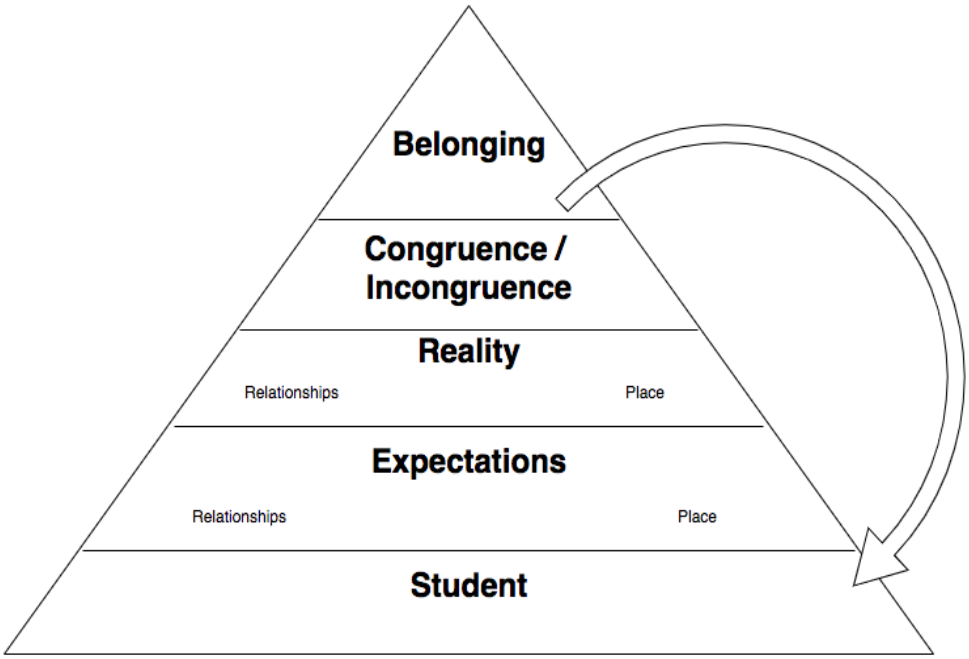
This model is useful for interpreting my study's findings as it explores the various factors which contribute to an individual student's sense of belonging. More traditional models of belonging may have focused on the other layers of this model, particularly the exo-, meso- and microsystems, as these are the factors most within the locus of control of school administrators and educators. School leadership can change policies to influence the school environment, encourage institutional norms and revise the school's mission statements, while individual teachers can undertake professional development, selectively apply school rules and provide classroom support, all with the aim of fostering a sense of belonging amongst students. Indeed this is where the bulk of the literature is centred and

research is carried out (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Tinto, 1993; Hausmann et al., 2009; Dunleavy & Burke, 2019). However, the findings from my study suggest that actually it is the under-researched factors in both individual (such as attitudes, cognitive styles, personalities and emotions), biological (such as race, gender, physical and neurological) and macrosystem (such as place, laws and host culture) levels which have the most influence on National Committee students' feelings of belonging. This model is also useful as it acknowledges the multifaceted nature of school belonging and how each of these influences interacts with one another, making belonging a dynamic and complex construct.

A new model of belonging may be required to understand the unique population of National Committee students' experiences of the complex construct of school belonging in international settings. While Allen and Kern's (2017) model does help us identify which factors that influence belonging have been the focus of the literature, it does not offer any understanding of the process of belonging students in international schools experience and therefore does not capture the experiences of belonging expressed by the National Committee students in my study. Instead, a new model is required to explain these experiences of belonging, grounded in the data from my study, but applicable to other students who have undergone intense educational transitions, or who know they will be in a school for a limited time.

I propose the Expectations / Reality Model of Belonging (ERMB) to better understand belonging in spaces like international schools and amongst populations like National Committee students. The 2D version of the model is represented in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Expectations / Reality 2D Model of Belonging (ERMB)



The ERMB is unlike any other models of belonging in the literature as it includes the presence of congruence or incongruence between students' expectations of their school experience, and the reality of their school experience by layering, in turn, their expectations, relationships, sense of place, and ultimately their sense of belonging. By situating individual students and their experiences of this congruence/incongruence as the foundation of the model, it is in line with the standpoint perspective (Harding, 2004) that I adopted when gathering the data. The base of the ERMB is the individual student. Understanding how individual factors such as students' personality, culture, physical appearance, motivations, interests values and goals interact with the reality of the environment they are in, is key to understanding students' experiences and standpoints and give rise to students' experiences of belonging. This is why individual students are the foundation of the model.

Students' expectations of the educational experience must be considered

and are the lens through which their educational journeys are perceived. Broadly speaking, students' expectations can be broken down into their expectations about place and relational factors. Students' expectations around place include their expectations of exchange, the local context, their academic prospects and the school context, values and culture. Expectations around place refers to both the physical built environment, but also the cultural and political climate the student is entering. Student expectations around relationships include their expectations of the strength and quality of their relationships with their peers, their teachers, their parents (or house parents), the school community, the wider local community as well as rules, laws or customs governing those relationships.

Student expectations of their educational experiences then come into contact with the reality of the school experience. The reality of school can again be broken down into place-based and relational factors. Place factors that influence students' experiences include the school culture, norms and mission, geographical realities, political climate, local culture and physical structures. Relational aspects of school reality include factors like the ease of forming and strength of relationships with peers, teachers, parents (or house parents), the school community, the wider local community as well as rules, laws or customs governing those relationships.

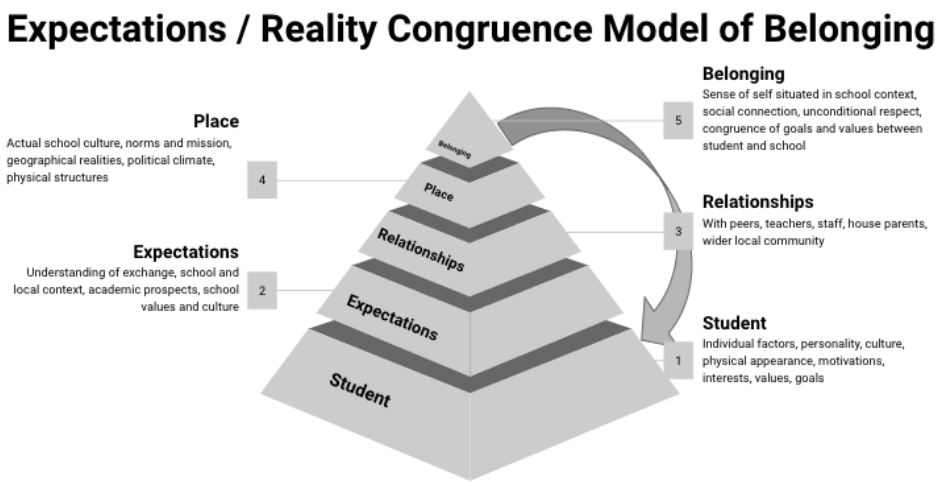
How students experience these relational and place-based factors, and whether or not these experiences align with their expectations of their schools, drives their sense of belonging at school. Students will feel a sense of belonging at school when there is congruence between their goals and values and the school's, and students experience unconditional respect and social connection at school as well as all the positive outcomes that accompany a sense of belonging discussed

in Chapter 2. In contrast if there is incongruence between what a student is expecting from their school experience and the reality of their school life, they will experience a lack of belonging and possibly all the negative outcomes discussed in Chapter 2.

If students experience a sense of belonging at school, this will in turn cause them to develop as individuals, build stronger relationships and influence their experience of place, causing students' individual factors to be reappraised and constantly adjusted. This in turn will impact their expectations and will have a flow on impact throughout the model. This notion of belonging as a dynamic process acknowledges the agentic role students play in their educational experiences. The ERMB conceptualises belonging as a process rather than a static state of being. By influencing one component of the model in a positive way that drives belonging, students can experience higher rates of belonging. Similarly, if students have negative experiences or incongruence between their expectations and the reality of school, this can decrease their sense of belonging.

While more traditional notions of belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Allen & Kern, 2017) are helpful to researchers and practitioners, they are reductionist and tend to miss some key features of belonging. As the full model below shows (Figure 8), my 3D model of belonging shows the process of layering that I am theorizing can better explain the congruence or not between the student and their sense of belonging in this elite international school.

Figure 8: Heyting's Expectation/Reality Congruence Model of Belonging



This model addresses the shortcomings of other research in this field in two important ways. First, most researchers begin with the *a priori* assumption that belonging is a state to be achieved rather than a fluid, dynamic process which is constantly changing within each students' experiences. If researchers adopt my model of belonging which accounts for a layered and inherently mutable sense of belonging, it might allow researchers to look beyond their epistemological assumptions about individual factors that are either fixed precursors to belonging or products of belonging. The second key aspect that is often missing from empirical and theoretical understandings of belonging is the agency of students in their experiences of and production of feelings of belonging. Student agency can be thought of as the process of students' intentional actions and interactions while at school (Biesta, 2008). Student agency is relational and situated within a given educational context, meaning that it is not only the psychological and individual traits of the student which influence their agentic capacity but also the social and educational contexts that students find themselves in (Scott & Marshall, 1998). A useful characterisation of student agency comes from Bandura's (2001) view of self-efficacy. Bandura (2001) suggests students, or people in general, have a sense

of self-efficacy when they believe they have the capacity and control to influence events. Adopting this perspective, Bandura (2001) views agency as the students' or person's ability to exercise their cognitions or behaviours to achieve the desired goal without the constraints of socio-cultural or systemic factors inhibiting this goal achievement. In terms of belonging, I propose that students must feel like they have agency to affect change over their sense of belonging for them to gain or improve any feelings of belonging to their educational institution. If students feel powerless to affect change in their sense of belonging, they may develop learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976) and stop trying to belong, resulting in lower levels of belonging.

The majority of research conducted on belonging in schools is institution centric, focusing on policies, procedures and practices that can support or encourage belonging at a whole school level (Kuh et al., 2006; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). The ERMB hopes to address this shortcoming by placing the student and their experiences and expectations at the foundation of my model, reminding researchers and practitioners of students' agency in how they navigate their educational lives.

The ERMB can be used as a tool to target areas where belonging can be boosted, for individual students, for groups or even whole school contexts as well as a diagnostic tool to investigate where the process of belonging has broken down. A majority of the belonging literature looks at ways of boosting belonging for belonging's sake (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Tinto, 1993; Hausmann et al., 2009). However, by acknowledging students' expectations, the ERMB suggests there is no need to boost school belonging to artificially high levels, if like in my study, students are not seeking belonging

from school, but have other priorities instead. Most of the models of belonging come out of individualistic, Western, Anglophone cultures (Tinto, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Allen & Kern, 2017), where individual aspirations and wants are preferenced over community harmony and connection at the broad cultural level (Hofstede, 1986). Students in other cultures may not be getting their desired level of belonging and social connection from family life or groups outside of school and therefore value and seek a sense of belonging from their school lives. Research has established how boosting belonging in these cultures increases a range of positive mental, physical and academic measures (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Anderman, 2002; Battistich et al., 1995). However, in international schools, culture is much more complex. Students come from a range of different cultures, live in a host culture and inhabit a 'third cultural' space (Pollock et al., 2010). It may be that these students, including the participants in my study come from more collectivist cultures and are having their belonging needs met outside the classroom through strong family and community ties and are therefore not seeking high levels of belonging from their school experience (Hofstede, 1986). Instead they are focused either on living out the mission and ideals of the UWC movement, or on their academic journeys and getting to the universities they aspire to. If this is the case, schools and researchers who focus their efforts on boosting school belonging are engaging in a romantic fiction, taking action and intervening more to feel and/or look like they are doing something, rather than focusing on what students are crying out for from their schools.

Instead of blanket policies which look to boost belonging at a school-wide level, school resources could be focused on intervening when students seem at

risk of not belonging and meeting students' other priorities. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but it represents a break from the traditions in the literature and may be more appropriate to the international school context. Rather than focusing on the aspects of Allen and Kern's (2017) model and the levers of belonging that are easily operationalized by school administrators and teachers, the focus of the ERMB is on individual student experiences and how their expectations align with the realities of school. Differentiation and individualised learning have been staples of pedagogical training for decades now and it is time we applied these notions of individualisation to students' sense of belonging at school. If we accept that not all students learn in the same way, why do we assume all students need the same things to feel a sense of belonging at school?

5.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed where the results of my study are in line with the literature, particularly in relation to the role of place and relationships in belonging. It has also discussed what the literature predicted that I would find, but that I failed to find evidence for in my study, particularly the role of cultural dissonance in creating a lack of belonging. This chapter then examined the findings of my study which were not predicted by the literature, specifically the low levels of belonging felt by all participants and how perhaps traditional models of belonging breakdown when applied to international schools. This chapter ended with a call to re-envision belonging in a more individualised way and the suggestion of the ERMB that may be of more use to students in international schools. In the next chapter, I will conclude my study, offer directions for future research and advice for practitioners.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Study

The current study investigated the research question: How do National Committee Students experience belonging at The United World College of South East Asia? Results from my study suggest National Committee students experience very low levels of belonging at UWCSEA. However, these low levels are the same for National Committee students as they are for non-National Committee students. Participant (n=164) scores were below the midpoint level on the PSSM ($x = 2.06$, $SD = .45$), suggesting an overall low level of belonging amongst this sample.

Other results suggest there appears to be a significant relationship between scores of belonging and the region students consider home (South East Asia vs Rest of World). The direction of the relationship is that students from SEA experience a stronger sense of belonging than those from the rest of the world. There also appears to be a significant relationship between scores of belonging and whether or not the student is a boarder. The direction of the relationship is that students who board experience a stronger sense of belonging than day students. Students who consider Singapore or South East Asia home also felt a stronger sense of belonging generated from their teacher relationships than students from the rest of the world.

The current study found support for several factors that can inhibit or enable National Committee students feeling a sense of belonging at UWCSEA. The factors that enabled a sense of belonging can broadly be grouped under the

categories of ‘relationships’ and ‘school culture’. The category of relationships that enable a sense of belonging can be broken down into ‘peer relationships’ and ‘teacher relationships’, while the category of school culture can further be broken down into ‘boarding house environment’ and ‘opportunities, activities and service’. Factors that participants identified as inhibiting their sense of belonging can also be broadly grouped under the categories of ‘relationships and ‘school culture’. The category of relationships that inhibit a sense of belonging can be separated into ‘lack of confiding relationship’, ‘relationships with elite students’ and ‘being treated differently because of National Committee status’, while the category of school culture contains ‘competition, stress and structure’ and ‘reality vs. expectations incongruity’.

The findings of my study allowed me to problematize traditional notions of belonging, especially those which focus on a single element of belonging and expand upon Allen and Kern’s (2017) BPSEM model. My study’s main theoretical contribution is to acknowledge the shortcomings of existing models of belonging in international schools and offer an alternative way to envision belonging using a more individualised approach rather than looking for whole-school solutions. I have proposed the ERMB to better explain students’ experiences of belonging in international schools which takes into account the relationships and place-based factors which influence students’ school expectations and experiences and ultimately lead to them feeling a sense of belonging or not. I also suggest it is more appropriate to triage a lack of belonging in international schools when it appears in individual students, rather than try to artificially inflate belonging to levels incongruous with many students’ home cultures and backgrounds.

Traditional theoretical understandings of belonging have focused on one aspect of belonging (Spady, 1971; Hausmann et al., 2009; Fallov et al., 2013; Wyn, 2015). These theories downplay the complex interaction of many forces that impact students' sense of belonging at school. While there have been attempts to address this and offer multifaceted models of belonging (Cuervo et al., 2015; Allen & Kern, 2017), these models often lend themselves to be utilised by practitioners and educators as 'catch-all' solutions, allowing practitioners to focus on the interventions that are easiest for their institutions to implement, rather than looking for the interventions that will have the greatest impact. Students at international schools, particularly international schools like UWCSEA with a strong global scholarship programme have some of the most heterogeneous student populations in the world. These traditional models of belonging which suggest by addressing one key factor (whether it be extracurricular activities, the school's mission, relationships with teachers or feelings of inclusivity), belonging can be increased amongst an entire student body are unrealistic for diverse, international populations. The ERMB illustrates how it is the congruence or incongruence between students' expectations of their school life and the reality of their schools which is the driving force of belonging, rather than any one single factor of school life. Different factors matter more to some individual students than others, so educators and schools must have a belonging tool belt with many different tools at their disposal to increase students' sense of belonging.

6.2. Limitations of the Current Study

6.2.1. Methodological Limitations

Epistemologically, research which adopts a standpoint theory perspective

and centres the standpoints of marginalised groups will provide a less distorted understanding of the society and social relations by focusing on voices who see the dominant paradigms through a critical lens as they have other ways of being to compare it to, as opposed to members of the dominant group who only know one reality (Harding, 1991). This runs against positivist trends in scientific research which have devalued rich, thick narratives in favour of digestible quantitative knowledge. As Swigonski (1994, p. 390) states, "the life experiences of members of marginalized groups have been erroneously devalued as starting points for scientific research and as generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims".

The use of standpoint theory also allowed me to utilise my "outsider within" (Collins, 1986, p. 199) perspective at UWCSEA. Collins (1986) encourages the use of this perspective if it is available to trained researchers as it is a position where aspects of social and power relations can be detected that are not accessible to researchers who are wholly outsiders or wholly insiders. As a former employee of UWCSEA and former house parent, but having been gone enough years to have never known any of the participants in my study, this 'outsider within' researcher standpoint is one I identified with and which allowed me to access a deeper level of participants' experience and knowledge than researchers from other perspectives.

One of the limitations of my study was a lack of time. I was only able to spend a week on campus and only interview 10 students once. It would have been interesting to revisit students a year later when they were nearing the end of their time at UWCSEA to see if their experiences of belonging had changed. It would have also been interesting to interview non-National Committee students to

understand if they had similar experiences of belonging and the processes in which they engaged to build belonging as the National Committee students interviewed. It would have also have been interesting to interview teachers and boarding house parents to capture their understanding of belonging in schools. These limitations leave room for future research to investigate these other perspectives on belonging in international schools.

My study may have also suffered from social desirability bias. Students interviewed may have wished to present themselves in socially desirable ways, whether that means protecting and supporting their school through a sense of loyalty, or distancing themselves from the school if being seen as too aligned with UWCSEA's culture and values was not considered socially acceptable in their peer group. When conducting research from a standpoint perspective, this is a limitation researchers' must live with, as it is of the utmost importance that participant experiences are centred in the research process and participants feel empowered to impart their perspectives to the researcher. I do not believe my results were unduly influenced by social desirability, as the interviews were conducted privately and students' were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Also being an outsider to participants and having not worked at the college during their time there could have increased their likelihood to share openly and honestly and not feel the need to guard their experiences.

6.3. Directions for Future Research

6.3.1. Belonging Beyond Borders—International Schools, Elite Schools and Singapore

> I have more of the feeling that this school isn't what I wanted it to be, so never like I'm not what the school wanted, but more that the school isn't what I want. So I feel like the community is strong and accepting, but the school itself isn't what I associate with. I'm also getting great experiences. It's just not what I imagined. I would still say that it's not really UWC here, but I would say that it's something else, and it's still a wonderful place and wonderful people and the school has a lot of money so you get amazing opportunities, so it's still good, it's just different. It's not like my school back home, it's not like Tanglin or SAS [two other elite international schools in Singapore] and it's not like other UWCs. It's its own thing. I want to point out that I am not saying other UWCs don't have problems, because they do, they're just different problems. It's just that this UWC, UWCSEA is set on such a different premise than other UWCs, I mean we have K1 kids, we have 4 year olds, we have parents who are way too invested in every detail of the kids' lives, but at other UWCs it's just independent young adults. It's just different. (Participant 8)

6.3.1.1. International Schools: Too Diverse to Belong?

What is missing from the literature as well as my study is an exploration of the experiences of belonging in international schools by all students. The literature on belonging is centred on fostering a sense of belonging to close achievement gaps between different populations of students. Factors which influence students from marginalised groups' sense of belonging are explored, but students from dominant groups are largely ignored. Given my finding that levels of belonging do not differ between National Committee and non-National Committee students, it would be interesting to investigate factors that influence all students'

experiences of belonging in international schools.

Typical of the literature, Zirkel (2004) found that feelings of belonging were a significant predictor of enjoyment of academic work and interest in pursuing academic goals among minority students but not white students. Similarly, Walton and Cohen (2007) found that an intervention designed to increase students' sense of belonging and "fit" on campus motivated African-American students to increase the amount of time they spent studying, improving their academic performance and graduation rates over time; yet again, no effect of the intervention was registered with white students. Noguera and Wing (2006) explain how this effect of belonging-based interventions may only be felt by minority students as while many prestigious high schools may be described as 'college preparatory', they may not seem to be 'college preparatory for me' to students from non-elite backgrounds —schools are rated and classed in ways that often make clear to students and families who they are 'for'. It would be interesting to explore if students at international schools felt that these schools were also not 'college preparatory for me'.

The literature suggests that belonging affects different populations in different ways. Curtin et al. (2012) examined sense of belonging among international and domestic graduate students in the United States and found that while a sense of belonging was related to academic self-concept among domestic students, there was no relationship between the two among international students. The authors explain this unexpected finding by linking the challenges related to being an international student around integration and acculturation (Ku et al., 2008) with the higher rates of graduation and faster rates of completion among international students when compared with domestic students (Council of

Graduate Schools, 2008). Ostrove et al. (2011) found that "the degree to which students felt that they belonged in graduate school positively affected their sense of academic self-concept or the degree to which they viewed themselves as competent and successful students" (p. 7). It would be interesting to explore if belonging is mediated by academic self-concept in international high schools as well.

If these low levels of belonging amongst the whole sample were not replicated in other international schools, it would speak to the unique context of UWCSEA. While built on the premise that everybody belongs in this 'UN-iversalist', ideological global space, perhaps in reality, nobody feels like they belong. The mission and values of UWCSEA make it depart culturally from even other international schools in its embrace of diversity, including through the globally colonial National Committee programme. This drive to foster diversity may have instead of creating a 3rd cultural space, created a no cultural space or a liminal space between cultures. Perhaps nobody feels like they belong at UWCSEA because it is an in-between space, not entirely existing in the codes and culture of Singapore or the global, capitalist elite, and thus removing its community members from their codes and cultures of their homes as well.

International schools being unable to provide a sense of belonging to their community members can be thought of as what Giddens (2002) calls the 'darker side of globalization', where although these forces of global convergence seem harmless and even a force for cultural progress as it increases countries' and cultures' mutual dependence on each other, they simultaneously drive inequality higher and exacerbate differences and tensions caused by long histories of racism, colonialization and exploitation. Bhatti (2006, p. 134) makes the point that these

forces of globalisation "while sweeping through the social fabric of the world, leaves it culturally a much poorer place", with those from developing nations remaining suspicious of the "civilized world". Perhaps those that do not conform perfectly to the globalist, universalist identity offered by these international schools are left questioning both their home identities and the relationship between their home culture and the dominant global culture of the school.

Some theorists argue that this optimistic view of international spaces inhabited by classes of transnational people with borderless identities "does not attend to the vastly different context of actual conditions of wandering, literal and figurative, the difficulty of movement for subjects and groups" (Kandiyoti, 2003, p. 5). People living in these international states of limbo, Kandiyoti argues, "struggle with the local in their journeys" (2003, p. 5). The role of belonging and educational contexts can be seen as a remedy for this state of flux through the lens of Stevenson's (2011) construct of cultural citizenship. Stevenson (2011, p. 19) suggests cultural citizenship is "not only concerned with formal processes, such as who is entitled to vote and the maintenance of an active civil society but also crucially with whose cultural practices are disrespected, marginalized, stereotyped and rendered invisible". Quoting Rosaldo (1999, p. 260), Stevenson argues that cultural citizenship "is concerned with 'who needs to be visible, to be heard, to belong'" (2011, p. 19).

While most of the research on belonging has centred around its use as a tool to enhance equality in academic outcomes and focused on the experiences of students from non-elite backgrounds, and rightly so, the experiences of students from elite backgrounds and their feelings of belonging is underrepresented in the literature and rarely systematically studied beyond as a point of contrast to point

out the inequities of the system (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Noguera & Wing, 2006). As Baker (2018, p. 37) suggests,

> The educational transformation of elites and elitism is a phenomenon ripe for future sociological investigation, and particularly given the global nature of the processes outlined here, a special emphasis should be placed on the growing internationalisation of education and elitism.

The literature cited above, which only engages with elite students' experiences of belonging as a control measure to contrast with students from non-elite backgrounds, suggests belonging measures do not change significantly when belonging-based interventions are introduced to elite populations of students. Belonging is a problematic concept when discussing elite students' academic motivations at school; there seems to be a lack of evidence supporting the strong, transformative role it can have on the academic achievement and psychological wellbeing of students from minority backgrounds (Zirkel, 2004; Walton & Cohen, 2007). I did not find an effect of belonging on students from elite backgrounds in my study either—belonging levels were low for all participants, both National Committee and non-National Committee students. If students are not looking to develop a sense of belonging at school, they must be having this fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) met through other social relationships and groupings, perhaps through the tight collectivist family ties of South-East Asian cultures. This hypothesis does find support in my research as students who identified South East Asia or Singapore ($M = 2.14$) as the place they call home reported the highest levels of belonging, compared to students who identified other regions of the world ($m = 1.99$). The calculated $t(155) = 2.037$ was significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level. It could be that students from South East Asia are finding psychological and social support within their family structures, or that

living in Singapore is causing them less cultural dissonance than students who call other regions of the world home. It would be interesting to investigate if these differences in belonging between students who consider different regions home were also found in other international schools.

Another place students may be turning to find a sense of belonging may be the boarding house. While outsiders may consider the boarding house part of the internal school structure, it was clear from participants in my study that there was a divide between the academic high school they attended during the day, and the boarding house they returned to each evening, both in terms of staff, peers and culture. Participant 1 expresses this divide between the boarding house and the academic day school and highlights the role of the boarding house in fostering belonging:

> I think one of the most groups that make me feel like I belong is like the boarding house because we have like house parents there and like boarding executives and they're like your parents when you're here, so I feel really close to them and they make everything easier for me. If it's a bad day at school or somebody is being mean or teasing me, when I get bad news I usually go and talk to my house parents or go and talk straight to the director, because I feel really comfortable talking to these people and I've had the bad news from home and so I had to go and talk directly with the director and she helped me solve it. They were very helpful. (Participant 1)

This notion that the boarding house is a source of belonging for students is also supported by my quantitative results. Boarding students reported a higher sense of belonging (m = 2.21) when compared to day students (m = 2.02) which was a significant difference with a calculated t(156) = -2.06 which was significant at the $p \leq .05$ level of significance. It would be interesting to investigate if these

findings of different rates of belonging between boarding and day students were found in other international schools with a boarding component.

Fostering a sense of belonging in international schools may be a more complex task than in state or independent schools due to the lack of cultural homogeneity (Hayden & Thompson, 1995). However, Druart (2015) has found that even in international school environments, students seek out other students with similar values and experiences to form connections with. Although the notion of what constitutes an international school is contested and in flux, they are almost always populated by a certain amount of third-culture kids (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) whose relationship with their home or parents' culture may be thwarted, and due to their highly transient nature, it can be an even more complex task to try to foster a sense of belonging amongst this group of young people (Hayden et al., 2000). While Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have outlined the many psychological, academic, and economic advantages being a third-culture kid brings, they also admit it is often accompanied by feelings of disconnection, rootlessness and a lack of belonging.

One of the very few studies which has looked at fostering a sense of belonging in international schools is a study by Dunleavy and Burke (2019) who examined the effectiveness of a classroom-based peer intervention administered during advisory (pastoral) lessons with 55 fourth and fifth-grade students at an international school in France. As in my study, the PSSM was used to measure changes in a sense of belonging. The students were tested before the intervention, immediately after and a month later to see if it was possible to foster a sense of belonging in this sample. The researchers found significant increases in belonging amongst the majority of students, suggesting it is possible to foster a sense of

belonging amongst students at an international school. From a research perspective, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study looking at the effects of belonging-based interventions in international schools and also to try to replicate these findings with students in their senior year in international schools. From a practitioner perspective, Dunleavy and Burke (2019) clearly show it is possible to increase a sense of belonging through administering a class-based intervention that can be facilitated by a teacher as part of a pastoral curriculum. Practitioners in international schools, particularly those with highly mobile student populations, may wish to consider the low levels of belonging found in my study, with the promising results of implementing a belonging-based intervention in Dunleavy and Burke's (2019) study and revise their pastoral curriculum to include activities and interventions designed to foster student connection and belonging early in the school year.

Another factor that was missing from both the literature and my results was the investigation of how the school community prepares for the arrival of National Committee students. Between the end of Grade 10 and the start of Grade 11, the student body adds 10% of its size with the arrival of National Committee students. So much time and effort is put into creating meaningful experiences for National Committee students when they arrive at UWCSEA, and the college and boarding house runs a wonderful orientation programme for National Committee students to help build a sense of community and belonging. However, there is no 'orientation' programme to prepare the rest of the community for the arrival of National Committee students. Enlarging a cohort's population by 10% with students from very diverse backgrounds can only disrupt a group's shared culture and identity; yet, minimal guidance or instruction is offered to existing members

of the UWCSEA community on how to deal with these newcomers, changing the fabric of the everyday life of the school. Perhaps in the future, some of that time and effort could be diverted to this aspect of the orientation experience.

6.3.1.2. Elite International Schools in Singapore

Elite international schools present contexts where global capitalist and geopolitical forces come crashing into contact with local customs, cultures and particularities. They are sites rich with contradictions and paradoxes and home to complex social realities that are rarely captured by traditional theoretical or conceptual frameworks that often hold up in more traditional or national educational systems. As I have found in the current study, elite international schools often produce unpredictable findings for both qualitative and quantitative researchers and offer up more questions than answers. What is needed in the future is a flexible and holistic approach to studying these unique institutions. One model is the constellation approach to ethnography, which, as Prosser (2014, p. 277) states, "advances the importance of positioning the topic—here, elite schools—within a context of modernity that criticises the teleological assumptions that dominate this period-cum-condition". By adopting a constellation approach to studying international schools, it should be possible to examine the range of influencing factors on these institutions and the staff and students who populate them.

Just as there is a debate in the literature about what constitutes an international school, there is a similar lack of consensus on how to define an elite school. Fahey et al. (2015, p. 3) understand elite schools as

> those which enjoy the greatest reputation and standing within their society due in part to their high academic standards and their provision

> of a well-resourced (from fees and benefactions), well-rounded education, which invariably leads students to tertiary studies at the world's elite universities, or the leading universities in their nation.

By this definition, it would be uncontroversial to class UWCSEA as an elite school in the Singaporean context. While elite schools are largely constructed to service those from elite backgrounds and ensure the social reproduction which benefits those from dominant social groups, research suggests they can also be a tool of social mobility for those admitted from non-elite backgrounds (Jones & Kavanagh, 2003).

Bourdieu's views on the role of scholarships to elite educational institutions seems particularly relevant to an analysis of National Committee students' experiences at UWCSEA. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that the controlled mobility of a limited number of individuals from non-dominant backgrounds into an elite class can help to perpetuate the status quo of the structure of class relations; they suggest this controlled mobility "entails assuming it possible to generalize to the whole class properties which sociologically can belong to certain members of the class only inasmuch as they remain reserved for a few, hence denied to the class as a whole" (p. 54).

The elites that dominate international schools like UWCSEA reproduce the globalist world order's social violences (Ayuero, 2007). Students from non-National Committee and elite backgrounds at UWCSEA are complicit in this societal reproduction, no matter how much the school's mission nods to social justice. However, Macdonald (2012) offers us hope by suggesting networks of socially-minded teachers and students have the potential to stand as a bulwark against the inevitable social reproduction and even change the course of outcomes

for individual students.

This transformative role of service to disrupt the cycle of social reproduction and empower students was present in my findings. A common theme in participants' responses around what made them feel like they belonged at their educational institution was participating in activities and services. Participants were very forward in acknowledging that the opportunities to join these groups was well beyond what was available in their home countries and helped them connect with like-minded peers and develop a sense of self-efficacy. Participant 1 expresses his experiences:

> I think the main thing that makes me feel like I belong here is the amount of activities and service that I get to do here and experience with people. In my home country, you don't do these activities, you don't do service, you don't do any arts. So for me the most important thing was to be involved in the most activities that you could possibly be involved in and every production and the service that I'm a part of. It really made me feel like I belong and that I can showcase what I can do, especially like through playing sports or performing or anything, when they were linked to service. Like playing sports and games with disabled children from a local school or doing my drumming service, yeah these service activities really do make me feel like I belong. (Participant 1)

The way we perceive these elite and international schools' role in society cannot be separated from their geopolitical context and "is guided by cultural, intellectual and personal interests" (MacDougall, 2006, p. 2). The same is true of UWCSEA and its relationship to its host nation of Singapore. It is worth considering the experiences described by my participants at UWCSEA with the history and geopolitical realities bearing down on the Singaporean nation state. In contrast to Bourdieu's France, Singapore as a field of power has been intentionally globalist since its independence from Malaysia in 1965. Becoming

enmeshed into the capitalist global marketplace and the world beyond its own borders became not only a priority, but a necessity for the government. As Kenway and Koh (2013, p. 275) state, "Singapore's 'field of power' is national, regional, global and highly mobile" and a large amount of transnational, powerful social capital calls Singapore home. Singapore's first foreign minister, Rajaratnam (1972, p. 8), boldly declared that Singapore would be a global powerhouse with "the world as its hinterland" well before the idea of a global city entered political, economic or academic discourses. With minimal land and natural resources, the Singaporean government relied on becoming a regional hub in Asia for the global capitalist system, and in many fields from logistics to finance to education, Singapore has been extremely strategic in establishing and maintaining global connections and integration (Koh, 2010).

Another feature of the Singaporean context is the imagined image of the ideal Singaporean citizen, put forward by the government to promote unity amongst Singaporeans from different ethnic and class backgrounds and promote Singaporean nationalism. The ideal Singaporean citizen may possess a globalist outlook in terms of maximizing their economic prosperity, but they are intensely loyal to Singapore and proud of their Singaporean identity. They are collectively minded, willing to be obedient and subjugate their own wishes for the national good. They are hard-working, respectful, grateful to the government and generations who have come before them and would never dream of challenging or even questioning the People's Action Party's right to power, authority and rule. Koh (2010) outlines this view and calls this the 'Singapore habitus'. Almost fifty years on from Rajaratnam's bold proclamation, Singapore has exceeded the expectations of global development experts to become a model of development

held up for other developing nations to emulate (Chua, 2011).

The history of UWCSEA is mirrored by the story of Singapore. First opened in 1971 by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew under the name of Singapore International School (SIS), the school was an associate member of the United World College movement. Singapore International School was established on the site of the original St. John's School, which was run by the British Families Educational Service, to support the children of British military personnel. When the British military withdrew from Singapore in 1971, and Singapore became more confident in its vision for an independent nation largely integrated into the globalist world order, the school sight was reopened as SIS and designed as a private, elite school for expatriate children. The school formally became the second member school of the UWC movement in 1975 after Atlantic College in Wales, changing its name to the United World College of South East Asia (UWC, 2020).

Although founded and still largely a school for expatriate children, UWCSEA shares many similar characteristics of local elite schools in Singapore and can be attended by Singaporean citizens with either a foreign parent or through special dispensation from the Ministry of Education. Singaporean children from these globally minded, middle and upper class families "whose parents are tertiary-educated English-speaking are undoubtedly at an advantage, with a head start in English-medium schools relative to children from non-English speaking, working class families" (Chua, 2007, p. 922). While the adoption of English as a national, unifying language during Singapore's founding made it possible for the middle and upper class realms of society to flourish, who already spoke English or had access to teaching and learning resources, it further isolated

citizens who did not have the time or resources to master this foreign tongue. This class distinction made between those who speak English fluently and those who do not is only further amplified by the cutthroat education system in Singapore and fierce competition for university places. Chua (2007) goes on to suggest English may be 'racially neutral', but is certainly not 'class neutral'. While heralded as a shining example of a multicultural society, Singapore is far from classless. There is a distinct pecking order, stratification and isolation amongst different groups in Singapore.

Even though the height of the British Empire's reach and power has long subsided, these elite schools, originally set up to serve the children of Britain's expatriate elite, have been able to maintain their elite reputation by adjusting to the times and tailoring their message to appeal to traditional and new upper class social groups (Fahey et al., 2015). MacDougall (1999, p. 17) describes these educational institutions as "inward-looking, ahistorical, conservative and self-perpetuating" but also goes on to illustrate that part of how these schools maintain this reputation is by being hothouses of educational innovation and dynamic learning communities at the forefront of new developments in educational practice.

This view resonated with participants in my study, who were deeply empathetic to the predicament their elite peers were in, needing to achieve nothing but high grades to enter the place reserved for them in the elite culture once they'd finished school. Participants also mentioned how tiring the catastrophizing of their elite peers over grades was, making each individual assessment seem like a life or death event. Participant 5 describes her experiences:

> Sometimes you tell them like ok 'it's your challenge not mine', but at the same times sometimes they ask you 'what did you get?' and you don't want to share your grade. Then you feel a bit uncomfortable and you feel a bit forced to share your grade even when you don't want. I told one of my classmates, 'If I tell you my grade, what is going to change in your life? Nothing is going to change, and if you wanna be the best in this class, and after school and after college, you're never going to be the best, you're going to face other people and there's always going to be people better than you.' And they were like 'oh yeah but I really want to know your grade because I want to know if I can get a 7 or not.' And they're always checking the mark scheme and this means I need to get this for a 7 and if I don't get it I will not get an IB and then I won't get a family and life will be over. (Participant 5)

There is a paradox within these elite schools built out of the remnants of the colonialism of the British empire, which use their colonial legacies and histories as one source of their claim to elitism, but also portray themselves as innovative, progressive environments that move with the times and lead the way for other schools to follow. Fahey et al. (2015) describe the schools in their study of elite schools in post-colonial environments, a group which UWCSEA could easily fit into, as drawing

> upon influences from both the community within which they are located and are subject to the forces of contemporary globalization that influence educational practices… [these schools] are acutely aware of their place as educational leaders in their own locality and the need to keep up-to-date with both curricular and pedagogical trends in order to maintain their reputations (p. 14).

Wacquant ('Foreword' in Bourdieu, 1996, p. 7) suggests that Bourdieu sees schools as "the state's most potent conduit and servant". In Singapore, evidence of this relationship between the education system and the state can be seen through the reliance of regular and high stakes testing and rigid streaming of

students from an early age. While primary school streaming was abolished in 2008, there is still fierce competition amongst parents to get their children into schools with excellent records of scores on the Primary School Leaving Examinations, which determine which track of secondary schooling students will be eligible to attend. Kenway and Koh (2013, p. 279) describe the effects of this system:

> This high stakes educational system has provoked intensive cramming and rote learning by students, the employment of private tutors by demanding and anxious parents and, overall, an education culture shot through with 'kiasuism'—a local colloquialism that captures the essence of the intensive competitive and the fear of losing out in the education race.

Evidence of these acts of symbolic violence hidden from view is found in Singapore's education system. Kenway and Koh (2013) found that the majority of Singaporean teachers they interviewed thought the selection processes were neutral and "appear to believe in their students' natural brilliance and point to the fast pace of their learning" (p. 282). whereas Bourdieu (1996) would suggest these students are getting selected for the elite secondary schools because of their "extraordinary concentration of symbolic capital". When this concentration of symbolic capital is coupled with a geographical spatial concentration, as happens in the confines of Singapore's small borders, Bourdieu (1996, p. 75) argues you also see "symbolic confinement", where a largely homogeneous group becomes more so and more separate from the larger society to the point where "symbolic capital increases with the degree of restriction and exclusivity of the group established. The monopoly … is converted into a nobility" (1996, p. 79). Bourdieu (1996, p. 103) suggests that

> The tag of gifted tends to produce a consecrated elite one that is not only distinctive and separate but also recognized by others and by itself as worthy of being so. Students are distinguished from the commonplace and come to know and feel that they are destined for greatness.

Parallels can clearly be seen between the elite Singaporean governmental high school that Kenway and Koh (2013) study and UWCSEA. Kenway and Koh (2013) describe the Singaporean elite school's view on winning: "winning is about much more than individual achievement, recognition and parental gratification; students must win for the school and its reputation, which in turn feeds each student's reputation. Constant competition is clearly the name of the game" (p. 284). In my study, the focus on achievement, results and winning permeated all participants' responses. Although a lot of this competitiveness comes through the student body and derives from parental pressures at home, participants also believe the school itself encouraged this competitive drive in certain aspects. Participant 5 told an anecdote where this pressure could be felt from the senior administration and it trickled down to all levels:

> The school cares about the other experiences you can have at UWC, but sometimes I feel like this school just wants to be really really competitive and really wants to win at everything. The head of campus had an assembly and there is this Harvard project on the impact that UWC is having on everyone and our UWCSEA was the worst one. Compared to all the other UWCs we got the worst scores for believing the UWC values. He came to this assembly and he said 'people you should go, you should participate to this school, we should change this.' But I feel like in a bit he's kind of angry we're kind of like not the top one but one of the worst ones so is he telling us to participate more because he wants to be the best and the top, or because he believes in the UWC mission? (Participant 5)

This focus on competition and winning for winning's sake is defined by

Bourdieu (1996, p. 110) as "an academic struggle for one's life" and that once achieved, "proves one's self control and stands as proof of one's right to control others". As is evidenced in my study and many others of elite educational institutions, this focus on competition and winning leads all community members to tie elements of their identity to winning and invest heavily in ensuring the winning continues.

Bourdieu's (1996) Grandes Ecoles share many features with UWCSEA, including the appeal of finding a community of like-minded people to live and grow with. Bourdieu (1996, p. 182) describes a "social paradise" when students are provided with an environment where everyone shares the same habitus and is able to recognise themselves in each other, leading to a virtuous circle of reinforcing and confirming one's values, identity and confidence. This rings true of what the participants in my study are seeking, but struggling to find, from their UWCSEA experience. Participant 8 describes their disappointment of not finding their social paradise at UWCSEA:

> I came here to meet new people and learn new things. This is an experience for me, not just a school. I came here to change the world or at least have a positive impact on it, not to memorise a bunch of stuff for exams. I wanted a community. A group of people to share with and work together with towards the same goal. And what I found when I got here was a bunch of people with a very different goal and outlook to me. It's really not what I expected or hoped for. (Participant 8).

The role of belonging in contributing to this virtuous circle of identity construction is outlined by Miller (2003) as the process of creating a self-identity within one's material, relational and social surroundings, or as suggested by Leach (2002, p. 287), belonging is the act "of recognising—or misrecognising—

the self in others". When we move away from the traditional view of belonging in terms of a "powerful, fundamental and extremely pervasive motivation" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497) and instead focus on how it helps us understand the role of self in relation to others, the power of belonging, or a lack thereof, as outlined by Participant 8 above, can be seen. As Weeks (1990, p. 88) suggests, "Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others".

Felski (2002) encourages us to view a sense of belonging as the ability to go about our everyday lives without second-guessing our actions or conscious thought. It is only when we experience a lack of belonging that our attention is drawn to how our expectations of what our everyday reality should look like are not being met. When our preferred ways of being and doing do not match up to our actual social reality, it leaves us feeling uneasy. There are connections between the psychological construct of belonging and Bourdieu's habitus. Bourdieu (1979, p. 171) writes of how when we are in a particular social field which fits our habitus, it feels natural and we are not consciously aware of our habitus as long as we stay within that given social field. However, the concept of belonging extends Bourdieu's habitus as it allows us to explain how people within a familiar social field, even if they possess the native habitus, can feel like they don't belong. May (2011, p. 370) argues that

> belonging is an intersubjective experience that necessarily involves other people. We make claims for belonging which others either reject or accept, and therefore, mere familiarity with a place, a group of people or a culture is not enough for us to gain a sense of belonging.

Belonging allows us to not only examine the role of the environment and the self in this discussion, but the role of other people in the environment as well.

While Bourdieu's (1996) theory of elite schools helps illuminate aspects of the UWCSEA context, it is not without its limitations. UWCSEA challenges Bourdieu by existing not only in such a globally-minded nation as Singapore but even within Singapore, UWCSEA exists in a third cultural space of an international school largely populated by a transnational global elite, whose symbolic capital extends beyond any national field of power. Kenway and Koh (2013) also note these shortcomings in their analysis of an elite government school in Singapore when they state

> the case of Singapore allows us to see what Bourdieu did not do. He did not conceive of fields that extend beyond the nation state or capitals with exchange value around the world. He did not see that elite schools could draw their prestige from the global hinterlands of a nation state as well as from the national field of power. (p. 287)

Third cultural spaces like UWCSEA and transnational communities which largely inhabit global cities like Singapore raise issues of the possible negative consequences of failing to establish a sense of identity bound to place. Casey (1993, x) has outlined "placepanic" where "we confront the imminent possibility of there being no place to be or to go… [and experience] a sense of unbearable emptiness". While these feelings of disorientation, homesickness and desolation were originally theorised in regards to those experiencing displacement, Casey (1993, p. 307) suggests that all of us in today's "speed-bound era" will experience some form of "place alienation" in regards to our locality, city, culture, nation or the world and it may leave us feeling alienated from our sense of self.

However, a lack of belonging need not always be experienced as a bad thing: Elias (2001) has pointed out how there is a tension between our psychological need to feel similar to others and belong in an in-group while at the

same time amplifying our unique characteristics that make us stand out from the group. Some people, including the National Committee participants in my study, actively seek out a sense of not belonging by traveling to new places. Bottero (2010, p. 8) suggests this deliberate lack of belonging can be productive, as it is when our enculturated habitus is disrupted that reflexivity is awakened in a process similar to Lefebvre's (2002) 'moments' that sever the flow of everyday experiences and make us take notice of the mundane aspects of existence and surroundings, allowing us to see, according to McCracken (2002, p. 151) "what could be" rather than just "what is". As May (2011, p. 373) writes, "Not belonging does not in other words have to have purely negative consequences, just as belonging is not necessarily a positive thing or an ideal state."

6.3.1.3. Lessons from the Experiences of Unaccompanied Minors

As there is a dearth in the literature looking at belonging amongst students from non-elite backgrounds in international schools, a useful tangential field might be that of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. Both the National Committee students in my study and unaccompanied minors seeking asylum have left behind the safety and security of their homelands and family members in search of better opportunities while making the transition from childhood to adulthood and negotiating their identities. While there are clearly differences in these two groups' circumstances, such as whether the journey is forced or chosen, it provides ample evidence to better understand my participants' perspectives.

Literature on unaccompanied minors reminds us that adolescence and identity are socially constructed and constantly changing within dynamic cultural systems (Alanen, 2015). They are subjected to the influence of multiple social identities, all impacting young people's ability to belong. This body of literature

suggests that when young people leave their homes and their families behind, and are subjected to different social norms based on their gender, age or ethnicity, belonging becomes particularly important to young people's ability to thrive in their new homelands (Wernesjö, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Kaukko, 2015). Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017, p. 11) suggest: "Denied claims of belonging and the lack of recognition of participation have been connected to social exclusion as well as individual and societal problems among asylum-seeking children." It would be interesting to investigate if similar outcomes of low levels of belonging were found in international schools.

Ogbu (1978) discusses migrants' understandings of citizenship, rights and obligations to both the country that migrants have left and the host country of residence. He discusses the strong impact of nostalgia for the homeland whether it has been left voluntarily or involuntarily, in both real and symbolic senses. When this strong influence of the backwards looking pull of nostalgia are combined with the culturally destructive and constructive forces of education, Ball et al. (2013) suggest education can be such a powerful force in identity formation that schools can be the sites where new futures are formed while others are torn down. This was certainly evident in participants' responses in the current study. For example, Participant 4 expresses their frustration at not being their ideal self at UWCSEA and how that impacts their sense of belonging. Participant 4 expressed their feelings of self-criticism:

> Back home I was way more confident and emotionally stable and I was working much harder and much harder than here because I had inner motivation, which I'm lacking right now. And here my houseparent literally told me yesterday that I look miserable all of the time and of course he's joking some time but he has some point. Yes here I'm not,

> I'm all the things I don't like about myself. What makes it worse is that life is so good here. I have people. That's the thing, I am really happy and I appreciate my friends here. I meet with some really amazing people. What could you miss because I'm ok in school and I have a good social life. But still something is missing, I still don't feel like this is the place for me. I don't feel like I am the version of me I want to be in this place. Something is just not right. (Participant 4)

While conducting large-scale questionnaires to collect quantitative data remains the de facto method for conducting research on belonging in schools, my study has suggested that qualitative research, such as interviews can offer insights often missed by more blunt tools of measurement. Qualitative research methods allow students' experiences to rise to the surface and allow researchers to investigate the what, why and how of belonging and should be combined with quantitative research methods where possible to provide a more holistic picture of belonging in schools.

Future research should also investigate if other groups of students also experience belonging in similar ways as the National Committee students in my study. It would be interesting to conduct similar studies in other UWCs and other international schools as well. It would also be interesting to dig deeper into students' understandings of what it means to belong. Research could interrogate to what or to whom students feel like they belong, and why this is the case.

From a place perspective, it would be interesting to investigate which physical aspects of schools are more likely to enhance students' feelings of belonging. This would be helpful for school architects and school decision makers when thinking about the use of space around campus. Particularly when combined with research investigating relational aspects of belonging. Understanding belonging as a multidimensional and dynamic process that is unique to each

individual students is the first step.

6.3.2. Research Practice Gap

Recently, PISA data has found that amongst 224,058 15-year old students in 8354 schools in 42 countries, school disaffection was reported at levels from 17% to 42% (Wilms, 2003). Across the entire sample, a quarter of students were considered as having low levels of belongingness and about one in five reported low levels of academic engagement. Given these low levels, it is surprising that today school belonging is still given so little attention by educators when compared to academic performance (Allen & Bowles, 2013). While research into a sense of belonging at school has increased in recent decades, there still appears to be a lack of translation of this research into practice in schools. Jetten et al. (2012) believe this is because educators, school administrators and the wider public still focus on academic achievement at the expense of social relationships, psychological safety and wellbeing. They also suggest that schools and society more generally have favoured technological or medical interventions in the field of student wellbeing and connectedness rather than more psychological or humanistic approaches due to the lack of supported and well documented pedagogical interventions to foster belonging. There still exists a lack of clear guidelines or best practices for fostering a sense of belonging amongst students. Research is siloed and often only addresses a fraction of the belonging puzzle. There has been minimal integrative work looking to combine proposed interventions that foster belonging into an accessible framework and roadmap. Fostering a sense of belonging in schools is complex and dynamic work that requires effort and synchronicity from individuals, teams and institutions that are often used to working independently. Schools and individuals have limited

psychological and chronological resources available and with no clear guide of how to most effectively use their time and energy to foster belonging, it can be easier to do nothing, or leave this work to someone else, some other team, or some other level of the school infrastructure.

Belonging is such a complex construct that it can be difficult for schools and educators to know where to start. The literature on school belonging is dense and often not practitioner friendly. A notable exception to this is Allen and Kern's *Boosting School Belonging* (2020), which offered practical advice and strategies for teachers and schools to help adolescents feel like they belong at school. The book offers digestible summaries of research followed by practical strategies and interventions that can be implemented quickly and easily to have a positive effect on belonging. The recency of the publication date suggests the lack of practical resources in this field up until very recently. This book would be a great addition to any school professional development library and useful for educators looking to add to their tool kit of strategies to boost belonging.

The ERMB suggests that it is the lack of congruence between my National Committee student participants' expectations of their time at UWCSEA and their experiences that caused such low levels of belonging. It would be interesting for future research to investigate how students' address this lack of fit and what action they take to resolve this cognitive dissonance. It would also be interesting to investigate what actions schools take to address this misalignment of student expectations and school realities. Would students be motivated to remake or reposition themselves to better align with their school environment, or would they be motivated to tackle institutional change and try to remake the places they inhabit to more closely align with the values they wish to see?

If schools wish to enable students to develop a sense of belonging it would be helpful to keep in mind it is students' expectations and individual perception of reality which matters more than any programme or feature. Belonging is an individualised process and will mean different things for different students. To support students developing a sense of belonging, schools may wish to offer combinations of peer-support structures, socio-emotional counselling, tailored and individualized advisory programmes, forms of mentorship and career or post-schooling advising. These programmes may not only help students in a relational sense, but also help them navigate the place-based aspects of school life as well.

6.3.3. Conclusion

What has become apparent from this study is that belonging is complex and multidimensional and is "something that is experienced by individuals in diverse and multiple ways (Stratigos et al., 2014, p. 177). Belonging becomes even more complex when studied in an international school setting. Perhaps it makes more sense to talk of belongings rather than belonging, with students looking to different groups to fulfil this fundamental psychological need.

One assumption that this study rests upon is that a sense of belonging is something to strive for and a positive psychological force in individuals lives yet this fundamental assumption may be at odds with our Western education system and individualist societies at large. We are constantly encouraging students to embrace their own uniqueness and strive beyond the norm. Elias (2001) has written about this tension many of us feel between wanting to be a unique individual and wanting to fit in with the group and be similar to others. Many of us find this tension productive. It causes us to expand our horizons, to travel, to

challenge our assumptions and seek out new perspectives, much like the National Committee student participants in my study had. It stands to reason then that the lack of a sense of belonging might not always be a bad thing. Not belonging helps us crystallise our own values, beliefs and identities and figure out what is most important to us. As Bottero (2010) argues, it is when our dispositional habitus is disrupted that reflexivity is awakened. When we feel like we do not belong, McCracken (2002, p. 151) suggests we are able to see "what could be" instead of just "what is".

The history of social movements is littered with examples of where a lack of belonging led to the development of social change. By conjuring other possible paths or ways of being into one's consciousness, it becomes apparent that the status quo need not be the only possible path or in place indefinitely. Morris (1986) suggests that along with other factors an intense lack of belonging catalysed the Civil Rights movement in the US, Probyn (1996) has documented how Quebecois experienced a lack of belonging within mainstream Canadian society, and Stychin (1997) has suggested that not belonging to the dominant identity of heterosexuality led to the development of 'deep diversity' amongst the queer community. Similarly Hayes and Skatterbol (2015) talk of the power of unbelonging as an act of resistance in educational settings if those educational settings encourage beliefs and practices of homophobic, misogynistic or racist groups.

Halse (2018) points out that to seek out a sense of belonging for belongings sake is also unproductive, arguing we need:

> 'to be wary of valourising or being reductive about belonging. Not all forms of belonging are personally beneficial, socially sanctioned or a "good"

> thing. Belonging to a gang of criminals or terrorists, for example, may give young people formal membership to a group and an emotional sense of attachment and 'being at home' but such belongings are socially undesirable as well as potentially personally damaging. (Halse, 2018, p. 17).

The literature establishing belonging as a fundamental human need is abundant and well established (Maslow, 1970; Baumeister & Learly, 1995; Ferguson & Strong, 2010). The current study's results do not question this canon of research. However, they do point to the fact that this population of students, children of the new global middle and upper classes in international schools, may be having their belonging needs met elsewhere. In summarising Adler's theory of individual psychology, Ferguson (1989) outlines how Adler thought it vital for an individual's psychological health that a sense of belonging was felt and reciprocated by significant groups in that individual's life. Perhaps the low levels of school belonging found in the current study suggest participants just do not see the school community as a significant group in their lives. Many of these participants will have strong family, religious, national and cultural ties that may be satisfying their belonging needs, freeing up the educational space to be viewed through a more transactional lens.

Future researchers may wish to explore the benefits of not belonging, or at least creating pockets of identity challenge or disruptions to the habitus to encourage students to question their worldviews and priorities. It would also be interesting to investigate if any of these positive aspects of not belonging are present in international schools and what effect they are having on students. It would be interesting to investigate if these low levels of belonging are found in international schools because students simply do not value a feeling of belonging,

so are placing their time and energies in other areas.

There has been minimal research into the children of the emerging class of the global elite who are not particularly tied to any one nation state, but rather move around or attach their identity to different nation states opportunistically, making the most of international laws, legislation and loopholes with a focus on consolidating symbolic capital, power and profit in the global economy (Sklair, 2002). Many of the global elite families who send their children to UWCSEA in Singapore are the perfect example of this. It would be interesting to study the long-term effects of growing up privileged yet rootless, as these students are.

If these students at this elite international school in Singapore are not turning to their school for a sense of belonging, and this need is being fulfilled through their families, boarding house relationships or cultural familiarity with the host nation, then it raises the question of what these students are looking for out of their school experiences? Could it be that students and their families are comfortable with the symbolic exchange value of attending one of these elite educational institutions? Perhaps these students see attending elite institutions like UWCSEA as a means to an end, a stepping-stone on the road to acquiring more symbolic capital and taking their place at the table of the global elite. Williams and Filippakou (2010, p. 5) define symbolic capital

> through its function of mediating power through prestige, and can be associated with economic, social or cultural capital. Symbolic capital can give value and recognition to all the other forms of capital… But two generations attending Oxford or Cambridge could often do the trick.

For the administrators who run these elite international schools, the teachers who staff them and the researchers who study them who largely come

from a traditional Western elite background, symbolic capital has always existed and been in abundance, leading us to try to impregnate our classrooms and education systems with more psychological meaning and function beyond the traditional Marxist view of exchange. However, perhaps for this new class of emerging global elites, who are getting these needs met elsewhere, all they seek from their educational experiences is the opportunity to cement their place at the top of the global social hierarchy.

My study offers a contribution to the field of research in international schools and to conceptualisations of belonging. In particular, the ERMB that developed from this study informs and extends existing theoretical frameworks of belonging and reimagines belonging as a process instead of a desirable state. While more traditional notions of belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Allen & Kern, 2017) are helpful to researchers and practitioners, they are reductionist and tend to miss some key features of belonging. By including the cognitive element of the congruence or incongruence between students' expectations of their school experience, and the reality of their school experience, the ERMB places students and their experiences at the heart of the model, in line with standpoint theory (Harding, 2004) and an advisable place for educators to begin when considering belonging in schools. If educators make efforts to understand how individual factors such as students' personality, culture, physical appearance, motivations, interests values and goals interact with the reality of the environment they are in, they will be better equipped to understand student experiences of belonging.

Students' expectations of the educational experience must be considered and are the lens through which their educational journeys are perceived. Student

expectations of their educational experiences then come into contact with the reality of the school experience, both in terms of relational and place based factors. How students experience these relational and place-based factors, and whether or not these experiences align with their expectations of their schools, drives their sense of belonging at school. Students will feel a sense of belonging at school when there is congruence between their goals and values and the school's, and students experience unconditional respect and social connection at school. In contrast if there is incongruence between what a student is expecting from their school experience and the reality of their school life, they will experience a lack of belonging. If students experience a sense of belonging at school, this will in turn cause them to develop as individuals, build stronger relationships and influence their experience of place, causing students' individual factors to be reappraised and constantly adjusted. This in turn will impact their expectations and will have a flow on impact throughout the model. This notion of belonging as a dynamic process acknowledges the agentic role students play in their educational experiences. The ERMB conceptualises belonging as a process rather than a static state of being. By influencing one component of the model in a positive way that drives belonging, students can experience higher rates of belonging.

If researchers and practitioners adopt my model of belonging which accounts for a layered and inherently mutable sense of belonging, it might allow researchers to look beyond their epistemological assumptions about individual factors that are either fixed precursors to belonging or products of belonging and allow educators to look for more nuanced and differentiated levers to pull to increase belonging. Another advantage of adopting my model of belonging for

educators is the assumption of student agency and students' role in their own experiences and production of a sense of belonging. In line with Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggest that empowering students to have a sense of their own autonomy and their efficacy to affect their world will only help reinforce their sense of relatedness and belonging. The ERMB is built on Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the work that underpins it around student agency (Scott & Marshall, 1998), student self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001) and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The ERMB suggests that students must feel like they have agency to affect change over their sense of belonging for them to gain or improve any feelings of belonging to their educational institution. If students feel powerless to affect change in their sense of belonging, they may develop learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976) and stop trying to belong, resulting in lower levels of belonging.

The majority of research conducted on belonging in schools is institution centric, focusing on policies, procedures and practices that can support or encourage belonging at a whole school level (Kuh et al., 2006; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). The ERMB hopes to address this shortcoming by placing the student and their experiences and expectations at the foundation of my model, reminding researchers and practitioners of students' agency in how they navigate their educational lives.

I hope that in the future the ERMB will be used as a tool to target areas where belonging can be boosted, for individual students, for groups or even whole school contexts as well as a diagnostic tool to investigate where the process of belonging has broken down. A majority of the belonging literature looks at ways of boosting belonging for belonging's sake (Dunleavy & Burke, 2019; Walton &

Cohen, 2007; Tinto, 1993; Hausmann et al., 2009). However, by acknowledging students' expectations, the ERMB suggests there is no need to boost school belonging to artificially high levels, if like in my study, students are not seeking belonging from school, but have other priorities instead.

In international schools, where culture is a complex construct. Students come from a range of different cultures, live in a host culture and inhabit a 'third cultural' space (Pollock et al., 2010). It may be that these students, including the participants in my study come from more collectivist cultures and are having their belonging needs met outside the classroom through strong family and community ties and are therefore not seeking high levels of belonging from their school experience (Hofstede, 1986). Instead they are focused either on living out the mission and ideals of the UWC movement, or on their academic journeys and getting to the universities they aspire to. If this is the case, schools and researchers who focus their efforts on boosting school belonging are engaging in a romantic fiction, taking action and intervening more to feel and/or look like they are doing something, rather than focusing on what students are crying out for from their schools.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the field by centring students' experiences of belonging rather than by using nomothetic whole school measures. By using qualitative interviews, this study has unearthed some of the experiences and processes of belonging that large-scale questionnaire data tends to overlook. Instead of blanket policies which look to boost belonging at a school-wide level, school resources could be focused on intervening when students seem at risk of not belonging and meeting students' other priorities. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but it represents a break from the traditions in the literature

and may be more appropriate to the international school context. Rather than focusing on the aspects of Allen and Kern's (2017) model and the levers of belonging that are easily operationalized by school administrators and teachers, the focus of the ERMB is on individual student experiences and how their expectations align with the realities of school. Differentiation and individualised learning have been staples of pedagogical training for decades now and it is time we applied these notions of individualisation to students' sense of belonging at school. If we accept that not all students learn in the same way, why do we assume all students need the same things to feel a sense of belonging at school?

The idea that there are many young people in international schools who feel like they do not belong is an uncomfortable one. We live in a complex and interconnected world where notions of identity and belonging are constantly shifting and renegotiated. To retreat to the fixed view of the world as 'us' vs 'them' and work for everyone to feel like they have a specific geographical place to belong is to perhaps miss the point of this research. Perhaps what this research signposts is the need to move beyond the traditional essentializing view of identity and see students in these international schools as the complex, multifaceted individuals they are, with multiple, often competing, identities whose main commonality is their possession of a unique story. We need to centre these students' voices in educational research to understand their feelings of belonging in international schools, even if these voices contrast with current trends in the body of literature. Only by beginning with students' own experiences of belonging in international schools and amplifying their voices will we be able to help educators respond to them with empathy and activism. There is so much to be learned from this population of students at international schools, and no more

time to waste.

The answer to the research question, ‘How do National Committee students experience belonging at UWCSEA?’ is, complex. Each participant offered their own ‘belonging profile’ and while there were commonalities in their stories, they were really looking for different things to help them feel a sense of belonging and spoke of different inhibitors which prevented them from feeling like they belong. What is needed is an individualised model of belonging like the suggested ERMB, where schools and educators can use different tools to foster a sense of belonging amongst different students, depending on their need. This is especially important in heterogeneous international environments and with students from non-majority backgrounds.

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Appendices

Appendix A—The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993)

Table 1
The Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale

1.	I feel like a real part of (name of school).
2.	People here notice when I'm good at something.
3.	It is hard for people like me to be accepted here. (*reversed*)
4.	Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.
5.	Most teachers at (name of school) are interested in me.
6.	Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here. (*reversed*)
7.	There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.
8.	People at this school are friendly to me.
9.	Teachers here are not interested in people like me. (*reversed*)
10.	I am included in lots of activities at (name of school).
11.	I am treated with as much respect as other students.
12.	I feel very different from most other students here. (*reversed*)
13.	I can really be myself at this school.
14.	The teachers here respect me.
15.	People here know I can do good work.
16.	I wish I were in a different school. (*reversed*)
17.	I feel proud of belonging to (name of school).
18.	Other students here like me the way I am.

Appendix B—Qualitative Interview Guide

- Do you feel like you belong here at UWC?
- What makes you feel like you belong here (or don't belong here) at UWC? Can you give me an example?
- Where else do you belong, what makes you feel like you belong there?
- Do you enjoy being here at UWC?
- Do people here celebrate your successes? Can you give me an example?
- If new students like you were thinking about coming here, would you recommend they come? Do you think they'd be accepted here? Why or why not?
- Do you think teachers at UWC are interested in you as a person? What makes you think this?
- Do you feel like there is at least one adult at UWC in which you have a trusting relationship, meaning you can be your true self and reach out to if you ever feel in trouble? What makes this relationship special to you?
- Are other students nice to you here? Can you give me an example?
- How are you involved in school life? What does your typical day look like? What about your whole week?
- Are you treated differently here compared to the other students? Can you give me an example?
- Do you feel like you can be your real self here? What factors make you feel this way?
- Do people here respect you? How do you know?
- Do people here know what you are capable of? How do you know they know?
- Are you proud to be a member of this school? What are you proud of?
- What else could UWC do to make you feel like you belong here?
- Do you believe in the mission of UWC?
- In an absolute sense, that is, not in comparison to anyone else, would you consider yourself a model 'UWC student'?
- In a year's time, when you leave UWC successfully, what does this success look like for you?
- How is this similar or different from how UWC defines what a successful student is?
- Do you feel valued at UWC? Can you give me an example?
- Do you feel like you are carrying the weight of all members of X group at UWC?
- Do you think this school is set up to help you learn in the ways you like to learn?
- Do you think that teachers and learners at this school have a shared language, understandings of roles, responsibilities and ways of the world, or is there a divide between the students and teachers?
- Do you believe one group of students is dominant at this school? If so, are people who are not part of this group alienated and disempowered?
- This study is about people from different backgrounds and their feelings of belonging in an international school. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about related to this topic?