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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

HONG KONG STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD: THE IMPACT OF CURRICULUM, STRUCTURE  
AND ETHOS: A CASE STUDY OF A RESIDENTIAL BRITISH BOARDING SCHOOL

BY

JESSICA MARY THERESE OGILVY-STUART

IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

AUGUST, 2014

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to explore the effect which curriculum, ethos, teaching and family support have on the way that Hong Kong students adapt and contribute to life in a British residential school. The recruitment of Hong Kong students into British boarding schools has increased dramatically over the last thirty years but as yet there has been little research in this area. This thesis employed a case study methodology to examine the experiences of Hong Kong students in the school in order to determine the factors which contributed to the success of otherwise of their stay. This research was conducted by using a qualitative, observation participant approach, collecting data over four prolonged visits to the school. Five key questions are addressed: in what ways do the classroom behaviours of Hong Kong students change as a result of their encounters in a British boarding school? Are Western teaching styles adapted to cater for students of different educational backgrounds? To what extent does the curriculum, structure and ethos of the school contribute to creating intercultural cohesion? To what extent does a cultural transfer take place? And what is the effect of the family on Hong Kong students in a British boarding school? The findings indicate that, although there are some initial difficulties for students in adjusting when they first arrive at the school, the institution is very successful in creating a harmonious intercultural community of respect where national identities are preserved. The study of this bounded community offers examples of how a learning environment which is not representative of a single culture may be created. The setting is significant as the boarding school is a closed environment in which student life is highly organised and therefore primary contact is with the culture of the school rather than that of the country.

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Ad Dei Gloriam.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The recruitment of Hong Kong students into British boarding schools has increased dramatically over the last 30 years; The British Council recorded 13,065 Hong Kong students in second and third tier education in 2013. Of this number, 3,024 were deemed to be studying at Colleges and Universities (British Council 2014) giving an approximate figure of 10,041 Hong Kong students studying at British Secondary schools. Although the Hong Kong student group represents an increasingly significant section of the residential boarding school student population, it represents a sector which is under-researched and about which little shared information exists. Through seeking to explore this student group, this research attempts to make a contribution to the field which may be of value to both educators and school managers.

The aim of the research specifically is to explore the ways in which the ethos, curriculum and structure of the schools they are entering, affect the expanding group of Hong Kong students attending British residential boarding schools, the ways in which teaching staff respond to students from different educational backgrounds and the impact of parental involvement on the students and (to a lesser extent) the school. The research takes as a basis the question identified by Bennett: "How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?" (1998:1). The question is adapted to avoid focusing on the absence of shared values between students of different cultural backgrounds, but rather asks a broader, more positive question about the ways in which the culture created within the context of the shared experience of a boarding school can reflect values which are not representative of a single culture. To rephrase the question: How can a school develop and promote a culture which promotes respect and understanding between students who do not share a common cultural experience?

This thesis will try to establish to what extent students are influenced by external parental factors and will attempt to assess the contribution of the social structure, curriculum and teaching styles of the school in creating an intercultural space.

## **1:2: Focus**

This thesis will be grounded in a critical framework which will encompass theories of intercultural relations, acculturation, and curriculum.

The research will examine the extent to which the structure and ethos of the school governs how Hong Kong students adapt to and are affected by their new environments (this area will encompass academic, social and sporting behaviours). It will also examine the relationship between Hong Kong students, parental involvement, teaching styles and the curriculum and attempt to establish the contribution each area has in creating an intercultural third space.

There are a number of areas which were explored prior to embarking on this piece of research including the fields of motivation theory, goal setting, linguistics and the effects of stereotyping. There is a rich body of data available in all of these areas and I felt that I needed to focus on aspects which had not been explored in any depth prior to the date of this research. My primary objective was to try to generate suggestions for future practice which would create an informed approach to the treatment of this growing group of students within British schools. The environment of a residential boarding is an enclosed space with clearly defined rules and codes of practice which have developed historically (Hodges et al 2013) and aspects of which are alien to the majority of new students, irrespective of culture. I felt that, by focusing on the impact of previous learning, the family, the school ethos, and curriculum and teaching as outlined above, I could attempt to identify how each aspect of the school experience can make a contribution to cross cultural integration. With relation to previous learning experiences and parental involvement, I perceived that these themes represented a significant impact on the group but may be out of the awareness or control of institutions and hence worthy of exploration.

## **1:3: Scope**

After carrying out early research with the objective of mapping the residential school landscape in the United Kingdom, I resolved on an in-depth case study analysis of one school. Initially, I had considered carrying out research in a number of schools in order to

draw comparisons between the impact of structure and ethos of different institutions on Hong Kong students. As I operate a tutorial school in Hong Kong, the Brandon Learning Centre, which provides advice on residential boarding options in the United Kingdom, I regularly visit British schools as part of my service to parents and was therefore able to view a range of schools. Subsequent to visiting over 30 schools, it became apparent that this comparative approach was unfeasible given time and economic constraints. Boarding schools tend to be located either in the countryside or in small towns, and travel between different areas was expensive both in terms of time and money. This initial research allowed me to observe different styles of school and gave me a landscape in which I could situate the school I eventually identified as my case study: The College in South East England (the name has been changed).

I suspected that the school differed from others as an initial visit and feedback from students indicated that it was highly integrated and would therefore represent an environment in which I could begin research which would focus on the positive aspects of intercultural communication. In a number of schools I observed a much less integrated situation and what appeared to be racially segregated groups. I felt that studying an environment which was clearly divided (as some of the schools I visited were) would run the risk of generating research which focused on negative “what not to do” messages. I was intrigued by the school, after having observed changes in their approach to learning of students I had prepared for entrance examinations and who had joined the school at the age of thirteen. The students, who returned to Brandon Learning Centre during their holidays, were positive about their experiences and demonstrated striking changes in terms of social and classroom behaviour compared to their peers who had attended other schools. I was also intrigued by the school’s approach to education: although they have excellent results and are sending boys to academically robust universities, they do not appear in league tables and appear to avoid publicity. My existing relationship with the school had been established in 2006 when I started preparing Hong Kong students to take The College entrance examinations and had developed into one of mutual trust. I approached the Headmaster, Dr T., and was given permission to carry out research at the College during four periods; February 2011, October 2012 and May 2013 and a follow up visit in May 2014.

## **1:4: The development of the global education market**

This research into Hong Kong students in United Kingdom boarding schools is set against a backdrop of increasing globalisation in the education market. In 2012, an approximate four million students chose to study abroad (defined as in a location outside their home countries) compared with two million in 2000. This group represents a significant source of revenue to educational institutions. Historically, the top destination countries have been unchanging although all saw their market share reduce from 55% in 2000 to 47% in 2012.

### **Top 10 destination countries:**

- United States (18% of total mobile students)
- United Kingdom (11%)
- France (7%)
- Australia (6%)
- Germany (5%)
- Russian Federation (4%)
- Japan (4%)
- Canada (3%)
- China (2%)
- Italy (2%)

### **Top 10 countries of origin of mobile students:**

- China (694,400 students studying abroad) (N.B. this includes students from Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China. Of this total, 17,938 are deemed as coming from Hong Kong)
- India (189,500)
- Republic of Korea (123,700)
- Germany (117,600)
- Saudi Arabia (62,500)
- France (62,400)
- United States (58,100)

- Malaysia (55,600)
- Viet Nam (53,800)
- Iran (51,600)

(UNESCO, 2014)

The Government of the United Kingdom estimates the value of the education sector exports to be GBP17.5 billion (Government, 2014) with 26,000 students studying in independent schools, generating a revenue of GBP685 million. In addition to this are the revenues generated as students spend money in the United Kingdom and parents increasingly invest in British property.

### **1:5: Background to Hong Kong students studying in the United Kingdom**

The increasing significance of the Hong Kong population in British schools has been a result of a number of factors: changes in local Hong Kong schools, financial wealth and social values. A key driver is the alterations made to the local education system (including the introduction of the three years middle school, three years high school, four years university structure, the dismantling of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education 16+ exams and the introduction of the 17+ Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (Zhao 2014). The first cohort took the new Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) examinations in 2012. Prior to this date, parents unwilling to try an unproven system were already looking at overseas education. Following the 2013 exams which resulted in 28,418 students being eligible for 15,000 subsidised university places (Knowles 2014) the exodus has continued. Equally, a trend in local companies favouring overseas graduates has made an international education more appealing, particularly in the light of the Hong Kong beliefs that education is a tool for economic success (Poon and Wong 2008).

Alternatives to local curriculum schools do exist in the form of the English Schools' Foundation (ESF) and international schools but both have limited places, extensive waiting lists and conditions of entry which restrict access to certain groups (Poon and Wong 2008). Entry to the ESF group of schools is based on the following ranked criteria with students given priority based on whether they:

1. Are Corporate Nomination Rights Nominees
2. Are the children of full-time staff at ESF or ESF Educational Services Ltd
3. Are siblings of students already attending an ESF primary or secondary school or Jockey Club Sarah Roe School
4. Are Individual Nomination Rights Nominees
5. Are the children of former students who have attended an ESF school for a minimum of 3 years or are former ESF students returning from a period overseas
6. Are children attending an ESF International Kindergarten\* [Note: contingent upon the child studying in the kindergarten continuously until the end of term 3 prior to entry into primary school]
7. Are other applicants who can benefit from an English-medium education  
(English Schools' Foundation 2014)

Entry to international schools is typically through examination with some schools requiring parents to pay significant deposits.

In addition to the pressure of limited places, the curriculum of non-local schools is another factor in parents' decisions to send their children overseas to study. The adoption of the International Baccalaureate in ESF Group schools and a number of other international Schools, including German Swiss International School, Canadian International School, Yew Chung International School and Chinese International School, has left parents with little curricular choice. This factor has been of particular relevance for students who find the demands of the broad IB syllabus a challenge but have been unable to find a place on an A level course in Hong Kong. Although this situation has been addressed by the opening of new international schools and secondary campuses (including Harrow International and Kellett Secondary School who both offer GCE Advanced levels) places are still limited and some parents are unwilling to try untested institutions.

Based on my discussions with Hong Kong families at the Brandon Learning Centre and my participation in Hong Kong based seminars about accessing residential boarding schools, I have noted that parents are increasingly recognising that Sixth form entry is both extremely



competitive and is reliant upon students achieving the standard of IGCSE levels in order to access the entrance examinations. As a result, an increasing number of families are opting to send students to British schools earlier in their academic career (due to the structure of most senior schools, entry points are either 13+ or 11+ for girls and 13+ for boys).

Financial factors play a part in the decision making process for some Hong Kong families. Increasing wealth and a benign income tax regime (between 10 – 15%) has meant that an overseas education has become more accessible to a larger group. Many of these students will be the first in their families to study overseas. Concessions are also made available to the children of designated Hong Kong Civil Servants for overseas studies which cover up to 90% of boarding school fees (HKSAR 1996). This group is large, encompassing civil servants and members of the police and disciplinary services.

As European and British economies have been struggling during the economic downturn, British residential boarding schools have increasingly been targeting Hong Kong, Chinese and Eastern European students. In 2013, overseas students accounted for 26.7% of the independent schools' population with 664 schools having a Tier 4 licence allowing them to sponsor visas for overseas students (ISC 2013).

As part of the colonial legacy, Hong Kong has historical links with British schools. As multiple generations have attended British boarding schools, there is a pattern of clear preference for certain schools based on the perceived prestige of alumni and the ability of the school to help students gain access to Ivy League, Oxbridge or Russell Group Universities. Allied to this is the perceived value of an overseas education conferring social, economic and academic status. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003:203) suggest that there are four factors which affect parental choice in selecting a school: The first is the "bandwagon effect" in which sending children to a particular school is fashionable either amongst their peers or groups they aspire to join. Secondly parents may move against the crowd and select institutions which are different to those being made by their peers. Thirdly that parents select a school based on aligning themselves with an elite group and finally that they desire to display their economic ability to choose the most expensive option. Of these criteria, all four may be observed at play when Hong Kong parents make decisions about schools (my experience). The second factor is less common although it is becoming more important as parents are

increasingly developing the perception that United Kingdom schools are full of Hong Kong or Mainland Chinese students.

Allied to the positive perception of an overseas education is the belief that the competitive pressure experienced in Hong Kong schools creates a negative learning environment which is detrimental to students' long term development. The extra-curricular and social opportunities offered by British schools are attractive to parents who perceive that the Hong Kong academic culture of tutoring and examining students creates a burden of pressure on their children which they wish to escape.

#### **1:6: My interest in this area**

In 1998, I moved to Hong Kong. After studying Cantonese at the University of Hong Kong, in 2006 I founded the Brandon Learning Centre. Brandon is a tutorial school with centres in Kowloon and Hong Kong and which specialises in preparing students to study overseas. The majority of our students go to the United Kingdom although some will go on to the United States, Canada or Australia. Between sixty to eighty of our students per annum will leave for overseas schools and often return during holidays for additional tuition. Students go to primary, secondary and third level institutions in the United Kingdom. I have been observing my pupils over the course of the last eight years and have noticed that some schools have a more profound effect on pupils than others. This is immediately noticeable in changes in social behaviour (for example, students are more willing to engage in conversation) but is also obvious in classroom behaviour. The majority of classes we teach are group based and student participation and critical engagement is more obvious in certain groups of returnees. This led to my seeking to understand why particular students immerse themselves in their new culture, some find the sojourn extremely distressing and why others return to Hong Kong seemingly unaltered by their experiences.

#### **1:7: Student backgrounds, parental expectations and Confucianism**

The local Hong Kong education system places an emphasis on results and achievements which is mirrored by parental expectations. As part of my role running tutorial schools in Hong Kong, I am extremely familiar with the competitive tendencies of Hong Kong parents

and their desire for their children to perform to a high standard in an academic environment. The family structure in Hong Kong remains hierarchical and conservative and is underpinned by Confucian values which may define inter-personal and group relationships. Essentially, the belief system defines a goal in life: “virtue with regard to one’s task in life consists of trying to acquire skills and education, working hard, not spending more than necessary, being patient and persevering” (Yeh and Lawrence 1995:664). This belief system manifests in clearly defined family roles and obligations including that of a child to study and of a parent to facilitate study (Stevenson and Lee 1996). As a result of this structure, students may not play a role in the decision to select an overseas school but are expected to perform well both in interviews and examinations in order to gain entry. Parental choice of schools is often heavily influenced by peer and family choices and, as a result students may already know each other or have family members within their British schools. Students tend not to be involved in the decision making process but do have some understanding of the benefits of an overseas education (Welikala and Watkins 2008, Yeo 2010).

As part of the preparation process which begins around the age of nine, parents often ensure that students learn at least one musical instrument to a high standard, compete in local competitions and participate in school sports tournaments (normally swimming, tennis or badminton). During this time, students have little free time and attend tutorial classes after school and on Saturdays. Parents facilitate learning but there is an expectation that the student will play their role and perform to the best of their abilities. This two way relationship is a distinct pattern by the time students leave for the United Kingdom and whether it is sustained or not was one of the areas I wanted to explore in my research.

The average cost of a British boarding education is now in the region of between GBP 30,000 - GBP40, 000 per annum which includes both tuition and residential fees. In addition to school fees, Hong Kong parents need to provide for flights, guardian services, uniform and “extras” (such as additional EAL support, school trips and incidentals).

## **1:8: The structure of the school year and term**

The majority of students join British boarding schools at the age of 13+ (Year Nine) and remain until 18+ (Year Thirteen). The school year has three terms of approximately ten – twelve weeks duration. Each term is divided in two by a half term holiday during which all students must leave the school. Unlike previous generations, the majority of Hong Kong students now return home during this break. On either side of the half term holiday, there is an “exeat” weekend during which the school is closed and students must leave the premises. As the exeat weekends do not provide enough time to return home to Hong Kong, students must stay with a guardian during this period. An alternative trend is parents renting hotel rooms for a group of students. This practice is illegal and discouraged by schools although a number I have visited acknowledge that it takes place amongst older students. The majority of the Hong Kong boys in The College returned home during half term holidays, often sharing a taxi to the airport and frequently spent exeat weekends together in London. There appeared to be an informal arrangement between Hong Kong parents whereby one parent would take responsibility for other students during exeat weekends. This is a reflection of the relationships formed between Hong Kong based parents of College students, the majority of whom come from or aspire to be a member of similar social groups. Interestingly, students whose families are not part of these social groups operate independently and make their own arrangements during holidays. (My observation based on conversations with students I have prepared and who joined the school).

## **1:9: Confounds**

Given my familiarity both with the school setting and some of the students, I was particularly aware that I might be drawn into making pre-conceived assumptions. The structure and language of The College is extremely specific and I was concerned that I might take some of the idiosyncrasies for granted. I have attempted to explain any eccentricities of the school system which have had an impact on my research but have not sought to cover

every area. However, Tafoya (1984:52) claims that methodologies are only part of the research process and the researcher “must be knowledgeable about the culture investigated – its social hierarchies, language, customs.” Within the world of the College, I did not want to emphasise my status as an outsider and found that my prior knowledge helped me to decode situations in which College specific examples were being used.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), and Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012) discuss the necessity for the researcher to become a stranger; giving them the ability to observe without personal bias or involvement. As my research continued, I came to the realisation that the level of access to the school which I was experiencing indicated that my prior knowledge was superficial and focused around specific areas of the school such as the registry whereas my experiences as a researcher took me to classrooms, boarding houses and staff meetings and were more profound. Equally, my previous students behaved more formally towards me outside Hong Kong but acted as guides to the world of the school (with one exception, a boy from a Hong Kong international school who insisted on calling “hey, Jessica” every time he saw me!)

#### 1:10: Outline of the thesis

Subsequent chapters will outline:

Context – including a background to The College, an explanation of the entrance procedure, the structure of the house system and features of both language and curriculum.

Literature Review – providing insight into the theoretical framework which has grounded my research.

Methodology – giving an explanation of the rationale of choosing a case study methodology, design issues and potential criticisms

Data Analysis– providing insight into data collected during two research visits, identifying themes and generating questions

Conclusions and Discussion – attempting to answer questions which arose during the data collection process, to provide explanations and to identify contributions to knowledge and practice. This section ends with a personal reflection on my experiences.

## **Chapter 2: Context**

### **2:1: Background to the College**

The College was founded in 1387 (Sabben-Clare 2005) and offers residential education to approximately 690 students (ISC 2012). The College is predominantly a boarding school with only six day students at the time of writing. Fees are currently GBP33, 750 per annum and bursaries are available on a means tested basis. Children of staff are offered subsidised places.

Entry to the school depends upon the results of an interview, an aptitude test and a school reference at 11+. For boys based in Asia, this process takes place in Hong Kong and is carried out by a representative of the school. Boys based in the United Kingdom visit The College and are interviewed by the House Master of the boarding house they have selected. The format of the interviews varies between House Masters and includes a written test. Based on the House Master's recommendation, boys who perform well at this stage are offered either a house or general place which is conditional upon the results of a 13+ examination in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and optional papers in Greek, Latin and French. Boys who are late but talented applicants may be considered via a Head's nomination. The school has an international student body with overseas students from Africa, the USA, South America, Hong Kong (the largest single group) and Europe.

### **2:2: Structure of the School**

This section includes information on both the management and social structure of the school with particular focus on the boarding system. Physical (environmental) structure will be covered in another section.

#### **2:2.1: Management Structure**

The College has a governing body of up to fourteen members who are appointed by group of institutions including New College, Oxford, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and

the Lord Chief Justice. The governing body is headed by a prominent individual who is referred to as “The Warden” and who has the task of overseeing the general direction of the institution. The Headmaster of the School is currently Dr T., an educator who has had substantial experience as a teacher and a Headmaster of both British and Australian schools. The Senior Management team consists of the Second Master, the Head of Studies, Subject Heads and key House Masters.

### **2:2.2: The House Structure and Entry to the College**

Students making ordinary applications are allocated to one of ten houses which are located outside the main school buildings and in which they sleep and eat. Each house is overseen by a Housemaster who is also a member of the teaching staff (with limited teaching commitments). The Housemaster is supported by a team which includes house tutors (also members of the teaching staff) and a matron who oversees domestic duties. These individuals have the most contact with the students and are a point of reference both for families and other teachers. The majority of Housemasters are married and their families and pets live in a separate part of the boarding house but frequently join the boys for meals or activities.

There is an eleventh house, known as Scholars, which houses seventy of the most academically able students. Scholars is located within the school grounds and entry is accessed via a scholarship examination. Entry to the school via scholarship entails students passing a series of interviews, sitting four compulsory papers (English, maths, science and a general paper designed to test IQ) and three optional papers. Based on the results of the examination and an interview, twelve places are offered per year. Members of Scholars wear academic gowns, share classes with non- Scholars boys and contribute to raising and maintaining the intellectual standard of the school (Frith 1936, Sabben-Clare 1989). Non-Scholars students may also compete for academic and music scholarships (known as “Exhibitions”) which are prestigious but do not carry any visible symbols of award.

When students first enter the school, they are housed in dormitories of between six – eight occupants which are designed to encourage the development of friendship groups. As they progress up the school, the boys move into twin rooms and finally, in their penultimate year, individual study rooms. Each house has a House Prefect who is part of a school prefect



group and who meet with the Headmaster on a regular basis. The practice of “SenOrd” or senior order under which junior boys were required to defer to senior boys who could give punishments for transgressions is in the process of being dismantled.

The houses are divided into three groups on historical lines: Group A, Group B and Scholars. There are two types of interhouse competitions: those in which each house participates (e.g. House Singing Competition which is of an extremely high standard and taken seriously) and an annual College Football match between Group A and Group B during which the teams consist of players drawn from each group of houses and the school divides to support their housemates.

### 2:3: School Philosophy

The College values academic excellence and enquiry: “intellectual independence has always been encouraged and practised” (Sabben-Clare 1989) but does not participate in any published school league tables. A code of conduct exists providing boys with guidelines covering bullying, use of drugs, plagiarism, use of technology and which includes the following points:

A serious approach to work is of the highest priority.

Honest, frankness, punctuality and courtesy are expected at all times. Male dons should be addressed either as “Sir” or by their full title (Mr/Dr Surname); female dons should be addressed as Ma’am or by their full and correct title (Miss/Mrs/Dr Surname)

(College 2012: 39)

Discipline was described as “humanized and liberal” in 1936 (Frith 1936) and “a culture of tolerance” was observed by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in 2012 (ISC 2012). My observation is that rules tend to be subtle and are enforced through respect and peer pressure rather than overt instruction. There are clear expectations related to time keeping, classroom discipline and respect for Dons and, based on my visits, these were upheld without intervention from the staff. During my visits, there appeared to be little abuse of

school rules other than a few cases of smoking. In contrast, academic standards and expectations are high and marking of homework is rigorous.

School uniform consists of: trousers, a jacket, any formal shirt and a tie of any design. There are no house ties, prefect badges or other signs of office. This dress code was described as giving “scope for artistry and emancipation” resulting in an “ease of manner”(Frith 1936). This policy manifests in a variety of ties, scarves, waistcoats and sock colours.

## 2:4: The Buildings

The Medieval school buildings including the Scholars’ house, the original school room, the Chapel and the library form the front of the school. The school has been extended over time to include a connected main teaching block which covers three sides of a court (“Flint Court”). This area is also used to post school notices. There are separate science, art, design and technology, music and sports blocks. Other key buildings include: a concert hall in the music department, a theatre, a science lecture theatre and a multi-purpose hall which is used for inter-school events, large scale concerts, debates, competitions and examinations.

The War Cloisters are a key area of the school. This covered quad was erected as a memorial to the war dead and memorials cover a period ranging the late nineteenth century to the current day. During the summer, some classes take place in the War Cloisters and staff and students pass through the area daily on their way to other parts of the school.

Teaching and key administrative staff are allocated houses within the vicinity of the College (mainly in the street which runs directly behind the War Cloisters) and the boarding houses are found within a square mile of the College.

## 2:5: Physical structure of the Boarding House

Each student is allocated to one of eleven boarding houses which acts as the centre of his time at The College. The houses are named after original masters and also have both a letter and a school nickname. For the purposes of this research, only the Scholars’ house will be referred to by name.

Each boarding house has a kitchen, dining room, large dormitories for younger boys, and study bedrooms for older boys, washing facilities, communal study rooms, matron's room and a recreation room. Younger boys have dedicated study rooms which are divided into carrels in which they do their homework. A central desk allows a senior boy to supervise their work on a rotational basis. Additional facilities such as gardens, yards and pool tables depend on the age and structure of the house. The House Master's residence is accessed through a connecting door.

Food is cooked in-house and each house has different menus which are agreed to by the House Master. The dining room has long tables for each year group. Boys arrange themselves and the House Master, tutors and visitors sit at the head of each table during lunch time.

## 2:6: Map of The College



Adapted from College (2012)

Key:

Purple blocks – boarding houses

Orange blocks – school buildings

## 2:7: Religious Affiliations

The College is a Christian school and has two chaplains (Church of England and Catholic) Attendance at morning chapel is mandatory for all boys. Sunday services are attended depending on denomination. There is a non-denominational faith circle which explores different religions for non-Christians.

## 2:8: Year Groups

Boys enter the school at the age of thirteen and the majority will stay until they are eighteen. Year group names are:

Junior Part (JP) – Year Nine (ages thirteen – fourteen)

Middle Part (MP) – Year Ten (ages fourteen – fifteen)

Fifth Book (VB) – Year Eleven (ages fifteen – sixteen)

Sixth Book two (VIBk2) – Year Twelve (ages sixteen – seventeen)

Sixth Book one (VIBk1) – Year Thirteen (ages seventeen – eighteen)

For the purposes of this thesis, year groups nine to eleven will be referred to as the “lower school” and years twelve and thirteen as the “upper school”.

## 2:9: School Terms

The School has three terms per year:

Short Half – September- December

Common Time – January – March

Cloister Time – April – July

Each term is divided by half term and there are five exeat weekends per year during which the boys leave the College and return home.

## 2:10: Structure of the School Day

The structure of the school day varies depending on season. Winter timetable is:

0900 – 1025 – lessons in the main school building

10.25 – 10.50 return to the house for break

10.50 – 13.00 – lessons in the main school building

13.00- 14.00 – lunch served in houses

14.00 – 16.00 Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday – no lessons (sports activities)

16.00 – 18.10 – lessons in the main school building

18.10 – 21.15 – return to house for tea, Toy Time (homework) and activities such as house practices, sport, drama or music,

21.15 – précis (assembly) and bed for younger students

All food is served in the houses. At lunch time, boys sit with their year group and each table is joined either by a member of staff or guest who sits at the head of the table and serves the food. Attendance at breakfast and lunch is mandatory. Tea is a more casual meal with free seating. Toast and drinks are available all day in designated areas of the house.

## 2:11: Language of the school

The College has developed its own terminology, known as “notions” for a range of areas including timetable, seniority and everyday items (Sabben-Clare 2005). The language has developed over time and new students are provided with a partial glossary. For the purposes of this thesis, it is worth identifying common terms used in everyday speech by the boys:

Hour – lesson (actually 40 minutes)

Up to books – lesson time

Toy Time – homework (so called because younger boys work in a carrel known as a “toy”)

SenOrd – Seniority ranking with a boarding house which conferred greater status to older boys (currently in the process of being dismantled)

Headman – Headmaster

Don- teacher

Division – broad based cultural and critical thinking course unique to The College. Referred to as by boys and teachers as “Div”

DivDon – Form master, also responsible for teaching Division

In addition to these terms, a number of slang words exist which are quickly adopted by new boys of every nationality, including “goive” – an expression of disinterest which is in common usage at the time of writing.

## 2:12: Curriculum

The school maintains a rigorous academic standard and students are required to achieve six A grades at IGCSE level in order to progress to Sixth Form. This requirement is stringently enforced resulting in a small number of boys leaving the school following their IGCSE year. The majority of public examinations are taken in Fifth Book (IGCSE) and Sixth Book two (Pre-U/A-levels) although some students take IGCSE Chinese and German in Middle Part. Students are divided into mixed sets for Division and are streamed based on academic ability for other subjects. Class sizes range from between approximately 8 – 16 students.

In Junior Part, students are required to study a broad range of subjects including a modern language and Latin both of which will be continued to IGCSE level. In Sixth Book, students choose 4 Pre-U or A level courses.

### 2:12.1: Division

Throughout the school, students take Division, which is a unique programme designed to encourage critical thinking skills and encompasses classical philosophy, history of art, history and literature. Until 2013, the subject was non-examined but students had to complete a weekly piece of writing (“Div Task”) based on the themes being covered by the class.

The Div Don (Division teacher) is given a broad remit within which he may teach any topic. Sabben-Clare describes Division as “the traditional pivot of a boy’s curriculum” (1989). In the lower years, the curriculum is standardised but this ends at Sixth form and Div Dons teach a wide range of topics including philosophy, economics, scientific theory and aesthetics (Thorn 1989). Topics are weighted towards the humanities and history (ISC 2009). Each boy participates in a school wide competition which requires him to give a presentation to his class based on a piece of art, sculpture or architecture and “Recita” which is an annual poetry recitation. In both cases, the class chooses their strongest candidate to participate at school level.

Generally, Division adheres to the following themes:

**Junior Part** – Introduction to English literature: contemporary poetry and prose, medieval literature, Shakespeare, nineteenth century novels. Six lessons per week are timetabled.

**Middle Part/Vth book** – Middle Part represents the beginning of the IGCSE programme which is taught in discrete academic subjects. Students typically take between eight and ten IGCSE subjects including English language but not literature. Division falls under the auspices of the English department who ensure that the IGCSE work is covered but is not the primary focus of the course which is still broad and includes both contemporary and classic literature. Eight lessons per week are timetabled.

**Sixth Book I and II**– Broad philosophical discussions based on acquired theory and knowledge. Classes observed covered: art history, translation of Dante, philosophical discussions on the treatment of death, poetry, classical philosophy, the role of folklore in creating cultural myths and the relevance of alternative medicine.

## 2:13: Sports

The school offers more than thirty separate sports. In the first year, students have timetabled sports lessons but, for the rest of the school, participation in organised team sport is optional. Each student must do some form of physical activity but the type is not mandated. The list includes a broad range of options including Tae Kwan Do, athletics, squash, badminton, rowing, and football, all of which are self-selected following the first



year. The College also has its own sports including The College Football, the rules of which have developed over time and are a matter of intense debate amongst the students. This sport is not played by other schools.

## 2:14: Sources and educational backgrounds of Hong Kong students at The College

Of the 690 students currently studying at The College, 35 have been identified as coming from non-English speaking families (ISC 2012). The school suggests that between 15 – 20% of the student body are from overseas which includes expatriate British families.

The following is a summary of the educational backgrounds of Hong Kong students entering The College at either 13+ or 16+.

**1: British Prep schools** – this is a growing group as Hong Kong parents become disillusioned with the local system and believe that a British prep school will facilitate entry to a “top” senior school and university (Yeung 2012).

Students who have attended British Prep schools have already become attuned to both the British education system and the social expectations of a boarding school before joining The College. Entry is typically in the summer term of Year 6 or the beginning of Year 7.

### **2: Direct Subsidy Schools**

These schools are part of the Hong Kong local system but have autonomy over budgets and curriculum (Yung 2006). Extremely prestigious and competitive, entry to these schools requires good school reports, references and a comprehensive student portfolio. St Paul’s Co-educational College, St Paul’s College, St Stephen’s College and Diocesan Boys’ School are DSS schools feeding The College.

Characteristics of the DSS system (Poon and Wong 2008):

- Large class sizes (40+)
- Competitive examination and testing systems – weekly testing, quarterly examinations resulting in school rankings which are visible to all
- Participation in competitive events valued e.g. Hong Kong Schools’ Speech Festival
- Engaged and driven parents

- Active alumni associations
- High degree of participation in group-based non-academic events e.g. fund raising, fairs, school gatherings
- Emphasis on discipline and conformity

Their schools will typically discourage interaction and pupils asking questions during class but will encourage academic competition between students. Students who perform well tend to be selected to represent the school in competitions. At primary level, this will increase their chances of access to a Band One or Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) school. At senior level, it will increase their chances of being identified as “Gifted” which may bring access to extra classes, high quality teachers and the chance of participation in external programmes. Students from local schools are unlikely to seek assistance from teachers (even if encouraged to do so) and will use other Hong Kong students in order to gain insight into the school system.

### **3: Other elite local schools**

Typically run by religious foundations, places in this group of schools are offered based on catchment area. Entry to Band One schools (e.g. La Salle) is extremely competitive. Similar curriculum and characteristics to those described in DSS schools.

### **4: English Schools’ Foundation (ESF) schools**

Comprehensive schools which offer English medium teaching. The senior school curriculum leads to IGCSE at sixteen (year eleven) and the International Baccalaureate or BTEC at eighteen (year thirteen). Non-competitive entry is based on catchment area and therefore the school has an intake which is made up of students of varying academic abilities.

### **5: International Schools**

These schools vary widely in terms of academic quality, intake policies and objectives but generally offer a non-local curriculum, tend to have smaller class sizes and favour a student-centric approach to teaching. At the top end of the academic scale are schools such as German Swiss International School and Chinese International School which are prestigious, selective and in high demand. Entry is via reference and examination and may be facilitated

by the purchase of a debenture (paying a deposit to guarantee the option of a place, Harrow International debentures are currently trading for around GBP550, 000). Other schools include:

- French International School,
- Hong Kong International School (American curriculum),
- ISF Academy (relatively new, offering an intensive Mandarin programme),
- Yew Chung,
- Kellett (British curriculum),
- Harrow International (opened in 2012 and attracted groups from Kellett and ESF and in-coming students from Mainland China)

Students from international schools will be familiar with the requirements of a Western educational environment but, with a few exceptions, the standard of written work expected is typically below that of British Prep schools in terms of critical engagement with topics, quality of grammar and spelling and structure. Reasons for this include an educational focus on creativity, broader intake and use of technology to produce projects rather than an emphasis on written pieces.

## **2:15: Special Educational Needs**

The College currently has 147 students who have been identified as having special educational needs. 23 students receive learning support (ISC 2013). All students, irrespective of Special Educational Needs are required to sit the entrance examinations.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### 3:1: Overview

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature which formed the foundations from which my research questions were developed. The literature falls into the following areas:

- The residential boarding school
- An analysis of cultural and intercultural dimensions
- The acculturation process
- Cultural values
- The curriculum
- The Asian and Chinese experience of overseas education

### 3:2: The Residential Boarding School

There is minimal existing literature into residential boarding schools which is not school-specific or dated (my research and Hodges et al 2003). Of the existing literature, the majority is focused on the United Kingdom and Australia although Hodges et al (2013) makes it clear that the Australian sector is extremely different, given that the majority of schools are not boarding schools but day schools with a boarding element. The lack of research into this area has been identified by a number of researchers including Hodges et al (2013), Walford (2011), and Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003). Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003:195) suggest that the lack of research into this field could be attributable to a number of factors:

Firstly, the relatively small size of the independent school sector (currently there are 508,601 students of all ages studying at independent schools in the United Kingdom which includes day and boarding pupils representing around 7% of the total population of school students). This figure has declined by .2% between the years of 2012-2013 and parents are now more likely to opt for day or weekly boarding rather than full boarding, possibly for economic reasons (ISC, 2013).

Secondly, the independent sector is competitive and schools seek to differentiate themselves from each other which removes the benefit of any collaborative research. Additionally, “the desire to keep market insights confidential has traditionally been strong.” Walford (2011:154) specifies that schools are likely to keep their overseas student numbers “quiet” possibly because the perception that the school is dominated by overseas students affects both international and local intakes. The former group looks for schools which offer a British experience and the latter are concerned that their children will not receive attention in a classroom dominated by overseas students (my observations). Hodges et al (2013:32) suggests that schools are motivated by a desire to “safeguard a school’s public standing and to protect its residents.”

Schools do seem to be willing to participate in The Independent Schools’ Council census. However, this survey presents anonymous, group level findings on the independent sector and therefore does not provide insight into the workings of any one school. From a study of the marketing literature available both online and in the form of prospectuses, it is clear that schools seek to differentiate themselves predominantly based on their academic, sporting and arts cultures.

Thirdly, recruitment of students in certain geographical locations (mainly London and the South East) has not been problematic for senior schools (ISC, 2013), hence the need for research has not been a priority.

Finally, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003) suggest that market research tends to be commissioned by schools individually, has a specific purpose and is therefore rarely publicly available.

Fox (1985:146) assesses the decision making process which parents go through when selecting a school which is based on superior teachers, discipline, perceived advantages and matching educational aspirations. They “believe that they (the other boys in the school) contribute to an environment where education in its traditional form is valued by all.” Walford (2011:64) explores the boarding experience from the student perspective. One area of interest is the identification that the majority of boys were attending public schools because “they and their parents believed that they would be more academically successful by being there.” This shared set of values becomes important if they match those of the

institution and represent a source of complaint if the students feel that their academic goals are not being achieved.

### **3:3: The culture of the school**

I initially began my case study from the focal perspective of culture, intercultural and group relations. In order to define the parameters of a school's culture, I applied Taba's (1995) definition cited by Berry and Williams (2004:127):

(School culture is) the patterns of acceptance and rejection, the methods of gaining status and leadership, the ways of using authority and allocating belonging, the ideas about individuality and conformity, about what constitutes success and worth expressed in the formal and informal rules of conduct.

As the study progressed, it became apparent that the culture of the school under observation also depended on wider considerations of social interactions, shared goals and a unique curriculum. I explored Confucian belief systems in order to gain a better understanding of students from Confucian cultures who were joining the school but felt that an in-depth analysis was not relevant to this research, as I wanted the focus to be on the student experience in the United Kingdom rather than an exploration of background. Having said that, some reference to Confucian values might be of value given that the philosophy is still taught in Hong Kong schools (including La Salle, Diocesan Boys' school and Saint Paul's Co-Educational College, all feeder schools for The College) and influences Hong Kong thought. Of particular relevance is the theme of filial piety and the role of students:

"Young men should be filial when at home and respectful to their elders when away from home. They should be earnest and faithful. They should love all extensively and be intimate with men of humanity. When they have any energy to spare after the performance of moral duties, they should use it to study literature and the arts (referred to in Putonghua as "wen")" (Chan 1973:20).

The broader cultural definition of education is similar to the view promoted by The College. Although Confucianism is a clear influence on Hong Kong, the territory has developed a parallel culture to that of China as a result of political history and economic experience

which, according to some researchers, embraces egotism, competition and pragmatism (Liu and Kuan 1988, Leung 1996, Morris and Ling 2010). Despite this historical political division, Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students were found not to demonstrate any differences in filial attitudes based on the results of a Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory questionnaire indicating that the two areas have deep rooted cultural similarities (Zhang and Bond 1998).

Students coming to The College are academically robust and have demonstrated analytical skills during the challenging admissions process. The first step in the entrance process to The College is an interview with either a House Master (for British students) or a school representative (for Asian students including those from Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore) during which students may be given verbal puzzles to decode or literature to comment upon. Students I have taught in Hong Kong have been given the following tasks during their interviews: comment on *No More We'll Go A-Rovin'* by Lord Byron, comment on *The Gettysburg Address*, comment on a piece of art, explain how you would lessen the negative environmental impact of a school. The result of this process is that students who pass the interview stage are likely to have a sound command of English and have displayed critical thinking abilities although there does appear to be some concession to students who demonstrate other skills, such as music (my observation). As The College requires students to be able to function easily in an English speaking environment, I did not include theories of language acquisition and dissonance but rather focused on educational expectations and experiences.

I explored the effect of educational encounters between Confucian based and Western values and the impact of family and group involvement. Based on my experience of other schools, and reading the available literature on the culture of British Public Schools, I came to the realisation that The College was atypical which led me to theories on third space creation.

### 3:4: Definitions of culture

I combined a number of definitions of culture in order to be able to frame my research.

Geertz (1975:261) defines culture as:

...an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.

Hofstede (2003) Collier (1998) and Fischer et al (2009) extend the description to emphasise the role cultural conditioning plays in establishing difference. For the purposes of this thesis, the identification of difference: “ The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede 2003:25) is used to identify sources of conflict but the primary focus is on areas of commonality between students of one culture albeit with different educational backgrounds and the culture of a school. Hecht et al (2005) add detail to the significance of culture as inclusive or exclusive with a three part definition of cultural identities:

1. Enduring historically but with changing, not static properties
2. Intelligible and accessible to group members
3. Membership demonstrated by understanding and the use of codes.

Crucially, culture is not static and Spencer-Oatey (2000:4) develops the definition by highlighting the fluid nature of culture; “group members are unlikely to share identical sets of attitudes, beliefs... but rather show ‘family resemblances’, with the result that there is no absolute set of features that can distinguish definitively one cultural group from another.’

The dynamic nature of culture and human behaviour is encapsulated in Scollon, Scollon and Jones’s (2012:3) conception of culture as a “tool for thinking” and Benet-Martinez et al’s (2002:512) definition:



... independent under some situations, and interdependent under other situations; they are individualistic at certain times and collectivistic at other times. Rather than an unmalleable characteristic, cultural meaning systems may be better conceived as a set of tools individuals have available to use in different situations according to their identity dynamics and situational relevance.”

The concept of meaning systems as tools which provide sense to events, and which are selected by the individual based on circumstances and need, highlights the idea of culture being fluid. In seeking to define where cultural meaning is required, Gupta (2002) divides the varying definitions of culture into six areas: descriptive, historical, normative, psychological structural and genetic. Within this context, cultures evolve and have meaning based on historical experiences. Adler (1982) and Samovar and McDaniel (2012) add that cultures must be internally coherent, equally valid and that everyone is, to some extent, culturally bound. In conclusion, culture is a system of internal programming which we access based on our current situations, is common to groups and has validity within the group but importantly is mutable and adaptable. It is the fluid nature of culture which is most applicable to this research and which I seek to explore in more depth, particularly the concept that culture is adapted through contact with value systems which contain elements of similarity and dissonance.

### **3:5: Cultural Exchanges**

Having explored various definitions of culture, I began to look at fields of cultural exchange and areas in which the products of cultural programming manifest. For the purposes of this research, cultural exchange may be defined as being when two groups with difference cultural values interact and deeply held beliefs are changed as a result of the contact. “Cultural programming” references the deeper cultural traits which are inculcated from childhood and which we may or may not be aware of but will be brought into play when making value decisions. Shaules (2007), and Triandis et al (1998) describe universal factors which govern human behaviour which may be summarised as:

- Giving vs. denying affection

- Giving vs. denying status
- Intimacy vs. formality

With reference to these fields, Foa (cited by Törnblom and Kazemi 2012) identifies six types of exchanges: love, service, status, information, money and goods. Cultural exchanges taking place may be governed by differing dimensions, namely:

- Values
- Differentiation
- Antecedents
- Consequences
- Expected Enforcement

Within the world of the school, new arrivals are more likely to immediately encounter differentiation on a superficial level and possibly identify academic rules based on previous experiences but engagement with the new institution's deeper cultural values requires time and experience of the new environment. In this area, students are initially encountering cultural differences both in the host environment and in relationships with peers which are conducted on a superficial level. Once familiarity with the school develops, the students begin to form deeper bonds with the classmates at which point more profound cultural exchanges take place.

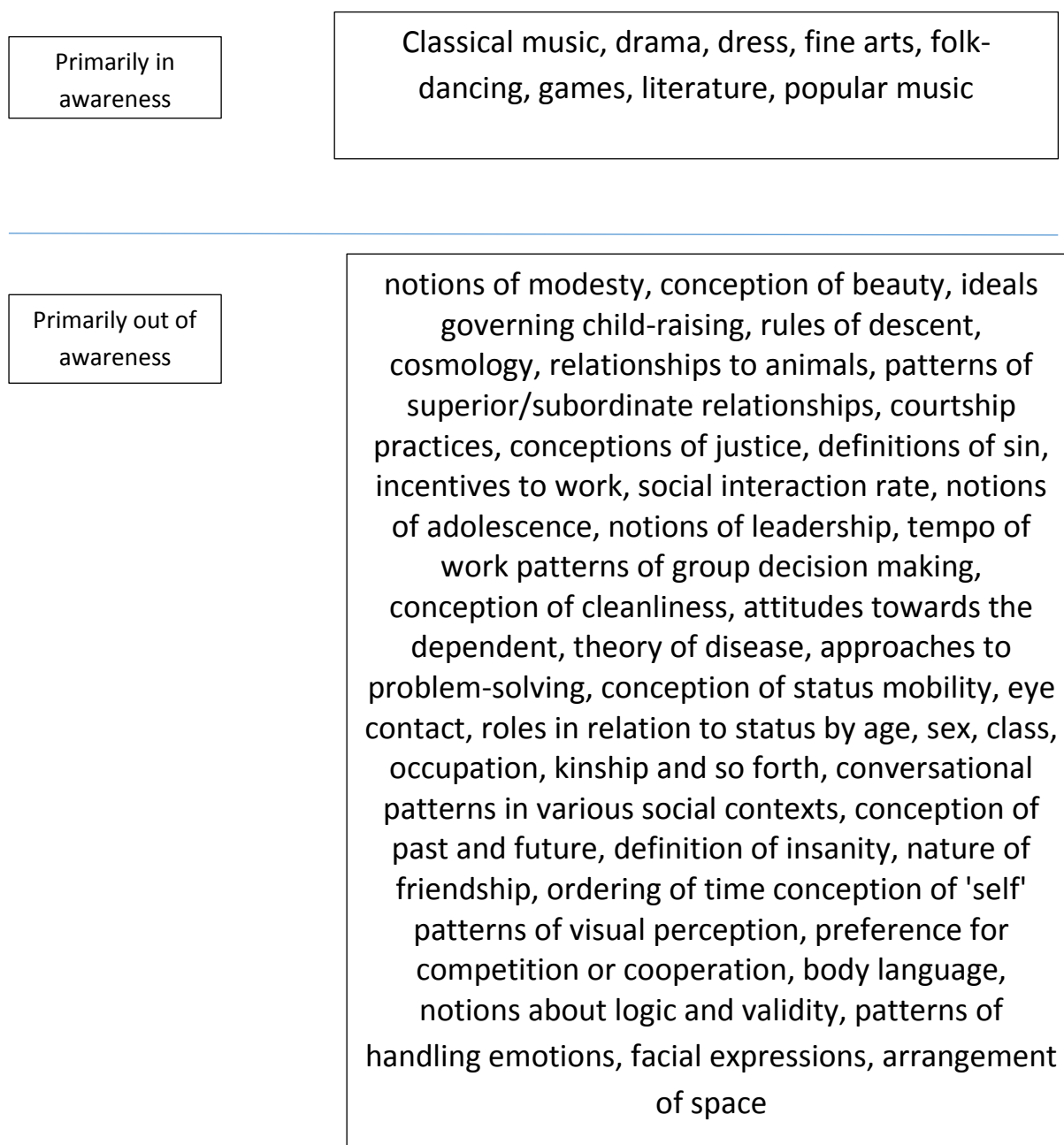
In an attempt to move past external manifestations of culture and seeking to understand at what level cultural encounters take place, I looked for literature which explored the deeper levels of culture. Terreni and McCallum (2003) offer an analysis of overt symbols and practises of culture and the deeper values which may be hidden on initial encounters. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1993:7) refer to these deeper values as a "cultural onion" although I prefer Shaules' (2007:35) description of "deep culture" as it implies that culture is operating simultaneously on different levels which may not necessarily be sequential. Singer (cited by Weaver 1998) refers to "attitudinal frameworks" which teach how to react to stimuli. It is this framework which may lead to Ross's "fundamental attribution error" (cited by Cullingford and Gunn 2005:56), or making judgements about events without realising that they are basing them on cultural interpretations. Similarly Paulston (1992) suggests that the deep nature of cultural programming, allied with an

appearance of having adapted to a culture (particularly in terms of fluency of language and acquisition of behavioural traits of the host culture) may lead to an inaccurate assumption of shared cultural values and a judgement about an individual's behaviour which does not correspond to these values:

...with behaviour, it is not necessarily clear just which cultural system your performance rules belong to. This can be a cause for problem, especially with very fluent speakers, as the addressee will fail to recognise another cultural system at work and instead merely see the deviant behaviour." (1992:124)

The deeper nature of culture, which is accessed as we decide how to react to any given situation, and which generates shared patterns of behaviour and traditions, is further explored by Weaver (1994:160) who uses the analogy of an iceberg with the easily identifiable symbols of culture being supported by deep, possibly hidden, cultural values. This concept was of particular interest to VBk1 students at The College, and led to a discussion about how culture can be reduced to a series of symbols. It is this essentialist view of culture which I wish to avoid in this thesis.

Fig 1: The nature of primary manifestations of culture and the deeper hidden values.



Adapted from Terreni and McCallum (2003), Shaules (2007)

One theme of interest to this research was the way in which an awareness of the internal programming of culture and belief can manifest as an individual acquiring a deeper sense of self-awareness. This in turn may lead to both students and teachers developing a more

profound sensitivity to the ways in which different groups interpret events and actions. Through acquiring an awareness of self, the individual is more sensitive to the impact they have on others (Buttjes and Byram, 1991). Cultural conditioning may be reflected in both language and actions (Schank and Abelson 1977, Abelson 1979, Wierzbicka 1991, 1999, Guilherme 2002), cultural experience (Azuma 2002, Nakayama and Halualani 2011), and the educational experience (Welikala and Watkins 2008). This analysis was of particular relevance to my research as it identifies the three main areas of engagement in educational relationships. Within the context of my research, I was especially interested in the effects of learning brought from home on Hong Kong students, specifically the way that previous enculturation had formed behaviours which reflected in classroom participation, perception of the role and status of the teacher, and peer interaction (Welikala and Watkins 2008).

Inside the school, relationships operate on different levels: social within the house, academic within the classroom and collaborative within the areas of sport and the arts. These relationships are not discrete but are rather part of the overlapping circles which form the structure of life within the school. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1993) identify seven dimensions in which relationships may display different characteristics in universalistic and particularistic cultures:

<u>Universalism:</u>  Dependence on rules and standards (which should apply to everyone equally (Ting-Toomey 1999:81))	Vs	<u>Particularism:</u>  Flexible approach to rules and standards (rules depend on how and to whom they are being applied (Ting-Toomey 1999:81))
Individualism: Autonomy, creativity		Collectivism: Consensus, taking care of groups
Neutral affection  (inhibited)		Affective

Specific: Actions relate to objective and relationships are secondary to the achievement of an objective.		Diffuse: Relationships are important and values are shared and ascribed.
Achievement orientated: worth is based on achievement, irrespective of position or origin.		Ascription orientated: power, titles and position are important. Authority is respected, titles are used, care is taken not to embarrass people in senior positions, family origins and roles are important.
Sequential time: time is linear and precious, Punctuality is important as are deadlines.		Synchronous time: time is perceived as being fluid with past, present and future being interwoven.
Internal control: individual can control their environment in order to achieve goals.		External control: Individuals are controlled by their environment and need to work with it in order to achieve goals.

Within this context, literature would indicate that boys from Hong Kong are most likely to display most of the behaviours outlined in the description of a particularistic culture, although the approach to law which is characteristic of China (Ting-Toomey 1999:81) only partially applies in Hong Kong as a result of the British colonial inheritance which engendered an adherence to the rule of law. They are also likely to be collectivist, demonstrate neutral emotions (as do the British), be ascription orientated, have a diffuse attitude towards relationships, a synchronous view of time and demonstrate external

control. Within this range of cultural dimensions, there are a number of similarities between the British and Hong Kong approach to life, including the shared desire to maintain neutral emotions. In addition to differing approaches to relationships, Stewart and Bennett (1991) focus on linear versus relational worldviews and outline the following characteristics:

<b>Linear</b>	<b>Relational</b>
Rational thinking	Connected thinking
Objective reasoning	Context based reasoning
Facts/evidence	Context and relationship
Polarised interpretation	Continuum interpretation
Analytical dissecting mode	Holistic
Tangible outcome	Focus on long-term relationship (avoidance of polarised outcomes)

Literature would indicate that Hong Kong students are likely to display patterns common to the second column (relational) but may apply the first column to specific pieces of work.

### **3:6: Cultural dimensions and variables**

Given the scope of items covered by the term “culture” I sought to find an area of focus which would cover the styles of engagement in order to compare cultural interactions. Hofstede identified a series of cultural dimensions which govern human responses at a national level (Yeh and Lawrence 1995, Hofstede 2003, Hofstede and Bond 1988, Hofstede et al. 2010). Hofstede identified four, later five (1988) dimensions of culture, namely:

1. Power distance
2. Individualism/collectivism
3. Masculinity/femininity

4. Uncertainty avoidance
5. Long term/short term orientation (Confucian dynamism)

Power Distance refers to the way in which cultures handle inequality and is negatively related to individualism (Singelis et al 1995). This dimension may be manifest in a preference for management behaviours. One example is that cultures with a high Power Distance, one example of which is often considered by researchers to be Thailand, are thought to favour an autocratic/paternalistic approach to leadership. This applies to education with the teacher/student relationship being more formal and the teacher taking the role of instructor in countries with high Power Distance. Shaw(2005) suggests that high Power Distance may result in individuals seeking help from those below them in order not to show weakness.

Individualism/Collectivism may be described as being the emphasis that a culture places on individual versus group goals. Within a collectivist culture, the greater good of the group takes precedence over individual desires and freedoms. Xi (2000) offers this dimension as an explanation of why Chinese students persist with overseas studies. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) suggests that collectivist societies are likely to perceive education, business, work, labour and government as being interconnected, creating success through their unity. This idea was particularly interesting to me when looking at how students viewed their time at The College. Triandis et al (1968), Triandis (1995), Triandis et al (1990), and Singelis et al (1995) felt that the individualist/collectivist division was too narrow and ignored the possibility of different types of behaviour within a society. They instead focused on individual personality traits described as allocentric (collectivist) and idiocentric (individualist). Simon (1997) refers to these as “individual and collective selves” which are applied fluidly as circumstances dictate a need to establish identity.

Masculinity/Femininity is initially defined as the way that society handles gender roles but is extended to characterise the society. Hofstede (2010), challenged by McSweeney (2002) and Patel (2007) as being too essentialist, deems masculine societies to be: assertive, competitive and aggressive. Feminine societies are described as being harmonious, with a greater emphasis placed on both interpersonal and environmental relationships. Hofstede’s (2010:96) educational interpretation of low masculinity index illustrations include settings



that value social adaptation, treat failure as a minor problem and guide curriculum choices by interest. Highly masculine settings treat failure as a major problem, award good students and teachers, guide curriculum choices based on career expectations and overrate performance. I felt that this dimension had particular relevance to the sporting culture of the school which is inclusive rather than competitive. Based on Hofstede's categorisation (2010:99), the United Kingdom is deemed to demonstrate masculine individualist values, whereas Hong Kong is deemed to be a masculine collectivist society indicating that both groups adapt to the culture of The College rather than it being reflective of any single culture. (This will be explained more fully in the data chapter).

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the ability of a society to handle ambiguity and threats of the unknown (2010:113). Within an educational context, low uncertainty avoidance manifests in fluid learning environments with teachers acknowledging that they may not have all the answers, high parental input and students attributing success to their own abilities.

Finally, the dimension of Confucian dynamism which indicates the long or short term orientation of a society's dynamic. Within this category, long term approaches place a higher emphasis on persistence even though rewards may not be immediate and short-term setbacks accepted. (Ting-Toomey 1999, Hofstede and Bond 1998).

Bowe and Martin (2007:83) accept the validity of Hofstede's values in "understanding potentially different patterns of thinking, feeling and acting" but question the appropriateness of the gender categorisation and the potentially judgemental, Western orientated position his research is deemed to take. They suggest Clyne's alternative labels which include "harmony", "degrees of negotiation", "assertiveness" and "weakness" (cited in Bowe and Martin 2007). There is some validity to this position, particularly as Asian societies value collective harmony over individualism (Hall 1976). Signorini et al (2009) and McSweeney (2002) raise concerns that Hofstede's research has been carried out exclusively in a single business setting which Hofstede claimed indicated a value-free setting yet the results have been applied to national levels and the education sector. Bowes and Martin (2007:83) raise objections to the "overgeneralisation" of gender roles but more fundamental critiques include Hofstede's theory that culture is essential, discrete, inflexible

and unchanging and his focus on difference particularly in relation to educational settings (Signorini et al (2009). Waldron (cited by May 2009:40) and Bhabha (cited by Feng 2009) also challenge the fixed and binary nature of cultural behaviours, introducing the concept of a cultural hybridity and “third space” in which new meanings are negotiated. McSweeney (2002) is particularly scathing both about the methodology and findings of Hofstede’s research. Interestingly, his challenges (particularly on statistics) were also raised by VIBk2 boys at The College during a discussion about Hofstede. Crucially, McSweeney raises the concern during a discussion about the co-existence of seemingly contradictory values that:

Hofstede’s dimensions exclude such co-existence and conflict and thus are blind to key cultural qualities. All of us, including Burmese highlanders and academics, have the ability not only to hold incompatible ideas/values in different situations but we may, in James Joyce’s apt phrase, have “two tinks (sic)” at a time.” (2002: 105).

Keeping these caveats in mind, Hofstede’s dimensions are a useful starting point for analysis without allowing the researcher to become either restricted or for the research to become prescriptive.

### **3:7: Individualism/Collectivism**

One of the most important areas I looked at was the different habits and beliefs associated with either collectivism or individualism. Gudykunst (2003) develops the individualism – collectivism variability concept, specifying that the pattern describes general tendencies of behaviour but manifests differently in each culture. Avant and Knutson (1993) proposed that it is possible for a culture to be both collectivist (work for the greater good of the group) and individualist (compete on a personal level) which certainly appears to be a more accurate reflection of both Hong Kong society and that of The College.

Singelis (1994) extends this theory to define individuals as having interdependent self-constructs (collectivism) or independent (individualist). The former reflects the individuals’ internal reference to others when mediating meanings, the latter focuses on reference to individual goals. The ability to access both of these frames results in intercultural flexibility. Both methods are reflected in communication styles with interdependent self-constructs

relying less on direct communication than independent. This has particular relevance when seeking to understand why Hong Kong students are less likely to raise concerns with teachers than their Western peers. A further development of communication styles is offered in describing cultures as having high or low context (Hall 1976, Lustig and Koester 2003). Within a high context culture, communication meanings are based on a physical setting, internalised beliefs, cultural norms and non-verbal communication. Messages may not be explicit as they are based on the assumption of shared understandings, relationships and positions. The objective of communication is to preserve harmony. Within a low-context culture, verbal messages make up the majority of the communication and may be direct and possibly hurtful. Interestingly Bennett (1993:36) suggests that recognising and matching both verbal and non-verbal messages play a key role in developing an understanding of cultural relativity. Crucially, members of high-context cultures are more likely to be sensitive to embarrassment and rejection than those from low context cultures and are less likely to articulate their distress (Hall 1976). To balance this, Bond proposed that individuals from countries with high Power Distances were more likely to accept criticism and less likely to resent the critic if he or she were of a higher status. However, within equal peer groups, insults from in-group members are more acceptable than those by out-group members. This does go some way to explaining why students were more likely to comment negatively on perceived insults received from their peers (and particularly non-Hong Kong peers) rather than react to those received from teachers (Bond et al 1985).

Within high-context cultures, in-groups are clear and unchanged making outsiders easily identifiable and creating social cohesion (Triandis 1995). Communication is more formalised, creating barriers in low-context cultures (Hornsey and Gallois 1998). Low-context cultures have multiple in-groups (Triandis 1995, Triandis et al 1988) which are fluid and engender a higher tolerance of non-conformity. Singer (1998) posits that groups are cohesive due to a similarity of perception, attitudes and communication styles and that in-group identity is clearer when juxtaposed with out-groups.

Triandis et al (1988) and Singelis et al (1995) propose a four dimensional model of collectivism/individualism:

- Vertical collectivism assumes status and power inequality within the group

- Horizontal collectivism (HC) merges self into the in-group.
- Vertical individualism (VI) emphasises completion and self-promotion
- Horizontal individualism (HI) the individual is autonomous but of equal status with the group. Hierarchy is accepted.

Hong Kong is a culturally mixed society with both British and Chinese influences and which demonstrates traits of both collectivism and individualism. Members may adopt superficially individualistic behaviours if there is a benefit to them in doing so. Triandis et al's study in Hong Kong and Illinois (1998) suggested that Hong Kong respondents were more likely to present individualist attitudes if they felt that they were more socially acceptable but gave collectivist responses to scenarios indicating that the society is in a state of change yet the fundamental collectivist culture still exists. This finding has relevance to Hong Kong students in British schools who may appear to subscribe to the values of the host institution whilst remaining loyal to previously held beliefs.

Hong Kong students are familiar with group work although it does not play a large role in the local school curriculum which is largely dependent upon individual effort in examinations. Within an educational setting, the Hong Kong learner experiences an obligation to perform in order for the group to succeed (Nield 2007). Earley (1993) tested theories of "social loafing" by which someone from an individualist culture is more likely to take it easy when working in a group, assuming that others will complete the task. This was not replicated in a collectivist group. This effect leads to frustration when groups are made up of a mix of individualist/collectivist students. Nguyen et al (2006) suggest that groups within Confucian Heritage Cultures have a different approach to group work compared to the typical Western model and require the task, the steps required and the outcome to be explicit.

### 3:8: Asian Psychological Factors

The connection between societal structure and behavioural traits pre-disposes individuals to act in predictable ways. In addition to universal personality traits, four personality

constructs specifically related to Chinese indigenous groups provide a framework for explaining reactions. These are:

- Dependability
- Chinese Tradition (further defined as strong identification with harmony, people-love (renqing) and face and negative identification with flexibility, modernity and optimism)
- Social Potency
- Individualism

(Song et al 1993, Cheung et al 2010, Zhang and Bond 1998)

To further explore Chinese Tradition, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009:112) propose a framework for analysing the concept of “face” which they define as being divisible into personal or value and social expectancy (“sociality rights”), and claims an individual may make. Individualist societies are more likely to be concerned with protection of personal rather than group face (Triandis 1982, Triandis et al 1988, Ting-Toomey and Korzenny 1989, Ting-Toomey 1999, Ting-Toomey and Chung 2005). Personal values include worth, dignity, honour, reputation and competence and sociality rights include fairness, consideration, social inclusion and exclusion. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009:110) identify two aspects of the concept; Quality face is the desire for personal positive evaluation by others. Identity face is the desire to be recognised in the social or group roles we hold. Sociality rights have two impacts which are relevant within this field:

1: Equity Rights- defined as the desire humans have to be treated fairly. This belief manifests in cost-benefit and autonomy-imposition assessments which govern the willingness of the individual to accept demands if he or she believes that the benefit in return is in balance with the burden.

2: Association Rights – defined as engaging in an association with others which is in “keeping with the type of relationship” This governs “interactional association-dissociation” or the amount of conversational involvement, and the “affective association-dissociation” or extent to which feelings and concerns are expressed.

### **3:9: Group memberships**

Having observed the formation of clearly divided groups in other schools, I was interested in the effects of group polarisation and the way in which perceived differences altered as students progressed through the school. Tajfel (1978, 1982), Gupta (2002), Scollon and Scollon (2001) Bowe and Martin (2007), Triandis et al (1988), Triandis (1975), and Anastasio et al's (1997) work on group identity models and the resultant creation of stereotypes, define the role of groups in forming identity. Social identity is formed by the group of which one is a member and also by identification of out-groups which confirm difference. Members of the in-group are likely to be treated differently and membership or otherwise predicts "what is communicated and how information should be transmitted" (Gao et al 1996:298). This identification of difference may lead to the formation of stereotypes if other groups are observed under limited circumstances. These stereotypes may have value in allowing the individual to make sense of behavioural patterns, and change as group relations change. (Eagly and Kite 1987, Yzerbyt et al 2002). Within the context of the school, students coming from another culture may have developed views about the behaviours associated with a single student and extrapolate this experience to reach negative conclusions about the student's ethnic group (Borden 1991, Yzerbyt et al 2002). The situation is exacerbated as Hong Kong and Chinese students are coming from societies which have unchanging group structures, value conformity and filial piety leading to fewer intercultural experiences and may also more likely to be dogmatic and predisposed to subscribe to fixed stereotypes (Zhang and Bond 1998).

The tension between in and out group members can be reduced if a common identity or dual identity is created but increased if the dominant group perceives that the subordinate group may represent a threat (Hornsey and Gallois 1998). Crucially, the group needs to provide positive social identity or members will seek to leave (Tajfel 1978, 1982, Yzerbyt et al 2002). Yeo (2010) proposed that the belief that the minority group felt inferior to the majority is a fallacy. Throughout my research, this theory did appear to be supported as Hong Kong students expressed their views on the insularity of the British students.

The group structure of a school has an important impact on the successful formation of an intercultural environment in which no one culture dominates. Thomas's (1992:430)

describes the school as ‘a set of sub-cultures subsumed under “schoolness”’ which is strengthened and supported by teachers whose role may be perceived differently by students based on their different cultural backgrounds (Vedder and Horenczyk 2006). In order to achieve intercultural learning, teachers need to empathise with the frustrations and aspirations of their students and recognise that there may be cultural differences between their own values, those of the school and those of their students (Buttjes and Byram 1991). Teachers play a key role in creating an environment which promotes cultural sensitivity whilst upholding the cultural values and ethos of the school.

One of the areas I was keen to explore was whether the school did create a culture in which existing group memberships could be maintained or whether they were either rejected or created tension. Anastasio et al (1997) propose the following solutions to intergroup bias:

- Recategorisation or decategorisation
- Conditions of cooperation between groups
- Status equality
- One group identity in which existing identities are also maintained

The Hong Kong student group I focused on are from a pre-dominantly collectivist culture which led me to look at the role this conditioning plays in the group dynamic. The effect falls within three main areas:

- Responsibilities to the group
- Relationships within the group
- Relationships outside the group

Hui and Triandis (1986) identify difference in dealing with goals between collectivists and individualists. In cases of discrepancy between individual and group goals, collectivists will favour those of the group whereas individualists will prioritise their own goals. Within this framework exists a hierarchy of groups and behaviour will vary depending on group context (Fischer et al 2009). Zhang and Bond (1998) explore the role of the desire to maintain harmony within the group which shifts focus from personal to mutual feelings, and the concept of Renqing (people affection) which indicates that an implicit set of rules within the group exist based on social ties and obligations.

Triandis et al (1990), and Triandis et al (1988) outline the limited quantity and static nature of groups within collectivist societies which have the effect of reducing social stress but highlight difference between group members and others. Additionally, members of collectivist societies have more static groups and fewer but more profound social interactions (Wheeler et al 1989). The College is a multi-layered society with multiple groups fitting Triandis's (1995) description of culturally complex societies. The number of in-groups and the creation of technical, psychological (taking responsibility for their own learning, a challenge to many Hong Kong students) and political autonomy within the school reduces loyalty to one group and therefore minimises the exclusion of non-group members (Triandis 1989, Vedder and Horenczyk 2006). Marginson and Sawir (2011) criticise the collectivist/individualist dimension on the grounds that it implies that individualists (from predominantly Western nations) are free to exercise liberty and creativity whereas collectivists (from non-Western countries) are somehow restricted by the demands placed upon them by their groups. My research and that of Jabal (2010) indicated that this was the case to a certain extent and that the effect of an overseas education created tensions between the desires of the individual and the group goals, with the result that students shifted between groups depending on their emotional and academic desires.

### **3:10: Cultural capital**

The College is a highly selective and, for the majority of the students, a fee-paying school resulting in a student body which is taken predominantly from a section of society which is likely to be educated and possibly affluent. One of the areas I wanted to explore was whether this highly selective group were pre-disposed to share common cultural values which transcended nationality. Bourdieu (1984, 1976, Brown and Szeman 2000) identifies cultural habits and dispositions which are inherited from the family and which translate into unequally distributed embodied "cultural capital." Habermas (cited by Wuthnow 1984, Guilherme 2002) describes "personal lifeworlds" through which cultural and linguistic messages are negotiated.

According to Bourdieu's theoretical applications: cultural, social and institutional capital may be used to gain social power (in this case, social capital brings access to the school



which in turn translates to institutional capital: attending The College opens academic doors leading to prestigious third level institutions). Cultural and social capital can be used either to identify groups who are deemed to be of equal status or as a differentiator (Bourdieu 1984), with parents selecting schools which they feel fit their academic aspirations and values. Bourdieu differentiates between societies with which have no defined system of rules in which power is constantly negotiated and structured environments in which power differences are objectified (e.g. via titles or position) which may be easily recognised as reflecting shared cultural values. The school has a clear power structure, cultural objectives and rules and transmits both academic and social knowledge (Hansen 1979, Apple 1982, Apple 1990). The ethos of the school is analysed through cultural frames of reference and assimilated into familiar categories as families selecting The College are likely to share some if not all the educational values proposed by the school (Fox 1985, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2003). The independent school sector is not subject to the restrictions of the British National Curriculum (Education) and therefore can respond to parental desires for results (Fox 1985, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2003) which transcend cultural boundaries.

The transmission of cultural knowledge was of particular interest to this piece of research. Apple's (1990:46) question: "whose meanings are collected and distributed through the overt and hidden curriculum in schools?" Vedder and Horenczyk (2006) identify two meanings: socialising to a national level and representing a global culture with students being given arenas of social participation which are relevant to their own cultures. My aim was to find out to what extent these two meanings were balanced and therefore to what extent there was a gap between socialisation experiences and the standards of the school.

### **3:11: Cultural adjustment**

I observed The College students on four occasions at different points of the academic year, and was able to identify students at different stages of adaptation. The pace and ease of the process of acculturation is factor of time, background and perception of self and is enhanced or retarded by the receptiveness of the host community and could therefore be deemed to be affected both by individual and systematic factors (Ting-Toomey 1999:239). Byram (1997:33) identifies three areas of individual attitudinal factors which affect the formation of intercultural relationships which include:

... the willingness of the interlocutors to expect problems of communication cause by lack of overlap in their respective knowledge of the world and each other's country. It may depend on the ability of the interlocutors to accept criticism of the values they share with people in their usual social groups, and of which they may not have been consciously aware. It may also depend on their willingness to accept at least initially that they will be perceived by their interlocutor as a representative of a particular country, its values and its political actions, whatever their own views of these.

This concept is particularly relevant for this study as relationships operate on multiple levels within The College including between student peers, between older and younger students and between staff and students. In the first case, students who enter The College at thirteen were observed to perceive language barriers but were not, on the whole, sophisticated enough to separate individuals from national groups. This led to a certain amount of frustration amongst Hong Kong students. Ryan (2009:68) specifies that each individual has a reaction to experience which is, "distinct and personal" and adds that stress is an essential aspect of the process of changing and adapting identities. She adds that:

...openness and willingness of the person to study one's own processes enhances how the individual will successfully resolve the problem and in turn forces them to create an atmosphere in which change in cultural identity can take place.

The majority of Hong Kong boys come to The College willingly and have undergone the stressful experience of stringent entrance examinations prior to entry. The result of this process is that entry to the school is perceived to be a positive event and boys are therefore willing to adapt. One explanation for the extent of the stress some boys reported could be that they anticipate that there will be difference yet, at the age of thirteen, do not possess the self-reflective tools to deal with the shock. In relation to Ryan's assertion that every experience is "distinct and personal," although an individual may experience unique reactions to social acculturation, one aspect which appears to be common is that there are shared experiences of educational acculturation, the extent of which may be governed by previous shared educational experiences.

On an individual level, I looked at two types of acculturation models: linear and pluralistic. The former is challenged by Deng and Walker (2007) and Shaules (2007) who suggest that the acculturation process is a series of experiences and adaptation which take place on many levels.

Deng and Walker (2007:190) define the process of acculturation as:

...a process in which an individual, owing to immediate contact with an adopted society, undergoes the loss of his or her original cultural traits and values while gaining those of the host culture.

Within the context of this framework, assimilation is a stage in the process of acculturation and the acculturation process is "multidimensional" (191).

Bennett (1993, 1998) outlines a six stage process of cultural adjustment, namely:

Stage One – Ethnocentric	Manifestation
Denial	Perception of self as central, others as stereotypical
Defence	Ignore difference

	Difference is acknowledged but denigrated
	Own culture is perceived as superior
	New culture is seen as superior
Minimisation	Difference is recognised but focus is on universal characteristics (physical or transcendental)
<u>Stage Two – Ethnorelative</u>	
Acceptance	Acknowledgement of difference but without judgement
Adaptation	Acquisition of new skills, frame shifting
Integration	Acceptance of and application of pluralistic identities

In terms of types of impact, Zaidi (1975) outlines four areas in which cultural adaptation is made: physical, academic, sociocultural and time. Within these areas, there is a U shaped process of adaptation based on Lysgaard's (1955) work, the linear nature of which is challenged by Brown and Holloway (2008), Brown (2009), Murphy-Lejeune (2004) and Ogbu (1993) who propose a more scattered adaptation based on individual resources, voluntary or involuntary position and challenges.

Shaules (2007) critiques this linear approach to acculturation, suggesting that some stages may not apply and that some may happen simultaneously. The pluralist adaptation process depends on periods of initial adjustment, crisis and regained adjustment and has certainly been my experience as an immigrant into Hong Kong. Berry et al (1987) exclude what Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963:36) describe as the initial "honeymoon" phase and outline a process of marginalisation, integration, separation and assimilation. Brown and Holloway (2008) also challenge the idea of an initial euphoric stage, positing that the initial excitement is overwhelmed by the stress of a new encounter. Kim (1988, 2001) describes the

marginalisation and integration process as cyclical although this does indicate that acculturation is never completely achievable and would appear to be a negative perspective. More positively, Shaules (2007) defines the final stage as one in which the internal logic new culture is not only understood but is also deemed to be valid. Kleinjans (1975) approaches adaption as an exercise in assimilation in which the first stage is cognition or analysis, the second affection in which traits are appreciated and identified and the learner undergoes a reorientation process finally leading to action or “losing foreignness.” Ogbu (1993:346) suggests that voluntary minorities are likely to try to adapt to the dominant culture without fear of giving up their original culture leading to an attitude of accommodation without assimilation.

There are varying levels of stress associated with acculturation which are affected by individual and environmental factors. Berry (2005) suggests that individuals who start with the aim of integrating into the new culture experience less stress. Schermerhorn (1978) and Paulston (1992:18) suggest the ease or difficulty of the acculturation process is dependent upon a balance of power:

There is a tendency to understand the relationship between ethnic groups... in terms of cultural features but a more accurate understanding would follow if we included an examination of the structural characteristics of the relationship, especially as they express the power relationship balance between the two groups.

Ting-Toomey (1999) and Berry et al (1987) explore the systematic features of an environment which may affect acculturation and distinguish between pluralistic societies in which cultural diversity is welcomed and encouraged and conformist societies which encourage conformity with existing behavioural norms. Although students arriving at The College may be equals as far as the school is concerned, those who are already familiar with a boarding environment and who are able to act as an expert voice may gain influence although this will be transitory as other students learn to navigate the new environment.

Students who have already experienced a Western environment display accelerated acculturation. Bennett(1986) theorises that a recognition of difference is the basis of successful acculturation and exposure to Western teaching styles and culture in the home country allows students to begin identifying variations. Ogbu (1993:355) suggests that

voluntary minorities develop a cultural frame of reference which is not “oppositional” to the host country and that they are driven by a desire for academic success which makes them likely to perceive cultural differences as barriers to be overcome rather than cultural sacrifices. Tadmor et al (2010), and Benet-Martinez et al (2002) distinguish between the cultural stresses of individuals who are bicultural (maintaining two cultures) and can switch between identities and those who reject/assimilate the new culture. Maintaining a bicultural status may engender on-going stress as new encounters are processed within two frames of cultural reference.

Anderson (1993) identifies four approaches to cultural adaptation which were recognised by teaching staff and applied to student profiles at The College:

Group	Attitude	Manifestations
Returnees	Aggressive, negative	Give up and return home
Time Servers	Disengaged	Avoid encounters, self-isolate
Adjusters	Confused but pragmatic	Focus on segmenting encounters and mastering functional
Participators	Enthusiastic	Optimal engagement, use of networks to negotiate meaning

Schermerhorn (1978) refers to groups having tendencies which are “centripetal” (desire to assimilate) or “centrifugal” (incorporated yet separate and with a desire to maintain own distinctiveness) Berry (1997), Kim (2002), Paige(1993), and Murphy-Lejeune (2004) identify four areas likely to facilitate or prevent cultural adaptation:

1: Adaptive predisposition of the sojourner

- Cultural/racial background (cultural distance between individual/host cultures (Schermerhorn 1978, Triandis 1982, Chiu et al 2009))
- Personality attributes (e.g. openness, resilience)
- Ethnocentrism (Bennett 1993)
- Language skills (Taylor 1987, Kramsch 1993, Guilherme 2002)

## 2: Preparedness for change (e.g. education, pre-entry training)

- Host environment characteristics
- Receptivity (Mahon (2006) shows that people with international exposure are more likely to reject ethnocentric ideas and support ethnorelative positions of acceptance and adaptation. "No longer is cultural difference something to be denied or denigrated." (Shaules 2007:118))
- Conformity pressure (e.g. formal and language policy, social segregation)

## 3: Communication of the sojourner

- Communicative competence (knowledge of host communication system, cognitive complexity, affective co-orientation, behavioural competence)
- Interpersonal communication with hosts as a source of information (Furnham and Bochner 1986)
- Mass communication with host
- Interpersonal communication with same ethnic group (may also be a source of misinformation (Lee and Koro-Ljungberg 2007))
- Mass communication of same ethnic group (exposure)

## 4: Adaptation outcomes (predicted by preceding three steps)

- Psychological health (absence of hostility to host stress)
- Functional fitness (congruent meaning system)
- Intercultural identity (third culture perspective)
- Strategic competence

Buttjes and Byram (1991:143) identify three levels of intercultural performance:

monocultural during which the learner is operating on one level and is using rationale which

apply to his own culture. This stage is required to establish a base level of intercultural competence. The second stage is named “intercultural”. During this phase, the learner can explain cultural differences but his position is defined as one that “stands between the cultures” indicating that he is identifying and explaining cross-cultural differences and that he is on his way to gaining understanding. This stage is of particular relevance to this research given that new students at The College are gaining information from existing students who are more likely to be closer to them in age and may not be in a position to offer true understanding or interpretation of cultural difference. The final stage is that of the transcultural level during which the learner can negotiate between cultural meanings. Within this definition, Torres (2003) adds another element to process of acculturation, namely the relationship the individual has with their own culture. Working with Latino/Hispanic groups, a four step bicultural model of orientation is proposed:

- Bicultural Orientation – the individual is at equal ease with both cultures.
- Latino/Hispanic Orientation - preference for the culture of origin.
- Anglo Orientation- preference for the majority culture
- Marginal Orientation - dissatisfaction with both cultures, indicating possible internal conflict

This model applies equally to other ethnicities and has been observed being applied when Hong Kong Chinese students are making group membership choices within international schools(Vinther 2010).

### **3:12: Existing literature about the Chinese and Asian overseas experience**

There is a body of research on the Asian experience of overseas higher education and immigrant experience (Brown and Holloway 2008, Brown 2009, Watkins 2008, Welikala and Watkins 2008, Feng 2009, Vinther 2010) but I was unable to find a substantive literature exploring that of voluntary residential high school sojourners from Hong Kong or Confucian countries in the United Kingdom although university level studies were available. Berry and Williams (2004) assess the difficulties Chinese ESL learners experienced in a United Kingdom boarding school. Although there were applicable elements of the research (such as the role of sport in preventing the formation of friendships), the researcher focused on problems



caused by language barriers. The majority of students entering The College are fluent English speakers whereas Berry and William's students had minimal English language skills. I explored research on Australian (Yeo 2010, Hodges et al 2013) and US schools (Lee and Koro-Ljungberg 2007) although the former tended to focus on South East Asian immigrants and the latter on non-voluntary immigrants whose experience is likely to be less positive than voluntary minorities (Ogbu 1993: 355).

The crucial difference between the university experience and that of the high school is that students in the latter are not responsible for navigating their way through their new physical environment (housing, food, medical care) and social relationships (introduction of peers, social activities) are provided. In contrast to the immigrant experience, students at a boarding school return home on a regular basis, are not accompanied by their family and tend to be on an equal or higher economic level to their peers (Brown and Holloway 2008). I have also explored literature which does not focus on Chinese or Hong Kong students but those of other Asian countries on the grounds that the collectivist societal structure is also strong in these areas and therefore there is likely to be a correlation in behavioural traits (Hofstede 1988, Bond 1996, Hofstede 2003, Hofstede et al. 2010).

### **3:13: Information gathering, cultural adaptation and the role of the family**

I was particularly interested in where students were finding their information about the school. Deng and Walker's (2007) theorise that higher education levels and application of technology, the media and peers result in a two-way acculturation process affecting both the immigrants and the host country. Marginson and Sawir (2011) build on this idea of developing cultures which they describe as a "reflexive relationship" between the culture and the individual. Within this context, there is a constant flow of information between students in the school and Hong Kong families which results in parents who choose the school having a closer understanding of the aims and aspirations of the institution.

Students return home approximately every seven weeks and therefore need to be able to re-adapt to Hong Kong expectations. Benet-Martinez et al (2002) and Cheng et al (2006)

propose a dynamic cultural perspective whereby individuals access two meaning systems (referred to as “cultural frame switching” (Benet-Martinez et al, 2002:495)), depending on their levels of bi-cultural integration. Individuals may be deemed to have a high or low bi-cultural integration (BII) which is developed via both internal attributions and external experiences. High BII may be created via long term contact with a new culture, language familiarity, positive acculturation experiences and acceptance of cultural identity. Low BII may lead to tension between the original and new culture and result in a feeling of being constricted by the new environment. Students from Hong Kong international schools are more likely to have begun to develop the ability to frame-switch based on their exposure to Western educational settings and non-Chinese peer groups whereas boys from local schools begin the process on arrival.

The majority of students attend The College voluntarily. However, there is always a small percentage of boys who are “made” to attend by their parents. Cheng (2006) and Ogbu (1993) identify the differences between voluntary immigrants who approach challenges as barriers to be overcome in order to achieve their goal of academic success and involuntary who have oppositional cultural frames of reference leading to conflict and distrust. Equally, appreciation of home culture plays a role. Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) suggest that a positive attitude to ethnic identity may contribute to an affirmative attitude towards the host culture. Students who begin their educational experience with negative attitudes are likely to experience the latter in their new environment.

One area of interest was the effect of family on the student experience, particularly within the areas of decision making about school and university choices. Whereas students from individualist cultures may be able to make autonomous decisions, the same may not be said for those coming from collectivist cultures. In studies of university students, Pimpa (2004, 2005), Lee (1994), Yeo (2010) and Triandis (1995) identify the importance of the family over the individual in the collectivist decision making process including location, course and profession. Students with families who have experienced overseas education are more likely to be influenced by them in regard to making educational decisions: choice of country, institution, course and finally, university. Pimpa (2004, 2005), Lee (1994), and Lee and Koro-

Ljungberg (2007), found that competition within the family unit is minimal but competition within peer groups and focus on academic discipline is significant and is actively promoted by the family. This competition is replicated within the new environment resulting in pressures for Asian students which may not apply to Western students.

### **3:14: The Learning Culture and the curriculum**

In seeking to define the questions which must be asked when designing a curriculum, Tyler (1949 cited by Lawton 1973:13), specifies four key points, namely:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organised?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Both Barber (1996) and Hirst (1969) suggest that the curriculum is the focus of the school and other activities are ancillary. Barber (1996) Apple (1979) and Bourdieu (1976) focus on the curriculum as a tool for the transmission of values;

The chief task of schools is to transmit elements of a culture from one generation to the next. (Barber 1996:14)

These values may be representative of a social class which are propagated by the institution although Apple (1979:130) indicates that there is a need to be critical when understanding how they are applied. He suggests that we apply judgemental standards and values unconsciously when talking about how students have developed historically within institutions and that the values should be treated as “historically conditioned data, not absolutes” (134). This point is important as one of the purposes of exploring intercultural education is to understand how historically developed cultural conditioning defines human reactions and how it can adapt as circumstances change. The school, through the curriculum, endorses and enculturates students with a set of values and acts as a “mechanism of cultural distribution” (Apple 1979:13). Within the context of The College, as Hong Kong parents of nationalities have selected the institution based on their research and

feedback from previous students, there is a possible indication that the values which The College is transmitting represent a match with those held in Hong Kong.

The College is very clear about its educational aims which are reflected in the curriculum which has been developed historically but undergoes constant review (ISC 2013). The objectives and values are clearly defined:

While the school enjoys an enviable reputation in public examination performance, its overriding objective is to offer a broadly intellectual, well grounded education. (College website).

The content of the curriculum is based on all students selecting courses which will lead to examinations but also participating in Division (defined earlier in this thesis) throughout the school. The result of this duality is that the school strives to avoid Hirst's (1969:182) definition of:

...the narrow-minded boffin reared on a restricted diet of science and mathematics from fourteen to fifteen... the arts man, blank in his incomprehension of the scientific outlook.

The learning culture of The College is defined by the objective of promoting rational thought, critical engagement and classroom discussion and may be defined as a dialogic approach to teaching and learning (Hammond and Gao 2002). This approach relies more on the Socratic method of the teacher asking questions rather than providing answers. Student participation and interaction is highly valued. In contrast, students joining the school from Hong Kong local schools are more likely to have encountered a dialectic educational system in which teachers provide lectures, answers and specific pieces of knowledge (Hammond and Gao 2002).

Feng (2009:76) defines a culture of learning as:

...the values and beliefs of good teaching or learning shared by a particular social or cultural group and their learning behaviours that are built on these values and beliefs.

Within the scope of this definition, the learning experience in Confucian societies is highly regimented. The Confucian philosophy of valuing education, trusting and respecting educators and teachers working with families to take responsibility for learning define the traditional Asian educational experience. This system may be perceived to produce learners who are passive, unquestioning and lack critical engagement with their subjects (Ho 1996, Zhang and Bond 1998). Students who achieve high academic results are seen as demonstrating discipline and therefore earning social respect which leads to a high degree of competition (Lee and Koro- Ljungberg 2007). That these traits apply to all Chinese learners is challenged as being stereotypical by Ryan (2010) Biggs (2003) and Gardner (1998) who further suggests that the perception of lack of creativity is attributable to the Chinese education system focusing on mastery first with the view that creativity will follow. Ryan (2010), Ballard and Clanchy (1997), Robinson-Pant (2005), and Watkins and Biggs (2001) also challenge the perception that the Chinese learner is somehow deficit compared to Western standards of an ideal learner and propose an additive approach of looking at learners of all backgrounds which focuses on the students learning rather than analysing differences. Ballard and Clanchy (1997:8) suggest that students from Confucian cultures experience challenges in Western classrooms based not on their mastery of language but rather on the “clash of educational cultures.” They suggest that Western educational settings value critical engagement and extending knowledge whereas Confucian settings promote reproduction and written skills. Interestingly, Hammond and Gao (2002:236) suggest that the dialogic system is more likely to connect learners to the group as success of otherwise depends on total participation:

Therefore, the dialogic paradigm among students can connect them together to form a harmonious and productive learning community.

This is significant as The College bases the majority of its teaching on the Socratic method and this is particularly relevant to the delivery of Division lessons.

Lam- Phoon (1986) and Nguyen et al (2006) identify a preference for students from Confucian Heritage Cultures to avoid any form of academic uncertainty which manifests as a partiality for visual aids and clear, written instructions. This last point is significant as many

Western educational environments rely on students opting to take notes and topics being taught via classroom discussion.

Teachers within The College adopt different methods of teaching based on a combination of their experience and objectives. Without exception, the teaching staff is well travelled and the majority had visited Asia at some point, either for holidays or work. Biggs (2003:138) identified three approaches to cross-cultural teaching with level one being teaching as assimilation, level two teaching as accommodation and level three, teaching as education. Teachers adopting the first level approach focus on what the students are and are more likely to subscribe to stereotypes. A level two approach focuses on what the teacher is and teachers may be observed to alter their behaviour or language when speaking to international students. The third level of teaching focuses on what the students do, irrespective of culture, and engenders a positive learning experience for all students.

Students join The College at the age of 13 and have therefore experienced approximately nine years of education in their home countries. Students come from a variety of educational backgrounds with bodies of prior knowledge which affect the way that they process subsequent learning (Watkins and Biggs 2001).

Learning in Hong Kong local schools is teacher-centric with an emphasis on reproduction of information, classroom discipline, mastery of materials and results. The frequent testing and value placed on results can result in surface learning and a desire for work to be well presented which reflects academic self-discipline (Gow et al 1996, Lee 1996, Gao 2008, Feng 2009, Jin and Cortazzi 2011). The accepted behaviour in Hong Kong classrooms centres on compliance and academic achievement whereas valued Western classroom behaviours prize participation with teachers more likely to focus on personality and engagement rather than achievement (Gow et al 1996). Cultural dissonance in the classroom may occur when teachers' conception of learning and the learners' conception of teaching differ (Mahon 2006, Welikala and Watkins 2008). This tends to manifest both in classroom behaviours including how students handle asking questions, and engaging in discussion and the shared perception that a teacher is responsible for students' successes (Lee 1996, Watkins 2000, Watkins and Biggs 2001, Welikala and Watkins 2008). Learning techniques which are common in Asia such as memorisation may be rejected in a Western classroom as lacking in

critical engagement (Gow et al 1996). In this situation, students may seek to take behavioural cues from their peer groups (Feng 2009) although teachers with intercultural experience are more likely to predict, recognise and manage cultural dissonance (Byram 1989, Mahon 2006). However, change is unlikely to occur immediately and students may not perceive that the new style of learning is positive. An added complication is that students return home for tutoring during which their old style of learning is re-introduced. Conversely, teachers may underestimate the effect of their own cultural conditioning on their behaviours. The balance of the relationship between students and teacher does carry the effect that the teacher is the dominant character and therefore their cultural pre-conceptions may carry more influence (Louie 2005, Ryan 2010).

Within every generalisation are exceptions. In the case of The College, boys coming from some international schools or boys who have been in the United Kingdom for some time before joining The College are unlikely to display the surface learning style observed in boys from local schools. Hornsey and Gallois (1998) and Ryan (2010) suggest that teachers may subscribe to deficit stereotypes of Asians as passive learners but equally pernicious are the stereotypes of quiet and diligent Asian students which draw attention to those who do not conform to this image.

In addition to educational differences, students coming from Confucian countries are likely to have a strong bond with family and parents are extremely involved in decision making related to education. Educational achievement is perceived as being the path to success in these extremely competitive societies and love between children and parents is closely tied to academic success (Gow et al 1996). This ethos is similar to the aims of British parents who select private schools in order to ensure that their child will be academically successful.(Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2003, Sullivan and Heath 2003). Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984, Bennett 2009) describes the process by which parents “equip” their children with cultural and social capital which may or may not match those of the learning and social establishments. A mis-match between levels of cultural capital may lead to students being labelled as inferior or incapable of learning. External pressures may additionally be brought to bear on students as parental experiences of learning and engagement may vary dramatically to those experienced in a Western setting leading to a different set of values and dissonance with Western institutions (Taylor 1987, Lee and Koro-

Ljungberg 2007). Phillipson (2007) portrays the relationship between parents and students is more of an ongoing discussion about educational and career goals rather.

### **3:15: The Third Space**

After observing life at The College, I began to explore Bhabha's (Rutherford 1990, Bhabha 1990, Meredith 1998, Bhabha 2004, Feng 2009) "Third Space" theory which propose that an environment may develop in which an existing culture no longer dominates and a new culture is created. Bhabha's description of the "third space" does carry connotations of post-colonial struggle and challenge which I do not feel are relevant to this thesis given that all students are entering The College on equal intellectual terms and are not struggling against an existing hierarchy. Rather, I seek to use the terms in order to define an environment which does not carry any one dominant cultural trait but rather represents a space in which all cultural meanings may have relevance and are considered in terms of significance:

... something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (Bhabha 2004:211).

The College curriculum is based in the Western tradition but is for the most part unfamiliar to the majority of students, irrespective of nationality, given that it is heavily rooted in the classical epistemology which is no longer taught in the majority of British schools. An important aspect of the Division curriculum is that no one world view is deemed to be more important than another; rather, emphasis is placed on quality of thought. Richardson (2009) develops the third space concept to apply to a curriculum which is not reflective of one nationality but rather one which harnesses cultural hybridity in which new cultural experiences are encountered, existing identities are disrupted and students transcend cultural bounds. The result of this space in which identity is negotiated, is that students acquire the skills to deal with "otherness" (Feng 2009) leading to degrees of intercultural competence. One aspect of attempting to define a third space by Feng (2009:74) was the rejection of opposites:

... a conception that reflects new insights into each of these academic areas by challenging binary opposites such as the here and the there, self and other, the



present and the past, the local and the global, and of course the traditional view that sees “education and “training”, “deep learning” and “surface learning” as polarities...

This concept was of particular interest to me as it highlighted the tendency of some researchers to view culture in terms of absolutes (almost “for” or “against” a particular worldview) thus emphasising difference rather than exploring the area of commonality between two worldviews. Brown and Holloway (2008), Brown (2009), Guilherme (2002), Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggest that this new space allows students to re-negotiate identity leading to lasting changes and intercultural sensitivity. Within the context of my thesis, this area is of specific interest given that it has implications for future research.

### 3:16: Conclusion

Although the research into residential boarding schools is limited, by combining research into acculturation, intercultural education, curriculum and cultural dimensions, it is possible to create a theoretical grounding in which to situate research data. Specifically, the available literature will serve as a background from which the research data, which observes the process of acculturation of the students, cultural matches between the school and family values, and the structure of the school and teaching may be evaluated.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4:1: Overview

This chapter will describe the process of identifying the case study methodology I employed in order to generate data and potential answers to my research question. I will begin by identifying my research questions, explore case study design and describe the methods I employed to collect data. The chapter will continue with an exploration of the reliability of case study methodology, a focus on ethics concerns and conclude with a description of the methods used to analyse data.

### 4:2: Research question

Kerlinger (cited in Cohen et al. 2007:6) defines research as:

... the systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena.” The research investigation may result in firm conclusions or confirmations about the initial hypothesis or may generate further propositions. The theoretical research question: “must permit deductions and generate laws that can be tested empirically.

As outlined in the introduction, the overall aim of this research was to analyse the extent to which the structure, teaching and ethos of the school affects the facility with which Hong Kong students adapt to and are affected by their new environment. This overarching aim generated the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the classroom behaviours of Hong Kong students change as a result of their encounters in a British boarding school?
2. Are Western teaching styles adapted to cater for Hong Kong students of different educational backgrounds?
3. To what extent does the curriculum, structure and ethos of the school contribute to creating intercultural cohesion?
4. To what extent does a cultural transfer take place?

#### 5. What is the effect of the family on Hong Kong students in a British boarding school?

The questions generated acted as a guide during my research visits but did not limit my findings. For example, I explored attitudes towards language learning which were not part of my original plan but which I felt shed light on sources of educational stress experienced by overseas students.

In deciding on an eventual research methodology, I considered both qualitative and quantitative methods. The purpose of the research, given the lack of available data in this field, was to generate rather than test hypotheses (Merriam 1998:10). The positive approach to research which generates “facts about the world” (Silverman 2006:119) and is based on empirical, numerical data, collected in a pre-defined format would restrict me from generating rich data which might allow me to generate causal theories (Brewer 2000:20). Additionally, a positivist approach, based on the assumption that the researcher does not play a role (Brewer 2000, Bassey 1999) would not allow me to apply my experiences of living and teaching in both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. Interpretive research, based on the assumption that the interpretation of events depends upon the observer would allow me to focus on the process of life within the school (Merriam 1998, Bassey 1999). As my objective was to look at the transformative nature of the school rather than presenting a static reflection of attitudes at a given time, I felt that a qualitative approach would allow me to best achieve my aims.

#### **4:3: Model – framework**

When exploring which methodology to use, I considered including the collection of quantitative data via surveys and carrying out in-depth interviews with a small group of students. However, I felt that these methods would give me data on the results of an overseas education but would not allow me to analyse the process of change. Additionally, the examination of a case study was chosen as the phenomenon which was to be observed (the integration of Hong Kong students into a British educational environment) could not be divorced from the surroundings and I wanted to explore the relationship between setting

and students. In line with this objective, Cohen et al (2007:253) identifies the case study as allowing the researcher to “observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects.” MacDonald and Walker (cited by Bassey, 1999:24) identify the immediacy of the case study methodology “the examination of an instance in action” which I felt would allow me to capture data as it happened. Rather than after the students had processed incidents and reported them back either via interview or survey. I also felt that I would gain more from observing behaviour within the school and supplementing it with interviews which would add additional insight (Silverman 2006:146). Yin (2009:18) highlights both the immediacy of the case study and the methodology’s ability to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” and identifies the scope of the case study as being:

... an empirical enquiry that

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

(2009:18)

One of the key aims of my research was to track the academic and social integration process of Hong Kong students into the student body of The College. The phenomenon (student cultural adaptation) and context (the College, the Boarding Houses, teaching styles) were inextricably linked and to study one without the other would, I felt, would result in less rich data but might also carry the risk of indicating that I had already made decisions about the answers to my research questions before carrying out research. For example, a survey item seeking to explore parental involvement in decision making surrounding course choices might be framed as: “what role did your parents play in choosing your A level courses?”, implying that the involvement is taken for granted. Additionally I did not want to emphasise difference and an interview which questioned the relationship between Hong Kong and other students would indicate that the two groups are distinct within the school. Detailed surveys and quantitative questionnaires have a valuable role in the qualitative research process but only after the phenomenon has been explored and specific areas of interest identified (Fetterman 1998, Silverman 2006.) As the literature review suggests, there is a

lack of research into residential schools in general and the intercultural dimensions of relations within them in particular. This indicated that a general case study should be conducted first with potential for future granular research.

In order to design the case study, I followed Yin's (2009:27) five components of research design:

1. A study's questions;
2. Its propositions, if any;
3. Its unit(s) of analysis;
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions; and;
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings.

Having outlined my questions, the unit of analysis (the boarding school) was self-evident. Initially, I intended to study multiple case sites and, after seeing a larger group of schools, visited ten boarding schools, observing interactions between different groups. This initial groundwork was time consuming but also allowed me to see that the majority of the schools I visited demonstrated lower degrees of interaction between Asian and non-Asian students than I observed at The College. I watched for mixed groups of students outside the school, watched sports teams and saw (when possible) how students behaved within boarding houses. Some schools were immediately ruled out as they were predominantly day schools with a small boarding population composed mainly of overseas students. Other schools appeared to be less integrated relative to The College. The propositions, defined by Yin (2009) as "how or why" questions stemmed from my observation that The College was a school with a significant overseas population (around 15% in 2013) which appeared to be highly integrated. Unlike other schools, when visiting The College, I observed mixed groups of students both during school and leisure times. Based on this initial observation, I wanted to understand whether my initial impressions were confirmed and how the process of assimilation had come about. As boarding schools involve both residential and academic components, I wanted to be able to observe students both in the classroom and within the residential boarding houses and to seek to identify the relative roles of each area of school life.

The process of gaining access to a research site particularly within the closed world of the public school, was dependent upon having access to what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:27) describe as a “gatekeeper.” Having had a five year relationship with The College due to teaching Hong Kong students who later joined the school, I was in a position to approach the school. My request was forwarded to the Headmaster who gave me open access to the school. This incredible level of permission resulted in my being able to explore every aspect of school life.

#### 4:4: Types of Case Study Design

In deciding on the style of the case study, I explored different types of studies in order to identify which would fit my research questions. Yin (2009) identifies case studies are being either:

- Exploratory – defining questions for a future study
- Descriptive – describing a phenomenon within a context
- Explanatory – exploring cause and effect relationships
- Interpretive – explaining how events happen

The explanatory case study is recommended for “how” or “why” questions. The case study design I embarked on incorporated the three first areas and attempted to address the fourth. Yin (2003) goes on to expand the four types by the addition of single or multiple site studies. The multiple sites are selected based on their ability to provide “literal replication” (similar results) or “theoretical replication” (predictable contrasting results.) Initially, I considered the latter approach which would have involved studying The College and a school I considered to be less culturally integrated. This approach would have confirmed the theoretical framework of inter-cultural adaptation yet would not have added any insight into The College phenomenon. Equally, I wanted to be as positive as possible about my research and felt that by studying a school which indicated a high degree of integration, I would be focusing on the positive aspects of multicultural education.

Merriam (1998) specifies that a case study needs to be “particularistic” or related to a specific event or programme, “descriptive” and “heuristic” or ultimately illuminating. She goes to identify four types of studies:

- Ethnographic – drawing on other disciplines
- Historical – evolving over time
- Psychological – studies of individuals
- Sociological – studies of an environment

The Ethnographic approach would appear to be most applicable to my research as I drew on educational, inter-cultural and sociological theories in an attempt to illuminate the phenomena under observation. This approach fitted with Merriam’s (1998) definition of ethnography as “a sociocultural interpretation of the data” which I felt reflected the plurality of my approach. Brewer(2000:77) identifies ethnographic case studies as being:

...distinguished by exploration of the case or cases as they present themselves naturally in the field and by the researcher’s direct involvement and participation in them.

Stenhouse (cited by Keeves 1997) identifies four types of case study:

- Ethnographic – in which a phenomenon is observed by an outsider and “causal or structural patterns” are identified
- Evaluative – in which a single or group of cases are studied with the aim of evaluating policies
- Educational – which aim to further educational discourse
- Action Research – in which feedback which acts on events as they unfold

Of these four types, both ethnographic and educational aims were incorporated into the research. Observations were grounded in intercultural and educational theory with the aim of attempting to identify links between The College’s structure and curriculum and the integration of different ethnic groups. My intention was always to further educational discourse. This aim became closely centred on curriculum as my research continued.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) Merriam (1998) and Fetterman (1998) explore the role of “etic” (or insider) and emic (or outsider) perspectives. The etic researcher works within the accepted conventions of the “native’s perspective of reality” and takes into account “multiple perspectives of reality” (Fetterman 1998). The emic perspective takes into account the researcher’s social science perspective (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). My research attempted to incorporate both perspectives as I observed interaction within the school and looked for ways in which the phenomenon could be explained by intercultural and educational theories. This approach fitted with Fetterman’s (1998:22) identification of “emic and etic orientations as markers along a continuum of styles or different levels of analysis” which I felt emphasised the organic and flexible nature of research. As my research continued, the boundaries between the two approaches became blurred through the process of becoming more integrated into the school, indicating that the two were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

#### 4:5 Structure of the Case Study

I was guided by Bassey’s (1999:5) four point framework for a case study when designing my research and writing up my findings:

The study should focus on some educational issue or problem; the context and the methodology should be discussed with appropriate reference to the academic literature; the collection, analysis and interpretation of data should be trustworthy and ethical; the conclusions should not generalize beyond the empirical evidence...

I felt that referring back to these guidelines throughout my research help me to focus my research as I constantly tested my findings against my readings and questioned the validity of both my data and its subsequent interpretation.

In structuring a case study, Merriam (2002:20) specifies the researcher’s need to have “an enormous tolerance for ambiguity” which was certainly necessary in my initial visit during which I sometimes felt that I needed to provide neat explanations for the phenomena I was observing. With experience, I began to understand that one of the benefits of a case study is that it may generate more questions than explanations leading to the researcher exploring new aspects rather than being restricted to pre-determined paths. Fetterman (1998:11)



adds the caveat that, although the researcher needs to have an open mind, this should contain:

... a problem, a theory or model, a research design, specific data collection techniques, tools for analysis, and a specific writing style.

I began my research by being a silent observer and experienced a great deal of frustration in my second week when my early theories did not appear to be applicable. This stage was extremely helpful in allowing me to introduce new theories which re-focused my research.

An initial visit was planned in February 2011 during which time I rented a house near to the College. At this stage of my research, I was not yet familiar with the town and had not realised that there would be a number of evening events which I would be invited to attend and which meant that I had to walk home, alone, in the dark. This did restrict me to a certain extent.

Having been granted permission to observe lessons and to participate in the life of the school, I outlined my initial plan to the Headmaster and the Director of Studies based on Silverman's (2006:68) outline of the aims of observational research as:

Silverman's aims of a case study	My application
Seeing through the eyes of ...	Observing events, both in the classroom and in boarding houses; initially as a detached observer but later as a teacher.
Description	Observations were not restricted to classroom activities but also included noting conversations, dress, school decoration and non-learning related activities
Contextualism – historical and social context	I framed my interpretation of classroom behaviours by referencing Hong Kong

teaching and learning habits.

Process – the interconnectivity of events

The life of The College is a tightly woven pattern of school, extra-curricular activities, boarding house activities and inter-school events, all of which are inter-related and could not be separated.

Flexible Research Designs

My research design evolved during my stays at The College as I encountered challenges (such as the potential for focusing on difference during interviews)

Avoid early use of theories and concepts

Although an initial range of intercultural theories were studied prior to my research, the most apposite frameworks were not apparent until my observations were complete.

My first visit was followed by further visits in October 2012 and May 2013 and a follow up visit in May 2014. During the second visit, I stayed with the Headmaster and his wife and was given accommodation on the street bounding the College for my subsequent two visits. I did feel that my proximity to the College during follow up visits marked me less as an outsider and allowed me to attend evening events more easily.

#### **4:6: Data collection**

Yin (2009) and Merriam (1998) speak of the richness of data which results from an observational study. Bassey (1999:65) specifies that enough data should be generated in order to:

- Explore the significant features of the case,
- Create plausible interpretations of what is found,
- Test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations,
- Construct a worthwhile argument or story,
- Relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature,
- Convey convincingly to an audience this argument or story, and
- Provide an audit trail by which other researcher may validate or challenge the findings or construct alternative arguments.

The data I collected fell into four categories:

- Recording of classroom discourse,
- Observation of settings and behaviours in classrooms, boarding houses and outside school,
- Discussions and interviews with student and teacher participants, and
- Feedback from students during my teaching sessions.

The timeframes of each visit are as follows:

Period	Duration	Data collection techniques
1 <sup>st</sup> visit – February 2011	3 weeks	Teaching, observing all classes, formal interviews in boarding houses (5)
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit- October 2012	3 weeks	Teaching, observing all classes
3 <sup>rd</sup> visit – May 2013	3 weeks	Teaching, observing division classes

4<sup>th</sup> visit – May 2014

5 days

Teaching, interview with  
Headmaster

Merriam (1998) suggests that data recorded as part of a qualitative study should include words, citations, description of context, participant actions and the behaviour of the researcher. At the beginning of every class, I noted areas of interest within the classroom which included cross-curricular posters, items brought by the boys and the arrangement of chairs. I was normally given a hand out by the teacher running the class although sometimes only textbooks or images were used to stimulate discussion.

I began by recording my observations using a word processing programme on an iPad. However, as The College does not use computers in the classroom, this created a distraction to the boys. I switched to a pen and notebook and Fetterman's (1998) caveat that a pen and paper prevents eye-contact was overcome by using a style of shorthand which I had learned when working as a temporary secretary and which allowed me to make notes as lessons progressed. If I was part of a conversation which I felt would be interrupted by making notes, I transcribed the dialogue as soon as was practicable.

Interviews took place informally with teachers in the common room or following classes. Student interviews were pre-arranged by House Masters and took place in rooms in the boarding houses which. This method of research proved to be largely unhelpful as they were constricted by formal environments and the audience of either House Masters or fellow students (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). During my second visit, I did not carry out any formal interviews but used my teaching sessions in order to gather feedback on my theories and to extend my ideas. Before each lesson, I made it clear to students that I was carrying out research and their participation was voluntary. These sessions proved to be extremely useful, particularly with the upper Sixth (VIBk1) who had five years' worth of insight into the way the school operated.

Cohen et al (2007) distinguishes between participant and non-participant observers. Initially, my role was a perfect example of their description of the non-participant observer.

I sat at the back (or side) of classes and made notes on both discourse and observations. However, as Cohen et al posit, this role is more suited to an “artificial” environment whereas the school is a “natural environment” and “it is hard for a researcher who wishes to undertake covert research not to act as a participant in a natural setting” (2007:260). The move from non-participant to participant began after being at the school for two days as teachers invited me to introduce my research and theories to their classes. This turned into my taking lessons. My first visit resulted in my forming good relationships with members of the management team. In an attempt to repay the College for the hospitality I was receiving, I made it clear that I would be happy to cover lessons or invigilate exams. The result of this offer was that during subsequent visits I acted as a substitute teacher for a number of lessons, acted as an invigilator for IGCSE examinations and moved into an insider role within the school.

To frame my eventual role within the school within the context of concerns about fieldwork identity (Denzin and Lincoln 1994), (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), I identified the following responses:

1: Concern: whether the researcher is known to be a researcher by all or some of those being studied

I was very clear about my role when speaking to both staff and students. Both staff and students were told about my background in Hong Kong, my affiliation with Durham and my purpose within the school.

2: Concern: how much is known about the research and by whom

I was introduced as a researcher to the Common Room and to students at the beginning of every lesson. This resulted in some misconceptions (that I was writing a book) which were quickly dispelled. The scope of my research was made known to all as were changes in my focus during my second visit.

3: What types of activities are engaged in by the researcher and how this locates him in relation to the conceptions of group membership used by participants?

After some initial uncertainty, I was perceived as a teacher by the majority of students. My role was less clear cut to teachers although, on my second visit, I was invited to take over classes by a number of them which indicated that feedback from my first visit had been positive and that they saw that my contribution had some value. They offered advice and insight into the workings of the school and the transition of various groups of students and in turn wanted to understand more about my research and findings. This position fitted with Merriam's (1988) collaborative partner designation in which the researcher is known to be studying the case but is a peer rather than an outsider during in the process.

4: The orientation of the researcher and how completely he or she consciously adopts the orientation of insider or outsider

I consciously tried to adapt to the school on a number of levels. The College has a constant flow of visiting outsiders and I was aware that my appearance affected the perception of the school to outsiders, therefore I chose to wear business clothes. Although I did not fully adopt the language of the school, there are a number of terms chosen to describe everyday school activities which I used in order to avoid reminding students that I was an outsider.

#### 4:7: Data Collection Techniques

As outlined earlier in this chapter, observations took place during three separate visits to The College, each with a duration of three weeks and a final visit during which I taught some classes but focused mainly on interviews with the Headmaster.

#### 4:8: In- Class observation

Initially, the majority of teachers began the lesson by introducing me to the class and either summarizing my role or giving me the opportunity to position my research myself. After this, I was allocated a seat either at the back of the class or on a side desk. Following my first week at the school, the majority of the boys had encountered my presence and teachers no longer introduced me.

My note-taking took the following format:

1: Class name – teacher’s name

2: Number of boys in the class and seating arrangement

3: Free form note taking as the lesson progressed which included instructions, dialogue and observations.

As explained, I had intended to use an iPad to take notes. However, this proved to be disruptive as computers are not used in the classroom (with recent exceptions for students with specific learning requirements) and this technique attracted attention. I switched to using pen and paper which was less obtrusive but did mean that I had to revise my shorthand techniques!

For two of the classes I taught, I sought permission of the class and then used a voice recorder. The idea was to capture feedback but the resultant recording was so poor that I abandoned this tack and made notes after each lesson.

#### **4:9: In-Class participation**

Towards the end of my first visit, I was invited by a number of teachers to participate in class discussions. This took the following forms:

**1: Responding to questions about my research.** There were a number of misapprehensions including that I was writing a book on the college. At the beginning of my research, my thesis questions were broad and explaining them to the group forced me to focus in on key ideas. As my first visit continued, I became aware that a significant proportion of the non-Hong Kong students were reflecting on the ways that they studied and interacted with their peers and started to share their own questions and insight. As a result of this process, I became aware that my research could be positioned as a holistic review of the school with cross-benefits for all students rather than a study of Hong Kong students.

**2: Inclusion in the lesson.** I was asked to participate as a commentator in class discussions. This was sometimes related to my background (for example, during an economics class I was called on to participate in a discussion about the stock markets in Asia) or the topic of the

lesson (such as poetry analysis). This participation did lead to my becoming more aligned with the teaching staff.

**3: Taking a class in order to gather feedback from new students.** I was given the opportunity to take over junior classes during which the students identified their expectations of the College, provided information on their sources of knowledge and discussed surprises.

**4: Teaching back theories.** Towards the end of my first visit, for part of my second, for the whole of my third and during my brief fourth visit, I was allowed to take over Division lessons in order to teach intercultural theories including acculturation, linguistic and sociological. I also taught lessons based on Chinese philosophy, symbolism and poetry. This was especially valuable with the older boys as they were able to identify areas with which they identified and question the validity of certain theories.

**5: Collection of teaching and marketing materials.** Additional data was collected in the form of hand outs, lesson plans, school magazines and flyers advertising in-school events.

#### **4:10: In-House observations and interviews**

During my first three visits to the school, I spent lunchtimes eating in different boarding houses. Boys sit in year groups and an adult (normally a teacher, member of staff or visiting guest) sits at the head of the table. Boys are expected to engage in discussion with visitors. I did not want to impose on the boys as lunchtime is a key opportunity for them to relax so discussions were general.

Some Housemasters invited me to join the house in the evening. I ate supper with the boys, helped with Toytime (homework) and spoke at Précis (evening assembly)

I did have the opportunity to speak to groups of boys in the evening. The boys had volunteered to share their insight and each interview started with a reiteration that anonymity would be preserved. After two sessions, I quickly discontinued this practice as I felt that it emphasized my role as an “outsider”, affecting my ability to collect in-class data, and also conveyed the impression that the Hong Kong/Chinese students were being singled out for study. I did not want to create bias by discussing topics which would invite reflection



on difference and therefore I abandoned this method after my first visit. Additionally, I was aware that group consensus might be create possible false impressions of agreement if boys were interviewed in groups (Fischer et al 2009) thus affecting the value of any resultant data.

#### **4:11: Staff Meetings**

During all four of my visits, I attended the weekly common room staff meetings and spent break times in the common room, either in the main school or the science department. The staff was incredibly welcoming for the most part. I did observe that certain teachers and Housemasters were avoiding speaking to me, as they moved away when I approached and made it clear to the person organising my timetable that they did not welcome observers in their classes. However, this group represented a minority of the staff. I did not seek to change this situation in order to avoid resentment or to interfere in the normal running of the school. During my third and fourth visit, I spoke at staff training sessions about intercultural and acculturation theories.

Half way through my first visit, I made the following note after observing the inter-house singing competition: "Very tired! I am wondering whether there is an element of a show being put on for me. Alternatively, The College could be an example of how things can really work"

#### **4:12: Interview with the Headmaster**

On my final visit, I spent four sessions with the Headmaster during which I asked him about his observations on both the school and my research. These meetings were extremely helpful as I was seeking to clarify whether the intercultural space had been created deliberately or had evolved over time.

#### **4:13: Caveats**

Nisbet and Watt, cited by Cohen et al (2007:262) identified five caveats for the researcher who embarks on a case study:

1. Journalism: distortion of events through the desire to sensationalise
2. Selective reporting (defined by Merriam (1998:42) as presenting “a slice of life” rather than a whole picture.)
3. Anecdotal style
4. Pomposity
5. Blandness

Although I was conscious of these five concerns, given my journalistic background, I was especially wary of falling into this trap and therefore paid particular attention to incidents which were dramatic but atypical. Silverman (2006:6) adds the temptation to romanticise events, or to see them through a personal cultural prism. Additionally, he warns of research which is carried out without a solid theoretical grounding which may result in a “tourist” experience as opposed to a testable proposition assessed by “validity or truth.”

#### **4:14: Ethics Concerns**

My research was governed by an adherence to Durham University’s ethical guidelines. Before embarking on my research, I applied for and received permission from Durham University’s Ethics Committee. The general approach which directed my research were outlined by Bassey’s (1999) directive that a researcher should be ruled by a respect for democracy (which I interpreted as giving all participants an equal voice) truth and persons.

Additionally, I took Silverman’s (2006), Yin’s (2009), and Bassey’s (1999) concerns regarding safeguards into account. They can be summarised as:

- Voluntary participation
- Protection of confidentiality
- Protection from harm
- Establishment of mutual trust between the researcher and the studied
- Informed consent

My observations were designed to protect anonymity, using letters to refer to speakers rather than names. The school, acting in “loco parentis” gave me full permission to conduct research and my background was checked as part of their child protection policy. Teachers

were informed of my purpose in advance of my visit and were given the option of not inviting me to participate in their lessons. At the beginning of every lesson, students were informed about my purpose and could choose whether or not to interact with me. In consultation with my supervisor and with reference to Durham University's ethical guidelines, the decision was made to anonymise both the data and the name of the school.

#### 4:15: Data Analysis

As anticipated, my three visits to The College resulting in copious quantities of handwritten notes and hand outs. I began by using N-Vivo but found the software unwieldy and realised that it was easier for me to code by hand which allowed me to have a visual overview of my data before beginning the triangulation process. I returned to using paper and highlighters. This technique was effective after I had discovered that highlighter pens erase water based ink and switched to using coloured pencils to code.

Merriam (1998:184) gives five guidelines for identifying data categories. The items should:

1. Reflect research
2. Be exhaustive
3. Be mutually exclusive
4. Be sensitive
5. Be conceptually congruent

Bassey (1999:70) further posits that data should be "condensed into meaningful statements" which in turn should be supported by evidence which explain and develop the thesis.

Initially, based on Ezzy's advice (2002:93), I read through the data and identified key theme areas as I worked (thematic coding). Once the main themes had been identified, I started to apply axial coding, which he defines as the process by which one can:

... examine the relationship between codes... specify the conditions associated with a code and compare codes with preexisting theory. (2002:93)

Through grouping ideas together, I identified categories which were weaker and required further research which I carried out by returning to my original notes, and some which I felt should be amalgamated (Fetterman 1998). As part of this process, I tried to assemble evidence which matched Fetterman's (1998:18) description of thick description: "The goal is to represent reality concisely but completely." Given that the majority of my notes were made up of lessons scripts and passing comments, I tried to add context such as comments on behaviours which I felt added richness to the reported speech. Becker (1996:64) questions the depth of detail which Geertz (1975) indicated should be collected. Becker suggests rather that the researcher should seek to:

... pick out its relevant aspects, details which can be abstracted from the totality of details that make it up so that we can answer some questions we have.

(1996:64)

I attempted to be concise, relevant and where possible, provide deeper description which provides context for the data collected.

#### 4:16: Conclusions

The case study methodology was determined based on the interconnectivity of the relationship between students and school. Having repeated access to The College allowed me refine my research and gather feedback from students and staff which in turn shaped my ideas. During each research visit, I took pains to transcribe data accurately whilst being mindful of ethical concerns including protection of anonymity and participants right to opt in or out of research. My analysis of resultant data was governed by a desire to ensure that my findings were valid, trustworthy and identified areas of interest which may lead to future research.

## Chapter 5: Data Analysis

### 5:1: Main Themes – an overview

This chapter will focus on analysing the data that I gathered during my research visits to The College with the objective of attempting to generate responses to my research questions:

1. In what ways do the classroom behaviours of Hong Kong students change as a result of their encounters in a British boarding school?
2. Are Western teaching styles adapted to cater for Hong Kong students of different educational backgrounds?
3. To what extent does the curriculum, structure and ethos of the school contribute to creating intercultural cohesion?
4. To what extent does a cultural transfer take place?
5. What is the effect of the family on Hong Kong students in a British boarding school?

In order to approach the questions, I focused my observation of life at the school on aspects of student behaviour, classroom participation and teaching styles. As my visits progressed, I became interested in the ways in which teachers and students interacted in an intercultural teaching environment and particularly the way that teachers in the lower school adopted teaching strategies to encourage Hong Kong students to participate. Based on scope of my questions, my analysis of data gathered during the observation of lessons and discussions with teachers identified the following areas of interest:

Teaching and learning style: This group of findings includes teacher awareness of and attitudes towards cultural difference, teaching strategies and attitudes towards group behaviour. Student learning patterns are also identified with the aim of generating data to respond to questions one and two.

Curriculum – languages: This was an unanticipated area of data which explores the relationship between Hong Kong boys and European (non-English) language learning but one which I feel relates most to question one.

The Acculturation process: I was particularly interested in the relationship between previous educational experience and students' rate of acculturation. This area also touches on the role of stereotypes and the perception of difference and responds to my fourth question.

The College effect: I explore the role of the school environment, structure, ethos and curriculum on creating a platform for intercultural interaction. This area relates to both my third and fourth questions.

Parental involvement and the school reaction: Hong Kong parents are very engaged in the education process and this section deals with the student and teacher perceptions of the engagement. This section of data relates to my fifth research question.

## **5:2: The Teaching and Learning Experience**

This section addresses data which relates to classroom behaviour and includes additional information which was shared by teachers in order to explain or add detail to the lessons I observed. The data in this section will be used to generate responses to the questions of how classroom behaviours alter, and the ways in which teachers adapt their teaching styles to cater for students from different educational backgrounds.

When I first began my research, the College was beginning a transition period during which senior teachers were retiring and were being replaced with younger teachers. This was a deliberate policy on the part of the Head who was hoping to re-energise the teaching staff whilst ensuring that the school's broader learning vision was maintained:

Only in the last 10 years have I made a point of appointing young dons. They are energetic and still formable. I could appoint an excellent teacher from a grammar school but he would reflect the orientation of the grammar school which is exam orientated.

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

This approach did appear to be reflected in shared enthusiasm which was present in Junior Div meetings (observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit) with teachers sharing ideas for Division. Senior teachers had devised strategies for dealing with Hong Kong students based on sustained interaction

whereas some of the new teachers had had minimal encounters with non-European students. Unsurprisingly, this difference manifested in different levels of focus with younger teachers trying to find explanations for classroom behaviour and adapt their teaching styles accordingly whereas senior teachers had either already developed a specific practicum or observed that boys would “settle in eventually” (Maths teacher, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit).

### 5:3: Attitude: Concern about non-participation

The main focus of teacher concern about Hong Kong students centred on classroom behaviours and lack of participation. The College favours a dialogic approach to teaching which is: “holistic, interactive, cooperative and diversified, emphasizing critical thinking, real time evaluation, hands-on experience, and overall educational quality.” (Hammond and Gao, 2002:229). This approach is in contrast to the dialectic method favoured in Hong Kong local schools which is based upon the teacher imparting knowledge, reliance of materials and constant evaluation (Hammond and Gao, 2002:232). As a result of their prior learning experiences, Hong Kong students from local schools are less likely to enter into classroom discussions, particularly in the lower year. One of the effects of this lack of participation was that teachers felt that they were not experiencing a valuable part of the learning experience (Lee 1996, Gao 2008, Feng 2009, Jin and Cortazzi 2011).

“Wish they would be a bit chirpier”

(Division teacher, comment after class 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“They don’t speak when they come in ... missing out”

(Physics teacher, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

There was some speculation about whether this non-participation was voluntary or not. I observed a biology lesson during which the class had been dominated by a group of extremely vocal Western students. The class seating plan had been self-selected with Hong Kong boys sitting together.

“.. (Hong Kong boys are) quieter, I don’t know if they want to be”

(Biology teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

With some teachers attributing the behaviour to students' fear holding them back:

“Don't know what to do with them. They have Grade 8 violin but nothing to say and are so afraid of being wrong.”

(Division teacher, comment in Common Room, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

There is some validity to this comment as the concern about saying the wrong thing or demonstrating lack of understanding is a feature which has been identified in other studies (Lee 1996, Watkins 2000, Watkins and Biggs 2001, Welikala and Watkins 2008), and was a theme which was replicated in conversation with boys:

“I'm not sure what to say. What if it is the wrong thing? At XX (the boy's previous Hong Kong school) everyone laughs if you say something wrong.”

(JP Boy, local school, in conversation during tea in house, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

There was recognition on the part of teachers that the focus of the Hong Kong curriculum and related teaching approach had created an identifiable approach to learning and a specific but restricted skillset:

“With humanities contribution... there is a contribution to discussion through challenge but in maths you don't challenge so the ethos isn't passed on but (they are) well taught...maths literate.”

(VIBk1 Mathematics teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This touches a deeper theme which is the difference between boys from local and international schools in Hong Kong. Hong Kong local schools have a high power distance between teacher and student which prevents students from challenging teachers. (Hofstede 2003). Boys from international schools had the opposite problem in that they were used to a casual, first name (in some cases) relationship with teachers.

“It was much more loose in H (International School). Between us and the teachers we were much more close. Here you're quite friendly with house tutors but there is a high degree of respect. It's an important thing here.”

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)



The quality of work produced by Hong Kong students in terms of delivery, completion and production was singled out for praise. This may be indicative of a surface learning style (Gow et al 1996) and is common in Hong Kong local schools. I have observed a degree of stress when students are not allowed to use correction fluid in exams which has been explained to me as a desire not to show mistakes. Within a College context, quality of content rather than presentation was more important to teachers:

“Prep is always perfectly presented, they work hard.”

(Biology teacher, in discussion after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Teachers expressed a frustration at the lack of critical engagement with their subjects and reiterated the value of the discussion process:

“After a while, they will stop expanding and only focus on the topic. It is the process of challenging which is valuable.”

(Division teacher, in discussion after class 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Some teachers felt that the Hong Kong students’ initial involvement with the classroom discussion did not indicate a lack of deeper engagement with the subject but rather a philosophy which was at odds with that of the Western teacher:

“A (1<sup>st</sup> year) has started to ask questions but they are pragmatic and always money based.”

(Division teacher, in discussion after class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This comment does highlight a possibly ethnocentric approach on the part of the teacher (Stewart and Bennett 1991) which may lead to cultural traits being judged negatively in relation to the teacher’s own experiences. The discussion of money was an interesting cultural difference. Hong Kong and China have a very direct approach to money (Poon and Wong 2008) and it often forms the topic of conversations. Asking directly about personal wealth is not a taboo whereas in the social group likely to attend and teach at The College, focusing on money could be interpreted as an indication of either membership of the “nouveau riche” (observation, VIBK1 Division lesson) or on the part of the teachers, an indication of students displaying a lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984).

Don: "What is a doctor's end purpose?"

British VB Boy: "to help"

Hong Kong VB Boy: "to earn money" (general disagreement)

(VB Division lesson in relation to a debate about university education, classroom observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Equally, this comment may be reflective of the connection in the Chinese mind between education and economic advancement (Gow et al 1996, Poon and Wong 2008). The concept of passing exams in order to enter a profession and earn a good living is well established and is also reflected in the degree choices made by Chinese pupils (medicine, law and engineering being popular).

Teachers whose teaching responsibilities were mainly with junior boys expressed a degree of frustration about lack of interaction when dealing with Hong Kong students, indicative of lacunae between the learning culture of the school and that of the new pupils (Feng 2009). Typically, these comments would arise in discussion following observed lessons and would be in relation to student behaviour which had just been observed within the class.

"We don't talk about this, can't get through to them so try to build relationships outside (the classroom) but can't get through"

(Humanities teacher, in discussion walking to the common room, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This sentiment was echoed by other members of staff. I observed one JP French lesson during which the teacher tried to elicit feedback from the group about their hobbies. One Hong Kong student remained silent throughout the discussions and gave monosyllabic answers when questioned directly. This was in stark contrast to the remainder of the class:

"...can't get through."

(JP French teacher, in discussion after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit. This discussion took place in the classroom following the lesson and involved the teacher analysing the different learning styles in his group. This group were the lowest French set and a number of the Hong Kong boys had not encountered the language before. French is an optional entrance examination for overseas boys.)

However, despite his lack of vocal participation, the boy in question had been observed to be making copious vocabulary lists (unlike the rest of the class) and was demonstrating a desire to master the materials being taught. Later, he explained that his strategy was to memorise “useful” vocabulary which might appear on exams indicating surface learning. He was clear about his rejection of the value of discussion which he felt “wasted class time” (JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit). This attitude demonstrates a pattern observed in Hong Kong classrooms as students feel that their main purpose is to receive information from the teacher, not adding their own ideas to the class (Gow et al 1996, Jin and Cortazzi 2011). Some teachers attributed the lack of interaction to students’ language abilities but coupled this with acknowledgement that the students were not seeking their help:

“Missing scientific vocabulary... like learning a new language... but they won’t ask”  
(Biology teacher, in class 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This could be a reflection that the students did not want to indicate difficulties to his teacher as part of his desire not to jeopardise the relationship and indicate possible weaknesses in his teaching (Hofstede and Bond 1998). There was recognition of disconnect between expected and actual classroom behaviour which some attributed to previous cultural learning:

“I can’t find any pegs to hang knowledge off. (They) Have no exposure to Western culture...doesn’t touch them. Hard to engage in discussion with their science brains”  
(Division teacher, after class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit in response to a question about how he perceived the transition of students from Hong Kong schools to The College)

The lack of communication and interaction was interpreted in rare cases as an indication of poor attitude:

“I ended up moving one boy because he sulked!”  
(Division teacher, after class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The boy in question was exhibiting resistance to the teacher’s methods. In later conversation, he told me that he felt that the class was “too easy” and that he was better than the rest of his peers. (Discussion in relation to my question about how he was getting on, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit).

The group coming from local Hong Kong schools were the most affected by the educational differences and were instantly identifiable as being silent observers in class. I asked one experienced teacher whether he had observations about the classroom behaviours of boys arriving from Hong Kong:

“Like automatons!”

(Science teacher, in discussion after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

However, he did go on to express his view that this tendency diminished over time. On the whole, teacher frustration at lack of participation on the part of Hong Kong students from local schools was reduced as boys spent more time in the school and developed discussion and critical thinking skills. Teachers of upper year students identified lack of participation with an absence of interest in their subjects rather than the students’ inability to communicate:

“One boy...total disconnect, never spoke. All (he) thinks about is numbers. Without a doubt because Div isn’t an examined subject”

(Division teacher, after class, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The fact that Division was unexamined and unrelated to IGCSE topics in the final two years is crucial: Boys who had either not adapted to deeper learning or who were reverting to learned behaviours as Pre-U examinations opted out of any work which was a distraction to time spent on examined topics (Gow et al 1996).

There was a perception from some teachers that, although outwardly compliant, the Hong Kong students were struggling with the new environment:

“Never know what is going on, they look happy enough but I’m not sure.”

(Housemaster, discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“They are very private... don’t really know them.”

(Housemaster, discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“They come, do their thing and leave. They get out of it what they want to. They don’t come back – actually one did once so he must have been happy!”

(Administrator, in discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This comment does illustrated one aspect of a group of the Hong Kong students' experiences which was that their primary relationship on entering the school was with other Hong Kong students. This relationship began before they officially joined the College, either in tutorial schools or once they had received their offers. They and their parents were meeting, organising events and socialising together in Hong Kong. This inclusivity could be a factor of Hong Kong being a collectivist society and families recognising that there was a value and strength in creating a group (Hofstede 1988, 2003, Hofstede et al. 2010). During this group meetings, advice about how best to deal with The College was shared between boys and parents. One of the results of this pattern was that, amongst many of the Hong Kong students, the relationship with the institution itself was secondary to the group and the bonds which were maintained after leaving were with their peer group, not the institution (Hui and Triandis 1986).

#### **5:4: Teaching strategies**

The overall tone of the classroom was one of calm and mutual respect. I did not observe any disciplinary problems and students were, on the whole attentive and focused. According to staff, classroom rules were established early on students' arrival in the school and I did not hear any references to behavioural expectations during my visits. Teachers adopted different strategies with Hong Kong students, and teachers of junior students anticipated that they would experience communication problems with their Hong Kong pupils which led to them attempting to find solutions which would enable the boys to adapt to life at The College (Byram 1997). Communication concerns were not based on language barriers but rather the main areas of concern were non-participation, encouragement and checking understanding. The concerns and expected standards were identified as desirable by the teacher rather than dictated by the school although there was a shared concept of what constituted optimal participation. Teachers adopted different strategies to achieve their educational objectives and these were observed in both lower and upper years with a

greater focus on participation in lower years and advancement of learning skills in upper years.

Examples of this included:

#### 5:4.1: Specific instructions to the entire class:

“write this down”

(JP French teacher, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Unlike the majority of teachers I observed at The College, this teacher took a very controlling role in directing the class. The majority of teachers did not enforce note taking, particular in Division lessons. Other teachers focused on the transmission of study skills:

“keep the pen close, this is how you abbreviate”

(VIBk1 Economics teacher, classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This particular teacher adopted a lecture based approach to teaching and the complexity of his classes indicated that he was focusing on students’ higher educational studies rather than the interim goals of their passing examinations. I observed this pattern across the curriculum with science teachers in particular incorporating work which was in advance of the level required for the Pre-U examination. I questioned one teacher about this strategy and he explained that his approach was student driven:

“They (the boys) want to be stretched. If I just stuck to the syllabus, they’d get bored. They can study that on their own.”

(Physics teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

#### 5:4.2: Specific instructions to Hong Kong students:

A number of teachers had different strategies for Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong students and took pains to ensure that Hong Kong students were both following the lesson and making notes of key points. This approach appeared to be extremely valuable in Division lessons. Division in the lower school is linked to the English curriculum and includes both literature and language. All boys take IGSC English language only and although the classes

are not restricted to covering the examination requirements, teachers do need to ensure that the curriculum is covered. One teacher in particular had a pair of Hong Kong students (referred to as B and C) in his focus and punctuated his teaching with direct instructions aimed specifically at them:

“B get it down

B and C, get it down

B, make sure you have this

Key moments ...get them down B”

(MP Division teacher, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Students on the whole had a positive reaction to this technique. I questioned one boy following a lesson during which the teacher had singled him out for direct instruction:

“...it means I don't miss anything”

(JP Boy, after class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit

Although the student reacted positively, one effect was to underline the difference between Hong Kong and other students.

One interesting phenomenon was that Hong Kong students reacted to direct instruction when teachers made a specific link with examinations/learning objectives whereas Western students tended to ignore them. One example of this pattern occurred in a class during an animated discussion about developing nations during a geography lesson:

“Make a note of this”

(Hong Kong students react, other students continue discussion)

(JP Geography teacher, in class, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In contrast, instructions which forced classroom discussion tended to be ignored by Hong Kong students and followed by non-Hong Kong students.

“Chatter to each other and agree before you commit to paper”

(Hong Kong students move straight on to the writing task, others engaged in discussion)

(VIBk1Physics teacher, classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

### 5:4.3: Confirming understanding

Some teachers made a point of checking understanding, specifically focused on students who were not joining into discussion or asking questions (normally Hong Kong students). This phenomenon was observed in division classes, geography classes and science classes of JP and MP and also tended to be coupled with direct instructions being given to Hong Kong students.

### 5:4.4: Attempts to create interaction

Some teachers had devised engagement strategies based on observation of students' behaviour. These fell into three main categories: direct instruction, creating familiar work styles and private guidance.

#### *5:4.4.i: Direct instruction*

Using the direct approach, teachers tried to engage students by bringing them into activities in a way which allowed them to take more passive role (such as reading) or asking direct questions:

“I ask him to read or he won't speak”

(VIBkl Division teacher, in discussion after class, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit. This conversation was sparked by my asking how he had set about creating a lively class. The boy in question was an obvious exception and did not engage in discussion)

The questioning approach appeared to have the effect of creating stress in some students and did not have the desired effect of bringing students into discussions as students completed the assigned task/responded to the question and then remained silent:

“They only respond if asked direct questions”

(JP Physics teacher, in discussion after class, 1st visit)



#### *5:4:4.ii: Introduction of group working patterns*

Rather than create individual attention, some teachers recognised that Hong Kong students would work as a member of a group and displayed a preference for collective study. After observing an animated history class, I asked the teacher how he had created an interactive classroom. He had studied the way that the students responded to different styles of activities and had focused on the role of group work as a way of creating engagement.

“Better if I start with group work first”

(MP History teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

One negative aspect of group work was observed in the lower years. If groups were self-selecting, Hong Kong students automatically gravitated together. The approach to group work within Confucian Heritage Cultures which was identified by Nguyen et al (2006), namely that students from Hong Kong were likely to require clear step by step instructions and have a clear understanding of the final outcome before starting work, was illustrated on a number of occasions as a result of this self-selecting:

During one biology lesson, the boys were allowed to choose their own groups in order to carry out experiments testing for proteins in food. Instructions were written on the blackboard. Western and mixed groups glanced at the instructions and started work immediately. I could hear comments along the lines of “right, what do we do next?” One group made up of Hong Kong students considered the instructions, identified the equipment they would need for the whole experiment and sent members of the group off to collect each piece before starting work.

(Observation, biology lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

#### *5:4:4.iii Private intervention*

The private intervention route of offering guidance appeared to be more effective than attempting to engage a student in public. This could be because the student was not required to admit that he was struggling, thus maintaining face in front of the class (Triandis

1982, Triandis et al 1988, Ting-Toomey and Korzenny 1989, Ting-Toomey 1999, Ting-Toomey and Chung 2005). However, the intervention was based upon the teacher recognising that the student was struggling but would not ask for help. A key feature of the approach was that the teachers were giving specific instruction (e.g. suggesting usually junior Hong Kong students set themselves the goal of asking one question per lesson) and the conversation was taking place away from the classroom. Within a boarding environment, this approach is feasible as teachers encounter students outside lesson times either in the boarding houses or as part of extra-curricular activities.

“C (15 year old local school boy) is transformed. Now he asks and speaks every lesson”

“Did you suggest it?”

“Yes, the other two never speak. It is very difficult.”

(MP Division teacher, after class 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

One recurring theme was that boys from Hong Kong local schools either expressed or demonstrated the desire to engage but did not know how to go about acting on their wishes or are pre-empted by boys who are quicker off the mark:

“I know that I should ask questions but by the time I have thought of them, someone else has asked them. It is the same when I think of an answer, I would have said the same (as the person who answered) but they get there first.)

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion walking to house, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Boys joining The College from Western educational settings have already adopted interactive classroom behaviours by the time they join the school and a large proportion of them were academically and socially confident. This manifested in quick responses and a tendency to dominate classes if allowed. In response to this phenomenon, teachers of junior classes were observed to adopt different strategies which included moving around the class and asking for feedback, ignoring more vociferous boys and singling out silent students for comment. During my second visit, I followed one group for a three week period and observed that the latter strategy resulted in painful pauses at the beginning of my visit but that the boys responded more quickly towards the end of my visit, indicating that they were

starting to adapt to the expectations of their new environment. The boys who had been initially dominant became more respectful of others:

“Tricky this year, I have a big group from C (UK prep school) and they are used to being the top of their school. They need to learn that there are others who have ideas which are equally and sometimes more valid.”

(JP Division teacher, in discussion after I had observed his class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

A number of Hong Kong students identified classroom engagement as a source of stress, in some cases due to a fear of either displaying lack of knowledge or being mocked.

“I don’t know what to ask” (Boy, JP, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“In Hong Kong they laugh when you make mistakes”

(JP Boy, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Another approach is to suffer in silence rather than to admit that one is struggling:

‘When I was in Hong Kong I rarely spoke English and going to The College was like skipping a form. In Hong Kong I was studying F1 and I’m F3 (Y9) now. And now it’s ok but I had to work really hard.’

JOS: “Did you ask for help?”

“Not so much”

(MP Boy, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The speaker above attributed the work challenge to skipping a form. This comment highlights one of the effects of the restructured Hong Kong educational system. Although the name of the form indicated that this was the case, he was with students of his own age and had covered the same body of knowledge in order to pass the entrance examinations. By British measurements, he was in the right form with the correct year group and would finish school at the age of eighteen but in Hong Kong he would have finished at the age of seventeen and therefore felt that he was being “made to do work over again” (MP Boy, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit). This view did not appear to be widespread, I asked a number of boys about whether they felt that they were repeating a year but they did not perceive this to be the case. One boy commented:

“It doesn’t really matter what you call the year. The fact is that we are doing stuff here which is more challenging than there (Hong Kong). Anyway, we all go to the same universities eventually.”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

#### 5:4.5: Non-intervention

Relying on their experience and personal observations, a group of teachers adopted a non-interventionist strategy to deal with lack of classroom participation on the part of Hong Kong students. This group tended to be composed of more senior staff:

“I don’t ask him. I can see his is learning from his expression. If I call on him, he will stall.”

(Division teacher, VB after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This teacher provided extremely clear hand-outs which were closely tied to the homework tasks he set. Classroom discussions during his lessons were fast paced and wide ranging and were controlled by the teacher who fired questions at students and made other students respond to the answers being given. As an observer, the speed of the lesson was exhilarating but would have been overwhelming to younger students.

There was a perception on the part of some teachers that students were observing and would join in at a future point. This concept was articulated by more senior teachers, based on their experience, and may be indicative of the teacher’s own intercultural sensitivity and ability to read non-verbal behaviours (Bennett 1993)

“They are watching and speak when they are ready. They are re-processing information. (They are) more comfortable in the house

(House Master, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Again, based on experience, older teachers did not make the mistake of confusing silence for agreement

“They aren’t automatons, they don’t readily offer opinions but they hold them.”

(Division teacher, in discussion 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

A number of teachers made strenuous efforts to engage students but were unable to articulate a clear strategy:

“I try to find a spark of something I can work with”

(Housemaster, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

#### 5:4.6: Lenience towards Hong Kong students

In general, the academic expectation of The College students is extremely high,

“Not many students could cope with the depth of understanding required. We don’t make any concessions” (Housemaster, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

However teachers of languages and humanities subjects were observed to make concessions towards Hong Kong students indicating that they were adopting an accommodating approach to teaching (Biggs, 2003). In language lessons, Hong Kong students were corrected less when making errors of pronunciation (French lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit). This technique did have consequences, namely that other students were aware of the different approaches and made comments:

(Latin lesson; teacher forgives use of wrong tense by a Hong Kong student in response to a direct question after correcting the preceding Western student)

“That’s discrimination against us because he’s from China”

(Western Boy, MP, in Latin class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Sometimes, students (not just Hong Kong) were praised for commenting rather than the quality of their comments:

“Roman means Romany” (*this was the period during which the television programme “My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding” was being shown and the difference between Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers was a topic of media discussion.*)

“No, in this context it means Roman Catholicism but that is an excellent hypothesis.”  
(English lesson, VB, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

In this context, teachers had a deliberate policy of encouraging comments indicating that they were demonstrating skills associated with Bigg’s (2003) third level of teaching in which the focus is on whether the student is learning rather than on his ethnicity:

“I am just delighted that he is joining in.”  
(English teacher, following VB lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Interestingly, given the competitive environment of Hong Kong schools (Poon and Wong 2008), students were likely to judge themselves more harshly and react negatively to praise which they felt was undeserved:

“They (teachers) say “oh, you got over 60% that’s quite good. I feel that’s not really good.”  
(Boy, MP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

#### 5:4.7: Incorporation of examples likely to be familiar to Hong Kong students

A few teachers, generally those who had either been teaching Hong Kong students for any length of time, or who were familiar with Asia, tried to form links between Hong Kong habits and customs and non-familiar subjects. This demonstrates aspects of Bigg’s second level teaching in which the teacher attempts to accommodate other cultures by using familiar examples. An illustration of this was in a French lesson (1<sup>st</sup> visit, MP) in which the teacher chose to use sentences which highlighted swimming and music examples, ignoring exercises listing team sports.

“I try to find things they can connect to. It is hard enough learning a language from a country they have never visited without trying to explain what rugby is.”  
(French teacher JP, following lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit. This comment was made during a discussion in which we compared our experiences of teaching French to Hong Kong students.)

In contrast, teachers had observed a desire for Hong Kong boys to blend in and did not seek to change this:

“Chinese boys don’t use Chinese examples to demonstrate things.”

(French teacher, MP, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Some subjects, such as economics and geography, naturally incorporated topics about Asia in which case teachers tried to make Hong Kong students a positive focus of the class:

“... this is more immediate to those of you living in Hong Kong and China, more abstract for anyone else.”

(Economics teacher, Vlbk1, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This approach was also applied to students from other countries for example, a JP geography lesson about deforestation involved a Nigerian student being called upon to describe the situation in his country. This turned into the student leading an animated class discussion during which he challenged the right of other countries to interfere in Nigerian industry. (Observation, JP geography lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). In contrast, when called upon to give insight into (normally) Chinese examples, Hong Kong students were reticent in lower years (cf geography lesson JB, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit) and, in upper years, almost patronising (cf discussion about stem cell research Vlbk1, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit). The closest I could get to an explanation for this was a comment:

“They think they know everything (about Asia) it’s annoying.”

(VIBk1 boy, after class, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This reaction to attempts on the part of Western students to demonstrate their knowledge about Asia could be a reaction explicable by Shaules (2007:189) theory that some cultural information coupled with lack of experience may result in over simplistic understandings of a culture and by Byram’s (1997:37) suggestion that successful intercultural relationships are formed by incomers accepting that their interlocutors will see them as representatives of a country rather than individuals and that knowledge is likely to be based on limited information accessed through stories or the media. With contact, a more sophisticated understanding emerges. Chinese (Putonghua) is studied in the school and I did observe a number of Western lower school boys with Chinese characters on their hands.

“I like it, it fits well together.”

(MP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

When I saw boys with Chinese characters either on their hands or books, I made a point of asking them whether they were studying Putonghua. Some of them were but others had asked boys in their house how to say something or had copied the characters from Hong Kong boys (this was identifiable as they were traditional characters, Putonghua uses a simplified written form). This may indicate that boys are curious about Hong Kong and Chinese cultures outside lessons and that the relationship between boys in the house is close enough to allow enquiries to take place.

#### 5:4.8: Previous Learning Styles

Teachers were, on the whole, unfamiliar with the educational environment of Hong Kong (Discussion during Inset teaching group, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit) and were intrigued to hear more.

(After hearing a description of how a classroom functions in a DSS school)

“That’s John!” (JP boy from a local school)

(Maths teacher, JP, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Hong Kong students were clear about the negative elements of their previous learning experiences but less articulate about the positive outside the results which were produced by the focus on achievement. What is interesting about the following comments is observing the emphasis depending on the amount of time boys had spent at the school. In the first quotation, the student focuses on the mechanical aspects of learning, in the second the speaker has identified differences but does not see discussion as learning and in the third, the student has homed in on the learning experience as a whole.

“In local schools like S and D (two Hong Kong DSS schools), all you do in the lesson is copy notes and in the science lessons you rarely do experiments.”

(Boy, JP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)



“All teaching in Hong Kong, don’t get time to stop and chat.”

(Boy, MP, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“(Hong Kong was) ...all about exams. I needed to get the grades to please my mom but I hated learning. Hated it” (Boy, VIBk1, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Teachers had identified the effects of previous teaching on their students, particularly the tendency for boys to focus on covering material quickly and with a focus on exam centric knowledge;

“Some want to be spoon fed, others read ahead and want lessons to teach them more” (Maths teacher, JP, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The idea that the teacher should provide all materials and guide students in relation to examinations also manifested in Hong Kong boys learning to write down notes as the teacher spoke rather than relying on hand-outs. A number of Hong Kong tutorial schools base their success on providing revision notes, and students are trained to rely on written materials tied to examination requirements which are a key part of the course. Written course notes provide a clear and structured visual guide to the materials being taught and can remove uncertainty about the focus of learning. The absence of hand-outs, or an assumption on the part of the teacher that the students will be making their own notes, can result in frustrations on the part of students from Confucian Heritage Cultures. (Lam-Phoon (1986) and Nguyen et al (2006)).

“They need to adjust to me writing skeletal notes on the board and they have to add detail as I speak.”

(Division teacher, VB, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit in relation an observation that some students were making copious notes and others barely writing.)

“I don’t know what to write down. They just talk and at the end of the hour I am lost. I normally look at the textbooks at night.”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The gap between The College's expectations of classroom engagement and the Hong Kong learning style created frustrations on both sides in class (Welikala and Watkins 2008):

"You want to be told D (Hong Kong student), you don't want to learn"

(Geography teacher, in class MP, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Hong Kong boys focusing on the content relevant to examinations and tests also created areas of tension, possibly because it was perceived to be a barrier to broader learning. In one IGCSE class, a discussion took place about the relative weightings of topics which would appear on the examinations:

"If I memorise the book, will I get an A?"

"Yes but it is a bit tragic!"

"I am willing to do it for an A\*."

"That is a sad reflection on my teaching."

(Chemistry teacher, VB, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The teacher's reaction is indicative that he subscribes to the ethos of the school which is to develop the desire to learn rather than focusing on examination results.

#### 5:4.9: Identification of group difference

Whereas some teachers expressed the view that all students were treated the same:

"I see everyone as the same – maybe I shouldn't..."

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

other teachers identified the tendency to group Hong Kong students together, in some cases aware that they were subscribing to stereotypes, in others using the groupings to define behavioural patterns (Tajfel 1978, 1982).

"It is so easy to fall into the stereotype of "the Chinese."

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

"The Chinese group at back, tend to be quieter."

(Mathematics teacher, MP, 1st visit)

This tendency was echoed by students in lower years, particularly if Hong Kong students were working in groups or sitting together:

“The Asians finished first!”

(Boy, JP Physics lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

However, although there was a recognition of difference, the value of having Hong Kong students within the school was echoed by both staff and the Headmaster, which may indicate that the general attitude of the institution avoids the deficit view of an intercultural student body (Ryan (2010), Watkins and Briggs (2001)):

The boys are very good. There aren't many Hong Kong boys who just come and work. So they aren't the kind of narrow, exam obsessed people that they were perhaps a generation ago. They become very westernised of course.

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

The College is a fee paying school and some of the boys come from extremely wealthy backgrounds. However, there was a perception that Hong Kong students lived a luxurious and extravagant life (possibly due to the presence of an unrepresentative group from extremely rich, high profile families)

“You don't realise how much money is behind until you see their watches”

(Economics teacher, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“(French) exchanges are difficult. Hong Kong parents rent hotels for the reciprocal visits.”

(French teacher, VB, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

With regard to this comment, there were a few Russian, African and Middle Eastern boys in the school who wore similar watches but their numbers were not significant. The African boys were referenced in terms of the perceived power that their families were supposed to wield:

Nigerian student: “We definitely don’t have rainforests in Nigeria”

Western student: “You’ve probably torn them down.”

(JP Geography lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Although this comment represents both a stereotypical and possibly ill-informed view of Nigerian society, it was said in tones of admiration. In contrast, the perception seemed to be generally held that Hong Kong students were in possession of great wealth which they used to employ servants. This differentiation between wealth and power with the former being despised and the latter praised is reflective of Bourdieu’s description of cultural capital being transformed into social and latterly economic capital. It is the connection between the three elements which has positive associations within the world of The College. Money without social capital has not value (Bourdieu 1984). This perspective percolated down the school with negative comments on wealth being directed towards Hong Kong students made in class:

“Have you heard of left luggage? Oh, you have your porters for that”

(French teacher, VB in class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Ethnic difference was used as part of classroom conversation by a minority of teachers as a threat and to emphasise the perceived difference between the positive environment of the College and the negative environment of Hong Kong (in this case referred to as China):

“If you carry on like that, I’ll send you back to Chinese school.”

(French teacher, JP, in class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“Bet you’d never learn that in China!”

(French teacher, JP, in class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Boys rarely mentioned ethnic differences, the rare example being during the Chinese lesson, possibly as part of an attempt to regain equilibrium. In this class, Hong Kong students were joined by Western students who were learning Chinese as a second language. The gulf in knowledge between the two groups was wide and the Hong Kong students spent the majority of the lessons I observed lounging in their chairs and mocking the non-Chinese

boys. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher drew a complicated ideogram on the board, rubbed it out and invited each student to try to replicate it. To the delight of the class, the Hong Kong students failed to replicate the character, leading to the final boy being told:

“If you get it wrong, you’re not Hong Kong any more” (gets it wrong)

(Boy, VB in Chinese lesson during which boys were called up to draw a character on the board, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Ethnic behavioural patterns rather than race were more likely to be a source of identification of difference within The College. Collectivist cultures are more likely to make conservative decisions in order to ensure profits or success (Hofstede 1988, 2003, Hofstede et al. 2010) whereas individualist cultures reward risk taking. Interestingly, this difference emerged on multiple occasions with different applications and the reward did not necessarily have to be money related:

(When asked at which price he would choose to sell a company share)

“Sell at breakeven”

“Typical Chinese, no risk” (Economics teacher, VIBk1, 3rd visit)

“Hong Kong boys do anything to avoid being out (in sport) won’t take risks but will cheat to stay in”

(Sports teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

In both cases, the boys are acting to prevent loss – financial or participation. Both teachers are critical of the lack of risk taking which may be perceived to be a beneficial trait in Western society.

### 5:5: Integration

For the most part, academic adaptation and changes in classroom behaviour was perceived by teachers to be a positive indication of the beginnings of integration (Bennett 1993, 1998) For others, the “well behaved” Hong Kong group were used as a bellwether monitor for

control indicating an awareness of difference in classroom behaviours. Within the context of the classes I observed, the Hong Kong students exhibited less extrovert tendencies and were initially passive learners, although this exterior compliance was not perceived to be a positive trait:

“Housemasters like them because they are biddable”

(Language teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

One effect of initial lack of engagement was to make any deviation more apparent (Hornsey and Gallois 1998). This phenomenon is reflective of Paulston’s (1992) suggestion that it is easy to use stereotypes as a norm and to treat any difference as deviant behaviour.

“They are getting cheeky – once the Chinese start getting cheeky, it is all going wrong”

Division teacher, after lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit

I observed that student seating plans (where they were allowed to choose) tended to reflect cultural groupings.

“They want to sit together”

(Maths teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Some teachers deliberately broke up the groups, deciding to pair opposites in order to encourage interaction (Anastasio 1997). Voluntary and organic variation was observed in Division classes, in one case causing a teacher to remark on changes:

“I see the seating plan has evolved. We are becoming a rainbow nation”

(Division teacher, in class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The class reaction to this comment was positive indicating that the teacher had achieved a group identity in which other existing identities were still maintained (Anastasio 1997). This teacher was knowledgeable, extremely insightful and especially revered by the boys with the result that he had created a collaborative and inclusive classroom and participation in his classes was enthusiastic.

I observed this integrated pattern throughout the school during Division lessons, in other subjects, the same groupings tended to occur. The role of the teacher in each case was the variable. Teachers who were highly respected created a more integrated teaching group. The College prizes intelligence at every level of the school and the boys subscribe to this ethos.

Hong Kong learners are familiar with group work and replicate their learning style at The College. As members of the group, they create a shared obligation to help each other succeed. (Nield 2007). This approach is most apparent in the lower school and was observed within the following areas:

French lesson – one member of a group of Hong Kong boys repeated vocabulary and instructions quietly to the group and provided Chinese translations.

(MP French lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Latin Lesson – one member of the group took notes on a provided source sheet which were then handed around and copied by other Hong Kong students.

(MP Latin lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Discussion about roles within Hong Kong groups was minimal. In a JP physics lessons (observed, 1<sup>st</sup> visit) the boys were allowed to self-select groups leading to one Hong Kong student cluster. The non-Hong Kong groups spent approximately the first five minutes of an experiment deciding on who would be presenting findings and making notes. Within three of the non-Hong Kong groups, boys were observed to be chatting as other members carried out the tasks (Earley 1993). In the Hong Kong group, there was an immediate division of tasks, not roles and the experiment was completed quickly. However, the group made fundamental errors but refused to ask for help, focusing instead on finishing first (the teacher had made it clear that this was a competition) thus gaining face for the group within the terms of the competition but at the expense of completing the task correctly (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009).

Conversely, Hong Kong students opted out of working in groups or pairs if the task was discussion based (observation in MP mathematics class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit, VB physics class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). Rather than entering into discussion, they tended to work silently or read ahead (MP biology

class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit, VB maths class 1<sup>st</sup> visit). One boy explained this phenomenon to me in terms of:

“It’s a waste of time. I can get more done and then have time to start my other work.”

(Vb Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The majority of non-Hong Kong students I observed did appear to be working rather than “social loafing” Earley(1993) but there was an accompanying level of discussion which accompanied the work and which was not deemed to be productive by Hong Kong students. Within the context of these science or mathematics based classes, the Hong Kong group did not see discussion as valuable and worked silently towards either mastery of or completion of tasks. Although by this point, the majority of the students participated willingly in discussion during Division lessons, the Hong Kong students did not appear to perceive any benefit in doing so during science or mathematics lesson.

#### 5:9: Teaching Strategies – Interim summary

The vast majority of teachers at The College had observed the difference in learning styles between Hong Kong and other students and had decided on a teaching strategy which would allow them to ensure that learning was taking place and would attempt to create a learning style based on discussion and critical engagement. Some teachers subscribed to the deficit stereotype of passive and uncritical learners and some to the positivist stereotype (Ryan, 2010, Louie, 2005) but the majority were attempting to reach a balance between the different learning styles in the classroom. Teachers decided on interventionist or non-interventionist classroom management techniques based on their experience.

#### 5:10: Languages

One unanticipated area of interest uncovered during my research visits was the tension caused by The College’s requirement that all boys study two modern languages up to IGCSE



level. Boys have the option of German (generally only taken by Hong Kong boys from German Swiss International School who have studied the language in Hong Kong,) French, Putonghua, Russian and Spanish. The majority of Hong Kong boys take French as option one and Putonghua as option two. Some take Spanish although this is seen as a more difficult option. Few take Russian as the Cyrillic alphabet presents more complications.

Overseas boys are encouraged to take French as part of the entrance process but it is not mandatory and many opt not to take it, preferring to focus on key papers. Based on my experience of invigilating French exams at Brandon Learning Centre in Hong Kong, boys who sit the French paper tend to do well in written/reading sections and less well in spoken/listening.

### 5:11: Teachers' Attitudes

Hong Kong students' struggle with language requirements was easily identifiable in a number of areas including: lack of engagement, overt complaints, lower marks, parental attempts to switch classes. Language teachers were sensitive to their students' attitudes towards the subject.

“They see the second language as a cross to bear.”

(Language teacher, in conversation after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Some teachers attributed the Hong Kong boys' negative attitudes to the complexity and unpredictability of the language structures being studied. Following one lesson in which the class had been covering pronouns and a group of Hong Kong boys had expressed concern about how they could work out noun genders, the teacher made the following comment in relation to a discussion of whether there was a difference between Hong Kong and other learners. His conclusion had been that the Hong Kong students worked on memorising information and sought to apply logic to the language;

“They don't like French... too many exceptions.”

(MP French teacher, in conversation after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This perception was supported by comments from Hong Kong boys who seemed to experience comparatively more trouble identifying clear rules in the language:

“So all furniture isn’t masculine even though the table is?”

(JP Boy, during French lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Can you put the irregular verbs in groups? How?”

(MP Boy, during French lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Although non-Hong Kong students were facing similar challenges, they did not appear to be attempting to apply concrete rules to the languages and appeared to accept any irregularities without comment.

### 5:12: Language Production

During my observation of French, Spanish and German classes, I noted that Hong Kong students were reluctant to speak in French (even when asked direct questions.) They struggled with both listening and language production (1<sup>st</sup> visit) and the oral test created a disproportionate amount of stress given that it is only one element of IGCSE. This could be the result of a number of factors including: embarrassment, fear of making mistakes, difficulty in pronouncing certain key sounds, lack of concrete frame of reference.

Students tried to apply methods which had proven successful in learning Putonghua, namely memorisation and use of flash note cards. The oral exam format was a recurrent source of concern. During one lesson, the teacher described the structure of the upcoming oral prompting a number of questions from Hong Kong students:

“How do we know what we are going to get?”

“How can we memorise it?”

“Can we write on the oral sheet in the preparation time?”

(French lesson VB, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Possibly one reason for this concern is that the questions asked in the oral test are broad, the topics may be unpredictable and therefore answers cannot be memorised with a high degree of confidence. Previous memorisation and rote learning techniques are inapplicable.

### 5:13: Purpose and Risk

Taking a second modern language is mandatory until IGCSE. Modern European languages perceived as a high risk subject by the majority of Hong Kong students given the unpredictable nature of the irregular tenses and the potential for difficult questions in the oral component. Another area of conflict is that the majority of Hong Kong students intend to return to Hong Kong and do not see a purpose in studying another European language.

“Latin was ok. I hated French. It was really hard and a complete waste of time.”

(Boy VIBk1, in discussion, third visit)

French results tend to be lower than those generated by other subjects for the majority of Hong Kong students. As a result, few Hong Kong students opt to take another European language at IGCSE level. Teachers specified that some of the boys demonstrated a talent for languages but speculated that the decision was based on parental input. I was curious whether Hong Kong students were choosing to continue studying languages after IGCSE and questioned language teachers about whether this happened. In response to their negative answer, I asked a broad question about what they thought were the reasons for this phenomenon.

“(Hong Kong) Parents take their boys out of the language classes and put them in science instead because it is easier to guarantee grades.”

(Language teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“(Hong Kong) Parents don’t want them to take another language in case it reduces their average.”

(Language teacher, in discussion 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The same pattern was replicated at Pre-U level. One boy was contemplating continuing a modern language and the teacher expressed excitement at the prospect:

“Never had any Chinese boys before”

(Language teacher, in discussion after lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

In top French sets, there were attempts to engage students over and above the syllabus through the incorporation of information on the French education system and way of life. The majority of students in these sets were non-Hong Kong with the exception of boys who had come from British prep schools. During classes I observed with lower level sets (the majority of Hong Kong boys were in these groups) the clear recognition that covering the syllabus was an uphill task and lessons were more grammar and vocabulary based:

“I just want to get them through IGCSE not to expand now”

(French teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

#### 5:14: Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese)

Hong Kong (Chinese/Hong Kong) boys wishing to take Putonghua as their IGCSE second language option were in a class with non-Chinese boys who were taking the subject as beginners. Given the enormous standard gap between the two groups, the Hong Kong students were given different work and the teacher focused on the new learners. At no point during the lessons I observed did the Hong Kong group attempt to inform or assist the other group. Rather they sat together, some leaning against the wall, making comments in Cantonese, and laughed at mistakes and questions:

“I saw Journey to the Centre of the Earth (should be Journey to the West – a Chinese classic novel) Have they made it into a book?” Laughter from Hong Kong group.

(Western boy, VB during Chinese lesson 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Western Boy: “is Macau in China?”

Laughter from Hong Kong group

Western Boy: “No... really” (more laughter and sotto voce comments)

Hong Kong Boy (loudly): “For goodness’ sake”

(Dialogue between Western and Chinese boys, MP during Chinese lesson 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

One possible explanation of this phenomenon could be that the non-Chinese boys were learning at beginners’ level and the division between the two groups was extreme. There

appeared to be a reluctance to share information which I observed only when discussions turned to Hong Kong and China:

“X how do you think that this (new law) will affect the Chinese economy?”

Hong Kong Boy: “No comment”

(VB Chinese Class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The behaviour of the group was markedly different during the class and one possible explanation could be the rare perception that the power base was now in the hands of the previously subordinate group and a desire to maintain the new status (Hornsey and Gallois 1998). I observed this phenomenon elsewhere:

“One of the boys looked up Chinese words on Wikipedia and tries to say them. Really funny, now I can make fun of him.”

(Boy, JP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The phenomenon did not appear when boys were describing discussions which had taken place in private with their immediate room-mates:

“They ask me about Hong Kong, they want to know” (boy VIBk2 in discussion 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This comment illustrates that the relationship between boys within the house is more supportive and less competitive than behaviour observed in the classroom.

### 5:15: Languages – Interim summary

Languages appeared to represent a source of concern to Hong Kong students. Whereas Western students were likely to have studied French for some time, the majority of Hong Kong students would have had minimal contact with the language and would be unlikely to have visited the country. This, combined with a fear of making mistakes and trouble with language production could explain the inhibition of any sense of enjoyment in language learning. In the Putonghua classes, the difference in levels created a divided class, possibly giving rise to an in-group who perceived that they held power created through knowledge and familiarity with the subject. This was the only class which I observed in which this

situation occurred; other classes were either in sets or all students operated from an equal base of knowledge.

#### 5:16: Parental involvement

One of the areas I was keen to explore was whether Hong Kong parents played a significant role in their sons' education once they boys were at The College. If this existed, I wanted to try to pinpoint areas of influence. From conversations with teachers about Hong Kong students, parental influence was normally mentioned early on in the conversation without prompting by me. There was a recognition that Hong Kong parents were likely to be deeply engaged in progress, examination results and decision making about courses and further study. The majority of teachers accepted that this would be the pattern with some expressing the view that boys should be allowed to make their own decisions.

#### 5:17: School recognition of shared Hong Kong parental and student goals

Hong Kong parents are closely involved with The College and a number will attend parents' days or visit on regular basis. One of the results of regular contact and the focus of conversations which take place during these meetings has led teachers to form the conclusions that exams and good results are a priority with Hong Kong parents:

“When I meet an English parent, they normally ask if their son is happy. Hong Kong parents always start with results.”

(House Master, in discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This focus illustrates the existence of disparity between the educational values of the teachers and those of parents.

“Oriental parents are obsessed with A's and do anything to get them”

(VB Division teacher, after lesson, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Interestingly, this focus is not displayed when speaking to the Headmaster, possibly because he is extremely clear that the goals of the school are not limited to students passing

examinations. This goal is reflected in The College's decision to opt out of league tables and not share examination results:

I think twenty years ago, they would have been measuring things by league tables. And I think a lot of Asian parents and not only Asian parents actually, do measure things in that way but I think the people who are attracted to us do measure things in a different way partly because we have taught them to do that but partly because perhaps they are have become people who have a much broader view of how you judge things in a system. Certainly when I go to Hong Kong, they are not going on exam results. Doesn't mean that they are not interested in them, I'm interested in them too but they don't form a headline part of the conversation. Other things do, like div, or music, or even things like, you know, the tone of the institution.

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

The ethos of the school is reflective of Hirst's (1969:183) suggestion that "the objectives of learning are surely certain developments of the pupil which are achieved in learning, and I suggest that these are all basically connected with the development of a rational mind."

Although parents may be focusing on broader curriculum in discussion with the Headmaster, the results and testing focus remains and is shared and demonstrated by Hong Kong students within the school. This does indicate that parents and students adopt some of the values of the new environment whilst retaining existing patterns of behaviour.

One observation is that the behaviour of parents (moving students out of less predictable subjects) and feedback from some teachers indicated that parents did not necessarily endorse The College's philosophy in its entirety and highlighted the discrepancy between the shared values of the teaching staff and school and those of Hong Kong parents (Bourdieu 1984).

".. mentioned that students challenge me to one Chinese parent and he said "not good" but it is, we need to learn together"

(Division teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

"I don't have a point, it is up to you guys"

(Division teacher, in class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Go to the absolute core of what is education? The College is trying to develop well rounded boys. The East sees it as a tool to go into society and find a job, they feel education is to equip.”

(House tutor, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

One of the manifestations of a preoccupation with results is the fear of failure and a focus on specifically exam-related information on the part of students.

#### 5:18: Examination focus and learning styles

Hong Kong boys frequently asked for detailed information if any type of assessment was mentioned. An ad-hoc test announced during a French lesson generated general complaints and grumbles from Western boys with Hong Kong boys refraining from passing comment but asking for specific information:

Teacher “There will be a grammar test next hour.”

MP Hong Kong Boy: “What exactly will you be testing? Is it in the book?”

MP Hong Kong Boy: How long do we get to prepare? Can we write on the sheet?”

(MP Boys, during French lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Hong Kong students were more likely to focus on specifics and ensured that they were aware of any punitive marking.

“Can we write more than 500 words? What happens if we do?”

(Boy, VB during Division lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Some Hong Kong students demonstrated a concern about any work which would be displayed or assessed publicly: either as part of internal projects such as decorating the library or external events such as the whole school competition based on presenting a piece of art. During one Division lesson, the boys were asked to write a poem on yellow paper which would then be displayed in Moberley Library as part of National Poetry Week. The teacher handed out the paper and asked the boys to write their poems directly on it. The majority of the class started work (with crossings out) but one Hong Kong boy spent time looking at his paper with increasing concern until asking:



“Do I have to use the yellow paper (to write my poem) what if it’s wrong?”

(Boy, JP during Division lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The College does not rely on text books and courses do not necessarily follow a publicly accessible curriculum (so IGCSE courses will not be restricted to covering the IGCSE syllabus). I observed that many Hong Kong student demonstrated a reliance on hand-outs and written materials and would show signs of worry when they were either not supplied or some boys appeared to be receiving different information (observation, Division lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit):

“Can we have a copy of the PowerPoint?”

(Boy, MP, Geography lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“We need a reading list. Feel like we are picking at material.”

(Boy, MP, Division lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“Sir it would be helpful if we had the pages.”

(Boy, VB, Biology lesson 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Some teachers, particularly those teaching VB IGCSE classes made a point of clarifying points from the examiner’s perspective (observation VB Latin lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). In other cases, boys asked for specific information:

‘Sir, do we need to know where countries are for IGCSE?’

(Geography lesson, MP, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

A clear behavioural pattern in years JP, MP, VB was that the Hong Kong students were disengaged during classroom discussions but reacted immediately once teachers indicated that they would be tested on a body of information under discussion:

Hong Kong students disengaged and ignoring discussions until the teachers says “this is important for your essay” at which point they start highlighting their hand outs.

(History lesson, VB, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Hong Kong students focus during parts relevant to exam, switch off during discussion about Roman living.

(Latin lesson, MP, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Another trend was Hong Kong students would use discussion times to read ahead in their books, ignoring conversations around them:

The class is put into groups. A self-selected Hong Kong group ignoring the classroom discussion of the experiment they are about to conduct and read ahead in textbook.

(Physics lesson, JP, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The consequence of the illustration above was that the group missed valuable tips and their experiment was off track as a result. One of the root causes was the perception that classroom interaction was a distraction rather than being part of the learning process.

“In Hong Kong people really concentrate in lessons, won’t talk about different things”

(Boy, JP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

There was a general sentiment from lower school Hong Kong boys with a local school background that discussion outside Division lessons prevented learning:

“Can’t learn anything in this class (maths) too many foreigners”

(MP Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The non-Hong Kong students were aware of the difference in learning styles and identified it as an area in which they had an advantage. I observed maths lesson in which the group was dominated by Hong Kong students who appeared to grasp concepts quickly and worked through ideas without reference to each other. A smaller Western group sat on one side of the classroom and burst to life when the teacher announced that the concept they were studying required discussion:

Maths teacher: “I want you to think and speak”

Western boy: “ha! Now we get to shine!”

(Boy, VB, during maths lesson 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

## 5:19: Extra Tuition

Both teachers and students were aware that Hong Kong students were likely to have extra tuition during the holidays. My observation in the boarding houses was that tuition was also taking place in the evenings. Teachers appeared to be unaware of this practice but other students were cognisant:

“E (VIBk1 boy from Hong Kong) has lessons online from Hong Kong.”

(Boy, VIBk1, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Although tutorial schools are becoming more common amongst the British, they tend to be used as revision centres before examinations rather than to teach basic syllabus. The concept of using holidays to study with tutors was met with disapproval from the majority of Western boys I spoke to but most said that they would study independently if they had exams. Hong Kong students saw the practice as beneficial irrespective of upcoming exams and, in the case of one boy, a way of catching up with work he had not understood during the term (JP boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit).

“The English boys find it weird that we learn in the holidays. I think they just relax and put it behind them. They never think of extra lessons in the holidays. I know some boys come every day. Got a friend who does 3 hours a day after school. It is normal in Hong Kong.”

(Boy, MP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

As students progressed up the school, they developed resistance to extra tuition and sought to reduce the hours they were taking although this is not always a decision which is theirs to make.

“We do tutorial in Hong Kong. English boys are more relaxed, they don’t want to work in the holidays. I think that there is a middle ground”

(Boy, VB, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“Every day I went back to Hong Kong and had lessons every day, 7 days. My dad forced me.”

(Boy, MP, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

As one boy jokingly said:

“Serious pressure (in Hong Kong); I come back (to The College) for a sleep!”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, third visit)

There were polarised opinions about extra tuition, some teachers perceived that students covering the basic syllabus outside the classroom gave them the opportunity to use teaching time to explore more challenging topics, others felt that it was the student’s responsibility to ask them for clarification or extra help:

“(they are)... bright boys, they normally cover everything before the class and we push forwards”

(Maths teacher, VB, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Parents ask us to tutor their children secretly”

(Division teacher, in conversation walking to Flint Court, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Hong Kong students demonstrated a clear advantage as a result of their tuition. In a VB Latin class, a group of Hong Kong students had an outline of the examination paper format and marking scheme. However, the reliance on tuition to provide guidance in the early years resulted in one student being designated as “uncooperative” by some teachers:

“He clearly doesn’t understand yet won’t ask”

(Division teacher, after JP lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Subsequent conversations with the student indicated that he had been instructed by his mother to write down questions to be covered with his tutor during the holidays.

A persistent theme when speaking to teachers was that Hong Kong students would sacrifice interests or non-examined subjects in order to focus on getting better results:

“one boy was a promising player but didn’t turn up because doing extra work. He’d get up early to work”

(Music teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This approach is also observed in Hong Kong as students stop all extra-curricular activities in the run up to examinations and could be learned behaviour. Western students I spoke to mentioned that they felt that they “deserved” a break after studying (VIBk2 boys, in discussion in house, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit) and they would “go mad” if they didn’t do something non-work related.

#### 5:20: Parental engagement and results orientation – Interim summary

Parents are a major factor in maintaining Hong Kong students focus on results. Parents provide direct guidance about the courses likely to lead to examination success, compare grades with each other and arrange tutorial classes during the holiday. This situation is accepted by Hong Kong boys and, in some cases, is welcomed by them. However, on the surface, this represents a division between the educational aspirations of the school and the goals of Hong Kong families and thus represents a source of concern to some teachers.

#### 5:21: Acculturation process

Boys coming to the school have varying degrees of international exposure before they arrive. Some boys have already been in the United Kingdom for some time, some have been at international schools in Hong Kong and have been in multicultural classes, and still others have minimal international exposure at local Hong Kong schools. Although the latter group may have attended study camps held in British school premises during the summer, these tend to be attended by other Hong Kong or overseas students and on the whole, offer minimal preparation for life in a British boarding school.

#### 5:22: Pre-learning/perceptions

Before arriving at The College, Hong Kong students and parents meet with each other on a regular basis. Often, students are coming from the same small group of schools or attending the same tutorial schools.

“There is The College Hong Kong society – we all met before we came.”

(Boy, JP in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Information is passed between Hong Kong students and parents about the workings of the and how Hong Kong students can best function within the school:

“These are the houses that are suitable for Hong Kong boys.”

(Boy, VIBk2 in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“I did a lot of reading up and speaking to people who said “take this course, take that course.”

(Boy, MP, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The result of this process is that parents form close bonds and compare information throughout their child’s time at the school. The boys are given a very clear picture of how they need to behave and the choices they need to make within the school. Based on conversations I had with different boys, this advice seems to focus on how to behave with certain teachers, which courses represent more work or may result in poor grades and which houses were “Hong Kong friendly”. Guidance did not extend to classroom behaviour. Information from Hong Kong students was valued more than that provided by the school.

“We’d heard about how the school worked and who to watch out for.”

(Boy, VB, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Teachers did seem to be aware of the information flow.

“Of the class, all Chinese boys had sought out information before joining the school.”

(Division teacher, in conversation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In discussion, they did not seem to be concerned, although there did appear to be negative impacts as discussions between parents in Hong Kong which resulted in parents making demands of teachers. Boys with weaker levels of English were entered for IELTS

examinations rather than IGCSE. Boys told me that Hong Kong parents met regularly and would talk about which courses their sons were taking and which sets they had ended up in. This resulted in parents being told that certain classes were of a lower standard:

“There is a perception that IELTS not good enough ... parents insist on changing groups”

(Division teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The lower level English class also seemed to be a source of embarrassment to some of the Hong Kong boys who felt that it somehow stigmatised them. After observing one lesson, I asked a boy I had previously taught and who had been disengaged during the lesson whether something was upsetting him:

“Not fair, all the Hong Kong boys get stuck in this class”

(JP Boy, in discussion after the class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This was not the case although there were a number of boys from Hong Kong local schools in the group. They had been placed based on their examination grades and the class was tailored towards filling in language gaps rather than the critical analysis of texts which the other groups were doing.

#### 5:23: Arrival

On arrival at the school, Hong Kong students fall into three groups: prep school attendees, international school students, local school students. The first group has already gone through the acculturation process and are comfortable with how to behave in a Western educational setting:

“Their year in prep school teaches them to be naughty”

(House Master, in discussion 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“I’d come from SL (prep school) so I wasn’t homesick, I was ok”

(Boy, MP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Social changes affected both the groups from local and international schools with discussion about food triggering animated discussion in the lower years:

“The food is not enough”

“We bring food back”

“everything (food) is expensive”

(JP Hong Kong Boys, in discussion at lunch time, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Interestingly, the above discussion took place as all the boys were finishing the food on their plates. Although there was the option of second helpings, only one boy opted to eat more! The complaints are sent home and Housemasters commented on the “incredible care packages” received by Hong Kong students.

The house structure in which first year boys share 6 – 8 occupant dormitories was seen as a positive by Hong Kong students:

“Much better to be with others at first because you aren’t lonely.”

(JP boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The Hong Kong boys accepted that they were at the bottom of the house pecking order, that they had responsibilities to maintain order in their rooms and that they would be governed by time and activity restrictions. None of the Hong Kong boys I spoke to expressed any dissent to the house regimes although some of the Western boys mentioned that the rules were “too strict” (JP Western boys, in discussion in house, 1<sup>st</sup> visit). This difference could be a factor of coming from a collectivist culture. The house group acts as a surrogate family and Hong Kong boys were quick to understand the obligations of their new group role.

“You can get annoyed but you have to think that you have to share.”

(JP boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

They were aware that they were representing their families:

“We’re staying in a room with six or seven other boys and how you behave conveys what kind of family you are from”

(JP boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)



In the first term, there is a marked difference between Hong Kong boys' ability to form friendship groups in the house and outside the house.

"They don't seem to know classmates" (i.e. those not in the house)

(Division teacher, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Yet I observed that the boys were busy and active in the house and joined in discussions at lunch time. In the evening, they were seen to be attending activities and playing table football with their peers. They were likewise forming relationships with older boys in the house and the house becomes a valuable source of help:

"If I have homework that I don't understand, I ask the fifth year boys... but when I really don't understand I ask the older boys. Some of my friends are homesick, I'm not, and when they call their parents they always tell them. I don't want them to worry so I go to the older boys first. They (my parents) won't be able to understand and the time difference is too much."

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

#### 5:24: Anticipation of environment

Discipline is a central focus of Hong Kong schools and was an area of difference which was mentioned frequently in conversation, often with disapproval. There seemed to be two schools of thought in this area. One group felt that the interactive environment indicated a lack of control (this may be representative of Bennett's defense stage (1993, 1998)).

"First impression wasn't all that impressive – the top years were rowdy... culture clash but you get used to life here."

(Boy, VIBk2, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

However, this perception was not static amongst boys from local Hong Kong schools who had had minimal exposure to non-Hong Kong students and had formed expectations based on holiday trip indicating that the judgement was also influenced by personality attributes (Murphy-Lejeune 2004):

“I thought foreign boys would be naughty – I’d seen them on study trips and they were unfriendly. But when I came here, they work really well and really friendly.”  
(JP boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This comment highlights the difference between non-selective study camps which tend to be populated by predominantly overseas students who arrive in large groups and the selective and deliberately integrated (in that overseas students are distributed throughout the houses) student body of The College.

### 5:25: Initial Coping Strategies

First year boys focused on remaining active and initially demonstrate Anderson’s description of adjustors (1993). The first speakers, both from local schools, indicate that the value of this strategy is that it permits them to avoid dwelling on being homesick.

“You have to do activities and music practice so you’ll be fully occupied and won’t have free time”  
(JP boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Activities outside the classroom form a new part of the students’ experiences but do play a key factor in increasing their satisfaction with the new environment.

“When you come from Hong Kong and are not used to doing much except work and music, it is a big change.”  
(JP boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The second speaker, from an international school, is in Kleinjans’s first stage of adaptation, that of cognition or analysis (Kleinjans 1975). He has reflected on the values of his new world and has seen that participation is a way of gaining approbation and forming friendship.

“If you don’t do activities, the House Master will be disappointed and you won’t make friends”  
(JP boy, international school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

There most common initial strategy for boys from Hong Kong was to comply and observe without deciding whether to accept or reject differences. The focus was more on understanding how to function in the new environment.

How do you learn the expectations? Watch and copy.”

(VIBk2 Boy, local school, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Although Hofstede (2010) identifies Hong Kong as a territory with relative low uncertainty avoidance tendencies, this is coupled with high power distance. One illustration of this theory is that local schools are extremely rigid, conformity is valued and rules and expectations are clear. Subsequently, boys from local school backgrounds, struggled with the new academic environment more than boys coming from international schools. Both groups found social interaction challenging although, in this arena, adaptation was more of a function of language skills, personality and international exposure (Schermerhorn 1978, Triandis 1982, Bennett 1993, Kramsch 1993, Chiu et al 2009). Social adaptation was perceived as a secondary aim to the bulk of Hong Kong students who felt that their primary goal was to get good academic results:

MP Boy: “Because you are in boarding school, you work hard as you can. It’s basically your job and because you are here and they’ve paid money for you to be here you work”

JOS: “Do you think other people share that view?”

MP Boy: “Definitely all Hong Kong people.”

JOS: “Others?”

MP Boy:” I don’t think so. The teacher bring it up quite often if people are messing about in class but I don’t think they care about that aspect”

(MP Boy, British Prep school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

## 5:26: The role of preparedness

### 5:26.1: Language

Language skills are a key factor in the speed of adaptation (Taylor 1987, Kramsch 1993, Guilherme 2002). Although all students have to take entrance examinations in English, there is no oral examination following the interview which takes place around the age of eleven. Students coming from predominantly Chinese environments will be used to using English within limited academic settings but tend to be more confident with written rather than oral English.

Students who had had time to adapt linguistically, experienced less stress than those coming straight into the new system. A MP boy who had spent three years at prep school prior to moving over was able to identify the role of language when articulating his strategy of preparedness for change and conformity (Murphy-Lejeune 2004, Mahon 2006).

JOS: "What advice would you give to new students from Hong Kong?"

MP Boy: "Relax and just don't think too much about your parents until you settle down. Don't think about it, you're fine. Try to fit in."

JOS: How?

MP Boy: Speak English, socialize with them. Well play... try to fit in with what they do"

(MP Boy, British prep school, in discussion in house, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This strategy had worked for him in the past and resulted in a positive reception by his peers which he felt validated his approach:

"They know that there are differences and try to adapt and help you."

(MP boy, British prep school, in discussion in house, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In contrast, another MP boy, from a local school, found adaptation challenging particularly operating in a new language. The levels of stress he experienced were reflected in a loss of weight:

“I wasn’t used to being exposed to an all- English environment. I didn’t have a great term ... didn’t realise until I got home and weighed myself.”

(MP boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Language was mentioned as a source of stress by other students:

“I, didn’t function in English when we came, takes time”

(VIBk2 boy, local school, in discussion 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

These reflections combine two areas outlined by Zaidi (1975) in which cultural adaptation are made: namely time and the academic domain. The impact of time was acknowledged by students but they were aware that this did not automatically lead to an ethnorelative position:

“You get used to it, whether you choose to accept it or not”

(VIBk2 Boy, in classroom discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The school terms are structured in approximately 12 week blocks which are bisected by a holiday during which the majority of Hong Kong students return home or spend time in the United Kingdom with their parents. This holiday provides a respite from the pressures of school life but also has the effect of making assimilation less vital.

“You are homesick, but you get used to it. And you go home often.”

(VB Boy, international school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

One boy had observed Western students and was envious at the ease at which they were adapting to school life:

“The English settle after about a week”

(MP Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

He attributed this to the fact that most English boys at the school had attended prep schools and were therefore familiar with boarding. Here the focus was on social adaptation yet the language and values of the new academic environment rather than those of the sociocultural (house) environment do seem to have more of an impact. The lack of clear guidance is a source of stress:

“When I first came, I panicked about what was expected of me.”

(VB Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Hong Kong students are more likely to seek advice from other Hong Kong students who are of similar age but may be in the year ahead of them during their first months at The College (observations and discussions with students, first and second visits). They were unlikely to ask for advice on minor matters from senior boys. One of the effects of this policy is that newcomers are seeking advice from students who had recently transitioned from a monocultural level and who were able to identify difference but not yet provide solutions (Buttjes and Byram 1991:142).

### 5:27: Use of Cantonese

There did not seem to be a consistent approach towards language usage in class. Some teachers reprimanded students if they heard Cantonese being used in class (VB mathematics lesson 1<sup>st</sup> visit, MP physics lesson 1<sup>st</sup> visit) others did not.

Cantonese seemed to be used by Hong Kong students in a number of ways:

- 1: On topic Cantonese discussion in class to explain concepts (MP mathematics lesson 1<sup>st</sup> visit, VB mathematics lesson 1<sup>st</sup> visit)
- 2: Private conversations (VB Chinese lesson 2<sup>nd</sup> visit, MP Division lesson 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

These behaviours were not observed in the upper school. By this point, class sizes were smaller, language skills more developed and academic goals were clear.

Not all students appeared to be willing participants in Cantonese discussions; Some boys clearly refused to speak English to the group, forcing the remainder to respond. The result of this was the creation of a stronger in-group identity which isolated them from the out-group (Singer 1998).

Outside the classroom, language was perceived to be less of an area of conflict by some, possibly because no penalties were associated with Chinese usage:

“They don’t mind you speaking Chinese with friends, so it’s quite nice.”

(MP Boy, British prep school, in discussion in house, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

However, language was a source of tension between students, particularly when centripetal and centrifugal approaches (Schermerhorn 1978) came into direct contact:

“M feels happier speaking Cantonese to me. I don’t want to”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion in house, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The speaker had been given clear instructions from his father to assimilate with non-Chinese groups and he perceived that being drawn into a Cantonese speaking group was preventing him from achieving his goal:

My father told me to become more open and learn from them”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion in house, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This view was echoed by another boy:

“He (B) finds it quite strange to speak English to a Chinese (sic). He always speaks Chinese to us. I often... if it’s... my free time, like going up town or playing sports I don’t mind speaking Chinese but in lessons I often prefer to speak English because it makes you better and the teacher wouldn’t be happy if you speak in Chinese.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Interestingly, the boy who was speaking Chinese was a fluent English speaker and did not appear to experience any difficulties with the language indicating that this was a conscious decision. Language as a centrifugal tool was observed during all three of my visits. In some cases, such as during a physics class (2<sup>nd</sup> visit) Cantonese was used in order for a group to discuss strategy without being understood. In other instances, such as boys walking together between lessons or back up to house, the discussion was free and relaxed. Language was also used as a mask for the expression of true sentiment whilst maintaining the semblance of complicity:

“Maybe ... swear in Cantonese because we can be more free ... no one understands”

(Boy, VIBk1, local school, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

There were three views of language between teachers indicating the lack of a standard policy and leading to different levels of conformity (Murphy-Lejeune 2004). Some allowed classmates to translate difficult concepts. This was observed in the JP and MP groups. (French lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit, Maths lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit) Other teachers perceived the use of Cantonese as a way of excluding non-Chinese students:

“There was a group playing together and excluding all the others ... speaking Cantonese. They were broken up.”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Interestingly, this view was shared by boys who had come from this particular house when observing a sports match between The College and a visiting school. The visiting school team was made up of Hong Kong boys with one exception and The College team was mixed European, Hong Kong and African. As the match progressed, it became apparent that the visiting team communicated only in Cantonese and were swearing vociferously. This elicited a series of negative comments from the group of mixed age Hong Kong boys observing the match (observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). The visiting team demonstrated clear centrifugal characteristics which were commented upon by observer:

“Wow, they are all Chinese now!”

(VIBk2 Boy, in conversation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

highlighting the extent to which The College boys saw themselves as part of the greater student body and could interpret behaviour from an intercultural perspective (Buttjes and Byram 1991).

#### 5:28: Teachers and students perspectives of the acculturation process

Focusing on the classroom behaviour of Hong Kong students, particularly in the areas of participation and work practises, teachers perceived the acculturation process as having both positive and negative consequences:



“(Hong Kong students) ...start out highly motivated...see the influence of the others in the second year.”

(Housemaster, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

From a student perspective, this process is part of adapting to the standards of the new environment (Bennett 1998):

“All my friends from Hong Kong are changing a bit. They’re not trying as hard in work”

(JP Boy, local school, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Recently arrived boys on my second visit could be described as exhibiting the behaviours associated with Bennett’s defence stage (1993, 1998). Perceiving that the educational standards of the United Kingdom as being lower than those of Hong Kong, they had created a self-supporting work group which was a source of pride to them:

“The three of us from Hong Kong, we are the only 3 of 5 whose work doesn’t need to be checked every night.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

For some students, the major cultural shift was not in terms of the quality of their work but more their reaction to grades. This is a fundamental change in attitude, being diametrically opposite to the situation in Hong Kong local schools in which form examination results are posted in a prominent location within the school and negative reactions to lower marks are intense:

“I found the work easy. I don’t work less but don’t feel bad if I get bad marks. Work the same as the others, not excessive but enough to get good marks.”

(VB Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Part of the perception of lower standards was a result of teachers providing praise rather than exhorting students to work harder. Positive feedback was a novelty for students from local schools (Lee 1996) :

‘English dons underestimate people. If you get 90% a Hong Kong teacher says “not bad” here they say “really good”.’

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“If you do bad (sic) they’re direct. If good, they praise a lot.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

As boys adapt, some are more likely to participate in classroom discussions,

“In the first year they are more reserved, in the second year there is more of a spark they try to be independent”

(Division teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“(You) ... see them changing and challenging in the second year”

(Maths teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

From a student perspective, this change takes place after a period of observation:

“At first I just watched, now I try to speak”

(JP Boy, local school, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

One reaction to classroom discussion was an assumption that it is an indication of lack of respect and therefore contrary to students’ perceptions of how a classroom should be managed (Welikala and Watkins 2008)

“My maths Don is new and has no class control so we’re cheeky and talk back and disrespect, I find that shocking”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

I had observed a number of the classes taught by this particular teacher; his method of teaching focused around animated discussions during which he challenged students to find errors in his reasoning. The contrast to classes I have observed in Hong Kong was striking. Time was a clear factor in the adaptation process and boys in senior forms were able to differentiate between challenging teachers and being discourteous.

“It took me a while to realise that the other boys weren’t being disrespectful when they challenged the Dons. The Dons liked it!”

(MP Boy, local school, in discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Interestingly, Dons did encourage discussion and challenges but teachers of junior boys were careful to draw a line when they felt that the (normally non-Hong Kong) boys were overstepping the bounds of respect.

#### 5:29: Setbacks

Following the pluralist acculturation model of progress, setbacks and re- adaption (Berry et al 1987, Shaules 2007) the students did appear to experience a cycle of challenges in their initial months at the school. For boys from local Hong Kong schools, the hypothesis (Brown and Holloway 2008) that stress prevented the “honeymoon period” described by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) certainly held true. Social adaptation did not feature as a main concern. Academic conduct, setting and results were a source of extreme stress in this group.

On arrival at The College, boys are put into sets for Division based on their examination results. As expected, Hong Kong boys from local schools scored highly in mathematics and sciences but performed less well in English and humanities subjects. The result of this was that they tended to be put into the lower sets including one which offered remedial English support. This came as a shock and was a source of humiliation as boys perceived that they were losing academic face (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009).

“At S (local Hong Kong school) I was in the top ten in English. Here I’m in the bottom div set but my grammar is better than theirs.”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Teachers recognised the phenomenon:

“They are the top boys at their schools. They come here and realise that they are one of many so lose confidence”

(House Master, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The uncertainty of how to act in class was one area of worry but the major preoccupation was with results. Setbacks in Division occurred early, particularly as written work was

returned. There was a clear gap between learning outcomes in junior boys from local schools. This was particularly apparent in English where Hong Kong students were used to focusing on presentation and grammar rather than critical analysis of a task:

Don: "You have too many annotations"

MP Boy: "But it is neat"

(MP Boy, observed in Division lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This pattern was also observed in discussion with junior boys (JP Boy, local school, in discussion 1<sup>st</sup> visit, JP Boy, local school, in discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). They felt that they were being marginalised because of their background (Stewart and Bennett 1991) rather than understanding that they were being supported as they learned the new expectations of a Western environment. One of the common themes was that boys felt that they lacked a clear understanding of expectations:

"We're just given work and we don't go through it in the lessons. At home, the teacher would tell us what to do first"

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

I did observe that this pattern was changing over the course of my three visits as a result of staff changes, more collaborative teaching practises and staff coming in from comprehensive schools.

### 5:30: Identification of Racial difference

I did not observe any direct racial slurs during my visits. On the whole, the boys were self-regulating, respectful of each other and aware of what constituted discrimination.

One grave misconception on the part of both the staff and other boys however was the perception that part of the assimilation process was the acceptance of "banter." Banter is a conversational form, a combination of light hearted mocking, criticism and back-chat. Initially, the sense of humour was a mystery to most of the Hong Kong boys I spoke to. Cantonese is a tonal language and a large proportion of jokes are dependent upon word puns and homophones.

“You kind of get the sense of humour after a while. Not when I came. You hear the phrase and generate the feeling about what they mean and how to react”

(MP Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Interestingly, the focus of this comment was less on the enjoyment and more on the decision of how respond.

One version of banter harnesses racial differences. Reactions as described by boys and by teachers were extremely different:

“They settle in and take a bit of banter about race”

(Language teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> trip)

Within a classroom environment, students from Hong Kong, a country with a high power distance in which relationships are defined by position and the aim is to maintain equilibrium (Hall 1976, Hall and Hall 1990, Hofstede 2003, Hofstede et al. 2010) would feel unable to respond to any teacher-lead comments. Within the house, the comments are interpreted as “teasing” which diminishes with familiarity:

“But after a while they don’t tease you any more”

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

There does appear to be a surface acceptance of other boys mimicking their accent as part of school life:

“Sometimes people make fun of the Chinese accent. Not to hurt, they think it’s normal”

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In line with the desire to maintain harmony, students would not retaliate. One evening, I spoke to a VB boy about his early experiences of The College:

VB Boy: “There was initial stereotyping. They’d try to speak in a Chinese voice.”

JOS: “What would happen if you spoke in their accent?”

VB Boy: “Never tried.”

(VB Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

However, this was not indicative of acceptance. This duality between surface and actual reaction was alluded to by one student but without detail:

VIBK1 Boy: "There are big differences in the way we react"

JOS: "Can you think of any examples?"

VIBK1 Boy: "Not really"

(VIBk1 Boy in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

As the majority of the Hong Kong boys joining the college speak English fluently, it is possible that other Western students are making incorrect assumptions that there is a shared cultural frame of reference which would lead to comments or behaviour being interpreted in identical ways by both groups (Paulston 1992).

### 5:31: Stereotypes

There was a clear recognition of the stereotypical image of Hong Kong students amongst the Hong Kong groups I spoke to and this formed a source of irritation. This was particularly evident in the lower years and amongst boys who had come from international schools in Hong Kong and were therefore reacting to a stereotype which was based on local school students which they felt did not reflect their skillsets (Yzerbyt et al 2002):

"You have to be good at everything and always play video games. The English don't know much about other continents. (They are) quite into their culture and think everyone should be the same."

(JP boy, international school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

On entering the school, the majority of boys from Western backgrounds and boys from Hong Kong local backgrounds are likely to have had minimal exposure to their respective cultures, leading to an easy formation of stereotypes (Eagly and Kite 1987, Zhang and Bond 1998). As contact develops, the importance of the stereotype reduces and new groups form (Thomas 1992). This process was a source of reflection amongst older boys with a focus on maths, hobbies (often computer gaming) and parental influence:

"They are good at gaming ...so are we"

(Western VB Boy, during classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

VB Boy: "They only focus on things to put on a CV"

VB Boy: "So do we, look at D of E" (the British Duke of Edinburgh scheme)

(Western VB Boys, during classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

"Not just Hong Kong parents" (who push)

(Western VB Boy, during classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Older students were more likely to reference stereotypes in discussion and use them jokingly. One Hong Kong student prefixed a conversation about his musical talent with:

"Contrary to popular belief, my family is very relaxed"

(VIBK2 Boy, in classroom discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In contrast, junior boys were likely to interpret behaviours as stereotypical and had negative responses as a result:

"They don't like it if you speak Chinese. There is a boy... sometimes I automatically speak Chinese... but they don't like it. Stereotypical. "

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The change in groupings was observed by a number of teachers who attributed it to the influence of the school:

"They forget about being Hong Kongers and become Collegers"

(Division teacher, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

### 5:32: Anger

The phenomenon of outbursts of anger from Hong Kong students was identified on a number of occasions both by staff and students. The outbursts appeared to be triggered by interaction with other students (teasing) and were normally unanticipated ("sudden" MP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

"They are the angriest in the house"

(Housemaster, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Hong Kong rage” (agreement from group)

(Western VB boy, in classroom discussion about the way different people behave in the house, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“You get to point of frustration and you can’t break into their circle”

(VIBK1 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Hypotheses for the outpourings of temper could be:

*In relation to other students:* Hong Kong students are trying to maintain collectivist harmony in a culture which operates as an individualist society. (Hofstede 1988, 2003, Hofstede et al. 2010). Within a collectivist society, all members work to maintain long term face and stability whereas in an individualist group, protagonists have little concern about maintaining face and would be expected to react to maintain their short term self-perception (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009). Additional to this, negative reaction to criticism by out-group members (initially non-Chinese) is more likely than in-group (Bond et al 1985). As Hong Kong students tend not to display their real reactions to the comments, this is interpreted as acceptance and the behaviour continues, building up resentment and leading to a breaking point.

*In relation to parental pressure:* some students appeared to experience a tension between parental involvement and the experience of their non-Chinese peers.

“They are definitely more free.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

As a result, Hong Kong students may experience high base stress levels with the result that apparently insignificant confrontations trigger disproportionate reactions.

5:23: Acculturation to or Rejection of the new environment



The students I observed could be defined by Anderson's four approaches to cultural adaptation: (1993)

Rejection: A minority of students will leave the school within the first year for various reasons related to an inability to adapt to the new environment.

Time servers: This group were a focus of concern but puzzlement:

"Some never adapt, is it their background?"

(Language teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Adjusters: This group segmented experiences, identifying strategies as they progressed:

"There are things to do here so you aren't bored; there are things to experience. You need to learn to deal with people because you live with them."

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Participators: This group had achieved a level of balance between schoolwork and the range of extra-curricular activities on offer. They used the latter to anchor their school relationships rather than relying just on the ethnic group:

"People here socialize more and together all the time. We meet after lunch and play football and socialize more."

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This final group demonstrated degrees of satisfaction and ethno relativity in which they saw the advantages of the new environment, centring mainly on the decreased amount of pressure and additional opportunities they experienced at The College:

"Changes the way you look at things. Before I came, just normal Hong Kong kid because in Hong Kong you work quite hard and get a lot of homework so maybe I have loosened up since I came."

(MP Boy, British prep school, in discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The removal of constant pressure to compete was a common theme. The main variation identified was that pressure in The College was intermittent:

“It’s quite competitive here but not as much as D (Hong Kong local school). In D people work hard and they’re always hard working.”

(JB Boy, local school, in conversation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The accepted perception of Hong Kong boys as being slavish workers was a source of discontent at every stage of the school:

“They say we are keen on studies but you should see the real thing at home!”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

On the whole, most boys felt that they worked less in than the British peers they had encountered with “they are more relaxed” being a common comment. (As an observation, whereas junior students of all nationalities may have taken a more relaxed approach to work, the senior students did not and tended to be working when I visited the boarding houses in the evenings. This perception may be a reflection of the belief in Hong Kong that hard work is a factor of time spent rather than quality of work (Gow et al 1996)). Another source of annoyance was the repeated mantra that Chinese students excelled at maths. Some students felt that this view was limiting:

“There is a view that Chinese are better at maths. To an extent that is true but there is a cultural gap between East and West...our work ethic. We work hard at everything... sciences”

(VB Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Amongst Hong Kong students, there was a clear belief that English students worked less:

“I thought it would be harder. People try harder in Hong Kong”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“And have a better work ethic”

(MP Boy, local school, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“They think that I practise (the violin) a lot. Because they don’t really practise that much, they think that an hour is already a lot. So they think I practise a lot. But in Hong Kong an hour is like nothing! ”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The College requires boys to handwrite most of their homework and therefore

“I work actually faster here because I can’t use a laptop so there is less distraction”

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Despite claiming that British students worked less, junior students interpreted stereotypical comments as negative:

“They say “oh you’re Hong Kong, you should be good at...” Really annoying I find English people really racist.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

A third view was that this perception was contrary to evidence.

“They are good at maths too. They forget we all did the same entrance exam”

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This view was coupled with an observation that standards at The College were unexpectedly high:

“Maths is harder here ... didn’t expect that”

(JP Boy, international school, in discussion 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“One of the surprising things is that maths is really hard. In the top set it is really difficult. Everyone told me that maths would be easy here!”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“I was in the second best set in Hong Kong but G set here... bit surprising. Strange.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The perception was explained from a teaching perspective:

“The Chinese counting system sets them a year ahead. The general population is better therefore the top end is better... explains the myth”

(Maths teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

#### 5:24: Cultural Defence/Minimisation

I did not see any indication that Hong Kong students passed through Bennett's (1993) defence stage in which own culture is minimised. One possible explanation for this could be that Hong Kong boys exert pressure on each other if they perceive that they are "losing Chineseness". This trend has also been observed by other researchers (Berry and Williams 2004) who encountered similar patterns of behaviour and comments:

"We had a bit of a problem with Chinese racism ... (the group) called one boy a "banana"!"

(This pejorative is applied usually by Chinese to Chinese and implies that the accused is not reacting in a "Chinese" way: the skin is Chinese but the inside is Western)

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

"... only racism I have ever encountered has been Chinese/Chinese"

(Division teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

In some cases, the collectivist tendency for lower school Hong Kong boys to group together based on shared experiences and values (Triandis 1995) was perceived as a threat to unity, highlighting the difference between the group and the rest of the school

"There was a large group in Z House, colonizing the basketball pitch"

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

#### 5:25: Sojourners?

The majority of boys I spoke to indicated that they would return to Hong Kong after university. I did not encounter anyone who intended to make their home in the United Kingdom as a result of their overseas studies. They adapted during their time at the school but did not want to become British and reacted negatively to any indications that they had somehow lost their Chinese nationality.

“Immigration pointed out that I was technically a British citizen. I was gutted”  
(VIBK2 boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“When I go home, my friends say that I’m not Chinese any more. It really bothers me”  
(VIBk2 boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Both of these boys had attended British preparatory schools prior to joining The College, hence the comment about being eligible for British citizenship. Based on my observation, this boy seemed to have acquired high degrees of BII and was able to explain his experiences in Hong Kong from both his original and new perspective (Benet-Martinez et al (2002) and Cheng et al (2006)) although his comments would indicate that they have acquired habits which differentiate between him and his Hong Kong friends. The changes which take place during a sojourn brought about alterations which were not obvious in the school, during which the students were surrounded by mixed groups, but became evident when they returned to Hong Kong and associated with peers who had not left the territory, (Shaules 2007).

#### 5:26: Enthusiasm about new experiences

Many of the positive reactions to The College were related to the contrast between the control and pressure of Hong Kong life and the independence of the school environment. The College does not make extra-curricular activities compulsory, including participation in music and drama outside house competitions. There were two clear approaches to this regime:

“I have a piano at home, here I have the choice so I do practice. I had too much to do in Hong Kong, so I never touched it”  
(VB Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“It’s a different way of playing. In Hong Kong when we play we aren’t allowed to play wrong notes but here they tell me to just relax and when I play a wrong note not to worry. My style of playing has changed a lot to when I was in Hong Kong.”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

One of the consequences of self-selected activities is a rejection of non-voluntary activities.

“They join up and stop playing because their parents are making them”

(House tutor, in conversation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“Made to practice... want to come here because there is less pressure. They get here and stop practising....Tricky balance”

(Division teacher, in conversation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This is particularly interesting as it does confront the perception that Hong Kong students do not have freedom of choice (Marginson and Sawir 2011). What it does illustrate that is the focus of parental control shifts once students have a place in the school. In some cases, music is seen as a pre-requisite for entry to overseas schools. Students recognised that control had been handed over to them to a certain extent (Vinther 2010):

“When I was living with parents I worked harder because my parents had different boundaries. The regime of work, is a similar kind of routine here but different. Now I have to be self motivated, I can do it or not.”

(MP Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

From a teacher’s perspective, Hong Kong students had an advantage over other students as their background had provided them with a positive attitude to work. The theme of self-motivation is echoed.

“They have the benefit of the Confucian work ethic but need to make their own personal motivation”

(House Master, in conversation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

However, as we will examine later, parental involvement for the majority of Hong Kong students continued at The College and in many cases the need for self-motivation was removed as parents managed work habits from a distance.

One of the greatest benefits mentioned was the positive study environment which The College represented compared to Hong Kong local schools:

“Hong Kong care (sic) about exams and tests more. If you fail here, they (British students) don’t feel bad or sad. I remember people being really sad because they’d got lower marks than expected.”

(MP Boy, local school, in a lunchtime discussion about the difference between Hong Kong and British schools, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

My observation was that the focus of teacher feedback was on participation and achievement of potential rather than grades.

“Ignore each other’s marks and ask yourself if you did your best.”

(JP Division teacher, in class, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“I know that you have worked on this, it shows a marked improvement and that is what I am after”

(JP Division teacher, in class, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

As students progressed through the school, they appeared to acquire a clear grasp of the expectations of the school. Boys from Hong Kong local schools demonstrated changing classroom behaviours after the first term and continued changing as they progressed through the school so, by Sixth form, the majority were participating in class.

#### 5:27: Acculturation – interim summary

The main factor affecting acculturation rates is the previous educational background of the students. Students from Hong Kong local schools were more likely to value exam results and be unclear about classroom behavioural expectations than boys from Hong Kong international schools. Boys who had attended British prep schools prior to joining The College had already established the rules of engagement within a Western educational setting and had experienced boarding life. As a result, this latter group acculturated quickly to their new environment but, in the upper years, were more concerned that they were losing their “Chineseness.” Social difference was less of an issue than academic difference

and, during the lower years, students were more likely to subscribe to stereotypes about the cultures they were encountering. With familiarity, these initial perceptions diminished and students demonstrated an awareness of similarity rather than difference.

#### 5:28: Parental Expectations and involvement

Within collectivist cultures, parental and family involvement in educational choices is common (Lee 1994, Triandis 1994, 1995, Pimpa 2004). The involvement manifests at every stage of the educational process.

#### 5:29: Decision making

Based on my experience of running Brandon Learning Centre, the vast majority of Hong Kong Chinese parents with academically strong children select schools based on rankings, and academic results with feedback from other Hong Kong parents being sought to confirm choices.

“My mom decided (on The College) by looking at the list of schools in England and the percentage of A\*’s.”

(JP boy, international school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“Very focused, it is a family effort to get into The College and Oxbridge.”

(House Master, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The decision making process is often not shared with students who may also have their own reasons for wanting to leave Hong Kong (commonly mentioned reasons include: Hong Kong’s teaching style, emphasis on exams and friends leaving for overseas schools):

“My father did choose a few. I don’t know why but my father thinks The College is the best and I don’t like the way of teaching in Hong Kong.”

(JP boy, local school, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)



A negative effect of this process is that boys trust in their parents to make good decisions (Pimpa 2004) and do not therefore display the critical engagement which House Masters seek in interviews. During one house lunch, a party from Hong Kong had just left, leading to a discussion about the behaviour of some of the Hong Kong candidates.

“Some of them don’t seem to know anything about the school; they just say “my parents chose it”.”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

However, younger students did seem to be aware of the broad reasons behind pursuing a British education and identified The College with being able to fulfil their criteria (Walford 2011).

“I came here for the good academics (sic) and for the environment. There is sport which helps me to have a healthy body. And the class sizes are smaller, you can’t just daydream. In Hong Kong there were forty five boys in my class so some of them just slept. You can’t do that here, they keep asking you questions!”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Some older students were aware of different elements which had contributed to their family’s decision for them to come to The College (and possibly more cynical!)

“There is definitely a social glory. When I in Hong Kong, I tell people that I study in the UK and everyone says “oh really?” (admiring voice).”

VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> trip

### 5:30: Results orientation and replication of Hong Kong work habits

In Hong Kong local schools, test results and school rankings are posted in a place where all can see. The College does not release exam results and I observed teachers encouraging boys to focus on their own work. Hong Kong parents have created a local network in which

they share information on test results creating competition between Hong Kong students (Lee and Koro-Ljungberg 2007):

“Parents all meet in Hong Kong and discuss grades”

(MP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“All Chinese know the other Chinese’ marks”

(VB Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Interestingly, this competition does not seem to extend to Western students’ marks and the competitive focus in all my discussions centred on Hong Kong students as a discrete group. I asked one boy whether competition with other Hong Kong students was something which featured in his life.

“Of course, there is also an element of competition built into our (Hong Kong students) subconscious”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

### 5:31: School reactions to parental involvement

Teacher reaction to parental involvement varied depending on the domains of engagement. There was a recognition that Hong Kong parents were likely to be extremely engaged:

“To generalize, few English parents are very worried (about results), most Chinese are. Clearer roles – mother engages and the father talks about golf/business”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

There was also an acceptance that the gap between aspiration and reality was likely to create problems:

“I dread having to tell a Chinese boy he won’t get to Oxbridge because of GCSE results”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Teachers did seem to question whether students were concerned about their own goals or those of their parents. Within a collectivist society, there is often differentiation between the two (Hofstede 1988, 2003, Hofstede et al. 2010) and parental involvement is part of an ongoing discussion with the student rather than being unilateral (Phillipson 2007). This lack of clarity was recognised by some teachers:

“(The exam) hadn’t gone the way X (JP boy) planned and he was very upset. Not sure if for him or for his mother.”

(JP Division teacher, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

During the time of my first visit, a number of Division sets had been reading Amy Chua’s *Tiger Mother* novel. The book details her parental philosophy which can be summarised as driven: ensuring that her American born Chinese children passed examinations, and practised their musical instruments. As a result of this, the topic of parental involvement was very much under discussion. Specifically, the book brought Chinese parental involvement into focus. Hong Kong students rarely challenged the validity of parental engagement but rather its application to the entire group:

“Most Hong Kong parents are more like the Western parents you see but the boys who come here have parents that kind (Tiger Mother.) Even more don’t care, more like Westerners.”

(VB Boy, classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Interesting is his assumption that Western parents do not care about results based on his three years spent at The College.

During another discussion, the boys touched on the cultural gap between exam achievement and artistic talent. As this group had been at The College between two to three years, their reflections were clearly coloured by feedback from teachers indicating a transfer of values (Bourdieu 1984).

“All the boys here, their parents are pushy. Music especially... like automatons”

“Yes, lots here are Grade 8 (music examination) but teachers say they are not as good as the boys who don’t take grades”

(Hong Kong VB Boys, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The cultural dissonance between individual and group decision, interpretation of actions and communication was a source of concern in a number of areas:

5:32.1: Students not pursuing areas in which they had demonstrated ability.

“Parents moving the promising boys out (of languages) so they can take science etc. instead”

(Language teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Parents don’t want them to take another language and reduce their average “

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

5:31.2: Students not being allowed to pursue their (often artistic) interests:

“One boy was under pressure from his parents. He wanted to study history of art but they thought he should be doing science. They were almost mocking him”

(Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This scenario is an example of the dominance of collectivist rather than individual aspirations but is also an illustration of the acceptance of more direct communication styles and insults from members with higher status within the group (Ho 1996, Zhang and Bond 1998). Interestingly, in the following example, the boys’ parents are not the only factor in the decision making process, the rest of the Hong Kong parents are also involved indicating that a group has formed with responsibility for mutual success.

“I had one boy who wants to study art. The other parents were telling his mother that was the wrong decision. He should be studying maths”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

### 5:31.3: Decision making outside the school

Teachers and University guidance counsellors were aware that Hong Kong students were more influenced by external advice than internal when it comes to choosing subjects and applications (in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“Some take biology for interest, most for medicine. It’s not their own choice, often the father or mother are medics”

(Biology teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“X (VIBk1 Boy) is going to study medicine. Both his parents are medics and he doesn’t seem to have a say in the process.”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

During classroom discussions (in class teaching, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> trip, VIBk1 and VIBk2) about the role of responsibilities within collectivist societies, Western students demonstrated a degree of sympathy towards what they perceived to be “unfair” (in class discussion, VIBk1, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). Hong Kong speakers tended to be more pragmatic about the process:

“My parents are doctors, so when I was little I was given books about anatomy... no choice”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Interestingly, during mixed group discussions, Hong Kong students were likely to demonstrate more individualist opinions about decision making whereas, in groups with Hong Kong students or individually, they reflected more collectivist views (Triandis et al 1998):

“My cousin came over and without my aunt’s pressure, didn’t push herself and ended up failing. Not a successful approach in the long run.”

(VB Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

#### 5:31.4: Preplanning and using connections

The contrast between the pre-planning and engagement of Hong Kong parents and their own experience and values (Bourdieu 1976, Brown and Szeman 2000) created an obvious source of concern for some teachers:

“Frightening... all planned... undergrad at Oxford and post in US”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Others observed the group in action with a detached fascination.

“Parents do the research about what qualities universities are looking for and look for contacts and networks. I watched them with the representative from X – the father came over, it was a family effort.”

(Administrative staff, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

#### 5:32 Parental involvement – interim summary

Parents form a network outside the school which allows them to gather information about The College and academic paths which may be suitable for their children. Parents and students maintain a close connection when the boys join The College. This connection affects how students perceive courses, the choice of which subjects to study and the boys’ eventual university destinations. The decisions about which educational path to follow are taken early and may not necessarily be communicated with the school which sometimes creates the perception on the part of teachers and other students that Hong Kong boys are not operating of their own volition. Boys do not appear to reject parental involvement and, in general, demonstrate a positive attitude to the support which it provides. On one level, this is demonstrated by boys asking parents to book tutorial lessons on their behalf, on another level it manifests in a general acceptance that parents will make decisions about careers and further studies.

### 5:33: The College Effect: the role of the school structure and environment

This section includes an exploration of the effect of the physical, hierarchical and social structure of the school upon students.

### 5:34: The College Hierarchy

The College has a very clear hierarchy with a distinct distance between Headmaster and students and Second Masters acting as intermediaries. During discussions of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and related research with VIBk1 and VIBk2 boys, the consensus was that the school was an example of an organisation with high power distance (Hofstede 2003, Hofstede, Hofstede et al. 2010). The reaction to this situation varied along collectivist and individualist lines:

"You have to have someone who is clearly in charge"

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

"He's (the Head) too remote"

(Western VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The power distance within the classroom was maintained in terms of the outward behavioural patterns I observed (standing up when a teacher entered the room, referring to teachers as "Sir") but boys and teachers operated on equal terms intellectually.

"We can challenge in class but not be cheeky"

(JP Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

"We argue, that's what we do"

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Across the curriculum but more frequently during division lesson, teachers demonstrated confidence in handing over teaching to the class (observation, division lessons, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> visits). Boys vied with each other to demonstrate subject knowledge, insight and to challenge teachers if they felt that their interpretation was inaccurate (observation, 1<sup>st</sup> and

2<sup>nd</sup> visits, Division lesson). This pattern was also observed in upper school science and mathematics lessons (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> visits). Within the outwardly highly structured and traditional classroom environment, the teacher maintains a leading role yet intellectual equality exists. On the surface, this does appear to be in contradiction with the Hong Kong perception of the teacher as a master whose role is to communicate knowledge to students (Lee 1996, Watkins 2000, Watkins and Biggs 2001, Welikala and Watkins 2008) yet, even in the lower school, the boys did not confuse teaching style with lack of knowledge:

“If the teacher is good, there is a lot of respect for them”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

One possible explanation for this is that teachers’ reputations and qualifications are discussed both within the school and by existing students in Hong Kong and therefore intellectual respect is created early on in the boys’ school careers.

### 5:35: Physical appearance

The College does not have a uniform as such. The only boys who are marked out are members of the scholar’s house who wear academic gowns. This distinction reflects the school view that being a member of this group (based on passing challenging scholarship exams) is a privilege which should be recognised:

“The scholars live together but are taught with all the other boys and are generally credited with raising academic standards amongst their peers.”

(Mathematics teacher, in discussion in common room, 1<sup>st</sup> visit in response to a question about the composition of his maths set)

Boys wear suits or formal jackets and either a tie or bowtie and there is little conformity. During my three visits, guidelines on dress became more rigorously enforced. However, these applied more to standards (such as having shirts tucked in) rather than dictating type (so boys would regularly wear odd socks) representing another illustration of the combination of the collective and individual expression. On the whole, Hong Kong boys



were smartly dressed, a trend which continued throughout the school whereas Western boys were more likely to be wearing clothes which appeared to be old. One superficial difference manifested during the winter during which Hong Kong students were more likely to be observed carrying umbrellas or wearing overcoats and scarves. Other students made few concessions to the weather. A flippancy comment from one boy when asked why he thought the other students were not wearing overcoats was:

“They (the other students) are insane. It is freezing here. I’m not sure what they are trying to prove but why bother?”

(VIBk2 Boy, in conversation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Winter marked the only period of the year during which there was a difference in appearance between Hong Kong and other students.

#### 5:36: The Role of the House in the acculturation process

The power structure of the boarding house is clear: at the top is the House Master followed by House Tutors and the Matron. The structure is hierarchical and Hong Kong boys, used to high power distances, did not appear to experience any problems adjusting unlike some of the Western boys I talked to who were struggling with a new House Master whose regime was markedly more authoritarian than that of his predecessor (Hofstede, Hofstede et al. 2010). Until recently, senior boys had the powers to dictate to younger boys. Boys from local Hong Kong schools are familiar with prefects from school, boys from Hong Kong international schools had adapted to a lower power distance and also found the hierarchy of peers strange:

“You have to get adjusted to the idea of respect for upper years. I had friends in upper years in Hong Kong but didn’t respect them.”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This struggle with senior boys’ authority was not unique to Hong Kong boys from international schools but was also echoed by boys from British schools who were used to a less hierarchical environment. These concerns had been reflected by House Masters with

the result that institutionalised senior privilege had been largely dismantled and was being replaced by a more equitable system:

“The decision was made by the new Housemasters of a particular generation, in their 40s and reflects the attitude of the generation. Not comfortable with the negative aspect of sen (sic) order which is a system of privilege based on age. Also I suspect that the younger boys were beginning to resist because their prep schools have become less hierarchical. They come as senior boys from prep schools and resist being at the bottom of the pile in terms of being treated in a way which they perceived to be unkindly. The old sen order is gone... although we do have to have something to some extent. The Housemasters run a system of delegation and have to have some system of responsibility. But it doesn't bring with it the privileges of the old sen order.”

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

Interestingly, boys from Hong Kong local schools accepted that there would be a power distance between them and the older boys and did not question it in discussion. This phenomenon does indicate the difference and similarities between boys from different educational backgrounds irrespective of nationality.

Each Commoner house has approximately between 12 – 14 boys per year group. The size of the intake means that any one overseas group can easily dominate and influence the house culture. With two exceptions, where Hong Kong groups have historically dominated, House Masters attempt to create a balance between overseas and local students and encourage involvement in extra-curricular activities.

“The House system works ... only 12 boys so they will be into everything.”

(House Master, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The House becomes the first circle of relationships within the school, offering a collectivist system of behaviour which is immediately familiar to Hong Kong students: “In the houses, pupils' relationships within and across age groups are excellent, and between pupils and staff they are warm, friendly, caring and supportive.” (ISC 2013: 3.9).

The deeper values of the school are not communicated directly to the boys and the houses (with one exception) operate as high-context cultures (Hall 1976, Hall and Hall 1990) transmitting values which are shared across the school but are not explicit. One example of this is Précis (evening assembly), which I attended on multiple occasions in different houses. The format for each house was different: in one house a poem was read followed by a brief commentary on the themes contained therein, another house had a pray which reflected the theme of caring for the weak and a third house had a joke punctuated story based on the Don's experiences at school. In each case, there was an underlying implicit message which matched the ethos of the school (intellectual engagement, caring ethos and manners) and the boys appeared to be receptive; they may not have been had the messages been more overt. Junior boys from high context cultures seemed to be aware of the deeper values which were being communicated;

"I think that they (the Dons) tell us about how to live and give us guidance."

(MP Boy, in discussion walking to the House, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Within the house, friendships are inter-generational and are based on creating a mutual support system:

"(There is a) different kind of friendship in the house."

(VB Boy, in discussion in house, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The house group creates an in-group which both competes in inter-house activities and endorses the participation of members in school events:

"We came to support the boys from the house."

(MP Boy, in discussion before the Greek play, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

"I didn't understand a word but X was in it."

(VB Boy in discussion after the French play, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

"Telling you about this event because one of us is in it."

(House Master, Précis in House, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Another effect of the in-group is that boys share skillsets: Hong Kong students helped with science and Western students offered advice on French homework (observed in House, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit).

“They make the other boys lift their game. They may not affect the whole group but they’re certainly a major impact on their friends. Even X (Western Boy) managed to try”

(House Master, in relation to a question about how the boys influence each other.

This was triggered after the House Master told one (French) boy not to think that he didn’t realise that a Hong Kong student was doing his maths homework. The discussion took place during an evening visit to the House, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Junior students were more likely to mention the difference between their own house (in-group) and students of other houses (out-groups) (Singer 1998).

“The boys in our house are really friendly but when I go to F (another house) they aren’t kind to me. Particularly the boys in the second and third years. I don’t know why. Maybe because I am from another house. It doesn’t happen in class, just in the evenings.”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This identification of difference is not prevalent in conversations with older students who were often with members of other houses. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the Junior boys have yet to form strong relationships outside the house are therefore focusing on identifying difference rather than similarity with other groups.

Due to the structure of the boarding environment, the boys have the chance to interact with teachers outside the classroom which allows them to adjust to the values and intellectual expectations of The College. In the junior year my observation was that the staff joining the boys at lunch worked hard to include all the boys in discussion and Hong Kong boys were observed to be quieter than their Western peers (1<sup>st</sup> visit, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). I asked one boy why he hadn’t joined in the conversation about an upcoming holiday:

“I get tired speaking English all the time. Sometimes I just want to rest.”

(JP Boy, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

In the upper years, boys initiated topics of discussion and were more likely to challenge the teachers on their perspectives during lunch. I observed an animated discussion about the relative merits of introducing examinations for Division (previously unexamined) during which the teacher was roundly accused of being brainwashed by the school administration!

“I like the fact that they eat alongside us at lunch and enjoy mental sparring with them.”

(VIBk2 boy, in conversation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

As a visitor, I was impressed by the way that the majority of boys were willing to engage with me at lunchtime. Observing the house during lunch at different times, I noted that the teachers present made efforts to engage all boys and the tables, seated by year group, were not racially divided in the way that classrooms sometimes were.

### 5:37: The Curriculum

The College has developed a unique curriculum which ensures that, in addition to their exam courses, all boys study a non-examined broad humanities subject throughout their school career.

#### 5:37.1: Breadth

The cultural breadth which boys develop as they progress through the school is created by Division lessons. Division is a compulsory, non-examined, (currently although this was a topic of hot debate during my third visit), liberal arts subject which is at the core of the curriculum. Lessons are normally discussion based with students producing written work outside class. Typically these tasks include close analysis of a text, essays or reflections. Attention is paid to both form and content. In the lower school, lessons are more prescriptive as boys head towards IGCSE examinations and the school seeks to create a foundation of knowledge. Division lessons in the lower school encompass English language, literature and history. The former is examined at IGCSE, the other two subjects are not. It is in the Sixth form that the real scope of Division is explored and Div Dons are not bound to

follow any set curriculum. However, at every stage boys are required to select and perform poems as part of a Speech Competition and to present a piece of art as part of the annual intra-school competition. Although I did encounter music being incorporated into Division lessons (as background inspiration, presentations on musical importance and as a way of identifying key developmental moments in the style of *Desert Island Discs*), literature, philosophy, art and history form the keystones of the curriculum.

Examples of lessons included:

Topics during the lesson ranging from: Romanticism as a reaction against the Enlightenment period, the definition of a folly and a discussion about why they had been built, the Palace of Westminster fire of 1834, Sturm und Drang. Vocabulary used during the lesson including epiphany-sublime-visceral-irrational.

(VB Division lesson, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

A discussion of David Hare's novel Racing Demon.

(VB Division lesson, classroom observation 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Analysis of the inventory of Titchfield Abbey based on contemporary documentation with students being asked to analyse monastic life from their interpretation of the primary source materials provided.

(JP Division lesson, classroom observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Discussion of Dante in Italian vs English based on the sound of language. None of the students spoke Italian but attempted to decipher the text based on having studied Latin, French, and in some cases Spanish. This was followed by a discussion about the implications of word choice in translations.

(VIBk1 Division lesson, classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

A lesson based on Umberto Eco's Name of the Rose. The class had been reading the novel together and had visited the College archives where they had looked at documents which were contemporaneous with the period described in the book.

The lesson I attended involved reading a description of a Cathedral in the novel and

attempting to draw the arch described therein. Students were already familiar with some architectural terms (such as “pediment”) from other classes.

(VIBk1 Division lesson, classroom observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Topics ranging from: Barbarossa, 12th century links to 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, East Germany, the Battle of Frankenhausen, Goethe’s novels.

(VB Division lesson, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The scope of a Division lesson relies on two things: the knowledge of the teacher and the participation of the students. In terms of teaching style, although knowledge is transmitted, the teacher is more of a facilitator for discussion rather than a lecturer. The teachers approach their task with enthusiasm and the amount of research which they carry out in order to prepare is evident in the lessons: “It was my College experience which gave me the assurance that teachers can be found to engage in such a course (Division) with enthusiasm, even if they are not themselves historians or students of literature.” (Thorn 1989:183). Within the context of the classes, the boys are expected and encouraged to challenge the teacher who does not take the role of expert:

“Good question, I am not entirely sure, what do you think?

(UVIBk1 Division teacher, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This approach to shared learning is, on the surface diametrically opposed to the traditional role of a teacher in Hong Kong as a transmitter of knowledge (Gao 2008, Feng 2009, Feng and Fleming 2009, Jin and Cortazzi 2011).

Ideas coming from class – not given by the teacher

(MP Division, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Div is about doing”

(VIBk1 Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“There is an ideological trap here, bear this in mind and shout if you think I am falling into it”

(VB Division teacher, classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

(Division is) "...about participation not lecturing"

(JP Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

(Division is) "About pursuing the fruitful red herring"

(VB Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

However, in order to achieve the above goals, the Division teacher clearly has to master a wide range of materials and master discussion based teaching techniques in order to be effective. Although the teachers played this aspect down to a greater extent, the quality of their knowledge was a topic of discussion amongst boys. Teachers with PhD qualifications were singled out for praise as were those who had published books or poetry.

"He's pretty much a genius. The Government talks to him"

(MP Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

"The dons seem to have taken an almost monastic commitment to a 'life of learning'.

They are smartly presented and not at all stuffy and are on friendly terms with us"

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Overall, teaching quality was compared favourably to that experienced in Hong Kong:

"At my school... it wasn't great... the teachers were basically teaching from the internet.

Here they really push you."

(UVIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The subject of Division as a compulsory course did engender a mixed reaction. Without examinations in the final two years, some students felt that it offered breadth, others that it was a time to shut down.

"Friends at home only study exam subjects but I feel as though I am learning more "

(VB Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

"Div is a chance to switch off. I can't help myself"



(VKBk2 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

“It is an escape from the exam machine”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

During one class which I taught, one boy was clearly falling asleep. The other boys carried on a boisterous discussion over his head:

“Ignore him, he is always like that. He stays up all night reading.”

(UVIBk2 Boy, after class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

I was upset by the incident but the boys assured me that this was standard practice and, given the degree of their engagement, I felt that the lesson had been a success. I did speak to other teachers in Common Room about this experience and they hastened to assure me that the boy did the same in their lessons. This was the only example of obvious opting out of lessons and it did not appear to be related to a specific subject. On the whole, although they were extremely enthusiastic about the subject, teachers were aware that some boys had a negative attitude towards division. Following one lesson during which two Hong Kong boys were clearly detached from the rest of the class, leaning back in their chairs and opting out of the discussion, one teacher commented:

“They don’t see the point of a non-examined humanities topic”

(VIBk1 Teacher, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

I did, however, observe that the same two boys became extremely animated when I took their class the following week and we discussed Hofstede’s dimensions. Their engagement was such that they offered illustrations from both Hong Kong and Macau and later caught up with me to continue the discussion. One boy’s comment was:

“Interesting... explains a lot about life here. Div isn’t really that interesting to me. It is just talk”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

I asked the Hong Kong students about their apparent lack of interest in the previous lesson to which one of them explained:

“You have to be in the mood for it! Depends on the topic. Sometimes it is really interesting but you couldn’t say that of every lesson.”

(UVIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The majority of teachers were positive about the effect that division had on their students, a minority were cynical:

“They may be more cultured comparatively. One of the best div boys I ever had was from Hong Kong but that was an unusual case”

(Division teacher, in discussion after lesson, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In line with the fluidity of the curriculum, teachers were not only committed to developing knowledge in their own subject area:

“I can teach better if I can explain the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but that doesn’t mean I am a historian”

(Music teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Really, we have a commitment across disciplines”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“I like maths as it is a field in which I can apply reason but that approach is not just restricted to maths”

(VIBk2 Division teacher, in classroom discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Teachers were very clear about what they saw to be the purpose of education and the value of developing cultural capital(Bourdieu 1984). They were protective of the ethos of the classroom. Some felt that the process of critical engagement was why parents chose the school:

“We take a group with a lower average IQ than X (British school) yet get more into Oxbridge. Why? They are not just accepting information and that is why Chinese parents send them here”

(Mathematics teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Parents want the children to open up – that is why they come”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> trip)

The process of education was not always the focus with the boys I spoke to who highlighted their end goals rather than the acquisition of a broader view:

“I am here to get into a good university”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“Mainly came (to the College) for uni”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion in relation to my questions about the reasons behind their decision to come to The College, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

However, these comments may have been because the boys were reaching the end of their time at the school and their focus was on university applications. This may also indicate that the boys were experiencing the final stage of sojourners during which they are disengaging from their host culture in preparation for a return to their homelands (Shaules 2007, Ting-Toomey, 2005). Although the college achieves the boys’ aim, the teaching process also results in an altered perception of the role of education. The boys have adapted to and adopted the school’s philosophy of intellectual breadth without necessarily losing the value of passing examinations.

“The purpose of education isn’t just about passing exams. I used to think it was”

(VIBk1 Boy, in classroom discussion about the role of education, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Their educational experience at The College has been additive and they have not been required to sacrifice their values in order to be part of the school.

### 5:38: Blurred boundaries

The boundaries between discrete areas of school life, physical fabric of the school and curriculum are blurred. Teachers constantly reference with school buildings or school experiences when teaching, which forms connections between past and present and brings a familiarity to topics which may be culturally alien to Hong Kong students:

(Discussing the Armada prayer) “You could hear it in chapel...”

(Division teacher, classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

(Discussing a poem as part of National Poetry Week “... descant voices ... like you hear in chapel.”

(Division teacher, classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

After studying a historical novel, one division lesson took place in the school archives which have artefacts and documents from the foundation of the College. The boys had been studying Umberto Eco’s medieval novel *The Name of the Rose* and the teacher made a point of drawing connections between the setting of the text and the artefacts being shown, particularly the record keeping of the time.

(Classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

(Discussing the structure of a Roman villa)

“Go and walk through the cloisters, the theory of using outside space to reflect is the same.”

(Latin teacher, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“We tried to bring the buildings into JP Div (Division) through sub-elements called “*The College and the world we live in*”. It has been included in the new div plan. We want to be more systematic but don’t want to overdo it. It needs to be used as a supplement for other things for example, a section on Gothic architecture.”

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

One group had visited the school museum and were discussing their reactions to the objects they had seen. The museum houses an extensive collection of Chinese artefacts and there appeared to be a division between Hong Kong students admiring Western objects and Western students admiring the unfamiliar Chinese objects.

(Classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The inclusion of the fabric of the school in Division lessons was deliberate in the lower school but appeared to be habitual throughout the remainder of school. During my fourth visit, I attended the rehearsal of a two-man play which highlighted the wartime relationship between Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and was to be held in the War Cloisters. As the rehearsal unfolded, boys were walking through the Cloisters on their way to lessons. Some stopped to listen. The play explores the poets' views on war and the War Cloisters are decorated with the names of previous students who have been killed in wars dating from the mid-nineteenth century. The connection between the play and the environment was commented upon by two groups of passing boys indicating that they are accustomed to seeing connections between literature and their surroundings.

Boundaries between subjects are also porous both in terms of cultural references and classroom decoration. Classrooms are decorated by the incumbent teacher and tended to encompass art, cultural references in language classrooms and information posters.

Examples included:

Boys looking at and discussing a poster about Mathematical discoveries and Golden Ratios in the Latin classroom.

(Classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Chinese Go (chess) and classical chess sets laid out in the library.

(Library observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Chinese characters on walls of non-language classrooms.

(Classroom observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

I observed a number of Division classes during which students were watching and discussing sections of Kenneth Clark's television series, *Civilisation*, which does serve to explain the boys' familiarity with classical references. Interestingly, teachers used minimal popular cultural references and television was rarely mentioned, possibly because it does not play a major role in the boys' lives. One of the consequences of this is that there is less cultural exclusion of non-British based students. Although less familiar with the Western literary

cannon, boys from Hong Kong local schools which often have Christian affiliations and active out of school Bible study groups, do have an advantage when the Bible is being discussed:

“Dangerous is when Western boys think they know the Bible. A number of Chinese boys are from the evangelical tradition – (they are) used to asking and being taught”  
(JP Division teacher, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

During all three visits, I identified a constant thread of cultural reference running through each lesson including constant reference to classical philosophers, history and literature which reinforced the connections between the cultural aspirations of the school and other areas of the curriculum. Examples included:

References to Aristotle and the Louisiana legislation.  
(VIBk1 Maths lesson, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Reference to Galileo.  
(VB Physics lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

References to Copernicus and Galileo.  
(VIBk1 Economics lesson, classroom observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

References to Erasmus and Darwin.  
(VB Biology lesson, classroom observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

References to Herodotus.  
(VB Geography lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Discussion of peripatetic philosophers including: Aristotle and Jesus. This was triggered by a question about the meaning of the word “peripatetic”.  
(VB Music lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Discussion of Latin derivation of names based on a question about Polaris.  
(MP Geography lesson, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

During a literature lesson, I was intrigued by the number of boys who had read Dickens based on a quick question from the teacher. Both Hong Kong and Western students had read at least one of his texts:

Boys arriving from selective prep schools tended to have a knowledge of literary texts... most had read more than one novel by Dickens.

(observation, JP Division lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“I am sometimes amazed at what boys have read or encountered before coming to us.”

(JP Division teacher, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This could possibly be as a result of sitting the school entrance examinations. The English paper consists of prose and poetry comprehensions and an essay. The prose is usually fiction and nineteenth century texts are frequently used. As a result, most preparatory schools or classes will introduce nineteenth century authors. The use of non-subject specific references appeared to increase dramatically after the first two years. Boys come from diverse backgrounds and, in the first year, teachers focus on creating a cultural base without making assumptions about prior knowledge.

“They are told it is about discussion but it isn’t in the lower school, much more structured.”

(JP Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

This is a deliberate policy on the school’s part with the explicit goal of developing a learning style:

Our students are not competing to beat others in exams. Schools are forced to adopt this approach through league tables. That kind of competition is anti-intellectual and undermines our purpose. We want the boys to be learners because it is a good thing... they develop a hunger and become aware of the need to learn. This is true of the school, and as the boys come into VIBk, they begin to understand. They are

reaching maturity. If they understood when they arrived, they would be bored with the place

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

### 5:39: Third Space

Although the majority of topics I observed were rooted in the Western Canon, Division lessons provided an opportunity for students to explore world literature, art and philosophies and approach them all as equally valid. As students progressed through the school, the lessons that I observed reflected more of the shared school values (Thomas 1992) than individual cultural traits, reflecting the formation of a new cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1990, 2004) which recognizes the value of all cultural backgrounds and avoidance the dominance of any one perspective.

Within the context of presenting a piece of art or architecture for the Kenneth Clark Prize (an in-school competition) I observed discussions in MP, VB, VIBk1 and VIBk2 Division classes of: Yu Min Ju (Taiwanese sculptor) the Eden Project, Guernica, the Sydney Opera House, the Mapa Mundi, the Spirit of the Dead Keep Watch, the Tower of the Juc Idea (North Korea), Tracy Emin's *People I have Slept With*, Raphaels' *The School at Athens* and the Dubai building known as the Burj el Arab. Students had chosen the topics themselves and the origin of the piece bore no connection with the ethnic origin of the speakers. All pieces were discussed with an understanding that they engendered a local reaction and an international reaction but would be assessed without reference to national preferences (Feng 2009, Richardson 2009).

The process of forming cultural links and sharing knowledge began early:

Don: "What do the psalms look like?"

JP Boy: "Chinese poems"

(JP Boy, Division lesson, classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

As part of a discussion on the ethical implications of stem cell development, a British student provided definitions and scientific background and a Hong Kong student



shared insight into China's stem cell development and the ways in which Hong Kong families are using the various treatments.

(MP Division lesson, classroom observation 1st visit)

(During a discussion about transubstantiation and the reformation)

VIBk1 Boy: "The middle way? That is quite Buddhist"

Don: "Interesting point, care to develop it?"

VIBk1 Boy: "Well, Buddhism is more about transformation and there is a focus on that rather than institutions."

Don: "Excellent point and one we will build on next hour."

(VIBk1 Boy, Division lesson during classroom discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Within the context of the Division lesson, all contributions were judged to be equally valid and were assessed by the standards of rational discussion rather than cultural prejudice. The key quality which was praised and encouraged by teachers was the ability to engage with and analyse the topic under discussion. Shallow responses were discouraged which reflects the school philosophy:

"Boys live in the world of sound bites and distractions and div is about long term concentration and continuity. They are brought up on computers and mobile phones. It is a big cultural challenge to encourage the skills and to enculturate them so that they feel that the knowledge is wonderful and valuable."

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

Boys did sometimes tease each other when (presumably) certain students pursued their own interests but on the whole this was humorous and the boys in question were allowed to continue their points:

(During a discussion of Angel Carter's novels)

Boy: "This is very Freudian..."

(calls and groans) "Oh God... not Freud again!"

Boy: "Go on... get on with it then..."

(VIBK2 Division lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

#### 5:40: Curriculum: interim summary

The College operates a curriculum which supports their educational ethos of providing a broad and challenging education which is not restricted to the attainment of public examinations. The objectives are clearly defined and are applied to every aspect of the education the boys receive in the school: “The outstanding curriculum is highly appropriate to the school’s aims of developing boys who are achieving at the highest level. Variety of provision and a concern to accommodate individuals are key principles.” (ISC, 2013:5.1). Division, which is compulsory for all students, sits at the core of the College programme, enabling all students to share a learning experience throughout their time at the school.

Students are exposed to predominantly Western philosophy, literature and culture across the curriculum, supported by a knowledgeable teaching staff. This breadth includes elements familiar to all students: music, art, literature, but is so diverse that no group is familiar with every element. Equally, any critical response is encouraged and valued and students are not taught that one response has value over another, creating an environment in which all cultural responses are equally valid: “They learn to listen to and treat each other with respect and to articulate their ideas with skill, fluency and maturity.” (ISC 2013, 2:24). The school’s objectives may not be shared totally by parents and students although they appear to adopt an additive approach and there are areas of overlapping values which mean that the curriculum and ethos of the school are not at odds with those of the Hong Kong families.

#### 5:41: The Role of Sport, Extra-Curricular activities and Music

Outside the academic curriculum, sport and music play key roles in creating cohesion within the school. The sports curriculum appears to adhere closely to Hirst’s (1969:183) suggestion that “...physical education... is pursued in accordance with a rational appraisal of the place and value of physical activities in human life which we wish the pupil to acquire, that the activities are viewed as those of a developing rational being, not merely an animal, and that they constitute part of the life of a rational person.” When applied to this case, sport is part

of College life but is not dominated by extreme physical demands or positioned as a key contributor to the value system of the school.

The College functions as a series of groups. The initial contact group is that of the house, then of school membership and finally of membership of sports, drama or music groups. There is no dominant group of sportsmen. Unlike many other public schools, The College does not have a primary externally competitive sport, and participation is not key to forming friendships (Berry and Williams 2004):

“Here you can do whatever you want to do without a fear of being alienated. I have a fear of that because of what has happened in my previous school. I find that if you didn’t play, say football, or cricket, then sitting around the lunch table it’s all people would talk about. It was quite a masculine thing anyway to talk about football results but because quite a few people in my house played for the school too, they could talk about that side as well as what happened with Chelsea and Man United. That seemed to be the only topic of conversation over lunch. And then there were a couple of individuals, like me and there or four individuals out of forty, who were not only very different to the group but very different to each other. For instance, one was very into music, one was very into English. I’m very into art, design and technology. That became the three that I hung out with. We got on fine but it’s not a natural group whereas the sport guys had sport in common, they’re all in the same boat in that respect.”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Boys have around 30 sports options and therefore there is no fixed in- group created by dominant sports. Two sports unique to The College exist: a form of football and a type of fives. The result of this is that these sports can only be played in internal competition between houses (Sabben-Clare 1989) and the size of each year group means that all members participate in some form. Equally, the school has a number of intra-school competitions in other sports which also require full house participation. The fragmentation of the student body between the sports results in a number of overlapping smaller groups. Subsequently, the difference between group members and non-members is not emphasised (Triandis 1989, Vedder and Horenczyk 2006).

“Sport is divisive – we do sport but not like other schools. It is not important if you don’t do sport... don’t do anything”

(Division teacher, in discussion, 3rd visit)

“Team sports aren’t dominant. I have friends at H (British school) who have to play rugby. The whole school thinks it is great. They hate it.”

(VB Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

On the whole, there did not appear to be a sports dominated house. One house appeared to be particularly keen on cricket but that was more a reflection of the House Master’s interests than a school pattern:

Teacher: “Do we have any batsmen here?”

MP Class ... no response

(MP Division class, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The generally accepted attitude towards discussing competitive sport was to be self-deprecating:

“Basically, we know that we’ve lost the match within about fifteen minutes. The rest is just going through the motions.”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Although a number of boys clearly took sport seriously (observations of rowing, basketball, cricket, fives and football training sessions) sportsmen were not singled out for praise.

“I really don’t get sport!”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“We aren’t aggressive at sports. We give up. We know we won’t win”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“The hero structure of the school centres on music... and intellectualism ... but especially music. You feel this on bigger scale when, last term for example, we had a boy in X house. He is very gregarious, loves sport but also a gifted violinist who

played the Mozart violin concerto to a large part of the school. They were intensely proud of him and we don't see that on the sports side. We had a group of wonderful cricketers a few years ago but their accolades didn't reach the levels of the boys who competed in both the chemistry and physics Olympiads or the boy who played a Mozart concerto."

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

The competitive atmosphere of the school is centred on academic rather than on sporting competition. There is wide participation in maths, chemistry and physics Olympiads. Boys come in to the school with the culture of their previous junior schools, many of whom will have an environment which is sports dominated, and adapt as they become more familiar with the less externally competitive nature of the school.

"We become gentler as we move up the school"

(VIBk1 Boy, classroom discussion of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

For Hong Kong boys coming from DSS schools, the fragmentation of sports represents a replication of the environment they are familiar with. Sport is played at a high level by a small group within Hong Kong schools and swimming, table tennis, running and basketball dominate (Stewart and Bennett 1991). A small group of students are identified by the schools and are expected to participate in extensive training sessions and competitive events. Boys who are not part of this group are unlikely to represent the school in sports and, based on my observations, therefore concentrate their efforts on music and academic achievements. This focus is as a result of the intense competition in Hong Kong for places in elite schools. Once students have gained a place at the institutions, the competition then focuses on gaining access to higher level classes which attract more opportunities to compete, may be allocated greater resources and will enhance the child's likelihood of entering a top Hong Kong university (Poon and Wong 2008). One personal experience of this phenomenon is that I was asked to teach a public speaking and debate class in a local DSS school. The calibre of the students was extraordinarily good and it was explained to me that they had been identified as "talented and gifted" by the school which gave them access to supplementary funding and therefore allowed external teachers to be hired to provide additional classes for the group.

For students who are heading for British schools, parents typically reduce all non-academic subjects from the age of ten (excluding music) in order to focus on the extra tuition required to pass entrance examinations, with the result that the boys are unable to commit to the demands of school training schedules and are therefore often not part of elite school teams.

The recognition that sports play a key role in setting the tone of a school is observed by both management and students:

“To introduce rugby into boys’ schools creates a dynamic of masculine aggression and makes heroes of the boys who play. Regular intelligent people want to play sport. We have an intellectual high culture as our educational objective and want to have sporting regimen to protect it. Most English boarding schools are effectively sports clubs! To people who value these things we are always the minority but you have create a sports regime which matches the culture of the school.”

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

“We compete intellectually!”

(VIBk1 Boy, classroom discussion of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The College football is played with degrees of enthusiasm by the boys and the school divides in two once a year for the annual House Block A vs. House Block B match. The teams are not reflective of one cultural group (observation 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> visit) and the intellectual spirit of the school dominates the physical side as the rules are opaque and represent a “bewilderment” (Sabben-Clare 2005:112). Boys who can challenge the referee by invoking rules are given credit by their peers (observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit) and therefore the game is inclusive for boys who are not sportsmen. Additionally, no boy has experienced the sport prior to joining The College and therefore all boys begin on the same level.

#### 5:41.2: Other extra-curricular activities

The College offers a number of non-academic experiences including membership of interest societies, expeditions and a branch of the Combined Cadet Force. Participation in the latter is compulsory during the second year and some students (of all nationalities) opt to continue following their mandatory year. These boys form another circle within the school

which has equal status to those formed by other extra-curricular activities. Boys choosing not to participate take part in community service.

The College has a diverse extra-curricular offering including a bell ringing society, an astronomy club (one house has its own telescope) and a ball room dancing club for VIBk boys which is shared with local schools. Each society promoted its own events and a number of talks take place which are open to all students. During my visits, these included: a VIBk1 boy talking about his trip to North Korea to a large group of boys of all ages, visiting poets reading their work at an event hosted by the boys, a talk questioning the existence of God given by Professor Anthony Grayling and a series of events de-mystifying the works of Shakespeare. Participation or otherwise in the various societies was encouraged by House Masters but was not mandatory.

Drama is not a part of the school curriculum but is a key part of the life of The College and participation is enthusiastic and inclusive. Boys are involved both front and back of house and the school has an extensive wardrobe department. A Junior Drama Festival takes place annually during which each house presents a play which is written and directed by a member of VIBk2 and is presented to the school as part of an inter-house competition. All first year boys participate. Other dramatic productions include presentations of French, English and Greek plays (in translation). Interestingly, boys who were not participating in the events were called upon to help friends practice and to offer support:

“X (boy in the same house) makes us listen to his lines. I think I know his part better than he does now and I can’t even speak French!”

(VIBk2 boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This comment does indicate the close friendships boys form in the house which results in their being involved in other extra-curricular groups, even though they may not be direct members.

#### 5:42: Music

Within the school, music acts as a binding mechanism. Without necessarily being a focus, music does form a background to many activities including: the presence of choristers in

chapel, music in division lessons, practice rooms in the house and constantly playing stereos in the house. The range of musical groups organised by the school is extensive and includes: an academy orchestra which is made up primarily from first and second year string players, a chamber orchestra, a reed ensemble, a choir (recruited from the first two year groups), un-auditioned choir, a brass ensemble, a saxophone ensemble, a soul band (open to the top three years), a wind band, a symphony orchestra, a wind octet, jazz groups, and a close harmony group. Unofficially, there are also a number of rock and pop bands. The range of options includes a number of assemblages which are predominantly composed of boys from the first and second years. The composition of these groups is important as they provide new students with the opportunity of immediate participation.

Culturally, there is a match between the veneration of the musician in Hong Kong and in the culture of the school (Bourdieu 1984). Crucially though, the emphasis is different. In Hong Kong, the goal of studying music is to pass exams and win competitions as opposed to developing talent for art's sake. This difference was both recognised and commented on by a number of different teachers. Teachers often mentioned that they were astonished that the boys had attained their Diplomas of Music prior to joining the school although I did note that the music department was not dominated by any one cultural group, indicating that other students were equally talented although they may not have taken the same level of examinations. The influence of the school's philosophy in the field of music does seem strong and affects the boys' focus as they work out and explore the values of the new environment:

“When I was in Hong Kong, I always played (the violin) like it was a competition.

Here, they have taught me to relax.”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“They have strong technical underpinnings, we develop engagement.”

(Music teacher, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The high status of music within the school means that it represents which Hong Kong students can influence others and find value.

“People wanted to try violin when they saw me playing. I practice with a friend.”



(MP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Music is frequently mentioned by students as a means of creating unity (discussions MP boys 1<sup>st</sup> visit, VIBk1 Boy 1<sup>st</sup> visit, VB Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> visit, MP Boys 2<sup>nd</sup> visit). During my first visit, I sat in on a music lesson which took place following the inter-house singing competition. All boys take part in the annual house singing competition. Each house performs two songs; one with the whole group, the second with a smaller group and the entire school and staff turn out to watch. Some houses were extremely competitive (La Donne e Mobile in Italian) others competed more on an intellectual level (such as a medley of around 70 different songs based on four chords which was written by a member of Scholars). The adjudicator was a recently retired music tutor who received a standing ovation. Intellectual one-upmanship was the dominant pattern and, according to discussions the next day, the houses that had opted to perform popular rather than classical music were scoffed at and describe as “lightweights!” (MP Boy, in conversation, house lunch 1<sup>st</sup> visit). As part of the music lesson, the boys were called upon to reflect on the competition and the role it played within the school. They displayed a familiarity with the talented players irrespective of their houses or ages but also recognised that participation in music was not restricted to musicians:

“(Music) brings the school together”

(VB Boy, during discussion, music lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

As this discussion took place during a music lesson, it may be expected that the speaker displays bias but the belief was echoed in other areas.

Music gets people together. Even house singing you have to spend time with each other and get to know each other.”

(JP Boy, during discussion about house singing competitions, house lunch, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Music is referenced regularly during non-music lessons giving boys who are highly musical the chance to shine and raising the general level of musical literacy within the student body:

Teacher: “Think about the universality of music: we can experience similar reactions to Sibelius, irrespective of where we are from.”

VIBk1 Boy: “visceral.”

(VIBk1 Division lesson, discussion about universality of human reactions, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Lesson based on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*.

(VIBk1 Division lesson, observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Lesson based on presenting a musical genre followed by an animated discussion about the difference between Rhythm and Blues and the Mersey Sound

(VIBk1 Division lesson, observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

Discussion about music playing in the background as students worked on writing poetry.

(MP Division lesson, observation, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Music transcends both linguistic and racial boundaries within the college. In the boarding houses, older boys take responsibility for training younger performers for the house concert. Ability rather than race is the deciding factor when choosing musical leaders and I observed one house who chose a Mainland Chinese conductor for a performance of a work by Bizet, performed in French by all junior boys.

#### 5:43: Music, Extra-Curricular activities and Sport – interim observations

Extra-curricular activities, music and sport act as binding agents within the school. Although the range of extra-curricular activities is broad, the groups formed are not exclusive. Boys participate either directly or through attending events. Attendance may not necessarily be based on interest but may also be a factor of demonstrating support for friends. The result of this cross participation is a fluidity of membership which minimises the difference between the groups and contributes towards the creation of an inclusive society (Triandis 1989, Vedder and Horenczyk 2006).

Music is very much part of the skillset which the majority of Hong Kong students joining The College will have acquired. Although some musicians may continue their studies at a high level, students of all abilities take part in House musical activities which emphasise participation rather than ability. Sport is played by some students at a high level but the

structure of the sports programme, in which there is no one dominant sport and intra-school competitions mean that all students participate, results in a number of overlapping small groups rather than one main dominant group. The existence of sports which are unique to the school create cohesion within the student body; Although some students may be aware of The College football before they arrive, they will not have played it and therefore all students begin their new school at the same level.

Within the culture of the school, students who attain musical or intellectual achievements are likely to be singled out for praise by the Head and teachers, whereas sporting achievements are downplayed. This results in the creation of a learning environment which represents a cultural match with the background of many Hong Kong students joining the school. Unlike students in a university, those in a residential boarding school are exposed to the culture of the school which may or may not be representative of the national level culture. The similarity between the familiar “sub-cultures” represented by education in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, lessens the impact of the shock which introduction to an unfamiliar national level culture represents for Hong Kong students (Twigg 2005:88). Similarly, the students have shared educational aspirations, irrespective of culture, which is more likely to result in positive evaluation of fellow students (Ting-Toomey 2005:297). This similarity creates a focus on similarity rather than difference. As has been demonstrated, the culture of The College includes elements of familiarity and dissonance to all students indicating that it is a hybrid culture and offers an environment which facilitates transition from Hong Kong.

#### 5:44: Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to analyse and categorise the data which resulted from my research visits to the college. Without intending to be restricted by my research questions, I found that the richness of the data collected allowed me to formulate conclusions which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

#### 5:45: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter will provide answers to the research questions, reach conclusions and provide recommendations for both future research and for future consideration for practice based on the analysis of data resulting from the research. I will also assess the strengths and limitations of the research.

The theoretical grounding for this research was provided in the literature review which identified the main concepts which provided the framework for the empirical research. The impetus to embarking upon this research stemmed from preparing Hong Kong students to attend British boarding schools and observing the differences in returnee students, which generated the desire to be able to provide advice to both students and schools which would facilitate the acculturation process.

## Chapter 6: Key Findings

My research questions were:

1. In what ways do the classroom behaviours of Hong Kong students change as a result of their encounters in a British boarding school?
2. Are Western teaching styles adapted to cater for students of different educational backgrounds?
3. To what extent does the curriculum, structure and ethos of the school contribute to creating intercultural cohesion?
4. To what extent does a cultural transfer take place?
5. What is the effect of the family on Hong Kong students in a British boarding school?

To address these questions, I carried out a series of observations and interviews with staff and students at The College. I had selected The College from an initial observation which appeared to show that the school body was highly integrated and the study of which might generate examples of how this could be achieved rather than focusing on areas to avoid and negative guidelines. Based on this research, I have generated the following responses to my initial questions:

### 6:1: Key Question: Classroom behaviours

1. In what ways do the classroom behaviours of Hong Kong students change as a result of their encounters in a British boarding school?

I made four research visits to the school and observed boys who were at different stages of their school careers. Based on this observation and confirmed by discussions with staff and students of the school, I perceived that, throughout the period of five years spent at the school, the majority of Hong Kong students adopt active patterns of classroom behaviour. However, the rate of change varies enormously depending on previous educational backgrounds. My observation is that students from DSS/local schools take between two - three terms to adapt to a Western educational environment. Hong Kong students who have

already had two years' or more experience in a British prep school have transitioned through this phrase prior to their arrival at The College. Students from international schools which have more casual interaction between staff and pupils (particularly those following US or Canadian curriculums) have adopted interactive classroom behaviours and struggle with the formality of The College classroom discipline.

Students from the first group (DSS/local schools) are initially reluctant to participate in class discussions and rarely ask questions. The early behaviours which are adopted tend to be mechanical (asking confirming questions) rather than patterns which indicate critical engagement.

“A (1<sup>st</sup> year JP boy) has started to ask questions but they are pragmatic and always money based”

(Division teacher, in discussion after class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Gradually, the majority of boys begin to ask questions which indicate a deeper engagement with materials and eventually will challenge other students and teachers.

“C (15 year old local school boy) is transformed. Now he asks and speaks every lesson.”

(MP Division teacher, after class 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

The latter is the final stage of adaptation and is one which younger boys are reluctant to enter without assessing the risks involved.

“I don't know what to ask” (Boy, JP, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“In Hong Kong they laugh when you make mistakes”

(JP Boy, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The process of accepting that the school values engagement and comments will not result in laughter is a function of both time and classroom management. During my third visit, I observed a JP Division lesson during which the boys were reading *The Owl* by Edward Thomas. A Hong Kong student in the second row was watching the teacher but made no attempt to be part of the discussion.

Teacher: “F, (Hong Kong local school student) what do you think the narrator means by his food being “salted”

Hong Kong Boy: “It tastes better”

Teacher: “Excellent idea. Without salt, food tastes of nothing. What happens if we add too much?”

Hong Kong Boy: “You can’t eat it”

Teacher: “Absolutely right. What makes us think that this could be what the poet means?”

(Discussion continues, student is fully engaged and turns to watch the speakers)

(JP Division lesson, observation, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

In contrast with this timidity, senior boys were observed to be willing to challenge both teachers and classmates (observations 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> visits). During one lesson I taught to a VIBk1 class during which we discussed Hofstede’s research, one Hong Kong boy constantly challenged Hofstede’s findings based on the premise that Hofstede was making assumptions that everyone from a given country behaved in the same way. This led to a fascinating discussion about cultural similarities and difference in which boys discussed how their parents had different nationalities and educational backgrounds and therefore could not be said to truly represent one country. I believe that this lesson was a good reflection of the ways in which students adapt their learning styles to those which are valued and promoted by The College whilst maintaining their own cultural identities. The mutual respect which is created in the classroom leads quickly to even junior boys making contributions to discussion which indicate that they are maintaining their cultural identity whilst applying their experience to the new culture.

Don: “What do the psalms look like?”

JP Boy: “Chinese poems”

(JP Boy, Division lesson, classroom discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

## 6:1.2: Interim Conclusions

During their five years at The College, all Hong Kong students adapt their classroom behaviours to accommodate those of the host environment. Crucially, it became increasingly apparent that Hong Kong students from local Hong Kong schools and those from international schools adapt differently to their new classroom environments. The requirements of the new environment are, on the whole, in line with existing student goals with the result that the new behaviours are additive and values which have been instilled in them in their Hong Kong schools are maintained. For boys from local schools these existing behaviours are chiefly discipline, achievement and diligence and critical engagement is added:

We (HK boys) definitely work harder but I've learned from the Western boys that there is more to life and I enjoy the down times too. Before, I just used to play computer games, now I prefer to mix with the others.

(MP Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

For boys from international schools, the discipline of the new classroom is acquired and interactive classroom behaviour is maintained but adapts so there is a greater focus on quality rather than quantity of participation. The richness of the curriculum which results in no single student having mastery based on prior learning, and the quality of teaching has the effect of students acquiring respect for other perspectives and a positive classroom environment is maintained. The College staff make it clear to students that no one perspective has merit over another provided that it can be supported by evidence and presented logically. Students adapt to this ethos and are not subsumed into any particular cultural viewpoint with the result that their behaviours adapt to match the culture of the classroom but their cultural independence is maintained.

6:2: Key Question: Adaptation of teaching styles

## **2. Are Western teaching styles adapted to cater for students of different educational backgrounds?**

Within The College, there is no uniform or mandated approach to teaching students of different educational backgrounds which means that teachers are able to develop teaching styles which they feel are the most effective means of achieving their goals. On the whole,



the teachers I spoke to espouse the value of developing critical thinking skills and developing knowledge rather than a focus on passing examinations indicating that they subscribed to and promoted the culture and ethos of the school. Although some teachers indicated an assimilation approach to teaching in discussion (Biggs, 2003:125), they were certainly in the minority. In the lower years, accommodation was observed (Biggs, 2003: 132), mainly in language lessons, and was used as a way to engage students in what the teacher perceived to be an alien world to them. This approach appeared to be promoted by an empathy with the students and a desire to help them adjust (Shaules, 2007). However, the majority of classes which I observed made little concession to ethnicity and the teachers focused on students' learning in the lower school and development of critical thinking skills in the upper school (Biggs, 2003:136). On the whole, expectations were uniformly high for all students, irrespective of their background and there was a recognition that standards in the school were rigorous:

“Not many students could cope with the depth of understanding required. We don't make any concessions” (Housemaster, in discussion, 2nd visit)

In addition to classroom practice, teachers were very reflective about their interaction with students and more experienced teachers incorporated their interpretation of non-verbal communication into their assessment of Hong Kong students (Hall 1976, Bennett 1993). During my visits, as staff found out about my Hong Kong teaching background, I was approached by a number of teachers who had generated ideas about why their (usually junior) students were behaving in particular ways and wanted confirmation of their theories. Again, this focus on teaching rather than student performance is indicative of Biggs's third level of teaching and was the common thread in the classes I observed.

Although teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss curriculum and issues with students, there is no prescribed teaching approach. On an individual level, teachers make decisions about how best to teach students based on their experience and objectives. As a result, a variety of teaching styles are observed throughout the school. Teachers in the lower school, teachers of languages and younger dons were very aware of cultural difference within the classroom without necessarily being cognizant of the educational background of their students. The formative teaching their students had received in Hong Kong local schools had

extremely different objectives and expectations to those of The College and had formed the behaviours being witnessed when the students arrived in the United Kingdom. The majority of teachers who had contact with students in the lower years had adapted their teaching styles in order to ensure that Hong Kong students were both participating in and following the lessons. Focus was split between mastery of materials and encouraging participation in discussions. Some teachers in the lower school set passing IGCSE examinations as a goal and aimed at ensuring mastery of examined materials. For teachers whose focus was beyond mastery, lack of classroom participation on the part of Hong Kong students in the early years was a source of frustration and various teaching techniques were employed to encourage active learning. Some teachers voiced an element of doubt as to whether students were really engaged in the materials in the early years but expressed an understanding based on the unfamiliarity of the materials:

“I can’t find any pegs to hang knowledge off. (The students) Have no exposure to Western culture...doesn’t touch them. Hard to engage in discussion with their science brains”

(Division teacher, after class, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit in response to a question about how he perceived the transition from Hong Kong schools to The College)

On the whole, teachers expressed surprise at the amount of exposure to English literature that Hong Kong students had on arrival at The College:

“I am sometimes amazed at what boys have read or encountered before coming to us”

(JP Division teacher, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

One of the results of this phenomenon was that more experienced teachers were unlikely to underestimate students’ knowledge. Less experienced teachers were aware that all the boys had passed a competitive English examination in order to get a place at The College and at no point did I see any teacher confusing lack of ability to discuss with lack of intelligence.

For the first three years, Division covers the skills required for IGCSE English and teachers made efforts to ensure that all students were equally prepared with extra attention being given to Hong Kong students who were perceived to require explicit instructions:

“B get it down

B and C, get it down

B, make sure you have this

Key moments ...get them down B”

(MP Division teacher, classroom observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Outside the requirements of the exam curriculum, the early years of Division attempt to familiarise all students with the progression of European history, culture and thought. This includes exposure to architecture, literature and art. The pace of the classes is fast although some concession is made by teachers of first year boys. By the time students reached the upper years, these concerns did not feature and the pace of classes and assumed a familiarity with major figures and ideas of Western civilisation.

Rather than teaching styles being adapted throughout the school to accommodate students from other educational backgrounds, students gradually altered their learning styles as they became more familiar with the school. By the time students had progressed through the school, they had gained an understanding of the styles of classroom participation which was valued within the school although, for the majority, this was based on experience rather than explicit instruction. For new students, there was no systematic communication of the expectations of the school (full participation in debate and critical engagement with the subjects) resulting in some students not being able to decode the new classroom rules. This was particularly apparent for boys transitioning from educational settings which had favoured a dialectic rather than a dialogic approach (Hammond and Gao 2002). Boys appeared to be adapting their behaviour as they encountered set backs, implying that the process occurred at different rates and represented a source of confusion to some students:

“We’re just given work and we don’t go through it in the lessons. At home, the teacher would tell us what to do first”

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The student in this discussion had not adapted to the College approach of setting tasks and expecting the boys to be able to develop the skills to respond to them in the hope that students would challenge themselves to think critically (based on my conversations with Division teachers, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit) rather than being told to produce a template piece of work. Boys

from Hong Kong local schools appeared to find this difference a challenge, particularly when early pieces of work came back with poor marks:

“I keep getting low marks. I don’t know what’s wrong with it” (shows returned piece of work. The piece was supposed to be an analysis of a Bible passage but the boy had produced a summary. The teacher’s comments indicated that she wanted him to give his views on the use of language in the passage and comment on its effectiveness.)

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The teaching styles in upper years made little concession towards cultural backgrounds and assumed that all students were familiar with the teaching style of The College. Dialogic lessons based on a series of challenges being presented to the class were fast paced and inclusive. Participation was valued and teachers encouraged discussion and the drawing of parallels between different experiences and types of learning rather than promoting a particular viewpoint:

(During a discussion about transubstantiation and the reformation)

VIBk1 Boy: “The middle way? That is quite Buddhist”

Don: “Interesting point, care to develop it?”

VIBk1 Boy: “Well, Buddhism is more about transformation and there is a focus on that rather than institutions.”

Don: “Excellent point and one we will build on next hour.”

(VIBk1 Boy, Division lesson during classroom discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

By the Sixth form, the majority of students participated voluntarily and the few who opted out were clear that this was a decision they had made rather than the result of confusion about how to function in the learning environment:

“Div is a chance to switch off. I can’t help myself”

(VKBk2 Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

## 6:2.2: Interim Conclusions

The teaching style at The College is dialogic, fast paced, demanding and based on mutual respect. The teaching staff of The College work from the premise that the boys they teach are likely to be intelligent, although they may be lacking language and critical thinking skills in the early year. This assumption creates a level of respect to which the boys respond.

In the lower years, teachers do make concessions to filling what they perceive to be gaps in learning styles by giving explicit instructions and ensuring that Hong Kong students have mastered materials being taught. Some teachers adopt interventionist strategies which may be public or private. Of the two approaches, private intervention appeared to be more effective as it allowed the students to both maintain face in front of the group and to receive specific instruction about classroom expectations (Triandis 1982, Triandis et al 1988, Ting-Toomey and Korzenny 1989, Ting-Toomey 1999, Ting-Toomey and Chung 2005, Nguyen et al 2006).

The approach to language teaching was one of the anomalies in the school in that teachers of less able students focused on transmitting the knowledge required to pass examinations rather than seeking critical engagement with the subject. The majority of Hong Kong students had little or no exposure to modern European languages prior to joining The College and therefore struggled to master the materials. A number of boys expressed frustration at having to learn a language which they did not feel offered any benefit to them:

“I really, really didn’t see the point of learning French. I still don’t. In fact, I can’t remember any of it and when my parents took me there, I couldn’t understand a thing.”

(UVIBk1 Boy, in discussion, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

In contrast to other lessons, language teachers responsible for the lower ability groups of students adopted a goal of ensuring that students passed exams. This manifested in clear hand-outs, indications about examination content and suggestions that learners memorise particular parts of the text book. Teachers of other areas of the curriculum mentioned examinations in passing and focused on expanding their students’ knowledge of the subject outside the exam curriculum.

Teachers of upper school classes assume that all students have acquired a deep knowledge of the requirements of the subjects they are teaching prior to joining the class. The pace of lessons increases and the materials under discussion become more complex (for example, one lesson I observed was based on a discussion of the teacher's PhD thesis.) At this level, any frustration is not driven by a fear that boys do not understand but rather that they may choose not to engage.

On balance, I would say that the expectations of the teachers are the same for students of every background but that the cultural sensitivities of the teachers increase with sustained contact with Hong Kong students and they are more likely to incorporate this knowledge into their decision making. For instance, a teacher might decide to speak to a boy privately rather than publicly. Whereas Hong Kong students may receive some concessions early in their school careers, this does not continue past the first two years, at which point all students are expected to perform equally and to engage in lessons. The teaching style is one which has developed around the curriculum of The College and the calibre of its students rather than their ethnicity, and teachers demonstrate a focus on learning and reflective teaching practice.

6:3: Key Question: Contribution of curriculum, structure and ethos of the school

**3. To what extent does the curriculum, structure and ethos of the school contribute to cohesion?**

The College has developed a curriculum which is a clear reflection of the values and ethos of the school (Apple 1979, Hirst 1969) and is organised in such a way that no single group is dominant. Both the curriculum and the house system ensure that The College is structured in such a way that an interconnected series of social groups are formed which prevent the formation of a large and dominant in-group. Access to group membership (sport, music, art, drama) is open to all due to the number of activities on offer and the wide range of intra-house competitions. The result of this is that, although some students display more aptitude than others, all are included in some way. As a product of this structure, the difference between group members is minimised leading to inclusivity (Triandis 1989, Vedder and Horenczyk 2006). The school body appeared to be broadly culturally integrated and staff,

students and families subscribed in varying degrees to the school ethos and stated educational values which are described as follows:

“We offer an approach to education which develops in our pupils

- an intelligent and critical awareness of the world
- strong communication skills based on systematic reading and discussion
- a confident ability to think independently and with originality
- enjoyment of living in a community in which the life of the mind is a priority
- an enthusiastic appetite for university study
- an unaffected modesty of manner.

We seek to welcome into our community boys from every kind of background who, with their parents, value these qualities”

(Headmaster’s introduction, The College website)

On a macro level, the cultural dimensions of the school are a mixture of those common to both Western and Eastern cultures and therefore represent a hybrid society which will have elements of both familiarity and dissonance to all students. Within this context, students join the school with shared values of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) based on their families having selected the school which opts out of league tables and promotes wider cultural learning. This creates an immediate shared approach to culture which is taken and adapted by The College in Division lessons and through music, drama and art.

Using Hofstede (2010) and Bond’s (1996) dimensions of cultural engagement (individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, Confucian dynamism) the school demonstrates characteristics of behaviour which are found in both the East and West creating an environment which has structural elements and expectations which are familiar to students from both Eastern and Western backgrounds but are not reflective of either one.

The school society represents a mixture of collectivist and individualist goals and habits; If we define a collectivist goal as being one which represents the good of the group rather

than the individual and an individualist goal as being one which satisfies the individual, possibly to the detriment of the group. The school structure is designed in a way that there are few opportunities for individuals to compete with their peers in such a way that one student is promoted at the cost of others. Resources are equally distributed and students who attain certain positions are not given extra. The teachers allocated to top students are of equal quality to those who teach less able students. Members of sports teams are not given concessions in terms of class time. This combination of individualistic and collectivist behaviours fits with Benet-Martinez et al's description of a dynamic and flexible culture which is navigated by individuals in different ways depending on need (2002). Again, this combined culture represents both familiarity and dissonance to students of all cultural backgrounds and does not advantage any one group.

“You could say that we are collectivist in that you encouraged to be a member of the community of your house but individualist in that houses are encouraged to compete against each other.”

(VB Boy, in class discussion on Hofstede's dimensions, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Students behave collectively both within the house, where participation is expected to support other members, and individually in the classroom. In the classroom, students are encouraged to pursue their own intellectual interests and to develop a critical approach to learning. This individualistic style of learning rewards students who demonstrate independent thought in relation to the materials taught and penalises students who adopt a mechanical approach to learning:

“We try to train boys to have independence of mind and that applies to parents as to everyone else.”

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

The adoption of a dialogic teaching method, although challenging when students first enter the school, does appear to create a sense of shared learning. Within the classroom, students themselves are part of the learning experience. The quality of student participation is related to the quality of learning which takes place. Students transitioning from local Hong Kong schools experience initial struggles as they adapt from a dialectic to a dialogic learning environment. This was observed less in the second year and was barely present in the third



year by which point students had adapted to the new culture. The result of this process is a learning environment in which all students have equal status and group cohesion (Hammond and Gao 2002).

In terms of power structure, the top management of the school is hierarchical, with a high power distance between the Headmaster and students. This situation is familiar to students from Hong Kong local schools as is the demonstration of respect to teachers (standing up when a teacher enters a classroom, use of “sir”, expectation that any teacher may comment on behaviour) However, within the classroom, students are encouraged to challenge teachers on an intellectual level, creating a much lower power distance which is more familiar to students from Hong Kong international schools and Western learning environments. The absence of democracy within the school is a source of low-grade discontent for predominantly non-Asian students but represents a familiarity and predictability to Hong Kong students from local school backgrounds:

(Discussion about conservatism and liberalism)

Teacher: “where does college fall?”

VIBk1 Boy: “conservative... patriarchal”

Teacher: “What about if there were no system and you could turn up when you wanted?”

VIBk1 Western Boy: “Well it works at X school”

VIBk1 Hong Kong Boy: “Structure is better. The better you are, the higher up you are here so you are not out of your league”

VIBk1 Western Boy: “If he, the Headman, said everyone could vote, there would be a clash of views but he’d please more people.”

(VIBk1 Division lesson, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The above discussion also touches on Hofstede’s (2010) uncertainty avoidance dimension. Within the school, there is a mixture of areas which represent a high degree of uncertainty because the expectations were ambiguous rather than being clearly communicated, (such as in the case of classroom behaviour) and those which represent certainty based on historical experience (for instance, the school’s ability to successfully prepare students for entry to university). Hofstede identified both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom as manifesting

similarly low uncertainly avoidance meaning that both groups are equally likely to react correspondingly. However, it was my observation that boys from Hong Kong local schools manifested a degree of stress as they attempted to understand their new environment whereas, after an initial uncertainty period on arrival, non-Hong Kong and international school students did not express any concern about the system and expectations of the school:

“For the first year, I really didn’t know what to do. It seemed like everything I had learned at SP (local Hong Kong school) was either irrelevant or wrong.”

(UVIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

Specifically, early on during their time at The College, Hong Kong students from local schools struggled with the lack of clear expectations and visual aids within the classroom. This could be one explanation for the reliance on holiday time tutoring as junior students expressed concerns about whether they were covering the materials which would be appearing on the examinations and were often unsure about the value of discussion:

JOS: “What did you do in class today?”

JP Boy: “Oh the Don just talked.”

JOS: “Did you make notes?”

JP Boy: “No, I don’t think it was important... Do you think it was?”

JOS: “I don’t know, I wasn’t there!”

(JP Boy, in discussion, evening in house, 2nd visit)

Amongst older boys, there is a demonstration of trust in the ability of the school to achieve academic goals coupled with the understanding that the student needs to work in order to fulfil their side of the bargain. This appears to be based on the school’s track record in university entrance.

“They will get us there, we just need to put the hours in.”

(VIBk1 Boy, in discussion about ways in which the school prepare for university entrance over lunch, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The curriculum of the school creates cohesion by being grounded in a Western high cultural cannon, which is unfamiliar to the majority of students, but to which academically selected

students can apply their intellect. Moreover, although the curriculum includes sport, it does not promote a sports-based culture. Having said that, the boys participate enthusiastically in sports and the entire school turns out to watch the annual College football match. This represented the only example of tribalism I observed within The College and was an interesting illustration of the way in which sports act as a bonding agent within the student body. The school has created an environment in which academic achievement of any kind is the primary currency and selects students based predominantly on their academic ability as they will be required to be able to cope with the intellectual challenges of the curriculum:

We have a policy that life of the mind comes first: this is implicit in our mission and present in the rhetoric of the school.

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

This philosophy is supported by a demanding academic curriculum which promotes the values of critical thinking and explores Western high culture but does not dictate the way in which it should be interpreted. Boys from Hong Kong might pick up on some elements more easily based on their prior exposure to music or religion:

“Dangerous is when Western boys think they know the Bible. A number of Chinese boys are from the evangelical tradition – (they are) used to asking and being taught”

(JP Division teacher, in conversation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

However, given the sheer scope and academic rigour of the curriculum, all students, not just those from Hong Kong, will experience elements of unfamiliarity for which they have no prior frame of reference. Division is compulsory throughout the school, and serves as an agent for the creation of academic cohesion. All students study the course but boys within each boarding houses will have different Division dons and therefore discuss and compare their lessons over lunch. A result of this is that students are not split between those who have opted to take humanities subjects and those who have chosen science. As both science and humanities teachers have Division lessons, the line between the areas of the curriculum is further blurred. The Division lessons create a forum in which knowledge from different areas of the curriculum is shared and has equal validity:

Porous is a good description... cross-references... the habit is innate in many of people teaching here such as X. They are well educated across the board. Every Wednesday morning we have a 10 minute lecture for third and fourth year boys. We adopt a theme for the term and ten dons speak. It unveils a breadth of interest these teachers have such as Camus or philosophy problem.

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

“Division is a combined learning experience”

(Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The curriculum in the upper school is based on classical Western civilisation and philosophy. Although the main body of the course is unfamiliar to the majority of boys, it includes elements which they have previously encountered within the Eastern tradition. More importantly, the focus of the course is on developing analytical and rhetorical skills which apply to both Eastern and Western topics. Within the classroom, boys discuss the ideas they are encountering on an equal footing and all perspectives are treated by the dons and boys as being valid provided that they can be justified. Boys from Eastern cultures have viewpoints which are of equal relevance to discussions as boys from the Western tradition and often can add insight which advances discussion.

Sport within the college is inclusive, competition is inwardly focused and the hierarchy amongst the sports on offer is not clearly defined. The College offers 30+ sports which are self-selected by students after the first year. Cricket is popular during the summer term and football during the winter term but not to the exclusion of other sports. Sports on offer which are likely to be familiar to Hong Kong students include football, swimming, squash, badminton, tennis, basketball and Tae Kwan Do. Rugby, which is a source of stress in other schools I observed due to its intense physical nature, is not offered. Unlike other schools which have a clearly defined hierarchy of sports (often dominated by rugby) the college is concerned that boys are participating in any rather than a specific sport which allows Hong Kong students to be able to focus on sports they may already have a preference for and to avoid those which may be unfamiliar or involve intense physical contact. During any given weekend, there may be up to thirty different sporting competitions taking place, each with its own supporters. This fragmented approach to competition allows students of all abilities

and interests the opportunity of participating without being marginalised or the creation of a dominant group. Therefore, the distance between a sporting in-group and other students is not created.

In addition to external matches and competitions, the houses compete with each other on the sports field. The external sports teams are active but results do not play a dominant role in the dialogue of the school, possibly because of the multiplicity of sports being played at any given time. In contrast, the results of intra house matches are reported in *Quelle* (the student produced magazine) and intra-house league tables are produced but are interspersed with high quality writing which is irreverent and reflective of the mood of the school. One of the effects of this is to convey a clear message that boys who are not sports orientated are valued as equally as boys who win sports matches. This ethos is promoted by teachers during lessons and assemblies which focus on academic development and cultural advancement rather than celebrating sporting achievements.

The college has two sports: The College football and The College Fives (a type of squash), which are unique to the school and which unify the student body. The College football is played by all students but is not played by any other schools, ruling out external competition. The result is intra-school matches of varying levels in which the majority of boys participate. Additionally, teams can range from six to fifteen players a side meaning that small groups of boys can play outside the formal framework of sports lessons. Given the relatively small student population of each house (between 12 - 14 per year group) house teams tend to be made up of the whole group for year based matches with the result that students who may not be sportsmen are not excluded and those who would otherwise opt out participate. The annual College Football match divides the school into two groups (consisting of the two groups of houses and excluding the scholars' house who compete separately) and involves every student, either as a spectator, player or producer of supporter's posters and collateral which are used to decorate Flint Court in the morning of the match. Again, this is an illustration of how sport brings the school together and allows boys from different backgrounds to combine their talents.

Music acts as both a source of excellence and another agent of cohesion within The College. At one end of the spectrum are the music scholars who play at an advanced level and hold

regular school concerts which are both well attended and discussed. Music is supported and promoted by the Head and teachers from different areas of the school with the result that it plays a role in lessons other than those with a music focus. At the other end of the spectrum, the inter-House singing competition is extremely inclusive, irrespective of talent and houses hold their own concerts in which all junior boys and most of the senior boys perform. Practises are held in-house and are student driven with older boys conducting junior choirs. Music is a key part of Hong Kong school life and most Hong Kong students joining the school will play an instrument. The result is a cultural match between the school and the original learning environment.

One area of friction in the curriculum is the school policy of requiring boys to take two modern languages as boys perceive that the subjects are difficult, acquisition of another European language is irrelevant and that the exams represent a degree of risk. Modern languages are a source of stress for Hong Kong students who perceive the unpredictable nature of language examinations, particularly the aural and oral components, as “risky” subjects which may reduce their ability to gain top grades. The majority of Hong Kong students who join the school will not have an extensive knowledge of modern European languages and the unpredictable nature of the curriculum is a concern to them (the exception being boys who attended one European international school in Hong Kong and who study German as part of the core curriculum. Boys from local Hong Kong school backgrounds expressed a fear of making mistakes when speaking which prevents their progress in the new languages. This concern does not seem to be shared by students from international school backgrounds who may have had previous exposure to modern European languages and are unlikely to have experienced a classroom culture in which students laugh at others’ mistakes, are more willing to speak and make mistakes in the new language. Equally, success in the oral and aural components of the examination is likely to be a result of experimenting with and displaying a flexibility when producing language and is limited if students focus on memorisation rather than production. The disquiet association with the compulsory language phenomenon could also be linked to Hong Kong students from local schools having a high awareness of grades early on with the result that any subject which is likely to lower their average is unlikely to be viewed favourably. Some boys expressed their opinion that studying another European language (in addition to English)

had no purpose as they did not intend to live in or travel to France, Germany or Spain. However, this comment appeared to be ancillary to the concern that getting an A\* at IGCSE in the languages would represent a challenge.

The college offers Putonghua (Mandarin) for a limited number of non-Chinese boys who were, at the time of my visits, sharing a class with boys from Hong Kong who were taking IGCSE Chinese. However, rather than offering a field of intercultural exchange, the two groups appeared to be operating separately and the Hong Kong group demonstrated a number of classroom behaviours which indicated a lack of support (laughing at questions, ignoring discussions, physically leaning back in their chairs.) One possible explanation for the disconnect could be that this represented one of the rare occasions during which Hong Kong boys could demonstrate mastery of language.

The physical organisation of the college enables students to integrate and form friends early on in their school career and offers support later on in the school. The house structure is central to creating cultural exchange within the College. In the first year, students share large dormitory rooms (each room housing around six boys) with the result that they form close relationships based on proximity rather than race. Currently, no one house is dominated by Hong Kong students who are distributed throughout the school. This situation is likely to continue as the majority of boys from Asia are now offered general places. In-house dining means that boys eat together at least twice a day, allowing them the opportunity to form close friendships outside racial groups. Housemasters are the main point of parental contact and were sensitive to the pressures to perform which Hong Kong students might be facing. There were cases of tension when Housemasters felt that boys should be allowed to make their own decisions about course choice or higher education, but on the whole the teachers demonstrated high degrees of awareness and understanding of cultural conditioning and background. In a number of conversations, Housemasters indicated that they were aware that racially defined groups had the potential to form which could then become divisive; some took steps to prevent this happening and others felt that the boys should and would organise themselves.

Academic and cultural achievement is lauded both in the rhetoric of the school and in physical manifestations of attainment. For example, the only identifiable piece of daily

uniform worn by students is the scholars' gown which is worn by members of the scholars' house. Attachment to the scholars' house is perceived by students as being prestigious and boys articulated a sense of pride at being in classes with scholars. The scholars are made up of a mixture of nationalities including students from Hong Kong and China. Membership of the academic elite transcends race. When discussing other students, the first reference given was whether the student was a scholar followed by race (this happened rarely and was only mentioned by Hong Kong boys about compatriots) indicating that the school has created a society in which members are judged on achievements rather than nationality. This approach may also indicate that the structure of the school results in groups which are a series of overlapping and fluid in-groups being formed which emphasise similarities between members rather than accentuating difference. The school appears to have attained one of the solutions to in-group bias proposed by Anastasio et al (1997), namely the creation of one group identity in which other identities are also maintained.

There are a number of visible signs that the school values academic endeavour. Records of academic achievements (Head's commendations for good work) are posted in central locations as are the 'A' and 'B' lists of Sixth Book boys likely to be Oxbridge candidates. During my visits, I observed boys reading and commenting on the lists and awards. Outside the main curriculum of the school, a wide range of cultural events play important roles including musical events, plays in various languages and art exhibitions. These are advertised by posters which are stuck on a bench at the open end of Flint Court. Boys pass this area multiple times a day on their way to lessons and the adverts serve as a constant reminder of involvement. Interestingly, sporting events are not advertised, indicating that the school does not have a sports-dominated power structure. Cultural events (such as the French or Greek plays) are widely supported and are mentioned in evening roll call. Rather than being agents of fragmentation, the events are offered to the wider school in terms of supporting fellow students. The result is that the Housemasters convey a sense of admiration for boys who participate in cultural activities which is echoed down throughout the house.

### 6:3.2: Interim conclusions



The ethos of the school is subtle and is transmitted at different levels both in the school and the house. On arrival in the school, boys from Hong Kong local schools and British prep schools may be more familiar with some of the more obvious codes of behaviour such as discipline and forms of address and therefore surface adaptation may take place rapidly. However, the deeper levels of the school's culture indicate the existence of values which are not reflective of any one ethnicity but rather encapsulate the more profound concepts of the worth of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984):

“I think the school is based upon the intersection of basic discipline, the promotion of learning which is the principle aim, and the pastoral care of the boys. We seek to maximise achievement of the aims; discipline, cultural learning and pastoral care. Mutually independent and important. The school's organisation depends upon achieving the aim.”

(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

The significance of a broader cultural education is one of the key reasons which is common to parents likely to select the school. As a result of this, students are pre-disposed to value others who display prowess in cultural fields:

“Those parents equipped with cultural capital are able to drill their children in the cultural forms that predispose them to perform well in the educational system through their ability to handle ‘abstract’ and ‘formal’ categories. These children are able to turn their cultural capital into credentials, which can then be used to acquire advantaged positions themselves.” (Bennett et al 2009: 13)

The rhetoric of the school, communicated by the management team and the teachers, promotes intellectual achievement. This message is clearly received and accepted by students. One of the results of this shared philosophy is that students who may be part of a minority group in other schools (such as those participating in physics Olympiads for instance) are included in general announcements praising all forms of academic prowess and may acquire status within the school community which they would not in other schools. The school is selective and therefore the vast majority (if not all) students have the ability to attain higher levels of intellectual engagement. Thus, the goals promoted by the school are achievable and an inclusive society is therefore created.

The structure of the school has developed in such a way that the formation of one large, dominant group is prevented. Boys have an inner circle of relationships within the house but these are not dictated by ethnic origin. Sports, music, drama and art are all secondary circles and the diversity of offerings results in multiple and overlapping groups. Participation in the first three activities is wide and occurs at multiple levels. The school community appears to place a higher value on intra-school competitions (in the case of sport, possibly due to the existence of a sport unique to the College) which means that the potential for inclusivity is higher as absolute number of students is small. One of the results of this is that sports, drama and music become unifying experiences which are shared by all students rather than by an elite group. The multiple sports on offer mean that, at any given time, boys are divided into at least twenty groups as they participate in different activities. There is no one main sporting currency in the school which, again, acts as a unifying agent as no group is excluded based on non-participation. This did not appear to be the situation I saw at some schools where a division between students who participated in the dominant sports of the institution and those who did not was observed.

The school promotes an ethos which is based on mutual respect and intellectual development. The curriculum and behaviour of the staff are clearly linked to this philosophy which governs the way that students are both taught encouraged. There is no ambiguity and student of all backgrounds adjust their behaviour to the expectations of The College. Again, these expectations are not reflective of any one culture but are rather a hybrid of behaviours united by the aim of the development of cultural capital.

6:4: Key Question: Cultural transfer

#### **4. To what extent does a cultural transfer take place?**

The College culture is additive, a feature of a pluralistic society (Berry et al 1987, Ting-Toomey 1999) with a third space being created in which new cultural meanings are created from existing values (Bhabha 2004). Rather than Hong Kong students losing part of their culture in order to adapt to College life, some of their main cultural characteristics of collective identity, group membership, valuing education and long term planning are applied to and replicated by the new environment. The College society fits Hecht et al's (2005)

description of an environment which has historical meaning, yet is evolving, is accessible to all members and has language and codes which are accessed by all.

The cultural transfer which takes place within The College operates on multiple levels: educational transfer in the classroom, social within the boarding house and cultural through the ethos of the school. The boarding house represents a space in which boys can interact with smaller groups and also serves the purpose of transmitting the values of the school and House Master. Within the house, junior boys share rooms and adapt their living patterns to the standards of the house. This value system is reinforced as students return to the house to eat together during the day. Within the house group, students share information about their backgrounds and pool skillsets:

“They make the other boys lift their game. They may not affect the whole group but they’re certainly a major impact on their friends. Even X (Western Boy) managed to try”

(House Master, in relation to a question about how the boys influence each other.

This was triggered after the House Master telling one (French) boy not to think that he didn’t realise that a Hong Kong student was doing his maths homework and that he was confident that the French student was doing the other boy’s French tasks.

The discussion took place during an evening visit to the House, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The relationships within the house are closer and appear to be more relaxed than general classroom relationships. This pattern is replicated in sports, music and theatrical groups which are made up of boys from different houses. The existence of so many small group circles enables boys to interact on equal terms with a large proportion of the school and results in a minimisation of difference. The intimacy of the house allows small groups to interact away from the pressures of the classroom. As a result of these relationships, a transfer of work habits from Hong Kong students to other boys and the reciprocal transfer of a more relaxed view of leisure time takes place leading to students revising their goals and priorities:

“They make the other boys lift their game. They may not affect the whole group but they’re certainly a major impact on their friends. Even X (Western Boy) managed to try”

(House Master, in relation to a question about how the boys influence each other. This was triggered after the House Master telling one (French) boy not to think that he didn't realise that a Hong Kong student was doing his maths homework. The discussion took place during an evening visit to the House, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

"Sometimes they like to come and listen to be practising (the violin). They say that they want to learn from me. There is another boy in my house and he will come and watch and sometimes we play together.

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

The house is a forum in which boys learn about the social expectations of the school. The House Master communicates expectations and values which are transmitted by House Masters and House Tutors:

"The Head promotes a cultural of learning, discipline and pastoral care amongst the staff who pass it on to the pupils particularly in smaller groups in the houses."

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

"Our Housemaster doesn't tell us what to join but he wants us to have a balance so he might suggest ideas to us."

(JP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

This technique does appear to be effective given the relative intimacy of the house and the creation of a relationship between staff and boys which is distinct to that of teacher/student. Some aspects of the culture of the house represented a challenge to the Hong Kong students. Boys from some Hong Kong international schools found the more formal relationship between junior and senior students particularly challenging:

"You have to get adjusted (sic) to the idea of respect for upper years. I had friends in upper years in Hong Kong but didn't respect them. They were good friends but the idea here is you have to respect them quite a lot... you have to treat them like ... (grimaces)"

(JP boy, international school, in discussion after tea in house, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

However, this sentiment was not generally shared by other Hong Kong boys, possibly because of their familiarity with the large power distance between senior and junior boys and the replication of the British prefect system in Hong Kong local schools. In this way, the boys from local Hong Kong schools were already accepting of inequality and the idea that certain students had greater powers than others.

In-house dining represents an opportunity to create bonds with other students but serves the dual purpose of enforcing the concepts enshrined in Division, namely those of discussion, critical engagement and reflection. Each table of boys is joined by one or more adult, often teachers who leads conversation. All the students are expected to participate:

“The aim of the outcome of our educational offering is conversation. The reason we have in house dining is that we want the boys to be able to converse to be about what they are doing in div therefore the classes need to be in sync. They have different div dons and sit on a single table.”

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

I observed a number of times when the boys compared the relative perspectives and merits of their Division teachers in relation to a particular topic which provided a depth to the discussion. This on-going analysis of content and delivery styles does seem to be a characteristic of the school and could indicate that the in-house dining facilitates the generation of a shared culture as boys become enculturated into the prevailing ethos of the school.

Within a classroom setting, the majority of Hong Kong boys are likely to adopt Western patterns of behaviour from their classmates and through the transfer of values from teachers. These include: asking questions, challenging ideas, and participating in discussions. There appears to be a period during which, for some boys, there is a rejection of previous learning habits (possibly indicating that the student is passing through Bennett’s (1993, 1998) defense stage of acculturation during which the host culture is perceived to be superior to the original culture.) Similarly, some boys experience a phase of rejecting the perceived educational values of their new environment as they struggle to associate discussion with learning:

“In Hong Kong people really concentrate in lessons, won’t talk about different things.”

(Boy, JP, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

For boys from Hong Kong local schools, the less systematically competitive environment of the British school represents a source of relief although parents may inadvertently create competition between Hong Kong students by comparing grades. The perception that Western students work less than Hong Kong based students is maintained by the majority of Hong Kong students, the primary reason given is that British students are unlikely to attend tutorial schools during evenings or holidays Time spent studying is used as a measuring factor here rather than the quality of the study itself:

“We do tutorial in Hong Kong. English boys are more relaxed, they don’t want to work in the holidays. I think that there is a middle ground.”

(Boy, VB, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Interestingly, despite comments about moderation, the majority of Hong Kong students I spoke to continued attending tutorial classes during their holidays whereas I did not encounter any Western students who said they had tutors. Some boys indicated that their parents “made” them study but others mentioned that the choice was theirs:

“I call my mother and ask her to book tutors during the holidays. I have a pretty good idea of what I need to cover and she sorts out the arrangements for me.”

(VB Boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

The concept of tutorial during holidays was an anathema to most of the Western students I spoke to and there did not appear to be any transfer of work habits in this area.

The culture of The College had elements of familiarity and dissonance for both Western and Hong Kong schools in terms of codes of conduct and language. For boys from certain Hong Kong international schools, the traditions and rules of the new environment present a challenge as they required a high degree of acceptance and conformity but are adopted over time. This approach has similarities to that of boys from less formal British schools whereas boys from traditional prep schools shared a common familiarity with boys from local Hong Kong schools.

The College has a language which has developed historically and some of which is still in usage today (see Context chapter for examples). The College terminology was unfamiliar to all students on arrival but represented a way in which they could immediately demonstrate membership. I taught one number of classes which were based on analysing Charles Mackay's *Some Extraordinary Popular Delusions* and discussed how students might use of in-College language with non-members. None of the boys appeared to have encountered the phenomenon in their previous schools but delighted in their acquisition of the new terminology. Interestingly, it was used by all students without exception very early on in their joining The College (observation, 1<sup>st</sup> visit). Following one JP Division lesson I taught, the following discussion took place:

JP Boy (Western): "It's brilliant. I had to explain to my parents what everything meant."

JP Boy (Western): "Me too, my mum had no idea about what I was talking about!"

JP Boy (Hong Kong) "It's something we all use so when I say something... like "bunter"... all the other boys know what I mean."

(JP Boys, Division lesson, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

A glossary of school terminology is provided when boys join the school which lists the main words still in usage, allowing boys to quickly assume the appearance of "belonging" irrespective of background.

I identified different stages of enculturation as I observed boys at different points in their school career. The main changes were in the area of classroom behaviour and a confidence in social engagement. Culturally, boys of all nationalities were able to engage in discussions which required a familiarity with philosophy, literature and high culture. These elements were not restricted to European illustrations but also included Eastern examples which were provided by boys of different cultural backgrounds, indicating that the critical thinking and analytical skills the boys had acquired were being applied without restriction. The porous nature of culture was represented in the library which had books on both East and West and also had Chinese and classical chess sets for boys to play.

"I think I'm giving you the end of the story, once the boys have gone through the school. I am sure that there will be things at the beginning that change as they

progress through the school. We should judge them at the end not at the beginning, surely?”

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

#### 6:4.2: Interim Conclusions

The College is transformative for the vast majority of students. Rather than cultural transfer taking place between the host country and the students, the transfer takes place between the culture of the school and the student. Importantly, the environment of the school is culturally pluralist rather than assimilationist meaning that students maintain their own traditions and values which are incorporated into the world of the school rather than the expectation being that they adopt the values of the new environment (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2005). This leads to no one cultural group dominating the school and prevents the formation of a cultural in-group. Shaules (1993:190) suggests that sojourners never really make deep adaptations to their host cultures as they focus on making surface adjustments to behaviour rather than understanding the deeper symbolism of the new environment. Within the closed world of the school, ethos and values are transmitted and explained by staff both inside and outside the classroom. The symbols and language of the new environment are understood and adopted by all students and Hong Kong and students from high-context cultures may be at an advantage given their familiarity with deciphering non-verbal clues (Hall 1976). Hong Kong students bring with them a desire to succeed in the new culture coupled with academic drive (Ogbu, 1993) which partially matches the educational values of the school and is broadened during their five years at The College to encompass broader learning and cultural depth. As part of their contribution to the culture of the school, the Hong Kong students bring a focused work ethic which is transferred within the small groups of their academic sets and within the more relaxed environment of the boarding house.

“The purpose of education isn’t just about passing exams. I used to think it was”

(VIBk1 Boy, in classroom discussion about the role of education, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)



### **5. What is the effect of the family on Hong Kong students in a British boarding school?**

As could be anticipated, Hong Kong families played a key role in selecting boarding schools for their children. This was to be expected given that boys apply to and are interviewed by The College between the ages of 10 – 11. The collective decision making about educational choices has been outlined elsewhere in this thesis. More significant is the ongoing relationship between the student and parents concerning choices of subjects and courses. There are aspects of this which are triangular (parent/student/House Master) and some which are bilateral (student/parent). Parents are likely to be in close contact with Housemasters, particularly when students enter the Sixth form at which point he becomes responsible for writing university references. The Housemasters were aware that parents would be engaged and anticipated their involvement and degree of concern about result related progress. This view had been formed based on their experience of engaging with Hong Kong families and international exposure which had led to sensitivity when discussing Hong Kong students with their parents (Byram 1989, Mahon 2006):

“To generalize, few English parents are very worried (about results), most Chinese are. Clearer roles – mother engages and the father talks about golf/business.”  
(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“I should think that there is still a general expectation of Asian culture... that parents will make decisions about their children’s future. I would say that it is still more expected than it is in the liberal West...I should think that it is probably true that because the culture of parental deference is comparatively strong in Hong Kong that the parents still have sway in the subject choices.”  
(Headmaster, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

There was some speculation about the boys having no say in the decision making process:

“X (VIBk1 Boy) is going to study medicine. Both his parents are medics and he doesn’t seem to have a say in the process.”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

Depending on family background, students in the school are ultimately aiming at goals which may be collectivist or individualist and may not be transparent to teachers or fellow students. Within the student body, this difference is not an area of focus but teachers and House Masters are aware that students are not only considering their own desires when making their own decisions about career paths. This comment was echoed on a number of occasions in relation to subject, career and university choices in tones which varied from disapproval to factual. The assumption does seem to run counter to the ethos of the school which promotes individual thought and decision making:

“I’m sure it (parents making decisions for their sons) happens with Western parents too. Their parents have a vision of them. But I would have said by and large, boys would have held out for subjects they want to take.”

(Headmaster, in interview, 4<sup>th</sup> visit)

This shared perspective could explain the existence of a bilateral decision making relationship between parents and students which is largely concealed from the school. This relationship is influenced by other Hong Kong parents who offer their own opinions on subject choices during meetings of College parents in Hong Kong. In this case, students who felt that they had no option but to accept the decisions made for them shared information with the House Master, possibly indicating a tension between the tradition of following family decisions and wanting to pursue individualist goals:

“I had one boy who wants to study art. The other parents were telling his mother that was the wrong decision. He should be studying maths”

(House Master, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

A different perspective was offered by a number of students who relied on their parents to make correct decisions for them which illustrates Philipson’s (2007) description of the relationship between family and individual as being more of an on-going dialogue about goals.

“I set the goals but my family certainly guide me and offer advice. They are more experienced than I am.”

(VIBk2 Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This take on the relationship indicates a deeper, more collectivist dimension to Hong Kong students who recognised that their success was dependent upon the group. Stevenson and Lee (1996:136) suggested that Hong Kong parents are most likely to associate academic success with achievement and parents are therefore likely to add their own efforts to those of their children in order to achieve this goal. This partnership approach appeared to be accepted by the boys:

“My cousin came over and without my aunt’s pressure, didn’t push herself and ended up failing. Not a successful approach in the long run.”

(VB Boy, in discussion, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Boys also mentioned that they had responsibilities towards their families. Family guidance was broad with more local Hong Kong parents indicating to their sons that part of the experience was learning from other students:

“My father told me to become more open and learn from them”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion in house, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

“My Dad said I should learn how to think not ... because in Hong Kong they don’t provide that kind of education.”

(JP Boy, local school, in discussion in house, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

These comments indicate that parents share the values of the school and there is an attempt to pass them on to their sons prior to their joining The College. This adds credence to the Head’s assertion that parents and the school share educational values and may be an example of how a cultural match can lead to the development of an intercultural learning environment.

## 6:5:2: Interim Conclusions

There are positive guidance aspects to the relationship between Hong Kong parents and their sons which may have negative connotations to Western educators who value free will and critical decision making. The academic relationship between Hong Kong boys and their parents is one of mutual support and decision making and may easily be misinterpreted by Western teachers:

“One boy was under pressure from his parents. He wanted to study history of art but they thought he should be doing science. They were almost mocking him.”

(Division teacher, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

However, the relationship based on collectivist values is perceived as being symbiotic by the boys rather than dictatorial. The shared values of the school and parents result in students being encouraged to participate both by teachers and their families back in Hong Kong. A less positive aspect of the relationship is the cross-referencing of results which takes place between College parents in Hong Kong which replicates the environments of Hong Kong local schools and places additional pressure on students. However, this behaviour is familiar to Hong Kong students from their previous experiences and only becomes an issue when compared to non-Hong Kong families.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

This thesis has contributed to research in the following ways:

The exploration of a bounded setting has allowed the examination of curriculum, structure and environment on a group of students from Hong Kong.

This research has sought to identify the additive aspects of intercultural education.

Whilst identifying the fact that a single case study will not provide data which can be generalised to the population of residential boarding schools (Yin 2009), this research seeks to provide themes which may be explored in further studies.

Through the creation of a rich learning experience for students of all backgrounds, The College has created an environment which is not reflective of any one culture but in which all cultures are appreciated. The currency of the school is academic endeavour (broad engagement as distinct to narrow focus on achievement and examination success). The rhetoric and entrance process of the school means that students of all cultural backgrounds and their families are likely to share similar amounts of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) which is shared by the staff and developed when applied to the curriculum of the school.

Teaching within the school requires boys of all cultures to adapt to the ethos and values of the College which are not necessarily representative of any one culture but answers the needs of many. On one hand, there is a culture of achievement, with boys gaining access to competitive universities and participating in external Olympiads, which reassures students from more goal oriented cultures that they will achieve their objectives. On the other hand, there is a strong overt and covert message that the acquisition of knowledge, motivated by a love of learning, is a laudable objective. Classroom discipline is implied: boys are expected to adhere to a code of conduct based on mutual respect and, on the whole, this is observed throughout the school: "Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are remarkable for the respect that is shown and mutual enjoyment of one another's company" (ISC 2013: 5.1). This climate of respect and the lack of enforcement appeared to be unfamiliar to the majority of boys and they responded quickly to it and became self-

governing. The teaching staff are motivated by learning and boys who respond to this are praised irrespective of their culture or achievement.

The teaching style of The College is overwhelmingly dialogic and in many Division lessons, is based on the Socratic method of questions and answers. All members of the class are responsible for the quality of learning, including the teacher. One of the effects of this to create equality based on intellectual participation irrespective of culture (Hammond and Gao 2002). In the junior years, teachers do make some concession towards all boys in terms of speed of teaching and most take pains to ensure that Hong Kong students are following the curriculum but this concession disappears in the upper school. Through a process of familiarity, response to praise and encouragement, the boys adapt their learning styles to those of The College rather than teacher adapting to the boys. Boys who have experienced a dialectic approach to learning struggle to come to terms with the new environment initially but show distinct signs of adaptation in their second year and have normally adapted in their third year. The upper years displayed a shared approach to learning, irrespective of previous educational background.

On the surface, the dichotomy between the aspirations of students from goal orientated cultures and those who value education as an experience would be assumed to create conflict. It is my belief that the boys' families and the College combined removes all uncertainty. The families support their sons by providing tutorial during the holidays which ensures that they are aware of the focus of the examination syllabi and have covered the relevant materials. During the early years, this support is crucial but, as they progress through the school, the boys adapt their learning styles to the less directive approach of teaching. The College has a track record in sending boys to selective universities and has precedent, which indicates to boys that they will achieve their goals if they trust in the system. The quality of teaching experienced in Division fulfils the desire on the part of families that the boys broaden their experiences. The three stakeholder groups: parents, students and teachers benefit from each other's perspectives and are the aims of all are subsumed into the College culture.

The majority of boys coming to the school come voluntarily and therefore are arriving with a desire to acculturate to the school (Berry 2005, Berry and Williams (2004). This results in

less cultural stress although, as has been seen the difference in educational expectations presents challenges. More importantly, the Hong Kong students are not required to give up their cultural values in order to become a part of the new society (Ogbu 1993) but rather to accommodate new values rather than sacrificing their original tenets in order to assimilate. This is an important point; Kim (1998, 2001) suggests that acculturation is never fully achievable but The College is not requiring Hong Kong boys to acculturate to British life but rather to the hybrid of values and cultural traits which it represents and therefore acculturation is an attainable goal.

The acculturation curve for boys from Hong Kong local schools is educationally steep as they are initially unable to demonstrate the skills of classroom engagement which are expected by the school but socially appears to be less of a challenge. Educational background plays a big role in determining the speed of acculturation; boys from international schools who are familiar with the surface level requirements of an interactive classroom and boys from some British schools experience challenges in adapting to the hierarchical nature of the school. Boys from local schools struggle with the expectations of engagement and the lack of clear guidelines for written work. Although applied to different domains, these challenges create a shared experience and reflect one of a pluralistic acculturation experience as boys experience setbacks and adapt accordingly. Unlike migrants who may be able to experience different sectors of their new culture discretely, the boys are immediately immersed into an environment which represents social, academic and behavioural change. This plurality of experience is reflected in an acculturation model which takes place at different levels (Shaules, 1993). During one lesson, an older student (from India) challenged Zaidi's model (1975), explaining that he had experienced both physical and sociocultural changes simultaneously. This experience was shared by Hong Kong boys in the class (UVIBk2 Division lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit) although with the caveat that the physical problem was:

“The food... disgusting. The weather didn't really bother me until February. It was freezing, and so gray.”

(UVIBk2 Boy, Division lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Significantly, these differences in acculturation underline the fact that Hong Kong students are not representative of a homogenous group and this distinction is recognised by teachers, the majority of whom adopt different teaching strategies for different boys. The majority of boys are joining the school voluntarily and are therefore predisposed to have positive acculturation experiences (Ting-Toomey 1999:239, Byram 1997:33). Based on observations during my research visits, social and educational differences are minimised as the boys adapt to their new environment, attempt to decode the values of their new setting and share information. Boys of all nationalities become more culturally reflective as contact develops between them.

Rather than coming into an alien environment, there is a match between the skillset of incoming students and those which are valued within The College. This match is promoted by the interview and entrance examination system. Skills which are developed because they are effective in order to compete within a Hong Kong context such as music, dedication to study and diligence, are extolled by the school, giving Hong Kong boys an immediate place in the student hierarchy. Sport is inclusive due to the number of sports on offer, sports which are unique to the school, and the absence of a dominant sport. Rugby is not offered, meaning that boys who may be physically slighter or who have never experienced contact sports are not excluded. Hong Kong boys and parents express a concern about sports which might cause physical damage and rugby is often mentioned as a source of worry based on my discussions with boys from different schools in Hong Kong prior to departure for the United Kingdom.

The physical structure of the school contributes to forming a large and diverse in-group as boys have no obvious characteristic in common other than a shared membership of the house. The house represents the formation of a collectivist culture in which students are made responsible for each other. This structure is likely to be more familiar to boys from collectivist Hong Kong than individualist Britain and therefore facilitates acculturation. Bonds are reinforced as boys return to the house to eat meals three times a day and join together to participate in inter-house singing, music, sports and drama competitions. As no one group dominates the houses, either culturally or in terms of skillsets, this structure creates social cohesion without emphasising difference. The group may be juxtaposed with other house groups without the possibility of identifying obvious dissimilarities (Singer



1998). The creation of this loose in-group is extended as boys are also being members of numerous other groups (sports/music/drama). Again, none of these groups are large enough to dominate the school culture or create what the Head Master refers to as a “hero structure”. Another impact of the structure is the absence of a dominant in-group and therefore less identification of difference between out-group members. The existence of multiple in-groups could be said to be characteristic of a low-context culture (Triandis et al 1988, Triandis 1995) yet the house group is unchanging and is therefore more reflective of a high-context culture. This is another illustration of the duality of The College cultural environment which is not reflective of any one national culture.

Hong Kong students do experience some struggles with the curriculum which were not observed amongst the majority of British students, particularly in the areas of modern European language learning and the expectations of classroom participation. These difficulties are overcome as students experience more of the school and, by the second year, the vast majority of boys are participating equally. As the majority of Hong Kong boys do not choose to continue to learn a modern European language at Sixth form level, the issues are no longer a feature after VB. It is interesting that the transformative nature of the rest of the curriculum does not apply to this field, possibly because the struggle of acquiring the language coupled with a focus on teaching to pass an examination in the lower sets does not engender any desire to extend learning.

The College has created a learning culture in which intellectual participation is valued and is not bound by a narrow curriculum. From my observation, I believe that the bigger challenge of acculturation for students from Hong Kong was adopting deeper engagement with the subjects being taught rather than focusing on task based work and examination results. This required a shift from goal driven learning to broader participation on the part of Hong Kong students from local schools and required a greater focus on content rather than participation from international school students. As Division is a non-examined subject, this course serves as forum in which boys are taught analytical skills away from the stress of examinations and, by the time they reach the upper school, the majority of students are active participants in the lessons. Although Division focuses mainly on the Western cultural tradition, it introduces classical thought, which is equally as unfamiliar to both Western and Eastern students, and thus no group is excluded based on prior knowledge. Equally, Division

engenders a teaching environment based on equal participation; no one perspective is promoted other than the requirement that boys supported their views with evidence and presenting their points coherently. Within the dialogic classroom, boys challenged each other and their teachers based on each participant having valid insights which were worthy of both sharing and further discussion. In this environment, power and learning is shared. This belief in shared learning is key to the school's ethos. There is an intellectual equality within the school which boys from all cultures respond to and which is culturally neutral.

The school ethos is strong and is promoted at every level of the school with the result that it boys internalise it as their contact with the environment deepens. Some of the values are overt and are shared during school assemblies or at précis; others are symbolic and are embodied in the physical structure of the school and the curriculum. One result of this is that boys from high context cultures (Hall 1976) are more likely to be sensitive to the symbols and unspoken values of the school although they may not initially be able to interpret them. Students from low context cultures are initially less aware of the hidden aspects of the school's culture and demonstrated a less holistic approach to analysing the school's values. Shared discussions in Division represent an opportunity for boys from high and low context cultures to be exposed to each other's insights. One of the extremely positive aspects of the school's ethos is that both discussion and respect for other's views are promoted and Division provides a forum for the development of a shared perspective.

Although there may be tensions between the results orientated society of Hong Kong and the rhetoric of the school, boys do seem to navigate between the two. The College is a hybrid of collectivist and individualist cultures which is most reflective of horizontal individualism in which the individual is autonomous but of equal status within his peer group (Triandis et al 1988, Singelis et al 1995). This structure accepts hierarchy which is familiar to students from local Hong Kong schools but is likely to be a source of dissonance to students from international and some British schools.

The school forms a society which is distinct rather than being reflective of a single nationality. The existence of a school language and culture which is shared equally by and distinguishes all members of the school, creates a homogenous in-group of students (Triandis 1995). Within the school, a level third space) exists in which all cultures are equally

valued and a new College culture is developed with principles which are both explicit (such as working hard) and implicit (including that of valuing critical engagement) (Bhabha 1990, 2004, Feng 2009). The new space has rules which have elements of familiarity to all cultures yet are not dominated by any one culture (Bhabha 1990, 2004) and therefore represents an environment in which boys are no longer defined by their nationality but rather by their intellectual and cultural ability.

Hong Kong students from a collectivist background are likely to maintain strong familial relationships which affect their decision making and motivations. As they return home on a regular basis, the influence is renewed and remains strong. During their time at The College, motivation is gradually transferred from parents to students (Vinther 2010) and is transmitted to non-Hong Kong students within the context of the boarding house. Parental involvement in terms of decision making about examinations and career paths is interpreted differently by teachers who saw it as something they could not challenge but ultimately disapproved of, and boys who perceived it to be a support mechanism. Students from Hong Kong families were likely to express gratitude to their parents for supporting them and the relationship was perceived to be based on mutual goals rather than the imposition of will. As with many of the attitudes of the College, criticism of the Hong Kong students' perceived lack of autonomy was not overt and teachers did not seek to influence students or create dissent. This approach is reflective of the overall ethos of The College which is to accept difference rather than imposing a standard and as such students felt that they were being supported by both families and the school.

Initially, boys go through an acculturation process which involves adapting to their new classroom environments and assimilating the values of the new school but as their stay progresses, there is significant and impressive intercultural interaction. The College is an example of an environment in which students do not need to sacrifice their cultural background in order to excel but rather they apply their new learning to existing values and share their insight with the group, resulting in a positive transfer of ideas and the creation of an intercultural space.

## 7:2: Strengths and limitations of the research

Strengths of the research include the background of the researcher, the access granted by the school, the attempt to avoid generalisations and the number of observation visits made. These four points are inextricably linked.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:77) describe researchers who gain credibility with the subjects of their research as being given wide access and being able to establish a relationship based on trust. I have a background in preparing Hong Kong students to study in British boarding schools and has therefore had extensive contact with both students and parents. As I have been operating a tutorial school in Hong Kong since 2006, I have also had experience of teaching students from a broad range of Hong Kong schools. This exposure, allied with a study of available literature, allowed me to focus in key research questions. Familiarity with the Hong Kong education system as a teacher gave me insight into the classroom behaviours which one would be likely to encounter in Hong Kong local and international schools.

The College gave me complete access to the school during my visits. This allowed me to observe life both inside and outside the classroom and be able to engage with staff in class and in the common room. I am deeply grateful to the Headmaster and staff of The College for their generosity in sharing their insights. On a number of occasions, I was asked whether the research would be made available and both staff and students expressed interest in reading my final thesis. I believe that the staff's belief that education is a lifelong process made them willing to participate in my research.

I have attempted to avoid the generalisation that Hong Kong students are a homogenous group. Instead, I have attempted to explore the impact of previous learning on a group of students who may be from the same geographical location but who arrive in the United Kingdom with extremely different educational experiences.

Finally, in order to attempt to avoid what Ryan describes as a "deficit" theory of culture (2007:41), I attempted to remain neutral and was wary of asking questions which would emphasis difference or lead the speaker to conclude that Hong Kong learners were in some way lacking. As part of this strategy, I abandoned the idea of interviewing groups of boys during my first visit when I felt that this approach was creating a "them and us" impression on the part of the boys.

Limitations of the research include the scale and duration of the project. This research was limited to one school due both financial and time restrictions. A further longitudinal study might establish further factors which affect the rate of acculturation. Similarly, a holistic study (Yin, 2009: 50) in which more than one unit of focus is selected for a case study (in this instance, multiple schools) might reveal more about the contributory effect of different school structures, extra- curricular activities or curriculum. The structure of the sports programme in The College appeared to be a key factor in creating an integrated student body. It would be valuable to be able to observe a group of schools in which sport plays different roles but who all recruit students from Hong Kong in order to establish the effect on the acculturation of different student groups relative to their familiarity with and preference for the sports on offer.

This study has been based purely on qualitative data. Although data was collected based on feedback from students and teachers, additional surveys of parents would add richness to the rationale behind parental involvement in decision making.

### **7:3: Interim Conclusions**

This study raises some interesting angles for further research, namely the role of the curriculum and school structure in promoting and developing an intercultural learning environment. The researcher's background was of some help in establishing a climate of mutual respect and trust and her familiarity with the Hong Kong education system allowed some insight into possible learned cultural behaviours. The research was limited by both economic and time factors and it is suggested that a further follow up study could be carried out which could either be longitudinal or could incorporate a group of schools. The latter approach would be extremely valuable in generating comparative data on the differing impacts of school environments on intercultural education.

### **7:4: Implications for theory and research methodology**

In the years 2012 – 2013, there were nearly 26,000 international students studying at British independent schools with fee income estimated to be £685m. Of this group, over half are

estimate to come from Hong Kong with numbers rising by an average of 4.8% per annum. This is a significant group and schools who seek to understand the motivations and behaviours of the students will find some of the findings of this research meaningful. There is a growing body of research into third tier education (Brown and Holloway 2008, Watkins 2000, Welikala and Watkins 2008, Feng 2009, Vinther 2010) but there appears to be very little research into second tier education, despite the growth in this sector. Unlike university level students, secondary school students are more likely to depend on an institution for their pastoral and educational needs and therefore a greater awareness of the acculturation process within the context of a British boarding school may lead to increase sensitivity on the part of the schools and may help parents and students pre-empt sources of cultural dissonance.

As this research represents work in a nascent area, the primary contribution to research is that it opens up the discussion about how students from different cultures contribute to and adapt to life in a residential boarding school. As I do not focus on language acquisition, the research centres on the ways in which the ethos and dynamics of an institution contribute to the creation of an intercultural space. Later researchers may find that the areas explored generate further research questions about student behaviour, school structure and the universal nature of cultural values. I have attempted to extend the initial framework of cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (Hofstede 1988, Hofstede et al. 2010) to the world of the school and believe that further research may be valuable in identifying the ways in which institutions rather than nations contribute to the development of cultural values. One of the criticisms of Hofstede's work is that he attempts to create national level values rather than looking for nuance. The methodology of the research has implications for theory in that the case study methodology is adapted slightly in order to avoid interviews which may lead to the reinforcement of group identities. Although in-depth discussion with interviewees about their motivations might serve to provide insight, this researcher felt that the risk of causing division and focusing on difference might have the effect of undermining what appeared to be a successful intercultural environment.

## **7:5: Implications for practice**

This research has implications for the ways in which schools prepare both students and teachers for their shared experiences. One of the key findings has been that students of one nationality may not be treated as a homogenous group but have extremely different needs and perspectives which are affected by their educational backgrounds. Based on the conclusions which have been drawn from the data analysis, students coming from different educational backgrounds, particularly those experienced in local Hong Kong schools, sought clear guidelines about classroom behaviour and standards. Lack of guidance was a source of stress.

“When I first came, I panicked about what was expected of me”

(VIBk1 boy, in discussion, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit)

For this group, a greater understanding of the role of the teacher in a Hong Kong context might help British practitioners to recognise the conditioning which their Hong Kong students have undergone. Clearly, the values and expectations of the British classroom are being sought after by parents and therefore the requirement is not to adapt them but rather to make them clear and achievable. Students expressed their concerns about being overwhelmed and not knowing how to engage:

“When I first came. I didn’t know how to join in. Then I tried asking a question every now and then. It got easier.”

(MP boy, local school, discussion in response to my question about what had been the greatest difference between his Hong Kong school and The College, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

This attitude indicates a desire to adapt which may be a reflection of the Hong Kong students being a voluntary minority group and therefore more likely to perceive adapting to the new culture as beneficial in allowing them to achieve a goal of educational success. This attitude is bolstered by parental messages promoting academic achievement and encouraging the students to overcome any barriers to progress. This positive approach to accommodating difference results in order to achieve goals is enhanced as The College is a school in which academic achievement is vaunted and students and teachers thus share similar objectives.

Lack of clear visual aids which specified important topics for study created a level of anxiety for Hong Kong students:

“We don’t really have text books for Div. I’m not sure what I should be learning.”

(MP Boy, in discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> visit)

“Will this be on the exam? Do I need to write it down?”

(VB Boy, physics lesson, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit)

Within a Confucian Heritage Culture, teachers seek to avoid uncertainty by providing clear visual learning guides (Nguyen et al 2006). Teachers in United Kingdom schools are more likely to rely on classroom discussion and self-made notes with the result that Hong Kong students experience concerns about whether they are covering topics which may later be important for examinations. One area which may be of value for future practice is for teachers to understand more about the classroom environment in Hong Kong and the reasons why Hong Kong students have the concerns that they do. This deeper empathy might lead to teachers focusing on the positive aspects of learning which all might benefit from rather than designating Hong Kong students as deficient learners (Ryan 2007).

Increased teacher sensitivity and positive reaction to cultural difference has been demonstrated to be a major factor in creating an intercultural environment which values all cultures equally (Buttjes and Byram 1991). Within the world of The College, the main value currency was intellectual and cultural achievement. This may not be the case in other institutions and teachers who are unfamiliar with Hong Kong students and their approach to learning might fall into the trap of viewing the learning style as deficient in some way. The College teachers tended to be self-reflective and sought to find explanations for the classroom behaviours they were identifying. Therefore, providing more information about background would be valuable not with the aim of transforming teaching practice but rather of informing it. Weaver (1994: 157) suggests that adopting an intercultural attitude begins with an examination of one’s own culture in the hope of being able to gain a deeper understanding of our own patterns of behaviour. This approach may decrease ethnocentrism, leading to the acceptance that one cultural pattern is not superior to another. A whole school awareness of personal cultural bias would enhance the learning



experience for all participants and might enhance the creation of an educational environment which views cultural differences as positives rather than deficits.

I am not of the opinion that Division, in the form which it is taught at The College, would be replicable in a school which does not have teaching staff who have a similarly broad cultural knowledge and are not constrained by examination requirements. However, a version of the course might be feasible which could cover key cultural theories whilst developing the skills of discussion and debate. Within this scenario, the teacher could act as a source of information and then a facilitator for discussion this allowing students from all backgrounds to share in this unique learning experience:

“If the objectives of our education differ for sections of our society so as to ignore any of these elements for some of our pupils, either because they are considered too difficult, or for some reason they are thought less important for these pupils, then we are denying to them certain basic ways of rational development and we have indeed got inequality of educational opportunity of the most far reaching kind.”

(Hirst, 1969:188)

The inclusion of a subject in which all cultural views and perspectives are equally respected combined with a focus on deep learning, could be transformative. Rather than trying to focus on aspects of different cultures, a subject which engenders discussion and critical engagement without promoting one cultural perspective over another, could develop a respect for other views and the creation of a truly inclusive educational space.

### **7:8: Personal reflections**

Carrying out this research has been an extraordinary process. Prior to embarking on the research, I was intrigued by the changes I had observed in returning Hong Kong students but had few theories about what had engendered them. During my research, I gradually formed the hypothesis that the ethos and structure of the school had a greater impact on creating an effective intercultural environment than the individual acculturation of the boys. Rather than expecting boys to adapt and conform to a set of Western values which place students from other cultures at a disadvantage based on lack of familiarity or previous experiences,

the school has created its own culture which is at once familiar and unfamiliar to all students. All students need to adapt and, as a result, all have to go through the process of change. This perspective has informed the way that I approach teaching. I believe that, as a result of carrying out this research, I am more aware of cultural difference and, more importantly, more appreciative of the benefits which it brings to learning.

I have been inspired by the professionalism and breadth of knowledge which I have witnessed from both staff and students in and out of the classroom. The College is unselfconscious about the pursuit of excellence in every area and the boys respond accordingly. I have been fascinated to see how, when placed in an environment which promotes achievement without encouraging competition, students from all backgrounds focus on developing knowledge. This leads to a sense of mutual appreciation which is culturally blind. This piece of research has given me a greater awareness of the positive potential of creating an intercultural space and I hope that some of the conclusions I have drawn will be of value to institutions hoping to replicate The College's success.

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## Appendix 1: Interview with the Headmaster

The following is a transcript of my interview with the Headmaster which took place during my fourth visit. The interview was transcribed by hand during the interview and typed up immediately afterwards.

**The boys believe that the school has a clearly defined hierarchy. How does this reflect the principles of the college?**

I think the school is based upon the intersection of basic discipline, the promotion of learning which is the principle aim, and the pastoral care of the boys. We seek to maximise achievement of the aims; discipline, cultural learning and pastoral care. Mutually independent and important. The school's organisation depends upon achieving the aim.

The Head promotes cultural learning, discipline and pastoral care amongst the staff who pass it on to the pupils particularly in smaller groups in the houses.

We have clear educational values – educational and pastoral values, mutually interpenetrative and a structure which promotes and protects them and by doing so, enhances the experience of any minority group such as overseas pupils.

**During my time at the College, I have noticed that the structure of Division has changed. What is your aim in doing this?**

The main elements behind the reform... there are two main reasons why the reform has come about:

Firstly, we have a group of young dons, who are not enculturated into div aims and expectations. We do our own training of dons when they arrive. Effectively they are single subject teachers in a multi subject enterprise.

The aim of the outcome of our educational offering is conversation. The reason we have in house dining is that we want the boys to be able to converse to be about what they are doing in div therefore they need to be in sync. They have different div dons and sit on a single table. Might be pejoratively referred to “more prescriptive” to serve the aims firstly of education of the dons themselves and secondly the education of the boys.

Only in the last 10 years have I made a point of appointing young dons. They are energetic and still formable. I could appoint an excellent teacher from a grammar school but he would reflect the orientation of the grammar school which is exam orientated.

**Can you comment on the structure of the boarding houses and specifically the dismantling of Sen Order?**

The decision was made by the new Housemasters of a particular generation, in their 40s and reflects the attitude of the generation. Not comfortable with the negative aspect of sen order which is a system of privilege based on age. Also I suspect the younger boys were beginning to resist because their prep schools have become less hierarchical. They come as senior boys from prep schools and resist being at the bottom of the pile in terms of being treated unkindly. They are used to a level of kindness that old Sen Order didn't really represent... Although we have to have to some order to a certain extent. The Housemasters run a system of delegation and have to have some system of responsibility. Doesn't bring with it though the implications of the purely privileged old Sen Order.

### **What role does sport play in the school?**

We have a policy that life of the mind comes first: this is implicit in our mission and present in the rhetoric of the school. The strength of the house system accounts for the experience of sport. The house wants to include everyone in order to run as a family and must have a regimen that develops that. What has changed is that we have much better organisation at the level of school teams and the standard of coaching has improved because we have younger dons who are extremely energetic.

### **In some schools I looked at, rugby plays a dominant role in school sports. Why doesn't The College have rugby?**

Somebody must have made the decision at some point. To introduce rugby into boys' schools creates a dynamic of masculine aggression and makes heroes of the boys who play. Regular intelligent people want to play sport. We have an intellectual high culture as our educational objective and want to have sporting regimen to protect it. Most English boarding schools are effectively sports clubs! To people who value these things we are always the minority but you have create a sports regime which matches the culture of the school.

### **(Discussion of Hofstede's dimension) The boys felt that The College was a more feminine than masculine school, primarily because of the lack of internal competition.**

Our students are not competing to beat others in exams. Schools are forced to adopt this approach through league tables. That kind of competition is anti-intellectual and undermines our purpose. We want the boys to be learners because it is a good thing... they develop a hunger and become aware of the need to learn.

This is true of the school, and as the boys come into VIBk, they begin to understand. They are reaching maturity. If they understood when they arrived, they would be bored with the place!

### **What is the role of Music in the school?**

The hero structure of the school centres on music... and intellectualism but especially music. You feel this on bigger scale when, last term for example, we had a boy in X house. He is very gregarious, loves sport but also a gifted violinist who played the Mozart violin concerto to a large part of the school. They were intensely proud of him and we don't see that on the sports side. We had a group of wonderful cricketers a few years ago but their accolades didn't reach the levels of the boys who

competed in both the chemistry and physics Olympiads or the boy who played a Mozart concerto. This may be perceived as a feminisation of the British male! Certainly it (the school culture) celebrates the intuitive elements in the personality and expressions of it such as the French play. Whether they understood it or not, the boys were there because they were proud of others.

### **Do you systematically try to bring the fabric of the school into div lessons?**

We tried to bring the buildings into JP Div through sub-elements called "The College and the world we live in". It has been included in the new div plan. We want to be more systematic but don't want to overdo it. It needs to be used as a supplement for other things e.g. a section on Gothic architecture.

### **One area which interests me is that the curriculum of the school is not porous rather than having clear divisions between subjects.**

Porous is a good description... cross-references... the habit is innate in many of people teaching here such as X. They are well educated across the board. Every Wednesday morning we have a 10 minute lecture for third and fourth year boys. We adopt a theme for the term and ten dons speak. It unveils a breadth of interest these teachers have such as Camus or philosophy problem. The theme this term is heroes/villains. I spoke about how Macbeth is both a hero and villain; one man's hero is another man's villain. At the end of the cycle, the boys will have heard ten interesting approaches to the theme.

### **Could Div be replicated?**

You would have to build it. It is about 115 years old here and has become part of the institutional DNA. It has to be fertilised and the reforms will enculturate another generation of Dons. They last for about 25 years and it (the reform) was last done about then. The older dons and older boys enculturate. Div really matters; it is a mantra I hear from parents and if we say it often enough and believe, miracles happen! I suppose it would be quite difficult to replicate now because of technology and the way people look at things... Boys live in the world of sound bites and distractions and div is about long term concentration and continuity. They are brought up on computers and mobile phones. It is a big cultural challenge to encourage the skills and to enculturate them so that they feel that the knowledge is wonderful and valuable. Div is marvellous at its best but how you would recreate in another school with the skills and appetites it needs... It could be done but would be a project of many years. You would have to change the appetites of the school.

How you create an ethos? Create and sustain. Immersing young people in a worldview? I think we do it but to some extent we're waging war on pervasive culture - distraction and trivialisation, sound bitery, instant knowledge.

### **What is the ethos of the school?**

We believe in having a healthy body and having communitarian values but they are not headline figures in this place: you know, we don't talk about building character here, doesn't mean that we aren't doing it. We are doing it by, as it were, waging war on the ... the trivialisms of the outside world.



**If you could define a product of The College, would that be possible?**

A product... emm... Well they're not all the same of course so in a sense you know we are not producing a type...I suppose that is different from a product. Is there something unmistakably "College" about them when they leave? Well I think what marks most of them is an independence of mind, which has definitely been encouraged here, and an understatement of manner.

**And how does that fit with Asian world as you've seen it during trips and from your exposure (to it)?**

Independence of mind, I mean, well, that's a challenge. Well, independence of mind is a challenge in any social setting because social settings are really to some extent inevitably constructed on conformity. And I suppose that Asian society enforces conformity more strongly than the liberal West... so therefore independence of mind is a more challenging thing to deal with. But at the same time the thing I hear endlessly when I go and visit China when people are saying, you know, "we want the influence of Western schools like The College in China because we are too conformist and we don't have enough independence of mind... enough thinking outside the box." So, I suppose you might say that in Asian societies they are becoming increasingly aware that they need, in order to develop their economy and their social and political culture, they need more independent thinking. While at the same time there is an overwhelming cultural tendency to conformism. So that's the independence of mind.

The understatement of manner... yes, I think that probably does sit more comfortably in Asian society because they, I mean, Asian societies precisely because they very communitarian really aren't they? Or at least very family orientated if not communitarian. You know, are rather embarrassed by sort of strident celebrity, which the West has not totally gone for. I mean, could Boris Johnson exist within an Asian body politic?

**No, the fact that someone who is asking people to trust them is behaving in a way which indicates that they can't control their own behaviour...**

Can't be trusted?

**Yes, that might be the Asian view. Similarly, presentations in Japan have to indicate a seriousness on the part of the speaker.**

The drive to conformism is very strong there isn't it?

**Yes it is.**

We're getting a bit more involved with Japan now. I've got six boys who are going to spend six days in a Japanese school and ABC University is sending us a Sixth former on full fees. They're paying for it and it is continuing, not just a one off. So like, China, they are not wanting something that they think an institution like this has that they don't have.

**In terms of the expectations or the understanding of what education should be that you see from Asian parents and teachers' perceptions of what education should be... do you see similarities? Or do you see gaps?**

I think the Asian parents over the period of my career... Well no, I think one has to be more specific... I think Hong Kong parents, who choose the school, have become have become better educated about what the school is trying to achieve and what its values are. I mean, I think twenty years ago, they would have been measuring things by league tables. And I think a lot of Asian parents and not only Asian parents actually, do measure things in that way but I think the people who are attracted to us do measure things in a different way partly because we have taught them to do that but partly because perhaps they are have become people who have a much broader view of how you judge things in a system. Certainly when I go to Hong Kong, they are not going on exam results. Doesn't mean that they are not interested in them, I'm interested in them too but they don't form a headline part of the conversation. Other things do, like Div, or music, or even things like, you know, the tone of the institution. And I think that's because they themselves... because Hong Kong is creating... is it that Hong Kong is developing a more variegated elite of its own?

**Yes.**

One element of which chimes with the values of this institution. But there are plenty of Hong Kong people who want to go to other institutions because those institutions express the values they are seeking.

So to come back to the question that you asked. Is there a match or a mismatch between the goals of teachers and those of parents? Less and less. I have come to the view that the Hong Kong parents are probably our best informed and best oriented sub-group, if you like, of the school. The boys are very good. There aren't many Hong Kong boys who just come and work. So they aren't the kind of narrow, exam obsessed people that they were perhaps a generation ago. They become very westernised of course.

**Do you think that is because selection processes have changed or that you are somehow not getting the people who are exam obsessed?**

Well I think that the ones who are really exam obsessed can't find us in league tables, so they don't even consider us probably. I think it's that. I think that, as with any part of our potential customer base, we put off more than we attract by describing accurately what we are. And that's good PR because we don't want those people and we don't have time to deal with them! I think we've got, and I think this is something that The College has got better at... Our label is clearer and we deliver what's on the tin... what the label says. And people know that now. Therefore it is easier for them to decide whether it is what they want or not.

**Could it possibly be that Hong Kong parents are likely to take exam preparation into their own hands...**

You mean tutorial? There's not much opportunity for them to do it here really. You mean that boys spend term time here and then go home and get put into a tutorial? I don't know how much of that is going on. I don't think the boys would put up with it now. The boys themselves have become too "Collage"!

**Based on my experience, many of them do spend time with tutors during the holidays.**

We did have one parent like that... they really did drive him. He went in the end... I think he went on to XYZ University. He came as a Sixth former.

**Sixth formers are very different. One of the things you see very clearly, with a few exceptions, is that when boys come over at Sixth form level their eyes are very firmly on the prize of university.**

Not sure if that's true. It was true of the boys I referred to. If we look at the top year... X's father is pushy but no more pushy than other non-Asians would be. He has enormous personality. He has been a good College student. We tend to take Mainland Chinese students into fifth book. They don't do IGCSEs but spend a year getting used to the school.

There aren't many in that category (Sixth form entry.) There are only ever be one or two boys joining at this level. We do control that, which may be why, it had got around that we are difficult to get into. That's a good message! What other areas do we need to talk about?

**Parents making decisions about which classes, which courses the boys should be doing? Teachers seem to be very aware of it.**

Well, you've talked to Dons about it. I should think that there is still a general expectation of Asian culture, that parents will make decisions about their children's future. I would say that it is still more expected than it is in the liberal West. We try to train boys to have independence of mind and that applies to parents as to everyone else. I should think that it is probably true that because the culture of parental deference is comparatively strong in Hong Kong, that the parents still have sway in the subject choices. But I am not aware of, I mean I am sure it happens... I mean we're not all walking around saying that it is spoiling our educational mission.

**I don't think that they are saying they're spoiling it and div is obviously a mitigating factor because even if you've gone down the one path, you're still exposed to the other paths. I think it's more of a disappointment that the dons are seeing a boys who has a talent which they feel is not being developed.**

But you see they'd be feeling that about a lot of boys here because they have to drop these subjects after GCSE's.

**The point was that they felt that the languages weren't being selected because the parents didn't want them to lower their averages and, for the other subjects, the students had expressed interest. For example they'd wanted to study history of art but the parents had suggested that they pursued other subjects.**

That wouldn't be only Hong Kong parents who would do that...

**So you're seeing it with Western groups too?**

I'm sure it happens with Western parents. Their parents have a vision of them. But I would have said by and large, boys would have held out for subjects they want to take. And for the majority of them, because we're good at maths, because we are selective and selection equals good at maths really. We have a strong maths culture, because they can all do it and enjoy it intellectually as a language, 75% do maths all the way through and I don't think that is primarily because of parental influence, I think it is because they enjoy doing maths.

Pre-U maths is hard. I don't hear boys saying that. You've spoken to dons so you've got some data there...

**The other area I was interested in was the Western boys taking Mandarin. Is that something you see developing?**

No. It's too difficult. They can do it when they're adults. They should learn languages in which they can make advanced progress; so they have a good experience of learning in and for itself. That's the view on which our offering of Mandarin, which is very limited, is predicated. That frankly after studying IGCSE Mandarin, they can scarcely say anything more than "good morning" and "I need to go to the lavatory!" It is not intellectually satisfying for them. So we would rather they take French, German, Latin, Greek to be able to read and communicate it at a sophisticated level, and having achieved that, when they go to University or get a job in the Foreign Office, they've got all the skills for learning Mandarin. So that's the view we take. The Hong Kong parents have accepted that it. They're not allowed to take Mandarin because we see them as semi-native speakers. And so we say twenty non-Asian students a year can do IGCSE Mandarin. I suspect that some of the Hong Kong boys have to do Mandarin lessons during the holidays but they've got long holidays and an hour's Mandarin a day isn't going to hurt them.

**That's normally what many students do.**

Yes, and they can go to China and speak it!

**Over and above learning the language, is promoting and interest in the East a part of Div? Will it be part of Div?**

Yes... we don't make a particular feature of it. I mean, X (teacher with exposure to East Asia) is a Div Don and he would make a particular feature of it. That's a very good question and I think probably we don't. Does it matter that we don't and should we be doing more? Our view is that Western European culture is so perilously in danger that we should actually be teaching that. Our basic assumption is that we're teaching these children... that we're equipping them with good basic skills and a serviceable breadth of mind which will allow them, in adult life, to feel confident about learning the new areas of thought, culture and language that life requires of them. So we're creating adaptability on the basic skills of the Western European tradition. And we still believe in the Western European tradition. We don't want to be syncretistic and say, you know, Eastern culture is as good as Western culture or whatever. That isn't the point really. They need to know who they are. And it is into that of course that the Hong Kong boys are coming. They are coming here for a Western education, they are not coming here for some kind of semi-Eastern education. And that's what their parents want. Certainly, no group has ever tried to change the thrust of the curriculum. Occasionally, you might get some of them asking about Mandarin and then some of them might say: why don't you do more Italian, or politics.

**Is there anything that you think I have not seen, or not picked up on, or that I am on the wrong track?**

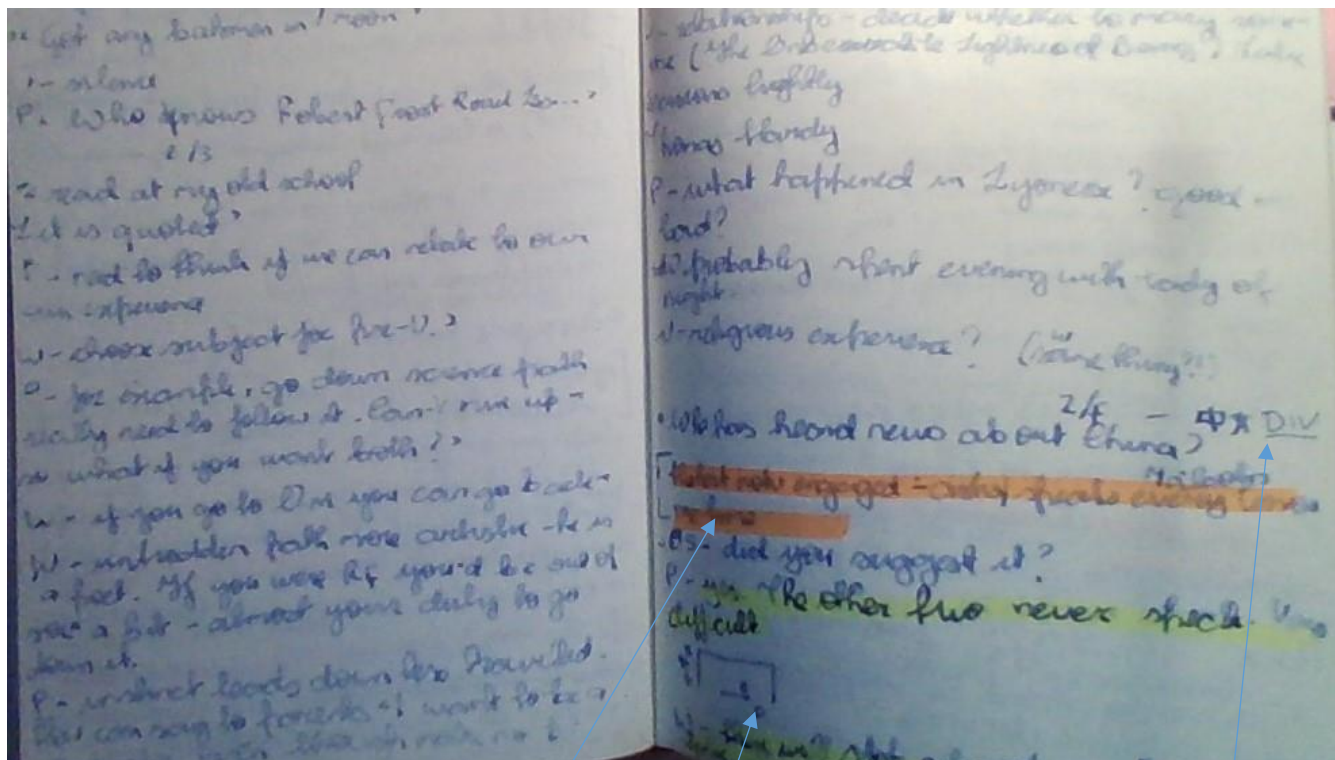
No I don't. I think I can see how all of this is going to fit together. I'd love to see it all! I think I'm giving you the end of the story, once the boys have gone through the school. I am sure that there

will be things at the beginning that change as they progress through the school. We should judge them at the end not at the beginning, surely?



## Appendix 2: Scanned copy of my notes

I developed a form of shorthand which allowed me to make notes during lessons. This page also gives an example of the illustrations I made of seating plans (x indicates a non-Hong Kong student, the Chinese character 中 indicates a Hong Kong student)



Mark up based on themes (in this case changed classroom behaviours based on teacher suggestion).

Seating plan

Lesson details