



香港教育大學

The Education University
of Hong Kong

Research Brief

DISTRIBUTED SYSTEM LEADERSHIP:

Student Understanding and
Enactment of Mission and Values
across United World Colleges

Presented by:
Dr. Arnett Edwards

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Faculty of Education
and Human Development
教育及人類發展學院



Department of Education Policy
and Leadership
教育政策與領導學系



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INTRODUCTION

This study investigated how United World College (UWC) leadership affects students' understanding and enactment of UWC's mission and values. UWC is an international school system of 18 schools and colleges. The study took a system leadership perspective to examine the influence of different system constituents on student understanding and enactment of UWC mission and values.



METHODOLOGY

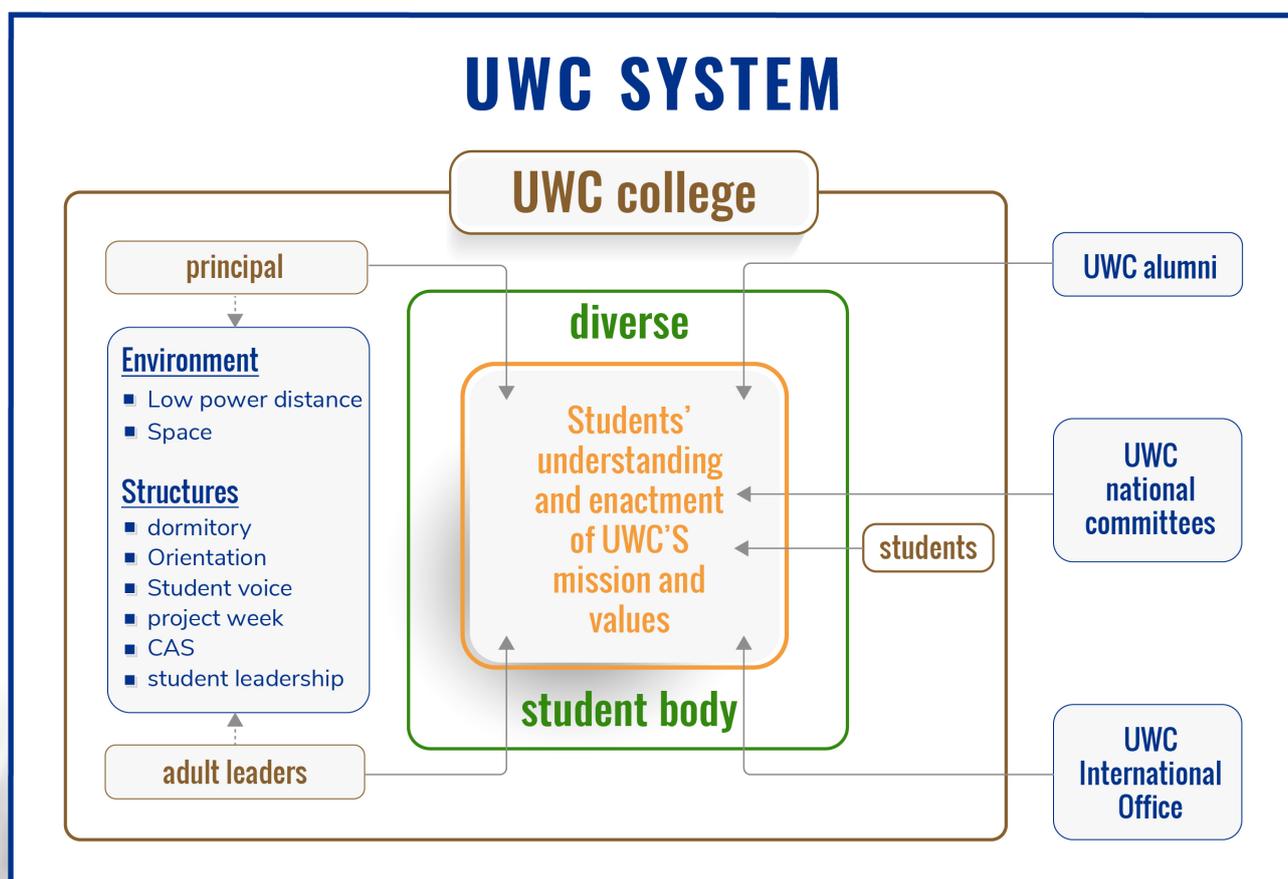
This study adopted a qualitative methodology. Grounded theory methods informed data collection and analysis. The study employed focus group interviews to collect student data and semi-structured interviews to collect data from adult leaders. In addition, a mixture of face-to-face and remote interviews was used, mainly for UWC external leaders. Finally, observational data were collected during visits to UWC campuses, and relevant documents were identified and examined.



THE FINDINGS

- The UWC mission and values statement provides a mechanism for all the system stakeholders to identify with an international system.
- A distributed system leadership model is evident across UWC. Principals, adult leaders, students, UWC national committees, alumni, and UWC International are integral parts of this international school system.
- There is a broad range of understanding of UWC's mission and values, which is reflected in the mission and values' enactment in and beyond the system. The UWC mission and values are ubiquitous in the consciousness of alumni, staff, and students alike.
- Students engage with multiple stakeholders to develop their understanding and enactment of the mission and values.
- Diversity is a deliberate key component in how UWC forms its student populations. UWC students interact with each other within this diverse student population, which results in them broadening their perspectives and horizons.

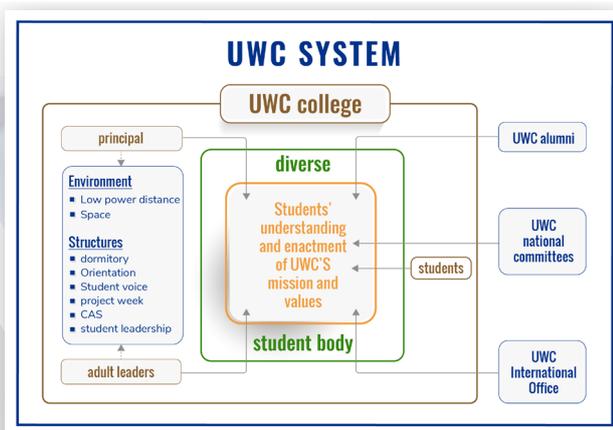
Diagrammatic representation of how the leadership of UWC affects students' understanding and enactment of UWC's mission and values



EXPLANATION OF THE DIAGRAM

The findings identified that distributed system leadership affected student understanding and enactment of the UWC mission and values. Within the UWC colleges, three primary actors directly influence students' understanding and enactment of the UWC mission: principals, other adult leaders, and students (peer to peer). Influence flowed mainly through articulating and role modelling UWC mission and values. Adult leaders, particularly school principals, also indirectly influence student understanding and enactment. They do this by creating structures and an environment to facilitate student understanding and enactment of mission and values.

External to the UWC colleges, three primary actors influence students' understanding and enactment of the UWC mission and values: UWC national committees, alumni, and the UWC International Office. National committees mainly influence student understanding and enactment through the student selection process, enabling students to develop an initial understanding of UWC. Alumni influence students by inspiring them to enact the UWC mission and values. The UWC International Office influences students principally through developing system-wide structures to support enactment.



IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

The study identified the different constituents and actors that influenced students within and outside the UWC colleges by putting the student at the centre of the system. The study, therefore, confirms how distributed system leadership can influence students with different constituents and actors, each playing an impactful role. This finding has implications for researchers of an educational system in how they frame their research on systems by developing conceptual models with the student at the centre of the system.

This study focussed on non-academic student outcomes, namely student understanding and enactment of UWC's mission and values. Principals directly influenced non-academic student outcomes through role modelling and articulating these outcomes. Students were also important influencers of non-academic student outcomes through peer-to-peer role modelling and articulating the UWC mission and values.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Link to thesis:

Thesis: [Distributed System Leadership: Student Understanding and Enactment of Mission and Values across United World Colleges](#)

For enquiries, please contact Dr Arnett EDWARDS at arnett@thearnett.com

