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## Current educational practice of alternative schools for misbehaved students in China

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**CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE**  
**OF**  
**ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS FOR MISBEHAVED STUDENTS IN**  
**CHINA**

**XINA RUHENG**

**ACTION THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT**  
**FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION**

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY MONTEREY BAY**

**COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES**

**MAY, 2005**

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CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE  
OF  
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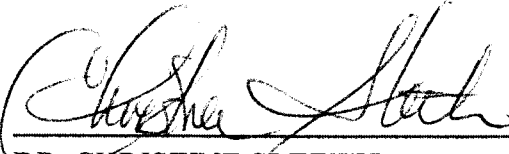
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## **ABSTRACT**

Based on the field study conducted at Beijing Haidian Boarding School (“BHBS”), the author of this research report attempts to uncover the myths of the current alternative school educational system in China. Through her one-month visit at BHBS and her personal experiences gained from her contacts with the students, the teachers and the parents, the author attempts to understand the pros and cons of the current alternative school system in China. This research project focuses on relationships among students, teachers, and parents, and uncovers factors that interfere with good relationships. By understanding the nature of the issues involved in the current system, the author tries to find meaningful solutions to enhance the quality of the current alternative school system in China.

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## I INTRODUCTION

In many people's eyes, I am considered an academically successful student or what they call a "good student" in school; however, deep down in my mind, I can never forget the difficult time I had experienced during my junior high years. It was the time when I just graduated from the elementary school. I went from a small village in my hometown to a new school district in the city; I was a complete stranger in new surroundings. I was having a real difficult time adjusting to the new environment and I was afraid of making changes (or maybe I just refused to grow up).

I was frustrated by my own experience in the new school and felt lonely and helpless at times. To act out my frustration and to seek comfort from others, I began to hang out with those students who were not into studying. I daydreamed a lot while in classes; I didn't care much about my homework, and worst of all, I didn't want to stay home because mom would be nagging me all day. Future was not a subject I cared much about at that time. Gradually, my classmates started to stay away from me; although I felt sad about this I didn't want to show it. My grades started to slip, it dropped from the first place in the class to the middle ranking within four months after I started in the new school district, and it was like a free fall. Fortunately, one person noticed my worsen condition and had extended a helping hand.

It was my math teacher who tried her very best to help me out of the situation. She was a very nice looking, soft-spoken middle-age lady with a kind heart. She didn't

treat me like a misbehaving student; she treated me like a friend and hung out with me. We often went to the local yogurt shop near the school to chat; sometimes, she would invite me to her home and we would chat over tea but most of the talking was conducted by me and she would just listen. I felt I was respected, and began to like her and trusted her. In the second semester of my freshmen year, she asked me to be the teacher's aid to help her in the class. Being a teacher's aid really inspired my passion in study and it helped build my self-esteem. I felt like a changed person and I worked real hard on my schoolwork. She gave me a motive to study and I wanted to make her proud of me. I graduated from the junior high with the highest honor and was able to enter the best high school in the Province. Looking back at my own experience, I feel lucky to have someone who really cared about me and was willing to give me a chance to make good for myself. With her patience and under her guidance, a lost child was once again found.

In my pursuit of this research project, I have gathered a considerable amount of information from the media regarding the alternative school system for misbehaved students in China, most of which turned out to be negative comments on the system. I have also heard horror stories about how those who were considered "misbehaving" were treated. Inequality, unfair treatment and even bias are among the common complaints the so-called "misbehaved" students had voiced. This information raised several issues:

- (i) Why are there biases toward these students and the people who are associated with them (such as their parents, relatives or even their teachers)?
- (ii) Why does the society keep a distance from them?

- (iii) Why do people consider academic achievements the primary (if not the only) measuring standard for our children's performance?

This research project was conducted using the Beijing Haidian Boarding School as the test group for my various assumptions and theories established for this research project. Beijing Haidian Boarding School is the first educational institution in China, which was formed almost 50 years ago as a supplement to the juvenile correction system. It later evolved to become a specialized school for students who have experienced apathy or learning disabilities. It also continues to provide correctional services for juvenile offenders. Current Chinese educational system mandates its children to go through a nine-year learning process. This is not only a right, but also an obligation for its children to finish junior high school. The majority of the students who go to alternative schools in China are the ones who have trouble with the laws. Even in that incidence, the students in alternative school are still required to finish the mandatory education.

In this research project, I examined the current alternative school system for misbehaved students utilizing the action research method in Beijing Haidian Boarding School. The entire on-site observation took place from December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 through January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005. For nearly 30 days, I attended the classes, held interviews with selective students, teachers and the parents. The primary purpose of my visit for this research was to establish whether certain interpersonal relationship problems existed in the school that prevent the students from learning, and the teachers from teaching. My goal was to identify the issues and hopefully, provide a sensible solution to the issues.

## II STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The focus of this research project is concentrated on the current educational practice of the Alternative School for Misbehaving Students in China. The purpose of this research is to find out

- (i) What are the participating students, parents and teachers' experiences in an alternative school for misbehaving students in China?
- (ii) Is there a better way to improve the current system for misbehaving students in China?
- (iii) How can we improve this form of schooling for misbehaving students?
- (iv) How can we make this system a more acceptable system to the parents of misbehaving students?

### **III LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this Chapter, I will attempt to discuss the evolution of the Chinese educational system from two approaches. In Part I, I will examine the cultural and historical background of the traditional Chinese educational system by introducing the various teachings given by Confucius. Through the study and discussion of his teachings, we will be able to see the influence he had on the modern education system in China. In Part II of this chapter, I will review one of the most influential books regarding the alternative school system in China. I will examine the various issues and/or statements made by the author and my agreements or disagreements toward those issues and/or statements.

#### **PART 1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In this part of the study, we will examine some of the conventional educational concepts that are relevant to the research subject at hand. In order to understand the current practice of this form of educational system in China, we should examine the cultural and historical background of the Chinese educational system. As a country with one of the oldest civilizations in the world, the modern Chinese educational systems are still greatly influenced by its cultural heritage. In this section, we will review several publications that provide relevant discussions and linkages tracing the modern Chinese educational system back to its origination. Confucianism is an ancient Chinese educational and cultural teaching that becomes the foundation of modern Chinese society including its educational and political system.

Confucius is considered the greatest educator in Chinese history. He was the first person who started a school at home, which broke the law that only government was allowed to set up schools in his time. He was also the first educator who brought education to the general public, which was also against the law at the time when education was only available to the noble ranks. Confucians' educational concepts had a great influence to the ancient Chinese society; many of his concepts are still in use in modern China.

Kehua Chen (2002a) introduced the teachings of Confucius and his fellow students with an emphasis on the development of Chinese traditional educational system. In his book, Mr. Chen illustrated the relationship between the teachers and their students, the students and their parents and the relationship between the students and the masses, and finally, the relationship between the students and the government. Even though Confucius' theories first came out in more than a thousand years ago, it still has great influence in modern Chinese society.

One of the most important educational concepts developed by Confucius can be summarized in one word --- Study. The word "Study" in Chinese, involves two separate processes, namely, to learn and to review what you have learned, respectively. In Confucianism, to learn is to learn how to behave, how to act among people, in your family and in the society as a whole. This is by far the most important foundation of Confucius' entire educational theory – learn to be a complete person. By extending this concept further, Confucius' teaching encourages a person who has accomplished the learning

process to become a statesman so the society can learn from him. In Confucianism, to learn how to behave properly is the basic and most important qualification of becoming a statesman and it is also the fundamental qualification to become a member of the society.

Following Confucius' teaching on "Study", the teaching also changed the political system in ancient China, as discussed by Chen (2002b). Prior to the Sui Dynasty, the statesmen were picked out according to certain very strictly followed hereditary system; all statesmen had county family backgrounds. The intellectuals who came from a civilian family background cannot become members of the government. Confucius objected to this rule. He insisted that the one who possesses the highest moral standard and academic achievement should be eligible to become a statesman regardless of his social or economic background. This was the foundation of the civil service examination system in ancient China, which is still in use in modern China today. After the Sui Dynasty, the government began to choose those with outstanding academic achievements to become statesman, and the civil examination became the only standard to judge a students' performance.

Another important doctrine of Confucius' teaching was the teaching of "filial piety". The teaching of filial piety stated that a child should excel himself in academic achievements to make his parents proud. It also asked a child to pay all the love back to his parents and be obedient to his parents at all time. This constitutes the foundation of the main stream Chinese Culture today.

In his book *LunYu*, Confucius often emphasized the importance of filial piety. Bisheng Chen (2003) pointed out that filial piety has become the core of the social value system in Chinese society, even today. It is said that the relationship between parents and children are not only blood related but also an axiological relation. Looking from the traditional point of view, the relationship between parents and children is not limited to raising the children and hoping someday, they will be able to take care of the family, but also about maintaining the family root and expanding the family for the future generations. This also means that when parents are still living, children should obey them, please them and respect them; this is the basic concept of filial piety. When the parents pass away, it is the children's obligation to inherit the moral concept of value from their parents, and to maintain its value so the tradition can be passed on to the future generation. Following the filial piety doctrine and combining it with the teaching of "Study", a student not only will learn for spiritual needs, he will also work for meeting the high expectation from the parents and maintaining the family's reputation as well. Because of this training and these expectations, a student carries a great burden coming from the family and the society as a whole.

After the formation of the civil examination system, the meaning of "Study" had changed. Academic achievement replaced the original motive to become the value standard when judging a person. In many cases, it had become the only criterion to determine whether a person is "good" or "bad". As a result, if a student were able to obtain good grades in school, parents and the society as a whole tend to turn their heads when improper behaviors were committed. However, if a student failed to achieve a



satisfactory academic outcome, it becomes a handicap to himself, and to his parents, and his family will be judged accordingly. In a word, it brings shame to the family if one cannot achieve academic success in school; thus, comes the bias.

This misunderstanding and misuse of Confucius' teaching of "Study" has created a major social issue for over a thousand years in the Chinese society and it is still an everyday event in modern China today. People understand the problem but there is no escape. Parents are putting more pressures on their children and have become more and more critical of the children's academic performances. As a result, parents tend to forget the real meaning of "Study" and often fail to help establish a healthy learning environment where children can learn to respect each other, to learn how to become a complete person. Schools have lost their color as learning institutions, and have become a training field for children to learn how to pass examinations. To think more carefully about all these we have just mentioned, I notice that the schools have problems in maintaining a healthy relationship between the students and the teachers, between the teachers and the parents, and most importantly between the students and their parents. They all have different expectations from each other and my goal is to find out if there is a common solution to mitigate the issue rising from these different relationships and expectations.

Following Confucius' footsteps came along another great educator, Mengzi. Besides his own academic achievements and the great teachings he left for us, Mengzi left a mark in history also because of his mother. The way Mengzi was raised became the

best demonstration of how important parental involvement is in raising a child.

Zhijian Zhao (2001) discussed how Mengzi's mother had to move three times before she could find a suitable place to raise her child. The author first told the famous story about Mengzi's mother. The history doesn't say much about Mengzi's father, but it did mention that Mengzi's mother had to work to support him. To cut living expenses, Mengzi grew up near a cemetery. When Mengzi reached school age, his mother noticed that he had picked up all the funeral rites. She decided that this was not the right place for her to raise her child, so she moved. The family moved to near the central square of the town where a market is nearby. Mengzi's mother was able to take more work home, but she soon discovered that her only child was learning after the local butcher in the slaughterhouse. This wasn't too encouraging as well, so she decided to move again despite the possibility that she might lose some of the work she was getting. Finally, the family found a small place near a school and she decided to settle down. When Mengzi saw the students attending the classes everyday, he asked her permission to let him go to school everyday so he could also learn something. What follows afterward is history. Mengzi became one of the greatest scholars and educators in Chinese history. This story shows us how important parental involvement is to a child.

As indicated in the story of Mengzi, parental involvement can be a vital part of forming a child's personality and his future. It is an old tradition of China that parents devote and dedicate their life to ensure that their child will one day grow up to become an unusual person. This was the case in ancient China and it is even more noticeable in

modern China especially when each family is allowed to have only one child. However, like a knife that cuts on both sides, too much pressure from the parents can also create a negative impact on the children especially when parents only focus on the children's academic performance and forget the real meaning of "Study".

Parental involvement is a very important factor in children's learning, so is economic bias. Since people come from all walks of life, bias naturally happens. There are two kinds of bias, according to Sue (2001). They are (i) assessment bias; and (ii) economic bias. Students whose mother tongues are not Chinese often experience certain kind of disadvantages especially when taking a test with the native speakers who don't have language barriers. This is an example of assessment bias. As an example of economic bias, to be able to out perform other students, those who are able to afford the cost of attending after school test preparation courses have a better chance to do better than those who don't have the luxury to buy into extra help. Notice that in both cases, the biases are not formed on purpose, they are just a way of life. However, the outcome can widen the gap between two groups of people, i.e., foreigner and native speakers, and social and/or economic issues can rise from there.

In modern China, bias can be easily found in the entrance examination, as mentioned Liu (2003). She discussed the merit of the entrance examination. The entrance examination system in modern China began to be a relatively fair system when it was first introduced to its people. As time went by, the system was mixed with political intentions and it started to give free rides to students who came from ethnic backgrounds

and/or students with disabilities. As a result, it created a social bias and the system is often taken advantage of. It lost its original intention and ideal. However, comparing to other systems, the entrance examination system in modern China is still a relatively fair system and generally speaking, it serves its purpose well.

With the understanding of the cultural and educational background of the ancient educational system in China and its influences on the modern Chinese society, we will now move to our next subject to discuss the alternative school system in modern China.

## **PART 2      CURRENT RESEARCH**

In this part, we are going to focus on the Alternative Schools System For Misbehaved Students in China and we will look into past and current researches that had been done in China regarding this subject.

The book "The Road to The Reformed Alternative School For Misbehaved Students" by Wang and Kao (2000) was considered the authority in the subject in China. Although the book presented itself by introducing the different stages of the development of this special educational system, the focal point of this book was the general concepts and theories of the special educational system for misbehaved students in modern China. The book further reviewed some of the issues and problems involved in the current system, which to some degree, paved the direction for my research of this project. There are three main sections in this part, (i) the model for alternative school system, (ii) the unique characters of misbehaved students, and (iii) the analysis on the causes which contribute to

students' misbehaviors. In the model for alternative school system section, we will introduce the "36431" model in detail; by going through the studies and discussions on the misbehaved student's psychological and physiological profiles, the family, society and school's influences on the students, we will attempt to understand what caused the students to behave this way.

### **1. Regarding the existing Alternative School System for Misbehaved Students in China**

Wang and Kao devoted a considerable portion of the book to the "36431 Model" of the alternative school system for misbehaved students. The authors considered this model the foundation of this type of special education system for misbehaved students. By reviewing the authors' discussions, one will be able to have a microscopic view of the development of the alternative school system for misbehaved students in modern China for the past 50 years. The key difference between the conventional educational system in China and the alternative school system for misbehaved students dwell on the fact that alternative school system's emphasis is on re-establishing the moral value for its students while the conventional school system focuses on academic achievements. In the alternative school for misbehaved students, correcting students' misunderstanding in life and helping students to establish a healthy and positive attitude toward life and the society as a whole is the primary target of the school's educational goal. The "36431 model" is the product of certain mass survey taken by scholars in China for the study of the alternative school system.

The “36431 model” can be summarized as follows: “3” represents three main principles in education, which are (i) respect your students; (ii) establish a healthy and positive moral value for the students first, then you can help them break away from the bad habits; and (iii) individualism (Wang & Kao, page 41). The authors stated that a lot of misbehaved students who distanced themselves from conventional education system because of their self-esteem were somehow damaged by others. To eliminate this psychological obstacle and to motivate their desire for further education, educators must start from learning how to respect the students as a person. It is only when educators can respect, understand and trust the students, students will learn how to respect themselves. Furthermore, in most cases, when students make a mistake, it is because they lack the necessary direction in life or moral value; as a result, to reestablish the students’ moral value, educators must first help the students to establish a healthy and positive attitude so students can be motivated to break away from the wrong, ill, and pessimistic attitude toward life. In addition, the authors recognize that each student has his unique problems and issues involved, we also have to consider the fact that each student comes from a different background, and therefore, an educator must look into each student’s individual background and treat the problems associated with each student individually. There is not one treatment that can cure all illness. Like each key only fits one lock, the program for each misbehaved student must be designed individually.

“6” means six different ways to solve a problem, (i) the first way is organization as a Body. The alternative school for misbehaved students system not only requires its teachers to take a lead position in the process, but also needs to ensure that the students

are the center of the system's main focus. By recognizing that the students are the center of this special educational system, by utilizing group therapy treatment method, the system hopes to lead the students to a direction where positive attitude can be re-established thus the students will make good progress in developing a constructive qualification toward life (Wang & Kao, page 42).

While conducting my field study in Beijing Haidian Boarding School, I paid special attention to find out whether the school was able to implement the "students are the center of the system" concept in its teaching and to what degree this policy was carried out. This is one policy that is easier said than done. Students with behavior problems are somewhat different than the regular students in that these students often have stronger personalities than other students and they tend to defend themselves very aggressively. It is not uncommon to see that these students often become suspicious of everything that happened around them. They are constantly in defensive mode; this creates a huge barrier when it comes to communication between the students and the teachers. Teachers often find it difficult to break the barrier and find it hard to reach the students and it becomes a real challenge for the teachers to really understand their students. How to blend in with the students in their daily life but at the same time, avoid violating the students' trust is a mission that cannot be easily achieved. It is indeed a difficult task to accomplish. We will discuss this issue again in this report.

(ii) Classrooms are the main teaching venue in any educational system in China. Classrooms are the center stage for students' daytime activities at school. It is the students'

social responsibility to learn while they are attending school. Once a student can be put back on the right track and pick up his learning process, it gives himself an opportunity to redefine his moral value and a chance to better himself. The education given in the classroom is not only for the learning of cultural, historical or intellectual improvements for a student, but also for the re-establishment of the student's moral value and to learn how to be a "complete person", as per Confucius' teaching of "Study".

(iii) By giving students a variety of different extracurricular activities, students have a chance to let out the extra energy that is building inside them. Students in their teens are often full of extra energy; this is especially true for students with behavior concerns. These students tend to be more active than usual and like to move around a lot. If we don't find a way to let them release that extra energy that is hidden inside them, they will find a way themselves to lose the energy and when that happens, it often occurs in a way that will not be acceptable to the society in general. To prevent this from happening, we should turn their attention and let them release their energy in a more controlled environment. An extracurricular activity that is supervised by teachers and organized according to the needs of the students will allow students to release their energy in a way that will benefit them in return. It also provides the students an opportunity to showcase themselves in a positive way. This is one theory that is popular among scholars who specialized in alternative school education for misbehaved students in China. It is also the educators' general consensus that classroom sessions alone will not be sufficient to accomplish the goal of re-establishing the students' ability to analyze things rationally. Successful classroom teaching must be accompanied by a guided extracurricular activity as a supplement for the



classroom works. To bring borderline students back to the program cannot be accomplished simply by giving them a 45-minute classroom session, you must earn their trust first, and to lower their guard, so they can open their hearts for you. Only when one can reach deep down to their hearts, will one be able to understand the psychological structure of their minds and therefore, find a solution to their problems. In my opinion, at the end of the day, this is a relationship-based issue. A relationship built outside of the classroom between the teachers and the students is a relationship often based on trust and understanding. It is a relationship necessary to earn the students' trust.

(iv) To widen students' view and enhance their experience, the school should organize different events, educational seminars, conferences and the like for students to participate in. The school may invite leaders in the education field or social elites to participate in the events and therefore provide the students an opportunity to learn from them. This again, goes back to the Confucius' teaching of "Study" --- learn to be a complete person. Students can always benefit from the ones who had accomplished the "learning process". These events can further students' appreciation to the beauty of humanity and moral value and eventually stimulate their desire to be honored and recognized by the society (Wang & Kao, page 42).

One of the models educators are trying to promote is to form a platform for the students to interact with the communities. Educators consider this an effective way of teaching misbehaved students in China. However, my field study suggests that it is still difficult to carry out this policy in China.

(v) Vocational training is an integral part of the alternative school educational system. In addition to the training on trade skills, vocational training at alternative school should also incorporate establishing students' self-motivation and training for participation in community services. By using the school as a vehicle and the vocational training as the means, students learn that there is no free lunch in the real world. One has to work for what he wants. By participating in the community services, students form a good work ethic and learn to respect their job and the people working with them, they will also learn to appreciate the fruit of their hard work. Hopefully, this training will help the students to establish a good habit, which will benefit them in the future.

(vi) To re-align the relationship between the students and their family using the school as the compensating factor, the system looks to fill in the gap where the family element is lacking. Without the participation of the family, the alternative educational system cannot be completed. School and the family are the integral part of the entire program and one cannot perform the job without the other. Whatever the family lacks, such as the scientific education or training, the school can make up for it. The teachers can also be the bridge between the students and the family when communication channels between them are blocked for whatever reason(s) (Wang & Kao, page 43). In a word, the school plays an important part in re-building the relationship between the students and their families; in theory, the school can take a lead position in the process.

“4” means training in four different areas, namely, (i) logical thinking, (ii) moral value qualification, (iii) forming a positive attitude, (iv) obeying the law. (Wang & Kao, Page 44). The reform process for misbehaved students is generally done through an alternative group therapy method by putting the students in a group living environment. The reform process is also accompanied by correctional efforts made to re-align students’ behaviors, and by the alternative group therapy method, collectively, students will go through the process together which hopefully, will lead them to the same designation --- a reformed person. In addition to the typical required political science classes, periodically, students in the alternative school for misbehaved students in China also receive training in different law related subjects which are aimed to provide students with a behavioral guideline so students can tell right from wrong and therefore. In that way, the training reinforces the students’ sense and willingness to become law-abiding citizens. There are many differences between misbehaved students and regular students; one of the major differences can be found on the students’ attitude toward things happening around them. Misbehaved students tend not to pay much attention to things that happen around them and they have little desire to learn academically and therefore, it will not be effective if we try to force the knowledge on them.

Again, “3” means three ways of teaching methods. (i) Reasoning. To discuss issues with misbehaved students either individually, or collectively, teachers must conduct themselves on the basis of respect and encouragement. Reasoning with students and not applying authority over them is a more effective way of communicating with students. This approach will eliminate the negative psychological and emotional impact

the students may have in fear of the authority and therefore, gain their trust during the process. By reasoning with the students, teachers will give students a chance to look under the surface of the issues and understand the reason(s) as to why things are done in certain way. This will promote students' self-esteem and motivation. Like I said, reasoning is a more effective and persuasive way of communication.

(ii) Supervised Activities. Activities, which are organized by teachers and conducted under the supervision of the teachers, can create an environment that incorporates the training of moral value. They can also stimulate students' sensitivity toward moral value and enhance their understanding toward the same. A supervised activity that incorporates the training on moral value provides students an opportunity to experience the joy and the taste of success harvested when the goal of the activity is met. It also motivates students' desire to succeed from within. A supervised activity creates a positive and healthy learning environment for students with behavior concerns (Wang & Kao, Page 45). My understanding on this particular teaching method is that a supervised activity is indeed a progressive process designed to encourage students to recognize their own efforts and to stimulate students to outdo themselves in every step of the process. By completing each step in the process, through the supervised activities, students not only learn to recognize their own accomplishments, but also stimulate their desire to be recognized by others outside of the school environment. In order to be recognized by the community, during the course of the supervised activity, students would change their daily life styles or behaviors to meet the expectations of others and eventually, the program will lead them to the path which the program is designed for.

(iii) Protective Restriction. When students experience negative influences from outside and lose emotional control to their own behaviors, teachers must intervene and exercise protective restrictions on the students in the timely fashion in order to prevent regrettable consequences from happening. After students calm down, teachers may then reason with the students and discuss the matters at hand with them in a more controlled environment. However, in practice, the so-called protective restriction commonly used by educators in alternative school for misbehaved students is to physically restrict students to stay within the compound of the school facility to avoid students being further influenced or stimulated by the outside. Teachers often monitor students within the compound of the school facility for more than 12 hours a day to prevent confusions and/or riots caused by misunderstandings among students. At minimum, this method delivers certain result in protecting the students, but at certain level, it also restricts the development of the relationship between the teachers and their students. We will discuss this issue further in the later chapters.

“1” means Leadership. Whether we can raise the bar on the qualification of the overall development of alternative school for misbehaved students, the qualification of the education on students’ moral value, and the qualification on the entire alternative school system and its benefit to the society, all depends on the quality of the teachers collectively, and whether teachers can take the leadership position in the process. Theoretically, we assume teachers should have the leadership role in the system; however, in reality, due to the reputation of the alternative schools and the fact that alternative

schools are often under funded, and the teaching results of the schools often do not meet people's expectations and many other reasons, it is difficult to recruit qualified teaching staff to alternative schools for misbehaved students and therefore, it is questionable whether teachers can really play the leadership role in the system.

The teaching model of the alternative school for misbehaved students is the focal point of my research. It is my opinion that the positioning and the understanding of the teaching model can influence the school's teaching concepts and its directions, which have a direct impact on the quality of the system itself. It is undeniable that the authors, Wang and Kao, have made a clear definition of certain teaching model in their book, however, when I compare the authors' model to the actual practices adopted by the existing alternative school system in China during my field study, I found a gap between the real world and the authors' reality, as I will show later when I describe findings from my study. In practice, when facing different scenarios, it is often difficult to carry out the authors' ideal teaching model, specifically the "36431 model". In reality, this model is a dream, which may never be achieved. However, comparing the differences between the authors' model and the model being used by the current system, prompts me to view the system from different angles and through the differences, I attempt to find a solution to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the current alternative school system for misbehaved students.

## **2. The Uniqueness Of The Misbehaved Students.**

In Chapter 4 of their book, Wang and Kao (2000) devote considerable pages on the unique physical and psychological features of the misbehaved students. It is the authors' opinion that the metabolism and energy level of misbehaved students is often higher than average people in their age group. Misbehaved students are often in their teens, and this is the time in their life when their metabolism is considered at the peak of their life cycle. In general, teenagers in this stage of physical development often demonstrate high energy level, and they are quick to respond to outside stimulations, whether they are physical or psychological. Signs of aggressiveness can easily be spotted in their behavior, and this is especially true for misbehaved students. Due to the higher than usual metabolism, the regular program or normal education system do not allow them to release the extra energy they carried. Other reasons such as psychological, emotional or other restrictions prevent them from letting out their energy properly; but no matter how hard they try to suppress the energy within them, they cannot stop the process of metabolism. "When normal channel does not allow them to release the extra energy or when there are negative stimulus, behaviors outside the norm become the way to deal with the pressure built inside them" (Wang & Kao, page 47).

The authors further stated, "the individual's overall educational level will correspond to the level of needs and interests" (Wang & Kao, page 47). In other words, the differences in vocational and educational qualification often determine the level of a person's social activities and interests. Due to the fact that misbehaved students often have lower educational level, their social interests are often associated with physical

needs and underground activities. They demonstrate strong desire in physical and material satisfactions and have fewer requirements for psychological and/or spiritual needs; as a result, their behaviors are often considered vulgar and despicable and are outside of the norm that is approved by the society.

Self-respect is the feeling of satisfaction that is achieved only by gaining the respect from the society or the communities while self-accomplishment must built on self-esteem, which is achieved by meeting personal goals through hard work. Both self-respect and self-accomplishment are considered higher-level forms of psychological needs (Wang & Kao, page 48). Because misbehaved students often do not possess necessary qualifications to meet expectations coming from the society or in some cases, themselves, no matter how hard they try, they often lack satisfaction from things they are trying to accomplish. In return, they face frustration, failure and sometimes, shame. Hopes turn into disappointments, and frustrations become an inerasable scar in their mind. All these were repeated again and again in the cycle of their life and they become defensive to everything that happened around them. The authors pointed out this unique scenario in their book.

From the psychological point of view, the authors pointed out the issue on the lack of proper intelligence for misbehaved students. To support their statement, the authors quoted an unnamed research report conducted by an unnamed research institution located in an unnamed southern province in China. Said “research paper” was conducted by taking a survey of students from elite high schools, regular high schools, alternative



school for misbehaved students, and juvenile retention centers. According to said “research paper”, the “survey” taken by said research institution indicated that “students from elite high schools have an average IQ of 120-140; students from regular high school have an average IQ of 100-110; students from alternative school for misbehaved students have an IQ of 85-95; and students from juvenile retention centers have an averaged IQ of 75-85” (Wang & Kao, page 49). The authors also say that the intelligence consists of three things: physical strength, skill, and wisdom. All three categories have a direct correlation with intelligence. The book further pointed out that misbehaved students often express themselves on physical strength and skill but generally lack the necessary wisdom comparing to students in the same age group. This is the direct result of their lower IQ scores. Because of their lower IQ and on top of that, misbehaved students often suffer from non-wisdom related psychological problems, their intelligence structures have an apparent malfunction comparing to students in their age group. Furthermore, due to the students’ lack of motivation, interest, willingness or habit to learn and other non-intelligence related psychological issues or emotional problems, misbehaved students are weak in computation, comprehension and the ability to learn. “Due to the negative psychological profile and their inability to stabilize their emotion, misbehaved students often found themselves unable to balance their own behaviors, especially on the emotion part of the scale” (Wang & Kao, page 50).

Generally speaking, normal people’s sexual desires are adjusted and restricted by morality. Underage young adults who are in the early development stage of sexuality often experience strong sexual desires; this is quite normal. As long as one handles his

sexual desires within the scope of morality, family value and culture restrictions, which are approved by the society in general, one is considered to have good control over such desires. Misbehaved students often lose control over their sexual desires due to negative outside stimulus and the direct reflex of their sexuality. When the psychology in sexuality and the morality governing sexuality miss their connection, one would lose control over his sexual behaviors. (Wang & Kao, page 52)

The reason why I specifically point out the authors' views on misbehaved students' IQ and their sexuality is because of my disagreement with their discretionary statements saying that misbehaved students have lower IQ and stronger sexual desires than students from normal or elite high schools. As the authority in the study of the alternative school system in China, I think it is irresponsible for the authors to make such statements without a thorough investigation on the subject matter and scientific supports to the "findings". Many educators or researchers who are entering or are already in the field of alternative school system were recommended to read this book as a guide. There is not a doubt in my mind that after reading through this book, many people will have a misunderstanding or even bias toward the misbehaved students. I do not believe that the lower IQ level and their sexual preferences are the only reasons that caused their misbehaviors and it is unfair that we put all the burdens on the students themselves without asking ourselves if we are responsible for their falls. Actually, my field study shows that students' IQ is not the main cause for students' misconducts. We will discuss this further in the later chapter.

From the study of misbehaved students' psychological profiles and physical descriptions as shown in this book, one will agree that children in this age group experienced rapid psychological and intellectual development and at the same time, they are in a high risk stage of personality development. Good education and clear guidance can lead children in this development stage to a positive growing path; on the contrary, by restricting children's activities or limit their ability to explore new knowledge, or simply ignore them will result in a negative growth experience. The physiological and psychological elements are like the compass, which point to different directions a child might take during this stage of development. As a result, in this special and important development stage, the examples set by the society; the school and the family play an important role in forming a child's future.

### **3. Analysis and Rationality On Misbehaved Students' Misconducts.**

Chapter 5 of Wang and Kao's book focused on the analysis of misbehaved students' misconduct from the family, school and the society's point of view. I use this section to discuss the authors' three approaches because I too use these three approaches in my own study. I am in agreement with some of the authors' viewpoints, but during my field study, some of the test questions end up with very different results than the authors'. Based on the authors' investigations on alternative school for misbehaved students, "in the last 15 years, certain alternative school for misbehaved students in Beijing had admitted more than 1/5 of its total student population from broken families; among these students, about one-half are female students" (Wang & Kao, page 56). There are plenty of data to support the statement that underage young adult who come from dysfunctional

families often experienced some kind of physiological or psychological impacts and/or damages which lead to the development of unhealthy personality and emotional distresses. Furthermore, negative influences are also found on children who come from a family with criminal records or other bad habits. Generally speaking, family members with bad habits or criminal records will most definitely set a negative example for the underage young adults. Because of their curiosity, their desire to copy adults' behavior, their sense of adventure and the urge to seek risk and other common behavioral characteristics often found in this stage of development, young adults often take a wrong turn and form negative or less acceptable personality.

The book also discussed the negative influences the family may have on their children when parents have different ideas of how a child should be raised. When both parents cannot come to an agreement on how to educate their children or when the grandparents' idea of how children should be raised conflicts with their parents, they all have a direct negative impact on the children (in Chinese society, it is not uncommon to see three generations living under the same roof). For instance, some parents are blindly optimistic and overly confident about their children' behavior and either cannot or refuse to recognize the problems or shortcomings their children may have until it is too late. Once their children's misconduct was found and the community considered them misbehaved children, parents may become angry with their children because they can't face their friends and colleagues. They may vent their anger on their children by physical punishment without thinking about the reason why their children become this way or if there's any way they can help their children to correct the problems. It is the authors'

opinion that “when young adults committed certain misconducts and was caught doing them, they may be condemned by the public opinion in the society or even received certain degree of punishment for it; they may feel shame for their own behavior and blame themselves for such wrongdoings” (Wang & Kao, page 58). Self-punishment and the feeling that they are denied and abandoned by the society may lead them to give up on hope, but this also presents an opportunity to rescues them from the fall (Wang & Kao, page 59). If parents can put aside their own pride and not vent their anger on their children, there’s a good chance that the parents could turn this misfortune into an opportunity to bring the children back to the right direction of life. However, if parents refuse to recognize their children have problems and decline to give them a chance to make up on the mistake they made, it is without a doubt that they just force their children to take the wrong path of their life.

With respect to the school’s role in correcting children’s misconduct, the authors raised the issues by using different scenarios such as “teachers giving up on students with less academic success because of the pressures coming from the entrance examination”, “teachers assaulted students with physical punishments”, “misbehaved students assaulted students in lower ranking classes” and etc. and they presented quite a few examples to demonstrate their points (Wang & Kao, page 62).

From the society’s point of view, the authors approached the issue by narrowing down how the young adults’ misconduct was influenced by the community they are living in. It is the authors’ opinion that the subculture in the community has a direct

influence on the formation of its young adults misbehaviors. The so-called subculture means the culture other than the mainstream ruling class mass culture. In another word, it is the branch of the mainstream culture that is considered the culture of lower ranking people in the society. Subculture carries certain appeal, taste, and style that has a deadly attraction to the members of lower ranking society (Wang & Kao, page 65). Another approach the authors took is the young adults' recognition of their peers' misconduct. Because of the closeness of their age and the similarity of their interests and needs, young adults tend to take in people who come from the same social background and accept their misconduct (although they don't consider it misconduct). The close relationship among the peers combined with other elements such as material and physical needs and the desire to be recognized, misbehaved young adults who come from the same community often form their little groups which are bond by tight cycle of trust.

The strength of this particular book lay on the fact that through long-term research and survey, the book elaborates on the various teaching models adopted by the alternative school for misbehaved students in China. Also through the analysis of the misbehaved students' characteristics and the origin that forms the problems usually associated with misbehaved students, the authors unlock the myth about this special group in our society. Regardless of how you approach the problems with misbehaved students, it is undeniable that the problems associated with misbehaved students are closely connected to the relationships between the students and their families, students and the school, and finally, the relationship between the students and the society. Everything is correlated and to solve the problems, we also have to approach them from the relationships among the

three. Thus, it can be seen that in order to understand the current situations with the alternative school for misbehaved students in China, we have to approach the issues from the triangular relationship among the family, school and the society. Unquestionably, to improve the current system for misbehaved student education, we also have to approach the system from the triangular relationship among the family, school and the society.

## **IV METHODOLOGY**

### **PART 1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research project was designed to be a case study. In order to have a better understanding of the current educational practice for alternative school for misbehaved students in China, I had chosen one of the alternative schools in Beijing to be the targeted test school for this research project and I had adopted interview techniques to conduct my research. At the targeted test school, I had planned to interview three sample groups, namely, students, teachers, and parents, respectively.

Since it is a case study, it requires me to give a clear definition of the boundaries for the scope of this research. I decided to use case study as the vehicle for this research project because, as a non-participant of the alternative school for misbehaved students, I lack the necessary experience in the subject field and I have very little knowledge about it. Also because of my lack of experience and knowledge in the subject field, I was able to observe the system from a neutral point without bias. The subject field is often considered a sensitive topic in China with a very heavy baggage. Through this research report, I will attempt to discuss the pros and cons of the current system and hopefully, I will be able to shed some lights to the industry practitioners and hopefully, contribute some positive feedback to the system in China.



## **PART 2      RESEARCH INTRODUCTION**

As the first alternative school for misbehaved students in China, Beijing Haidian Boarding School (“BHBS”) naturally becomes a good candidate for my field study. Its long history in juvenile correctional practice and the rich experience it gained throughout the years provides an invaluable service to my research project. To explore such a major topic in a nation as big as China, it is impossible for me to visit more than one school during my one-month stay. As a result, I had to limit the scope of my research and concentrate the focus on the examination of the triangular relationships between the students and their parents, students and the school, and students and the society. Much of the field study was conducted through face-to-face interviews with randomly selected people from three sample groups, the students, the teachers and the parents, in addition to classroom visits.

This research began on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 and was finished on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005. During the 30 days period, I normally visited the school from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.. I normally attend the morning classes and spent the afternoon observing the students’ various activities. During my visit with Beijing Haidian Boarding School, I spent the first four days with the teachers and the students. I ate lunch with them and I also participated in the extracurricular activities with the students in the afternoon. I wanted to get a general idea about the composition of the student body and was hoping to establish some basic understanding of the students. I’ve always thought that teachers more or less have some kind of preferences over certain students. Who wouldn’t like students who would

listen and obey the teachers? I thought if I can get some information from the students directly, it would help me find out which students I should talk to. Unfortunately, I found it difficult to communicate with the students. Apparently, students had built their wall against me who the teachers had introduced as the graduate student from an American University who was there to investigate them. Instinctively, their defense mechanism went up. From the way they looked at me, I realized that they had put me into the same category as their teachers, the enemy. This is one thing I really didn't want to see.

The following few days, I sat in on a few 7<sup>th</sup> grade classes in the morning, and would rotate to different classes in the afternoon. The school separated the girls from the boys and they are instituted in different classrooms, which forced me to change my interview tactic and I had to interview the male students and female students separately. This was not my original plan at all. Because there were so few activities that allowed both male students and female students to join together, I had to divide my time into half in order to complete my survey. Another important task in my research was to collect stories about misbehaved students. I had heard quite a few stories given by teachers and I was happy that some teachers were willing to speak to me in private. Through the conversation, I had picked up some information about students, especially information on those who were considered "good students", but these were not why I was there. I didn't come all the way to China to listen to some story about how good the students were, I wanted to find out why these students were in the school and their background, especially their family background, personality, and the current status in school. I wanted to have a comprehensive understanding about the student body and how the system was helping

them. With the help of the staff members, I finally selected four representative students and five teaching staffs as the test subject for further investigation. The parents of these four students were also willing to participate in my interest.

I also want to remark on the assistance given to me by the vice principal of the school, Mr. Xu and his colleagues who gave me a lot of help and encouragement during my visit with the school, especially when I was frustrated with the refusals I had to deal with when trying to schedule an interview.

### **PART 3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

While I was in the school, I interviewed four students (two male students and two female students), and their parents. (When I made my selection on these four students, I had heard a lot of their stories. I wanted to find students who can be fair representatives of the entire study body based on their family backgrounds and why they are in this school. In Part II of Chapter V, we will introduce their respective backgrounds as well as their parents'.)

Five teachers from the staff were willing to participate in this research project but all requested that the interview be held outside of the school complex. They represented different seniority levels in the school; one of the teachers had been with the school since she graduated from college some 29 years ago; two teachers just joined the school in 2003; one of the teachers planned to leave the school system in February, 2005 and another teacher-to-be would be joining the school in February, 2005.

I called the two female students Student A and Student B and the two male students Student C and Student D. For parents, we will match them with their child and call them Parent A, Parent B, Parent C and Parent D accordingly. Following the same principle, we will name our Teaching Staffs Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher F accordingly.

## **PART 4      RESEARCH METHODS**

### **1.      Interviews**

One of the important parts of my research was the interview. Prior to my departure, I had prepared a series of interview questions (interview questions can be found on Part 5 of this chapter).

The first interview with students was conducted on the lawn inside the school campus. Originally, I wanted to find a café to do the interview thinking that the students may be more relaxed in a more comfortable environment, but I was not able to obtain the school's permission to check out the students during weekdays. Students were only allowed to leave the campus on weekends and only with the school's permission. I had to compromise with the school's policy and conduct my interview with the students inside the school complex.

As to the interview with the teachers, due to their tight schedule, the majority of the interviews were conducted in their office. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to be

invited by a teacher to visit her house as a guest. We had a nice exchange of conversation during my visit to her house.

Among the three test groups, the interviews with the parents were considered the most difficult ones. It was extremely difficult to get in touch with the parents and I had to go through the school to reach them. Although I was armed with the authorization from the school to speak to the parents, I didn't get much cooperation from them. They didn't seem to be willing to participate in the process; nevertheless, I was able to obtain some useful information from them.

Originally, I planned to do group sessions with the parents and the teachers. I couldn't make the parents join the group discussion because it's hard to make a proper schedule for all of them. Unfortunately, due to the teachers' busy schedule (for the school was celebrating its 50-year anniversary and on top of that, it was the time for final examination) and other personal reasons, I was not able to put the group together and therefore, had to interview the teachers individually.

During the interview process, I noticed that the interviewee was nervous about being put on tape or any kind of record. I remember distinctly that in my very first interview with one of the students, when I pulled out the tape recorder, the student immediately became very suspicious and asked me "Are you interviewing me or interrogating me?" I was shocked to that reaction. I told him that I just wanted to chat. He warned me that tape recorders were used only when interrogating a criminal at the

police station and I should not use the tape recorder if I just wanted to chat. At the same time, interviewees were not comfortable with me taking notes. One of the students even said that I was taking a “written statement” of him, which was also referred to the police’s note taking practice during interrogations. This remark reminded me that I should not do anything that would offend them during the interview process, as a result, I had to try to remember everything they said which appeared to be a difficult challenge even with my young age. Another reason why note taking was not a practical way of conducting interviews was that when the interviewees were in the mood, this applied to teachers especially, they tended to talk rapidly and continuously and there was no way that I could take notes this fast. If I had to take notes while they talk, I would miss most of what they said during the interview and therefore, I often made notes of my interview after the interviews were concluded.

The interview technique used on the parents and the students was a bit different from the one used on the teachers. Teachers tended to be more willing to talk and occasionally, they would allow me to take a few notes although recording them on tape was still not an option. When interviewing the students and their parents, how to crack the ice was an art itself. During the interview process with the parents or the students, I found it hard to get them to talk and when they did talk, they often entertained questions with some ambiguous answers, which wouldn’t make any sense at all. It would be worse to try to take notes. To deice the situation, I would buy them some drink and we would walk while we talked casually. Students tended to relax fairly quickly and were willing to respond to questions as long as the questions were asked in a “language” they were

accustomed to and in a fashion they felt most comfortable with. I frequently used this same method when talking to students and I was able to obtain some very direct responses from the students. The parents, however, were a different story. Some of the parents were very street smart, if they were faced with questions they were unwilling to answer, they tended to answer by raising a question to me. For example, they often asked me about my life in The United States, they were curious about the way of living in the United States and they apparently had a lot of questions about how people live in the States. So to avoid the situation, I had prepared a list of related questions for the parents and I would constantly lead them back to my questions when they tried to distract my attention. It was a battle I had to go through but now I think of it, it was quite an interesting experience.

## **2. Journal Notes**

While I was at the school, I spent most of the time observing. I observed how the teachers and the students interacted with each other, and how the students acted in the group. Sometimes, when students decided to speak to me, I would spend time chatting with them, casual chats with no particular topic in mind. I participated in their extracurricular activities, and sometimes, I tutored in their English classes. I remember some of the students would comment on my teaching style by saying that “you don’t look like a teacher, but we enjoyed your classes, you were funny.” I found humor an effective way of communication with the students.

I recorded my daily activities and my thoughts in my journal during my field study in China. Through the journal, I realized that I had a brand new understanding about these children and a new respect for the school. Normally, I wrote down what I had observed and my thoughts after I got home from school. I often received useful information during my visit at school, and I had to take it down in my note before it was gone. At night, I would organize them into my daily journal. From time to time, I would interview those teachers who do not attend classes or meet with parents, I would write down my mental notes right after the interview when the memory was still fresh.

### **3. Casual talk**

Casual chat was my favorite way of communication during my field study in China. In the casual environment, I found my subjects more relaxed and more willing to talk and they were more real. I chatted with students or teachers during breaks between classes, or lunch hours. I also found that during the afternoon extracurricular activity period, students and teachers were more relaxed and were willing to talk for longer period of time. During my brief stay in Beijing, I tried to talk to anybody who would listen. I would ask them questions about alternative school system in China and seek their opinion on the subject matter. Through this random chat method, I was able to collect some general public's opinion about the current alternative school system for misbehaved students that were very helpful.

One pleasant surprise that happened during my field study was that I had a chance to visit the local community association. On my way to meet one of the parents, I met this



old lady from the local community association. My appointment didn't show up, but I had a chance to spend some time with this old lady who has been living in the same community where the school is located for a long time. My conversation with her gave me several important historical backgrounds information about BHBS, which was invaluable.

## **PART 5      INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **1.      Interview Questions For Students**

1.      Could you describe your typical daily routine at school?
  
2.      How do you describe your relationship with classmates/teachers/parents?
  
3.      Do you have contact with your former friends or schoolmates? If so, could you give me an example? If not, why not?
  
4.      Have you ever been in a situation with regular school kids? If so, could you describe the situation? How do you feel when you are with other kids from regular high school?
  
5.      Why are you in this school? What brought here? What do you wish to accomplish from this school? To what extend is this school helping you?

6. How welcome do you feel at this school? How much are you involved in this school's activities?
7. What is the most joyful things you have experienced in this school so far?
8. What is the most depressing things you have experienced in this school so far?
9. If you have a chance to transfer to a regular school, will you go? Why do you want to go? If not, why not?
10. What is your expectation of your future?

**2. Interview Questions For Teachers:**

1. Could you describe your typical daily routine at school?
2. Why do you choose to be in this school? What brought you here? What do you think you can give to your students?
3. To what extend do you think the school is helping the students and in what way?

4. As a teacher, how do you improve your teaching skills? Could you give me an example?
5. Do you have experience teaching in a regular high school? If so, could you tell me the difference between being a teacher in a regular high school and a teacher in an alternative school for misbehaved students?
6. How much are you involved in the decision-making process in this school?
7. How do you describe your relationship with the students?
8. How often do you contact the parents? How much are parents' involvement in school activities? What is the one thing you want to get from the parents most?
9. What is the most joyful experience you have in this school so far?
10. What is the most depressing thing you have experienced in this school so far?
11. What are your expectations of your students?

### **3. Interview Questions For Parents:**

1. Could you describe a typical weekend with your child?

2. Do you see any change on your child since he entered this school? Could you give me an example?
3. Comparing the former school your child attended to and the current one, which one do you think your child is more involved in? Why is that? Could you give me an example?
4. What brought your child to this school? What do you wish to get from the school? To what extend is the school helping your child?
5. How much are you involved in the school's activities? How often do you contact the teachers? What kind of help do you get from the school? Are there any other ways the school can help you?
6. Are you facing any problem with building your child's character? If so, could you give me an example? As a parent, what kind of help do you wish to get for yourself?
7. What is your expectation of your child's future?

## **PART 6 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **1) Category**

In this case study, I had multiple tasks to study. When all the raw data were collected, I organized them into different categories hoping to apply relevant data to different issues at hand and eventually, found a meaning to it. I would separate the notes I took based on my interviews with students, parents and teachers, respectively, then I would file these notes in their respective folders.

## **2) Coding By Shorthand**

I developed a shorthand system for my data collection. During the process of categorizing different data, I used my shorthand system to mark on that specific piece of information when I came across relevant information that belongs to certain category. For instance, I would mark the relationship between the students and the teachers as “s—t re”, the relationship between the students and the parents as “s—p re” and the relationship between the teachers and the parents as “t—p re”. Using the three categories mentioned above as a guide, I further developed sub-categories under each category to store more detail discussions or researches material I found on that category.

## **3) Search For Supporting Documents**

I would re-read my coded data and try to find out if there are multiple perspectives that can be related to the same concept. I have also considered find multiple supporting documents for each of the key concepts discussed in this report.

#### **4) Domain analysis**

I would re-read the data collected during my field study and select certain folk terms and some cover terms out of them. I would then enter some of the examples I collected during my interview with the test groups that fit the semantic relationship, which could be strict inclusion and means-end. Finally, I would make a list of possible domains, following the forms like: X is a category of Y or X is a way to Y.

#### **5) Meanings**

Based on categories I developed, the key concepts discussed in this report and the basic theory I adopted for this research project, I would attempt to find a meaningful explanation for the data collected during my research for this particular project.

Looking back, I realized what a challenge this research project was. To conduct a research project like this in a closed society is not an easy task. There are different rules and regulations that were imposed on me when I conducted my field study. For instance, during the interview, I was not allowed to record the conversation or to take notes. All I could do was to try real hard to remember the content of the interview after I got back to the hotel and wrote down whatever I can remember. In a country like China where the old mixes with the new, people still consider alternative school system a sensitive subject and most people still have twisted impression about the system and its student. Generally speaking, when I mentioned alternative school for misbehaved students, people either clammed up or tried to stay away from the subject. For those who are involved in the system or whose family member maybe a party of the system, shameful expressions were

easily identified from them when the subject was mentioned. It is still a taboo to mention misbehaved family members and the same thing applied to alternative school system for misbehaved students. All these biases created an even bigger challenge for me during my visit in China. How to induce the interviewee to talk to me about the subject was a routine challenge that happened to me on daily basis while conducting my field study, even though the time spent on the interview was normally brief. Fortunately, I was able to win over the trust from some of the people I encountered and they were willing to talk to me casually. Although I was not able to record the conversation or to take videotapes, which was my original plan, I still believe that I have obtained some useful information from these causal conversations.

## V ANALYSIS

In the process of reviewing and reorganizing the data I collected from my field study, I paid special attention to the issue of “Relationship.” the relationship between the students and their teachers, the relationship between the students and their parents, and the relationship between the teachers and the students’ parents. I thought if I approach the alternative school system for misbehaved students from the issue of “relationship” I could have a clearer view of the problems that existed in the system and hopefully, I could find a realistic solution to the problems. As a result, I organized the topic of “relationship” into several categories based on the conceptual framework, the themes of this research project and the data I collected during my field study at BHBS. Basically, there are three main categories and each carries different “themes”. For instance, the first category, “The relationship between students and their teachers” outlines the conflicts or themes between the students and their teachers and the difficulties they each faced. Each “theme” is supported by theories, documents and information collected during the research process; for example, “presidential suite” is used to illustrate students’ attitude toward the Dean Of Discipline’s office. The following are my analysis.

### **PART 1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS**

#### **1. Serious Conflicts Found Between Students And Their Teachers.**

During my visit to the Beijing Haidian Boarding School, I found serious conflicts existed between the students and their teachers. This is one thing that touched



me the deepest. During my visit, I did not experience the harmonious educational environment in BHBS as mentioned in the news article I read before I went. Apparently, the content of the news article had been re-written cosmetically for public relationship purposes. I noticed the conflict on the first day of my visit to the school.

### **“Admit your mistakes”**

The following is an incident I ran into accidentally, which left me a vivid impression and I recorded in my daily journal. It was a Monday afternoon when I first visited the school. The vice principal was taking me to my assigned classroom. On the way to the classroom, we passed a corner office and I overheard someone yelling “If you don’t admit your mistake, you will continue to stand before the wall for another hour. If you still won’t admit your mistake after that, I will ban you from visiting your family this weekend.” (I observed that BHBS manages its student using the military training model. Students are not allowed to leave the campus without the permission from the Director of Discipline. Students also follow a strict schedule which dictates students’ daily activities such as meal time, light out time, etc.. Only those students whose behaviors meet the teachers’ approval are allowed to visit their families on weekends. When students returned from their weekend visits, they must bring with them their parent’s signed statements regarding their behaviors over the weekend while outside the school campus.) It sounded like a teacher lecturing his students and I was right about that. I later found out that it was the Director of Discipline in that office. His job is to “clean up” after those students who were turned over to him by the teachers in charge of the classrooms and his office is nicknamed the “Presidential Suite” by the students. The vice principal

told me, jokingly, that only the “higher ranking” students have the opportunity to visit the Presidential Suite. The boy who was in the Presidential Suite on the first day of my visit later became one of my interviewees. I called him Student C.

A teacher who I interviewed who was in charge of the classroom told me that Student C’s father is a businessman, a very successful one. Both of his parents are very busy, they are on the road all the time traveling from city to city. Student C grew up with his grandparents, who spoiled him badly. Aside from his bad academic performance at school, he spent most of his free time at an internet cafe hanging around gang members and playing video games. He often got involved in fights and bullied younger students at school. He was expelled from his school and his parents transferred him to an overseas language school hoping he would straighten himself up in a new environment. Unbeknownst to his parents, he got into the habit of taking illegal drugs and things had gotten worse. Out of desperation, his parents transferred him back to a private school in China. I was told that there wasn’t any public school in China would consider admitting him. He was sent from one school to another and his behavior had become more and more problematic and finally, he got into a serious fight and badly beat a person to serious injury. He was taken to court and was sentenced to serve in the alternative school for misbehaved students.

After spending a few days with him, I had the following conversation with him during a break between classes (I will use X to refer to myself and S-C for Student C):

- X: I saw you at the corner office the other day.
- S-C: Are you referring to the Presidential Suite? I often visit there whenever I don't feel too happy about things.
- X: Oh, you mean you are a frequent visitor to there. What happened there the other day?
- S-C: What can you do? I have to defend myself firmly so I can go home for the New Year celebration (he said it jokingly). I don't care if he doesn't let me go home on weekends, I don't really want to go back home.
- X: So, you didn't admit your mistake after all?
- S-C: Let me tell you, I have not lost my battle in there as of yet, don't let them scare you in there, they are only trying to scare you.
- X: What do you normally do on weekends?
- S-C: Nothing really, what about you?
- X: Well, I will go out with my friends, sometimes I spend time with my parents.
- S-C: I used to go out with friends, but not anymore, I hate weekends now.
- X: Why?
- S-C: No reason, just don't feel like it.

My data indicated that Student C's offensive attitude toward the teachers is not a unique phenomena, it is a common attitude exists among the majority of the students. I had a chance to talk to several other students who were also frequent visitors to the "corner office". I asked them about the Presidential Suite and what they thought of it, Most of them reacted the same way as Student C, and they all had the same theory about defending yourself diligently and holding your ground firmly. This seems to be the

common understanding among the students. Students described this type of educational system like dogs chasing their own tails; they kept running around circles. In their view, this system is ineffective and to a certain degree, boring. Some students even said that the school should come up with some “new tricks”. As to the school’s punishment of not letting them visit their families on weekends, some students said it is better this way; they don’t want to go home anyway. Near the end of my visit to the school and when they lowered their guard with me, students began to ask me about my personal life. I often sensed their strong curiosity, especially when I mentioned that I like to go out with my friends to KTV (Karaoke bar) or spend time with my parents, although some girls would say that I am boring, but I could still sense their envy showing from their eyes.

“Weekends are boring, there’s nothing to do on weekends.” This was a common complaint among the students. During the weekdays, all activities are pre-arranged by school according to a strict schedule. Whether students are forced to participate in it or they volunteer for it, students are always busy, they are always doing something and have a place to go. On weekends, things are different. Most students said it was boring because they have nothing to do, some students even said that “I rather stay at school, at least I can be with my classmates”. In any event, they disdained the school’s disciplinary method that bans them from going out on weekends.

My conversation with Student A also showed her dismay toward the school’s disciplinary teaching method (again I will continue to use X to refer to me and S-A for Student A):

X: Do teachers ban students' weekend privilege as a method of punishment?

S-A: Well, besides banning students' weekend privilege, forcing them to stand in front of the wall, or forcing them to perform some hard works in school, what other trick do they have?

X: How do you compare this school to the ones you attended before?

S-A: There's not much difference, alternative schools are all the same, I was just transferred from one jail to another, the prison warden is the same (meaning the government).

X: Do you wish to accomplish something from this school?

S-A: No, I never did wish to accomplish anything from school, nobody understands me.

X: Have you ever considered that the teachers here are trying to help you?

S-A: Don't pretend that you understand me....

A lot of the students mentioned that the school is no different from any other alternative schools for misbehaved students they attended before the only difference is the students around them. Most students felt comfortable around the peer students because "they are just like you". During the one-month visit at the BHBS, I noticed that the tension between the students and the teachers was really tight. Some students didn't pay any attention to the teaching staff at all, they did whatever pleased them, and they were frequent visitors to the Presidential Suite.

Although most students hold an offensive attitude toward the teachers, there is a small group of students whose attitude are indifferent and in a sense, more friendly. I also observed that there was another group of students in school who behaved differently from most other students, they are quiet and most of the time, they are ignored or forgotten by their peers. They don't talk much, and they usually don't communicate or mingle with other students. They generally don't have any trouble with the school and rarely express any opinion or emotion. Student B belongs to this quiet group. The difference between the two groups can be observed from their classroom manners. The students from the first group, Student A and Student C, are loud, and they often do whatever pleases them, like sleeping in class, talking and fighting in class without regard to others or the teachers. Students in later group, like Student B, are quiet and they don't do anything that will attract people's attention. In my interview with Student B, she mentioned that she thought being a teacher in this school is not an easy task, she even thought some of the teachers know her better than her parents. Nevertheless, students like Student B are the minority in school. There are a lot of complaints generated by the students against their teachers, but I also found teachers often complain about the students and the schools. I noticed this during the breaks in the teachers' lounge.

## **2. Teachers's work makes it difficult to get to know students.**

Apparently, it is not an easy job to teach and live with misbehaved students on a daily basis; I found this a common experience shared by many teachers during my visit at BHBS. The following data illustrate the challenges and difficulties faced by the teachers at school, it serves as the supporting evidence to show how helpless the teachers

are when dealing with certain student affairs. Teacher A, who devotes her entire teaching career to BHBS left me with a great impression. She was sincere when saying that “Teachers who come to this school have a mission in mind, they love kids and they care greatly about these special kids. Being a teacher itself is a challenging job, being a teacher in an alternative school for misbehaved students is ten times or even twenty times harder, but the rewards are little. It’s not an easy job, not easy at all.” When these words slowly came out from her mouth, I sensed not only her love toward her students, but also her worries and concerns for them. In my conversation with the ranking members of the school, the vice principal Mr. Xu had mentioned that since early 1990s, the annual budget the school received from the government has been gradually reduced but the number of students the school has to care for have increased on yearly basis. The reduced budget has a direct impact on the teachers’ salary as well as their benefits. In addition to that, the school also lacks necessary funding to replace aging equipment; this also has a direct impact on the teaching quality itself.

**Heavy workload prevents teachers from communicating with students.**

During my visit at BHBS, I noticed that each classroom was assigned two teachers who are responsible for everything that happens in that particular classroom including supervising students’ academic performance, their activities, and discipline. There are 16 classrooms in the school and a total of 60 teaching staff, including administrative staff. The school barely has enough staff to run its daily operation. It is extremely difficult to find replacement or substitute teachers if anyone of the teaching staff is sick or on personal leave. The workload of the teachers-in-charge of the

classroom is unbelievably burdensome; they not only have to teach different classes, but also have to supervise students' daily activities. They generally start their day in the morning when students wake up; they accompany students throughout the day, and at night, they still have to rotate to check on the students to make sure everything is in order.

Teacher B, a new teacher who had been with the school for only one year, said to me that "Sometimes I have to go out of the school to find the missing students at night, and this can happen several times a week. Often I will find them at some internet café playing video games, I have to try every way I can think of to get them out of the internet café and come back to school with me. It is not unusual that this will take all night and we will return to school at dawn; even so, when I return to school, I still have to check on the students when they get up and still have to teach different classes in the morning. What can I do, we are short of teaching staff." I was wondering how long he can last under this working condition and he is only 24 years old.

The direct result of the teachers' heavy workload is the lower teaching quality. In a school like BHBS, the teachers not only have to manage the students' activity on a daily basis, but also attend to various incidents caused by the students, such as fights, breaking and battering school facilities, the senior class members bullying lower class members, and sometimes, students even try to fight the teachers. In an alternative school, the students are creative in terms of trouble making, these things all happened on regular basis. In addition to supervising the students, the teachers still have to teach. They attend the classes, grade the homework, and after all that, they still have to prepare for



next day's classes. All these have to be done in the limited time they have. It is indeed a challenging job. I once asked Teacher B about some students' remark that "Teachers don't understand us" and he answered, helplessly, "I want to understand them more, it is good for the teaching, but I really don't have time to communicate with them. I wish I can cut myself in half so I can do more things at the same time but I just can't. These are children who carry different wounds and it is not easy to communicate with them, you have to be extremely careful when approach them, it takes time to find a way to earn their trust. Unfortunately, I have so many things to attend to every day and they are often emergencies that require my immediate attention, sometimes, I just feel helpless to the situation".

Another interesting thing I found from BHBS is that most teachers are male; there are few older female employees at the school. For this, Teacher C, a retiring senior teacher at school, gave me a good explanation: "The heavy workload is the reason. Once you become a teacher-in-charge of a classroom, you barely have any chance to visit your own home. You are taking care of other people's children and leave your own children behind to the elders at home. You work days and nights but you don't bring home enough money to take care of your own family. Worst of all, you don't earn any respect teaching in a school like this in the society." In China, teaching is considered one of the most challenging jobs because of its workload. Teaching at an alternative school for misbehaved students is even more difficult. For a lot of female teachers, especially those who are married, this is not a job they can handle

### **Teachers are embarrassed by the students' impolite behaviors.**

During my one-month visit at the school, I also found that it is not uncommon to see students ride on young female teachers. They pay little attention to teachers and they often make fun of young female teachers and show absolutely no respect toward them. To male teachers, most students don't engage them with direct verbal confrontation, but for female teachers, the exchanges are often direct and abusive. I overheard some female students laughing at their language teacher's body as "airport runway", because she is skinny. They called another female teacher an "old witch" because of her looks. They even put these abusive words in writing, in a form of poem, and inserted it into the teacher's file. Apparently, female teachers must have a strong heart and psychologically, they also have to be strong enough in order to face the challenges at school.

Other than peers, teachers are the ones students spent most of their time with everyday. The relationship between the students and their teachers has an important role in the teaching process and many outside factors can influence this relationship. A better teaching environment and a lighter workload can be a foundation for creating a healthy and improved relationship between the students and the teachers. A lot of the complaints I received from my field study can be the pointers for improving the school and the alternative school system in China.

## **PART 2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS**

- 1. Students' emotions toward their parents are often complex, they long for their parents' love, but at the same time, they are afraid of it.**

During the time I spent with these 15-16 years old teenagers, I realized that kids are kids, no matter what they do; they can't hide their true nature. Sometimes, when I talked to them, they seemed to be very mature and it was because of what they had gone through in life; but sometimes they were just so naïve. When organizing the data, I found my journal and interview note regarding students' mixed emotion toward their parents.

Student B used to be a top student from certain elite high school. Her parents are both lecturers in college and they had very strict rules at home for her. Her parents took turns tutoring her after school, and on weekends, they sent her to music classes. Her parents' expectation was for her to be an outstanding physician in the future. Because she didn't meet her parents' requirement on one of the examinations at school, her parents blamed her for not trying hard enough. Her self-esteem was deeply hurt. She started to skip classes, and on an accidental chance, she joined some girl gang and started to hang out with them. Fearing that her behavior will set a bad example to other students, her teacher persuaded her to withdraw from the school. For some reason, she was transferred to BHBS. She is very quiet and she pays attention to teachers at school. She is one of the few students who really want to learn something from school and she doesn't create disturbances at school like some of her classmates. She usually minds her

own business and has few friends at school. Because she doesn't like to talk, she usually sits at her seat by herself during breaks. It took me a while to gain her trust; after we started to chat, we had the following conversation. Again, I will be X and she will be S-B as Student B:

X: I noticed that you are quiet most of the time unlike other students.

S-B: Well, I am not the kind of person who likes to be around a lot of people, I like to be alone. Don't you think what they do is kind of childish and boring?

X: I heard that you are the top student in your entire class, all of your teachers like you a lot.

S-B: I didn't want to be the top student, I just want to graduate from here without any trouble.

X: You will be graduating from the school next year, any plan after graduation?

S-B: I like to paint, I like to be a comic artist. I am going to use the most beautiful color and paint the things I like the most. I still want to continue my flute lesson. I don't have friends; when I am alone, my flute is my friend. Do you know that I started to learn flute when I was five? At first, I didn't like it, but gradually, I started to enjoy it and now, I think flute is the one instrument that fits me the most. I still remember that my mom had to force me to practice.. (She smiled lightly)

X: Your mom devoted a lot of time and attention to you, does she know that you like comics?

S-B: No, she just wants to raise me to become a good physician, she doesn't care about my hobbies.

X: Do you still communicate with your parents? Do you spend any time chatting with your mom?

S-B: Will, I like the way it is right now. Although I sometimes do miss those wonderful days in the past when I was young, I am more relaxed now since I don't live with them any more. I am not tense all the time any more, unlike before, I was like in the frontline, I had to be ready for the combat at any time.

X: Do you still complain about your parents?

S-B: Not any more. I often think that I will never force my children to do anything they don't like to do.

The above conversation with Student B left me with a very vivid memory. I still remember that snowy afternoon when we were the only people sitting in the classroom. Sometimes she would surprise me by saying something so mature that is beyond her age, but sometimes her behavior reminded me that she is still a child. Each time she realized that she was showing a child like behavior, she quickly covered it up and became a quiet mature student, but I can still tell from her eyes that she is still a kid that required people's protection. Nevertheless, from her conversation, she firmly expressed that the distance between her parents and her now gave her a sense of relief and relaxation. This complex emotion was also found in other kids I had a chance to converse with later on. Their struggle between wanting to have a family and fearing having a family at the same time left me a vivid impression. They let me see certain maturity which should not be the case with young children like these. This complex conflicting emotion can also be found on the parents as well.

## **2. Parents' love and hate toward their children.**

I interviewed four different students' parents in this field study; they all came from different backgrounds. Parent A had been divorced for years. He had custody of Student A. Parent A is addicted to gambling and he often gambles for days in a row without breaks. When Student A came home from school, he was usually out gambling. He would leave enough money at home for Student A to buy food; unbeknownst to him, Student A would use this money to play some on-line video game. Student A was so addicted to the games she started to skip school. When Parent-A finally received a home visit from the teacher, he hit Student A savagely after the teacher left. After the beating, things returned to normal; he still go out to gamble and still left money for Student A to buy food, and Student A continued to play the online video games and skip classes. Because she had plenty of money with her, she was recruited by the gang outside the school and eventually, she joined the gang. She was sent to the alternative school for misbehaved students because of one serious mistake.

Parent B is a lecturer in college, a highly educated person. The pressure and high expectation she put on Student B led to Student B's eventual escape from school. Parent C is a very successful merchant who is traveling all the time. Because of his traveling schedule, Student C was put under the grandparents' care and was badly spoiled. Student C was overbearingly indulged, and academically he just fell behind. Because of his misbehavior, his parents had to move him to different schools, both domestic and foreign, and he was refused admission by most schools in China. Unfortunately, the change of the environment alone didn't help him and eventually, one day, he got into a fight with

another student and seriously injured the person. He was sentenced to serve his term in juvenile correction facilities and was eventually transferred to BHBS.

Parent D doesn't have a stable job he worked as a temporary help. He has an extremely high expectation of Student D and hopes Student D can bring honor and glory to the family. He tried his best to provide Student D with a good learning environment but at the same time, he was very strict when it came to education. According to Parent D, "The entire family will depend on him". Because of the heavy burden, Student D was tiring of study and eventually abandoned his study completely. Student D later committed theft and was sent to BHBS.

These four families are the typical representatives of the student body. Although they all have their unique situation and come from different background, there is a common ground in all four families. They all have very high expectations of their children. During the interview, Parent A once said, "He is a student, it is a student's job to get good grades from school. I give him the opportunity to go to school so he has a chance to learn and if he fails to do that, that would be considered unfilial". Other parents more or less agreed with this concept, they all agreed that "get a good grade" is the children's responsibility. Nevertheless, Parent A admitted that "I am not a good parent, I didn't do what I am supposed to do as a parent. I am mostly responsible for what my kid has become today and now, I don't have any other expectation of her, I just want her to be well and graduate from this school. Furthermore, I don't want her to hate me as a father." I asked him if he ever told his daughter about this and he said, "I don't

know how to tell her.” He also told me that he seldom talks to his daughter now even when they are together. He didn’t know how to start a conversation with her daughter.

During my interview with Parent B and Parent C, they both showed their regret about their wrongful use of the parental authority in bringing up their children. However, due to the apparent reason of “saving face”, they never really did communicate with their children about how they really felt. When I told Parent B about her daughter’s interest in becoming a comic artist, she was shocked, “She wants to paint? Did she paint before? I have never seen her paint before.” When I told her that her daughter enjoys playing flute and she misses the time when she was young, Parent B became very emotional and didn’t know how to react. She felt embarrassed every time when asked about how she would communicate with her daughter. The following is an excerpt of my brief conversation with Parent B:

X: Your daughter now can only visit home on weekends, what do you guys do when she gets home?

P-B: Actually, the weekend is the most confusing time in the week at our home. She is the only child we have and we really miss her when she is not around; but when she comes back, we just can’t think of anything to talk about.

X: Did you have a chance to talk to her about things happened in school?

P-B: Well, she is a very quiet child she doesn’t like to talk too much. To be honest, we have spent all our time and energy on how to raise her to become a contributing member of the society, but we never really spent any time trying to understand



her. Sometimes, we don't really know what she is thinking about, she normally stays in her room when she gets home from school. She likes to read.

X: Have you ever tried to check with her teachers to find out how she is doing at school?

P-B: Sometimes we will give her teachers a call to check on her. Teachers generally have good words for her but I just don't feel right about what happened to her. I have been a teacher for years but I can't even give my own child a good education. Sometimes, even though she is right in front of me, I still feel there is a huge gap between us and she is beyond my reach.

X: Is there any expectation of her now?

P-B: Well, I just want her to concentrate on her study, knowledge is still a very important thing to have in your life and learning new knowledge is never going to hurt you, someday, you may need it.

I can't say if the parents have good introspection about the ways they bring up their children, or if there's any desire to change the current situation, but I am sure that more or less, they had all thought about it somehow. The problem is, under the current situation, they are in a dilemma when it comes to managing their relationships with their children. They are somewhat embarrassed of what they had or had not done before, but few parents tried to find a way to re-establish a new relationship with their children or try to re-build their now broken home. For the children, they have experienced so much at such a young age; can their young minds bear all these burdens? Is there anyone who they can share their burdens with? This is probably the type of "Home" these children

are looking for, a safe harbor where is warmth, full with love and care. I think this is probably the first step the parents have to take to de-ice the situation with their children.

### **Part 3      The relationship between the teachers and the parents.**

The relationship between the teachers and the parents is the one relationship I anticipate to understand the most and care the most about. Unfortunately, during my nearly 30 days field study at BHBS, through personal observation and interview, I was deeply disappointed about what I saw from the data I collected.

#### **1.      It is difficult to hold the parent-teacher conference because of the lack of parents' participation.**

Let's use Teacher-A's class as an example. In 2004, there were supposed to be four parent teacher conferences, but of the four, only two of them actually took place and the teacher had to cancel the other two for whatever reason. There were 25 students in the class but when the parent teacher conferences were held, fewer than 17 parents showed up. The low attendance rate has been an old problem the school has endured for years. When asked why the attendance rate was so low, the teacher responded by saying that "some students told their parents about the conference when they got home on weekends, but some other students may have forgotten to mention it to their parents. Normally, teachers will phone the parents directly at least once to remind them of the conference. Because most parents work on weekdays, we try to hold the conferences on weekends, but still, there are many parents choose not to attend the conference. Some

parents don't show up because they are embarrassed about having a child in an alternative school, they still can't overcome the psychological hurdles. After all, this is not something you can show off to your friends."

In another interview, Teacher-B mentioned, "Parent Teacher conference is a real challenge. It is not easy to hold a parent teacher conference, many of the teachers still have to work overtime on weekends because they have to stay with those students whose weekend privilege to go home was cancelled due to behavioral misconduct. It is difficult to take care of the students and hold the conferences at the same time. The intent is to put everybody together so communication can be exchanged, but it is really difficult to find time to do that. The quality of the parents is another issue. Some parents think that their children are here simply because they can't give them a good education. Since the students are here, it is the teachers' sole responsibility to make sure that their children are getting a good education and they give the teachers full authorization to do their job. With this attitude, I don't know whether to laugh or to cry sometimes."

I wondered whether there was any other way to communicate with the parents besides the parent teacher conferences. When I raised this question, Teacher-A, who had been with the school for more than 20 years, said "Nowadays, with the way the technology is going, the information is more readily available and you can always communicate with the parents by phone, but consider that you have an average of 25 students in a class, and a lot of things you want to communicate with the parents are the same, if you have to use the phone as the only vehicle of communication, you would have

to repeat it 25 times and this is considered lucky. What I mean is, if all of the parents are willing to communicate with you on the phone, it will be a lot easier this way, but when one or a few of the parents can not be reached by phone, you will have to visit them in person, this will take up a lot of your time. With the kind of workload we have right now, it is nearly impossible to do that. This is the main difference between the parents for students from regular school and the parents for students from alternative school. The situation at the regular school is just the opposite of what we have here. Normally, the parents are the ones who want to talk to the teachers all the time. In alternative school, teachers have to work really hard to find a way to talk to the parents.” If what Teacher-A said is true, it appears that the parent-teacher conference is the most effective way of communicating with the parents but I wonder what the parents think about the parent-teacher conferences.

## **2. Parents tend not to discuss children to save themselves from embarrassment.**

When I interviewed Parent-C, he told me: “I rarely attend the parent-teacher conferences. When he (Student-C) was in regular school before, I was afraid of going to parent-teacher conferences. When all parents were sitting together, I stand out because of my success in business and my social ranking, but when it comes to my child’s academic performance, I had to excuse myself and move to the back of the room and preferably, to a place where no one will notice me. At that time, at least my child was in a regular high school but now, he is in an alternative school, I can’t deal with it. I still prefer to talk to the teachers in private. I sometimes communicate with the teachers by phone, but even that is rare. Everyone is busy!”

Parent-B also shared the same view. She pointed out that at one of the parent-teacher conferences, the teacher wanted her to share some of her view with the group because she is also a teacher, a college lecturer, she was totally embarrassed. “I can almost guess what other people were thinking about”. She said a few words and quickly left the conference, and from that point, she rarely attended any parent-teacher conference, she prefers to communicate with the teachers in private. The problem is “The teachers are often too busy to talk, they don’t have time to talk on the telephone,” she said helplessly. Chinese are always concerned about “saving face” and when it comes to the practical issues like children’s education, it is still a dilemma for many parents. They neither want to lower themselves to communicate with their children, nor do they want to communicate with the teachers or other parents because they need to “save their faces”. I wonder if saving face is more important than saving their children? Are they willing to abandon their children so they can save their “face”? When I asked Parent-B this question, she told me firmly “I didn’t give up on my kid, I just don’t know how to deal with it.” What a conflicting thought!

If students are the body of the alternative school system, then teachers are an important supplement to the system, as well as the parents. The cooperation between the teachers and the parents becomes an important link to the success of the system. Home to a child is the most important place where warmth and safety can be found. Although students spend most of their time at school with teachers and only visit their homes on weekends, home still proves to be the most effective place to improve the relationship

between the parents and their children. Communicating with teachers will be a convenient way for parents to find out how to effectively communicate with their children and to understand how their children are thinking. When the parents know what their children's needs are, they can find a common ground in the relationship.

When organizing the data I collected during my field study, I focused on the key word "relationship". Through the different relationships among the parties, I attempted to understand the current alternative school system for misbehaved students in China. In the process of data collection, I saw many negative developments in the existing system, so whether it is a negative remark or a positive progress, they all provide me a way to further improve the system.

## VI CONCLUSION

During my one-month visit at the Beijing Haidian Boarding School, I learned a lot from both the students and the teachers alike, and I also experienced many things that will be kept in my heart for the rest of my life. Although I had such a limited time with the students, I learned to respect the students through the information I collected during my field study as well as from my personal experiences.

The alternative school system being the special education system by its nature, its uniqueness and complexity are the main factors that attracted me to this research. When I said special education, I didn't mean to convey any bias or negative meanings, I simply wanted to approach this subject more carefully and observe it from a closer range. The reason why I spent so much time introducing the education system in ancient China, especially the teachings given by Confucius in Chapter III of this research report, is to point out that this system is unique in its own way. The Chinese educational system, the alternative school system included, has its deep root in the conventional teachings and in many ways it is heavily influenced by the teachings of Confucius. Naturally, as time goes by, many of the original ideas or teachings were misunderstood or misinterpreted by the later generations; to a degree, I had attempted to analyze these differences or misunderstandings in this report. In the literature review, I also summarized several research works done with respect to the modern alternative school system in China. Through this research and the educational models developed by the various authors for the alternative school system, and through surveying the various causes that resulted in

the misbehaviors engaged by the misbehaved students and the common features found on the misbehaved students, I hope readers of this report will establish a basic understanding of this unique educational system. This discussion also provides me the background information for the issues and problems that were presented in this report.

In Chapter IV, Analysis, I presented notes taken from my journal and conversations I had with the students, teachers and the parents. Through the analysis of the triangular relationship among the students, teachers and the parents, we have an opportunity to observe the problems existed in the modern alternative school system in China and hopefully, have found a sensible solution to the problems through our discussion. In this Chapter, I once again re-introduce the triangular relationship and will discuss the probable solutions for the problems discussed in prior chapters. We will again focus on the “Relationship-Centered” condition of the modern alternative school system in China.

**1. Good Hardware Support is An Effective Way To Improve The Student-Teacher Relationship.**

The Student-Teacher relationship may not be as perfect as we want it to be, and undeniably, there existed some outside factors that contributed to the imperfectness of this relationship. These outside factors are something we can work on.

“Lun Yu” taught that “Teacher is like a father”, which means, the relationship between the teachers and the students is like the relationship between a father and a son.



It also said that “if teacher does not discipline the students, it is because the teacher is lazy and is not doing his job.” For a long time, strict discipline has always been an important part of the Chinese education system. The relationship between the teachers and the students is built on the authority the teachers had and the rank of the teachers is also based on the power or authority he is assigned to. There is always a clear definition with respect to the power and authority in school. In addition, there is also a clear definition for both the teachers’ and the students’ obligations within the system. It is the teachers’ obligation to teach and students’ obligation to learn at school. Teachers make certain that students learn what has been taught at school and students make sure that they can digest whatever is been passed on to them at school. In ancient China, there was a saying that described the student-teacher relationship, “Once a teacher, always a father”. This saying defined the student-teacher relationship, which cannot be on an equal footing. It rarely is a two way street and students always consider the teacher as a father figure, with respect and fear. Any time when a student tries to defend his position against the teacher’s or question the teacher’s teaching, it is always considered disrespectful to the teacher and is a challenge to the authority. In a word, the teacher is always positioned on top of the mountain and he is always right; a student can only worship him and cherish him, but can never be an equal to him.

At BHBS, many of the students had once had a tense relationship with the teachers. When taking a closer examination to their past relationship with their teachers, I found that the student-teacher relationship maybe a contributing factor to what they are today. The teachers’ excessive use of discipline on the students or the teachers’ ignorance

made students to feel at a loss in the system. These are the factors I have encountered during my visit at BHBS. Disregard the role the teacher played in the formation of a failing student; I am more concern about what role a teacher can play in the alternative school system to help reform the students.

Apparently, the conflicts between the students and the teachers are a common phenomenon in China, as indicated in my survey. Most students think the teachers don't understand them and they purposely keep a distance from the teachers. At the same time, teachers helplessly express their lack of ability to do what they want to do. On the one hand, teachers want to understand their students' personalities and their thinking; on the other hand, teachers' heavy workloads and work related pressures prevent them from spending more time with the students or conducting the badly needed individual tutoring sessions with the students. Lack of communication between the students and the teachers effectively prevents the chance to improve the teaching quality. Without communicating with each other, teachers cannot execute the policies instituted by the system. Because of misbehaved students' unpleasant experiences in the past, students tend to be very defensive when dealing with others and they tend not to trust other people to protect them, as a result, it is unrealistic to expect students to take the initiative to improve the student-teacher relationship. To overcome this issue and to provide an environment where a more effective communication between the students and the teachers can be implemented, a better-equipped school is the foundation.

To carry out this policy to improve the school's teaching environment, we should (1) improve the teachers' benefits to provide the teachers with a worry-free living environment; (2) improve the quality of the teachers so the overall quality of the alternative school system can be enhanced; and (3) enlarge the size of the teaching staff so the teachers' workload and work related pressure can be reduced and therefore, improve the teaching quality. At the same time, it will also ensure that teachers have time to conduct the necessary individual tutoring session with students so they can design a more individualized teaching model for the students.

From the alternative school's point of view, because of the reduction in the school budget, the school has to cut back on the teachers' benefits; this resulted in teachers' common complaint about the increased workload and relatively low pay. For the same reason, alternative schools have hard time attracting new teaching staff and therefore, create a bad cycle of not getting new blood in the teaching staffs. Budget decline also affects the quantity and quality of teachers' training. Continued education for the teachers is also an important factor in improving the teaching quality. Although all of the teachers at the alternative school are graduates from colleges with education as their major, the fact that the alternative school is an unique teaching environment requires its teachers to use different techniques when "handling" students, lack of proper training in this area will be a major handicap for teachers. We have to bear in mind that students in alternative school normally carry certain wounds with them, psychologically, and they require special handling and certain flexibility when dealing with them. For teachers working in alternative schools, continuing education in their teaching technique is

especially important. It is important for the teachers to know how to effectively communicate with the students on the sensitive issues or how to communicate with the students effectively, period. It will be beneficiary for the teachers to update their skills periodically so they can improve on their teaching quality. Considering that the teachers are having such a heavy workloads because of the lack of sufficient teaching personnel, it is utmost importance that the schools work on recruiting new teachers immediately.

The lack of sufficient budget is probably the main reason why the alternative schools defer replacing the school teaching equipment and facilities. It is my opinion that the schools should not rely on the government as their only source of financial aid, they should try to obtain their own financial resources from the society and try to gain support from the communities they are in. Communicating with charitable organizations or educational foundations is an effective way of getting financial assistance.

**2. Regardless if they were the students, teachers or parents, when dealing with the issue on relationship, they all seem to be helpless. Proper counseling will help them cope with the problems.**

Wang and Kao (2000) categorized misbehaved students' psychological and physiological profiles into different categories. Although I disagreed with them on the statement that "misbehaved students have lower IQ than the students from regular high schools" (Wang & Kao, p49), I do think their statement that "misbehaved students generally fail to maintain a balance between their emotion and their intelligence" is accurate. They stated that "normal people usually maintain a balanced emotion and the

intelligence and under normal circumstances, the emotion is controlled by the intelligence of the person. Underage adults normally are unstable in controlling their emotional balance due to their young age, it is not unusual to see them lost control in their emotion; this is especially true on misbehaved students. Basically, misbehaved students are constantly found to be in a state of emotional imbalance” (Wang & Kao, Page 51).

Most of the misbehaved students experienced things people in their age group will never have experienced. They suffered from psychological wounds people in their age group can never imagine to have. Proper psychological treatment and counseling would greatly help them to release the anger and frustration hidden deep inside of them. From our discussion in Chapter III about the conventional educational system in China, the story about “Meng Zi’s mother” presented a good illustration of how important it is to provide a child with a good learning environment. In the information age we are in today, it is amazing how much effort, money and energy the parents spend on providing their children with a “proper” or “suitable” living and learning environment. Unfortunately, it also adds unnecessary pressures to the children and this, indirectly, is one of the reasons that leads children to the wrong path of life. This pressure coming from the family and the society is the nightmare the children can never get rid of.

As a result, if without building the trust with the parents or the teachers, proper professional counseling can fill in the gap and provide the children with a direction and/or purpose in life. It will also help students to understand their family as well as their teachers better. Apparently, this will not be an easy process simply because misbehaved students

are constantly on defensive mode. How to lower the guard of the students and make them to communicate with you and seek professional help voluntarily is the one task we have to work on first.

From my limited contact with the parents, I found them helpless when facing their children's misconduct and the reality that their children are in an alternative school. Again, I found counseling for the parents also a necessary course of action in the problem solving process. Chinese parents are known to take their children's academic performance way too seriously. They often consider children's academic performance the glory of the entire family. They like to show off their children's achievements at school to their friends and other family members and this is one topic they are never tired of it. Hoping their children will be successful when they grow up is every parent's wish; as a result, parents usually plan ahead for a bright future for their children the moment they are born or even before they are born. When the children are growing up, parents usually raise their children according to their own wishes, sending them to different training classes hoping to raise their kids to be a "complete" person. Only those kids who achieve academic accomplishments are considered filial children in China.

Because of this cultural background, when their child turns into a misbehaved student, parents considered this a shameful event to the family and often feel humiliated. They often say that they can't "raise their head" in front of people because of their children. This unhealthy psychology of the parents has great influence on how they deal with their children's current situation as misbehaved students. I think this is why parents often

expressed their frustration about not knowing what to do with their children during my interviews with them. As a result, I think proper counseling should be provided to the parents so they can correct their imbalanced attitude toward their children and face the reality by accepting their children the way they are. Hopefully, counseling will also help them to rebuild their confidence as a parent and help them to wanting to take on their own responsibilities as a parent. Another important purpose of counseling is to help parents to understand their children, to observe what their children need and to re-discover who their children really are. This is an important step toward rebuilding the student-parent relationship. As long as the student-parent relationship can be improved, students will be willing to go back to the embrace of the family and to enjoy the warmth provided by the family. I sincerely believe that as long as there's love, everything will become easier to deal with.

During the one-month stay at BHBS, the pressure the teachers experienced left me the deepest impression. On a daily basis, teachers are faced with students who are constantly causing trouble or creating new situations, and the homework that is piled up high on the desk waiting for the teachers to review, and the students who make noises in the classroom interrupting the classes. For those teachers who are married, after they finish worrying about the students at school, they still have to take care of their own family after school. Being in this situation day after day, and when you are surrounded by negative environment, no matter how strong you are, you will get frustrated sooner or later. As a result, it is also important to provide proper counseling to teachers as well. Through counseling, teachers have a way to let out their frustration and regain their balance in life.

Hopefully, with the help of counseling, teachers can maintain their impartial and healthy attitude when dealing with students. This is the key to maintaining a healthy student-teacher relationship

- 3. We should increase the interaction between the students and the community to encourage more understanding for each other and eliminate bias has against the misbehaved students. This will reduce students' worry and psychological pressure and increase students' self-esteem and self-confidence.**

In Wang and Kao's survey, they had specifically studied the influences the society had on the students and had concluded that these influences were mostly negative. The misbehaviors conducted by the people in the community, and vulgar customs all had negative influences on the students and were major factors in the formation of the students' improper behaviors. However, despite the negative factors mentioned in Wang and Kao's book, I thought the community also can provide some positive feedback to the students.

During my interview with the students, when asked about "whether they have any communication with students from regular schools or whether they wish to be transferred to regular schools," most of the responses I received were negative. Students often were repelled by the idea of having any contact with the world outside of the school (alternative school) and many students mentioned several incidences in which they received unfair or even biased treatments when contacting students from regular high schools. I thought this was the main reason why they refused to have any exchange with the outside world. The



misunderstanding or stereotyping toward misbehaved students in society has its long history this is an undeniable fact.

I remembered the first time when I visited BHBS, I took a taxi there. On the way in, I had a short conversation with the driver and I was shocked to learn how much bias toward the school was coming from the driver's mouth. He compared the school to the mafia society and this made me extremely uncomfortable. He also expressed his concern about my safety during my visit to the school. When I asked him if he had any direct or indirect personal contact with the school, he told me no. Whatever he said to me was hearsay, he didn't have the "guts" to go near the school. Later on when my friends knew about my research project at BHBS, they all expressed their concern about my safety and kept telling me to "watch out" for myself. All of these "concerns" depressed me, I felt sorry for the kids at the school for they have to face this discrimination everyday.

When I recall my experience with the students during the one-month visit at the school, I have to say that they are not unpardonably wicked people, they are just kids who made a few mistakes in their lives and because of the mistakes they made, they now have to carry the evil burden and discrimination against them for the rest of their lives. When we put down the school, at the same time, we effectively wound the damaged souls the second time. How do we make people understand that these are just kids like yours and mine, and give them another opportunity to have a fresh start? This is not a job that can be accomplished overnight. We have to start small and from the people around us, then we can expand the idea to the community and the society as a whole.

To spread an aggressive and positive message to the community, we should first increase the frequency of the interactive activities between the students and the communities and the school should take the initiative to communicate with the community. The school could organize students to participate in the community charitable activities. This will not only rebuild the school's positive new image, but also will motivate its students to be more socially responsible. Through these community activities, students may overcome their psychological roadblock and re-establish their self-confidence. One thing we should also pay attention to is that not every student should participate in the community activities. Based on the consideration of each student's unique background and psychological profile, school should careful select the students for the activities in which they should be allowed to participate. For those students who are not ready to step out of the school boundary, the school should carefully evaluate whether they should be apart of the activities.

The above three pointers are my recommendations to the alternative school system in China based on my personal observation and experience obtained during my field study at BHBS. I sincerely believe that as long as we are persistent in meeting the goals of the program, we can achieve whatever we wanted to do even with such a simple method as I suggested. Although during my field study I had experienced numerous negative messages and the results coming from my research were not exactly what I had in mind, I am still hopeful. Like the teacher-to-be at BHBS told me, "I am fully prepared for the road I am about to step on, I know it's going to be difficult and I will meet with many challenges, but

I firmly believe that so long as we all contribute a little more love, a little more understanding and a little more energy, these kids who had walked the shadow of the valley will someday meet the sunshine again.”

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