



Team Belonging: Bradley Hotson, Lucas Flood, Remy Yan, Ethan Simopoulos, Ilios Lagopoulos

What was your RESEARCH QUESTION? (15-25 words)

How can teenage boys increase a sense of belonging in others by identifying the factors/gestures that build a culture of belonging at school?

What led you to this AREA OF STUDY? (100 words)

(e.g. the history - what had you noticed, worried about, hoped to try, wondered..)

We noticed that Crescent was a relatively tight-knit community. However, many students have turned to chirping to gain acceptance and join a friend group. We felt like that didn't align with Crescent's core values and that there must have been a better way. Our first thought was kind gestures that build each other up, which we define as small and simple acts of kindness. This led us to research these kinds of gestures that are more conducive to belonging and other factors that can improve students' sense of belonging.

What does RESEARCH TELL US about this topic? (300 words)

(a short synopsis of at least THREE readings, APA formatting.)

Why Students Need to Feel a Sense of Belonging and How to Create it, written by Sarah Whedon explains to us the importance of greetings, why we need to value celebration, the value of gestures, and why it is so important to be authentic. This article played a key role in our formation of our questions for our survey. *How to Cultivate a Sense of Belonging in Schools*, written by Michael Ralph showcased how important belonging is to a person's life. It affects our mental and physical health, along with our academics. This article showed us the importance of co-curriculars, which ended up being a major part of our research. *Boyhood and Belonging*, written by Michael Ward and Thomas Thurnell-Read showed us the difficulties boys face while trying to achieve a sense of belonging. It talked about how men specifically have difficulty fitting in due to the nature of masculinity. It highlights the lack of male role models, and how this has led to many concerns with young men such as high suicide rates.

References

Ph.D, S. W. (2023). *Why Students Need to Feel a Sense of Belonging and How To Create It: A Comprehensive Guide*. www.panoramaed.com.

<https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/student-sense-of-belonging>

Ralph, M. (2022, December 6). *How to Cultivate a Sense of Belonging in Schools*. Edutopia.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/importance-belonging-in-schools>

Ward, M. R. M., & Thurnell-Read, T. (2019). Boyhood and Belonging. *Boyhood Studies*, 12(2), 1–10.

<https://doi.org/10.3167/bhs.2019.120201>

METHODS: How did we investigate my question? (200 words)
(brief narrative description of your action/procedures. Include who your participants are and how you collected data. How did you ensure anonymity for participants in your reporting? How did you obtain permission? (to participate, interview, take photos, videos)

After conducting our literature review, we conducted a survey and a focus group of our own. Our survey was sent out to all students in grade 10 at Crescent. We made sure that this survey was anonymous, and did not collect any data about the respondents of our survey. The questions we made were related to our research question, and were mostly about gestures, and the other factors that can impact students' sense of belonging. In total we asked nine questions, eight of which being pretty simple and checkbox style, and one of them being an open ended question for students to talk about their personal experiences and what has improved their sense of belonging. We had 36 students respond to the survey, and this gave us a lot of great data.

We then conducted a focus group, with 12 students, using questions that we formed based off of our data we gathered from the survey. This survey was audio-recorded and we then transcribed it, with no names of course to keep the participants anonymous. We also made sure to let the participants know they were being recorded, and they were able to opt out if they didn't feel comfortable. Because we had more time and better ability to go into detail, we asked the participants some more in depth questions which gave us some really great data that we just couldn't get from our survey.

What did we discover? (400 words)
(FINDINGS - through analysis, 3 main takeaways)

After conducting our research, we came away with three main takeaways.

The first was that kind gestures are more conducive to belonging than rude chirps or teasing. This correlates to our preconception about the result of kind gestures. When we asked about what gestures specifically improve a students' sense of belonging, some of the common answers were greeting them, including them in a group chat, complimenting them, and even including them in a social event outside of school. They said that if you are close to someone, the chirps don't really have much of an effect, but if you don't it can cause people to feel negatively about themselves, which would have an impact on their sense of belonging.

The second takeaway was that co-curriculars have a great impact on students' ability to make new friends and feel accepted. In the Upper School, teams and clubs span across grades, which allows students to make connections to kids that are older than them. These older peers allow the younger students to receive advice, and they can create a close bond with one another. This is especially important for new grade nine students who are looking to find their place. Being a part of a team or

clubs allows them to make bonds over common interests, which can lead to more meaningful relationships throughout students' journey through the upper school. The third takeaway was that dominant cliques can cause students to be afraid of being their true selves, which in turn lowers their sense of belonging. We also found that the way that many students try to join these dominant cliques is by using chirping and teasing to gain approval from those in the clique. This is why their impact is so massive on how students behave at school.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN (400 words)

(implications for future practice and study, including intent to track impact next year)

After reviewing our research, we have created three key recommendations based off of our three main takeaways.

The first is the implementation of kind gestures. We will post our list of gestures around the halls, so that students who are struggling with finding their sense of belonging can have some help on knowing what to do. We will also encourage teachers to lead by example, treating everyone with respect and in a way that they would like to be treated. We understand that implementing gestures like these is something that could be quite hard to do, but we will try our best to lead by example by using them and hopefully it catches on and we can build a more tight knit community at school.

The second key recommendation we have is for teachers. We found three things that teachers can do that will improve the overall sense of belonging in their classroom.

- The first is group activities. This could be a game at the beginning of class, debates, or even quick breaks where students can socialize with each other.
- The second is implementing a seating chart. We recommend that teachers spend the first two weeks of classes recognizing the groups/cliques that start to form, and then implementing the seating chart after they have done this. The seating charts aren't just to separate these cliques though. Many of the participants in our focus group agreed that seating charts are beneficial for new students who are trying to fit in, as they can create connections that they might not have naturally made.
- The last thing teachers can do is assign group projects. Group projects make connection between students necessary, and similar to seating charts, allow for connections that wouldn't normally be made, to be made.

Our final recommendation is for students. We want to encourage all students to join all the co-curriculars that they are interested in, as it has been shown in our data that these greatly improve students' sense of belonging. These co-curriculars are so important because students can bond over common interests, and working together to achieve a common goal like winning a championship or competition has shown to build relationships. Students should join co-curriculars that they are genuinely interested in, and willing to put their best effort into.