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# Choosing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

Transnational Students creating Social Differentiation through  
School Choice in the Swedish Education Market

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## **Abstract**

It is estimated that by 2025 there will be approximately 8.26 million students enrolled in over 15,000 international schools globally. This increased expansion of international schooling cannot be disconnected from a process of globalisation where neoliberal policies have influenced the growth of education markets. International schooling arrives as a welcomed option to students and families looking for alternatives to national programmes which are perceived to be rigid and unchanging in a new globalised economy. With enrolment rates increasing over twenty percent in the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East regions, the International Baccalaureate Organisation is perhaps the fastest growing educational group offering international schooling around the globe.

In this qualitative comparative case study, fourteen students enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) across four schools were asked about their experiences in the process of school choice in the Swedish education market. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore student's motivations and strategies in choosing the IBDP over national programmes. Utilising a grounded theory methodology linked with Bourdieu's theories on symbolic capital, the study attempts to understand student's choice behaviours. Findings revealed that regardless of social or educational background, students share similar motivations and strategies for choice making. Further analysis demonstrated that a collective perception of the IB alongside similar ideals of self-identity and class influence and legitimise their choice behaviours. The implication of these findings demonstrate that choice behaviours in the Swedish education market work to establish a degree of social reproduction and differentiation.

Keywords: Bourdieu, International Baccalaureate, school choice, Sweden, symbolic capital

## **Sammanfattning**

Det beräknas att år 2025 kommer cirka 8,26 miljoner elever att gå i över 15 000 internationella skolor globalt. Denna ökade expansion av internationell skolgång kan inte separeras från en globaliseringsprocess där neoliberal politik har påverkat tillväxten på skolmarknaden. Internationell skolgång framstår som ett möjlighet för studenter och familjer som söker alternativ till nationella program, som uppfattas vara oföränderliga i en ny globaliserad ekonomi. När antalet inskrivna ökar med över tjugo procent i Amerika, Asien och Stilla-havs-området, Afrika, Europa och Mellanöstern, är Internationella Baccalaureatorganisationen kanske den snabbast växande utbildningsgruppen som erbjuder internationell skolgång runt om i världen.

I denna kvalitativa jämförande fallstudie utfrågades fjorton elever i IB-programmet (Internationella Baccalaureat, IBDP) vid fyra skolor om sina erfarenheter av skolvalet på den svenska gymnasieskolmarknaden. Semi-strukturerade intervjuer användes för att undersöka studenternas strategier och motivation för att välja IBDP framför nationella program. Med hjälp av metod byggd på grundad teori (grounded theory), kopplad till Bourdieus begrepp symboliskt kapital försöker studien förstå elevernas strategier vid gymnasievalet. Resultaten visade att oavsett social eller pedagogisk bakgrund delar eleverna likartad motivation och likartade strategier vid skolvalet. Ytterligare analys visade att en kollektiv föreställning om IB tillsammans med liknande ideal beträffande självidentitet och klass påverkar och legitimerar deras val. Implikationen av dessa resultat visar att valbeteenden på den svenska skolmarknaden bidrar till viss del till en social reproduktion.

Nyckelord: Bourdieu, International Baccalaureate, skolval, Sverige, Symboliskt kapital

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## List of Abbreviations and Swedish Terms

### Abbreviations

ATL	Approaches To Learning
ATT	Approaches To Teaching
CAS	Creativity, Activity, and Service
DP	Diploma Programme
EE	Extended Essay
GT	Grounded Theory
HEPP	Higher Education Preparatory Programme
HL	Higher Level
IB	International Baccalaureate
IBA	IB Americas
IBAEM	IB Africa, Europe, & Middle East
IBAP	IB Asia Pacific
IBLP	IB Learner Profile
IBO	IB Organisation
ICE	International and Comparative Education
IE	International Education
ISA	International Schools Association
ISES	International Schools Examinations Syndicate
ISG	International School of Geneva
MYP	Middle Years Programme
NAE	National Agency for Education
NP	National Programme
PS	Pilot Study
PYP	Primary Years Programme
SL	Standard Level
TCK	Third Culture Kids
USS	Upper Secondary School

### Swedish Terms



Allmänna	General education line
Flickskola	School for girls
Friskola	Independent school
Gymnasieantagningen	Upper secondary school Admissions
Gymnasiemässan	Upper secondary school fair
Gymnasieskolan	Upper secondary school
Latinlinjen	Classical studies education
Reallinjen	Natural science education
Realskola	Lower secondary school
Skolverket	National Agency for Education in Sweden

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# Chapter 1:

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

In the past decades, the process of globalisation has greatly influenced the development of international education and expansion of international schooling. While the causes and effects of globalisation are beyond the scope of this discussion, there is some agreement on the definition of the term. Essentially, globalisation is a process of “transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions” which influences a flow of “networks of activity, interaction, and power” (Held & McGrew, 1999, p.483). As individuals increasingly move across national boundaries, capital, culture, ideas, politics, and technology move with them creating networks of activity which influence educational systems. These systems, responsible for the production of the world’s knowledge economy are continuously being transformed by these complex interactions (Coulby & Zambeta, 2005).

Once the primary responsibility of the nation-state, education has been transforming as policy makers are forced to adapt to global influences. In order to supply citizens with quality education that is competitive on the global scale, nation-states embrace neoliberal market ideologies which in turn transform education into a commodity (Connell, 2013; Bouhali, 2015). In the neoliberal model, markets are introduced to education in which parents and students become consumers who are encouraged to make choices based on their own understandings, needs, and desires.

Though the origin points of international schooling were based in the necessity to educate children away from their home countries, it has since developed into a growing market where many different types of international education are offered (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). According to Hayden (1997) the expansion of international schooling has become an increasing presence and challenge to national education systems in two ways. First, policy-makers are increasingly promoting internationalization of national education systems by introducing international perspectives and concepts such as global citizenship. Secondly, these forms of schooling which respond to the needs of a growing transnational class of citizens are outside the direct control of nation-states (Hayden, 1997).

Robinson suggests that these global citizens can be positioned into three categories: ‘transnational capitalist elites’, ‘peripheral casualised workers’, and the ‘structurally excluded’ (in Hayden & Thompson, 2016, p. 187). As the transnational capitalist elite reap the rewards of global mobility and capital, their embracement of cosmopolitan beliefs and tendencies trickle down (Hayden & Thompson, 2016, p. 187). As a result, these parents seek similarly minded education for their children and drive the growth of international schools.

It thus cannot be excluded that social class formations are interwoven by international education and schooling. Class divisions and social differentiation are not only built into the origins of international schooling but are perpetuated by it through school choice and education markets.

In Sweden where neoliberal ideologies have been politically supported since the early 1990s, the education market is shaped by a voucher system where schools collect funding based on enrolment. One unique feature of this system is the decreased restraint of common proximity-rules which dictate where students are allowed to enrol in schools. Consequently, the responsibility of finding information and selecting schools falls to parents. However, as students end their last year of compulsory schooling (year 9), they are free to decide on their own if they would like to continue their education (years 10-12). For students who will enter into secondary school, the choice period is marked by the importance in finding the right information and strategically choosing schools which will come to shape their futures.

This study focuses on secondary school students in Sweden who have chosen to continue their educations within the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). Do students make choices on their own? What is the level of involvement of parents in these decisions? Do students see themselves as international or global? Do they embody class differences due to their backgrounds or is it a by-product of their enrolment within international schooling? Through semi-structured interviews with multiple students across four different IB Diploma Programmes in Stockholm and Malmö, this comparative case study investigation provides insight into the motivations, strategies, and drivers of IBDP-choosers.

## **1.2.Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the trend of choosing the IBDP over other available secondary school programmes in Sweden. To this end, the study is conducted with students enrolled in the first year of the IBDP across four different schools in Sweden. The focus is to explore student motivations, strategies, and reflections of their thought process in choosing the IBDP. The comparative aspect seeks to gain an understanding of whether these individual processes in Sweden are similar to each other and more so to that of other students choosing the IBDP in countries abroad. The study has the following objectives:

1. Understanding the theoretical context of education markets and school choice as it pertains to the International Baccalaureate in Sweden.
2. Understanding the theoretical context of the International Baccalaureate and its possible influence on social class formation.
3. Conducting a qualitative comparative case study of student's subjective experiences of the process of school choice in Sweden.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

Although extensive research has been carried out on the topic of school choice, concentration has been on parental strategies, understanding middle-class tendencies, and the impact that social, cultural, and economic capital may have in education markets (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996; Taylor & Woollard, 2003; Lynch & Moran, 2006; Bell, 2007; Benson, Bridge, & Wilson, 2016; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2017). Speaking practically, studies can ascertain much about the nature of school choice and local school markets by studying parents and guardians. After all, it is parents who take the primary responsibility in choosing schools for their children. Further, it is relatively easier to gain access to parents for a study than students who will need consent. However as choice policy transforms to allow for students to have a more active role in choice, student motivations and strategies must also become focal points in research. Previous approaches, though well intended, have failed to acknowledge student's own perceptions and reflections of the choice process. Likewise, research on the IB has been limited to exploring its connections to international education, globalism, and social class formations. Thus, leaving a gap in research where the IB intersects with school choice. Within this framework, the study raises the following research questions:

1. Why do secondary school students in Sweden choose the IBDP over other available curricula?
2. Which strategies do students use in making their choice?
3. How do these choices reflect their backgrounds and imagined futures?

### **1.4. Significance to International and Comparative Education**

As discussed in the opening of this chapter, the combination of globalisation and neoliberal systems have resulted in a rapid development of international schooling within a global education market. As a result, global education markets inform and transform local education markets via the presence of international organisations such as the International Baccalaureate (IBO). Over the last few decades, the IBO has expanded at an increasing rate around the globe stretching not only its presence but influence on national education systems (see *section 3.2*). Influenced by the IBO, national systems attempt to model themselves in the image of international education by transforming local education systems to include elements such as English-medium instruction, admission of an international student body, or concepts such as global citizenship.

With this expansion it is not just education or schooling that transforms, parents and students also undergo changes as agents within the process of school choice. As will be discussed in the following chapters, certain identities are constructed and applied to individuals that engage or are a part of a transnational or international schooling project. While international mobile adults might be classed as transnational capitalist elites

(particularly if working within the international sector), internationally mobile students might be classed as third culture kids (Useem, 1976; see *Section 2.3.2*). Acting as agents who are influenced by their international or transnational backgrounds, these individuals work to create their own identities within the process of school choice at the local and global level. In the arena of international schooling or education, like the IB, choice is a process in which personal background, attitudes, desires, motivations, and strategies come together.

Though the concepts of globalisation, neoliberalism, education markets, school choice, and the IB have all been to some extent individually explored within the field of International and Comparative Education (ICE) – specific intersections of these have yet to own their own body of literature. Only very recently has a growing body of literature within these themes been explored and offered insight into the choice process of international mobile students (see *Section 2.2*). This study aims to contribute to ICE and a greater body of academic work in the growing area of research concerned with exploring the intersections of school choice and the IB specifically.

Through a comparative look of student attitudes, motivations, and strategies, this study aims to provide insight into the school choice process in Sweden across four IB schools. Though at a glance this study might seem to focus on school sites as the unit of comparative analysis, the accurate comparative focus of the study is the students themselves. Thus the study takes a micro gaze where depth of understanding of individual experiences hopes to illuminate larger processes that are influenced by a variety of factors. Bray describes the importance of comparative education studies at the lower level where individual differences and process can be examined and observed closely (2007, p. 487). However, a note is made that macro-level studies often ignore “higher level studies” in so far as they do not include them into their analysis (2014, p. 487-488). To counteract this, the present study will work to include and discuss the findings of individual respondents within a larger field of work.

## **1.5.Limitations**

The present study worked within limitations that were both predicted and unforeseen prior to the beginning of the study’s process. These were classified into two types, empirical and theoretical limitations. Other limitations concerning the qualitative design of the study are discussed in further detail in *Chapter 4 Methodology* in *Sections 4.1 - 4.3*.

Predicted limitations primarily concerned practical matters such as sample size. The study limited itself to four sites selected and a total number of fourteen respondents. This was done not only to contain the study to a reasonable size but also because theoretical saturation had been reached at this sample size (this is discussed further in *Section 4.3 Sampling Design and Selection Process*).

One limitation that was realised was empirical and concerned the nature of the

respondents chosen. As the study was concerned with investigating first year IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) students, the researcher reached out to students already enrolled in DP1 to be included as respondents. The idea was that students within their first year of the DP would be able to better recall the reasons why they chose the DP and the strategies they utilised during the choice process. In stand-alone IB schools<sup>1</sup> the DP begins at year 11, as was the case with site **L1** and **L2**. This means students from these two sites enrolled and began the DP in year 11. However, in schools where the IB is not the only program offered – choosing to enrol in the IBDP begins at year 10, as was the case with sites **L3** and **L4**. This year is commonly known as ‘pre-DP’ specifically tailored to introduce students to the IB and DP. Thus it could be said that respondents from **L3** and **L4** had chosen to enrol in the DP as soon as year 10 instead of respondents from **L1** and **L2** who had only begun the IB in year 11. This discrepancy was not realised until interviews had been completed and thus present a slight empirical limitation on the study. As far as the findings are concerned, this limitation is slight and most likely presents little impact on the study.

Another limitation that was realised within the process of the study concerned theoretical limitations. Since this study takes a grounded theory (GT) approach (discussed in greater detail in *Section 4.2 Research Design* and *Section 4.8 A note on GT*), the selection of theories and previous research to be included was a delicate concern. As this study is inductive in nature and sets out to investigate respondent’s attitudes, motivations, and reflections of the choice process – the inclusion of theories was also an inductive process. Since the study worked from the data and outwards, theories were included as an ongoing and parallel process. This means that included theories might not be able to account or explain all phenomena that occurs in the study. Likewise, it can be entirely possible that theories or concepts were not included in this study that might have fit within the parameters of the findings.

## **1.6.Organisation of Thesis**

This overall structure of the study is organised into eight chapters. Thus far, in *Chapter 1 - Sections 1.1 to 1.4* have presented the background of the study; its aims and objectives; the research questions; its significance to international and comparative education; and, limitations of the study.

*Chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework & Previous Research)* presents the theoretical framework of the thesis and describes key concepts related to the study. *Section 2.1 Education Markets & School Choice* is divided into two main subsections. The first *Neoliberalism, market-theory, and education markets* elaborates how these three

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<sup>1</sup> Stand-alone IB school refers to schools where the IB is the only curriculum (program) offered.

concepts work together to influence education markets as a whole. The second subsection, *Parent's Choice and Educational Strategies* expands on previous research on the topic of school choice and places the thesis within a larger field of academic literature. In *Section 2.2 The IB & Choice* the thesis introduces specific literature focused on the intersections of the IB and school choice. The chapter ends with *Section 2.3 Social Differentiation, Distinction, & Class Formation* which is divided into two subsections. The first, *Bourdieu's Theories of Capital*, gives a brief introduction and overview of Bourdieu's concepts of capital and social reproduction. Following this, *The IB as Social Reproduction*, presents previous research which describes how Bourdieu's theories can be utilised to analyse the IB as an institution of social reproduction.

*Chapter 3 (School Choice in Sweden)* has been divided in two sections and lays the foundation of contextual information related to the study. *Section 3.1 School Choice in Sweden*, begins with a brief historical overview of Sweden's school choice reforms and their influence on education markets (*Education Market Reforms*). The second subsection then presents an overview of Swedish upper secondary school today. *Section 3.2 A Brief History of the IB*, is divided again into subsections. First a brief account on the history of the IB is presented, followed by a closer look at the structure and components of the DP.

*Chapter 4 (Methodology)* begins by diving into the epistemology, ontology, and research strategy of the study (4.1). This is followed by an explanation of the research design and an introduction on GT (4.2). The next section (4.3) is divided in two subsections that describe the *selection of sites* (4.3.1) and *selection of participants* (4.3.2). A description of *Data Collection Methods* (4.4) is followed by the study's *Analytical Procedure* (4.5). As the study is qualitative in nature, a section is dedicated to exploring *Criteria's of Trustworthiness* (4.6). The next section outlines the *Ethical Considerations* (4.7) taken in the study. Finally, the chapter closes with the researcher's own reflection on the use of GT (4.8).

*Chapter 5* presents the *Findings and Analysis* of the study. *Section 5.1* and *Section 5.2* introduce *Background* and *Interpretive Codes*, respectively and give an account of trends that occurred during the study. To delve more deeply into the themes that emerged in the study, *Section 5.2* is divided into eight individual subsections each titled with one or two corresponding codes (e.g. *5.2.3 Choice Autonomy and Choice Strategy*). Each of these describes in greater detail trends by providing quotations from respondents with a short summary analysis of the end of each section.

*Chapter 6* lays the *Discussion* of the study and is divided into five sections. The first three sections (6.1 - 6.3) considered the three research questions first presented in *Section 1.3*. Each of these sections attempts to not only summarise results for each question, but also links the finding backs to the theoretical framework presented in *Chapter 2*. In *Section 6.4*, a general discussion of the findings and theories of Bourdieu are linked together. The chapter finishes with a reflection from the researcher on the process of the study (6.5).



The study resolves with two final chapters, *Conclusion* and *Suggestions for Future Research* (Chapter 7, 8 respectively). These chapters summarise the entirety of the study and propose new avenues for future research within the field of school choice and the IB.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **Theoretical Framework and Previous Research**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis and attempts to define or describe key concepts, including previous research related to the study. First, the concept of an education market is explained incorporating with it the influence of neoliberalism and globalism. In the same section previous research on school choice is introduced to place the thesis within the broader scholarly literature on the same topic. Here, the thesis considers in which ways the previous research lacks (fails to acknowledge relevant ways of understanding school choice) and gives justification for the aims of this particular thesis. In the next section research specifically focused on choosing the IB is introduced, conducted primarily by Doherty et al. (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2013) within the Australian context. While little research has been devoted to this particular area, this research does provide one of the platforms from which this study is built and allows the thesis to connect itself to existing knowledge. In the final section of the chapter, the thesis first examines and describes Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'social reproduction', 'habitus', and 'capital'<sup>2</sup> (Bourdieu, 1994). These concepts are then discussed in relation through literature which theorises how and in which ways the IB might be tool of social reproduction and distinction.

It is important to note that this theoretical framework does not serve to design a hypothesis or research methodology for this thesis. Instead, concepts, theories, and previous research are presented in this chapter in order to investigate the relationships that the IB forms with the world around it. With this knowledge, the thesis expands in the following chapter with a deeper understanding of the IB in the Swedish context.

## **2.1. Education Markets and School Choice**

### **2.1.1. Neoliberalism, market-theory, and education markets**

Before presenting previous research on school choice, it is first necessary to discuss how the influence of neoliberalism, globalisation, and market mechanism have helped shape and create education markets. To date, several authors have examined the effects of these concepts (neoliberalism, globalism, market mechanisms) on the restructuring of educational policies (Ball, 1994; Daun, 2007; Hooge, Burns, & Wilkoszewski, 2012). Though it is difficult to pinpoint motivations for educational policy change, many take place within the context of political and economic shifts occurring within the nation itself

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<sup>2</sup> Includes all forms of capital that Bourdieu references: cultural, economic, social, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1984).

(Ball, 1994; Connell, 2013). This however, does not mean that educational policy change is not influenced by international dynamics – there is in fact a valuable body of research that explores this line of research (Ball, 2012; Resnik, 2009, 2012a; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Cambridge & Thompson, 2010).

Historically, the term ‘neoliberalism’ has been used to describe the concepts of *laissez-faire*<sup>3</sup> and has over time broadened to include a number of meanings. Today, neoliberalism can be thought of as an ideological commitment to economic policies that argue against state-intervention and instead favour markets, free-trade, deregulation, and privatization (Centeno & Cohen, 2012). For Centeno & Cohen, neoliberalism also encompasses an “expression of political power and ideational hegemony” (2012, p. 328). As the idea of neoliberalism was legitimised through economics and academia – market-theory became normalised to the extent that it is believed to be an “inescapable natural law” of policy development (Centeno & Cohen, 2012, p. 328).

Over the past thirty years, neoliberalism has quickly become a hegemonic force in education, where market-theory continues to dominate educational policy development. In this paradigm, students are thought of as human capital<sup>4</sup>, where the individual is responsible for their own production of economic activity. Apple writes that as the world becomes increasingly economically competitive, “students as future workers must be given the skills to compete efficiently and effectively” (2005, p. 214). Thus, students become not just labour force but the targets of educational investment and training.

As nation-states compete to provide quality education which will ensure maximised human capital of students – neoliberal ideologies become the political solution to reimagine national education policies (Lubienski, 2003; Connell, 2013). Following Milton Friedman’s theories of school choice, market-theory in education encompasses three principles, deregulation, competition, and parent-choice.

Beginning with deregulation of the public sector or nation-state provided goods, private-interests create a market of alternatives for individuals. In education this means limiting the nation-state’s role in sole-provider of education as well as their role in setting the quality standards of education. Additionally, deregulation entails that barriers to school entry are reduced through elimination of proximity guidelines, allowing individuals to choose schools outside their immediate living area. The theory is that as state-oversight is reduced, different forms of schooling are encouraged to enter the market.

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<sup>3</sup> Laissez-faire refers to economic liberalism, that is an economic system in which private parties are free from government intervention (i.e. regulations, tariffs).

<sup>4</sup> Human capital should not interfere with Bourdieu’s symbolic capital. For a deeper reading of human capital see, Apple (2005).

This increase in alternative translates into consumer choice, where education becomes a commodity and parents with their children become the consumers. In an education market, parents and students are motivated to choose based on availability, preferences, and quality. The rationalisation is the belief that markets will increase diversity of products and competition will drive innovation and bolster quality. Choice, which is seen as a democratic process individuals take, justifies the market and supposes its self-regulation. That is, if products do not meet the needs of consumers, they will eventually be replaced by more efficient and superior goods. What has occurred in several countries is not just the proliferation of alternatives to state-provided schooling (charter, voucher, and private schools) but also the state itself providing state-supported alternative curriculums in state-funded schools (for example, the International Baccalaureate) (Adamson, Åstrand, & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

Central to an education-markets life cycle is the introduction of parent-choice and school-vouchers. By deregulating the market from central control and introducing choice, parental-demand helps determine the supply of schooling. In order to stay in the market, schools compete to fulfil parental demand. With the introduction of school vouchers, that is state funding attached to students – no matter their choice of schooling, only the schools that satisfy parental demands remain in the market, while others are eliminated. Theoretically, right of choice places the responsibility of quality education in the hands of parents or students themselves. In theory then, education-markets are positive policy implementations as they provide an avenue in which quality of education is diversified and improved, while also encouraging individual participation, voice, and agency. Opponents of choice claim that education markets favour only the upper-middle class while harming the working-class which does not have the necessary skills to navigate the market successfully.

In an analysis of the effects of neoliberalism in the Australian context, Connell (2013) suggests that market mechanisms construct access to education as the commodity. Since markets necessitate regulation of goods (schooling), hierarchies are created ('good schools and bad schools') by which competition filters out those institutions that cannot attract demand (choice). Connell highlights how the transformation of schools and universities as existing in a for-profit industry, alongside the resurgence of competitive testing, and the extension of public funding to private schooling has been a direct result of the market (2013, p. 102-103). As a consequence, teachers in this system are placed under performative stress and curriculums are narrowed or become extremely similar to one another. In highlighting positives of the market, Chubb & Moe (1990) argue that school choice provides one of the only legitimate pathways that parents of low socioeconomic means have to send their children to 'good schools'.

There are however, a number of challenging questions that arise out of the education market model. Do education markets truly expand the options of schooling?

Does quality of schooling improve, and in which ways? What is the real effect of parental demand and choice in an education market? Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine all of these questions, let us now consider previous research dedicated to exploring school choice via the perspective of parents.

### **2.1.2. Parent's Choice and Educational Strategies**

To better understand parental strategies and school choice, Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1996) conducted 137 semi-structured interviews over three local areas in the U.K. By applying Pierre Bourdieu's theories on judgement and taste<sup>5</sup> and using his method of social-class analysis, Ball et al. illuminate the connection between school choice and social class differences. Ball et al. (1996) identify three types of parental engagement in choice that are interconnected to their level of education and class: 'skilled, semi-skilled, and disconnected' (p. 92). While skilled parents are classified as middle-class professionals, disconnected parents are typically working-class, and those who are semi-skilled come from various different backgrounds (p. 93). The findings suggest that parent choices are largely rational strategies associated with risk that strongly depend on class-based tastes. While skilful parents are able to navigate the education market by choosing the 'right or good schools' or enrolling their children in private schools, disconnected parents often make choices out of necessity and see different types of schools as more or less the same. Ball et al. proposes that this typology of choosers serves to explain the importance of cultural and social capital that is necessary to decode knowledge of schools and navigate education markets successfully (1996). The researchers conclude that since social class differences have such a large impact on choice, the threat of an education market where choice responsibility lies with parents can mean the reproduction of class positions and divisions (Ball et al., 1996, p. 110-111).

Working from literature on risk and individualisation, as well as research on education markets, Taylor and Woollard (2003) investigated how middle-class parents navigated school choice within Alberta, Canada. The researchers conducted focus group interviews with six parents and six teenagers who had recently chosen a high school within the public school system of Edmonton, Alberta. The researchers concluded two important findings, one, parents act as 'risk managers' for their own and their children's choices; and two, both parents and children construct their identities through the choice process (Taylor & Woollard, 2003). As Ball et al. (1996, 2003) suggested, Taylor and Woollard also found that parents with lower financial resources tended to make choices out of necessity rather than engaging with 'risk calculations' (Taylor & Woollard, 2003). The researchers found that parents who were more engaged in trying to manage choices

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<sup>5</sup> This will be expanded on in a later section.

felt more empowered and those who lacked knowledge of the system felt more pressure to pick ‘the ‘right type of school’ (Taylor & Woollard, 2003, p. 625). Similar to Ball et al. (1996, 2003), middle-class parents in this study also relied on ‘hot-knowledge’ built from social networks to make choices that would ensure their children went to the ‘right schools’ (Taylor & Woollard, 2003, p. 625). The ability to choose the right school and ensure a quality education for their children then was considered a direct result of parent’s engagement with the choice process. Thus parent identity or what constitutes a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ parent was constructed through the choice process. In contrast, student’s own identities were constructed in relation to their “social positions and future plans” (Taylor & Woollard, 2003, p. 628). Thus we see that even when changing geographical placement in the study of school choice, similar results appear – choice functions for the middle class as a tool of identity and social reproduction.

Thus far the previous studies have focused on two educational systems where a clear education market was present with little interference from the state. However, what occurs when choice does not exist within the public sector? In Ireland, where the state has refused to implement school choice, Lynch & Moran found that middle-class parents used their own economic and symbolic capital to enrol their children in fee-paying schools (2006, p. 226). They observed that since schools also occupy their own historical and social spheres, they are placed on a hierarchy of class that works to exclude certain students from attending (2006, p.226). Factors such as fees, school reputations, extracurricular activities, and uniforms were class signifiers that impacted parent and student choices in enrolling (Lynch & Moran, 2006, p. 227-228). Since choice is unavailable in the public school sector in Ireland, only parents that had the economic and symbolic capital of school knowledge were able to successfully engage with the choice process. Lynch and Moran write “only those parents with sufficient economic, cultural, social, and emotional capital have the knowledge, confidence, time, and resources to select the exclusive schools” (2006, p. 226). This means that parents and students who do not have the sufficient capital to engage in the choice process are essentially left to schooling and education provided by the state. Thus even when an education market is not policy endorsed, it still exists and continues to function as a tool of social reproduction.

In contrast to the previous studies that focus on the tendencies of middle-class parents, studies by Bell (2007), Bunar and Ambrose (2016), and Larsson & Hultqvist (2017), explore how education markets are informed by the geographical space schools are located in. In a longitudinal study of thirty-six parents within one American school district, Bell (2007) identified a few ways in which ‘space of schools’ played an important role in school choice. First, parent’s limited their choices of school dependent on the geographic placing – schools that were too far, in ‘bad neighbourhoods’, and not close enough to work or home were often disregarded (Bell, 2007, p. 400). Parent’s choices

were also dictated by the sense of place or environments within schools (i.e., what occurs in a school, learning environment, types of students) (Bell, 2007, p. 400). Additionally, Bell found that parents also considered whether their children would ‘fit in’ with other students at the school (Bell, 2007, p. 400). The findings of Bell’s study suggest that choice is not just influenced by economic or symbolic capital as posited by other studies, but is also dependent on factors such as physical location. However, it can be argued that physical location itself carries with it a certain symbolic capital which in turn affects choice processes.

To explore how symbolic capital might be tied to space, Bunar and Ambrose (2016) conduct ethnographic fieldwork in three schools within Stockholm, Sweden. The researchers posit that urban areas are marked by class and ethnic identities which impact the choice process that individuals undertake (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). Interestingly, Bunar & Ambrose found that while one school was typified in interviews by its urban space, the two other schools (where there was predominantly a middle-class, native Swedish population) were not (2016, p. 40-41). The findings suggested that while individuals living in largely multicultural areas viewed themselves and their communities with positive representation, those outside of the community constructed immigrant students negatively (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016, p. 43-44). Bunar and Ambrose succinctly observe that while these constructions might be surface labels, they inflict a certain narrative or pathway that is available to students. Bunar and Ambrose write, “these labels contain powerful narratives about what is required in a ‘good’ school, including acquisition of proper language, social norms, strong networks, and good grades” (2016, p. 42). Like this, students themselves construct their identities and restrict their school choices based on the identity that others place on them. Immigrant or multicultural students might be labelled ‘ambitious’ if enrolling in a less multicultural school and those who stay in ‘bad’ schools might be labelled as disconnected or unengaged. This in turn also fuels individual anxieties about choosing the ‘right’ school for those students who wish to maintain a certain social class. And similar to the findings of Taylor & Woollard (2006), parent anxiety rises when they perceive the quality of schooling to decline due to not being able to control the mix of students in a certain school (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016, p. 46).

Keeping with the theme of school choice and space – Larsson and Hultqvist (2017) investigate how representations the upper secondary-school market in the inner city<sup>6</sup> of Stockholm work to distinguish and reproduce class and social divisions. Similar to the findings by Lynch and Moran (2006) in Ireland, Larsson and Hultqvist (2017) find that schools utilise their locations and historical origins to drive reputation and encourage

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<sup>6</sup> In this study, Larsson and Hultqvist refer to the ‘inner city’ of Stockholm as the literal geographical boundary of the innermost area of the city.

choice in a competitive school market. Larsson and Hultqvist observe that although all schools within the inner city of Stockholm are considered to have symbolic capital, ‘internal hierarchies’ between schools still exist (2017, p. 12). Here, elite schools attract the students with the most cultural capital and other schools attract a more diverse student body. Interestingly, even though school choice in Stockholm does not rely as heavily on economic capital as in other countries, students of the same economic means still end up in the same schools.

Together these studies provide important insights into school choice processes and local education markets in different contexts. Working from early studies in choice that connect to Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of capital, towards the intersections of choice and space, the evidence suggests school choice processes are directly impacted by a number of factors. These are not limited to parental education background, socioeconomic means, or even available choice within the market, but also by geographic location, school reputation, and shared imaginaries about what constitutes good or bad schools. Although the methodology and evidence here is relevant and useful, it only represents a small quantity of the literature available on school choice. For example, only a portion of the studies invest methodology that includes investigating student’s own school choice processes (Taylor & Woollard, 2003). Further, studies tend to focus on choices made by parents within one or more geographical spaces, rather than the choice of specific schools or curriculums. Consequently, this leaves many areas to be explored and raises many interesting questions. Why do parents or students choose particular schools or curriculums? What makes these schools stand out? How are these choices made? Keeping in the context of this study the following section will present research specifically centred on choosing the IB.

## **2.2. The IB and Choice**

Despite the expansion of the IB around the globe and the pertinence of school choice research, there are a limited number of studies dedicated to exploring the connections between the two. As previously mentioned, school choice literature has tended to focus on the process of school choice through the lens of middle class parents. As choice policy expands in many countries, there is a growing need to investigate student’s own motivations and strategies when choosing schools.

To investigate these questions, Doherty (2009b) performed an analysis of IBO documents and news reports to examine how the IB is represented in Australian public discourse. Doherty utilizes Bourdieu’s theories of capital to illustrate how the IB in Australia is increasingly appealing, due to its ability to promote both geographic and social mobility (2009b). Doherty argues that the IB is appealing due to three positive brand messages: it is a global brand with value, it is accessible to the middle class, and it is a viable alternative to state-curricula in the Australian education market (Doherty,



2009b, p. 85-86). Doherty, argue that while the IB's brand works to attracts the ambitious middle-class through the promises of educational advantages, it also discourages certain types of students from applying (2009b, p.86). What the researchers discuss is that although the IB is open to all applicants in the education market, the brand message attracts only those parents and students who already 'fit into' the IB. By branding itself as a competitive, difficult, and yet rewarding education – the IB attracts high achieving, ambitious students, as Doherty writes “the students do not just choose the curriculum, the curriculum chooses the student” (2009b, p. 86). While this certainly functions to attract a dedicated student body, it also serves to create exclusivity. In other words, the IB distinguishes itself by presenting itself as a worthwhile alternative to the monopoly of state-curricula. Doherty concludes that as the IB localises itself to the middle-class consumer in education markets, these same groups defend their choice as a form of distinction – further legitimising the IB product (2009b, p. 87). However, is it only parents that choose the IB? How does it become legitimised for students and their families? Why and how do they choose this programme? Doherty and others investigate these questions in a follow paper.

In continuation of previous research, Doherty, Mu, Shield (2009a) were interested in seeing why secondary school students choose the IBDP over state-based curricula in Australian state schools. The researchers explore this choice through focus group data and online surveys of 240 students in 23 schools which offered the IB and the Australian state curricula.

Though this research might seem similar to previous research, Doherty et al., are exploring areas of research that are missing in school choice literature. That is, that parents and students are making 'nested' choices of both school and curriculum (Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009a). As is the case in Australia, the IB is offered not just in stand-alone IB schools but also in state schools where the alternative is the national curriculum. Then on which grounds do these individuals choose the IB?

In the focus groups, Doherty et al., found that one major reason for choosing the IB was continuity, that is – students decided on the IB because they had previously attended the IB in another country or school (2009a, p. 764). In contrast, other students specifically stated they were seeking a better quality education that could be realised through the IB (2009a, p. 764). Though claims by students were not investigated, respondents made clear comparisons between the IB and state schooling. One student was quoted “If I did the local curriculum then I won't have a lot of choices. If I do the IB then I can choose any university and I would have a lot more choices” (2009a, p. 764). The significance of these statements, Doherty et al. note, is that students show a clear strategy and reflexivity when processing the pros and cons of their decisions.

When the researchers asked students to describe their imagined futures, IB-choosers were more likely than non-IB choosers to state that a desire to travel, live, or

study overseas. Doherty et al., quote one student “We don’t do the IB because we’re nerdy, we do it because we don’t wanna be stuck in Australia or wherever else you are living” (2009a, p. 767). Further, Doherty et al., noted that IB choosers were 3.14 times more likely to indicate their desire to study university abroad than non-IB choosers (2009a, p. 767). The researchers noted students also linked their choice to their future by indicating that the IB would help facilitate global or transnational movement, “I am doing this because I don’t want to stay here. I want to go to America or somewhere else. Because I can’t afford the university if I stay here” (2009a, p.768). Another says “I want to go back to England after I finish school here. So I thought if I do the IB then it will help me to do that” (2009a, p. 768). For these students, the IB is not just a particular choice made in a local setting but serves as step towards future mobility.

Doherty et al., quote Wells and Crain (2000, p. 620) “choices are not just behaviours of economic rationales but also ‘identity projects’ – “decisions about symbolic social institutions such as schools are strongly affected by where the chooser see themselves fitting into a highly stratified society” (Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009a, p. 760). Through this theoretical lens then, choosing the IB denotes a specific type of identity or at least an ambition to achieve a certain type of identity. Through the lens of research discussed in the previous section, the argument would then be that choosing the IB is a tool of social reproduction for the middle-class or perhaps even a tool to achieve middle-class status. However, these lines of analysis do not explore who the IB chooser is, rather only what they would in theory desire to achieve through choice. To build a framework to understand the identity of the IB student Doherty et al., borrow the term “border artistes” from Beck who uses it to describe how individuals utilise borders to their individual advantages (cited in 2009a, p. 761). Beck writes “the greater the spatial autonomy of individuals... the less important the border becomes” (cited in Dohert et al., 2009a).

Since IB choosers seem more comfortable than non-IB choosers in imagining a future outside of Australia, then it seems that their spatial autonomy is high and thus the limitations of national borders are low. Their ‘social imaginaries’ as Doherty et al., puts it, do not stop at national borders but instead transcend beyond that to the global stage. Students choosing the IB are not just acting in the local or national education market but are also engaging in a global market. Doherty et al., observe that the IB can be thought of as an ‘educational commodity’ and an ‘ideological product’ that transforms both local markets and the individuals that engage with it (2009a, p. 760). Educational choice then, is a significant process in not just identity development for students but also as a tool for geographical mobility.

Beyond IB-choosers engaging in a global or transnational identity project, questions still surround their identities. As another follow up to this research, Doherty, Luke, Shield, and Hincksman (2012) expand on differences between IB-choosers and

non-IB-choosers. Through an analysis of 179 parent and 231 student surveys Doherty et al., found statistically significant differences in “family income, parent’s education, student aspirations, transnational lifestyles, and cosmopolitan beliefs” (2012, p. 311). In line with previous research, the study showed that IB-choosers scored 27% higher in desire to study abroad (2012, p. 320). Additionally, IB-choosers were more likely than non-IB-choosers to have at least one parent with residency status or citizenship in another country (2012, p. 320-321). While different from previous literature on school choice, Doherty’s series of studies seems to agree with the theory that social reproduction can be accomplished by choice behaviour in educational markets.

This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of literature related to school choice and the IB. Although studies are brief and limited, findings illustrate that there are relationships between identity, socioeconomic status, background, and educational choice. Data from several studies who take up the theories of Pierre Bourdieu suggest that in stratified educational markets, school choice is not just a preference decision but reflects an individual’s social, economic, and cultural capital. In the following section, the thesis describes Bourdieu’s concepts in more detail and links them to literature which discusses the IB as a tool of social reproduction.

## **2.3. Social Differentiation, Distinction, & Class Formation**

### **2.3.1. Bourdieu’s Theories of Capital**

As can be discerned from the literature presented thus far, Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of capital and social reproduction have been highly influential in the study of educational markets. Collectively, these studies suggest that social reproduction is mediated by education systems which function as legitimisers of class inequalities (Sullivan, 2002). Success and failure in education systems then is linked to an individuals’ possession and successful use of certain types of capital. In this literature, social reproduction is then concerned with the link between original class membership (before entry into the educational market) and ultimate class membership (after entry).

Developed from his work on French society and its educational system in the late 1970s, Bourdieu’s theories of social reproduction concern themselves with how individuals create and maintain class status through aesthetic tastes (Nash, 1990; Sullivan, 2002). According to Bourdieu, aesthetic tastes are built on individual preferences for certain cultural objects, such as art, clothing, food, music, or even schooling. These preferences Bourdieu said, are internalised into individuals from a young age and passed on through family and social clusters (Dirks, 1994). As a result, individuals in dominant classes create power through cultural and symbolic capital which is then re-legitimised through individual

agency. This happens through *habitus* - an individual's habits, skills, and dispositions or the tendencies that guide individual behaviour and thinking. Some theorists suggest that habitus is not fixed but can transform over time or through specific situations such as educational choice (Sullivan, 2002; Navarro, 2006).

Bourdieu also introduces the concept of capital in three forms, cultural, social, and symbolic. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is the familiarity an individual has with dominant culture and the ability to understand or use it to their advantage (Sullivan, 2002). Sharing similar forms of capital creates collective identities and thus groups which have power over other groups. Since cultural capital is inherited through family or social networks, those without education parents for example are placed in a disadvantaged position. In contrast those possessing high cultural capital form collective groups that stick to themselves and further legitimise their positions of power. Bourdieu also distinguishes cultural capital into three forms – embodied, objectified, and institutionalised (1984). Embodied cultural capital refers to that which cannot be separated from the individual – such as dialect, language, or physical being. Material items such as books, cars, or clothing are considered objectified cultural capital, while credentials such as degrees or titles are referred to as capital in its institutionalised state. These different forms of capital are meaningful as it becomes the habitus that individuals possess in order to navigate their social world. In studying the French education system, Bourdieu suggested that variations in educational attainment were due to individual differences of habitus. According to Bourdieu, education systems presuppose that individuals have some form of cultural capital, but since most students do not – they ultimately fail to succeed in school (Sullivan, 2002, p. 145).

The significance of this type of capital is that it provides a non-economic form of hierarchy. In essence, those with economic capital can stack their advantages and those without significant economic capital can acquire another type of power. Depending on how one perceives an education market, this can either be a positive or negative mechanism. Take this hypothetical situation, choice exists in an educational market place where both public and private schooling is available. In this market, private schools are not publically funded and thus only those with sufficient economic capital have access. This creates a stratified market and reproduces class inequalities as one group almost always has access to another product that is deemed exclusive. However, if individuals possess enough cultural capital, they can in theory successfully navigate around these limitations. They might for example know about certain scholarships to obtain access to fee-paying schools or they might have through 'taste' in similar cultural objects have networks that will gain them access. However, if choice exists in an education market where all schooling is publically funded (as is the case in Sweden), then individuals possessing both economic and cultural capital are at a significant advantage over those who have only one. This happens when dominant groups place high value on certain types of schools (private, prestigious, elite) and thus the market becomes a competitive ground where students contend for places in similar schools.

The theory that education is tied to the reproduction of social class is not entirely tied to Bourdieu nor is the idea that children from better socioeconomic means are more likely to succeed a new concept. The significance of Bourdieu's theories however is that they give language for conceptualising how individuals acting as reflective agents in educational markets work to reproduce class inequalities. Sullivan sums it up nicely, "for cultural capital to be an important mechanism of social reproduction it must be the case, not just that cultural capital facilitates the acquisition of educational credentials, but that educational credentials are an important mechanism through which wealth and power are transmitted." (2002, p. 147). In theory then, parents and students must possess some cultural capital to choose an IB school and in turn the IB education (diploma) becomes cultural capital in its institutionalised form.

Yet, as previously mentioned the IB is not being chosen solely within a local or national context – it is an educational commodity that exists in a global market. As more individuals engage with education that transcends national borders, there is a need to understand the link between IE and the formation of a global class or elite group (Brown & Lauder, 2009, p. 144).

### **2.3.2. The IB as Social Reproduction**

In exploring the role of IE and elite universities in creating access to transnational corporations, Brown and Lauder highlight the importance of credentials and character formation through these institutions (2009). Commenting on character, Brown and Lauder (2009) write "education creates character by differentially creating or reinforcing the kind of dispositions, attitudes, and cultural attributes necessary for entry into professional middle class occupations" (p. 130). In other words, IE produces the necessary embodied (character) and institutionalised cultural capital individuals must possess in order to succeed in an increasingly globalised world.

In the discussion of character, Brown and Lauder reflect on the role of IE as both existing within the national and global community. Students who are drawn to IE and often arrive at international schools from abroad form identities that are not tied to any specific place. Brown and Lauder quote Useem (1976) who devised the term 'third culture kids' (TCKs) to describe internationally mobile young adults. Often times these students have spent significant amounts of time living in countries abroad due to their globally mobile families and feel most themselves in a 'third culture' that exists and is reproduced through a shared imaginary (Brown & Lauder, 2009, p. 132-133).

Brown and Lauder suggest that one reason IE facilitates access to transnational corporations is because TCK develop very similar characteristics to "key workers in high-end managerial positions" (2009, p.133). These characteristics include: "multilingualism,

cross-cultural awareness, diplomacy, flexibility, patience, tolerance, self-sufficiency, independence, maturity, among others (Brown and Lauder, 2009, p. 133). An example of one characteristic that is passed on through IE and becomes embodied by students is the English language. Commonly IE is English-medium in instruction even in non-English majority speaking countries. This gives students an advantage when applying to universities abroad which are English-medium. According to Brown and Lauder, this type of access further develops a ‘class of global elites’.

Given the global expansion of the IB, Bunnell (2010) critically reflects on how components of its brand (IB Learner, IB Learner Profile, IB World) potentially create a framework of class consciousness. Influenced by Marxist theory, class consciousness refers to the self-understanding of individuals in a social class and their awareness of their relationship to other classes. In line with Useem (1976) who posited that IE creates TCKs, Bunnell suggests that through the IB learner profile, the IB promotes an “internal discourse of international mindedness” and thus informs a shared ‘class consciousness’ (2010, p. 353). Similar to Brown and Lauder’s (2009) argument, Bunnell (2010, 2011) proposes that the IB legitimises a shared identity among students who see themselves as being apart from non-IB students. These views are supported by Gardner-McTaggart (2014) and Outhwaite and Ferri (2017) who critically reflect on the expansion of the IBDP and how question how elite classes are formed through the function of exclusivity and membership.

Even though the IB seems to promote a discourse close to global citizenship, Gardner-McTaggart argues that IE may not be chosen for the values or education it offers but more so for the cultural capital it represents (2014). In the Global South where IB expansion is happening within elite institutions, only those with enough economic capital achieve access, creating a level of exclusivity in the educational marketplace. This is similar in England where the expansion of the IB was met with great interest but the decline and subsequent removal of many IB programmes resulted in high demand but low supply (Outhwaite & Ferri, 2017). Thus after withdrawal of the IBDP from state-funded schooling in England, only those with sufficient economic capital can afford to access the IB. Since IB education is deemed to be a pathway to elite universities, its removal from state-funded schooling carries with it the threat of reproducing educational inequalities for those who lack the capital to access the IB education (Outhwaite & Ferri, 2017).

In this way the IB provides an exclusive, globally centred curriculum which is only accessible to the few with enough capital – further legitimising and reinforcing a class consciousness (Gardner-McTaggart, 2014). Referring to class, Bunnell states “social status is not necessarily an inherited feature or a measure of wealth, but it is a position of power that can be gained through education and training”, in this way social status can be attained through access to a social mobile pathway” (2010, p. 353). For those with enough capital to access the IB – this is a positive pathway, it reinforces a social status and legitimises their

distinction. For those who cannot access the IB, higher social status cannot be attained and potential pathways into higher education cannot be achieved.

Although the IB seems to create privilege or distinction amongst its members, this does not mean it seeks to “replicate oppressive ontologies or epistemologies” (Gardner-McTaggart, 2014). What is true is that students who choose the IB seem to undergo some form of social consciousness – an awareness that their individual lives link and a need to act in harmony with a globalised world. In this class consciousness, students seem aware of their positions and reflexive that their enrolment in the IB opens doors and offers possibilities otherwise not accessible in state sponsored education.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Context of Study**

The following chapter will discuss contextual information about the study. The first section begins with background on Sweden's school choice reforms and how they facilitated the expansion of an education market. In the same section a review of the development of upper secondary schools (USS) and current statistics on enrolment are presented. Lastly, the section ends by describing the procedure of applying to USS. In the next section, a brief background on the IB and its theoretical foundations are expanded on. In the final section, the IBDP is described in greater detail.

### **3.1. School Choice in Sweden**

#### **3.1.1. Education Market Reforms**

The Swedish education system has long been marked by the tradition of the welfare state (Forsberg & Lundgren, 2010). Developed in response to the Second World War, the welfare state was meant "create a society based on the values of social equality and universal rights" (Blomqvist, 2004, p. 139). To achieve this, the Swedish government carefully controlled the provision of social services by channelling funds to the public sector, essentially depleting the private sector (Blomqvist, 2004). The aim of these methods was to ensure social security benefits for its citizens, who would in turn support and promote Swedish state values.

In education, the state has long played a large role in the planning and provision of education. In 1842, six years of compulsory primary schooling was introduced. By 1920, the state developed a comprehensive USS that would be built upon the lower secondary school (*realskola*) and the school for girls (*flickskolan*) (Skolverket, 2012). At the time two USS tracks were established, classical studies (*latinlinjen*) and natural science studies (*reallinjen*) (Skolverket, 2012, p. 9). In the 1950s, parliament would establish nine years of compulsory primary schooling and a third USS track, the general line (*allmänna*) which comprised of both language and social studies (Skolverket, 2012). A decade later, all USS tracks would be combined into one comprehensive USS (*gymnasieskola*) with five different tracks – "economic, humanistic, natural science, social science, and technical studies" (Skolverket, 2012, p. 10). In this system, students attend compulsory schooling until year nine and then depending on their level of skill or interest be divided into different USS tracks or enrol in vocational education.

Largely supported by the Social Democratic Party, the aim of the system was to provide all students regardless of background, equal opportunity through education.



Although private alternatives to public education existed, they were politically and publically discouraged (Tilton, 1991, in Blomqvist, 2004, p.143). The argument was that if services remained centrally provided and regulated, then the state could guarantee access to quality education. Then theoretically the need for alternative education would disappear and freedom from the private sector would be achieved.

However, by the 1970s Sweden would enter a period of economic instability marked by severe budget deficits, which in turn would spark political debate about the welfare state's effectiveness (Blomqvist, 2004). Soon political criticism began to mount about the inability of local governments to effectively provide quality social services, like education and health care. Disapproval in the public sector's size and productivity, would lead the Conservative Party Coalition to utilise public debate to campaign for a move towards neoliberal market policies. The argument was that if public services could be privatized, then consumer choice would solve public discontent with state provided services. In the proposed market, services would be separated from political control and free choice for consumers could be implemented (discussed in Section 2.1).

Reforms within the school system would begin in the late 1980s into the 1990s through a series of legislations aimed at decentralising and deregulating social services (Blomqvist, 2004). As early as 1985, Moderate party politicians would introduce the idea of parental choice in the school system, "The family – not the state or the municipality shall have the decisive choice regarding choice of childcare and school" (1985/86: Ub 253, p.1). Building on this argument, Moderate party leader Carl Bildt suggested that economic equality could be achieved for those who choose independent schooling through a system of school vouchers (1986/87: Ub 812, p. 11). In the choice system proposed, funds would be allocated individually and follow students to the school of their choosing. According to the Conservatives this would create market competition – thereby placing pressure on public schools to compete for students and thus raising quality of education.

In 1988, legislation approving the decentralisation of resources and regulation from the state level down to the municipal level was approved (Ahlin & Mörk, 2005). This legislation stipulated that resources could be given to government approved independent schools as was done for municipal schools based on enrolment (1990/91: 115). Additionally, legislation would require municipalities to grant parent's school choice with priority given to those nearest to chosen school (Björklund, Edin, Fredriksson, & Krueger, 2004). Effectively, these reforms transformed the school system from a welfare model where nearly all schools were public and centrally controlled, to one where an education market would thrive.

Over the past two decades, these reforms have bolstered a rapid expansion of alternatives to state-sponsored education. By 2000, the number of non-public schools had increased from a mere 60 to 475 (Blomqvist, 2004). As is shown in Table 1 below, the

number of municipalities with independent schools has spread to almost all of Sweden's 290 municipalities (adapted from Friskola, 2016).

Table 1. Number of Municipalities with Independent and Public Schools

	<i>Independent Schools</i>	<i>Municipal Schools</i>
<i>Pre-School</i>	243	290
<i>Compulsory School</i>	186	290
<i>Upper Secondary School</i>	100	255

Note: Adapted from Friskola (2016).

According to the National Agency for Education, in the 2016/17 academic school year there was approximately 4,000 independent schools in Sweden (Skolverket, 2015). Meaning, that nearly 25% of all Swedish USS are enrolled in an alternative to state-sponsored schooling (Skolverket, 2015).

Though these reforms opened the market up for alternatives, it is not entirely clear of the market has improved conditions to an extent that is relatively visible (Bunar, 2011). What has become more visible has been the growing variety of alternatives coupled with stratification of the education market. Since schools compete for students (fund allocation), then schools in less demand lose students, and thus lose funds. In Sweden, this has led to school-death, oversaturation, long queues for enrolment, and segregation (Skolverket, 2015). These events are also consequences of the choice market, where some schools develop elitist profiles and others develop bad reputations as 'bad schools' (Böhlmark & Lindahl, 2007; Bunar, 2011).

### **3.1.2. Swedish Upper Secondary School**

Possibly developed in order to compete with independent schools in the market, Swedish USS was reformed into 17 national programmes (NP) in 1995. Today, there are a total of 18: 6 focused on higher education preparation and 12 vocational programmes aimed at providing working life skills (Skolverket, 2017). In addition, there are 5 introductory programmes aimed at providing individualised studies for students who are not accepted to any NP. Table 2 below illustrates the different variations of NP available to students entering USS in Sweden.

Table 2. Swedish National Programmes at USS level

<i>Higher Education Preparatory Programmes</i>	<i>Vocational Programmes</i>
<i>Business Management and Economics Programme (EK)</i>	Child and Recreation Programme (BF)
<i>Arts Programme (ES)</i>	Building and Construction Programme (BA)
<i>Humanities Programme (HU)</i>	Electricity and Energy Programme (EE)
<i>Natural Science Programme (NA)</i>	Vehicle and Transport Programme (FT)
<i>Social Science Programme (SA)</i>	Business and Administration Programme (HA)
<i>Technology Programme (TE)</i>	Handicraft Programme (HV)
	Hotel and Tourism Programme (HT)
	Industrial Technology Programme (IN)
	Natural Resource Use Programme (NB)
	Restaurant Management and Food Programme (RL)
	HVAC and Property Maintenance Programme (VF)
	Health and Social Care Programme (VO)

Note: Adapted from National Agency for Education (2017).

Due to the liberalisation of the education market, these alternatives are not just provided in municipal secondary schools but are found within independent schools across Sweden. In addition to Higher Education Preparatory NP, the IBDP is also considered a higher education preparatory programme. In the academic 2015/16 year, approximately 39% or 135,531 students had enrolled in one of the seven preparatory NP (Skolverket, 2017, p. 10). Of these, the IBDP accounted for nearly 3,593 students, just above the HU NP and more than VF and HT Vocational NP (Skolverket, 2017, p. 10). However, unlike the NPs, the IB has its own curriculum and examinations that are entirely different from the NP.

Important to this discussion is the distribution of these programmes throughout Sweden. While some municipalities have virtually all programmes available over a variety of schools (public, private, and independent), the concentration of many schools lie in urban centres. Table 3 below shows the total number of USS in the six largest municipalities in Sweden. The IBDP, for example is found in 33 schools in only 24 municipalities (Skolverket, 2017). Though it is understandable that a larger population will equal to a larger number of schools, the distribution of schools can create a stratified market. While those living in urban city centres have a wider school market to choose

from, those living in smaller cities and rural areas have less options. Data collected by Phillips, Larsen, and Hausman (2014) suggests that families living in more racially diverse areas also tend to participate more in school choice but do not necessarily choose outside of their direct areas. These findings are supported by Bunar’s (2010) findings in Stockholm, where the majority of students that are choosing to move schools are young girls from lower socioeconomic areas to more affluent schools in the inner-city. Further, students and families are more likely to choose schooling that reflects their socioeconomic standing or backgrounds. Since it is more likely for students and families living in urban centres to have international backgrounds, it is also more likely they will choose schooling that reflects this.

Table 3. Total number of USS by municipalities

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Total number of USS</i>
<i>Stockholm</i>	932,917	106
<i>Gothenburg</i>	554,540	56
<i>Malmö</i>	326,645	38
<i>Uppsala</i>	213,333	29
<i>Helsingborg</i>	139, 659	27
<i>Norrköping</i>	138, 625	11

Note: Adapted from National Agency for Education (2016).

According to the National Agency for Education (NAE) there were approximately 1,141 applicants to the IBDP for the 2016 school year (Skolverket, 2017). At least 395 of those students had at least one parent who was born outside of Sweden, 112 were born in Sweden with both parents born abroad, and 483 applicants were born abroad (Skolverket, 2017). Though, 75.3% were qualified for entry, only 59.4% were admitted in 2017, of which 58% were born abroad – more than half of the applicants. Interestingly the highest rated accepted was applicants who reported parents with an education background that was equivalent or more than bachelor level studies. The statistic illustrates that although a growing percentage of students are eligible for the IBDP, a restricted few are admitted. This could be due to a number of factors: number of places available, funding, prioritizing of students, and the distribution of the IBDP across Sweden.

What is the process of applying for the IBDP look in Sweden then? While the IBDP is a two-year higher education preparatory programme (HEPP), USS in Sweden consists of three years of study (year 10-12). In stand-alone IB schools, grade 10 is included into the Middle Years Programme (MYP 5). In non-IB schools where the DP is offered, grade 10 is known as the Pre-IB year where students are introduced to the IB and

the DP. If students have completed MYP 5 in good standing, there is a good chance of entry into the DP. Students who have not previously attended an IB school must enter the DP by applying to the Pre-IB year and completing it in good standing. Additionally, all students must earn a grade in English language as all DP instruction in Sweden is conducted in English.

To apply for any USS, all students in Sweden receive a password through mail or at school during year nine which they use to log into their specific USS admission site which corresponds to the admission region in which they live (Gymnasieguiden, 2017). While all regions vary a bit in admission dates, most open approximately in December to February. Students log into their online portals and complete an online application where they choose their favourite programmes/schools. At this time the student places the schools from first choice to last on a list. This application is printed out, signed and handed into a school counsellor. During spring time, students are free to change their applications and preliminary decisions begin arriving between June and July. Some programs, like the IBDP in Sweden use entrance exams to determine if students have the necessary knowledge needed for the programme.

## **3.2. The International Baccalaureate**

### **3.2.1. A Brief History of the IB**

In 1948, Marie-Therese Maurette, a French educator working out of the International School of Geneva, Switzerland (ISG), wrote an essay in which she explored if pedagogies could be used towards establishing peace through education (IBO, 2017). Her reflections would become the framework for the development of the International Schools Examinations Syndicate (ISES) which would later become the DP. In 1968 the IB was established in with the main intention of being the controlling body of DP examinations. By the 1970s, the first DP examinations were completed in 12 schools across 10 countries, including a German and French state school (IBO, 2017). Early results of the test proved satisfactory and soon examinations would be accepted by universities across Europe (Hill, 2007, p.4).

In 1978, the IB held a standing conference in London (32 countries were represented) where they attempted to work together with governments to promote the IBDP (IBO, 2017). At the time the IB heavily promoted itself as a vehicle for to promote ‘international understanding’ and to serve students of globally mobile families (i.e., diplomats, politicians) (Tarc, 2009). Though it was not able to secure funding directly from international actors (UNESCO) at the time, the IB instead turned to establishing school fees to cover programme costs (Tarc, 2009, p. 52). By the mid 1980s, the IBDP was offered in three working languages (English, French, and Spanish), had established offices in Buenos Aires, London, and Singapore; and had expanded to 100 schools across

the globe (IBO, 2017). After years of preparation, in 1994 the Middle Years Programme is introduced followed closely in 1997 by the Primary Years Programme (IBO, 2017). At present, it is estimated by the IBO (2017) that there are 4,538 IB schools worldwide, split across the IB Regions: IB Americas (IBA), IB Africa, Europe, & Middle East (IBAEM), and IB Asia-Pacific (IBAP).

Essential to the founding and the expansion of the IB has been the development of the values the organisation seeks to promote via education. Born by the idealism for a peaceful world after the Second World War, educators at the time sought to develop students who would be responsible world citizens (Hill, 2007). In the 1950s, the International Schools Association (ISA) which was at the time also working within the ISG, stated:

*“an international education should give the child an understanding of his past as a common heritage... an understanding of his present world as a world in which people are interdependent and in which cooperation is a necessity.*

*...a basic attitude of respect for all human beings as persons, understanding of those things which unite us and an appreciation of the positive values of those things that divide us...” (ISA Report, 1950 cited in Hill, 2007)*

Since early target students were from globally mobile families, educators perceived them to have more complex understandings of the world because of their distance to being confined to singular national contexts (Hill, 2007; Tarc & Beatty, 2012). The idea was that by creating an international student body, the exchange of ideas, cultures, and even languages would naturally develop ‘international understanding’. To aid this process IB educators promoted pedagogies which linked critical thinking, community engagement, and character development (Hill, 2007, p. 5).

The first official IB mission statement was introduced in 1996 and then revised in 2002, today it is as follows:

*The International Baccalaureate® aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.*

*These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (IBO, 2018).*

Accompanying this is the IB Learner Profile (IBLP) which states,

*“The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and share guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.*

*The IB learner profile represents 10 attributes valued by IB World Schools. We believe these attributes, and others like them, can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national, and global communities.” (IBO, 2013)*

Similar to the mission statement, the IBLP encases within it the hopes and expectations placed on prospective or current IB students. The first four qualities encompass attributes of what it means to be good students, “inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, and communicators”. The others, “principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective” speak to the early goals of IB educators – developing ideology and character in IB students that has the power to promote understanding.

While the mission statement and LP exist as guiding principles for educators and students, they also serve as one of the ways in which the IB promotes itself to the education market. Whether or not the IB organisation is marketing themselves directly or indirectly is up for discussion, and not the in the scope of this paper. However, the impressive growth of the IB has been identified by many scholars as a clear sign that the programme is no longer only a proponent of international idealism – but a globally valued product (Cambridge & Thompson, 2001; Bunnell, 2008, 2011; Resnik, 2012b). What exactly then makes the IBDP valued and sought after? Is it its long tradition of being a successful HEPP that grants access to top universities? Is it distinct due to its academic rigour? Or is it that it develops students into individuals prepared to face a globally complex world? The following subsection outlines the IBDP in more detail.

### **3.2.2. The IB Diploma Programme**

As mentioned in the previous sections, the DP is a HEPP that has been at the core of IB

from its beginning. To streamline the understanding of the DP, the IB has created a diagram that encompasses within in it, all aspects of the programme (Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. The IB Diploma Programme



Note: Adapted from IBO (2018b).

At the core of the DP is the LP (which was discussed previously), which is then circled by Approaches to Teaching and Learning (ATT & ATL). According to the IB, ATT and ATL are the “strategies, skills, and attitudes” that construct the learning environment for IB students (IBO, 2013). As can be seen in Table 4 below, both these approaches take the desired attributes from the LP and transform them into necessary skills for achieving success in the programme.

Table 4. IB Approaches to Learning and Teaching

*Approaches to Learning*

*Approaches to Teaching*



<i>Thinking skills</i>	Based on inquiry
<i>Communication skills</i>	Focused on conceptual understanding
<i>Social skills</i>	Developed in local and global contexts
<i>Self-Management skills</i>	Focused on effective teamwork and collaboration
<i>Research skills</i>	Differentiated to meet the needs of all learners

Noted: Adapted from IBO (2013).

Students are then assessed on the programmes three core elements, Theory of Knowledge (ToK), the Extended Essay (EE), and Creativity, Activity, and Service (CAS). ToK, or the study of the various branches of knowledge is a course that aims to “make students aware of the interpretative nature of knowledge, including personal ideological biases” (IBO, 2018b). Students are then evaluated on an oral presentation and a 1,600-word essay which considers if the students have managed to develop ATL by which they themselves make interdisciplinary connections. In the EE, students choose an area of interest and conduct an independent research paper of 4,000 words. This not only gives students the freedom to explore a topic of interest but serves as preparation for undergraduate research. Lastly, CAS is split into three areas: creativity (drawing, painting, dance, music, film, photography, other aesthetic experiences), activity (physical experiences such as sports), and service (unpaid or voluntary time in which students learn but also respect others). Failure to complete any of the three core elements, regardless of passing all subject areas and examinations – results in no diploma awarded.

Additionally, students must complete courses in the six IB subject areas language acquisition, studies in language and literature, sciences, the arts, mathematics, and individuals and societies. A minimum of three courses must be completed at Higher Level (HL), meaning that students turn in additional assignments and attend the course for more hours, than their Standard Level (SL) courses. While most schools offer at least one class in all subject areas, subjects vary depending on individual schools. This means while one school might offer psychology, another might have philosophy instead. For students wishing to take course not available on their campus, the IB has as of 2010, offered at least 15 online DP courses (IBO, 2018b). In the second year of the DP, students begin to take mock examinations in early spring in preparation for end of year examinations. IBDP examinations are then internally and externally assessed to ensure objectivity and reliability.

The DP is thus not only a curriculum aimed at instructing students with information but seeks to embody students with the qualities and attributes of individuals who will succeed for the academic rigour necessary in higher education studies. While

the intensity of the programme seems that it would dissuade individual from enrolling – IB statistics illustrate that the DP is only growing.

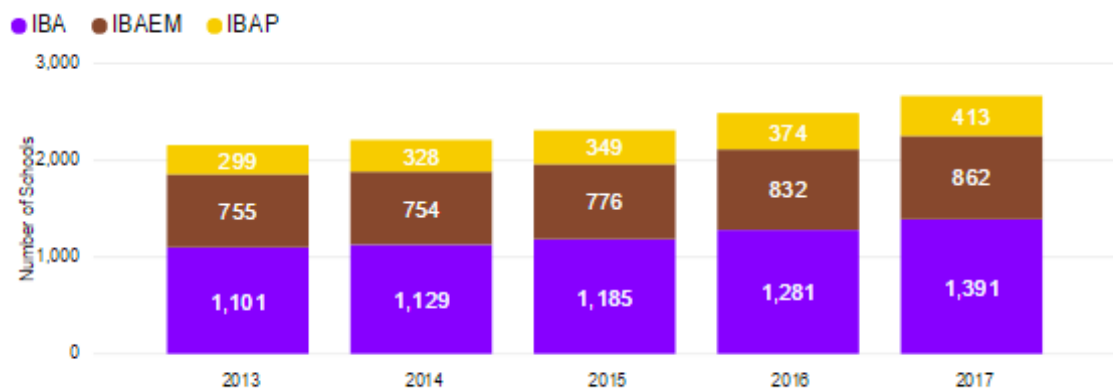
Table 5. IB Diploma Programme 2017 Summary

<i>Total number of IB Candidates</i>	<i>Total number of Exams</i>	<i>Total number of Subjects</i>	<i>Total number of Countries</i>	<i>Total number of schools</i>	<i>Diploma Pass Rate</i>
157,488	586,800	221	139	2,666	78.40

Note: Adapted from IBO (2017).

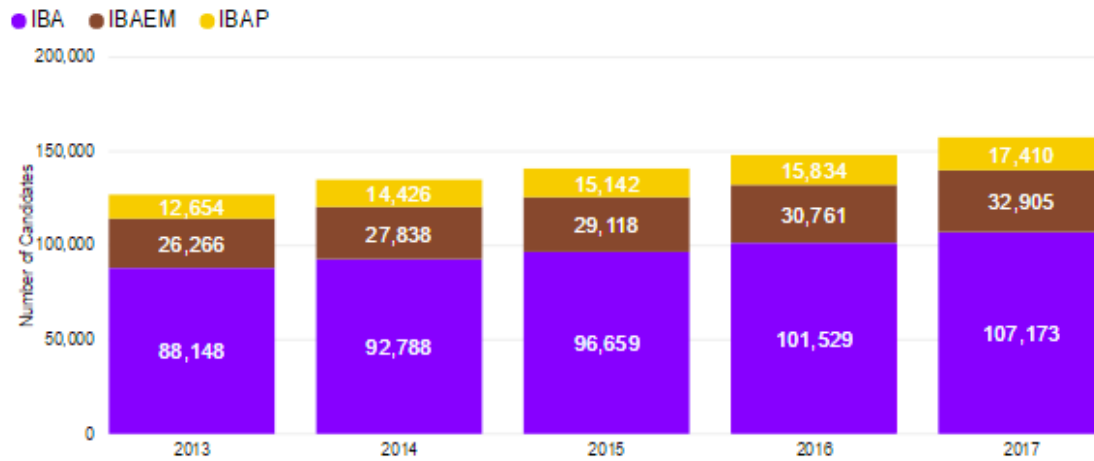
Table 5 above shows a quick summary of the DP’s 2017 statistical summary. According to the IB, over half of all IB World Schools in all IB Regions participated in examinations. With a pass rate of nearly 79%, it is clear that the programme is succeeded in producing IB graduates. Figure 2 and 3 below, show the growth of IB schools and IB candidates by IB Region respectively.

Figure 2. IBDP Growth of Schools by IB Region



Note: Adapted from IBO (2017).

Figure 3. IBDP Growth of candidates by IB Region



Note: Adapted from IBO (2017).

As per Figure 2, IBAP shows the largest growth rate of schools at 38% over a 5-year period. Similarly, Figure 3 shows that IBAP has the largest increase of candidates at 38.58% over the same 5-year period. While it is not in the scope of this paper to go into further details about the specifics of these growth rates, there is something to be said about the increasing number of candidates that are turning away from traditional state sponsored education and towards the IB. What is not clear from these statistics is the number of total schools represented that are not stand-alone IB World Schools but rather schools which offer the DP alongside national programmes. For example, in Australia, Canada, Denmark, the US, and the UK where some degree of school choice is present, the DP is offered in schools where the national programme is also present (Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009). This data also does not distinguish how many schools are private or public. Additionally, there is not specific data for which national or local governments aid or hinder the promotion of the IB.

Bunnell (2015), Outhwaite and Ferri (2016) outlines the rise and fall of the IB in the UK due to limitations by the local government in implementation of the programme. In contrast, Yamamoto, Saito, Shibuya, Ishikura, Gyenes, Kim, Mawer, & Kitano (2016) presented a report on the collaboration between the Japanese government and the IB in establishing at minimum 200 IBDP schools within a 5-year period. These statistics could offer a deeper understanding of the specific type of growth of the DP within different national school markets.

What is it then that is driving this increased growth for the IBDP? Why are students and families choosing this specific curriculum? Does it have to do with the values promoted of global citizenship and responsibility? Is it more to do with the academic quality? The promise of higher education? These are some of the central reflections this thesis attempts to explore. However, before answering these questions, Chapter 4 will explain the methodology used in this study.

## **Chapter 4:**

# **Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology utilised in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the thesis. The previous chapters have described in some detail the theoretical framework of the study, including previous research and contextual information. As noted previously, current research on school choice with special regard to the IB is limited (see Section 2.1). Further, literature on school choice has tended to focus on the motivations and process of parents rather than students themselves. As little information on these intersections is present in research, one aim of the study is to investigate student's subjective experiences of the process of school choice. To do so the study takes a qualitative comparative multi-case study approach. It should be noted that the methodology described here has been developed from a previous pilot study (PS) conducted by the researcher. The PS, conducted from November to December 2017, explored the same topic by using similar techniques that will be elaborated in the following chapters (Gonzalez, 2017).

First the ontological and epistemological standpoint of the researcher is explored to understand the chosen research design. The next section explores the study's use of grounded theory as a tool in the collection and analysis of data. Next, research strategy and further methodology are described. The remaining sections describe the sampling design and selection process (4.4); data collection method (4.5); analytical procedure (4.6); and the ethical considerations (4.7) undertaken throughout the study.

### **4.1. Epistemology, Ontology, and Research Strategy**

The study assumes an interpretivist paradigm in both its epistemological and ontological position. An interpretivist ontological position holds that the nature of reality is continuously social constructed by social actors (Bryman, 2012). Hudson and Ozanne (1988) cite Berger and Luckman (1967) "all human knowledge is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations" (p. 509). This position agrees with Blumer's symbolic interactionism - social actors actively engage with their environments to shape their own realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 510). From this view point, one can assume that an analysis of individual's representations of their own realities will reflect some truth from that reality. This position allows the researcher to explore qualitative questions such as: What is the symbolic interactionism of the IB chooser? How is this student engaging with their environment to choose the IBDP? How do they maintain these choices – what are their experiences, motivations, and positions? By collecting multiple individual experiences of the process of school choice, the study can paint a picture of what is occurring in these given situations. In contrast, a positivist position would assume that

one objective reality exists regardless of what social actors believe. Through a positivist lens it is assumed that students experience exactly the same reality with no degree of variation. This problematic as it (1) highly unlikely, given the differences in the sample size, (2) would in high probability still result in multiple accounts, and (3) yield rigid, objective answers that would then have to be ranked in order of most truthful. Instead, the interpretivist perspective allows the questions to place importance on all experiences regardless of precise similarity.

The interpretivist paradigm also assumes that no one truth or reality exists – meaning that research performed under this position is subject to less generalisability. To truly grasp understanding the research must continuously seek *verstehen*, or the shared meanings between individuals. The interpretivist epistemology then is to seek out the subjective experiences of individuals and form what Geertz (1973) calls a ‘thick description’ (cited in Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). By identifying similarities or differences in the processes and experience of school choice, the thesis forms a thick description that sheds light into the shared meanings that students experience in the process of school choice. Additionally, by comparing multiple narratives or cases a more complex understanding of these shared meanings is possible.

However, Hudson and Ozanne (1988) remind us that the process of understanding is a continual one, “what was interpreted enters into the current interpretations, just as the current interpretations will influence future interpretations” (p. 510). Thus the interpretivist research strategy must be an emergent process in which “ideas, meanings, questions, and data-collection techniques are cooperatively developed” between participant and researcher (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 513). Since very little research focusing on the intersections of school choice and the IB are present, the use of grounded theory (GT) as a research strategy is optimal as it directly parallels the emergent process.

Kathy Charmaz (2008) states that grounded theory (GT) starts from a place of inductive reasoning and “seeks to understand emergent empirical findings” (p. 157). In line with the interpretivist paradigm, GT methodology develops theory or understanding from the data itself through a comparative process where data collection and analysis are constantly referenced to one another (Bryman, 2012, p. 381). The constant comparison process involves the researcher perform analysis of data repeatedly, as new ideas and assumptions arise so does the need to refer back to new theories. Though many interpretations of GT have been developed since Glaser and Strauss’ (1976) initial GT – the most recent version takes a constructivist (one might say interpretivist) position which views knowledge as an emergent “product of particular social conditions and interactional situations” (cited in Charmaz, 2008, p. 160). Thus even though Glaser argues that the researcher should remove themselves from their own presuppositions and let data guide the research – the constructivist or interpretivist claim that the researcher’s own questions, ideas, and assumptions are a part of the GT process (Charmaz, 2008). Heath and Cowley

(2004) cite Becker (1993) who notes that although the researcher's own ideas will naturally come into play – they must remain open to all interpretations of the data (p. 143).

The tension of these epistemological and ontological positions is that all data is subjective and descriptive. For this thesis, description becomes more substantial through the use of a qualitative research strategy and GT methodology. Data is collected and shaped by the interpretation of the researcher who continuously finds, uses, and applies theories to understand behaviour rather than to explain it (Heath & Cowley, 2004). For a more detailed account of the GT analytical methods, see section 4.5 *Analytical Procedure*.

## 4.2. Research Design

The research design for this study has been developed in accordance with the above mentioned epistemological and ontological positions. As mentioned previously, the study undertakes a GT methodology, which provides the framework for data collection as well as analysis. The research design can best be described as a qualitative comparative multi-case study, which provides the framework for sampling as well as data collection. Both of these elements will be discussed in more detail below.

As mentioned previously, research design for this study has been developed from an initial PS conducted by the researcher as a part of the International and Comparative Education Master's Programme at Stockholm University (Gonzalez, 2017). Unlike the current study, the PS involved an explanatory sequential design that combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. In the PS, a quantitative questionnaire including open-ended questions was utilised to gain insight into relevant background information on the initial sample of 36 students. While this information did add depth to the PS, it was not deemed sufficiently dynamic enough to be utilised again in the current study. More importantly, the PS initial sample size of five IB students provided the basis of understanding on student experiences, motivations, and perceptions of school choice. Additionally, the PS provided the testing ground for the GT procedures that are used in this study. With the use of GT methodology, the analysis of this data revealed a number of codes that were then connected to theories. A number of these codes were utilised once more in the current study (see *Chapter 5 – Data Analysis and Findings*). Once preliminary understandings were reached, the researcher noted that further data collection and adaption of the methodology was needed to establish more significant meanings. Since this study does not use a quantitative survey for background information – the current interview guide, seen in *Appendix F – Interview Guide*, has been adapted to include additional questions. Since participant responses did yield interesting findings, the use of a PS helped strengthen the link between research questions and possible evidence.

Due to the small sample size and the use of one location in the PS, it was not

possible to compare data sets or investigate additional nuanced understandings of experiences. In order to make the study more comparative as well as more complex in its understanding, a comparative multi-case approach is used. As single case studies are often associated with focus on one particular location, subject, event, or even process – a multi-case study is defined by the presence of two or more of the aforementioned. A number of advantages are considered with multiple cases, (1) more coverage of the topic at hand; (2) cases can cover different contexts adding to generalisability of findings; and (3) can lead to more dynamic findings (Yin, 2009, p. 6-8). Particular disadvantages include: the additional time needed to cover multiple sites or subjects and defining whether or not all cases in the study do add to the findings or analysis. Bryman (2016, p. 69) warns that in selecting cases, the researcher must define the unit of analysis, in other words, “what or who is being investigated?”

For the study, four schools were chosen with a total of 15 respondents split across the locations. Though the schools themselves all provide an interesting backdrop for the study they were not the “focus of interest”, rather this was the individual student respondents (Bryman, 2012, p. 69). However, as every location describes a particular context regarding the IBDP, the study defines these as the cases (A, B, C, and D). For further discussion of the cases and locations, see section 4.3.1 *Context and Participants*.

Similar to the PS, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all respondents. This process is elaborated on in section 4.4 *Data Collection Method* and in section 4.6 *Ethical Consideration* where potential privacy concerns are discussed. Finally, in the design of this study reliability, replicability, and validity criteria were also considered – these elements are addressed in section 4.5.2 *Criteria of Trustworthiness*.

### **4.3. Sampling Design and Selection Process**

The study uses purposive sampling in which the units of analysis are chosen in reference to answering the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 410). Closely resembling GT, theoretical sampling refers to the process of data collection in order to develop theory through constant comparison methods (Bryman, 2012, p. 419). Maines (2004) emphasis two primary ways of integrating theories: (1) choosing new sites for data collection that address potential theories and (2) a process of coding (this will be addressed further in *section 4.5 Analytical Procedure*).

As previously mentioned, the small sample size of the PS prevented an investigation into the possible comparative elements of student experiences. The limitation of one site also meant that theoretical saturation was not reached or the phase in the research where no new data appeared (Morse, 2007). Due to the previous limitations, the current study set out to expand sites and number of candidates to address developing theories that emerged from the PS. Additionally, the research specifically set out to include sites that were mentioned by the previous five respondents.

However, the mechanism of sampling could also be termed a non-probability convenience sample. Unlike other types of sampling, convenience sampling describes a sample in which participants are chosen due to their availability (Bryman, 2012). As will be described in *section 4.3.1 Context* and *4.3.2 Participants*, the use of this sampling technique does broaden the sample size but also presents the study with considerations. According to Bryman (2012) convenience sampling lacks in transferability – making it difficult to generalise findings to other contexts beyond the sample. Additionally, participants recruited might not be representative of a whole population – in this case the study had clear delimitations in the participants chosen. *Table 6 Organisation of Cases, Locations, and Respondent Codes*, describes which respondents belong to which location and case.

Table 6 Organization of Cases, Locations, & Respondent Codes

<b>Case</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>L1</b>	<b>L2</b>	<b>L3</b>	<b>L4</b>
<b>Respondent</b>	A	D	H	L
	B	E	I	M
	C	F	J	N
		G	K	

Note: Author’s own creation.

As the study progressed, the researcher organised respondent interviews at four separation locations over the course of a one-month period. After every phase of interviewing, the research engaged with the analytical procedure (see section 4.5) and returned back to data collection. The study reached theoretical saturation at four locations and 14 respondents. At this phase the researcher determined that final interviews repeated similar data that was previously identified. At this point it was possible to begin a process of solidifying theoretical categories and the analysis.

### 4.3.1. Selection of Sites

In total the contextual sample consisted of four school sites: **L1**, **L2**, **L3**, and **L4**. Each location was chosen specifically as it exemplifies a different contextual backdrop of where the IBDP is provided. As mentioned in *section 4.2 Research Design*, multiple cases improve coverage, can add generalisability, and lead to more dynamic findings (Yin, 2009). *Table 7 Site Information* below provides a quick description of the sites included.



Table 7. Site Information

<i>Location</i>	<i>L1</i>	<i>L2</i>	<i>L3</i>	<i>L4</i>
<i>Type</i>	Municipal (public, no fees)	Independent (fee paying)	Independent (public, no fees)	Private Boarding (fee paying)
<i>Geographic Location</i>	Inner city Stockholm	Malmö	Inner city Stockholm	Greater Stockholm
<i>Grades</i>	K-12	K-12	10-12	7-12
<i>Curriculum</i>	IB only	IB only	IBDP and NP	IB MYP & DP and NP

Note: Author's own creation.

The first location, **L1**, was chosen for three reasons: (1) It was the same site of the PS meaning level of accessibility was high, (2) potential list of respondents was high, and (3) it typifies the 'ideal' IB school. As the researcher is a part-time member of staff at **L1**, accessibility was granted quickly and allowed the researcher to utilise school classrooms to conduct interviews. Further, using the same site but different respondents allowed for the possibility of testing whether similar findings would arise from the previous sample pool.

**L3** and **L4** were chosen as they were heavily mentioned by respondents in the PS. Additionally, **L3** presented an interesting case for two main reasons. First, it is an independently school (*friskola*) managed and directed by a company in the public sector. Secondly, it is a stand-alone USS where the IBDP and the NP are taught side by side. While the entire student body interacts through extra-curricular activities, instructors often teach multiple classes and are not tied to a specific programme.

**L4** also presented an interesting case study. The school, located in the greater area of Stockholm is a private boarding institution with a long tradition of education. Due to its private status, the school is able to charge fees for tuition as well as boarding. Similar to **L3**, the NP is also offered as a curricular choice for students. Unlike the other sites, **L4** is distinct in that it can accept students from abroad who do not have Swedish residency or citizenship.

Lastly, **L2** was chosen as an outlier site to test if similar concepts would appear or differ from the other sites. Similar to **L4** - **L2** is a private school that charges tuition fees and like **L1**, it is a stand-alone IB school. Unlike the other sites, it is located in Malmö and not Stockholm.

To confirm the site as a sampling location, the researcher sent out an introductory

email to the DP Coordinator, School Principal, and Assistant Principal of each school. Access to emails for all individuals from each school were provided to the researcher by the DP coordinator of **L1**. The email included an introduction to the study, study procedures, an attached copy of the consent form (see *Appendix E – Consent Form*), and a copy of the thesis supervisor’s recommendation letter (see *Appendix A – Ethical Reference*). Additionally, at the request of **L3** and **L4**, a copy of a police background check on the researcher was provided. The researcher was not presented with any difficulties and was granted accessibility to the student body and use of classrooms with ease.

### **4.3.2. Selection of Participants**

Participants for the study were sampled according to context. From **L1**, respondents were contacted from those who previously expressed interest in partaking in the PS, who were not included in the PS itself. From **L2**, the researcher offered a short presentation to a classroom of DP1 students describing the study and its procedures. From this cohort, a total of seven respondents volunteered and four were chosen at random. At site **L3**, the DP Coordinator chose four student volunteers to partake in the study. Finally, at site **L4** the researcher presented the study to a cohort of approximately 45 students. From this sample, three students were included into the study.

All participants were DP1 students who had started the programme in the 2017-2018 academic school year. In accordance with ethical standards all respondents were at least 16 years of age and able to consent to participation (further discussed in *section 4.6 Ethical Considerations*). *Table 8 Description of Respondents*, below gives a brief overview of the respondents included.

Table 8 Description of Respondents

<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Country of Birth</i>	<i>Previously attended IB school</i>	<i>Previously attended international school/ Location</i>	<i>Parents Occu.</i>	<i>Parent Occu.</i>
<b>RA</b>	M	Czech Republic	No	Yes/ Sweden	Tattoo Artist	Teacher
<b>RB</b>	M	Beijing, China	No	Yes/ Bangladesh	Embassy	Stay at home parent
<b>RC</b>	F	Bangladesh	No	Yes/ Bangladesh	Hidden	Government Officer
<b>RD</b>	M	United Arab Emirates	No	No/ UAE	Engineer	Teacher
<b>RE</b>	F	Italy	No	Yes/ Kenya, Dakar, & Tanzania	Diplomat	Consultant
<b>RF</b>	F	Sweden	Yes	Yes/ Switzerland	Engineer	Journalist
<b>RG</b>	M	Somalia	No	No	Hidden	Retired Teacher
<b>RH</b>	F	Sweden	Yes	Yes/ Sweden	Project Leader	Consultant
<b>RI</b>	F	Sweden	Yes	Yes/ New York, USA	Diplomat	Stay at home parent
<b>RJ</b>	M	Sweden	No	Yes/ Sweden	Teacher	Event Manager
<b>RK</b>	M	Sweden	No	No	Media	Producer
<b>RL</b>	M	Shanghai, China	No	No	Own company	Engineer
<b>RM</b>	F	Sweden	Yes	Yes/ Sweden	Hotel Owner	Hotel Owner
<b>RN</b>	F	Sweden	No	Yes	Economist	Business

<b>Total n=14</b>	M = 7 F = 7	7 countries represented	No = 10 Yes = 4	No = 4 Yes = 10		
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Note: Author’s own creation.

#### 4.4. Data Collection Method

The study utilised semi-structured interviews with all respondents conducted by the principal researcher. As previously mentioned in *section 4.2 Research Design*, an interview guide was developed to guide conversation into the areas that would be covered (see *Appendix F – Interview Guide*). The interview guide was flexible, allowing the interviewer to follow lines of questions deemed more important or to drop questions that seemed irrelevant. A large focus of the interviews became the clarifying questions, where the researcher asked respondents to expand on certain answers and clarify what they ‘meant’. This technique was essential as it provided the researcher with a pathway in finding *meaning*. Participants were thus encouraged to provide examples and continue expanding on answers if they felt comfortable enough to share.

As previously mentioned, four respondents from **L3** were pre-chosen by the DP Coordinator at their site. The remaining 10 respondents were picked randomly from their respective cohorts. Interviews were schedule on going over the course of one month over email or phone contact. All respondents were organised and assigned anonymized codes (see *Appendix D – Interview Coding Guide*). All interviews began exactly the same way with the principal researcher walking respondents through the consent form (see *Appendix E – Consent Form*). Though the consent form stated that interviews would last approximately 30 minutes, the shortest interview recorded was 17 minutes and the longest 40 minutes. Interviews were all audio recorded with consent for further analysis at a later time. Post interview all respondents were specifically reminded that they could contact the researcher or study supervisor if they had any questions or concerns.

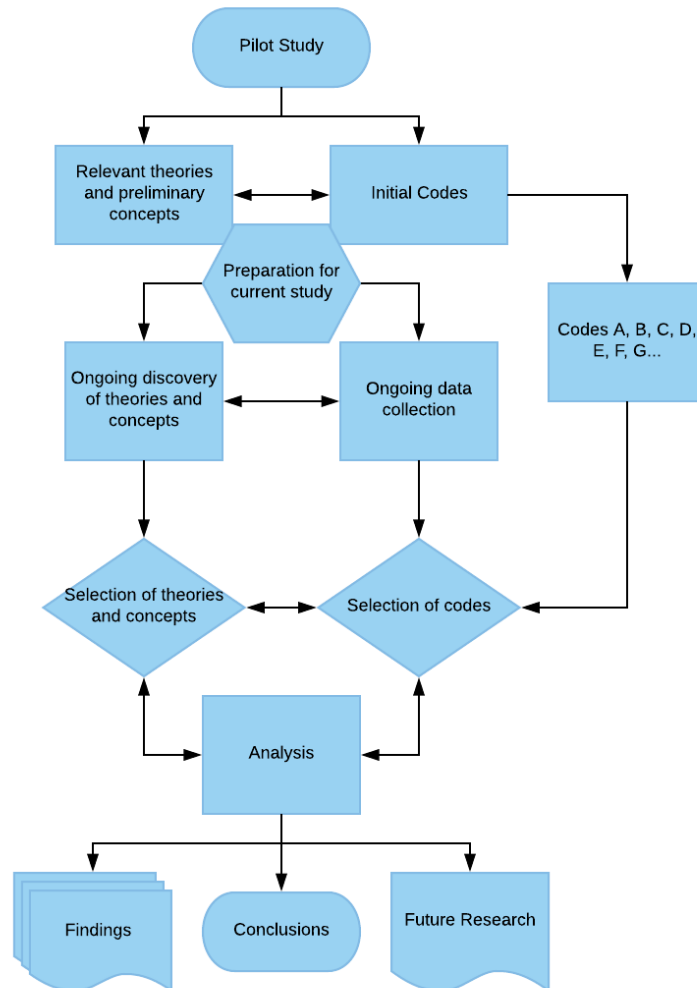
#### 4.5. Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure used in this study is illustrated below in *Figure 4 Analytical Methodology of Study*. As mentioned previously in *Section 4.2 Research Design*, the study was built on a previous PS and utilised GT methodology (Gonzalez, 2017).

As depicted by *Figure 4*, the study began from the groundwork of a PS (Gonzalez, 2017). The purpose of this PS was for an introductory search of relevant literature, as well testing relevant research techniques (i.e. GT). From the PS, a recursive technique was employed – as the researcher found concepts in literature, and data was collected, initial codes were conceived. During the beginning stages of the study, there was an ongoing discovery of theories and concepts through relevant literature. It was at this point the

researcher made connections between school choice, the theories of Bourdieu, and the IB (see *Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Previous Research*). Simultaneously, there was an ongoing process of data collection from the four sites, **L1**, **L2**, **L3**, and **L4**.

Figure 4. Analytical Methodology of Study



Note: Author's own creation.

As the study progressed, it became clear that the recursive project of data collection and concept discovery could not continue indefinitely. Subjective decisions were made by the researcher to select appropriate codes and concepts that most fit with the framework the research was building.

The analytical process was a continuous one over the course of the research. This was aided by the experience of the PS in which the research realised that analysis had to begin quickly if relevant and poignant connections would be made. Theoretical memos

were completed on printed copies of the interview guide before, during, and after interviews. All interviews went through several rounds of listening and finally transcription. These documents were read repeatedly to find pertinent connections. Critical to the above process was the development of codes. A code can be described as a “word or short phrase that symbolically” represents portions of the data (Saldana, 2008). Codes can be descriptive in nature, summarise data and also reduce it, depending on the subjective perspective of the researcher (Saldana, 2008, p. 4). Similar to the process of the PS, coding began simultaneously as interviews were completed and transcribed (Gonzalez, 2017). As Miles & Huberman (1994) state “data is coded both during and after collection... for coding *is* analysis” (as cited in Saldana, 2008, p. 7). Through the analytical process, it became clear that codes utilised in the PS were still relevant to the current emerging data and thus were brought into the selection of codes used in the study. Below, *Table 6 Study Codes*, lists the selected codes that were utilised in this study. For a more detailed description of codes and their given definitions see *Appendix C – Description of Codes*.

Table 9. Study Codes

Background	Academic Climate
Identity	Academic Initiative
Educational History	Academic Readiness
Networks	Opinion of Instructors
Sources of Information	Opinion of Student Body
Choice Autonomy	School Reputation
Choice Strategy	Future Mobility

Note: Author’s own creation.

As there was a wealth of information, the researcher devised the use of thematic analysis to help extract reoccurring concepts, codes, and themes from the data. The use of thematic analysis is best explained by the framework method or a matrix system for “ordering and synthesising data” (Bryman, 2012, p. 574). This is meant to resemble qualitative analysis software and help manage data collection (Bryman, 2012, p. 580).

Below, *Figure 5 Framework Analysis of Codes, Part 1* and *Figure 6 Framework Analysis of Codes, Part 2: Research Questions* illustrate the matrices utilised to organise the data collected. As transcription occurred, corresponding cells in the matrices were filled with quotations and notes from interviews. This process allowed for a cyclical act where emerging data was repeatedly linked back to itself across cases and respondents. This method took several rounds of analysis. The first cycle was merely a process of organisation throughout the transcribed interviews – codes and notes were assigned to the data. The second cycle focused on going through the data once more to find patterns. Following this, the third cycle concentrated on taking the relevant patterns in the data and across codes to finalise precisely how the codes were defining themselves through the data. This step would become the definitions in *Appendix C – Description of Codes*. The final cycles of analysis took the Framework Analysis and related it to the relevant theories found through the process of the study.

Table 10. Framework Analysis of Codes, Part 1

<i>Codes</i>	<b>Opinion of Instructors</b>	<b>Opinion of Student Body</b>	<b>Academic Climate</b>	<b>Academic Initiative</b>	<b>Academic Readiness</b>
<i>Case</i>					
<i>A</i>					
<i>B</i>					
<i>C</i>					
<i>D</i>					

Note: Author’s own creation.

The final stages of methodology involved the presentation of the *findings* (Chapter 5), *discussion* of the findings (Chapter 6), *conclusions* made from the study (Chapter 7), and finally *suggestions for future research* (Chapter 8).

Table 11. Framework Analysis of Codes, Part 2: Research Questions

<i>Research Question</i>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Why are students choosing the IB?</b>	<b>Strategies for choice</b>	<b>Future mobility</b>
<i>Case</i>				
<i>A</i>				
<i>B</i>				
<i>C</i>				
<i>D</i>				
<i>Codes</i>		Future Mobility; Academic Climate, Initiative, Readiness; School Reputation	Choice Autonomy, Strategy; Networks; Sources of Information	Future Mobility; Identity; Background; Educational History

Note: Author’s own creation.

#### 4.6. Criteria of Trustworthiness

While assessing reliability, validity, and generalisability of a study is an essential step in quantitative research – these elements do not always fit the model of qualitative research. Instead many researchers suggest that alternative criteria are needed (Bryman, 2012). To evaluate the rigor of qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln suggest establishing trustworthiness through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (as cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 384).

Unlike internal validity, credibility is measured by how close the research has arrived to representing reality as it has been experienced and lived by respondents in the study (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). According to Krefting (1991), the research must then set out to test their findings against several groups thus the study becomes credible when others who share a similar experience can immediately identify with the data (p. 216). One such technique for establish credibility is known as respondent validation, or providing respondents with an account of their own experiences in order to corroborate if the findings have represented their realities (Bryman, 2012, p. 390-391). Through the process of the study all respondents were continuously informed about the nature of the study and purpose to ensure transparency. Additionally, all respondents were sent a recording of their interview and asked to reflect on how they felt about their answers. Respondents were encouraged to write back and provide clarification or adapt their answers if they felt it was necessary. No respondent provided additional comments or changes to their interviews.

As mentioned in *Section 4.1 Epistemology, Ontology, and Research Strategy*, the



study's philosophical design leaves little room for generalisability to larger populations. According to Sandelowski (1995) a strength to qualitative research lies in the fact that it is entirely unique to every researcher and every situation, thus making the generalisability criteria an irrelevant. Instead, transferability is encouraged or whether or not findings *fit* within another context outside the study (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). To aid this, researchers are encouraged to use thick description (see *Section 4.1*) to provide others with references "for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings" (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). Although this study does not set out to be generalizable to larger populations, the researcher attempts to convey through thick descriptions a number of realities presented by the respondents. The aim is that these experiences, described and presented across multiple settings will present substantial patterns that are identifiable in other similar contexts.

Dependability is established when the methodological process is supported by detailed records of the study (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). By having detailed accounts and reasoning for every step taken from the conceptualisation of the study, to data collection, and presentation of findings – consistency can be reached. A version of 'auditing' can be utilised here in which a peer audits the study during its process to ensure consistency in procedures (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). Though peer auditing was not utilised in this study, meticulous records of the methodological process, interviews, transcriptions, and findings were kept throughout the study.

The last criterion, confirmability is conveyed when the researcher is shown to have acted in the most objective way possible. As mentioned through this chapter, the philosophical underpinnings and research strategy almost entirely ensure that all data collected is the product of particular subjective and lived-experiences. Thus to ensure confirmability in this study, the researcher worked closely with the academic supervisor who provided feedback throughout the PS and current study. Since the researcher's own subjective presentation is impossible to ignore, everything has been done to represent the findings in the most objective way possible.

## **4.7. Ethical Considerations**

Throughout every phase of the study from beginning to end, the researcher took into serious account ethical considerations to ensure absolute protection of all respondents. As all respondents in the study were adolescents, special actions were taken. In order to ensure good practices, the four ethical principles defined by Diener & Crandall (1978) were followed:

1. Whether there is *harm to participants*;
2. Whether there is a *lack of informed consent*;
3. Whether there is an *invasion of privacy*;
4. Whether *deception* is involved. (Bryman, 2012, p. 135).

The first steps taken to ensure ethical standards have to some extent been previously described in this chapter and are concerned with establishing contact with appropriate school authority figures (see *Section 4.3 Sampling Design and Selection Process*). As mentioned, relevant program coordinators were notified about the purpose and procedures of the study before any data collection began. This confirmed that the researcher had access to school grounds, facilities, and the student body. Additionally, letters of recommendation and police records helped to establish trust between the researcher and coordinators. These steps ensured not only consent but also reduced levels of deception by creating transparency.

As respondents to the study were in age range of 16 to 18 years old, it was imperative that consent be established to abide by Swedish ethical standards and law (Codex, 2016). To ensure this a *Consent to Interview* form was devised (see *Appendix E*). In this form, respondents were presented with an introduction to the researcher and study, purpose of study, procedures, potential risks, and a statement on confidentiality. Before interviews began and were recorded, all respondents were read the *Consent to Interview* form by the researcher. At this time the researcher ensured that respondents were clear about the nature of the study, procedures, and were aware that they could withdraw at any moment. Additionally, all respondents understood how to contact the researcher and academic supervisor post interview. All respondents were cleared and signed the forms, with one copy being kept by them and one by the researcher.

Although there were no physical risks associated with the study, there was a possibility for emotional harm to participants through interviews. Though no questions included in the *Interview Guide* are in particular distressing or difficult, there was an opportunity for respondents to feel exposed or vulnerable when discussing their experiences. To reduce deception and harm - the researcher made sure all participants were aware that they were free to not answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. To further reduce invasion of privacy, Diccio-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest establishing trust with respondents during interviews. This was done not only through informed consent procedures but also by coordinator with respondents about where they felt more comfortable conducting the interviews.

#### **4.8. A Note on GT: Researcher's Reflexivity**

Following the suggestion of Potts (2007), who states that self-reflection is critical of the research in order to develop a critical voice – this following section aims to present a reflexive look at how I utilized GT in this study.

As mentioned in *Section 4.1 (Epistemology, Ontology, & Research Strategy)*, GT assumes an inductive approach to the research process. A methodology for research since the late 1970s, GT has under the past decades assumed different forms that bring the

methodology to tension between several researchers who disagree on what constitutes the *truest* form of GT (Heath & Cowley, 2004). In this study the GT methodology has been an inductive process in which a dialogue between the theoretical work and empirical analysis have been parallel.

Many GT work however, assumes that research starts from a place where there are no preconceived notions, ideas, or even literature. This study, which has been built from the ground up and from previous experience of a PS – does assume some preconceived ideas (Gonzalez, 2017). For example, the researcher questions from the PS to this study have experienced little change, as have a majority of the codes. However, this does not mean that I came into the process unwilling to change certain elements. Rather, I approached the study with the same blank state as the PS – letting the data speak for itself as the process continued.

How did I then approach this study *a la tabula rasa* if I had preconceived ideas about codes and with the inclusion of theories like Bourdieu's? First the inclusion of previous research on the topic of education markets and school choice was a necessity to place the study within a localised field of research. As the study progressed in data collection, I began to notice certain patterns and themes of social hierarchy and exclusion among the respondents. At this moment it became clear that I had not researched deeply into the IB itself. The parallel data collection and literature search led me to the theories of Bourdieu – which themselves seemed to be built from an inductive process.

Bourdieu himself in the writing of his theories did not seek to explain behaviour but rather understand it – this constructivist approach fit nicely with my own epistemological and ontological positioning. His theories of symbolic capital thus became a pathway by which it was possible to think through many of the trends and patterns that were emerging in the data. The inclusion and explanation of his theories thus became a necessary component of the thesis. Though this inclusion seems to clash with GT methods, the reader should be reminded that GT is an inductive, one might say experimental approach that allows for this type of technique.

In the following chapter, findings and analysis of the study will be presented. This chapter is meant to be both descriptive and analytical – allowing the data to speak for itself. In *Chapter 6*, a discussion of the findings with a link back to theories presented in *Chapter 2* will be presented.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

In this following chapter, analysis and findings of the study are presented and described. Utilizing the approach described in *section 4.5: Analytical Procedure*, a number of background and interpretive codes were developed throughout the course of the study. While several codes were adapted from the PS, new codes were included and combined to streamline the presentation of ideas (Gonzalez, 2017). It should be noted that these codes are subjectively developed from the researcher's own interpretation of the data. *Background codes* are largely descriptive in nature including information that pertains to respondent's background, educational history, and identity. *Interpretive codes* attempt to convey behaviours, experiences, and phenomena that were extracted from respondent statements.

In *section 5.1 Background Codes*, a descriptive account of respondents will be presented. *Section 5.2 Interpretive Codes* and its subsequent sections (5.2.1 – 5.2.11) will present the trends and insights gained from respondent interviews. A list of the codes as well as definitions to their meanings is found in *Appendix C – Description of Codes*.

### 5.1. Background Codes

The following section is a description of the 14 respondents in the study. As can be seen in *Table 8 Description of Respondents* (see *section 4.3.2*), the population of the sample resulted in diverse backgrounds. Seven respondents identified as male and remaining seven respondents as female – giving the study a gendered balance. Overall seven countries were represented, with half of respondents being born in Sweden. The remaining respondents represented six countries from Eastern Asia (China), Western Asia (United Arab Emirates), Southern Asia (Bangladesh), Eastern Africa (Somalia), Southern Europe (Italy), and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic).

As the researcher began the process of selecting participant (see *section 4.3.2*), the initial assumption was that the majority of students would have previously attended an IB school. Contrary to this, only four respondents answered that they had attended an IB school prior to enrolling in the DP (**RF, RH, RI, & RM**). However, 10 of the respondents had previously attended an international school within Sweden and abroad. All respondents had at least one parent who was working full time, with only two respondents having a stay-at-home parent (**RB, RI**). Contrary to the IB's origins of being schools for the children of foreign diplomats (see *section 3.2: The International Baccalaureate*), only three respondents had parents who worked in the government sector (**RB, RC, & RI**).

All respondents reported taking a minimum of six classes and the ToK class (total 7 classes), three at HL and the remaining at SL. Additionally, all respondents were involved at minimum in 3 CAS activities at the time of the interviews. These included everything from Model United Nations, Student Union, sport clubs, dance troupes, theatre, and volunteer work abroad. For a summary of this information refer back to *Table 8 Description of Respondents* in section 4.3.2.

## 5.2. Interpretive Codes

In the following subsections, the *interpretive codes* that were utilised to make sense of the data collected are presented. As mentioned previously the meaning of these codes can be found in *Appendix C – Description of Codes*. Instead of the following codes being termed *descriptive*, they are instead labelled *interpretive*, to convey how they have been developed from the researchers' subjective interpretation of the data. While many of these codes were developed during the PS and adapted for the current study, the researcher approached the data with an *a priori* stance in order to allow the data to represent itself. To this end respondent quotes are presented in each subsection to illuminate trends and findings. These patterns are then summarised at the end of each section.

### 5.2.1. Sources of Information

When asked where they found information when making their school choice, all respondents referenced varying sources of information. Below are respondent quotes that demonstrate the different sources of information.

**PR:** *Where did you find information when looking for schools to apply to?*

**RA:** *I went to the gymnasiemässan (school fair). I did an internet search on international schools in Stockholm and the area. I definitely talked to people where I work – that used to go to IB schools. Overall, I talked to everyone. Anyone really.*

**RC:** *My school took us to the gymnasiemässan (school fair) – which is where I got most of my information from. But also my school gave us a handbook which had all of the national programs and then at the end of the book it had a sort of check list about how much you would like to do certain things from 1 to 10. I saw that my total was either arts or IB – but I can't do arts! So I choose the IB.*

**RJ:** *Well I went to the open houses, which I found the websites. I also*

*– we went to the gymnasiemässan, which is this fair – you probably know what it is. Where you get to talk to them. And I read all the brochures for the schools. We went with the schools, because we had a class trip there. But then I went to the open houses with my parents.*

**RA, RC, RJ** all received information about school choice primarily by attending the annual school fair (*gymnasiemässan*). These events are typically held once a year and serve as an “annual information and guidance exhibitions” for students in the process of school choice. Students are free to attend on their own, with parents, but typically primary schools themselves organise class trips. It should be noted that **RA, RC, RJ**, were also respondents who had already been living and attending school within Stockholm and thus to some degree familiar with the school choice process.

Other respondents relied more heavily on **Networks** of friends and family in gathering information before making their choice. Once general information about the school was obtained, respondents typically took the next step in visiting open houses and arranging school visits. **Respondent K** for example had a parent set up an individual school visit. As respondents had more connected networks of friends and family, they expressed feeling more confident in their decision making.

**RK:** *Well I know quite a lot of people, so I had quite a few friends who went to different high schools, from Kungsholmen, Södra Latin, Globala, Rytmus, Varmdö, all these schools but no one from L3. So I got a lot of information from there and of course I knew the general gist of it. Then the most I got from L3, I had the flu when they had the open house so I wasn't actually able to go here but my mother came instead and she managed to set up a private tour where I would be shown around the school. And I think that's how I got my main information. Also the leaflet, the brochure - which I call propaganda.*

**RH:** *It was my friend from my old school, she was also talking about switching schools. Like maybe I want to go to this school and then I checked out this school and it seemed pretty nice.*

**PR:** *What do you mean you check it out?*

**RH:** *I went to the open house. I mean, when you're in 9<sup>th</sup> grade you end up talking about it with your friends you know? So I did talk about coming here with some of them and they were like oh ok!*

The information gathering process was notably more difficult for students moving into Sweden from abroad. Since many respondents did not have a previously set up **network** of trusted individuals, respondents relied on family and internet searches to gather information. **RN**, **RM**, & **RE** all expressed relying on parents and siblings who had previously attended or had experience with the particular school that was chosen. Interestingly, only **RE** mentioned a father figure being influential in the process of gathering information. Given the popularity of social media, it was noteworthy that only **RM**, specifically mentions finding information in this way.

**RN:** *Well mainly it was my choice, but my mom encouraged me to come here, **L4**. And so did my sister. My sister went here. I mean I could have gone back to Paris or Brussels. I could have gone to any other international school in Sweden I guess. But after hearing her experience, I came right after she graduated. I was kind of very excited to come here.*

**RM:** *My mom was like - I don't know, as involved as a parent can get. Planning, doing a lot of reading, sending me links and everything. Telling me to study before in the summer so I could be prepared.*

**PR:** *Where did your mom find information or where did you find information?*

**RM:** *About the schools? Well first we went to the website and then we read about it. We saw videos and I wanted the student perspective so I went to social media. And like hash-tagged **L4** to see if people had posted things about the school. And um, yeah. And we also came to visit.*

**RE:** *My father went to this school, **L2**. The other school I looked at was Borgarskolan but this one had primary and it made it easy because my little brother can also come here. With my parents, I looked at past scores of students who went to the school, ratings, reputations, and prices. We looked at home pages or websites. And then we booked meetings with the counsellors and school visits.*

Both **RE** and **RM** mention school websites, ratings, prices, and logistics of school placement as important informational elements to look for. For **RB** who transferred from abroad, first impressions during school visits were the most important. **RB** makes it clear that choosing a “*pure IB*” is more desirable as there seems to be less competition between students and a more peaceful **academic climate**.

**RB:** *The thing is that when I first came to Sweden I didn't know about the schools. So I didn't know... I had four choices – four schools. And I treated them equally because I didn't know what the reputation was like so I based all my expectations on the school on the structure of the school basically when I first visited, my first impression. And at first I did like this one school and it looked like a castle but I didn't like the vibe. Because it wasn't a pure IB, it had other departments and sectors. It felt – that it was that people disliked the IB students and the IB students disliked the other students. There was a rivalry. I visited L3 but then it seemed, when I went for the entrance exam it seemed too formal for me. So in a way, this school, L1, was my number one choice. But I did most of my research online, I didn't know many people once I came to Sweden so I didn't have anyone to contact.*

**PR:** *Was it difficult to get information?*

**RB:** *Um, it was difficult finding information on the internet. And there are is always people writing negative reviews for each and every school. So I did focus on the negative reviews to choose one and then narrowed it down to which schools were the least negative.*

For **RD** and **RG** who both came to Sweden from abroad and had previously studied at Swedish state-schools, sources of information came from the schools themselves.

**RD:** *My student counsellor at [school name], she helped me know which schools I wanted to apply to. I would have a meeting with her once every two weeks and try to find schools that fit my criteria I had or the subjects I had.*

**RG:** *Actually the teachers here and the school counsellor, they give you a lot of information, any information you want. Even the school counsellor she will recommend you the school you want to go to. Even the teachers are very honest with us, like, if I want to go to [school name] it is actually your choice. No one here is going to push you. They will give you a recommendation, but this is your life it is up to you. If you ask the teachers, they just tell you what they think about the school and what the differences are.*

**Summary:** All respondents sought to find external sources of information from one or more places. The main source of information for respondents seemed to be internet searches for school websites, reviews, and even representations of schools through social



media. Respondents suggest that school websites must be informative but not too formal that respondents feel alienated or uncomfortable. Other respondents relied on online reviews but noted that these are not always to be trusted. Perhaps the most trusted source of information was word of mouth through friends and family. Respondents indicate that discussing information through friend groups gives the most truthful knowledge about schools. A main source of information for respondents was school visits and open houses. Being within the school, seeing the campus and speaking to teachers gives respondents information that cannot be gathered from brochures or online searches. The responses reveal that individuals seek multiple sources to build a web of information that is considered trustworthy. This suggests that while schools seem to distribute a lot of information through websites and representatives, it is primarily **school reputation** and word of mouth through students themselves that is most trusted.

### 5.2.2. School Reputation

Throughout the PS (Gonzalez, 2017) **school reputation** was continuously linked by respondents as an element that influenced school choice. Below are chosen remarks made by respondents on this category during this study.

**RC:** *This was my first choice yes. My best friend's brother used to go to this school and graduated the year before I joined. So I heard a lot of good feedback from him and other people and also when I did my research in Gymnasieantagning<sup>7</sup> at that time I had seen that the IB at **L1** as opposed to **L3** was more relevant. It might be my personal bias. IB is world renowned. It has its own reputation that the Swedish system doesn't have. And it's also more global, so you don't have – its not a local competition you are competing with students all over the world. So that's also why I would say the pressure is kinda more.*

**PR:** *What do you mean by that? The pressure?*

**RC:** *I would say that it is, **L1** competes with **L3**. They compete with each other quite a bit. It's not professional but instead its mostly just students who compete with each other. But since this is just an IB school it has a lot more reputation, a better reputation because **L3** is not just an IB school. It has the other national programs.*

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<sup>7</sup> Gymnasieantagning is a school information website for upper secondary school in Sweden.

**PR:** *How do you know that it has a better reputation? Can you explain what you mean?*

**RC:** *I see when I'm out in the hallways, oh look L3 doesn't have to do this or that. Then we're all - oh we are at L1 and we have to be in the real IB. However, it is better for us because we are getting the taste of the IB in every stage and at L3 they don't it's kinda like whatever about the IB.*

School reputation was often constructed by respondents through a process of comparison. **Respondent C** states that the IB as an entity has its own 'global reputation' which doesn't compete locally. Interestingly, **RC** who attends **L1**, mentions another school in the study, **L3**, as a direct competitor. Since **L3** is not a stand-alone IB, **RC** feels that its reputation as an IB school is much lower compared to that of **L1**. Similarly, **RF** compares **L2** to another IB school in the same area (not included in this study). For **RD** reputation is built on quality of the **academic climate** (see *section 5.2.8*) – whether students are graduating and going to good universities.

**RF:** *I don't think this school has a good reputation compared to other schools. I think though they find us very simple and easy to get good grades. If you compared to [school name], a lot of people decide to go, there because they have been running the DP program a lot longer than L2 has. And it is very close by as well.*

**RD:** *It's a good school, it has a good reputation. Barely anything controversial happens here. But also people who study here they go on to proper universities – so that is a good factor in having a good reputation.*

**PR:** *How do you know that it has a good reputation? Where did you find this out?*

**RD:** *People like the school counsellor told me but I also heard that 60% of students didn't pass last year so that's maybe not good. And half of the teachers know what they are doing but half of them have the information but don't know how to deliver it to the students. So that's not good.*

For respondents at **L3**, the schools own presentation of itself was a bigger indicator of reputation than external status. The house system<sup>8</sup> at **L3** was mentioned by

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<sup>8</sup> The house system at **L3** is an extra-curricular activity which splits the entire student body into

several of the respondents as being a factor by which **L3** attempted to build its own school reputation. For both **RJ** and **RK**, reputation is tied to the school's ability to handle events with care. Though the feeling of prestige or status was clear, for **RK** reputation was considered to be a pretence to actual events in the school.

**RI:** *I think you're I think the school's reputation is a lot different from a younger stage, from a different view. Its known to have a wide variety of courses that they offer. And also this house system which I think they really push is to kind of make you think that the students would enjoy school. Which I do notice when I'm here that they have the house system but it's not as noticeable as what I thought it would be.*

**PR:** *What are they pushing? The house system? Can you explain?*

**RI:** *I think that they push for this international mind-set and the fact that they speak English.*

**RJ:** *Well the school handles some things well and handles other things poorly. On the outside the school seems to people – it seems it has a good reputation and they have communication with universities and you see that in the school as well. You get oftentimes universities come to talk to students. Then there are things that you only know in turn and – they are - less good at handling.*

**RK:** *Prestigious? Or that they seek prestige then divided and I would say a little bit hollow comes to mind.*

**PR:** *What do you mean by hollow?*

**RK:** *Because I have a little bit of a difficult relationship to some of the things that happen in the school. I feel like we put on, we in some areas put on a facade to the outside world which is what I meant by prestige seeking that they want the good grades to make it look good and attractive for other students to come her. And then to some extent I mean the house system that they're very proud about. I see is it's it only works to separate the school, the students to some extent not really bringing them closer. And that*

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four groups. These groups have different themes and subjects. Students do a variety of activities within their groups and also compete against the other groups. It is meant to serve as a unifying activity.

*we have these things that we know we boast about that aren't really, aren't really true in some ways.*

For **RL**, **RM**, and **RB** school reputation was gathered by word of mouth. These respondents mention 'hearing about the school' from others via the community, other students, and school fairs.

**RL:** *They feel - oh my gosh this school is really good. I really enjoy that because I used to talk to the cinema owner in [town redacted] and she said my daughter goes to another school and she just said oh my gosh your school the national program is so popular and also the IB program they have to sign a stand-by list to come here. They really want to join our school because we are really good and nice and we have the best teachers.*

**RM:** *Snobby [laughs] because look, like, before I came here I was just like so I was scared to death to come here because I was like - you know I heard that they are super snobby. I heard that the girls are like really bitchy. And I was like I don't know if I want to come here but its's not really like that. I mean there are people like that but it's just more like a stereotype.*

**PR:** *Where did you hear those things?*

**RM:** *Uh, students, friends, like social media when I was looking for information before I came here.*

**PR:** *Ok, let's talk about this school. Can you describe this school? What is this school's reputation?*

**RB:** *After being to a few events, like the gymnasiemässan [school fair] the school does have a good reputation. And being a CAS ambassador and spreading the word of the IB, it does feel like people react positively. The name of the school, it is formal, it seems like a good school to choose. Itself, the school seems professional. But also at the fair, the students who are representing the school they have a very common and formal language with the people who come up to the stalls. So you see the type of education that will be at the school.*

**Summary:** Respondents have several versions of a school's reputation. Similar to findings in the PS, reputation was linked to choice (Gonzalez, 2017). As schools were

considered to have a better reputation, the desire to attend said school was higher. For respondents from **L1** and **L2**, reputation was built through a comparative method of judging schools against one another. For respondents from **L3**, reputation was perceived from a more critical standpoint perhaps due to the school's push to present itself in a certain way. Though perceived reputation played an important role in choice selection, student's own understanding of it seemed subjective at best with respondents offering little objective information. **School reputation** on its own seems to be a source of information that is disseminated by multiple actors including students, faculty, school administration, family, community members, as well as school's own websites and brochures.

### 5.2.3. Choice Autonomy and Choice Strategy

Respondents had a variety of strategies when it came to choosing the IBDP. Frequent responses included utilising **sources of information** and **networks** in the choice process. As discussed in the previous section **networks** included trusted peers and friends. For many choosing strategy involved a discussion with one or more parents. As parents were more involved, **choice autonomy** decreased in respondents. Individuals felt more comfortable choosing the IB alone when parents trusted them.

**RA:** *I think it was, it was overall a discussion with my parents. I didn't really talk to my parents about my school choices before. But once they realized I was going to come to an IB school, I explained everything about the school to them. And they were like ok – that's ok with us. As long as you can handle it. Obviously they supported my choice. They were just like well realise that it will be challenging so you have to really focus and maybe give up some things, like football. It was the closest school to where we used to live. I sat down with my mom and dad and discussed it. They said it's an international school so there is a lot of kids from other countries and you can fit in. Rather than go to a Swedish school were I will be the outsider.*

**RB:** *I didn't want to attend **L3** – it was, the first impression was too formal. My parents were not involved in the choice. When I went to the British system school they were lets say about 80% involved but this time I made my choices. They said that – my parents didn't come with me to look at the schools but they gave*

*me the responsibility of doing that.*

**PR:** *Why do you think your parents let you make the choice on your own?*

**RB:** *I think it's because I've had a lot more experience with English medium schools, they trusted me with the choice. They felt probably that I would be a better judge than themselves in choosing a school.*

**PR:** *Were your parents involved in the choice process?*

**RH:** *No not really. I was the one doing things because my parents didn't really know about **L3** and they aren't super involved in schools and such. I don't want to say I was the one who found **L3** but yeah I was the one who was like maybe I should go here.*

If respondents felt less secure about making the choice, parents became more involved and acted as advisors to the decision making. As **autonomy** increased, tension between students and parents seemed to rise.

**PR:** *And so you mentioned that your parents were involved in your choice making. Can you give me an example of how they were involved?*

**RK:** *Well my dad he didn't want to, he didn't want me to take either IB or go to singing school because he thought that going to songs school was a passion and a hobby and nothing that you should be working with on a daily life. And he said like there's not really too much of a future in it. And then when I wanted to pick IB he said that you're rejecting your Swedish heritage. I mean you're throwing your family to the side. So it was quite a lot of resistance from both of them.*

Respondents frequently mentioned other IB schools in the area as alternative options that were considered in the choice process (**RA**, **RB**, **RI**). In choosing the IB, being able to study in English was not just a necessity for some students but also a desired element. **RC** and **RI** both mention that the desire to study in English is a critical element in being able to study abroad or internationally.

**PR:** *What was your first choice?*

**RA:** *My first two choices, well yes, this (**L1**) was my first choice. My other choice was **L3**.*

**PR:** *Why did you choose this school?*

**RI:** *I chose this school (L3) because it offered the IB program I wanted to do but it also offered several other programs so I knew I would be surrounded by students that weren't like taught in the way I was taught and have different approaches and also backgrounds like from different schools. And then I also wanted to go to school outside Sweden preferably. So I've been considering Scotland. And I knew like, I was actually choosing between natural science and IB in the end. And I think it came down to was that I had taken IB before so I was used to it and I was used to the program. So it felt easier to continue in the same path. And the same style of teaching.*

**PR:** *What was your second choice. Did you have any other choices?*

**RI:** *My second choice was actually IB at LI.*

**RC:** *Well we were asking around a lot about international schools because we weren't really planning to stay here for too long in Sweden. So our three siblings, we wanted to go study in England so we thought studying in English would be better for us because we want to study in English. And prior to coming to Sweden we were in an English-medium school. So we asked around a little bit, and one of our grandpas he knew about this school and he said we could try to enrol here and we tried and it went well.*

**RN:** *It's a big change because I have never studied in English before. My previous educations have been all in French. The IB focuses on everything, being outgoing, CAS activities. At my previous schools I did do a lot of ballet, fencing, and that part isn't so different. My previous school was also very focused on Latin and Greek so I was studying a lot of history and not at all scientific. So I chose to go here because I wanted difference and I wanted to study in English, to make my choices later more broad.*

**PR:** *You mentioned your parents trusted you to make the choice alone, why do you think that is?*

**RN:** *They trusted me to know what I wanted to do. They know the IB and no one would say no to that. For university it opens a lot of doors. The program itself is very broad.*

Like many of the students who were not fluent or native Swedish speakers, choice was limited to the IB since it is offered in English.

**RD:** *I couldn't apply to Swedish schools because I didn't really have the right subjects or grade in Swedish. So I knew I would be limited to the IB programs.*

Interestingly the issue of security and safety was a factor in making school choice for two students from abroad (**RL** & **RM**).

**PR:** *Did you have a choice in another country or just here?*

**RL:** *America. But because the news is so full with gunshots. My mom saying it's too dangerous and our friends say it's too dangerous and too many Chinese there.*

**PR:** *What do you mean by too many Chinese?*

**RL:** *I want to be somewhere like less Chinese and more foreign peoples. And I can talk much, more English.*

**PR:** *Were there any schools that you did not want to go to?*

**RL:** *Just Chinese high school. Because they just like feed you like you feed duck. Ok you know? Just give you knowledge and let you to understand it and do a lot of task papers and teachers not that helpful and too much pressure.*

**PR:** *Why did you come? What influenced you to make this choice or to leave Brazil?*

**RM:** *Because I was getting really bad in school. Yeah, like... And also I was done with science in general and math. And I was like I can't. And also it's getting a little violent in the area where I live. So I wanted to be able to go to like the supermarket without like being super extra careful and be able to walk or like take the bus. So it's like having more freedom.*

For **RJ**, **RH**, and **RF** being surrounded by an international peer group was an element taken into consideration when making a choice. The preference for diversity was directly contrasted by respondents to the homogeneity they considered to be the defining element of Swedish USS. For respondents below, choosing the IBDP between **L3** and two other schools was based not only on the community present at the school but also the availability of courses.



- PR:** *So this was your first choice, why is that?*
- RJ:** *I felt like I wanted to do the IB because I had been an international system already not necessarily the IB. But I felt I could continue the academic I was at. So I chose this school because when I did the entrance test this schools one it wasn't ridiculously difficult but it was more challenging than the other two which were L1 and Åva. It felt more challenging and I felt like they should be best place to be challenged.*
- PR:** *Why was L3 your first choice?*
- RH:** *Because I wanted to do IB and I was very, well not very limited but I was limited because of that and also because of where I live. There are some IB schools that are very far away. And then also it felt kind of useless to pay to go to school because so that also limits it.*
- PR:** *What was your second choice? Were there schools you wanted to avoid?*
- RH:** *It was L1. There were no schools I didn't want to go to. I mean no, I mean not really as long as I got to the IB I was happy with my choice. But if there was one school where I didn't want to go to it would be [school name].*
- PR:** *Why is that?*
- RH:** *Because they don't offer physics or math higher level. I was or I do take physics. So... And that was something I wanted to take and math higher is also something that I was interested in.*
- RF:** *I didn't really know which schools were in Sweden. But I had a choice of this school or a Swedish USS and I chose to go here (L3). I like that people are coming from a lot of places around the world. I like hearing their perspectives – I like the international aspect of it. I also didn't want to go normal Swedish school because in the past I did not have such a good experience with them. I fit in better with the international group because they have seen – they know more about the world than Swedish students who are very centred or focused on Sweden. I didn't really think about the choice, I knew that at this school I could get my MYP certificate and the DP certificate. And it was the school with the most international students.*

**PR:** *And so what led you here then?*

**RK:** *Yeah it was either L3 or L1. But I picked L3 because it felt a lot more like my old school. To some extent. And also that I wanted to actually go to a bigger high school. I didn't want to be stuck in a small school. Which L1 is. I mean L1 only has the IB classes. While L3 has so many other courses as well and I wanted to be a part of a larger community.*

For **RL**, who is a foreign national and does not have a Swedish personal number - choice was limited to boarding school options.

**RL:** *Yes. This was my only choice. Yes, because only the, the foreign student can only join the boarding school in Sweden. I used to, I did, I applied to Stockholm International School in the city but they said sorry because you are not Swedish citizen and you do not have a personal number you can't come here but we can recommend another school to you. Which was this school L4. I had to have the right permit, but I only have a study permit.*

**Summary: Choice strategy and choice autonomy** were closely linked codes that arose in the respondent's answers. Strategies included everything from talking to family, friends, trusted peers, teachers, and other individuals who acted as advisors on choice. Critical elements that were important to students when choosing a school involved location, courses offered, size of school, diversity of student body, language of instruction, and to a lesser extent safety. **Autonomy** when choosing was higher amongst students who perceived themselves to be more independent and preparing for future choice making. **Autonomy** was lower in students who unsure about the educational market in Sweden or had tensions with family members over school choice.

#### 5.2.4. Opinion of Instructors

In discussing choice of the IBDP over other programs, respondents were asked to elaborate on their attitudes, feelings, and opinions of school. Respondents **opinions of instructors** was a code that frequently arose when discussing the DP and previous schooling. While respondents typically spoke of instructors before the IB as being close, DP instructors were considered to be more detached – leaving a sense of more responsibility with students themselves (**RA, RB, RE**).

**RA:** *Definitely, the teachers they obviously make sure you get good grades but in DPI you take responsibility for yourself. In DP they treat you as you have your studies together, your life together. In DP they expect you to be ready to be in the DP program. They do their job. But it's not like anything more than that. They teach you the syllabus and you learn but it's not more than that. It is beneficial for both parties. You develop a better relationship another way but it works. But I still want them to be closer.*

**RB:** *I have said before I go back to the British system, the teachers tell you have to be a certain kind of student, you have to be a certain type of person. But in the IB they treat you as an adult, it is all up to you if you want to study, if you want to do this, it is all up to you. You have to have a lot of initiative.*

**RE:** *The teachers in the DP see me as an adult. They don't – I have much more decision making. I can work with deadlines; they see me as responsible compared to the school in Kenya, I was more of a child there.*

Respondents often compared instructors to previous Swedish schooling (**RC, RF**):

**RC:** *In Swedish school teachers are more involved with the students and they really work to help them and stuff. But just kind of, they help the students overcome anything personally, any troubles. Whereas in Bangladesh its strictly very professionally related. And we are going to stay as professional as we can. In the DP it's all on you.*

**RF:** *I feel that Swedish high school they don't really care about you in the same way that the IB cares about their students. IB schools are pretty small compared to local high schools and then you get a more personal relationship and they really want to make sure you succeed.*

**RH** and **RJ** both link their own academic engagement to instructor quality and motivation:

**RH:** *It's more like they treat you more like an adult. If you have a*

question they're going to put more effort into kind of trying to give you a proper look the best answer.

**PR:** Can you give me an example?

**RH:** I mean because they're all fairly different. I have or I have had some like from last year I had some teachers that were kind of unmotivated in their work as teachers. But then at the same time I had teachers that basically it almost felt like they put their whole life into just teaching and seem super motivated and loved their job. And you can tell, if they are unmotivated – it's not good for my own motivation. I just don't feel like I'm motivated to also learn.

**RI:** There were also many students that had been placed there because they knew English and it was one of schools that offered the IB. So it was kind of a difference between those who really wanted to study and aim for higher grades and those who knew English and therefore were in the program. I do think...I still have friends that go there to **LI**, who really enjoy that way of working because they feel that the teachers are able to adjust to their need. Whereas I think this school suits me better because the teachers are a little bit more demanding of the quality of the work I guess and time.

**RJ:** Well for the most part the teachers at my old school were also qualified as they are here but there were a few which I don't believe had proper qualifications which create some issues. Some issues but they I mean it's comforting here to know that they're qualified.

**PR:** Why is that important to you?

**RJ:** Well it makes me feel like... I believe experience is good experience can also substitute qualification sometimes. But we had like people who are fresh out of school not fresh out of school. But there was like young people. At one point we had a teacher who was 21 and it didn't feel like he was a teacher. He felt like he was one of us and learning things with us. It just gave off a weird feeling because he had not gotten...like there are young teachers obviously but he didn't have the qualifications.

Although the DP was described as being one where independent work was the norm, DP

instructors were still considered helpful. **RL** describes enjoying that in the DP a diverse group of instructors are available to help with potential language barriers.

**PR:** *Are your instructors or teachers different in the DP from your previous school?*

**RL:** *Oh yes. Like when you have some questions you ask them they just say you can do your own stuff, so you can go use the search engine. And here (in the IB) when I have questions, they will explain it and maybe if I request more, do you have any more sources or some YouTube videos that I can study they will kindly provide me after the talk.*

**PR:** *That seems very helpful.*

**RL:** *It is wonderful here in the IB, because I am from China and there is a lot of teachers here from abroad. And so even busy teachers, like one she come from Singapore and she also speaks Chinese. So if I have some problems and I can't understand I just can ask her - could you explain this work in Chinese because I'm really confused and she always explains to me.*

**Summary:** A strong and positive **opinion of instructors** was apparent when respondents elaborated on the IBDP. Respondents typically explained their opinions in broad, subjective statements by creating dichotomies of ‘DP teachers’ and ‘non-DP teachers’. Instructors in the IB were perceived by respondents to treat them as maturing adults by placing a bigger sense of responsibility directly on the student. While some respondents found this helpful as it allowed them to feel a sense of maturation, other students recounted missing a sense of closeness to their instructors.

### 5.2.5 Opinion of Student Body

Another trend that was mentioned by respondents in the decision making process was the importance of a stable, engaged, and academic **student body**. Although the DP program is described as desirable for its diversity (see previous *section 5.2.3*), students describe that some ‘diversity’ is not desirable:

**RA:** *Students, there was a big difference. It was very chaotic. It's a school around an area that is regarded already as chaotic. It's the classic, a 'hood' school. Especially me and my friend, we were like the only light skinned people in the school. It was a different experience than being here at this school where*

*everyone is mixed and everyone knows English. Where everyone comes from a normal family. There it's like some kids would not even know English or Swedish. And they would be straight up out of their countries.*

For **RC**, a smaller student body equated to a positive experience as it allowed them to feel more personally supported:

**RC:** *The student body is quite good as well. Things always happen, teenager stuff. Overall the environment is very supportive. If something happens in my personal life I feel that I can talk to the school, I am struggling and the school will try their best to help me. The school environment is accepting and supportive.*

At **L2**, **RG** describes that a small student body is not as desirable since it decreases the possibilities for socialising with other students. According to **RG** this influences students to choose the other IBDP in the vicinity due to its bigger population:

**RG:** *Well from the student perspective, or the guy perspective. There just is not a lot of girls here or people.*

**PR:** *Can you give me an example?*

**RG:** *Well like, Borgar school is good because there is so many people. So many girls. [Laugh] Well, the MYP5 students when they are finishing here their first plan is to go to Borgar school. A lot of students here they plan to go there. And I think it's not because the education between that school and **L2** is any better, I even think **L2** is better. But students are going to Borgar because there is a bigger population, it's a bigger school and it's just a high school. There is more socializing compared to like **L2** where it's just a few people.*

At **L3** where the IBDP coexists side by side with the Swedish NPs, **PR** describes the differences between IB and NP students as being one of world views:

**PR:** *Do you think...are the IB students different than the Swedish program students? If you feel comfortable expanding.*

**RI:** *Yeah no, no, it's ok. I do think so in some ways because they're kind of made to adjust to this type of person that supposed to be open minded and international. So they are more subjected to*

*that. But I also believe look the school has several Swedish students that are also open minded because of the atmosphere around the school but from other schools. The friends that I have outside of L3 I can see how they are different and how they might be focusing on things that I find completely irrelevant.*

**PR:** *Can you give me an example of that?*

**RI:** *Well this concept of style I guess. I see a lot of my Swedish or like some of my friends have come into the possession of designer clothes and that's also something you see around town I think but I'm very happy that it hasn't become something at this school because of the status that you get from the clothes. There's not like a focus on people being pretentious like at other schools.*

**PR:** *Is that a good thing? Not being pretentious?*

**RI:** *Well here it's kind of like embraced to do your own thing but it's also... I think everyone's aware here that they have different personalities. Since there are also reflecting upon this IB school and Swedish school thing. In the IB I mean there are obviously more people that come from outside Sweden. And that affects their view of culture and is being subjected to different cultures and having seen how their lifestyles. But I feel like that's mostly only noticeable in regards to certain topics.*

Though the large and diverse student population was a desired element in making school choice, **RK** describes the coexistence of both the IBDP and NP at L3 difficult. As students from both programs do not typically intermix in courses, the ability to make large social circles or socialise with many different people decreases.

**RK:** *At my previous school everybody knew everybody. There was not really any division between the classes like how I feel it can be here. Because here of course you have your classes and you go to different courses so of course they can really mix up the year groups but not the students. That means that I don't know too many people who maybe go to social sciences or the natural sciences, were in my previous school I would know everybody.*

**PR:** *How do you feel about the division of students?*

**RK:** *I definitely prefer the way my previous school was. I think it became, the classes as an entity became very close and there was a lot of free space you've never felt locked down. For example, maybe if you happened to find yourself being in a friend group*

*then you suddenly didn't really feel comfortable in. There was quite... It was not difficult to find new people to be with because you knew everybody.*

**PR:** *Is the diversity you see a good thing?*

**RH:** *I think that in our class there's maybe 8 or 10 people who are Swedish out of 70 and the rest are from around the world. I mean here in my class I mean I have two people who come from Syria, several people who come from around the globe. I mean there's other people from Canada, the US, Brazil, Australia, Chile, there's the Middle East, the whole Middle East is here you know, a couple from Africa, Egypt, Asia, Central Asia, India, Indoasia, India. I mean that's from all over the world. And you just do not get exposed to that sort of variety of cultures and upbringings in Swedish school. And I think that sort of really prepares you for the real world in some ways how it will actually be traveling abroad meeting different cultures and experiencing learning different customs and interacting with other cultures and being open minded.*

**Summary:** Respondents were largely positive when discussing their opinions of the student body within the IB and outside of it. In general, other IB students were perceived to be international and diverse. Typically, respondents perceived non-IB and especially Swedish students as being less diverse.

### **5.2.6. Academic Climate**

A recurrent theme that arose throughout the interviews was the importance of **academic climate** to students. Positive teaching and learning habits within school were considered a strong indicator of a student's own engagement and motivation. **RG** and **RM** describe positive experiences with the structure and organisation of the DP. **RG**, **RM**, and **RB** all mention to some degree that an **academic climate** where students are engaged and interacting is a positive experience:

**RG:** *But everything you learn in the DP is what the teachers are teaching you. There are no surprises. So you can be ready for the exam. It's not a big surprise. I have friends who go to Swedish schools right now and it's not the same as going to international school. Most of the students who are going to Swedish school they*



*are born in Sweden or raised in Sweden so they are not kind of – you won't find anyone different from a different country. But here you find people from everywhere. From Brazil, from Somalia like me, from all over and we are in the same class.*

**PR:** *How do you feel about that?*

**RG:** *It's a great thing. You guys, like international people – they have so much to talk about, different perspective. Even in class, we interact a lot. Like if the teacher asks a question about Africa or somewhere else, like, you have someone from there who can give their own perspective. It's more engaging if you have different perspectives in class.*

**RM:** *Well it's I feel that there are a lot of people who are really good here. Like really just, really into studying and just really focused and really ambitious.*

**PR:** *Can you expand on that?*

**RM:** *It's like silently competitive. Like if you're the only one in your class who gets a 3 maybe you won't tell anyone but maybe you think you have to do better. But at my previous school it felt like no one cared. Here at **LA** it's really organised, the quality is high. Like the structure. I feel like they work in harmony.*

**PR:** *Who works in harmony?*

**RM:** *Like teachers, students, the school board. From what I see, it works. I feel more like I'm learning because the organisation is really good.*

**RB:** *In the British system its more practical to memorize the facts they give you and write the exam. In the IB I have learned from this experience, we do learn theory but then we learn how to use it practically to learn better. So we have a lot of more assignments and labs than we did in the British system. In the IB there is a lot more discussion, questions thrown around, there are different methods of teaching. We play games like Cahoot so we can see who is doing better or not better but add some competition even if it doesn't mean anything.*

In contrast, respondents considered their experience with Swedish schooling to be too easy in comparison to the IB:

**RA:** *Well the system is totally different. It's a Swedish system, it's a Swedish school. Well it was international but not IB, it was Swedish but in English. It's a different kind of pace, requirements. It is more difficult in the IB. Everything there – you learn at the same time. Here, you have to keep up with the pace of other people who learn faster.*

**RC:** *The IB is so demanding. However, in the Swedish school in Sollentuna International, it was much less, it was nothing. It was kind of like I could turn in an examination without studying and I would still get the A. It was fairly easier.*

**RD** and **RF** noted the importance of stress and pressure to be academically engaged and motivated. Similar to **RA** and **RC** who perceived Swedish schools to be too easy, **RF** reflects that attending a Swedish school would not have offered the same opportunities as an IB school does:

**RD:** *Every day we had exams in the UAE. At Latin it is much more relaxed and not a lot of studying – I kind of lost control there. I stopped caring about my studying. I came to the IB because it was a similar system to what I had in the UAE. Trying to get some stress back for studying. I used to study everyday 3 to 4 hours.*

**PR:** *Can you explain what you mean by stress?*

**RD:** *Because everyone needs a little stress, if you don't have it – then you have no pressure to study. And if you have pressure you do well but not too much pressure so that you crack but just a bit so that it adds motivation.*

**RF:** *We didn't have CAS that was all about doing projects you like, expressing yourself, stuff to improve yourself as a person. Here as well, the difference between Swedish schools and the IB is that - there students have more control over teachers. The DP pushes you, encourages you to do well in your subjects and motivates you to be engaged in your subjects. And I think that really motivates students to work harder.*

**PR:** *Do you think it would have been the same if you have studied at the Swedish programme you wanted to get into previously?*

**RF:** *No because first of all I would be studying everything in Swedish – and I would then be limited to a Swedish university. While the*

*IB is an English medium and I am open to more opportunities and choices. Swedish school really limits you academically.*

Pressure, stress, and competition are not always positive elements as noted by **RE**:

**RE:** *My previous school there was a lot of students. There was a lot of peer-pressure and you were in because you wanted to be the best. It was a business. There was a lot of peer-pressure to get the best grades.*

**PR:** *A business, what do you mean by that?*

**RE:** *It's different from the Swedish system. In Kenya you have to pay a lot of money to go to school. And so, if you are paying all this and you are not getting good grades you are sort of feeling really bad. Also people around you are getting those grades and so you have the pressure to get top grades. And that is different from here where almost anyone can get into this school (**L2**) and that pressure doesn't exist.*

For **RL**, flexibility within course content and small class size provide a positive **academic climate**:

**RL:** *Well in the Chinese junior high school we just do the papers, do the works, and we always study what teacher give us. We can't go to do our own research. Like every day we have tests and test in the morning and when we get it back, the paper back immediately and the teacher does not say what your mistakes, what mistakes were made. So there are a lot of pressure and the IB I can have free time because my schedule now is very flexible. I have school time on different days. But in China I just have the same day every day to 6 pm or 7 pm.*

**PR:** *Do you think that your classes here are different from the ones they had in Shanghai?*

**RL:** *Yes, we get smaller. We have different classes like the maximum just one of the business courses is the biggest one in the school now in my grade and the smallest just like 14 people but in China we have about 40 students in the same class now. So yeah we have about eight classes in the grade and even the same grade so for total we got about 300 so that is too much. Yes, so that's why the teacher can't take care of every student. They are so busy.*

**Summary:** Respondents linked the decision to study the IB with the importance of a strong academic climate. Whether or not respondents had perceived the IB as being an academically challenging program before joining is less clear. Some level of pressure and stress were considered acceptable as a catalyst to establishing **academic initiative**. Regardless of the academic challenge, many respondents expressed a strong positive experience within the DP program.

### 5.2.7. Academic Initiative

All respondents express a clear understanding that a certain level of **academic initiative** is needed in the IB in order to succeed. Without **academic initiative**, respondents describe a decrease in motivation and engagement towards studies which in turn negatively affect the **academic climate**. A sense of collective agreement among students was described by respondents as a key motivator within the IB:

**RB:** *In the IB the teachers give us responsibility over our own lives and studies. We do have certain feeling in the class that we are all here together, and we are doing everything we need to do for our futures. The teachers are teaching us and we are as students learning*

**RG:** *In my classes, the students are motivating me a lot. Like the extended essay it's called, I feel really pushed to – motivated to – really to make it great because you know people, others, are making theirs good, spending so much time on it.*

**RH:** *I...they were I mean compared to this school they weren't as academically motivated some were but the majority was only they were as academically motivated. Otherwise I think it's fairly similar.*

**PR:** *Do you think you have to be a certain kind of student in the IB?*

**RH:** *To fit into an IB school like socially no. Academically I think you have to be fairly like disciplined and balanced.*

**PR:** *In which way balanced?*

**RH:** *Being able to balance your workload and being able to kind of balance your six subjects and then on top of that your task, your EE, and your social life.*

Respondents describe the DP as tool in **academic readiness** for future university studies as well as helping build life-long skills:

**RF:** *In the DP you learn the things you have to learn and then it is in your hands about what you want to study and what you want to focus on or need to focus on in order to do well later on. It's a lot more independent I think. It's not like other schools where you learn, learn, learn. In the IB you have to be – I mean it prepares you for the future you know? How you problem solve. And you use the knowledge that you learn to solve conflicts that you meet. While in other schools its more school related problems than world problems.*

**PR:** *How do you know this?*

**RF:** *When I went to Swedish school, it was very focused on the curriculum but here you have an application always to real life. Even in math, and you always see how you can apply the skills you learn to everyday situations.*

Approaches to learning (ATL, see section 3.2) and pedagogical skills were also mentioned by students as elements that improved **academic initiative** and boosted **academic readiness**:

**RG:** *Here in the IB we have to reflect on everything we do, we write everything that might have gone wrong. Then you know where you have gone wrong. You understand the strengths, limitations of what you have done. But back in my other schools we just do the exam. Like the teachers just don't even give you comments on your work. Just the grades and you have to figure out which units you have to learn again. But here in the IB, but even the questions are divided into units in the exam. So let's say you miss question 1 or 2 – that represents that you have to go back to unit 1 or 2.*

**RI:** *So here you're being you're being pushed academically but you're also – they are taking care of you like at the same time. I feel sometimes like an outcast but academically I'm motivated, like I'm going to be ok in the IB because everyone is kind of moving at the same speed but like also their own pace.*

When asked to describe a profile of an 'IB students', respondents answered that certain

academically inclined personality traits were essential in succeed within the DP:

- PR:** *Do you think you have to be a certain type of student in the IB?*
- RK:** *Depends on what you want to do with the IB program. I feel like if you want to go to the IB program and earn or get the top grades which are very difficult to achieve... I feel like you definitely need to have some sort of some personality traits that are that are significant in you reaching those goals. I mean you have to be quite disciplined and you to have a lot of self-motivation. But I feel like due to the way that the IB program is set up you are able to choose the subjects that you enjoy and that you like.*
- PR:** *What kind of student do you think you are?*
- RK:** *I've always...If I set my mind to something I'm going to do it right. And I love going to school I think it's one of the best things I don't even though I might not sometimes look it. I am, I'm a big nerd. I love reading. I love doing school work. I think it's one of the best things in the world learning. So I feel like a lot of the reasons why I'm why I go to the IB program, and like why I'm still motivated to succeed in it is because I really enjoy the process. I'm actually learning things because I didn't really do that in my old school.*

For **RK** who described themselves as coming from a family of academics, the DP presented new opportunities for learning which were not possible before, increasing motivation and initiative:

- PR:** *You don't feel that you learned at your previous school? Can you explain?*
- RK:** *I have I come from of like a family of academics on one side always been very interested in like how the world works. So a lot of the things that they taught us there I already sort of knew and I was in that room that never really made me motivated because I was like all this stuff I have to study I know already. But now when I come here it's like there's this alien world in the IB. Like so many new things to discover and learn about which keeps me motivated to keep going. It never gets dull.*

**Summary:** Respondents express that certain levels of academic motivation, initiative, and engagement are needed to succeed as IB students. Personal responsibility, independence, and reflective work were noted as specific approaches to learning that were

developed in the DP by respondents. Collective academic initiative was also noted as being a critical element that attracted respondents to the DP and also made the learning process more engaging.

### 5.2.8. Academic Readiness

In discussing imagined future plans after completing the DP, respondents discussed ATL and pedagogical skills learned through the IB as a preparatory step towards university. This is represented below in **RG**, **RH**, and **RI**'s answers:

**RG:** *The IB is helping so much, I feel like since in every subject we have to write reflections, we have to write a lot, we have a lot of exams, mock exams, extended essays. It's all about work and reading lots of books. And when I tell my friends I do a lot of work like this and all they do is like – in three months they only do like 2 exams that are only internal exams... I actually feel like we are doing so much more work you know? We are more prepared for university. Like the extended essay – in uni we have to write a lot so this is good preparation.*

**RH:** *In the DP you're expected to kind of study more on your own but you're not told which way to go. In DP it's more like take the path that you want. At **L1** It was more just like learning through doing. So it's like reading science it would be like doing experiments. I remember for one of our projects regarding global warming and fossil fuels we would like e-mail, we e-mail the UN and all these other companies. We aren't doing that here at **L3**.*

However, respondents do not believe that the IB is only preparing them academically, but also socially:

**RI:** *Well they want you they really want you to do well academically. And I think that really shows. Because they kind of make sure that you always have a time where you can go to teachers and ask. I think I mean they put an effort into making sure that you're social with other kids. So it's like we have a house system. At the beginning of the year you have one day where you kind of meet - not like you meet everyone you kind of say hello you get introduced to new people and then you have all these like inter house*

*competitions so it's like we have a cross country, you can participate in dancing, table tennis, chess you can do all this stuff and you just get to meet new people.*

As mentioned in the previous section on **academic climate**, respondents positively mention that having challenges in the IB are beneficial to developing good academic and life skills:

**PR:** *Why is that challenge so important? You mentioned wanting the academic challenge?*

**RJ:** *I don't want things to be too easy. Because I mean I'm not going to learn anything. Because if I'm challenged I'm going to learn something and get something out of it. Well I feel like there's no point in really studying if you're not learning anything. Studying is supposed to prepare you for university which is going to prepare you for a job.*

Below **RK** gives a succinct response on how they feel the DP is helping them reach their goals. Like other respondents **RK** believes the DP is a better option than Swedish education to reach university studies:

**PR:** *Do you think the DP is helping you reach your future goals?*

**RK:** *Definitely. I think the DP program definitely challenges students and is able to prepare them properly for university education abroad and in Sweden. I think it is valued higher than many of the education that Sweden provides because I personally I think that the quality of Swedish education is lacking. I think it is very forward thinking in many areas but I think it's lacking and it's in the like sort of what's it called what it produces. I think I don't think it's doing well. Their outcomes are not great. And I think the DP program for what I've heard from my siblings from I heard from from other people who I've met who have taken the program and who are currently in university, everybody says that it prepares them well and I can see why. Because I mean I still have my friends from Swedish school who go to Swedish high school and I can see that the quality of the work that they're producing and they're working with are in some areas what we did in the first term and first year. Now I mean that's what they're doing now. And I feel like the DP program also gives you another*



*sort of international-mindedness maybe not inherently because of the DP program is set up in itself but that exposes you to several different cultures. Maybe not inherently due to the coursework or such but because of the people that you get surrounded by.*

Similarly, abroad student **RL** who considered different countries when choosing the IB, contrasts the DP with England's A-Level course works:

**PR:** *Do you think that the IBDP is helping you achieve your future goals?*

**RL:** *Yes it's really helpful and it's better than the A-Levels or the APs because I can use this diploma apply a lot of university different universities.*

**PR:** *Why do you think it's more helpful than the A-levels or APs?*

**RL:** *Because A-levels is just a really traditional English program but the IB is much more international they give you international grades they let you know the world and learn the world.*

When discussing future plans, all respondents answered that university studies and travel abroad outside of Sweden were end goals. **RA**, **RB**, **RF**, and **RC** all describe wanting to take university studies abroad in primarily English speaking countries:

**RA:** *I think for me at least I will take a gap year. I already work, so I will focus on work. And during that year I will think about what I want to do next. Do I want to do uni in Sweden or maybe somewhere else. Or if I want to just – but I will take a gap year. But realistically I think I will take a gap year and go to uni after.*

**PR:** *Does the DP help you achieve that goal?*

**RA:** *I think obviously in some way it helps. Even if it's not what I want to study in the future, the IB diploma is regarded up there as well. It will help me wherever I go. If I went to a Swedish school, I would have to work so much harder in the end. I wouldn't be able to take a gap year. Let's say I go to a Swedish school and pick a program and then I already made my choice. I can't decide to do something different after my gap year. With the IB, maybe during my gap year I decide I want to study science, well I can do that because I studied some science. Here my choices are broad, there they are too narrow. If I go there, I work more, I study more in the end.*

**RB:** *My plans are to... I'm trying to go out of Sweden for my studies. My plan is either Canada, UK, or Australia to study computer engineering. But then I'm trying my best, there is problems with staying in the UK after my student visa expires so I'm trying to lean more towards Canada and Australia since I also have family members in both those countries who can help me out.*

**RF:** *I want to go to university. I don't know if I want to take a gap year first or figure out what I really want to do. Maybe UK or maybe Scotland. Because they have great sports facilities. I feel like they are also international countries and I can keep the international aspects that I want. I want to study sport sciences and Swedish universities don't really offer anything that good for that. I feel that when we go to university there is so much to organize and prepare for and the IB is preparing us for that purpose.*

**RC** describes the desire to study university abroad and the difficulty of IB credit translation for entrance into Swedish higher education (a point that will be brought up again in *section 6.3*):

**RC:** *After finishing the DP I would like to go on a gap year and explore what I want to do in the future. I want to work and travel but I hope I am in university within five years. I need at least 41 points to get into the university I want to get into. I want to study law at Queen Mary's university.*

**PR:** *Do you want to stay in Sweden at all?*

**RC:** *No not really. I mean the Swedish system has this credit system - so you get this many credits for this subject for this many hours and then they all add up to this one point – then the IB has a more complicated one where you can't really translate grades. Which I thought was a win-win for me because I don't want to stay in Sweden for university anyway. It wouldn't really matter to me to get the Swedish points or translate my IB points to Swedish university. It's easier to translate IB points to outside of Sweden university but inside Sweden it's kinda of hard.*

For respondents who came from abroad to study the IB in Sweden (**RE, RG, & RL**), the

desire to study university in Sweden was stronger:

**PR:** *What are your plans after finishing the DP?*

**RE:** *University in Sweden. Not entirely sure, looking at my options with the subjects I've chosen in the IB. I would like to be in one place and university in Sweden would be free compared to other places so it's like an easy decision.*

**RG:** *I plan to go to uni straight in Lund or in Stockholm. I want to be a doctor or a surgeon and it takes like minimum 7 years to do.*

**PR:** *So you want to stay in Sweden?*

**RG:** *Well I also want to go other places, maybe the UK because they speak English and I have family there as well. Maybe to study, it can be an option.*

**RL:** *I continue with university. I really want to go to Stockholm university. In the National Business and Global Politics, I think this program is my first priority.*

**PR:** *Why Sweden? Why not return to China?*

**RL:** *Because as I say Swedish has really, really, good education and I fit here. I graduate 2019 and that means I have lived here for almost three years. I get familiar with here so it won't be I would be nervous if I go back now, maybe I go to Sweden, Denmark, or Norway. It's a really new environment for me. So I will need about maybe one or two months to get familiar with their environment. So that's why I want to stay in Sweden especially in Stockholm.*

In contrast, **RI** who had previously lived abroad, and **RK** who has multiple passports express a desire to study abroad regardless of having set future plans:

**RI:** *I think my immediate plan is to take a year to find work and travel to my friends and then perhaps also during that time look at schools and kind of figure out what interest I have mostly because high right now I'm caught in between different choices. At some point I'm considering becoming a doctor while at times still considering being a marine biologist interested in biology. But sometimes I just don't want to go to science at all.*

**PR:** *Do you want to stay in Sweden?*

**RI:** *A little bit. But I think perhaps I might want to come back here when I'm older and be abroad for most of my life.*

**PR:** *Why do you want that?*

**RI:** *Because of how I've seen the experience of being abroad and the fact that there is so much more of us in the world apart from Sweden.*

**RK:** *I'm going to take a gap year because I just got a sailing, a shipmate certificate. And I also got a couple of job options. So I think when I graduate I will work for a couple of months earning money as a shipmate on the cruises and earn a little bit of money. And then after that I'm going to learn French. I have family in Paris. I'm going to go there and take a course, an intensive course for three months and then I'm moving to Montreal and hopefully I will get into my dream university.*

**PR:** *Why study university abroad?*

**RK:** *Because one I'm a Canadian citizen. So I have never lived in Canada and I really want to because it's I mean it's one of my three nationalities. I have French, Swedish, and Canadian passport.*

For respondents who had less clear plans about the future, choosing the IB as a way to keep choices open:

**RN:** *I'm glad I choose the IB program because it really gave me a good base of everything, I have physics, sport science, math, English, French – my choices are very broad. It's not like I'm just focused in one direction and that feels good. My goal is good grades and then I can choose whatever I want. I want to go to university in Europe but perhaps the US because they have really great universities there.*

**RH:** *I don't really know because I mean look those were the reason why I chose the IB... I didn't know what I would do at the university. So I wanted just to be able to pick all my subjects and then from that find something that I like and narrow it down. So it's like the idea of having open opportunities.*

**PR:** *You mentioned before that you didn't want to go to a Swedish school - is that why?*

**RH:** *I mean it's not the only reason but it's one of the main reasons. It's that and then I wanted to go somewhere where they spoke English. Also with the IB be just if I wanted to study abroad the IB would kind of help me with that.*

**PR:** *How does the IB help you with that? Can you explain?*

**RH:** *I mean I think the DP and IB program kind of lets me go abroad almost well I don't want to say anywhere but a lot of places. But then I think it's kind of the school that presents me with different university options. So when I say like I want to go abroad I'm not really focused on the country. I'm more focused on the school and the quality of the school and the subject I will be taking.*

**Summary:** When respondents were asked to describe imagined plans after completing the DP, **future mobility** was one of the biggest trends that surfaced. Although studying in Sweden is certainly an option for many individuals, respondents frequently expressed how studying and traveling abroad was more desirable. Specifically, respondents mention the desire to attend university in major English speaking countries, including the U.K., the U.S., and Canada. Respondents reflect positively on choosing the IB as a strategy for keeping options open about the future and tend to build a collective imagination surrounding Swedish education and university. In this collective imagination, Swedish education is perceived to be narrow, specific, and offers little room for creative thinking about future plans. As before, expressing wanting to be surrounded by a more open, international community was also a trend that was discussed by respondents.

## Chapter 6:

### Discussion

In the previous chapter, findings and analysis of the emergent data were presented. This discussion expands on findings in relation to the objectives and research questions (see *Section 1.2 & Section 1.3*), which are presented in the following three sections (6.1 – 6.4). By a linking of the research questions, the findings, and the theoretical information presented in *Chapter 2*, this chapter hopes to illuminate an understanding of how and why students choose the IB. Finally, the discussion ends with a section dedicated to a self-reflection of the researcher's own understanding of the study's process.

#### 6.1. Research Question One

*Why do secondary school students in Sweden choose the IBDP over other available curricula?*

The motivations for choosing the IBDP over other available curricula in the Swedish education market arose as a nested decision, respondents were not only choosing the IBDP but also the specific school in which it was provided. The findings suggest that three components of thought were reflected on when making these choices: practical considerations, philosophical standpoints, and preparatory techniques for future mobility.

The majority of respondents took into account practical considerations when choosing the IBDP. These concerns included school's geographical proximity to home, lack of other available schools that offered the IB, whether or not schools had extra fees, continuity of similar education, and necessity for English-medium instruction. As Swedish USS works on the voucher system, schooling is free of charge for all students. However, privately and independently run schools are free to charge additional fees. Such is the case for site **L2** and **L4** in this study, who both had fees for tuition and boarding<sup>9</sup>. Though fees for schooling are not the norm, this was not the biggest concern to respondents. Unlike previous research on school choice that illustrates fees being a major concern for parents in the process of school choice – the trend of respondents in this study to not particularly take up this matter brings to question the class identification of students. Are these respondents of a higher economic bracket that fees are not particularly

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<sup>9</sup> Site **L2** had one-time enrolment fees of up to 10,000 SEK. Site **L3** had tuition fees of up to 20,000 SEK and additional boarding fees of up to 300,000 SEK. Additionally, **L3** added fees for IBDP end of year examinations.

a concern? Are parents the individuals in responsibility of fees and thus respondents are less aware of them? Though these are interesting issues to explore, the study did not delve into these questions.

Another practical consideration for students was geographical proximity and scarcity of schools which offered the IBDP. For respondents of site **L2** in particular, schools which offered programs in English and the IBDP were scarce and separated by larger distances – narrowing choice to a few schools. For respondents in the Stockholm region (sites **L1**, **L3**, **L4**), available schools that offered instruction in English and the IBDP were more but added to individual pressure in the decision making process. For respondents who had previously lived in Stockholm, inner-knowledge of schools through word of mouth and school reputation was a factor in choice. As previous research on school choice illustrates, respondents within Stockholm seemed to be aware of how geographical space influenced perception of schools (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2017). With this knowledge of which schools were ‘good’ and which were ‘bad’, respondents in this study narrowed their choices of schools down to a select few that corresponded with their own self-identifying attitudes, motivations, and self-perceptions. Respondents from abroad who were not previously acquainted with schools in Stockholm and lacked this inner-knowledge, reacted with feeling more pressure to make the correct school choice with the information they had.

As previous research showed, one practical consideration for many respondents was continuity of education (Doherty, Mu, Shield, 2009). Though only four respondents had attended an IB school before, at least ten respondents had attended an international school. These respondents mention that continuity of similar studies was a critical consideration for choosing the IBDP.

The largest and most obvious concern which was mentioned by a majority of the respondents was the necessity to study in English. Since most NPs at USS in Sweden are taught exclusively in Swedish and a majority of respondents were not native Swedish speakers, English-medium instruction was a top priority for IBDP choosers. However, even for respondents that were native Swedish speakers, the desire to study in English was a major motivating factor in choosing the IBDP. When respondents were questioned why the desire to study in English was a high priority, answers moved from a practical consideration to a philosophical standpoints and reflections of future mobility.

Studying in English was perceived by respondents to be of more value than studying in Swedish. For respondents, English-medium instruction as provided by the IB not only allowed a chance to practice [English] language skills, but also prepares them for future plans (a point to be discussed in greater detail in *Section 6.3*). Thus, respondents perceived Swedish instruction as less valuable as they felt it would not adequately prepare them to attend an English-medium university.

When respondents were confronted with multiple school options for the DP and

practical considerations had been accounted for, philosophical viewpoints were considered by all respondents in the decision making process. These included perceptions and school reputations, opinions of the role of instructors, opinions of student peers, academic climate of schools, and how well schools could academically prepare students for future plans.

As mentioned in *Section 5.2.2*, desire to attend a school was higher when school reputation was perceived to be higher. Respondents in the study from both the Malmö and Stockholm regions frequently compared IB schools against one another on a variety of factors. These included the way in which schools presented themselves to the public through websites, brochures, open houses, and school fairs. Respondents perceived schools with more ‘formal’ websites as more professional but also more intimidating.

Reputation was also gauged by respondents through open house visits and representation at school fairs. The findings suggest that respondents are aware and react positively to the IB brand message of global thinking and internationalisation. Effort into presentation and school environment during open house visits was also mentioned by respondents as a factor in their decision making process. Physical school environment was also an element of decision making for respondents. Schools considered too small were less desirable, as they presented respondents with too little opportunities for socialisation.

A major response type in decision making for schools was respondent’s opinion of the role of instructors and student peers. In choosing schools, respondents made frequent positive remarks of IBDP instructors by creating dichotomies of IB instructors vs. non-IB instructors. DP instructors were perceived to be more educated, more engaged, and more willing to recognise respondents as capable adults. Though these answers were highly subjective, they reveal that respondents desire school environments where they are treated with a level of responsibility that is not perceived in non-IB schools. Opinion of student peers was also an element in decision making. Respondents had a strong desire to be surrounded by peers of ‘similar background and thinking’, as well as to be surrounded by a diverse student body. When questioned why these elements were important, respondent answers revealed that a diverse student body would equal more diverse classroom interaction and thus lead to more academic engagement. While opinions of both instructors and student peers were formed prior and after enrolment in the IBDP – these attitudes served as legitimising elements in choosing the IBDP.

The final component of reflection in choosing the IBDP is linked closely to RQ3 – or how respondents perceived their future plans. Findings reveal that choosing the IBDP is not only a combination of previously mentioned considerations but also a strategy for future mobility. Academic climate, initiative, and readiness were three of the major concerns respondents noted in making their choices. Respondents repeatedly commented that a strong academic climate where students and instructors were engaged led to more



self-motivation and academic initiative. Since all respondents expressed the desire to study further at the university level, specifically at English-medium universities, academic readiness towards these goals was a considered element in choice making. The IBDP was perceived by all respondents to be the most appropriate and efficient way to realise these goals. As in previous research by Doherty, Mu, and Shield (2009), respondents all made clear comparisons between the IBDP and state schooling (in this case NP in Sweden). When questioned if any Swedish school or NP could be a similar pathway to reach these goals, the majority responded negatively.

In response to the first RQ, choosing the IBDP was not only a matter of personal preference for students, but a combination of practical considerations, as well as personal viewpoints about the nature of students and instructors. Additionally, choosing the IBDP was a preparatory technique for future plans to study university outside of Sweden after completion of the DP. In this way, respondents envision themselves as global citizens that will utilise their DP certification to cross national borders.

## **6.2. Research Question Two**

### *Which strategies do students use in making their choice?*

In the previous section, the why of choosing the IBDP was discussed at length. The study now turns to RQ2, which explores the how, or strategies utilised in choosing the IBDP. Strategies for making school choice should not be considered as existing in a vacuum. All individuals used at least one form or multiple techniques when choosing the IBDP. These strategies seemed to be highly dependent on individual's backgrounds, networks, and their level of accessibility to the Swedish education market.

A main strategy for choice was utilising different sources of information to make informed decisions. The primary source of information for all respondents included a preliminary internet search for school websites, online reviews, and to a lesser extent school representation through social media (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, & Instagram). Respondents indicated that 'getting a good feeling' or sense of 'comfort' when searching online was an important element in choosing which schools to further research. Respondents seemed aware that online representations could be façades and not necessarily represent truths.

Following this, the majority of respondents attended school fairs either independently or on class trips. School fairs presented respondents an opportunity to talk to current students from schools and collect brochures or pamphlets with more school information. Respondents who attended school fairs reflected on the experience positively and recall it as an important approach in being able to compare schools side by side. Not surprisingly, respondents enrolling in the IBDP from abroad were not aware of

school fairs. This could be due with having less familiarity with the Swedish education market and there being no official dissemination outlet for information on these events. Visits to open houses and independent school visits were the next strategy employed by respondents. Since information for these events was primarily disseminated at school fairs and through school websites, it is those respondents who had attended or researched this information who were aware of these events. Further since open house events were primarily held in the evening, only respondents and their families who had time could be in attendance. For respondents who felt that they or their families did not have the time to attend these events in the evening, more importance was placed on other sources of information. Independent school visits were less common amongst respondents, perhaps because individuals were not aware that this could be a possibility. These events presented respondents with opportunities to gather information by meeting students, asking questions, and getting a ‘feel’ for schools. Further, respondents reflected positively on the opportunity to network with peers and construct preliminary opinions of potential schools.

The most trusted source of information for respondents was word of mouth and perceived school reputations. Respondents frequently stated that gathering information on schools was best done through fellow peers and older students who had or currently attended schools. Information gathered included what school environment was like, what facilities were available to students, what could be expected of instructors, and if the student body was regarded positively or negatively. This type of information according to respondents was not available through online sources or mere school visits. For respondents who had previously studied in Sweden and within Swedish schools – networks of peers and thus information was much larger. For a few respondents, networks of peers also included family members who had previously attended schools within Sweden or the school chosen. Discussing pros and cons, risks and potential positives with peers and family was a crucial strategy in the decision making process. For respondents enrolling into the IBDP from abroad, these networks were smaller, presenting less opportunities for discussing choice. However, this is not to say no networks were present. Respondents from abroad who moved to Sweden with parents because of work typically had corporate or consultant agency help in gathering information on the ‘right’ schools.

Since several different accounts and sources of information were available to respondents, discussion with peers, family, and other trusted individuals was a crucial strategy in the decision making process. Though the study did not set out to investigate parental strategies in school choice, it is necessary to discuss parental involvement in this study. As in previous research on school choice, there was a relationship between strategies employed and parent’s level of education and knowledgebase (see *Section 2.1*). Similar to research conducted by Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1996), more involved parents in this study tended to be those with an academic background or stronger ties to Swedish

education (having themselves studied or grown up in Sweden). With more engagement from parents, respondents relinquished control and realised less autonomy in the choice process. Not surprisingly, respondents who indicated that their parents were less familiar with the education market were then less involved; echoing findings by Taylor and Woollard (2003, see *Section 2.1*). However, regardless of parental knowledge of the education market – respondents do mention discussing their choices with one or more parents. These discussions were seen as negotiating moments where parents acted as ‘risk managers’ helping respondents come to the ‘right’ decision by weighing out multiple options. The majority of respondents were nevertheless very clear that ultimate decision making was theirs alone.

Strategies for choice were highly dependent on sources of information and thus subjective knowledge. Though information officially disseminated by the schools was taken at face value, assumed knowledge (i.e. word of mouth, reputations, and hearsay) was considered more trustworthy. Though respondents were aware that assumed knowledge was subjective, no known effort was made by respondents to establish whether or not this knowledge had any objectivity to it. Further, no respondents mention receiving information at home or through official governmental channels (e.g. National Education Agency). While school fairs represented the education market in its physical state, respondents already seemed aware of what they were searching for. Strategies were largely dependent on how well respondents and their networks were familiar with the Swedish education market. Surprisingly, parental involvement and engagement in the choice process was low from the perspective of the respondents. This reveals that a sense of independent identity is particularly strong within this cohort. Personal responsibility and a strong sense of self is further legitimised when respondents enrol in the IBDP.

This section has discussed at some length the multiple strategies utilised by individuals for choosing the IBDP. In the following section, RQ3 will explore how the act of choosing the IBDP is a strategy unto itself for future mobility.

### **6.3. Research Question Three**

#### ***How do these choices reflect their backgrounds and imagined futures?***

As discussed in the previous sections, respondent’s background played a role in the choice process. This influence was evident in respondent’s familiarity with the IB, the Swedish education market, and the extent and utilisation of their networks (i.e. peers, family, and trusted individuals). Respondents whose parents had academic backgrounds or had completed more schooling seemed to feel more confident involving and discussing choice with parents. Confidence of choosing the IB was also higher for respondents that had previous experience within Swedish schools or international schools in Sweden. For

respondents who had previously attended IB schools or international schools both within and outside of Sweden, continuity of studies was a major factor in choosing the DP. Regardless of previous educational quality, all respondents expressed that a search for a high quality education within the IB was an important element in the choice process (this echoes findings by Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009).

As previously discussed in *Section 5.2.8*, when asked to describe future or imagined plans after completing the IBDP, all respondents reflected on a desire to travel and study abroad. The desire to study abroad was a major motivating factor in choosing the IBDP. Respondents perceived the IBDP as the necessary pathway to achieve these goals, while at the same time constructing a shared imaginary that non-IB or NP would not facilitate these goals in the same way. As in the previous research by Doherty et al., IB choosers perceived NP in Sweden to be limiting and restricting. When respondents were questioned why they held this belief, the answer included that NP in Sweden are aimed to specific areas of study, while the IBDP allows for a more rounded education which touches on several subjects (see *Section 3.1*).

The subject freedom within the IBDP was seen as a positive aspect which would serve as academic readiness for future plans to study at the university level. Respondents felt that by choosing the IBDP, options of future studies would remain open at the university level. Not surprisingly respondents felt that if one of the six NP was chosen – studies at the university level would also have to be restricted to these specific fields of study. Though some respondents mention specific ideas of what they would like to study (e.g. ‘I want to be a doctor’; ‘I want to study engineering’; ‘I want to study Psychology’), the majority of respondents expressed the desire to keep options ‘open’.

In constructing their imagined futures, respondents constructed parallel visions of Swedish NP and education. These opinions were nearly homogenous across the cohort, with little deviation. In this collective imagination, Swedish schools were perceived to be limiting academically and socially. In contrast, IB schools were perceived to be more academically challenging, diverse, international, and open.

In reflecting on future plans, mobility to go abroad and across national borders was high. Though several respondents expressed that they could attend university in Sweden – the desire to go abroad to English speaking countries was much higher. Not surprisingly, typical countries named by respondents fell within the ‘western world’ – Canada, U.S.A, U.K, and Australia. These answers reflect that respondents are undergoing a nested choice process, (1) they are choosing the IBDP over national curriculums, (2) they are choosing a specific school, and (3) the choice to study the IBDP is a strategy itself to facilitate higher education studies outside of Sweden.

Within this cohort of respondents there seems to be a confidence towards transnational movement and global mobility. A finding that is echoed in previous research on school choice and the IB. Thus within these nested choices is a reflection of identity -

that is, who do these students imagine themselves as? Where does this identity originate from and is it further legitimised by the choosing the IBDP? The following section investigates these questions and ties them together with Bourdieu's theories of symbolic capital.

## 6.4. Social Differentiation

Thus far, the previous sections have discussed the research questions to some length through descriptive information and analysis. While primary objectives of the study were to investigate the answers to these questions, an additional question arose in the research process. This was not included as a primary research question but can be included here as a part of the discussion. It should be noted that this question was not an objective of the research but arose during data collection and the GT process.

The combination of answers and literature led the research to the following two questions: Can class, background, or previous experience explain the choice towards the IBDP? Or is the process of choosing the pathway by which class formations are formed? In order to think through these questions, the study turned toward Bourdieu's theories of symbolic capital. Throughout the interview process, it became clear that a particular habitus was present amongst respondents in the cohort.

Though all respondents had specific and unique backgrounds, there was a certain habitus or red thread amongst the cohort. All respondents had to some degree experience with international education before enrolling in the DP. Additionally, all respondents had to some degree an international connection (i.e., a non-Swedish parent, multiple passports, were born abroad, or had lived abroad for at least one year or more). Interestingly, even though no respondent's mother-tongue was English, all respondents had a preferred disposition to studying in English.

Though this description constructs the cohort as slightly homogenous – all individuals utilised to different extents and degrees, various forms of symbolic capital (refer to *Section 2.3*). The strongest and most obvious form of embodied capital was language fluency. Respondents whose native language was Swedish were at a clear advantage when navigating the Swedish education market. This is due to two primary reasons: (1) more sources of information on the Swedish education market exists in Swedish, and (2) fluent Swedish speakers had the additional option to study in Swedish and were not limited to the IB due to language constraints. Fluency in Swedish language also allowed respondents to expand their social networks and speak to more individuals when gathering information on schools. Those who were not fluent in Swedish, relied on translated sources of information which are not always as detailed or accurate.

The presence of objectified cultural capital was less blatant, but could be represented in respondents recounting of home life. Many respondents for example

mention the presence of multiple books at home or having taken several trips abroad of the course of their childhoods. Possibly not reflected on by the respondents themselves, it can be theorised that these simple materials, such as having many books at home or the experience of going abroad – have influenced the respondents to build a subconscious partiality towards more global or international preferences. Recalling Useem's (1976) classification of TCK, it is not strange to imagine then that the respondents in this study are also undergoing a process of identity building through the process of choosing the IB. On this note, it is also possible that the preference toward internationalism not only comes from previous experience but is also formed and legitimised within the IB. Documents such as the IB Learner Profile for example, do not just serve as guidelines by which the IB moulds individuals, they also serve as guidelines for the type of student the IB seeks to attract. Thus through its globally branded identity, the IB requires a specific type of symbolic capital already be established within an individual.

Further for respondents with enough economic capital, choice was not limited to local public markets. The availability of economic capital allowed for respondents from site **L4** to pay fees and boarding costs. Though these students are not consciously creating social difference, the distinction is apparent. Without sufficient economic capital, respondents would not be able to choose, enrol, and study at site **L4**. These respondents, who also represented the individuals who made not just a local IB choice but a global one, could have chosen to study the IBDP in a different country.

Symbolic capital was not just present before the choice process began or decision making started, it is something that was continuously developed and created. Through the information gathering process, the forming of networks, and utilisation of different strategies – respondents regardless of background became increasingly familiar with the Swedish education market being able to navigate it with more ease as time passed. Further, though it is entirely possible that students graduating from Swedish NPs have the possibility to apply to universities outside of Sweden, it is the educational credential of the IBDP that is perceived to carry more symbolic capital.

Is the IB then a tool of social reproduction? It is difficult to state with objective certainty. The IB world necessitates a certain type of character. Since the IB brands itself in a specific way: global, international, transnational, competitive, challenging, yet rewarding – students seeking to enter the IB must first possess at least some of these traits. Even when respondents do not consciously assume these identities, through enrolment in the IB – choosers seem to undergo a social consciousness project where a collective identity of 'IB student' is formed. Respondents create social differentiation by constantly performing a IB vs. non-IB project. This identity project is further explored when respondents reflect on a globally mobile future that will take place abroad.

Thus even when class background or personal background cannot objectively account for the choice towards the IBDP, choosing the IBDP seems to be its own

transnational identity project. Social differentiation is informed by a sense of belonging in the IB and through a collective imaginary of us vs. them – IB choosers legitimise their distinction.

## Chapter 7:

### Conclusion

The present study was designed to investigate the motivations, strategies, and process of individuals choosing the IBDP in Sweden over other available curricula. The study presented three main objectives. The first concerned the theoretical context of education markets and school choice in relation to the IB. The second presented an introduction on the theoretical context of the IB and its possible connection to social class formation. Lastly, the study conducted a qualitative comparative case study of student's experiences with the process of school choice towards the IB.

The results of this study show that students undergoing the school choice process in Sweden, choose the IBDP for a multitude of reasons and undertake a number of different strategies in the decision making process. Motivations for choosing the IBDP are various and include everything from practical considerations (i.e., "This was the only school available to me") to personal preferences (i.e., "I wanted to be surrounded by international students") to philosophical viewpoints (i.e., "School should be challenging, the IB is challenging"). The study also found that choice was a nested progression. Meaning that choice involved not only choosing the DP but also choosing the specific school which offered it.

In the process of choosing, individuals utilised various strategies in gathering information, weighing options, and discussion. Through word of mouth and networks of trusted peers, school reputations were formed that constructed a collective knowledge. These collective understandings were perceived as more trustworthy than officially disseminated information by schools themselves. Respondents also frequently gathered information through school fairs and open houses. School fairs in particular represented the Swedish education market in its most physical state. This can be seen as a direct reflection of students making choices in their local market. For students coming from abroad with little and no access to school fairs, choice of the IBDP in Sweden was not only a local market choice but a global market choice.

While choosing the IBDP involved motivation and different strategies; the significant finding is that choosing the IBDP is a strategy itself for future planning. The greatest underlying motivation to study the DP seemed to be the desire to study higher education abroad. Even when respondents did not have clear plans for the future, DP certification was perceived to be the appropriate tool by which to keep options open for future studies. These ideas were further legitimised by respondents through a creation of a shared imaginary of Swedish schools as limiting and restricting. These findings complement those of earlier studies on choice and the IB (see *Chapter 2*).

While educational and social background cannot directly account for choice in



this study, educational history and familiarity with the Swedish education market did serve as reliable predictors of how well individuals would navigate the choice process. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that school choice is to some degree an indicator of class based differences or preferences. The results also support that the school choice process can also serve to create social difference or at the very least that choice entails some difference be already recognized. Theoretically, the study ties well with Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital. However, these concepts cannot explain for all behaviours investigated in this study. Nor should Bourdieu's theories be taken as the only concepts that can be applied to this work.

As has been discussed before, the IBO is a growing global brand and educational institution. Projections for its growth exceed a number of other international schooling groups, with the IBO being far ahead in expansion across different continents. Combined with the growing movement towards free school choice for parents and students across many countries, the IBO is not slowing down soon. Important to remember here is that the DP is a stand-alone curriculum, capable of being implemented and run parallel to national curriculums in state schools. For parents and students operating in the education market, the IBDP alongside national programs is a positive element – it simply means more choice. However, for national programs and local markets – more choice can equal a drop in enrolment towards national programs or even school-death. Although significant work on school choice has been conducted in a number of fields, little research has been dedicated to investigating its intersection with the IB. Though small in scale, this study adds to this field of research and contributes to ICE by presenting significant implications in understanding how IB-choosers create themselves and the world around them through the process of school choice in the Swedish education market.

## **Chapter 8:**

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The present thesis presents a small scale comparative study of fourteen respondents. The questions raised in this study were largely influenced by previous research on school choice and the IB (see *Chapter 2*). Thus, this work provides a substantial base for further research on the same topic at a larger scale. Even if research questions remain unchanged – research design could be altered to include quantitative methodology; such as Likert Scales or survey questionnaires. If the research design chooses to remain qualitative, the inclusion of focus groups could reveal deeper insights into the school choice process. A more apparent comparative methodology could also be taken by investigating the choice process of non-IB choosers. A further study could also utilise different methodologies to look more closely at respondent’s backgrounds and correlate them to choices made in order to determine if elements such as class play a role in the choice process.

Further research might explore why many respondents frequently mention the desire and motivation to study in English. This focus could naturally lead into investigating why there seems to be a growing number of English-medium instruction schooling Sweden. Further investigation into this area would be significant as there seems to be a clear internationalisation of schooling at the compulsory school and USS level in Sweden – while higher education seems to be moving more slowly in this regard.

Another possible direction in research would be to explore the connection of the IB and higher education within Sweden and abroad. One question might focus on the recent IB-point policy change in Sweden. This policy change, lowered USS points received by DP graduates in Sweden, increasing difficulty for students to apply for Swedish higher education. Another pathway would be to investigate exactly where DP graduates enrol and attend higher education, and how this choice process develops.

Finally, how does the IB enter and collide with national systems of education? Where is it being challenged and where is it being accepted or promoted? For example, in 2011 the Japanese government introduced a plan to implement over 200 new IBDPs over a 5-year period (Yamamoto et al., 2016) – a clear sign of the IBs influence on national education systems. Further research into phenomena’s such as this one or the situation of higher education points in Sweden (perhaps a sign of an IB backlash), are needed to determine the extent of influence global bodies like the IBO introduce into local-markets.

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# Appendix A – Ethical Reference



Institutionen för pedagogik och didaktik  
[Redacted]

Fil. dr, universitetslektor  
[Redacted]

## Letter of Certification

To whom it may concern

I hereby certify that Rebecca Gonzalez, [Redacted], is studying International and Comparative Education, 120 ECTS on the Master's program at the Department of Education, Stockholm University. I am her supervisor for the Independent Study and thesis work. Rebecca is preparing and conducting a study about how the IB program contribute to the students' identity and future plans. The study is well prepared and the intention is to complete the thesis work before the summer. It is very important that Rebecca may interview as many students as possible in order to get a true and fair view of the students' perceptions. I appreciate that she can now be prepared for this. All participation is of course completely voluntary. I want to emphasize that we are very careful to maintain the privacy of those who may be included in the survey, and no identities will be disclosed.

Of course, you are welcome to contact me if there are any questions.

[Redacted Signature]  
Stockholm, January 24, 2018

[Redacted Name]  
PhD, Senior



Stockholms  
universitet

Institutionen för pedagogik och didaktik

██████████  
Fil. dr, universitetslektor



## Intyg

Till den det vederbör

Härmed intygas att Rebecca Gonzalez, ██████████, studerar på masterprogrammet i Internationell och jämförande pedagogik, 120 hp, vid Institutionen för pedagogik och didaktik, Stockholms universitet. Jag är hennes handledare för delarna Självtändig studie och Uppsats. Rebecca förbereder och genomför nu en studie av vilken betydelse studer vid IB, International Baccalaureate, för elevers identitet och framtidsplaner. Studien är väl förberedd och avsikten är att uppsatsen blir klar innan sommaren. Det är av stor betydelse att Rebecca kan beredas möjlighet att intervjua så många studenter som möjligt för att på så sätt få en rättvisande bild av elevernas uppfattningar. Jag uppskattar att hon nu kan beredas möjlighet till detta. Medverkan är givetvis helt frivillig. Jag vill understryka att vi är mycket noga med att bevara sekretess för de personer som kan komma att ingå i undersökningen, och inga identiteter kommer att röjas.

Det går givetvis utmärkt att ta kontakt med mig om frågor föreligger.

Stockholm den 24 januari 2018



Fil. Dr, universitetslektor

## **Appendix B – Anonymized Codes**

### Interviewer

Principal Researcher	PR
----------------------	----

### Respondents

Respondent A	RA
Respondent B	RB
Respondent C	RC
Respondent D	RD
Respondent E	RE
Respondent F	RF
Respondent G	RG
Respondent H	RH
Respondent I	RI
Respondent J	RJ
Respondent K	RK
Respondent L	RL
Respondent M	RM
Respondent N	RN

### Sites

Location 1 Case A	L1
Location 2 Case B	L2
Location 3 Case C	L3
Location 4 Case D	L4

## **Appendix C – Description of Codes**

**Background** – Describes the participant’s age, gender, country of birth, nationality, and languages spoken.

**Educational History** – Educational history of the participant. Level of education attained and experienced throughout their lives.

**Networks** - Describes network of personal, professional, or social interactions connected to the participants.

**Identity** – Characteristics mentioned by the participant to describe themselves and others.

**Sources of Information** – People or places where participants found information regarding schools and enrolment.

**Choice Autonomy** – Characterizes moments [acts] when the participant is assertive, makes choices, and acts independently.

**Choice Strategy** – Planning and procedures taken by the participant in making school choice and on a lesser level strategy involved for future plans.

**Academic Climate** – Participants descriptions of school’s teaching and learning habits.

**Academic Initiative** – Describes the participant’s motivation towards their own education or within school.

**Academic Readiness** – Student’s descriptions of being prepared for learning.

**Opinion of Instructors**– Describes participant’s notions and feelings about the role of teachers (IB and non-IB).

**Opinion of Student Body** – Describes participant’s notions and attitudes about students (IB and non-IB).

**School Reputation** – Describes participant opinion of the position, acceptability, or distinction of schools.

**Future Mobility** – Describes participant’s imagined plans for the future.

Codes are sourced from previous Pilot Study conducted by the researcher (Gonzalez, 2017).

# Appendix D – Interview Coding Guide

Department of Education



Identity Coding Guide

Interviewer:

Name	Code
Rebecca Gonzalez	RG

Participants:

Interview	Code	Name	Contact Details	Interview Date	Interview Location
1	A				
2	B				
3	C				
4	D				
5	E				
6	F				
7	G				
8	H				

9	I				
10	J				
11	K				
12	L				
13	M				
14	N				
15	O				

2

# Appendix E – Consent to Interview Form



## Consent to Participate in Research:

### International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Student Interview

**Introduction:** You are being invited to participate in a study conducted by Rebecca Gonzalez, from the Department of Education at Stockholm University. This study is being conducted as part of a Master thesis. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are currently enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore student motivations for choosing to enrol in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. This will be studied with a sample of students that are currently enrolled in the first year of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

**Procedure:** If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Attend a one on one interview with the researcher within the city of Stockholm.
- The interview will be audio recorded.
- The researcher will ask you to share as much information as the participant is comfortable sharing.
- The interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts:** There are no expected physical risks if you decide to participate in the interview. There is a possibility to feel uncomfortable when being asked personal questions. In case of discomfort, the participant is allowed to refuse to answer any questions for any reason.

**Confidentiality:** Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Audio files of the interview will be coded and password protected. Confidentiality will be maintained by coding participant information and data. Only the researcher will have access to audio files as well as transcription of interviews.

### Department of Education

Stockholm University  
SE-106 91 Stockholm  
Sweden

Address:  
Frescativägen 54  
www.edu.su.se

Telephone: +46 8 16 20 00  
Fax: +46 8 15 31 33



**Participation and Withdrawal:** You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

**Contact:** If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me at +46 73 633 3947 or [Rebecca.gonzalez@Stockholm.se](mailto:Rebecca.gonzalez@Stockholm.se) . You can also contact the thesis supervisor Jonas Gustafsson at [Jonas.gustafsson@edu.su.se](mailto:Jonas.gustafsson@edu.su.se)

**Consent:** Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate in the interview and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You make keep this letter for future reference. Thank you for your participation.

Participant's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's name (signature): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name (signature): \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

---

## Department of Education

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# Appendix F – Interview Guide

## Interview Guide

**Conductor of Interview**    RG  
**Date**    \_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant**    \_\_\_\_\_  
**Length**    \_\_\_\_\_

1. Background Information		
Sub-Section	Questions	Clarifying Questions
a. General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where were you born?</li> <li>- In Sweden: Have you ever lived outside of Sweden?</li> <li>- Yes: Why did your family move back?</li> <li>- Outside of Sweden: How long have you lived in Sweden?</li> <li>- Why did you move to Sweden?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you tell me more about that?</li> <li>- Can you expand on that?</li> <li>- What do you mean?</li> </ul>
b. Educational history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where did you go to school before starting DP1?</li> <li>- Same school: Did you want to stay here at (name of school).</li> <li>- Other school: What was the name of the school? What kind of school was it? (IB, non-IB, international, Swedish, public, private).</li> <li>- Who decided you were going to that school? (Themselves, parents, not sure).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you tell me more about this?</li> <li>- What do you mean?</li> </ul>

2. Background + Philosophy		
Sub-Section	Questions	Clarifying Questions
a. On the IB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If student has experience outside of the IB:</li> <li>- How would you describe the main differences between the IB and a non-IB school?</li> <li>- If the student was in the IB before:</li> <li>- Are there differences coming into DP1 than being in the MYP?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- Can you tell me more about this?</li> <li>- What do you mean by that?</li> <li>- How do you know that?</li> </ul>

b. On Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students who attended a different school:</li> <li>- What were teachers like in your previous school? (Note the school)</li> <li>- Do you think the relationship between students and teachers is different in the DP than in your previous school?</li> <li>- Students at same school:</li> <li>- Are teachers different in MYP than in DP?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- Why do you think this is?</li> <li>- What do you mean by that?</li> <li>- How do you know?</li> </ul>
c. On Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What were students like at your previous school?</li> <li>- Do you think you have to be a certain type of student in the IB? Why?</li> <li>- Are students different in MYP and DP? How? Why?</li> <li>- What kind of student do you think you are?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- Why do you think this is?</li> </ul>
d. On Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you think that your classes in the IB are different than at a non-IB school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- How do you know that?</li> <li>- Why do you think that?</li> </ul>

3. Current School		
Sub-Section	Questions	Clarifying Questions
a. Opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describe this school for me.</li> <li>- What is this school's reputation?</li> <li>- Where did you hear that? Do you believe that [reputation]?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why do you think this is?</li> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- What do you mean?</li> </ul>
b. Teachers c. Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are teachers like in the DP? (Might have answered in Section 2b)</li> <li>- How many classes are you taking?</li> <li>- Do you have a favourite subject? Least favourite?</li> <li>- What are your CAS activities?</li> <li>- Would you engage in activities like CAS, if you were at a non-IB school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you tell me more about this?</li> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- What do you mean?</li> </ul>

<b>4. Choice</b>		
Sub-Section	Questions	Clarifying Questions
a. Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was this school your first choice?</li> <li>- No: what was your first choice? Why those schools? What was attractive about those schools?</li> <li>- Yes: Why did you choose this school?</li> <li>- What was your second choice?</li> <li>- Were there any schools you did not want to go to?</li> <li>- If they had no choice:</li> <li>- How did you feel about attending here? Did you want to have a choice?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you expand on this?</li> <li>- Can you tell me more about this?</li>   <li>- Why was this important?</li> <li>- Can you expand on this?</li> </ul>
b. Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parent's choice:</li> <li>- Why do you think your parents chose this school?</li> <li>- Parents not involved in choice:</li> <li>- Was this choice ok with your parents?</li> <li>- Why do you think they let you choose on your own?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you expand on that?</li> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- What do you mean by that?</li> </ul>
c. Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where did you find information?</li> <li>- Were you active in finding information?</li> <li>- Was it useful information?</li> <li>- Did anyone help you?</li> <li>- Who or what influenced your decision most?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> <li>- Why do you think this is?</li> <li>- Can you tell me more about this?</li> </ul>

<b>5. Future</b>		
Sub-Section	Questions	Clarifying Questions
a. Future Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are your plans after finishing the DP?</li> <li>- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?</li> <li>- Why do you want those things?</li>   <li>- Does the DP help you with that?</li> <li>- Do you think a non-IB school would help you with that?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you see that happening?</li> <li>- Why do you think this is?</li> <li>- Can you tell me more about this?</li> <li>- Can you give me an example?</li> </ul>
b. Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you want to stay in Sweden?</li> <li>- Do you want to go somewhere else? Why? How do you see this happening?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you stay?</li> <li>- For how long?</li> </ul>

Department of Education  Stockholm University	
	- Can you tell me more about that?

<b>6. Participant</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there anything you would like to add?</li> <li>- Are there any questions you wanted to talk more about?</li> </ul>