Responding to the Market: A Study of International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

The increased competition associated with market forces, which are increasingly evident in secondary school provision, has led to the use of marketing activities in schools and a proliferation of studies into school marketing. This thesis explores the Hong Kong international secondary school market with the aim to analyse the nature and value of the marketing activities of international secondary schools in Hong Kong. The research explores the nature of the market, the marketing activities of schools, and the cultural and socio-economic characteristics of parents of potential pupils. It also investigates school choice factors and identifies sources of information used in the school choice process.

This research uses a specific model of relationship management outlined by Barnes (2001) and adapts this model to the educational context in order to develop a conceptual framework matrix as a tool for analysis. This matrix is used to present the research data and provides a framework for a cross-case analysis of the findings. The matrix enables a logical construction upon which to draw conclusions about the marketing approaches observed within these schools.

The study reveals that, although academic factors were deemed to be highly influential when selecting schools, emotional factors such as pupil happiness were also significant. It also shows that visits to schools and the 'grapevine' were most important as information sources during the selection process. The data suggested that emotions often associated with positive relationships, such as mutual trust and understanding, play an important role in mediating school choice.

The research strongly indicates that, where school selection is becoming a more democratic process, school marketing must reflect this by recognizing the value of positive relationships with stake-holders. Where school managers appreciate the need to engage in dialogue which nurtures trust and understanding, then their schools are more likely to recruit and retain pupils. These schools also reap the rewards of personal recommendations to other parents seeking schools for their own children. For these reasons a philosophy in which relationship management forms the basis of a school marketing approach is advised.

Acknowledgements

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I should express my gratitude to colleagues who allowed me access to their school communities. I should also like to recognise the contribution that my colleague Scott Bell made during the many hours we spent discussing management issues in Hong Kong schools. Finally, I have relied on the advice and support of my wife, Lita, who has been my best 'critical-friend' and to my daughter, Jessica, for her understanding when Dad was too busy to spend time with her.

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1 Introduction

Schools operating in countries where market environments exist increasingly witness parents engaged in a choice process in deciding where to educate their children (Woods *et al*, 1998b). This is a manifestation of greater competition between schools. Often, where choice among schools is possible, the choice options may be obvious, with ease of travel, gender or religious factors weighing heavily upon the choice process. However, sometimes the choices are based upon more subtle factors and choice patterns among parents can appear complex and difficult to understand (Coldron and Boulton, 1991). The complexity of the choice process has prompted some schools to apply marketing activities in an effort to attract greater numbers of students or to be increasingly selective of the students they admit (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995, Glatter *et al*, 1996). Whilst some schools have prospered under these competitive conditions, others have struggled. Such a market environment appears to exist within the Hong Kong international secondary school market and the aim of this research has been to identify whether marketing activities adopted by these schools have played a part in determining the success of their operation. The study uses a conceptual framework matrix (Smyth, 2004) to underpin the research. This matrix has been derived from a specific relationship management model of marketing and has provided a useful basis upon which to construct the research methodology, and to analyse the data. This research is unique and original in that although the use of relationship marketing has been recommended by other writers, this research takes a specific model of relationship management outlined by Barnes (2001) and adapts this model to the educational context and further, uses it to develop a conceptual matrix as a tool for analysis. This matrix is used to present the research data obtained from three similar study schools and provides a framework for a cross-case analysis of the findings. It also enables a logical construction upon which to draw conclusions about the successful marketing approaches observed within these schools. The research is also unique and original in that this has been carried out on international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong provides an unusual opportunity for a study such as this. The relative similarity of some of the international secondary schools reveals more of the subtle nature of school choice among parents and has allowed greater focus upon the nature of the marketing activities themselves. The research has been conducted in the unusual situation where schools are geographically close and which offer very similar

educational experiences. In this way, obvious choice factors such as travel times, gender or religious choice factors may be negated and more subtle factors may be revealed. Studies on marketing in international secondary schools, especially in Hong Kong are rare, and the nature of the Hong Kong environment indicates that it is an unusual situation. For this reason this investigation involves an examination of three similar international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong. The specific aim and research questions are stated on page 21 and dealt with in greater detail beginning on page 84. The study uses questionnaire survey, interviews and documentary analysis tools to obtain the data. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from a survey used in an extensive study of school choice called the Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) study, which was designed to address the impact of the market-like environment which had developed in the United Kingdom (Woods *et al*, 1996). It has been employed to answer research questions one and two. Questions three and four were answered using a semi-structured interview used in a UK study on school responses to marketization challenges (Foskett, 1998). Other interviews were used to provide triangulation with the survey responses. In this way, qualitative data has been used to triangulate with quantitative data in an effort to establish validity and reliability in the findings.

International secondary schools have represented a small but significant portion of the secondary education sector in Hong Kong. Separated from the local secondary schools either by language, educational system or both, the original international schools were created to educate expatriate children living in Hong Kong. The first school in Hong Kong that offered education for children from overseas was the Central British School founded in 1902. By 1967 this school became one of the first schools to form the English Schools Foundation (ESF), the largest group of international schools in the world. Other international schools developed in Hong Kong to meet the needs of foreign groups including those from North America, Switzerland, Germany and France. A significant number of returning migrants in the late 1980s and early 1990s further contributed to the need for more classes offering foreign curricula (Bray and Ieong, 1996).

However, demand for international school places showed signs of slowing prior to and just following the handover of sovereignty of Hong Kong back to China in 1997,

when expatriate numbers dropped. Despite great pressures the International school sector continued to grow and the demand for international school places was still continuing in 2001, and at the time of writing a number of expansion projects were underway and new school buildings were being erected to keep pace with the demands. Recently demand for places in the international school sector has also come from local parents who see the international school sector as an alternative to the local examination driven education system. Some argue that the desire to send these students to international schools has been motivated because of the need for social stratification, with only the wealthier families being able to afford the high school fees charged by the international private sector (Bray and Ieong, 1996). International secondary schools in Hong Kong form an interesting sector to be studied from a marketing point of view because there are a number of these schools offering fundamentally similar services to a finite number of families who are crowded into a relatively small area. It is therefore the purpose of this thesis to explore more thoroughly the nature of the international secondary school market in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong SAR has been described as one of the most open markets for business in the World and its international secondary school market displays many open market characteristics.

There is certainly a degree of choice among international secondary schools in Hong Kong, especially among schools that offer similar curricula. The thesis will look at why parents choose particular international secondary schools and will investigate how, if at all, the international secondary schools in Hong Kong employ marketing approaches to attract customers. Where marketing techniques are used, it will be established whether they are ad hoc and informally implemented, or formally planned, with marketing personnel and separate budgets. Where schools do use marketing techniques it can be acknowledged whether or not they are more successful in maintaining numbers of students. There follows a description of Hong Kong as an internationally recognized business centre and the need, subsequently, for the provision of schools which offer education to the children of large numbers of expatriates working in the specially administered region.

1.1 Hong Kong: An International City

Hong Kong has long been home to large numbers of foreigners. Hong Kong's colonial past created the need for an expatriate civil service and, more recently, the rise of Hong Kong as a financial and business centre for the region has led to the firm identification of Hong Kong as an international city. As one guide to Hong Kong puts it:

> The economy is extremely flexible, thanks to a general policy on the part of the government to intervene as little as possible in the business process. The establishment of a business is easy and cheap; money and staff freely move in and out;.....The government assumes that when you start a business in Hong Kong, you know how to make money at it, ...so it leaves you alone.

(Insight Guides: Hong Kong, 1992, p. 82.)

	Jan. 1980	Sept. 1988	Jan. 1990	Jan. 1991	Jan. 1992	Jan. 1993	Jan. 1994	Oct. 2001
Australia	7600	9800	10800	12600	13400	15400	17500	
Canada	3100	10000	11500	13600	15100	17800	21200	
India	13900	16000	16900	17500	17700	18400	19300	18543
Japan	7500	8900	11100	12600	12400	13900	16200	14180
Malaysia	8500	10800	11000	11900	11500	12300	13300	
Philippines	10300	44000	54700	68800	80200	92400	112000	142556
Portugal	6200	8000	7700	9100	8800	8500	9000	
Thailand	6500	11000	12700	14800	16800	19300	22000	14342
UK	23500	14000	17600	17600	17100	20800	23200	18909
USA	10900	16000	18100	21000	21800	25000	28300	
Others								61345

Table 1-1 The Largest Groups of Foreign Nationals in Hong Kong, 1980 to 2001

(Based upon Bray and Ieong, 1996, p.53)

This image of Hong Kong as a free economy and an international state was further enhanced during the period leading up to 1994 as the number of foreign nationals working in Hong Kong grew at an increased rate. Kwong (1993), linked the increase in the numbers of foreigners with the booming economy of the People's Republic of China in the early 1990s, as many foreign companies were hoping to gain access to the China market by opening "beachhead operations in Hong Kong". For example, the

number of American companies operating in 1992 had increased by 30% to 900 since 1990. Coinciding with the potential China market was an expansion of tertiary education and the building of a new airport, both requiring recruitment of foreigners, mainly from Australasia, Europe and North America (Bray and Ieong, 1996). Table 1-1. shows the increase in population of the largest groups of foreign nationalities during the period 1980 to 2001.

Table 1-1., shows that the largest increase of all the foreign groups was among the Filipino population, which rose from 10,300 in 1980 to 112,000 in 1994. This dramatic increase was due to the large numbers of women from the Philippines coming into Hong Kong to work as domestic helpers. The other foreign groups that showed the largest increases up to 1994 were from the USA, (10,900 to 28,300), Thailand, (6,500 to 22,000), Canada, (3,100 to 21,200) and Australia, (7,600 to 17,500). It is most likely that a large proportion of the foreign nationals from Canada, Australia, and USA were returning Hong Kong citizens who had previously immigrated to those countries to obtain a foreign passport. Bray and Ieong (1996) identified that this large number of returnees and foreign nationals had a dramatic effect upon international schools in Hong Kong during this period. The expansion and development of international schools in the territory is well documented in the local press (South China Morning Post, July 14th 1997, March 15th 1999, May 6th 1999, July 1st 1999) and in 1996 reports of expansion for more than 3,000 places in international schools were being written (Chamber, S., SCMP, April 17th 1996).

1.2 International Schools in Hong Kong

Before looking at the role of the international secondary schools in Hong Kong it would be useful to define the nature of the international schools which operate there because the schools which make up this group can vary dramatically in type and size. The Hong Kong Government defined an international school as:

> schools which follow a non-local curriculum and whose students do not sit for the local examinations (e.g. Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination). They are operated with curricula designed

for the needs of a particular cultural, racial or linguistic group or for students wishing to pursue their studies overseas.

(HK Education Department, 1995, p. 4.)

This definition is perfectly adequate for the means of this thesis although it may not conform to some definitions of an "international" school. Defining exactly what an international school means is somewhat difficult. Despite operating in an international environment, many of the international schools in Hong Kong display relatively 'narrow' national characteristics. For example, the Japanese International School conducts all its classes in Japanese and uses a curriculum found in Japan. Some schools have diversified their curriculum to the extent that they offer two 'streams'. One 'stream' is modelled upon a popular or common system in the parent country and taught in the mother tongue of the parent country, whilst the other stream is normally taught in English and models the curriculum offered in either England and Wales or North America. More recently some major international schools have adopted the International Baccalaureate (IB) as their post sixteen qualification. Also of significance in Hong Kong are the schools that offer curricula found in parts of Canada or North America. Many of these schools have developed in response to the large numbers of Hong Kong Chinese returning from overseas. The largest international school in Hong Kong caters to students wishing to follow an American education.

For the purposes of this investigation, international secondary schools teaching in languages other than English have been ignored. The reason for this is that these schools cater to such a specialized niche. It should also be noted that there are a number of prestigious private schools using English as the medium of instruction in Hong Kong. These however, fall under the control of the government and offer local examinations (Hong Kong Certificate of Education, HKCEE, and Hong Kong A levels) they will therefore not be included in this study although their significance will be noted later.

The Hong Kong Government placed the international schools into three categories "on the basis of the extent of their financial assistance from Government":

1. **Group A** schools are the 15 schools run by the English Schools Foundation including one special school.

2. **Group B** schools are the "10 non-profit-making schools, normally associated with a national group which offer an English stream, and which receive Government assistance in the form of land grant and/or financial subsidies under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)[1]" and,

3. "**Group C**: 15 private independent schools offering a non-local curriculum which do not receive any Government assistance, except reimbursement of rates for those non-profit-making ones. Many of them are profit-making, and some are national in character."

<div align="right">(Hong Kong Government, 1995, p. 5.)</div>

The number of international schools operating in Hong Kong had "grown markedly" over the decade prior to 1994. In 1994, 18 international secondary schools were operating (Bray and Ieong, 1996). Of these, four had been operating in the 1960's, four more opened in the first half of the 1980's and three more in the second half of that decade. Seven further international schools were opened throughout the 1990's, more than one third of the total international schools operating at that time. Bray and Ieong describe the rapid expansion of the international school sector since 1980;

> From the late 1980's the sector has taken remarkable new directions. This partly results from the growth in the total number of foreigners living in Hong Kong, but it also reflects the changed attitudes and needs of Hong Kong people. Some Hong Kong parents have chosen to send their children to international schools in order to gain access to curricula which emphasise discovery and creativity more than rote learning; but many others have chosen international schools either because they plan to emigrate or, more commonly, because they have returned with children who have become used to the school systems of Canada, Australia and the USA and who can no longer easily fit into the local system.
>
> Bray and Ieong (1996, p. 72)

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[1] Schools admitted to the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) were eligible for government grants equal to the difference between a schools income from fees and the cost to the government of an aided school with similar numbers of pupils. (Bray, 1994)

In 1995 the enrolment in primary and secondary international schools was predicated to continue to increase towards the turn of the century. Table 1-2 shows the predicted increase in demand.

Year	Enrolment
1995	22,768
1996	24,120
1997	25,553
1998	27,071
1999	28,678
2000	30,382

Table 1-2 Projected Enrolment for the Years 1995 to 2000

Source: Hong Kong Education Department, 1995

Recently released figures show that actually the enrolment figures in the international schools had not actually reached the predictions.

Year	Enrolment
1995	23,681
1996	23,246
1997	23,868
1998	23,615
1999	24,040

Table 1-3 Actual Enrolment for Years 1995 to 1999

Source: Hong Kong Education Department, unpublished at time of writing

The actual enrolment figures for in all international schools were substantially lower than those predicted and might be explained by the expatriate migration prior to and just after the hand-over, but also by an unforeseen Asian economic down-turn. However, in international secondary schools there did appear to have been a slow increase in enrolment since 1995.

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
All Int'l schools (inc. ESF)										
Classes	282	327	364	438	432	477	459	470	481	479
Enrolment	7137	8140	8588	10577	9750	10580	9927	10305	10417	10708
ESF only										
Classes	149	153	160	169	176	184	184	189	196	200
Enrolment	3717	3942	4041	4357	4457	4595	4630	4848	4903	5182
Other Int'l Schools										
Classes	133	174	204	269	256	293	275	281	285	279
Enrolment	3420	4198	4547	6220	5293	5985	5297	5457	5514	5526

Table 1-4 Showing Enrolment and Number of Classes (S.1 to S. 7) in International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong Between 1990 and 1999.

Source: Hong Kong Government, April 2000

This is illustrated in Table 1-4, which also showed the increase in the number of classes during the same period. It is obvious from the table that both the number of classes (282 to 479) and the total enrolment in international secondary schools (7,137 to 10,708) had increased throughout the decade. Whilst there had been no new international secondary schools since 1995, there was been a steady expansion of classes as existing schools had either extended buildings, moved to new sites or continued with planned growth in senior sections of their schools.

It is useful to divide the figures to show how the provision of the international secondary school sector has expanded in the secondary schools of the English Schools Foundation (ESF) compared with other international secondary schools. Both the ESF and the other international schools have increased the number of classes between 1990 and 1999. The ESF increased its secondary classes by about one third, from 149 to 200 whilst the other international schools more than doubled their secondary classes from 133 to 279. Enrolment in ESF secondary schools had increased by approximately 29%, from 3717 to 5182, whilst enrolment in the other international schools had increased by 39%, from 3420 to 5526. Figure 1-1 shows that the increase in enrolment during the decade beginning in 1990 roughly paralleled the increase in the number of secondary school classes. The rate of increase in both enrolment and number of classes was greatest during the first part of the decade with the rate of increase slowing somewhat after 1994.
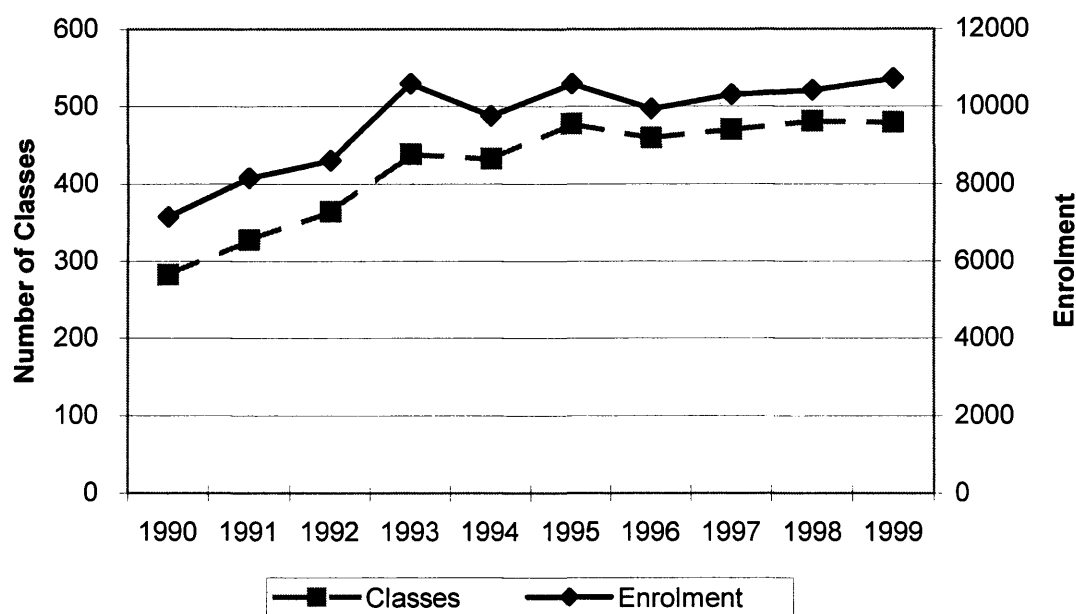
Figure 1-1 Graph showing Enrolment and Number of Secondary Classes (S.1 to S.7) in the International Secondary School Sector between 1990 and 1999.

Source: Hong Kong Government, April 2000

The picture becomes more complicated however, when we start to look at enrolment as a *percentage of capacity*. For example, if a class can accommodate 30 students but has actually enrolled 23 students, then we can say that the class is only about 75% full. It should be pointed out that the figures derived for the percentage capacity have been corrected to allow for differences between the figures that the ESF use to denote accommodation and that used by the international schools. A simple calculation reveals that throughout the decade, the ESF secondary schools had set a maximum average accommodation figure of between 28 and 30 students per class. The other international schools had been more generous in their assessment of the number of students that could be accommodated per class, with average figures varying from 31 to 36 throughout the decade. Obviously, if the potential accommodation is high, it is more difficult to reach this target with actual enrolment. For this reason the "Percentage Full" figures calculated in these tables has been corrected to use the lower, ESF average figures for accommodation. This correction has the effect of allowing for fairer comparison between the ESF and the other international schools. Table 1-5 shows data concerning the number of classes in international secondary schools and the number of students these classes could accommodate. The row

indicating the "Capacity" represents the number of students in a full class. If we look at the "Actual Pupils per Class" row we can see that these figures differ from those in the "Capacity" row.

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Classes	282	327	364	438	432	477	459	470	481	479
Accommodation	8815	10305	11828	13886	12786	15086	13972	14402	14374	15011
Capacity	31.3	31.5	32.5	31.7	29.6	31.6	30.4	30.6	29.9	31.3
Enrolment	7137	8140	8588	10577	9750	10580	9927	10305	10417	10708
Actual Pupils per Class	25.3	24.9	23.6	24.1	22.6	22.2	21.6	21.9	21.6	22.4
Percentage Full	80.96	78.99	72.61	76.17	76.26	70.13	71.05	71.55	72.47	71.33

Table 1-5 Showing Proportion of Student Places Filled in All International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong From 1990 to 1999.

Source: Hong Kong Government, April 2000

From these figures we can derive a "Percentage Full" row that indicates the proportion of capacity actually filled by students.
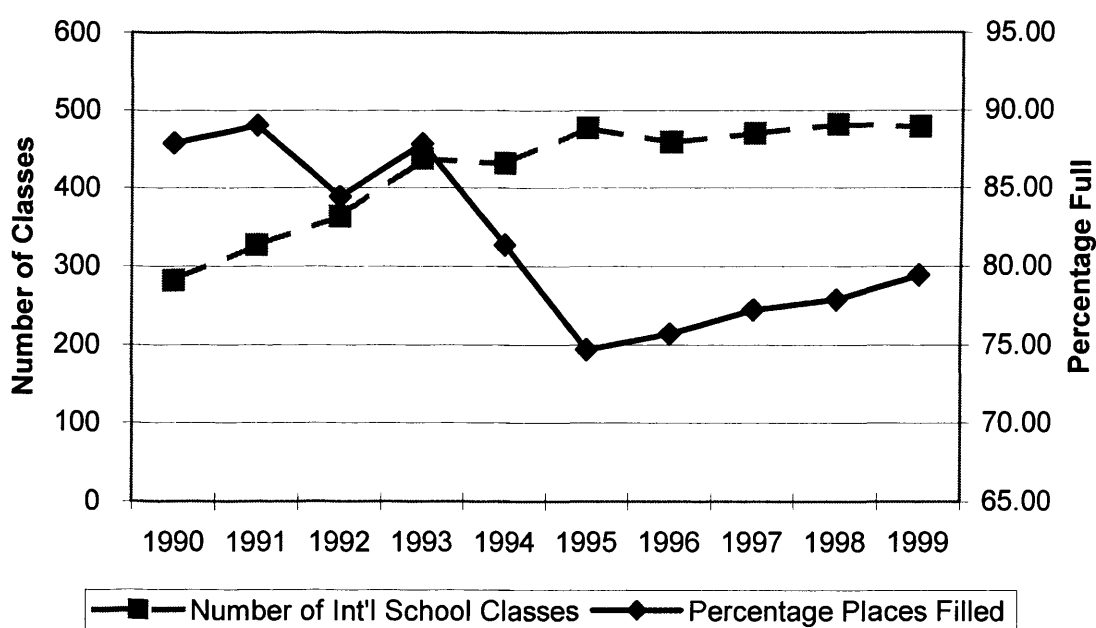
Figure 1-2 Graph showing the Number of International Secondary School Classes and the Percentage of Places Filled from 1990 to 1999.

Source: Hong Kong Government, April 2000

Figure 1-2 indicates that average capacity in the classes of international secondary schools was maintained between 84% and 89% until 1994 when the figure drops to approximately 81% and which reached a low in 1995 of about 75%. From this low point, the figure gradually increased to 79 percent in 1999.

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
ESF only										
Classes	149	153	160	169	176	184	184	189	196	200
Enrolment	3717	3942	4041	4357	4457	4595	4630	4848	4903	5182
Percentage Full	**86.54**	**91.95**	**89.74**	**92.64**	**89.59**	**82.16**	**85.74**	**87.89**	**87.79**	**90.04**
Other Int'l Schools										
Classes	133	174	204	269	256	293	275	281	285	279
Enrolment	3420	4198	4547	6220	5293	5985	5297	5457	5514	5526
Corrected Percentage Full	**89.21**	**86.11**	**79.20**	**83.09**	**73.14**	**67.20**	**65.63**	**66.54**	**67.90**	**68.83**

Table 1-6 Showing a Comparison between the Percentage Full figures of the English Schools Foundation and the Other International School.

The figures reveal a higher proportion of filled places within the ESF secondary classes than has been found in the other international schools. Whilst the ESF secondary schools have maintained an average of approximately 88% throughout the decade (with a minimum of 82% in 1995 and a maximum of 93% in 1993) the other international schools have an average enrolment figure of 82%, dipping to a low of 66% in 1996 and with a high figure of 89% in 1990. Figure 1-2 illustrates the comparison.

Both the ESF secondary schools and the other international schools showed a gradual decrease in the proportion of places filled during the first part of the decade, The ESF secondary schools appear to reverse the trend a year or so earlier than the other international schools as well as maintain a higher proportion of filled places than the other international schools in Hong Kong.
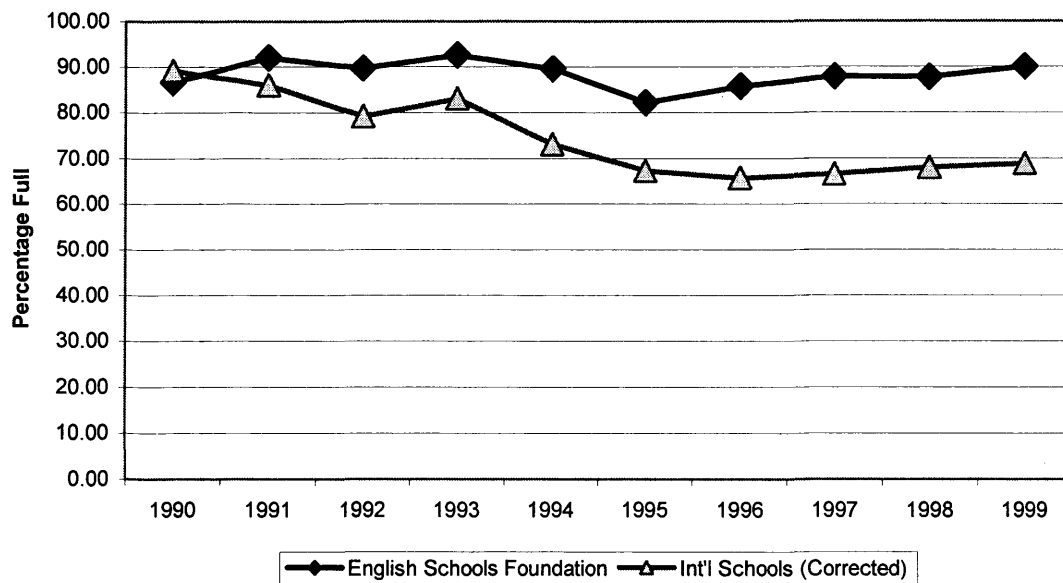
Figure 1-3 Graph showing a Comparison Between the Percentage Full Figures for ESF Secondary Schools and Other International Schools.

Source: Hong Kong Government, April 2000

Letters from parents in the South China Morning Post (SCMP, May 18th, 1997) and the evidence above show that despite initial forecasts of expansion in student enrolment into international schools, the actual picture reveals a tightening of the market throughout the latter end of the 1990's and it is the premise here that international schools were forced to look at ways in which they could appeal to wider numbers of students in-order to maintain income and continue to fill increasing class places. Newspaper reports about the need for international schools to adapt also appear around this time (SCMP, June 17th 1997), and the ESF schools announced that Putonghua would be included in the curriculum for all students enrolled in their schools. More evidence of the need for the international schools to broaden their appeal appeared in an article titled "English Schools Body Changes Course" (SCMP, March 13th 2000) in which it was announced that local students would be offered places two new schools.

1.3 The International Secondary School Market in Hong Kong

It has been shown that forecasts of increasing numbers of international school students had led to a building program by a number of the existing international schools during the early part of the 1990's. The increase in the numbers of students failed to

materialize in the ways predicted and so international schools faced a tightened market in which to operate. However, some changes in the local education system might have helped to widen the market base for these schools. It is likely that the decision to make the southern Chinese dialect of Cantonese the medium of instruction in the majority of local government schools benefited the international secondary school market. Poor understanding of English and the almost universal use of Cantonese, spurred the change, although some political motives were also suggested. There had been a number of prominent dissenters including a Secretary for Education and Manpower who had recently said that the use of Cantonese as the medium of instruction was "killing" students (Chan, Q., SCMP June 7 2000, p.2). Many local Chinese parents agreed, and consider proficiency in English language to be an advantage to the careers or the educational advancement of their children and have protested at the relatively small number of local schools allowed to offer English as the language of instruction. Cheng (Cheng, A., SCMP, Mar. 18, 2000, p. 17) states, "Many parents are eager to send their children to these (100 English speaking local) schools." The reduction in the number of local government or private schools using English as the medium of instruction spurred interest in the international schools in Hong Kong. Although carried out in connection with a different educational innovation, a survey showed that 40% of parents would "definitely send their child abroad to study and 42 per cent said they would most likely opt for an overseas institution" (Wan, C., SCMP, May 12, 2000). This finding certainly provides further evidence of the international outlook of a large section of the local population. The Hong Kong government has not ignored the role of the international schools and recent indications are that the international school sector may increase its profile.

The significance of international schools to the Hong Kong government has previously been articulated through the head of the English Schools Foundation who said, "International schools are an important infrastructure of Hong Kong. The Education Department has been very helpful in planning for their future" (Chambers, S., SCMP, April 17, 1996). Recent initiatives such as awarding a school site to be developed by the English Schools Foundation for the education of local students in English (Forester, K., SCMP, June 8, 2000) are further signs of the continued, and arguably expanding, influence of the international schools as an alternative choice for

the children of non-expatriate families. An extension of funding from the government to the English Schools Foundation has also been awarded.

1.4 Conclusion

Table 1-1 showed that the numbers of foreign nationals continue to increase, and, it is the influx of immigrants into Hong Kong which forms the most significant cause of the overall population increase in Hong Kong. During the 1990's the returning migrants from North America, Canada and Australia had contributed greatly to the numbers of so-called foreigners entering Hong Kong to live. During the lead-up to and just after the change of sovereignty in 1997, a number of expatriates left Hong Kong. These leaving expatriates contributed to a slowing down of enrolment rates in the mid-1990's, rates which have proven to be well below those predicted by the Hong Kong Government. Enrolment and introduction of classes in international secondary schools (including the ESF) had been increasing rapidly during the first part of the 1990's, slowing in the middle of the decade but then continuing to increase up until 1999. This observation was supported by the work of Bray and Ieong (1996), which showed an increase in the number of international secondary schools during the first part of the decade. At the end of a decade which had seen an increase in the number of Europeans returning to their homelands and a decrease in the number of immigrants from Australia (South China Morning Post, October 1999), international schools had found a rapidly changing environment in which to operate and survive. Many of these organizations continued to flourish but one or two have found it impossible.

The aim of this research is to analyse the nature and value of the marketing activities of international secondary schools in Hong Kong. The research questions will be shown to emerge from the literature review and are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3 (page 84), but are stated here for reference.

1. What is the nature of the Hong Kong international secondary school market?
2. What are the marketing activities of schools?
3. What is the nature of the choosers?
4. What factors influence school choice?
5. What sources of information are most valuable?

The original contribution of the work is the use of a conceptual framework matrix derived from a relationship management approach to marketing which has been adapted to the educational context also, the research uses the unusual nature of the Hong Kong secondary international school sector as the context for the study. The research should be of interest to school managers operating within the context of the Hong Kong international secondary school market. There has been no deliberate intention to generalize findings outside this context, although it is thought that aspects of the study will be considered useful beyond these boundaries. Where limitations to the scope of the study are apparent, they reflect the nature of a professional doctorate undertaken by a practitioner working as a full-time teacher. Time and access constraints due to work commitments made further data collection an almost impossible task. However the aim of this study was not to collect *all* the available data but rather to collect *enough* data to provide a sufficiently full picture upon which to satisfy the aims of the research. It was considered that the data collection was successful from this point of view. It would have been desirable to interview a wider range of school staff in order to gain more data to triangulate with the Head teacher statements, particularly regarding internal marketing, however, opportunity and access to these sources were not made available. Access was also denied to a school which was originally identified as a useful source data for the research, but the inclusion of another school as a substitute proved to be more than adequate in terms of the amount and nature of the data collected. The implications and the solutions to these predicaments are explored further in the methodology chapter.

The study seeks a more complete picture of the market in which these international schools operate and establishes whether the schools have had to be proactive in maintaining student numbers through the use of marketing approaches. To do this, the research explores the factors that influence parent's choices between international secondary school, and establishes the range of responses of international secondary schools to these choices. It obtains data about the marketing approaches of some of the international secondary schools participating within the market and identifies which marketing approaches have been most successful. By doing so, it is hoped that international schools in other rapidly changing environments can benefit from the

knowledge gained and further data can be added to our knowledge base of marketing secondary schools in the international context. The next chapter outlines the literature and reveals that school marketing and school choice are complex processes which are influenced by a number of factors. The creation of a conceptual framework is presented in which a model of relationship management in organisations is adapted to the educational context and is used in conjunction with the main themes derived from the literature to develop a matrix as a tool for directing the research

2 Literature Review

Searches of the literature have revealed very few sources of information about educational markets and educational marketing specifically related to Hong Kong. However, the nature of the schools which are the focus of this thesis makes international literature sources more valid and for this reason much of the review of the literature refers to work produced in other countries but which can be applied to the Hong Kong context. This chapter starts by introducing a theoretical framework of educational marketing upon which the thesis is to be based. The literature review is used to construct a complete conceptual framework which takes the form of a matrix (Smyth, 2004). This matrix provides a useful tool upon which to analyse school marketing because it allows managers to gain not only a broad overview of the context within which a school operates but also facilitates a focus upon the subtle yet complex issues associated with school marketing. Throughout the literature review main themes from the marketing research emerge, and these are linked to a relationship management model of marketing to produce the matrix which is presented at the end of the chapter. The review looks at the literature related to educational markets to help categorises the nature of the market in which the international secondary schools of Hong Kong find themselves. This is important because it serves to set the scene within which the international schools operate. The next part of the literature review focuses upon a range of different marketing approaches and marketing responses used in education. In the third section of the literature review, patterns of school choice among parents looking for secondary schools for their children are explored. These choice patterns are affected by the characteristics of the choice makers can have an effect upon the ways schools react to the choice process which parents pursue and so the next section looks at the ways that secondary schools can respond to these choice patterns. The final section on educational marketing highlights a model which is may be most appropriate for marketing secondary schools especially in environments such as Hong Kong where a degree of competition appears to exist.

2.1 Markets and Marketing

In purely economic terms, a market exists when somebody offers a product or service that a customer or consumer wishes to purchase or rent. The market becomes competitive when several suppliers offer similar products or services, and in an

attempt to maximize profits, try to corner large segments of the available consumers. As producers vie for customers by attracting larger portions of the market in competitive circumstances, economists believe that improvements in the products or services on offer or a reduction in the price of the service or commodity, is the result. Theoretically, in competitive markets the consumer has a powerful voice, and producers who disregard that voice, often do so at their peril. A producer, who fails to deliver quality or fails to offer an attractive product or service, provokes the consumer to enact their ultimate prerogative, which is to 'exit' from the relationship and choose another product or service. The errant producer who loses custom is likely to fail and ultimately is fated to be removed from the market.

Gray (1991) defined marketing as, "a management process, responsible for anticipating, identifying and then satisfying consumer wants and needs with a view to making profit". The marketing process is complex and can involve a "dialogue" with customers enabling the identification of needs through market research, followed by planning, the use of the marketing mix and the application and evaluation of the resulting strategy. A traditional product based marketing strategy can be viewed helpfully by the so-called marketing mix adopted by the manufacturing sectors. This view of business underpinned a marketing approach which emphasised a "marketing mix" which included the 4 Ps of Product, Place, Price and Promotion. Gray's own model for educational marketing applied 5 Ps to his own educational marketing theories (Product, Place, Price, Promotion and People).

Whereas "product" is easily defined in manufacturing environments, the product in service industries can be a more difficult concept to resolve and, recognising the particular marketing needs of service industries over the past decade or more, has led to various moves to refocus marketing strategy away from the product centred transactional marketing approaches towards a more customer centred model and to a review of the significance of the marketing mix model (Gummesson, 1999, Egan, 2001). The emphasis of the service centred approach to marketing was clearly being placed upon the potential profitability of customer retention over longer periods (Gummesson, 1999) and the importance of relationships. Later in this chapter it will be shown that the service industry model of marketing has been widely recommended for adoption in education. The review of the marketing mix for application into

service industries led to the suggestion to add a further 3 Ps to the original marketing mix, to produce an educationally more appropriate 7 Ps model including **People, Process** and **Proof**, (James and Phillips, 1995).

Barnes, (2001), identified a relationship management model in which price and place are subsumed into "product", or in other words, the essence of what is offered to a customer. The interactions and the relationships formed with stake holders, clients, and customers, was emphasised by the "people" dimension. "Performance "is the "proof" that the company is "getting it right" and delivering the service they promise, whilst "process" is the system and activities which support the provision of the service. Thus the relationship model put forward by Barnes is made up of the 4 P's of **Product, Process, Performance** and **People.** It shall be agued that this 4P's relationship model is a useful basis upon which to construct a framework for analysing the marketing responses of the international secondary schools in this thesis.

| **Product** The essence of what is offered, e.g. the curriculum, school environment, facilities | **Ability to add value** | **Processes** System and activities which support the provision of the product, e.g. teaching and learning |
| **People** Interaction with employees, client, e.g. student, parent, colleagues | **Ability to differentiate** | **Performance** Provide the product as promised, getting it right, e.g. inspection process |

Figure 2-1 The Relationship Management Model
(Adapted from Barnes, 2001, p.15.)

In Figure 2-1, adapted from Barnes, (2001), this model is applied to the marketing of schools represented as the 4 Ps of Product, Process, Performance and People. The central core is the product itself, which in the case of a school might be the

curriculum, the school buildings and facilities, gender or academic selectivity practices.

The core "product" is essentially the first point at which parents make a decision about choosing or rejecting a school. Beyond this central product, the "process" of education begins and this layer contains the teaching and learning ethos of the school, the way in which teachers are expected to operate in the classroom, for example. In the next layer, the "performance" layer, formal assessments of how the organization is operating may be made, often through inspection, or possibly through the academic results generated by the students. Each layer makes up an aspect of the school where parents can get information or impressions upon which choice decisions may be based. Finally, the outside "people" layer makes up the interface layer between the organization and the outside community and the point at which relationships start to develop. It is in this layer that the management of relationships can influence parents in their choice processes. Barnes (2001) indicated that as an organization moves its concentration away from its central purpose and reaches the outer layer, it is more likely to be able to differentiate itself from other organizations offering similar products through value added activities, or, in other words, "going beyond expectation". Table 2.1 summarises the adaptation of this relationship management model to the educational setting and these headings provided by the relationship management model form the basis upon which a conceptual framework matrix is to be constructed throughout the rest of the chapter.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Business/Service Industry Context	*Essence of what is offered to the customer*	*System and activities that support provision of service*	*Providing the product as promised – getting it right*	*Interaction - how customer is treated in the encounter*
Educational Context	*Nature and type of school and curriculum, public examinations*	*Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Spending on resources, buildings*	*Criteria by which product can be assessed, e.g. Inspections, public examinations*	*Customer, clients, pupils, parents, employees, LEA stake holders*

Table 2-1 4P's Relationship Management Model and its Adaptation to Education.

In the educational context, product is interpreted as being the essence of what the school offers in terms of its curriculum, language of instruction, examinations, or selective criteria. Process refers to the activities which support the product and these include approaches to teaching and learning and resource allocation for example. Performance refers to measurable criteria of success in providing what a school professes, whilst people indicates the interaction of organisation with stake-holders in a school community such as pupils, parents, or education authority.

The market model of economics has gained increasing support amongst governments of the developed economies over the last few decades, because markets encourage, "independence, self-reliance and self-respect which had been corroded by the workings of an all-powerful, interfering state" (Walford, 1996). For state schools in the UK, price would be of little significance to the marketing mix adopted by the school. However, the situation for the private international schools in Hong Kong would obviously have to consider price very carefully as they formulated a marketing strategy. The market model so popularly applied to economies has increasingly been extended to include educational markets. Walford, (1996) has described the 1980's and 1990's as two decades of reform in which many countries have "radically reorganised" a state maintained educational system.

2.2 The Nature of Educational Markets

At one time it would have been difficult for many observers to consider education as operating within a market environment at all. Traditional educational provision, particularly in Europe, had been coordinated by the state, and it would have been difficult to imagine that schools could some day operate within an environment displaying market characteristics. However, the state provision of education has become somewhat eroded in a number of countries including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Holland, USA, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand (Walford, 1996, Karsten and Teelken, 1996, Miron, 1996, Van Zanten, 1996, Weiss and Steinert, 1996, Cookson, 1996, Marginson, 1996, Gordon, 1996, Whitty et al, 1998, Bush, 1999, Vandenberghe, 1999,Witte, 2000), and the acceptance of a market environment has become more widespread. These two modes of educational provision lie upon a

continuum with state provision at one extreme and private provision at the other. As Witte (2000) points out, the two paradigms - traditional public schooling as opposed to private schooling - represent two extremes in the range of school choice options and policies, and yet they represent the two most common models of school enrolment. In the traditional public system, schools are compelled to accept students from within their catchment area, in contrast, private schools may exercise a degree of selection and parents may have free choice over a range of alternatives. The nature of the market in which schools operate will greatly affect the way in which they interact with communities and for this reason it is vital that the wider context is characterised when investigating educational marketing and why this issue forms the first part of the conceptual framework matrix and is shown in Table 2-2 on page 34.

2.2.1 The Power of Market Environments in Education

The movement towards a market approach to educational provision has been prompted by the desire to ensure that schools wishing to remain active education providers will need to provide a service that is attractive to parents and students. If this is not so then they suffer the consequence of closure. Schools which provide a quality service should attract larger numbers of students and, more likely than not, a higher income which can then be used at the discretion of the schools themselves, to maintain or further improve the service. Gewirtz *et al* (1995, p.1), suggested that, "The forces of the market will out, the good will survive, the weak will go to the wall, and everyone will be better off than before". Kotler (1987) optimistically observed that competition would create a pattern of varied educational institutions each with a clearly defined educational product to offer and that better choice in educational provision should lead to greater diversification because schools will identify niche markets and will adapt their educational models to cater for the needs and desires of the population. Other writers have predicted that reforms toward an educational market would lead to a more economical provision of education and that schools operating within an environment of increased competition and reduced protectionism would need to more effective to meet the needs of its clients, and to meet those needs more economically than they otherwise might (Witte, 2000). Bush (1999) for example, describes the situation in the United Kingdom as having evolved from an environment in which organizations were 'domesticated' by protection from the catchment area mechanism, to an environment in which organizations are 'wild' and

operate within a more competitive system where only strong, effective schools survive. This view has also been expressed by the CERI organisation:

> Open enrolment and an increasing autonomy for schools both internationally and in the UK has led to a free market environment and has meant that schools have become, "dependent for their resources on the decision by 'customers' to attend them"
>
> (CERI, 1994, p.12)

Also central to the market reforms is the emphasis on the decentralization of financial control and management which has lead to greater school autonomy. Further justifications for increased choice in school selection include increases in liberty, equality and economy (Glatter et al, 1997, Whitty *et al*, 1998, Gorard, 1999). The first point is that liberty manifests itself in allowing greater choice, and that choice is an indication of freedom. For many people, freedom is viewed as a positive characteristic and it follows logically therefore that choice must be good. With increased choice comes an extension of the opportunity for those previously excluded, to participate in a process that was once exclusively the prerogative of the rich and powerful. The opportunity to choose leads to a greater degree of equality for all. The third imperative, economy, is fundamental to the reforms in several countries (Whitty et al, 1998), in which the increase in choice for schools has resulted in a level of competition and a level of economic pressure, which focuses schools upon, "satisfying their users by providing a good service" (Gorard, 1999, p.28). Other theoretical by-products of a more open educational market are a greater diversification of educational provision and greater accountability. But, there is evidence which contradicts such optimism and some have sought to explore what has been the real effect of the move towards a market environment.

Gewirtz *et al* (1995) has suggested that one of the main effects of the move towards a market environment has been the importance placed upon school image. This greater concern in presentation has manifested itself in the production of more professional school brochures, as well as an increased emphasis on central quality control over documents and communication intended for external consumption. The schools operating within the new markets take concerted efforts to make sure that they present the most attractive image possible to their potential consumers. Among the "new

semiologies" identified by Gewirtz *et al* (1995) were the "glossification" of image, the growing abundance of suits, an improvement of buildings and school environment, with a particular emphasis on reception areas, and an emphasis upon what is described as, "middle-class symbolism". The "corporate image," school symbols and logos were indicated in the study as having increased significance among the schools. The observation that large amounts of resources were being pumped into improving image and the glamorizing of communications rather than being used to buy teaching materials has caused concern. These realities bring into question the blind acceptance that a move towards market environments naturally improve the quality of education. In fact, there have been a number of studies carried out, particularly in the United Kingdom, which challenge the assumptions that greater freedom of choice in the educational market is a guarantee of improved educational provision.

2.2.2 Limitations to the Market Approach

Gintis (1996) provided evidence that competitive product delivery systems work only under certain conditions. For example, competitive systems are only effective if several real alternative suppliers are available and that consumers are able to accurately assess the quality of the goods or services they wish to purchase. For a competitive system to be successful, consumers would be required to be the best judge of their needs. A competitive system is only socially efficient if the product or service is a "private good" the positive and negative effects of which fall exclusively on the consumers (Gintis, 1996 p. 635). In addition to the economic advantages that the market offers, it is also predicted that a market environment leads to a greater diversity of educational provision that appeals to the needs and desires of a number of distinct groups.

Market environments do fail. They fail due to the existence of natural monopolies, public goods, incomplete markets, externalities and imperfect information. Lamdin and Mintrom (1997) suggested that a commodity is only efficiently provided through private competitive markets. The authors contend that only externalities and imperfect information are relevant to education. Externalities refer to the social benefits which education bestows upon the children, such as socially beneficial behaviours. In this instance the private benefits to the student may be outweighed by the social benefits and therefore demand by the consumer is low. In this case there is an argument for

government intervention to maintain efficient levels of the externality. The reality of the market approach suggests that increased choice in educational systems does not necessarily lead to greater equality by empowering the disadvantaged. Indeed, Gewirtz (1995), Glatter et al. (1997), Broccolichi and van Zanten (2000), point to a potential consolidation of the choice hierarchy, as previously successful schools attempt to maintain their position by implementing selection criteria on the students they are prepared to admit. Parents, especially those who are at the top of the school choice hierarchy, are often happy to maintain the selectivity of their child's school (Gewirtz, 1995, Herbert, 2000). Evidence that school choice as social engineering was leading to reduced access to the less privileged has been presented by Herbert (2000). As one of the conclusions, Herbert wrote that high income suburbs "used their catchment schools with confidence and stood aside from the flux evident in other parts of the city" (Herbert, 2000, p.95). Wells (1993) found that impoverished families were not able to act upon the so-called empowerment offered by increased school choice.

> Empowerment does not always come from a voluntary transfer plan because the lack of power that some families experience is embedded in their social and economic lives.
>
> (Wells, 1993, p.48.)

Willms (1993) found, in a Scottish study, that parents seen to exercise their right to choice in school selection tended to be from more highly educated families often with prestigious careers, the schools they selected had a higher socioeconomic status with high mean levels of attainment, but which only marginally benefited children's academic attainment. Also, the study showed that the parents were rarely able to effectively assess the relative strengths of the schools they chose. Lamdin and Mintrom (1997) asserted that choice led to change in the structure of accountability and those schools had to become more responsive to the needs to their students. They argued that the market could disadvantage children with special needs because schools would not want to shoulder the heavy burden of financial investment on infrastructure or staffing. This view was shared by Gewirtz *et al* (1995) who argued that there was evidence that resources were actually moved away from students with special needs. Also evident is the mistaken belief that parents from lower income or disadvantaged groups could have the same choice making powers as middle-class or affluent groups. Disadvantaged parents can be barred from vital information which the more

empowered can access, thus making their decision-making less effective. Information must be provided as far as possible on school quality (which is often difficult to assess) either by government or non-government organizations, also schools themselves would need to be responsible for providing information about the product they offer.

The argument that market environments lead to liberty, equality and economy, the three justifications for greater school choice, have also come under question (Whitty et al, 1998, Gorard, 1999a). The notion that increased liberty due to freedom of choice is a natural consequence has failed to recognize the possibility that parents do not always have sufficient information about schools to be able to widen their choices. That increased choice will lead to greater equality was a splendid ideal within which choice, that had previously been the preserve of the economic and social elite, would now extend to all. Unfortunately it is argued the reality is more likely that those who were previously able to choose have had these privileges extended whilst those who were not able to make choices still do not posses the 'social or cultural capital' to make effective choices even where choice may present itself (Gorard, 1999a). Indeed, Gewirtz et al (1995) found that good schools operating within a more competitive environment actually became more selective and further disadvantaged those previously struggling to enter such schools.

2.2.3   Quasi-Markets or Public Markets in Education

Markets are rarely, if ever truly free, and government control normally exists to some extent in the provision of education. The term 'quasi-market' has been used to define the state of education provision which is no longer wholly provided by the state but which does not show all the characteristics of a free market. It can be characterized as a highly regulated, free market (Vandenberghe, 1999). What actually exists in these environments is a controlled market. The quasi-educational market has been a way of "making public services behave more like the private sector" (Whitty et al, 1998). This apparent contradiction in terms arises because the educational markets of some developed countries outwardly display many of the characteristic of a free market, such as the provision of choice, but in actual fact, remain highly regulated because of government control on providers, quality and, in many cases, price. The creation of a quasi market, a model lying between the two extremes of full state provision at one

end and a fully private one at the other, could be the solution to the criticisms placed upon the two extremes. However, there are cautions to this view also.

> While the stated aim of school reform was frequently voiced in terms of improving the quality of education in all schools in the state sector, there is little evidence that competition could translate into school improvement. In contrast, there is growing evidence that the quasi-market of schools is leading to greater inequity between schools, and greater polarization (sic) between various social and ethnic groups within each society.
>
> (Walford, 1996, p. 14.)

The issue of polarisation in schools is illustrated by Broccolichi and van Zanten (2000) who described the increasingly common practice (among the middle classes anyway) of parents selecting schools other than those they qualify for by way of residence. In France, pupil flight from schools in areas that maintain zoning is not widely acknowledged because it contradicts the generally accepted opportunities for social integration through schooling. As has been shown in a number of other studies relating to this topic, the poor and disadvantaged are continually denied opportunities to make the same choices open to wealthier families. Their study showed that there were certainly schools which were avoided by parents because they were deemed to be 'bad' schools. These schools were not perceived to be able to offer either a 'safe' environment or an acceptable standard of academic support. Institutions were seen to take steps to improve their image. Schools which were considered inferior by the community tried to improve their image by creating, often unofficially, academic banding within the school. This was usually achieved by selecting only the top students to take a second language like German or Latin. Unfortunately this had led to some 'bands' containing only highly disruptive students and classes which were barely functional. In these situations the main aim of the school was to protect the top students from mixing with the others. This research also illustrated that parents were using the perceptions of those around them when making decisions about which schools they would choose for there children. The role of primary school teachers and primary school head teachers in the selection process was also highlighted and parents would often use them as sources of information upon which to base secondary school choice. Broccolichi and van Zanten (2000) concluded that the increased incidence of pupil flight to the most popular schools was leading to, "an inexorable deepening of

segregation" because the opportunity to make choices was particularly acute with the middle-classes. Social inequalities were exacerbated by the exclusion of ethnic minorities and deprived people to make educational choices for their children.

In response to some limitations in the quasi-market definition, Woods (2000) proposed an alternative model to which they refer to as a public-market. Like the concept of a quasi-market the public market is a hybrid of two extremes, with the "free market" dimension at one end of a scale and a "public-interest" dimension at the other. It differs from the quasi-market model because of the social dimension which dominates, evidenced for example, by schools emphasising aspects of education for minorities or small groups of disadvantages students, activities which would be unlikely to attract the masses and therefore challenges the belief in a 'market dynamism' characterised even by quasi-markets. This type of educational altruism is at the heart of the resistance to product based marketing. Therefore, a public market hybrid has merits in as much as the model represents a more humanistic environment, one in which people are somehow brought to the fore in the debate. This is a key issue and Woods makes the plea for a 'third way' which,

> ..is not a matter of simply introducing 'market dynamism', even with the public interest in mind, but it essentially entails transforming market elements through the ethical and philosophical dynamism of public professionality and cultural engagement which gives expression to humanity's highest values.

(Woods, 2000, p239)

The provision of education is a human issue and the role of people in the whole process shouldn't be ignored.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Nature of the Market State or Private, Quasi, Public	State school or private school, open enrollment or catchment, gender or religious selectivity	National Curriculum, Strategies, school determined curriculum, teaching and learning philosophy	School effectiveness Academic selectivity, quality or polarization? sinking schools,	Democratisation, level of empowerment, level of competition, level of choice, level of minority support, altruism

Table 2-2 Nature of the Market

Synthesising and summarising the literature regarding the nature of the market against the relationship management model, produces Table 2-2.

The nature of the market in which a school operates will influence the nature of the product it offers. In a state dominated environment the school would have little input into the decision making whereas in a totally free market the school would have complete autonomy to decide on the product it will offer. A school operating in a quasi-market enjoys a degree of freedom whilst constrained within certain set limits, as does a school which operates in a public market. Only here, the constraints are determined differently. For the reasons outlined here, it is an important aspect of this research to determine the nature of the market in which the Hong Kong international secondary schools operate. In the next part of this literature review the focus will be on the marketing responses of schools.

2.3 Educational Marketing

The next part of the conceptual framework matrix is made up of the marketing responses schools make as responses to the market in which they operate. The need for some form of marketing activity within education has been more accepted as the environments in which schools operate have evolved. In 1990 the National Association of Head Teachers wrote:

> Schools can no longer operate in isolation. The expectations of society, whether expressed by individual parents, identifiable groups, or government legislation, mean that schools need to be aware of the views being expressed. They must take account of the public perceptions of how well they are performing and be prepared to respond to those articulated concerns which are genuinely representative. Marketing is about this kind of responsiveness just as much as it is about responsibility to lead and educate public view.
>
> (NAHT, 1990)

The application of marketing techniques to education have been questioned given the "service-collaborative culture that has characterized the best of schooling anywhere," (Styan, 1991) however, Styan encourages schools to adopt marketing as an, "integral part of their development plan." The advantage of such an inclusion would be to build on the aims and values of the school (Coleman, 1994). Gray (1991), writes that

marketing in secondary schools may still not be particularly wide-spread although, according to James and Phillips (1995), colleges appear to have embraced the concept more warmly. The next section demonstrates how a traditional marketing approach might be adapted to the school situation and draws parallels with development planning which has been an accepted management strategy in education. This marketing approach has drawn upon the product transaction experience and serious doubts about its application to education are raised in subsequent sections.

2.3.1 The Traditional Marketing Process

The structure of the Marketing Cycle strongly mirrors that of a Development Plan with each of the two processes begining with an audit or market research to ascertain the nature of the starting position of the school or business. Coleman (1994) observes that within most secondary schools, teachers could undertake market research using common research techniques such as questionnaires or interviews.
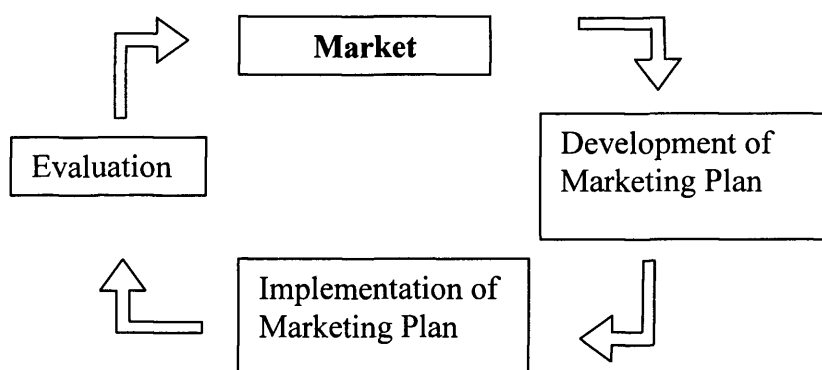
Figure 2-2 The Marketing Cycle, adapted from Coleman, 1995.

Another technique taken from development planning is the use of a SWOT exercise to identify the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats to the school. Evans (1995) felt that market research was particularly appropriate under certain circumstances, particularly when information is required for decision-making, where a variety of choices are offered, or when new problems occur, such as falling roles. Market segmentation might also form part of the market research.

> At its simplest, this requires the institution to look at its existing and potential customers and analyse them into categories ...(it)

then allows the school or college to consider the suitability of its method and manner of communication with these market segments

(Coleman, 1995, p.15.)

The initial market research is followed by the development and implementation of the marketing strategy. Implementation of a marketing strategy most appropriate to the individual school contexts involves a response to some or all of the following, which have been differentiated by Gray, (1991) as:

- Tasks associated with recruitment;
- Income generating tasks;
- Relationships with employers;
- The preparation of publicity materials and public relations;
- Internal marketing to staff.

The final phase in each marketing cycle is marked by an evaluation of the process thus far. Coleman (1995) described the tools that might be used in the evaluation process. These include discussion amongst school staff, a cost benefit analysis or the use of other performance indicators of the objectives of the plan. Performance indicators are measures of the achievement of goals e.g. whether more children had been recruited. Educational marketing can have very obvious benefits, for example, in Australia the use of marketing within the international educational arena has led to a dramatic increase in the number of international students attending Australian schools and colleges. In fact, the increase has been so significant that by 1998 international education accounted for 9 per cent of Australia's total service exports (Mazzarol, 1998, p.163). Findings for a variety of tertiary and secondary schools offering international education to overseas students led to the conclusion that two factors were most important for success in the international market. Firstly, image and resources, including, "level of market profile or recognition, strength of financial resources, reputation for quality, size and influence of alumni and range of courses and programs." (Mazzarol, 1998, p.172) Of equal importance in the study were the contacts and "strategic alliances" which the institutions forged. Additional findings suggest that the ability to offer breadth and depth in the courses and programs would "provide a

degree of product differentiation" somewhat akin to the service industry approach to competitive advantage by sheer scale of what is on offer.

However, as Foskett (1999) points out, marketing has not always sat well with educators who have been suspicious of its application to the provision of education and in the wide interpretation of marketing. Furthermore the economic justification for greater school choice assumed that the resulting increase in economic pressure would focus schools upon, "satisfying their users by providing a good service" (Gorard, 1999a, p.28). There have been a number of people who would question the whole concept of the marketability of education and that the pressure to improve services in response to customer needs has not been brought to bear, at least, not constructively. James and Phillips's (1995) investigation of educational marketing in schools found a lack of any coherent marketing practice despite the fact that the schools were operating in what was perceived as a competitive environment. On the other hand, all the schools were active in, "various elements of the marketing mix," although in an *ad hoc* and intuitive way. A true marketing approach, according to James and Phillips (1995), demands more than an informal approach, "There is a special quality and complexity to the educational relationship which makes the marketing of it as a service problematic." (James and Phillips, 1995, p. 86) It is an ignorance of what marketing entails that has led to the belief that marketing is an add-on process, and as a result there has been an over-emphasis upon promotion. James and Phillips also discovered that the majority of marketing has been directed at parents and not pupils. Also, schools tended to see marketing as a crisis management tool necessary for survival, rather than a strategic approach as part of the management process. A more detailed look at marketing as applied to schools is undertaken in this next section.

2.3.2 The Nature of Educational Marketing

The concept of marketing in education has been an uncomfortable one for many educators and is a concept that has caused some confusion within the profession (Foskett, 1999). The term has been used synonymously with public relations, promotion or even advertising, although these aspects are more likely to be activities carried out within a marketing strategy. For some schools marketing is explicit but for many schools, marketing (or a form of marketing) may actually be occurring in the day-to-day running of the organization but is not identified as marketing. For example

community relationships are seen by many schools to be of paramount importance and they would be actively trying to ensure that relationships are healthy through listening to the views of community members. As shall be shown later, this is a valuable approach to marketing.

Whilst some might consider the only role of educational marketing is to promote the school, Kotler et al. (1987) insisted that it can be described as a "much broader management concept." Holcomb (1993) for example, stressed the need for educators in America to view education as, "a product as well as a service which could be, "measured, evaluated, weighed, verbalized, packaged .. and marketed." Applying this view of education Holcomb defined educational marketing as:

> A method by which students of teaching and learning, school board members, superintendents of schools, school principals, state and federal lawmakers, educational agencies at all levels might use some of the methods used in the private sector to effectively and efficiently market their products to those identified as 'consumers'.
>
> (Holcomb,1993, p.188.)

More recently Davies and Ellison defined school marketing as:

> The means by which the school actively communicates and promotes its purpose, values and products to the pupils, parents and staff and wider community and makes it the wider responsibility of all those in leadership roles to engage in the strategic marketing process.
>
> (Davies and Ellison, 1997, p.vii)

Traditionally, in countries like the United Kingdom, despite the existence of fee charging schools, education has not been viewed as a commodity that could be 'sold' to a consumer. At best, the view that education is a 'service' has been more readily accepted. If education can be seen as a 'service' then any discussion about marketing in schools has called upon the experiences and expertise of marketing service industries such as banking, tourism, restaurants etc. Service industries differ from those industries which produce goods in many ways. Goods are tangible; they are "an object, a device, a thing" whereas a service is "a deed, a performance, an effort" (Lovelock, 1991). Services involve people and, in contrast to the situation found in

goods producing companies, who tend to be remote from their customers, service providers are usually in direct contact with customers. Quality assurance is more easily defined where manufactured goods are concerned. Their measurable qualities make it possible to accurately ensure that the goods conform to specification long before they come into the hands of the customer. Services, however, are consumed as they are produced and mistakes are more readily witnessed by the purchaser. This makes consistency very difficult to achieve, especially with service organizations represented by large numbers of service personnel.

> The relationship between a seller and a buyer seldom ends when the sale is made. In a great and increasing proportion of transactions, the relationship actually intensifies subsequent to the sale. This becomes the critical factor in the buyer's choice of the seller the next time around. This is certainly true of all financial services, consultancy, general contracting... and any vendor organization involving a continuous stream of transactions between seller and buyer.
>
> (Lovelock, 1991, p.12.)

The final phrase in the quotation above could be attributable to an educational organization, with "buyer" transactions occurring daily through contact with students or parents. It is easy to see that any marketing approach to education could be more likely to come from the service industry perspective than that of the manufacturing one. However, any attempts at locating education firmly within the service concept remains, according to James and Phillips (1995) to be relatively limited and unsophisticated.

> There is a special quality and complexity to the educational relationship which makes the marketing of it as a service problematic. Teaching is not simply about responding to customer wants, it is also about meeting customer needs.
>
> (James and Phillips, 1995, p.86.)

The distinction between "wants" and "needs" also stirs debate, and Giles (1995) pointed out that some research assumes that parents really do know what they need but also equates choice with need.

Farrell (2001) enters into the discussion with a cautionary note about communication and the potential for messages to be misinterpreted by the receiver. There is never any guarantee that the message will be received as intended. But, even when a message is clear and unambiguous the effect may be to only alienate swathes of the community who do not share the same enthusiasm for the message.

> The more the institution seeks to create a corporate identity, to define itself in the market place, to restrict the degree of interpretation that may be made about what it stands for, so the more it sets itself up in opposition to that which it is not. This may well....lead to greater demand for what is currently excluded to be included. The school which espouses tradition may find a caucus growing which demands progressive change. The school which proclaims it is avowedly progressive may find itself under pressure to restore 'traditional' values.
>
> (Farrell, 2001, p. 176.)

There is a predicament for the educational marketer. Whilst on the one hand the educational marketer is trying to deliver a service to the customer, the package is limited as to how much it can cater to the needs of the customer. This is particularly true in the United Kingdom with the introduction of the National Curriculum which dominates curriculum content and emphasises a common culture which in multi-ethnic Britain may not exist for many.

> So the well-informed, postmodern-minded educational marketer is in the predicament of becoming increasingly aware of the multiplying complexities of the socio-economic-cultural background of the catchment area and may support a customer-led approach, but feel constrained by an inflexible curriculum which is geared to meet the needs of a mythical common culture.
>
> (Farrell, 2001, p. 176.)

According to research findings in the UK (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995, James and Phillips, 1995, Giles, 1995, Glatter *et al* 1996) schools have generally had relatively unsophisticated approaches to operating within a market environment. They found:

- A varied interpretation of marketing.
- A project marketing focus.
- Using marketing for crisis management such as recruitment issues.

- Slow cultural shift towards acceptance of the role of the market.
- Lack of market research
- Stereotyping school image for conformity rather than differentiation.

The terms *marketing, selling* and *promotion* have often been used to describe similar activities by schools and are indicative of a lack of a coherent definition of marketing by them. James and Phillips (1995) found that schools had a greater awareness of the 'face' which was presented to their clients, and schools had diverted funds to maintain or improve facilities and the appearance and condition of buildings. The funding of building maintenance by diverting funds away from educational activities has been made more likely by the move to local management of schools. However, these diversions of funding into apparently non-educational areas only went so far. For example, there was an absence of any personnel employed solely to market the schools. This would not really be surprising given the relatively modest budgets under which some schools operate and the threat of diverting some of those funds away from educational activities. Some schools had recognized the importance of "internal marketing" and were directing marketing efforts towards teaching staff so that they would, in turn, market the institution to outside agencies including parents.

Foskett, (1999) identified two marketing perspectives. The first being marketing as a function of management whilst the second as an all-encompassing 'marketing philosophy' that underpins the operation of the entire business. Although for many schools in the UK marketing has now been accepted as an established characteristic of educational management, it has been shown that the concepts of marketing remain undeveloped (Foskett, 1998). Marketing is a management task rather than an ethos that is part of the culture of the school. Even within management, marketing is seen as a 'bolt on' activity, external to the central management practices and is often viewed as 'selling' or promotion. Marketing does not figure in staff development programs and has not been linked to strategic planning. It is also unlikely that there is any structured evaluation of marketing related activities such as promotional events or practices. Although head teachers may have an acute awareness of the competitive nature of the market in which they operate, they may be reluctant to engage in overt marketing practices for fear of alienating themselves from the professional support

and community which schools have traditionally enjoyed. This particularly appears to be the case among the group of Primary School Head teachers in Bell's study (1999).

> This is evident both in their relatively unconsidered approach to marketing their schools and in their general unwillingness to become involved in strategic approaches to marketing....It is rooted in value systems which reject, or at least fail to legitimate, marketing as an appropriate activity for this group.

> (Bell, 1999, p.71.)

In fact, Bell (1999) concludes that the market atmosphere has led to a certain amount of ambiguity with regard the management of education and the approach to marketing. On the one hand head teachers are aware of the market environment and of the strategic plans they might wish to implement but on the other hand they do not see any long term advantage to doing so.

The marketing of schools has failed to take into account the interests and desires of the students and even leads to disenchantment and cynical view of consumerism and the shallowness of its appeal. Of the marketing rhetoric Reay and Lucey, 2000 wrote:

> These children's collective experience highlights the flaws in the market rhetoric. They and their families had no sense of being empowered in the market place, rather they felt buffeted and demeaned by market processes, which were controlling, rather than being controlled by, them.
> (Reay and Lucey, 2000, p.89.)

The image of a school has repeatedly been presented in such a way as to be attractive to parents by portraying traditional values such as discipline and neatness, but these are characteristics of schooling that may be of little interest to students.

> students are constrained but discerning, sophisticated but cynical participants caught on the horns of many dilemmas in the Janus-faced world of school marketing. This world celebrates surfaces, encourages conformity, hypocrisy and repression and encourages a view of education which favours the interests of adults over children.
> (Kenway and Fitzclarence,1998, p.676.)

Farrell (2001) described that modern theories of educational marketing have been based upon a number of flawed assumptions and so current educational marketing must also be flawed. This post-modern view is based upon the belief that postmodernism rejects the concept of absolute rationality and its potential to solve social problems. An example of this is the concept that social groups were once considered being well defined and categorised. The postmodernist would argue that it is in fact not possible to be so clear-cut and that the boundaries between groups are fuzzy and ill defined and people will tend to move from group to group anyway. Thrupp and Willmott (2003) take the argument much further and argue that it is a fundamentally unacceptable practice. The authors do not deny the pressures on schools to adopt marketing practices especially where schools see falling roles or have been identified as failing. However, they recommend a more honest approach to rectify the situation in which schools might find themselves. Rather than adopting promotional stances to gain publicity they urge schools to be upfront about what it is they are trying to do rather than where they might find themselves in league tables. They go further to stress the need for schools to maintain links with other schools to share good practice and expertise, not to engage in competitive activity often associated with marketing rhetoric.

Although some authors might argue that marketing in schools is morally indefensible, it is suggested here that some form of marketing is appropriate, especially in the international schools market in Hong Kong. These international schools operate in Hong Kong because there is a segment of the market unable to benefit from the state education offered by the Hong Kong government. The Hong Kong government needs to attract expatriates to do business and therefore has an obligation to allow international schools to flourish so that the children of expatriates can receive an appropriate education. Furthering this argument, it is suggested that the international schools have a moral obligation to maintain a minimum standard of educational provision and if, in order to maintain numbers, which guarantees income, which improves provision; then the need for marketing is indicated. But some models of marketing in education have been seen to be unjustified, ineffective or misinterpreted to such an extent that their effectiveness is minimal. The next part of the literature

investigates models of marketing which might be more acceptable and more effective in the international school market.

2.3.3 Strategic Marketing

It has been reported (Hanson and Henry, 1992) that schools are most likely to adopt marketing strategies when a particular problem or situation arises. For example, schools might use market research to obtain information about a particular section of the community so that it can offer a more effective bus routing. Once the information has been collected and used to inform management on the most appropriate initiatives then market research will come to a close with the marketing strategy put away until another project comes along. This *project marketing* approach is a short-term activity, targeted at a particular problem. The marketing activities cease once that particular task or project is completed. However, a more effective use of marketing approaches known as strategic marketing is recommended (Hanson and Henry, 1992; Gray, 1991; Foskett, 1998). In strategic marketing the marketing process should be seen as an integral part of the management of the organization. For an organization to have fully integrated marketing into its management strategies the organization would have to become what an organization described as "market-oriented" (Foskett, 1999 p.37). According to Foskett (1998) organisations may be categorised in three ways;

Product-oriented organisations see their product as central and in service industries such as education they would assume themselves to be the experts at providing the service. This view tends to deny the recipient of the service a significant degree of input into how the service should be presented because the experts, "would know best", and would require little or no feedback from recipients to improve the quality of the service. Many schools have traditionally fallen into this category and, indeed have defended the professionalism of teachers from this stance. Marketing activities would have a low priority in organizations of this type. *Sales-oriented* organizations would also have a strong product-centered view but would see the need for a robust selling strategy. This perspective has been popular for schools faced with a more competitive market for the first time and need to increase promotion in order to "sell" their product. A *marketing-orientation* tends to place the customers needs and wants more to the fore. According to Foskett (1998, p.50) this represents a more holistic philosophy which is, "central to the organisation's whole approach." Once the

customer becomes the focus of an organisation's endeavour then issues of quality and responsiveness are essential, and lead to the development of a marketing triad for schools shown in the diagram below.

QUALITY

RECRUITMENT   RESPONSIVENESS
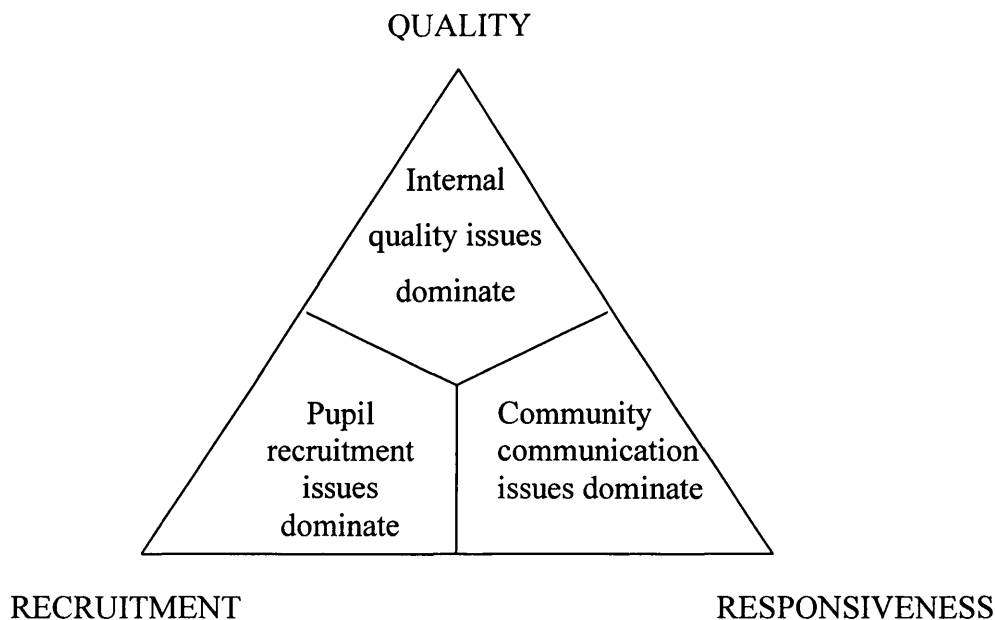
Figure 2-3 Marketing Orientation of Schools, from Foskett(1998a)

Foskett's model allows for what are termed 'micro-market' conditions whereby an organization may, at different points of its operation, move more towards different corners of the triangle. For example, schools facing declining pupil numbers may well focus marketing energy on the recruitment issue.

By 1995, Giles reported that very few schools had progressed towards integration of marketing into the strategic planning of schools. The *ad hoc* approach to marketing activities was highlighted and Giles warned that without a clearer planning strategy, based upon sound market research, schools would be in danger of " 'blowing in the wind' of parental wants and desires".

> Even though the integrated strategic market planning approach offers positive advantages, unless schools can develop their strategic capability to invest in actively developing a market

approach which shapes and informs a coherent programme of change, and which educates client perceptions of need, they will increasingly be driven by a middle-class planning agenda, which will further enhance the divisions which are still all too apparent in British society.

(Giles 1995, p.28.)

Many studies referred to in this review of the literature fail to find a great deal of evidence that school managers employ strategic marketing as part of their role (James and Philips, 1995). There have been few signs that this situation might change, even relatively recent research in the primary school sector by Bell, (1999) shows that few school managers have adopted marketing as a strategic part of their planning. Bell observes that primary school managers at least have a value system which would, "reject, or at least fail to legitimate, marketing as an appropriate activity for this group" (Bell, 1999, p.71). More recently, Bell (2002) has cautioned the notion of strategic planning within school management and presumably also to the strategic planning of marketing activity. He states that planned management,

..needs agreement within the school about basic values and broadly acceptable means which are not rooted in the traditional hierarchical management model with its rule bound inflexibilities and emphasis on the separation of functions.

(Bell, 2002, p.420.)

The evidence that few school managers have adopted strategic market plans might be explained by a perception that orderly strategic planning is difficult within the ebb and flow of the normal school environment. Bell further argues that planned management should,

..shift from debate to a dialogue which focuses on finding out rather than knowing, on questions not answers, which proceeds through listening not criticizing, sharing rather than winning and losing and exploring new possibilities not defending established positions.

(Bell, 2002, p.421.)

This style of management lends itself more towards the adoption of a planned approach to marketing rather than a strategic model of marketing and would also be a

shared approach across and through the organization rather than being dictated from senior management.

2.3.4 Marketing in Private Schools

James and Phillips (1995) analysed the marketing conceptualisation of schools by applying their 7Ps marketing model, *product, place, price, promotion, people, processes*, and *proof*. Their findings illustrated some differences between the conceptualisation of marketing by private schools and state maintained schools. Whilst none of the schools had personnel with any formal marketing training, all the schools recognized the importance of marketing. However, the understanding of marketing and of market theory was ill developed. The schools tended to confuse the terms selling and marketing and none had any documented marketing policy. Private schools at that time however, had a clear view of their market whilst maintained schools tended to view the market in terms of their catchment area.

Generally speaking, the product offered by schools in the UK tends to be defined by the National Curriculum and from this point of view one cannot consider schools to be 'market led', but rather 'curriculum lead' (James and Phillips, 1995). The quality of the product is arguably measured in terms of examination results but this would be a simplistic view of the rather more diverse function of schools. Price is one aspect of the marketing mix, which illustrates a divergence of approach between maintained, and private schools. Price is made up of costing and pricing elements. Costing is the debit side of the equation as far as the organization is concerned, whilst pricing is the cost of the product to the consumer. Naturally all educational institutions, even state sponsored schools, need to be aware of how much their educational provision costs to provide. Private schools however, are extremely wary of their pricing strategies, especially when charging for boarding facilities and are conscious of parent's 'exit option' to withdraw children from the school (James and Phillips, 1995). Certainly it is plausible that whereas maintained schools are eager to break even, private schools are more likely to be motivated by profit concerns.

> So, in the short term schools may well benefit from publicizing their distinctive qualities, and thus establishing themselves in the forefront of parents' minds when they are considering schools for their children. In the longer term, however, if a school is

> genuinely concerned to meet the wishes of its 'customers', then it may need to make significant changes to the product it is offering.....this would seem to imply some continuous system of quality monitoring whereby customer satisfaction could be ascertained and the product redesigned to meet customer specification.
>
> (Smedley, 1995, p. 101.)

2.3.5   Market Research and Sensing the Environment

Foskett (1998) linked marketing with strategy planning by stressing the importance of intelligence gathering, and knowledge of the market in which a school operates. This market analysis provides useful information about the current state of the environment (confirmatory evidence) in which a school currently operates and also provides clues as to how the market might develop in the future (anticipatory evidence). The need for information gathering by educational institutions has been recommended by Hoy and Miskel (1989), Gray (1991) and, more recently, by Waring (1999) who has espoused the need to develop a culture of information collection. Sources of information vary from informal sources to more formal ones. Informal sources of information are important, and for many educational organizations, informal sources may have been the only way that information about the market or environment was collected. According to Waring (1999) this information may come through staff contact with parents or from local businesses, government agencies or other educational establishments, Bell (1999) states that scanning the market to identify parental preference is not a high priority. Whilst informal information gathering can be useful, we are warned that there are disadvantages to relying solely upon informal information gathering. Firstly, it is possible to gain a false impression of how thoroughly ones knowledge of the market extends. Anecdote and hearsay may not be sufficiently reliable to base policy changes upon. Secondly there may be inherent bias in the information gained from such informal sources, especially when information comes from voices that tend to dominate important issues possibly in attempts to gain advantage or favour. Finally, knowledge that is gained informally might not illuminate areas of knowledge not already available, leaving gaps in the overall view of the environment in which an educational institution operates. For a more complete picture of this environment, more formal methods of information gathering (Waring, 1999) and structured techniques (Gray, 1991) should be employed.

> The systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of market information can lead to the identification of previously unexpressed and unmet needs, as well as providing a basis for continuous improvement in the quality of provision made by a school or college.
>
> (Waring, 1999, p. 191.)

Formal market research may incur costs which informal research would avoid; however, the reliability of the information would increase confidence when using it for strategic decision-making, a key reason for market research. Weindling (1997) argues that strategic planning is necessary in rapidly changing settings and likens the use of reliable information for strategic decision-making to a guided missile seeking feedback from its environment in order to more accurately strike a moving target.

> The strategic planning process needs to be embedded within a culture of information, in which the institution is constantly searching for and reacting to developments in its external environment.
>
> (Waring, 1999, p.191.)

Both Gray (1991) and Waring (1999) argue that schools have routinely gathered data about students and stored the details on paper files or computer databases. Prudent use of this data can provide useful information for marketing purposes, although data users would need to be certain that they are not infringing data storage legislation. Data about school leaver's future career and education paths may also yield indicators of schools long-term effects. Schools might also search for information gathered by external bodies such as those sponsored by local or national government. These secondary sources would normally be reliable but the data might not be specific to the needs of the school. For more control over the specificity of the data to the needs of the organisation, it is more likely that schools would rely upon their own data collection; this is known as primary data collection.

2.3.6 Responsiveness

There has been the danger that head teachers, under pressure to market their institution, may adopt a transactional view of the marketing activities, indeed evidence suggests that this has been the case. However this view fails to recognise that rather important models of marketing are also available which fit comfortably within the

educational domain and which schools have been adopting for generations, although not from an overtly marketing perspective.

Developing and maintaining relations with a community also entails a degree of responsiveness to the needs or demands of that community. However, defining the meaning, extent and degree of responsiveness is complex. Whilst 'participation' and 'consultation' would appear to be necessary prerequisites for a school to be responsive to its stakeholders, Robinson and Timperley (1996) argue that participation and consultation do not go far enough to create the responsive school. *Participation* fails to imply the degree of involvement of all those involved in the educational process. Power, should be shared equally among all interested parties otherwise participation for some can be relegated to a largely passive role. For example, parents can *participate* in events such as open evenings but can find themselves spoken *at* rather than engaged *in* any useful debate about the education of their children. *Consultation* may offer the parent some greater degree of input but questions of efficiency and delay are difficult to resolve at times. For a more accurate definition of responsiveness Robinson and Timperley state:

> A school is responsive to the extent that it is open to learning about parental concerns, willing to debate the validity and educational implications of those concerns, and able to act on those agreed to be warranted and within its sphere of influence.
>
> (Robinson and Timperley, 1996, p. 67.)

According to this definition, a school is responsive if it goes beyond merely listening to the complaints or suggestion made by parents, but actively considers whether or not those complaints or suggestions have educational merit. Where merit is agreed then change will occur, provided the changes are possible to make. This approach also demands that teachers have the correct attitudes and skills needed to accept parent involvement to this degree and then to be able to respond appropriately. Lumby (1999) identifies a working definition to responsiveness as:

> those (schools and colleges) who have resolved the issue of to whom they wish to respond with some exactness and commitment, and have moved beyond involving others to empowering them.
>
> (Lumby, 1999, p.195)

In Lumby's definition schools and colleges will have carefully identified the segments of the community they are prepared to respond to and will have made a *commitment* to do so in a way which not only involves those segments of the community in bland discussion but empowers those segments with some sense of partnership or enhanced importance in the way the school or college operates. This definition raises the obvious danger of interference from those segments of the community wishing to protect or enhance their own agenda or power and so greater attention needs to be paid to how to choose appropriate segments to respond to and how to respond.

Schools have been shown to respond more to developments in other schools than to the direct needs of the parents or pupils (Bagley, Woods and Glatter, 1996, 1996b; Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe, 1995; Gorard, 1999a) but when there was evidence that schools were responding to parents, it was the voice of the already privileged classes who were given most attention (Woods, Bagley and Glatter, 1998a; Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe, 1995). Lumby (1999) indicates that groups within the community would need to be explicitly prioritized and those priorities justified educationally. Questions as to *how* a school responds are also problematical.

Alongside increased responsiveness comes the claim that the professionalism of educators is threatened by interference by untrained groups or individuals. Once again, Lumby (1999) provides insight as to how increased responsiveness might impinge upon the professionalism of educators. Indeed, far from threatening the status of educators, Lumby predicts that the skills to "engage with the wider learning of the community" are enhanced and conform to the needs of a "learning society". She concedes that responsiveness in practice is likely to be more art than science but believes that it has an important role to play once two issues are resolved. Firstly the concept of marketing must be seen as a holistic organizational endeavour and not merely as the promotion of a glossy image of the school. Only then can the importance of responsiveness to the marketing process be properly understood. Secondly, Lumby stresses the need to properly address the needs of the internal members of the school community, the students.

Schools may display few if any of the characteristics of responsiveness. An apparent lack of responsiveness from a school may be due to a number of reasons and can

simply indicate that a school has no real need to respond to its customers, especially if it is in the strong position of selecting pupils who attend the school. Sometimes schools exist in an environment where there is no motivation to be responsive, for example, where a school is protected from closure or has no need to attract students to obtain funds or resources. More likely perhaps is the situation where a school operates in a catchment area and is allocated students according to proximity or which receives its students from feeder primary schools. In this situation school responsiveness to attract students is also of limited value.

There are also a number of barriers to achieving responsiveness and these have been outlined by Bagley *et al* (1996b). These barriers might emanate from within the organization or from external sources and can impinge upon different organizations in different ways. Reputation and environment can hinder schools ambitions to become more responsive as large sections of communities ignore the messages put out by schools with poor reputations. Location in poor neighbourhoods, characteristic of clientele, gossip or rumour within the immediate community can have a negative effect on the school's image and thereby prevent responsiveness. Financial constraints can limit the ability of a school to respond to the needs or desires of its customers because of lack of funding for teaching staff, learning resources or building maintenance. Responsiveness can be barred simply by the attitude, skill or experience of the head teacher or senior management team or by a range of complex factors that exist within the school. School culture and the ability for an organization to change will influence the level of responsiveness that otherwise might be achieved. Responsiveness can also be shaped by a schools willingness to ignore innovations adopted by competing schools in the district. Paying too much attention to the actions of those schools can deflect attention away from those one should be responding to. Finally, barriers to responsiveness may manifest themselves in the form of government policy, which ultimately distorts the market in which the schools operate.

The concept of responsiveness is an important one for schools, but a model of marketing which would most effectively inform and implement school responses to market needs is required. Also, where the short-term, transaction based business models of marketing have tended to fall short of wide-spread acceptance within the education context, relationship marketing which supports the need for long-term

affiliations within the service industries, provides an alternative marketing approach for schools. The conceptual framework matrix which has been building up throughout the chapter uses a specific model of relationship marketing which has been briefly introduced earlier. This next section develops this further.

2.4 Relationship Marketing

Foskett (1998) wrote of the concept of *relationship marketing*, which springs from approaches developed for small businesses, as a very useful strategic marketing concept for schools. He stated this because of the recognition that the product or service should not be the only aspect which is core to an organization, but that the relationships with the customers are equally important. This concept differs from that of *responsiveness*, which is the measure of the manner in which a producer responds to the demands of its consumers (Bagley *et al*, 1996b). Responsiveness embodies a degree of consumer empowerment and raises the spectre of schools pandering to the whims of all individuals within the school community. This should not happen and as Woods (1992) explained, the possibility that consumers will enjoy absolute empowerment is "a myth".

The relationship marketing approach may form the basis of what Woods (2000) called, "the third way", a model which, on the one hand, accepts the nature of the market dynamism but which balances that on the other, with an ethical acceptance of the public interest. Foskett (1999) strongly relates the concepts of marketing and relationships between schools and entities that are external to them. These external relationships would include students, parents, and government representatives such as Local Education Authorities or Education Departments. Where some aspects of marketing might sit uncomfortably within the education arena, it is argued that external relationships are part and parcel of education and managing them effectively is vitally important to the effectiveness of the organization.

> Where an institution is market focused, however, all external relations management has a marketing component, since it is designed to support the notion that all of the organisation's activities are focused on customers and clients, that marketing is

an holistic philosophy for the school or college. Such a perspective means that the harsh equation of 'marketing = selling' can be replaced by a perspective which is much more in tune with educational philosophies.

(Foskett, 1999, p.37.)

2.4.1 The Origin of Relationship Marketing

The concept of relationship marketing was introduced in a service context to describe a longer term approach to marketing (Clark and Payne,1995, p.54.) and it is argued that the development of relationship marketing in many areas of commerce may be attributable to the influence that service industries were having on marketing philosophy during the 1980s and the changes in organizational structure and practices as a result of business research at the time (Egan, 2001, p.4). Payne et al, (1995, p18) wrote that in the 1990s relationship marketing had, "become a topic of central importance within many companies." The shift towards a relationship marketing philosophy was also seen as a change in the traditional view that marketing was adversarial in nature, where marketing rhetoric had previously concentrated upon "competition", "capturing customers" and "taking-over" markets (Grönroos, 1996, p.6). Juttner and Wehrli (1995, p.223) stated that relationship marketing emerged in response to blurring boundaries between markets, increasing fragmentation of markets, rapidly changing customer buying habits and more knowledgeable and sophisticated customers.

2.4.2 Defining Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is best described as a marketing philosophy and should not be confused with direct marketing, database marketing or loyalty programs. Although these marketing activities show some of the elements of relationship marketing, Egan (2001), warned that it is not acceptable to treat them as synonymous with relationship marketing. In fact, he indicated that a tidy definition of relationship marketing may be difficult. Payne (1995), linked quality, service and marketing together and stated that, "Relationship marketing can therefore be seen as a focal point for integrating customer service and quality with a marketing orientation." Payne, (1995, p.43.). By concentrating especially on overcoming psychological barriers of relationships, relationship marketing is in close dialogue with 'mass customisation', which focuses the individualization of exchange objects." Jütther, and Wehrli, (1995, p.240.)

	Transaction	**Relationship**
Objective	To make sale Satisfy customer needs	To create a customer Customer integration
Customer Understanding	Customer anonymous Independent buyer and seller	Customer well-known Interdependent buyer and seller
Marketers task	Focus on gaining new customers	Focus on retention and value enhancing for existing customers
Performance criteria	Assessed on products and prices	Assessed on problem solving competence
Core aspect of exchange	Focus on product Sale as 'conquest' Discrete event Communication to 'broad customer segments'	Focus on service Sale as agreement Continuing process Individual dialogue

Table 2-3 Differences between Transaction Marketing and Relationship Marketing

(Adapted from Jütther, and Wehrli, 1995, p.227.)

Table 2-3 summarises Jutther and Wehrli's position regarding the differences between transaction marketing and relationship marketing approaches. What does seem apparent is that relationship marketing implies co-operation between buyer and seller, where both parties benefit from the relationship (Tynan, 1997). Below is Egan's summary of the features of relationship management.

- Customer oriented
- Frequent customer contact
- Focus on customer value
- Long time scale
- Emphasis upon customer service
- Commitment to meeting customer expectations
- Quality is a concern of all staff

(Adapted from Egan, 2001, p.24.)

2.4.3 Relationship Marketing and Education

Bush (1999), Foskett (1999) and Middlewood (1999) all contributed chapters about relationship marketing in a book edited by Lumby and Foskett (1999) and so this approach is not new to education. Stokes (1997) wrote that at a time when private sector businesses and service providers were questioning the value of the transactional approach to marketing, educational marketers were being asked to adopt them. He argued that the relational marketing approach which aimed at developing supporters

and partners each striving to gain advantage from an existing relationship was more in tune with the language of teachers. The notion of a partnership is what makes relationship marketing a potentially useful approach to marketing education.

According to Egan (2001) relationship marketing is particularly appropriate where the commitment between two parties is over long periods, where there is a degree of risk involved and where emotions play a significant part. Most recently Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) have carried out an in-depth analysis of the school marketing literature and highlighted the importance of relationship marketing as an area for educational marketing research in future.

Trust, ethics	Dependability
Commitment	Awareness of history
Reliability	Two-way communications
Attachment	Warmth, intimacy
Understanding, empathy	Interest in needs
Mutual goals	Knowledge
Shared values	Responsiveness
Reciprocity	Keeping promises
Respect, sincerity	Social support, community
Caring, affection, liking	Competency

Table 2-4 Showing the Dimensions of Relationships

(From Barnes, 2000, p.119.)

Table 2-4 shows some of the dimensions of relationships identified in Barnes, (2000). It can be seen that many of the dimensions of relationships have been shown to be issues in school choice research. Relationship marketing is also important where a degree of trust is evident in the partnership, where closeness is of value and where customer satisfaction is of high importance. When a parent selects a school for a child it is likely that the involvement with the school will be for an extended period, although, in the international context, that period may range from just a few months to the entire school life of a child extended over more than a decade.

Choosing a school involves an element of risk associated with the choice of a school. A bad choice can leave a lasting negative impression upon a child, whilst a good

choice can improve life opportunities in future. When a parent sends a child off to school there is a large degree of trust in the school to ensure not only the quality of education on offer but also to guarantee the safety of the child as well as the social and moral well-being of the child. Closeness in any relationship can vary, but a close relationship between school and parent/child leads to a stronger and longer lasting relationship.

Wyatt (1999) and Whitby (2000) described the use of relationship marketing approaches in Higher Education, particularly when trying to convert student interest into selection and formal application. In a study into the use of relationship marketing strategies in a contracting primary school Stokes (1997) described the success of employing such an approach to increase parent participation in the school. The emphasis on the campaign was not to attract more customers through advertising but rather to involve existing parents more fully in the life of the school. The resulting improvement in relationships with the parents led to a greater number of referrals to other parents and a gradual increase in role to capacity. A parent from the school stated:

> I think half the battle is marketing the school to parents you have already got – to get them to believe in the school as being a good school, where their children are happy, where they are learning well, where if they want to get involved they can do and not pull the school down. The more involved you are the more content you are.

(Stokes, 1997.)

Table 2-5 summarises the school marketing literature and focuses upon issues relevant to the Hong Kong international secondary school market and these have been placed in a matrix, derived from the relationship management view. The study will investigate educational marketing approaches used by the schools and characterise these approaches as either, formal, strategic models, or informal, *ad hoc* models of marketing. Barnes's (2001) 4 Ps relationship management model used here differs from the James and Phillips (1995) 7Ps model because some components of the model have been integrated into the former. Here, "place" and "price" from the James and Phillips model, have been integrated into the "product" category of the 4Ps model.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Marketing activities of schools	Informal approaches to marketing, *ad hoc* market research, irregular promotion activities	Informal school visits	Crisis management approach to school quality and effectiveness,	Reputation, responsiveness, short term relationships,
	Formal strategic approaches market research, regular promotional activities, product-oriented culture	Regular open days, parent evenings,	Formal approach to school quality and effectiveness Inspection reports, publishing exam results,	Long term relationships, internal marketing philosophy, customer emotions, building trust, marketing-oriented culture

Table 2-5 Marketing Activities

This is possible because these factors are just two of the "macro" factors described earlier that are linked very closely to a range of other factors which make up the essence of the whole product. These factors which make up the "product" have been used to identify study schools to be used in the current study. They have combined in these schools to effectively identify that each school provides fundamentally similar products and so these variables have been "controlled out" through this careful selection of schools which are in close proximity to each other in Hong Kong. In much the same way that "place" and "price" have been included as part of the "product" of a school, "promotion" is not included as a separate entity because it is viewed as being included in the marketing process, like, for example, market research. Consequently, Barnes's (2001) 4 Ps model has been shown to be easily adapted to provide not only a suitable marketing model but also a useful analysis tool because of the *macro* and *micro* views of marketing it enables. The 4Ps relationship management approach is therefore an invaluable component of the conceptual framework adopted for this research.

The marketing activities of schools have been shown to be largely dictated by the nature of the market in which schools operate and the nature of the market is also influenced by and plays a part in determining the nature of those making choices. The next section of the literature review looks at the nature of the choice makers.

2.5 The Nature of Choice Makers

Reay and Ball (1998) revealed that differences existed in the dynamics of secondary school choice between middle-class and working-class families in the United Kingdom. Their study suggested that contrary to evidence gained from earlier research, working class families would usually support their child's preference of secondary school choice. It was argued however that this was largely due to the fact that any potential choice of secondary school was so narrowed down because of cost factors, location, or school manipulation of intake, that the choice activities of working-class families, "may actually be seen as pragmatic decision-making based on a realistic grasp of the constraints surrounding working class choice" (Reay and Ball, 1998, p .444). Herbert (2000) looked at the effect of the local environment on school choice. Although unlikely to be relevant to the Hong Kong international school situation because of its small size, locality, proximity and the physical environment can play a part in the choice patterns for schooling children in the UK. The study took place in the southern part of Wales in the United Kingdom, characterised by the diverse nature of the environment found in the area. The diversity was due to both economic and physical factors, with school districts representing a wide socio-economic range and also a range of physically different environments. The findings illustrated that socio-economic differences did affect parental choice and that the majority of "losing schools" with falling roles, were found in disadvantaged areas. These schools were also found to be losing the more able students who came from "more supportive homes". The "wining schools" in the study either had a history as a successful school or were exercising some form of selection process.

Thomas and Dennison (1991) looked at the influence of pupils on school choice in urban schools and found that children had significant influence over final choice. Parents were reluctant to contradict the choice of their children as they wished to avoid confrontation and felt that the children would be more secure in the school of their choice. However, no investigation was carried out to ascertain the subtle coercion which might have been used by parents to ensure that children ultimately picked the "correct" one. Although family school choice dynamics within middle-class families had previously been viewed as markedly democratic, with the view that the children themselves had a significant contribution to make in the choice process,

the truth of the matter might be quite different. Reay and Ball (1998) suggested that this so called democratic process may hide the true process by which secondary school choices were made by middle-class families.

> Middle-class families, for a variety of reasons, have the possibility of a choice of a range of schools, including predominantly working-class comprehensives (which are in many cases desperately trying to attract middle-class families). Increasingly, in this market locale at least, they are choosing to reject working-class schools as possibilities, filtering them out, often prior to any consultation with children, early on in the choice-making process.
>
> (Reay and Ball, 1998, p. 444.)

So, in an effort to maintain their position within the economic and social elite, middle-class families have tended to *coerce* their children into believing that they are part of the decision making process whereas in reality, the parents have already made the decisions beforehand. The authors concluded that ultimately it is the parents who were experts on "making something of oneself" and that within such a framework of school choice it was inevitable that the parents, and particularly the mother, who dominate such matters. For the middle class group, atmosphere and ethos, a well-disciplined environment, and special attention to able students were important. Typically this group would be considering choosing between the private sector and the state sector or, if confined to the state sector will be considering three or more schools. Whether state or private, quality of education and academic excellence were what mattered and the child's wishes were not rated very highly Smedley (1995, p.98).

Reay and Lucey (2000) researched the involvement of children in school choice in inner London and found that social class, as well as some individual personal characteristics, would influence secondary school choice decisions. Middle-class children have been seen to have access to adult discourse on secondary school choice. Children of this social status talked of, for example, "getting a good education". Often their perception was that their own choice of school would give them exactly this. Working-class children in the study tended to value 'localism' and tended to favour the choice of local secondary schools whilst middle-class children, "operating with a conception of horizon that is much broader than that of the working classes," (Reay and Lucey, 2000, p. 87) tended to accept the likelihood that travel would be a

necessary consequence of their school choice. It was argued that working-class children valued proximity to neighbourhood and friends and that an ideal school was one that family or friends already attended. Of school choice Reay and Lucey (2000) said that working-class children "demonised" schools which they did not want to attend or which were most likely out-of-reach. This is characteristic of the process of limiting desires to what might reasonably be expected to be obtained. In conclusion Reay and Lucey wrote, "In this specific urban locale, class differences appear to be exacerbated by the emerging quasi-markets in education" (Reay and Lucey, 2000, p. 98.)

Gorard (1998) suggested that a parent's own educational experiences could influence the choices they make for their children. In a study of Welsh parents making decisions about whether to select private or public schools for their children, it was found that some parents selected schools which conformed to their own traditional view of education, a view they had often gained from their own schooling in fee-paying schools. In fact, as Gorard pointed out, many schools play on the fact that they maintain small class sizes and value a "traditional" ethos whilst actually hiding the reality that the school cannot change to a more modern view of education because of falling rolls or lack of funds for example. In the same study there was evidence that the school experiences of an older sibling would also affect school choice, even if the experience had been gained several years prior to the current choice process. This "domino effect" of school choice is well known. Gorard concluded that:

> Choices being made today are critically influenced by events in the past, sometimes long in the past, and that opportunity, nostalgia, tradition, and convenience often combine to make school choice a far from 'rational' process.
>
> (Gorard, 1998, p.522.)

Smedley (1995) noted that ethnicity and gender were also important factors in parental selection of schools for their children. Smedley's research however, went on to state that academic standards and exam results were still often identified as being very important factors in selecting a school. Hunter (1991) showed that parents with girls, and Asian parents, would often consider single-sex schools for their daughters, but

were not so choosy with regard to schooling for their sons. In the same study, Afro-Caribbean parents were also seen to stress exam results.

The nature and characteristics of those involved in making choices has been shown to have a considerable impact upon school choice and as a result this forms another important section of the conceptual framework matrix. Table 2-6 incorporates these issues into the matrix, categorising them under suitable headings. For example, under the product heading, it has been shown that certain groups of choice makers would be likely to bias their selection upon their socio- economic status or upon their own educational experience or religious denomination. Selection of processes may depend upon the special educational requirements identified by the choosers.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Characteristics of choosers – Socio economic, culture, special requirements	Fee paying or state, religious denomination, gender	SEN support, EAL support, gifted and talented,	Selection by academic performance, security,	Income, culture, pupil gender, emotions, subjective opinion, educational experience of choice makers, parental, pupil, or joint choosers, lack of choice, access to information

Table 2-6 The Characteristics of Choice Makers

It has also been shown that socio-economic and cultural issues can affect attitudes towards academic achievement as a performance measure. Another aspect of the school marketing process is the importance of a range of factors which influence school selection. In this research, these have been classified as "micro" factors because they are considered to be subordinate to the "macro-choice factors" of product such as place, price, gender or religious preference. The next section explores these micro-choice factors in more detail and relates them to the further construction of the matrix. These choice factors are considered alongside sources of information which choosers find most useful. The literature indicates that information sources such as brochures have been a result of the "glossification" of school marketing and so these are considered with a range of other sources.

2.6 School Choice Factors and Sources of Information

Studies about parental choice of schools in the UK are numerous (West and Varlaam, 1991, Hammond and Dennison, 1995, West *et al*, 1995,Gorard, 1997, Reay and Ball, 1998, Woods et al, 1998, Herbert, 2000), and have been carried out in response to the educational reforms which have led to a quasi-market in the education system of that country (Vandenberghe, 1999). In one of the most influential, Woods, Bagley and Glatter (1998) carried out a large scale study in three areas in England in which they investigated the relationship between parental choice and school responses through marketing. The study employed postal questionnaires sent to parents of students attending eleven secondary schools in three areas. In three annual surveys totalling 6,000 respondents, parents were asked to indicate a range of factors which were influential in deciding which school was to be first choice for their child's education. They were also asked to rank the three most important factors in order of importance. West *et al* (1995) concentrated on the process of school choice, paying particular attention to when parents started the choice process. (Coldron and Boulton, 1991; Gorard, 1999; etc.) much of it spurred on by the education reforms a number of countries have adopted, which create a market environment in which schools operate. The general direction of interest in this area has traditionally concerned itself with identifying what influences families in their choices of schools for their children. Gorard (1999) indicated that there had been a change in emphasis in more recent research into school choice, and that greater efforts are being made to unravel the complex processes that parents go through as they make their school choices.

Recently the school choice debate has been looked at from another angle, where the question has not been why parents choose a school, but why parents *reject* a school (Bagley *et al*, 2001). They showed that UK parents tended to reject schools for the following main reasons. Firstly, distance/difficulty of access was cited as the most common reason for rejecting a school. For this reason, studies into why parents would choose one school over another would need to ensure that schools being studied were equally accessible. Parents were also seen to reject a school if they did not like the other pupils in the school. There was also evidence that the racial mix of the pupils in a school would influence whether or not a school was rejected. A poor school

environment was also shown to be a strong reason to reject a school and an unhelpful attitude displayed by members of staff was also a significant factor. Other factors cited as reasons for rejecting a school were poor perceptions of the Head teacher, poor reputation of a school and the notion that bullying was at the school. The concept of market segmentation and the implications of parental choice in the selection of secondary schools have been studied by Smedley, (1995). In his review of literature on parental choice, Smedley suggested reasons why a parent might reject schools. A bad reputation, poor discipline, badly behaved pupils and bad academic results were found to be the main reasons for parental avoidance. Schools with highly visible and badly behaved students were particularly at risk. Ellison and Davies (1993), listed the characteristics of bad schools which were bullying, violence, racism, low academic standards and a poorly motivated teaching staff. So, whilst the reasons for rejecting schools have been put forward as being clear, Smedley (1995) has stated that parents were less consistent with their reasons for making positive choices about schools.

Gorard (1999a) identified 5 general criteria, which affected school choice.

- Academic criteria – easily quantifiable and comparable because of certification, is the belief that children will fare better academically in some schools than in others.
- Situational criteria – convenience of travel, although this criterion is less well defined among more affluent parents (Hammond and Dennison, 1995).
- Organisational criteria – the ethos of a school, probably based upon a school's tradition or reputation.
- Selective criteria – this could be based upon gender, religion, attainment etc.
- Security criteria – the general well being of the child.

These criteria provide a useful overview by which to categorise the school choice processes, however, this list of criteria can mask the true complexity of the school choice process and further exploration of the issues is necessary. For example, the importance of academic criteria to school selection is debatable and the publication of school exam results might indicate that it is the academic performance of schools which featured most heavily in the school choice processes among parents. Certainly this is true of one group of UK parents, who have been identified by Farley (1993) as,

"active choosers," and who view the academic performance of a school as of over-riding concern. They tend to be part of the professional "middle-classes". However, National League tables of school exam results have not always been reliable measures of school selection. Webster et al., (1993) found only 18 percent of parents believed exam results and truancy figures were important in selecting a school, whilst 22 percent, "thought them misleading and were actively suspicious of them." Other research has supported the assertion that parents in the UK have not placed academic standards as the most prominent criterion in secondary school choice. Petch (1986) wrote, "The majority of parents...[are] less concerned with measurable criteria of product than with the creation of an atmosphere supportive of the child's well being..." Smedley, 1995, reported that choice factors appearing at the top of parents lists were child's preference; siblings, friends or relatives attending the school; good discipline; and caring teachers who had good relationships with the students. Smedley (1995) makes the general point that his work illustrates that, "parental choice is constrained by the number and variety of choices available locally." If all schools in the area provide a basically sound education for students then the choices become more idiosyncratic, and will depend on factors such as the quality of sports facilities or the existence of computer facilities. "As a rule," he states, "offering parents real choice results in greatly increased choice activity" (Smedley, 1995, p.98).

Dennison (1989) proposed *25 factors* which could provide "the competitive edge" to make a school more attractive than its neighbours. They included quality of buildings, location, history of school, evidence of a 'caring' nature, the particular catchment area of the school, the examination results, the quality of teaching, the number and nature of extra-curricular activities, and HMI reports. The reputation of a school has been shown to be an important factor when choosing a secondary school. Glover (1992) looked at the reputation of a group of schools and how these affected current judgment and perceptions of the school. They found that past reputation can mask the current limitations of a school. "Reputation, as the basis of judgment and choice, appears to lag behind the actual developments within schools by many years" (Glover,1992, p.229) Conversely, a school which had undergone a range of improvements and which by all measures would be considered "a good school" might suffer from the stigma of a "Secondary Modern" label.

West *et al* (1995) looked at school choice in two inner London boroughs using interviews. They found that a substantial number of parents started their school choice deliberation during the last year of their child's primary schooling and recommended that secondary schools made information available and held open days during this time. The study found that the range of subjects offered, facilities, atmosphere, ethos, and academic record were frequently referred to as reasons for choosing a secondary school for their child. Single-sex schooling was mainly considered by the parents of girls. About half the parents found information about exam results to be useful, a large number found the information to be confusing. Pupils themselves were indicated as having some influence over the ultimate choice of secondary school and West *et al* (1995) suggested that schools might respond by providing extra-curricular activities for primary students.

Research carried out on school choice by parents of primary aged students (Coldron and Boulton, 1991), showed that it is the happiness and security of the children which were most important factors in choosing a secondary school. Attending a school in the neighbourhood was also an important factor in secondary school choice. Choices by a child's friend, the attendance of siblings at a school, and the presence of caring teachers in the school, were also important factors that influenced the parents of primary aged children. The study also showed that parents wished to avoid confrontation with their child by agreeing to send their child to the secondary school of their choice. West and Varlaam, (1991) looked at how parents of Primary 4 students in inner London LEAs would choose their child's secondary school. They found that a variety of reasons were important when choosing a particular secondary school. Child wishes ranked first and "good discipline" was deemed an important issue. School proximity, considered very important when researching into parental choice *after* choices had been made, was not considered of importance in this study. A large proportion of parents of girls wanted a single-sex school. The research into secondary school choice at the primary school stage prompted Smedley (1995) to suggest that secondary schools start to raise parent's awareness of their school image during the last four terms of the primary school. It is during this time that many parents make decisions about secondary school choice. The use of open days has been demonstrated to be particularly effective in influencing choice. Contact with parents during such events allow for increased discussion and enable parents to ask questions.

Of great importance during such events is the image portrayed by the frontline staff, particularly the Head teacher, whose image was deemed to be of great importance as parents go about making their choice (Smedley, 1995). Forging links with primary schools through staff visits or by inviting primary students and their parents along to view a secondary school were also recommended as possible attractions for choosing a secondary school.

School choice is a complex network of different factors which can explain why schools who have a less than impressive academic performance might recruit more students than it might be reasonable to expect. (Coldron, J. and Boulton, P 1991) The complexity of the school choice process was voiced by Coldron and Boulton who stated:

> The process of choice is just that – a process. Regardless of the amount of time and thought given to the issue, parents' choice of secondary is addressed over time until a deadline is reached, when a decision has to be taken.
>
> The cold summary that researchers ask for should be seen as having as much relationship to living process as snapshots have to the experience of a holiday.
>
> (Coldron, J. and Boulton, P, 1991, p.170.)

2.6.1 Information Sources

As a result of increased marketisation of schools it has been shown that information sources have played a more significant part in the school choice process, with glossy school brochures and prospectuses being a notable addition. Although for a number of parents the secondary school prospectus may be a significant source of information about a school, it is likely that a significant minority of parents do not read school prospectuses (West et al, 1995). Schools in England and Wales are required by law to publish prospectuses and, since 1990, they have to contain certain identified information (Knight, 1992). Despite this there appeared to be a large diversity of content in the prospectuses. One commonality between prospectuses was that they depicted schools which were, "happy, caring communities in which high academic standards are achieved, homework is plentifully set ....." (Knight, 1992, p.58). It was

suggested that these schools might be more concerned with image management than actually offering what is professed.

> As evidence about schools, prospectuses are, of course, subjective. They are public documents which must project a positive, even uncritical image of the school: future funding, jobs and resources depend on it.
>
> (Knight, 1992, p.64.)

The subjective nature of prospectuses has drawn criticism of their use in research projects but Knight, 1992, senses that prospectuses provide insight into how schools wish to be seen. They allow a view of a school's educational ideology, a picture of what the school sees it becoming.

The democratisation of school choice does raise the stakes regarding the importance of parents to be able to access information about schools and certainly a lack of information may be a disadvantage in this process. However, Lamdin and Mintrom (1997) made the argument that informed consumers who are engaged in making choices within a market will protect those uninformed consumers by providing clues about which choices are most popular. Ball and Vincent (1998) explored and defined the "grapevine" of information available to parents and explained how commitment to the grapevine made them feel more confident in their own choices when supported by those of other parents.

The use of online sources of information such as school web sites and email communications have become more commonly used marketing tools. Recent research has shown that sophisticated web sites and a structured email response system were most highly valued by customers enquiring of international schools (Gomes and Murphy, 2003). It was suggested that online resources such as these can also be useful in creating customer communities, such as an online alumni community, that present user feedback to help establish online trust.

Schools can devote large budgets to the production of information sources such as brochures or, more recently, web sites, but the literature suggests that these are not the only potential sources of information about schools. The literature also points to word

of mouth recommendations and identifies the "grapevine" as an important source of information about schools. Therefore, obtaining a clearer understanding of which sources of information are valued most strongly by parents in Hong Kong during their selection process will be part of this investigation.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Factors influencing school choice	Macro choice factors such as state or private, gender or religious selectivity, location	Teachers and philosophy to teaching and learning	Academic performance of pupils, value added	Idiosyncratic, perceived reputation, perceived quality of teaching and learning, security and happiness
Sources of Information	Brochures, LEA publications, surveys to inform	School visits, web sites, newsletters	Exam results, brochures, web sites, newsletters	Word of mouth recommendations, grapevine, domino effect

Table 2-7 School Choice Factors and Information Sources

The summary table 2-7 illustrates the categories which choice factors fall into according to the relationship management model of marketing. The model makes the assumption that "product" factors can be the initial basis upon which a school is selected or rejected. For example, parents may wish for their child to attend a local private school rather than the local state school, or location may determine the choice of school if it is convenient for travel.

As stated earlier, for the purposes of this study, it is useful for these "product" factors to be considered "macro" choice factors, whilst factors falling into the subsequent categories of "process", "performance" and "people" are subordinate to the product characteristics and shall be known as "micro" factors. It should be recognised however that their relative importance may still be very high, for instance, performance factors, such as academic success have been shown to be important by some groups, whilst people factors such as happiness and security are more important among other groups. In this study it will be necessary to establish which micro-choice factors contribute most significantly to the school choice process of those active in Hong Kong's international secondary school market.

2.7 Conclusion

This section reveals the convolution of the school choice process through the large number of factors which may be attributable to school choice and the variables which impact upon those choice factors, such as the social class, gender, culture, ethnicity and personal experience of the choosers. And yet this complexity reflects the truly "human" nature of the school choice process and should come as no surprise. Broadly speaking though, location, academic performance, security, subjects, and overall quality appear to be determining factors in school choice, although religious and gender selection can take precedence over these. It is also clear that schools and communities can use the selection process to their advantage by manipulating criteria and in the way that information is made available.

At the time of writing this thesis, there was limited educational marketing literature which could be directly attributed to research in Hong Kong and for this reason much of the literature review refers to abundant sources relating to school choice and educational marketing which has been produced internationally, particularly from the United Kingdom. This review of the literature does indicate that there are a number of unresolved debates in our knowledge of marketing and school choice issues and it is argued here that these gaps are likely to be the result of the absence of a general single model of educational marketing that is widely accepted by practitioners. The literature also reveals gaps in our knowledge specifically related to the international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong. This research aims to fill some of these knowledge gaps in several ways. Firstly, the research adapts a marketing approach which could form the basis of such a widely accepted educational marketing model and uses it within a framework which can form the basis of a valuable analysis tool not only for the specific context of the Hong Kong international secondary schools market but also for use by educationalists in a variety of other contexts. This matrix is to be employed to investigate the nature of the Hong Kong international school market and its participants, and establish the degree of competition between the international schools. Then the conceptual framework provided by the matrix is used as the basis to drive the gathering of and analysis of data on how these international schools employ marketing activities in order to maintain a successful position within the market. The matrix further provides a starting point to investigate the choice patterns among the

participants in the Hong Kong international schools market and assists in establishing the information sources considered to be most useful. As a result, effective marketing activities or marketing approaches can be identified. It might then be possible to establish how such approaches could be transferred to other educational markets.

Through the review of the literature it has been established that, as one of many moves to improve quality among schools, there has been a discernible move, in many countries, away from central management of education to a more localized approach. The provision however, rarely devolves completely from some form of central legislation and so a "controlled free market" emerges in many instances. This quasi-market model characterises the one found among the secondary international schools in Hong Kong. Although a closer look at the efficacies open markets in education is beyond the scope of this thesis, it was important to consider the issues which impinge upon school operating within such an environment. Proponents for the integration of choice within an educational market argue that it should lead to a gradual improvement in educational provision as bad schools fail and good schools prosper. Unfortunately the realities of such environments can be quite different with powerful communities disenfranchising less powerful groups and some schools being forced to move along paths which sit uncomfortably with educational goals. However, Woods (2000) argues that a public-market can exist in which ethical approaches to educational provision outweigh the pure needs of the quasi-market. This model embraces the humanity of the educational market and the education providers operating within it.

The ways in which schools respond to these market environments through marketing also provides a wide variety of responses. Whilst there has indeed been a measurable increase in marketing in schools operating within more competitive environments, it has also been shown that traditional marketing models transferred from industry have not been widely accepted within the educational sector. Interpretations of the marketing process have been broad and their implementation ad hoc, usually as short term responses to short term issues. One suggestion is that schools adopt a strategic view of marketing and bring marketing into their formal planning and in order to market most effectively. This model would predicate the use of specialist personnel and budgeting. However, a note of warning is presented which states that a strategic

approach to management in schools should be viewed with some caution and that a more egalitarian approach would be beneficial. Certainly this might explain why the literature from the UK at least, reveals that marketing activities show little evidence of strategic planning.

Some authors report that the most acceptable models of educational marketing have been provided by the service industries. For those adhering to this view, the literature presents the educational sector with an alternative model of marketing which, it is suggested, would be better suited to schools as a strategic *approach,* rather than as a strategically *planned* marketing view. It is a model of marketing which best fits the criteria for responding to a complex and multi-faceted choice process and accepts the open market whilst also accepting the ethical dimension which a human market requires. This marketing model may provide us with what Woods (2000) terms as "the third way". This marketing model is located in the management of relationships as a marketing approach, a model which espouses the need for a close and trusting dialogue between provider and consumer. This *relationship management* model is based upon the premise that relationships between customers and service providers are long term and not merely transaction based. This long term view and the need for the management of relationships in order to maintain a trusting, communicative bond among stake holders, provides education with a potentially powerful tool upon which to build on existing practice, by refining relationship management into a marketing strategy for schools. In this research, marketing models by James and Phillips (1995) and Barnes (2001) have been merged to create such a marketing approach.

The literature also showed that the school choice processes are highly complex, with a vast range of variables affecting choice patterns. These variables include socio economic and cultural and ethnic factors, as well as the educational experiences of the choosers. Although factors for rejecting schools seem to be consistent, factors for choosing schools are less predictable, although some studies indicate that locality and gender and religious selection are often important. Other important factors include academic performance, and the security and well-being of the pupils. The review also shows us that access to information can affect school choice processes and reports on the grapevine phenomena which rely upon word-of-mouth recommendations. Finally, previous research has indicated that school choice can be influenced depending on

who is involved in the choice process. The pupils themselves, for example, can be influential within some chooser groups.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Nature of the Market **State** **Private** **Quasi** **Public**	State school or private school, open enrollment or catchment, gender or religious selectivity	National Curriculum, Strategies, school determined curriculum, teaching and learning philosophy	School effectiveness Academic selectivity, quality or polarization? sinking schools,	Democratisation, level of empowerment, level of competition, level of choice, level of minority support, altruism
Marketing activities of schools	Informal approaches to marketing, *ad hoc* market research, irregular promotion activities	Informal school visits	Crisis management approach to school quality and effectiveness,	Reputation change, responsiveness, emphasis upon short term relationships with stake holders, both external and internal.
	Formal strategic approaches market research, regular promotional activities, product-oriented culture	Regular open days, parent evenings,	Formal approach to school quality and effectiveness Inspection reports, publishing exam results,	Emphasis on long term relationships, internal marketing philosophy, customer emotions, building trust, building reputation, marketing-oriented culture
Nature of choosers – Socio economic, culture, special requirements	Fee paying or state, religious denomination, gender	SEN support, EAL support, gifted and talented,	Selection by academic performance, security,	Income, culture, pupil gender, emotions, subjective opinion, educational experience of choice makers, parental, pupil, or joint choosers, lack of choice, access to information
Factors influencing school choice	Macro choice factors such as state or private, gender or religious selectivity, location	Teachers and philosophy to teaching and learning	Academic performance of pupils, value added	Idiosyncratic, perceived reputation, perceived quality of teaching and learning, security and happiness
Sources of Information	Brochures, LEA publications, surveys to inform	School visits, web sites, newsletters	Exam results, brochures, web sites, newsletters	Word of mouth recommendations, grapevine, domino effect

Table 2-8 Conceptual Framework Matrix Derived from the Literature and the Relationship Management Model

The main themes which have emerged from the literature, in addition to the relationship management approach already outlined, provides the conceptual framework upon which this investigation is based and a summary of the framework is presented in Table 2-8 as a matrix which has been used as the foundation for the research described in this thesis.

It is important firstly to state that the production of this model is not in any way a criticism, nor does it seek to undermine, previous educational marketing work. Indeed it encompasses and supports many of the recommendations and conclusions reached by other authors. However, in providing this matrix it is suggested that a valid overview of educational marketing can be achieved and that it re-emphasises school marketing as a fundamentally human process. The matrix allows for the five main marketing issues of nature of the market, marketing activities, the nature of the choosers, choice factors and information sources to be juxtaposed against a holistic view of the school, made up of the product, process, performance and people. Each cell then provides a discrete area for investigation to ensure complete coverage of all the issues and this is described in the following summary.

A deep understanding of the nature of the market is very important to the operation of a school. The nature of the market provides the context within which a school operates and this context shapes the types of school (the *product*) which are required and also the degree of competition which exists for them. In a competitive situation, if the educational product does not relate to the requirements of the market then the school will fail completely or where competition is less evident and where alternative products were not available, the school would fail to effectively meet the needs of that particular market.

This situation is equally true when looking at the activities which support the product, categorised here as the *processes* within the school. These processes include curriculum, teaching approaches, emphasis upon learning, the management of structures and personnel. Where these do not mesh with the needs or requirements of the market then a school will experience tension and possible failure. The nature of the market also influences attitudes to *performance* measures by indicating which performances are most crucial to the particular sections of a community but it should

also focus the school to look at *all* aspects of performance as an aid to whole school improvement so that no section of a community is disenfranchised. The *people* dimension of the nature of the market indicates the degree to which choice is available to choosers and the levels of support for individuals, especially those with special educational requirements. Market perceptions and market empowerment are people aspects and information from this section is vitally important when investigating school marketing issues and the responses schools make.

In the matrix, school marketing activities are analysed and investigated in the same way, but this marketing section has been sub-divided into what have traditionally been ad hoc, informal activities and into those activities associated with a strategic, planned approach. *Product* marketing would involve marketing activities such as promotion or market research and these activities may be undertaken as a short-term response to short-term problems or they might form the basis of a regular, planned marketing strategy. It is possible that both approaches exist within a school, but it is necessary to know. Marketing of product is not the only activity which might go on in schools.

Process marketing is defined here as the use of marketing which focuses upon those activities which support and help to define the essence of the school product. These processes include curricula, teaching and learning philosophies and management approaches. These aspects of a school appear to be most often available for scrutiny during informal school visits or during fomalised school open days or parent evenings. However, it is not certain how such opportunities are viewed as prospects for marketing. Whilst it might be argued that process issues do not get the marketing attention they deserve, performance issues, in parts of the UK at least, do. The publishing of academic performance of schools or inspection reports is common place and is a statutory requirement for state schools in parts of the UK for example. Among private institutions, good performance, particularly good academic performance, can often be the focus of marketing activity both informally and formally. This kind of data is often included in publicity material or on online sources of information such as web sites. One final aspect of marketing which it is argued has been neglected is the marketing of relationships. It is perhaps odd that these *people* issues have been ignored as marketing activities, because the building of relationships with pupils and parents and community members has been an important aspect of schooling and for

many educators might be seen as central to their role. The emphasis of relationship management focuses upon the rapport and association developed between school and stake holder. The creation and maintenance of long term relationships through trust and understanding is the main goal of this marketing philosophy and the matrix enables the researcher or school manager to look at how a school manages this very important aspect in the life of a school.

The nature of the choice maker forms the next row of the matrix. Categorised in the framework under the 4 Ps headings it is possible to look closely at how the characteristics of those involved in the school choice process lead to particular decisions about schools. Socio-economic and cultural characteristics have been shown to be particularly strong influences upon school choice and a deep understanding of these and other experiential characteristics such as school background are important to this research. It is the contention of this thesis that certain of these chooser characteristics are influential at the macro level of school choice, for example when choosing between fee-paying or state provision or when considering gender or religious selectivity. Other factors, considered here to be micro choice factors, are considered in the penultimate row of the matrix and are regarded as those factors which choice makers regard as important when making choices between two or more fundamentally similar products. The last row of the matrix looks at the sources of information which are determined to be most important during the school choice process. By considering each of these issues against the headings in the matrix it is more likely to get a more thorough picture of the school marketing process.

This matrix therefore provides a framework for the consequent research methodology and analysis of data obtained from the investigation into international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong. The research methodology has been designed to identify the nature of the market in which the choosers are active, to identify marketing activities adopted by schools and to gather information about the nature of those choosers. The research will also gather information regarding the factors which influence choice and the information sources identified as important in the choice process. The next chapter looks at these issues more closely. Fortunately the literature describes a large scale study carried out in England which looked into the school choice process and the ways in which schools respond to those processes and it also

reveals a number of tools which may be adapted for use in the Hong Kong international school context and these are explored more fully in the methodology chapter.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction to Methodology

In this chapter, a methodology for the investigation into marketing Hong Kong international secondary schools is discussed. This thesis has set out to identify whether marketing activities adopted by international secondary schools have played a part in determining the success of their operation. The literature review has aided in generating a conceptual framework for the research and has helped to identify the research questions that the research methodology must address. Table 3-1 shows the research questions.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
	Nature and type of school and curriculum, public examinations	*Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Spending on resources, buildings*	*Criteria by which product can be assessed, e.g. Inspections, public examinations*	*Customer, clients, pupils, parents, employees, LEA stake holders*
What is the nature of the Hong Kong international secondary school market?				
What are the marketing activities of schools?				
What is the nature of choosers? **Socio economic, culture, special requirements**				
What factors influence school choice?				
What sources of information are most valuable?				

Table 3-1 Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

The development of these research questions are explored in greater depth later in this section but these specific questions have been shown to relate to the overall aim of the study because of the need to establish nature of the environment in which schools operate and the nature of the marketing activities which schools employed as a

response to the market. The literature has shown us that cultural, socio-economic characteristics of parents active in the school choice making process does influence the nature of the choices that are made, therefore data about the choice-makers was gathered. Lastly, it had been noted in the previous chapter that there are a range of factors which persuade parents to make certain choices about schools and that they value certain information sources to support the school choice process. These issues were also investigated. Data was generated in response to each research question and then this was analysed using the framework matrix shown in Table 3-1. The use of the matrix to support the analysis provided a valuable tool with which to focus upon each of the research questions and to apply the conceptual framework which underpinned the relationship marketing approach.

The research tools used in the study were adapted to fit the context and specific nature of this investigation from similar tools used in studies carried out in the United Kingdom. These research tools included a questionnaire survey, interviews and documentary analysis to collect data. The questionnaire survey collected data regarding the nature of the market, important school choice factors and important sources of information used in the school choice process. Interviews were used in two ways. Firstly, a series of telephone interviews with a sample of parents was carried out to a) triangulate their responses on the questionnaire and, b) to enable this group of parents to provide deeper insight into the school choice process by expanding upon the questionnaire responses. The second sets of interviews were used to collect data from the Head teachers regarding their approaches to marketing each of the schools. Documentary analysis was employed to identify whether or not marketing tools such as brochures or web sites were made available by the schools.

In studying the Hong Kong context, careful selection of international secondary schools controlled out what might be described as confounding variables. These confounding variables included the location of the schools and other major selective criteria such as gender, or religion. By factoring these general choice criteria out, it was possible to focus upon more subtle factors involved in school choice, and to identify the specific responses which schools made through marketing and to establish where these responses were successful.

As stated in Table 3-1, several research questions emerged from the overall research aim and these questions are analysed here:

1. What is the nature of the Hong Kong international secondary school market?

The literature review revealed the existence of a continuum of different educational provision, with state provision at one extreme and private provision at the other. In reality, most educational markets would lie somewhere between these two extremes, with education provided by both state and private means and these markets would also offer differing degrees of opportunity for parents or students to choose schools. The first part of this research is to establish how to distinguish the international secondary school market in Hong Kong. The international secondary school market in Hong Kong has been changed recently by a number of factors; amongst these the most important may be the hand-over of Hong Kong from British to Chinese administration. There has been evidence that the number of expatriates living in Hong Kong has decreased during the period prior to the change in sovereignty and during the period immediately after. More recently, mother tongue teaching and proposed educational reforms have affected, or look set to affect, the international school market in Hong Kong. The survey questionnaire contains questions related to choice of secondary school and explores whether or not parents considered sending their children overseas, if they needed to consider special educational needs when choosing a school. The literature identifies that although choice among schools seems to be theoretically available, in actual fact, choice options could be limited. The research should establish if the surveyed parents considered that they were actually able to exercise a degree of choice between schools and if valid options really exist in the Hong Kong context.

2. What are the marketing activities of schools?

Schools do respond to their customers and the environment in which they operate. This has been shown from the literature review. These responses are either planned or not and either based upon ad-hoc and informal information gathering or on formal strategies designed to gain accurate feedback about the market. Interviews with key figures in international schools and an analysis of promotional material would be useful approaches to researching how schools have responded to the environment in which they operate. Interviews with parents would confirm whether school responses have been successful or not. The literature reveals a number of different approaches to

marketing and a wide diversity in how marketing might be defined, varying from formal models adapted from product oriented businesses to ad hoc promotional activities or even to more subtle but all-pervasive approaches to managing relationships with customers. Have Hong Kong international secondary schools adopted marketing strategies into their management responsibilities or are promotional activities the normal response to changing markets? Interviews with head teachers gain information about the use of marketing strategies within each of the study schools.

The hypothesis is, that schools employing formal marketing strategies are more likely to be successful in terms of recruiting enough students to fill classes with students for whom the school is most likely to benefit. A successful international school is measured not only by the number of students on the school roster. International schools in Hong Kong need to attract students most able to benefit from an education delivered in English and so success criteria would include the number of native or nearly native English speakers applying for the school. Questionnaire responses and interviews with parents can obtain qualitative information about how successful each of the schools might have been.

3. What is the nature of the choosers?

The literature indicates that culture, and socio – economic factors can influence school choice. The educational experience of the choosers can also influence the choices they make for their own children. The research will obtain data about these issues. A complication may emerge in looking at some of these variables however. The wide variety of ethnic groups may not always be reflected in passport information and so careful questioning will be necessary to create a true picture of the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the choosers in this market. Data regarding the socio-economic status of the choosers is also complicated by the likelihood that a large proportion of the choice makers will receive an allowance in their salary package which will pay part or all of the tuition fees charged by the schools.

4. What factors influence school choice?

The literature describes a number of factors which influence choice decisions in the selection of schools for students. However, little data has been collected from the Hong Kong context and a better understanding of the patterns of international

secondary school choice among parents in Hong Kong would assist in understanding how schools have responded to the market and perhaps, why they have responded in the ways they have.

5. What sources of information are most valuable?

Parents and choice makers utilise a variety of information sources when engaging in the school choice process. Brochures and, more recently, web-based sources have been viewed, by schools, at least, to be important sources of information about schools and sometimes substantial budgets are devoted to the production of these sources. There is evidence in the literature that these sources may be superseded by word of mouth recommendations and the existence of the "grapevine". This research will obtain data about which sources of information were considered most valuable by the choice makers in the Hong Kong international secondary school market.

A number of research tools have been employed in this study, including survey, interviews, and documentary analysis. Use of a survey questionnaire to collect data about choice factors has been used by Woods, Bagley, and Glatter, (1998a) and a similar, though adapted survey is utilised here. A survey enables a researcher to gather a large amount of data from many respondents and is indicated as a research approach and the use of interviews to support the survey findings would be appropriate. In this instance a survey of 179 sets of parents from three schools was conducted in order to gain insight into their school choice habits and to see if there was any marked difference between the choice factors of parents from each of the three study schools. The survey questionnaires were colour coded to identify the school respondents and completed questionnaires were anonymous unless the respondent was prepared to be interviewed later as part of the research. Structured interviews were carried out with the head teachers from each of the school in an attempt to identify marketing approaches from each school. Interviews were also used with questionnaire respondents as a way of obtaining more detailed information about their school choice patterns, and to test the validity of the survey tool. Documentary analysis was used to look at the school brochures and web-sites which each of the schools used to support promotional strategies.

The next section of the methodology chapter investigates the selection of the study schools and then evaluates the use of questionnaires and interviews as valid research

tools within this study. Interviews have been employed in the research to provide both triangulated data and greater depth of information from questionnaire respondents, and to gain focused information from international school Head teachers. The next section includes a discussion regarding the use of survey instruments. A survey questionnaire has been used in the research to gather a range of school choice information from a large population of parents. Finally, documentary analysis is considered as a tool to analyse school web sites and prospectuses.

3.2 Selecting the Study Schools

Whilst it would be feasible to survey all the relevant international schools in the Hong Kong population using only questionnaire, such an investigation in itself, though perhaps valuable, would be insufficient to gain qualitative data of any real depth. Obtaining the qualitative data would not be feasible however across the full number of possible cases, and would, in any case be misleading, because of the variety of different international schools, many of which target specific, populations of non-English speaking students (Japanese, French, German, Chinese etc). Therefore, a small sample of similar schools has been selected to be a more realistic group for this study. This had also addressed issues of access. The use of one single case could provide a great deal of depth of information but would most likely lack any significant confidence in generalization across other similar schools in Hong Kong or in other countries. For this reason, a multi-site case study has been identified as most useful to provide results which were both valid and which might form the basis of generalization. Yin (1993) stated that a replication model of case selection should render data which possess external validity. However, as the case selection relies on the fact that the cases would be essentially similar, there would necessarily be a trade-off against the degree to which findings could be generalized to other less similar schools. Validity for the case study may be achieved through 'between method' triangulation and therefore 'between case' triangulation might afford some compromise. Schofield's (1993) approach to case selection aimed to increase the opportunity for generalization by deliberately selecting cases which were dissimilar. The following discussion considers the population of international secondary schools in Hong Kong and establishes which schools have been used for the research.

When selecting appropriate cases for a study of market responsiveness of international secondary schools, several criteria for case selection were necessary. Firstly the nature of international schools must be considered. The working group for a Hong Kong Government report defined an international school thus,

> "*International Schools*" are schools which follow a non-local curriculum and whose students do not sit for the local examinations (e.g. Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination). They are operated with curricula designed for the needs of a particular cultural, racial or linguistic group or for students wishing to pursue their studies overseas.
> (HK Education Department, 1995, p. 5.)

International schools in Hong Kong have been placed into three separate groups, (see page 9). The first group contains the schools which belong to a Foundation, each offering an English language education based upon the National Curriculum of England and Wales. The second group are associated with a national group but which offer an English stream, and receive Government assistance in the form of land grant and/or financial subsidies under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) and, finally a group of 15 private independent schools offering a non-local curriculum which do not receive any Government assistance, except reimbursement of rates for those non-profit-making ones. Many of them are profit-making, and some are national in character. The schools selected for this study conformed to the following criteria:

- Secondary
- Mixed gender intake
- International intake
- Based upon England and Welsh National Curriculum
- Located on Hong Kong Island
- Mandarin as an additional language
- Modern campus offering sporting, science and technical facilities
- A program of extra-curricular activities

The 5 Group A schools are similar because they are members of a large foundation of schools. They are of similar capacity (over 1000 students), two located on the

mainland peninsula of Kowloon and three located on Hong Kong Island. They all share similar admission policies, each adhere to similar curricula and students pay fees which are set by the foundation and are the same for each school. These Group A schools also select students from geographical zones surrounding each school and the majority are fed by primary schools belonging to the foundation and which are located near the secondary school.

Group B schools share similarities, in that they are mostly selective in terms of English ability, have fee paying students, a capacity of over 500 students and are often described as "elitist" with substantial, and usually, modern campuses. Schools in Group C are physically smaller with fewer than 400 students, housed in either small or modest campuses. These similarities within each of the groups provide evidence that selecting one school from each group would offer a representative sample for a small scale multi-site case study approach to an investigation into marketing in international schools. Further justification of selecting one case from each group can also be offered.

The schools in Group A have responded to market fluctuations in recent years by expanding English as an Additional Language (EAL) for students without English as their mother tongue. They have also set up an Educational Services section, which offers educational programs during vacation periods. This has been accompanied by widespread advertising in the press and through their schools. Both of these initiatives bear the hallmarks of a strategic marketing policy and would be worthy of further investigation. Schools in this group represent an ideal situation or at least represent what might be possible. Schools from group A appear to conform to Schofields (1993) description of *what may be*, or *what could be* and would be a justifiable inclusion in any multi-site case study investigation.

Issues of access (Stake, 1995) have previously been raised and for this reason one of the group B schools was a candidate for selection because of the author's position as Head of Information Technology within the school. Permission was obtained from the Headmaster and the Chairman of the board of Governors for such an investigation to be carried out in the school. This school (School C) is typical of Group B schools and

the management of the school was aware that other international schools from Group B were in direct competition with it.

Finally, a Group C school would serve to illustrate the perspective of a smaller institution within the Hong Kong market. These schools are characterized as having limited resources and lower numbers of students when compared to Group A and B schools. Some have managed to enroll students by advertising strengths in English improvement, but accept that once a student has gained sufficient command of the language, they are likely to leave and move on to a school from Group A or B. Unfortunately, the Group C school which was initially identified as a potential case had such a small intake into its Year 7 cohort (it amounted to 7 students) that the Head teacher of the school declined permission to take part. In order to allow for the possibility for generalizing findings, it was decided that another Group A school would be a better replacement and would present data which could be of interest from the perspective of coming from the same group as one of the study schools but at the same time as being a further contrast from the Group B study school.

Each of the three study schools described above offered GCSE and A level examinations. The annual tuition fees for each institution were in the range of HK$74,900 and HK$80,900 which fitted roughly in the middle of a spread from HK$67,700 to HK$118,000 for other similar international secondary schools. They each offered well-resourced sports and IT facilities. They were also situated on Hong Kong Island and separated by only 4 or 5 kilometers from each other, negating the locality factor that influences choice in the United Kingdom so much. By identifying the similarities between the three cases there had been a deliberate attempt, as Yin (1993) pointed out, to increase confidence in any findings that were seen to be repeated across each case. Schofield (1993) recommended that a multi-site case study using dissimilar cases would allow for greater generalization of findings, however, part of the design for the research is to minimize the differences between case schools so as to remove certain choice factors between the schools.

Following on from the selection of the schools for the case study it is now the intention to look at the research methods which have been employed in the multiple case study approach described above. A survey adapted from a UK study into school

choice has been used in the multiple-case study used here. The survey provides a range of qualitative and quantitative data about the respondents, the influences on their choice patterns and their perception of the international secondary school market in Hong Kong. Interviews with parents have been used to triangulate data generated from the survey and also to obtain information from key school personnel. The use of interviews in this study is discussed at greater length in Section 3.5. The next section investigates the use of questionnaire surveys and describes the adaptation of a similar questionnaire used in the United Kingdom in a research study of school choice patterns among parents there.

3.3 Survey Questionnaires

Studies about parental choice of schools in the UK are numerous (West and Varlaam, 1991, Hammond and Dennison, 1995, Gorard, 1997, Woods et al, 1998a), and have been carried out in response to the educational reforms which have led to a quasi-market in the education system of that country (Vandenberghe, 1999). In several of these studies, the postal questionnaire has been employed as one of the data-gathering tools. Although the findings of these surveys have been criticized (Gorard, 1999) as being too general, a number of consistent patterns have emerged. The criticism has been leveled that surveys of this type have been unable to identify specific criteria upon which parents select secondary school and that a number of selection criteria that have been put forward as specific, such as "good discipline", remain ill defined and open to a number of interpretations. Part of the focus for many of these studies has been issues relating to social class and the selection of private schools. Whilst some of this work may well be relevant to the Hong Kong context, it is more likely that the differences encountered in the populations of each country would tend to make comparisons difficult.

According to Jaeger, (1988, p.303) "The purpose of a survey is to describe specific characteristics of a large group of persons, objects or institutions." Johnson (1994, p. 13) defined surveys as, "eliciting equivalent information from an identified population," where 'equivalent' meant the same kind of information obtained by standardised questions. Bell (1987, p. 8) stated, "In most cases, a survey will aim to obtain information from a representative selection of the population and from that

sample will be able to present the findings as being representative of the population as a whole." Wilson (1984, p. 35) indicated that the survey research method could be administered either by an interviewer who recorded respondent responses to verbal questioning or as a self-completed form sent, for example by post. Whatever the method used to obtain responses, the respondents either represent the whole of a population (census) or part of a population (sample). If a sample is used in a survey, then that sample must be representative of the population if results are to be generalised successfully across the whole population. Wilson (1984) also pointed out that if the questions used on the sample are the same, then some comparisons between individuals in the sample may be made. Cohen and Mannion (1994, p. 83) claimed the survey method was the "most commonly used descriptive method in education research."

Surveys provide the researcher with a tool that can collect a large amount of information in a short time from a vast number of respondents. Research findings are often generalisable to a wider population (if care is taken with sampling or if a census has been used) and surveys provide, "a wealth of descriptive data" which may be used to detect patterns from the findings. The standardised nature of the research tool makes it possible to approach a large number of respondents and to collect lots of information relatively quickly. Generally speaking surveys can be a low cost alternative to interviews. Where probability sampling is employed, confidence in the generalisation of results may be high and regarded as being representative of the whole population from which the sample is drawn. Comparison of large amounts of data gathered from surveys also provides descriptive data about a situation and can reveal patterns. Surveys are however, hindered by some inherent limitations.

Although covering a broad base, a survey is unable to explore a particular topic in any great depth. Standardisation of questions and answers can hide subtleties in the data which must be explored further by other means. The standardised nature of the method tends to limit the opportunity for exploring a particular topic which might not have been anticipated, particularly true in the case of a postal questionnaire for example. Some survey techniques are also unsuitable for sensitive issues and, as with many research methods, there is ample scope for bias to appear in the findings.

Sample selection is an important aspect of survey design, and if the selection process is flawed, then bias will be present in the interpretation. Macpherson (1998) wrote,

> If there is some systematic or consistent process taking place that will make the questionnaire results from a sample not representative of the population from which the sample was drawn, then we have biased and, therefore, possibly useless data.
>
> (Macpherson, 1998, p.117.)

Bias can also occur as a result of low response rates and wherever possible every effort should be made to increase the response rate of a survey (Hoinville and Jowell, 1984). Bias caused by non-returns may be reduced by approaching 100% return rate-through telephone administration and by dogged and persistent follow-up. The response rate of the survey carried out for this study was improved by sending a reminder to parents. An increase of approximately 12% in the response rate was found after the reminders were sent.

Popular among the survey methods is the postal questionnaire, which, due to constraints over finances and resources, is often an attractive choice for small-scale educational research. The standardised nature of a questionnaire makes it particularly reliable for collecting equivalent information from respondents. Johnson informed us that,

> The essence of a questionnaire, as a research tool, is that it is in the hands of the respondent, and is completed by him or her... A questionnaire empowers the respondent, who may read all the questions before completing any, may complete and return the questionnaire at a time convenient to themselves, or fail to complete the questionnaire at all.
>
> (Johnson, 1994, p. 37.)

Questionnaire design is obviously most important because it is likely to be completed in the absence of the researcher.

> Its design must minimise potential errors from respondents..and coders. And since people's participation in surveys is voluntary, a questionnaire has to help in engaging their interest, encouraging their co-operation, and eliciting answers as close as possible to the truth.
>
> (Davidson 1970, in Cohen and Mannion 1994, pp. 92-93.)

Gorard's (1997) study of school choice also used a questionnaire to obtain information from parents. However, limitations to the so-called "shopping list" nature of the instrument used in this type of research have been highlighted. The danger, remarked Gorard (1997), is that this type of instrument has been influenced by market research tools which might over-simplify the process of choosing schools. The suggestion is made that by researching this process using "shopping lists" assumes the fact that school choice is made in just such a check-list manner. Other dangers exist with lists. There is the possibility that the list is incomplete and that some important aspects have been missed out. Lists can also lead the respondent into believing that a reason for choice was important when the questionnaire was filled in but was actually not considered at the time the choice of school was made. Lists also have the potential for bias when the researcher attempts to narrow down the number of questions to include on the instrument. Gorard (1999a) has since stated that the direction of interest for school choice research has moved away from investigations into criteria by which families choose schools and more towards gaining greater understanding of the relatively complex process involved in decision making such as how, when and by whom school choice is made. In other research, links are being forged between school effectiveness and specific marketing effects (Gorard, 1999a). Gorard (1997) however, is equally cautious about more qualitative approaches to school choice research; the potential for bias still exists. He concluded that a combination of approaches and methods can increase confidence in reliability and validity. Therefore, apart from the use of questionnaires, this research used additional data gathering techniques, including interviews with a sample of questionnaire respondents to triangulate findings and increase reliability. The sample frame to identify which parents would receive the questionnaire was made up of the entire Year 7 (first year secondary school) cohort of each of the case study schools. From this point of view the sample must be considered as a non-probability, quota sample, as no attempt at random selection was made. As one of the schools selected was the work place of the researcher, the sampling could also be considered to be partially a convenience sample. This convenience sample also made it possible to pilot a similar questionnaire on a small sample of students from a previous cohort.

3.4 Study Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was based upon a design used in an extensive study of school choice called the Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) study, which was designed to address the impact of the market-like environment which had developed in the United Kingdom (Woods *et al*, 1996). A copy of the questionnaire used in the Hong Kong survey is included in Appendix I. The questionnaire was colour coded to identify returns from parents of each of the case study schools. School A questionnaires were white, School B questionnaires were blue and School C's were green. Included with the questionnaire was a letter, addressed to parents, explaining the purpose of the study. A stamped addressed envelope was also included for parents to return the completed questionnaire. Also included in each pack was a Chinese translation of the questionnaire, provided as an aid to the large numbers of Chinese families which made up a segment of the population under study. Translations into other languages were not included.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section explored the nature of the students being educated in the international school market and respondents were asked to give details about gender, mother tongue, and primary school experience of the student, overseas education experience/expectations and whether or not local schools were considered among their choices. This section asked respondents to indicate if the school place was their preferred choice and if they felt they had sufficient choice potential among schools. More data about the international school market was collected in the last section of the questionnaire. Respondent parents were asked to provide information about ethnicity, profession, their own school and university experience and whether or not they received an education allowance as part of their salary package. Respondents were also invited to indicate their willingness to take part in a telephone interview as part of the survey.

The second section of the questionnaire explored the choice factors which parents found important when choosing a secondary school for their children. The parents were presented with a range of coded choice factors which may have influenced their choice of school. They were asked to tick the three most important and place into priority order. The third section offered a similarly coded list of sources of

information that respondents might have used to obtain information about secondary schools. A reminder note was passed to all students approximately two weeks after the initial handing-out of questionnaires. This note had two aims, one to prompt non-returnees to return the completed questionnaire and one to thank those respondents who had already returned the instrument. The questionnaire results were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 11 for further analysis. Where statistical significance is investigated SPSS was used to generate a chi-squared test and these figures were compared with critical values at the 95 percent level of confidence.

According to Johnson (1994), piloting a questionnaire is very important to ensure that completed questionnaires will meet research needs and as a basis for improving and amending the final questionnaire and Rea and Parker (1997) stressed the need for reviewing a postal questionnaire for quality control purposes. A pilot study was therefore carried out in School C one year before the final research was undertaken. The pilot questionnaire was given to approximately two thirds of the Year 7 cohort and the return rate was 65% out of 54 initial postings. A review of the pilot questionnaire provided an ideal opportunity for fine-tuning the instrument prior to the investigation proper. The majority of the questions had appropriate responses with no pattern of non-responses evident among completed questions. Open-ended responses however were included on only one of the returned questionnaires. In a few isolated cases (<3%) ranking of influence on school choice received multiple responses where several influences were ranked with the same importance. This was deemed to be acceptable however, as several different influences may indeed warrant equal ranking in terms of importance. As a result of the pilot study some amendments were made to the questionnaire prior to the main investigation.

The pilot questionnaire did not explore the possibility that parents might have included local non-international schools when considering their choices. The apparent reduction in returning Hong Kong Chinese and the decrease in some expatriate populations had suggested that there were a greater number of local families choosing international schools as a way of providing English language education to their children. This may be especially true in the light of the Hong Kong Governments decision to restrict the number of local schools using English as the language of

instruction. Therefore a question that explored this potential choice between local and international schools was included in the final questionnaire. It was also decided that more information should be sought regarding the future educational plans of the respondents and whether or not their children were likely to spend some of their education overseas. This item was included because of the need to establish a link between international schools and the likelihood that students would move overseas at some point.

School	Questionnaires handed out	Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate %
School A	170	86	50.6
School B	150	56	37.0
School C	60	37	61.7
Totals	380	179	47.1

Table 3-2 Questionnaire Responses

The final questionnaire was passed out to students by class teachers in sealed envelopes and these were then passed on to parent respondents. As shown in Table 3-2, 380 questionnaires were handed out and 179 of these were eventually returned. An analysis of the response rates from the main investigation shows some variation between schools.

Table 3-2 shows the questionnaire returns from each of the study schools. School A had 170 handed out to the Y7 cohort and 86 questionnaires were returned. This represented a response rate for school A of 50.6%. Questionnaires were handed out to 150 Y7 students in school B and 56 were returned. The response rate for school B was the lowest at 37%. School C had the smallest number of Y7 students with 60 students receiving questionnaires; a response rate of 61.7% was the result of 37 completed questionnaires being returned. The overall average response rate across all three schools was 47.1%. The response rate from school C was the highest but only made up 20.7% of the total number of responses from all three schools. Responses from school A parents were most numerous and made up 48% of the total number of responses. The researcher worked as a teacher in school C and might explain the higher response rate from the parents at the school. A reminder was passed to each student two weeks after the initial posting and the response rate from each school increased by between 8% and 15%. Only one reminder was passed out because it was considered too intrusive to request for any further teacher involvement.

3.5 The Study Interviews

Interviews were used in this study in order to triangulate data obtained from the survey respondents and also to gain information about marketing approaches employed by the case study schools. According to Wolcott (1988), the interview is one of a number of techniques used by ethnographers to investigate a particular social system. Pelto and Pelto (1978) highlighted the importance of, "listening to and noting the contents of human speech," as a research instrument for the collection of primary data in social sciences. Briggs (1986, p.7) described an interview as, "the collection of data (which) must occur in a face-to-face situation". He continued, "The interaction must also occur in a research context and involve the posing of questions by the investigator." Wolcott (1988, p.195) defined the interview as, "anything that the fieldworker does that intrudes upon the natural setting and is done with the conscious intent of obtaining particular information directly from one's subjects". Wolcott also included questionnaires and standardized tests in his list of interview categories as a way of illustrating that interviews can mean many things. Cohen and Manion, (1994) argued that the interview can be used to gather information, which has a direct bearing on research objectives, such as particular knowledge, information or attitudes and beliefs. The second function of the interview is to test hypotheses and the third function is to follow-up unexpected results, to validate other methods or to gain more information about respondent's motives.

Researchers into educational management use interviews to obtain different types of information depending upon which side of the research 'fence' they stand. The quantitative, positivist would be very careful to ensure that structure and repeatability are inherent in the interview process, whilst the qualitative researcher may wish to 'loosen' the interview process in order to obtain a more descriptive, in-depth body of information. The study of education often involves the use of qualitative research methods with the interview often relied upon to gain information. As Seidman (1991, p. 7) wrote, "It (interviewing) is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues

through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education."

The PASCI survey used interviews as a means of obtaining more personal information about the choice habits of UK parents and this study in Hong Kong also employed telephone interviews with parents for the same reason. Respondents had been asked to indicate on the returned questionnaires if they would be prepared to take part in a short telephone interview. These interviews were open ended in nature but each interview started by getting parents to explain why they had selected the particular factors in the questionnaire. This was done to try to support the findings of the questionnaire and to ascertain whether or not parents had other factors which were more influential than those included in the list of options. Interviews with respondents were used in the current study to provide triangulation with questionnaire data and also to gain deeper knowledge of the perspectives of the three schools included in the case study. Triangulation was supported by conducting 28 telephone interviews with parents. Respondents had provided a contact telephone number on the returned questionnaire. Interviews lasted between ten and fifteen minutes and interviewees were initially reminded of their response to the school choice factor and were then asked to explain what inspired their responses (Appendix III). After the initial questions related to the questionnaire responses, subsequent questioning was largely interviewee directed, leading to open ended questions often posed in response to the previous comments of the interviewee. The objective of the interviews at this stage was to draw out any further data which could provide greater insight into the complex process of school choice. Mindful of some of the limitations identified by Gorard (1997) of "shopping-list" type questionnaires, it was decided that these interviews should be employed to offer respondents the opportunity to add their own choice factors which were absent from the list or to indicate whether or not their original choice had been representative of their true ideas. In the event there was no indication of either of these eventualities, indeed the interviews went some way to providing increased confidence in the responses from the questionnaires.

More structured interviews were also carried out with each of the study school Head teachers as a means to seek information about responsiveness and marketing activities

among the schools. The interviews were based upon a set of questions designed to obtain information about a range of issues regarding educational marketing in the schools (Foskett, 1998a). The interview schedule is included in Appendix II. The interviews with head teachers were conducted as face to face interviews, the shortest lasting 45 minutes and the longest, just over one hour. These interviews were not taped but detailed notes were taken and these have been presented in Appendix II. Each interview was conducted in the respective head teacher's office at the case study schools some time after the questionnaires had been collated from parent respondents. Brief summaries of the questionnaire results from each respective school were presented to the head teachers as a symbol of gratitude for being allowed to conduct the study in their school. Specifically the interviews probed the following areas:

- The use of marketing for specific purposes such as promotion campaigns to attract students or to conduct market research activities.
- The existence of strategic marketing through the use of marketing committees, marketing plans, marketing budgets or marketing training for employees.
- The production of brochures.
- The production of web sites.

3.6 Data analysis

This case study research employs both quantitative data collection tools and qualitative data collection tools and this mixed method of data gathering have already been described as a characteristic of the case study approach. The data from the survey generates essentially quantitative data whilst the data obtained from the interviews and a study of the brochures and web sites is qualitative in nature. The data from each of the cases will be presented separately with quantitative data for each of the three cases summarised and tabulated into frequency tables and interviews with parents used to support the findings. The examination of the data using a cross school analysis of the data will entail a comparison of the data collected from each case. SPSS has been used to analyse the quantitative data and statistically significant differences between each set of case data is reported where they are observed. As Stake (1995) suggested, the analysis of qualitative data "capitalises on ordinary ways of making sense," whilst Yin (1989) warns of the need for a planned strategy. A

planned strategy for the analysis of the data must bring more validity to the study and so a structure of the qualitative data is intended. The conceptual framework matrix shown in Table 3-3 provides the structure for the analysis of the data and enables convenient coding of data where necessary. The qualitative data from the interviews with the head teachers of each school is presented separately and analysed for patterns using a form of closed and open coding systems which is derived from the conceptual framework matrix. The data relating to marketing is collected from semi-structured interviews and so the responses are easily categorised by the question they responded to and the framework matrix outlined previously. However, mindful of the need to look for the unexpected, open coding allows for unplanned themes to emerge. Stake (1995) equated this approach with the experience of meeting with someone we had not met for years. At first there is a failure to recognise what we see, but gradually recognition takes place and we start to make sense of and explain the data.

Finally, the author is conscious of the potential bias of parent interviews using a small group of willing volunteers identified through the survey instrument. Their willingness to be interviewed could have brought some prejudice to the process; however the purpose of these interviews was to triangulate survey findings and to provide additional qualitative data about school choice and these interviews were invaluable from these perspectives.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	Process	Performance	People
Nature of the Market				
Marketing activities of schools				
Nature of choosers				
Factors influencing school choice				
Sources of Information				

Table 3-3 Conceptual Framework Matrix for the Analysis of Data

The analysis of school brochures proved to be less valuable than anticipated, because in each case, these brochures were being updated and were considered to be outdated sources of information. In any case, the study did not focus upon the content of the brochures but more on the value of these as sources of information to assist with the school choice processes.

3.7 Conclusion

A multiple subject case study has been described in the methodology in which three similar international secondary schools, within close geographical proximity, have been selected to research international school marketing. Table 3-4 summarises the research tools against the research questions and indicates that some aspects of the "product" column such as curriculum and resources have been negated because they are common to each of the study schools and therefore data was not collected for comparison. The selection of three similar schools enabled the factoring out of what have previously been described as "macro" choice variables which are associated with the "product" column of the matrix and this allows for greater confidence when generalizing findings which are common among the schools, whilst still giving an opportunity to identify differences between the schools. A survey questionnaire is used to obtain data about the nature of the market, the nature of the choice makers, choice factors and sources of information which parents from each school found most influential when selecting a school for their children. The questionnaire is based upon a tool used in a large scale study of school choice in the United Kingdom, which had been adapted for the Hong Kong context. Telephone interviews with a willing sample of respondents provide the opportunity to triangulate the questionnaire data and further explore their questionnaire responses to provide greater depth. Interviews with Head teachers gain information about school responses to parental choice factors and explore how schools use marketing activities as part of their response. Sources of information about the schools are explored, firstly by using questionnaire items to find which sources of information are deemed most useful by parents and then by looking at promotional material produced by the schools themselves.

4P's Relationship Management Model*			
Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Nature and type of school and curriculum, public examinations	*Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Spending on resources, buildings*	*Criteria by which product can be assessed, e.g. Inspections, public examinations*	*Customer, clients, pupils, parents, employees, LEA stake holders*
What is the nature of the Hong Kong international secondary school market?	Careful case selection cancels out some "macro" variables	Survey and triangulating parent interviews	
What are the marketing activities of schools?		Semi-structured interviews with Head teachers	
What is the nature of choosers? Socio economic, culture, special requirements		Survey and triangulating parent interviews	
What factors influence school choice?		Survey and triangulating parent interviews	
What sources of Information are most valuable?		Survey and triangulating parent interviews	

Table 3-4 Summary of Research Questions and Research Tools

The following chapter sets out those results obtained from the three case study schools and analyses the findings by comparing questionnaire results and interviews. The results of the data collection are presented initially as three separate cases and then in a separate chapter, a cross school analysis compares the data to find patterns of marketing responses upon which theory may emerge. The analysis reveals both similarities and differences between the schools.

4 The Findings from the Study Schools

This research has set out with aim of identifying whether marketing activities, adopted by international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong, have played a part in determining the success of their operation. The literature review has helped to identify several key questions connected with the overall aim and a questionnaire survey and interviews have been employed to gather data relating to those questions. This chapter sets out the data obtained from the three study schools operating in Hong Kong. The analysis of the data is driven by the conceptual framework matrix presented on page 76. The presentation and subsequent analysis of the data in the next chapter follows the order set out in this matrix, looking at the nature of the market, marketing activities, chooser characteristics, school choice factors and information sources for each school. The conceptual framework matrix is used to identify themes which emerge from the data by categorising these as product, process, performance and people themes. Where appropriate, interview data is coded according to these themes.

The study schools share a number of similarities which have enabled the focus of the investigation to be directed away from macro issues involved with school choice and towards more subtle issues more closely associated with marketing activities. In each case, contextual information about the school is presented, followed by the presentation of data relating to the nature of the market in which the school operates, the marketing activities of each school, and the respondents who made decisions about sending their children to the schools. Also presented for each school are data connected to the factors regarded as important when choosing a school and data relating to information sources rated as important when engaged in school choice.

4.1 Study School A

Situated in a popular residential area of Hong Kong Island, School A belonged to the Hong Kong government defined Group A category of schools and had facilities associated with the larger international secondary schools such as swimming pool, indoor sports hall, outdoor sports areas, squash courts and a full complement of teaching rooms. Tuition fees at the time of the study were HK74,900 per annum and no debenture payable (Unpublished School Document, 2001).The school web site explained that School A,

"opened in 1967 as the English school for secondary students on Hong Kong Island. The school moved to its present site in 1970, offering a broad liberal education to 1200 students of some 40 different nationalities and preparing them for the British GCSE, AS and A Level examinations".

School A web site (1999).

The following survey data is presented so that a profile of School A can be built up and a comparison made between it and the other two schools in the study. The data reveals both similarities and differences between the three schools which would not be easy to identify merely by looking at school rolls for example. The data was shown to Head teachers and they were invited to comment where they felt there were surprises in the data or if they felt the data was not representative of their own knowledge of the school.

4.1.1 The Nature of the Market – Levels of Choice among School A Respondents

Firstly, it should be stressed that School A operated loosely upon a catchment area and the vast majority of its students would be resident in specific areas of Hong Kong Island or from one of Hong Kong's outlying Islands. It would be unlikely, though not impossible, for a student living within School A's catchment area to attend School B and vica versa. In practice the majority of students attended their local school. However, respondents had a free choice to send their children to School C which closely matched the characteristics of School A. There were other choices also available to the respondents and these are explored throughout this section. The first set of data shows the proportion of parents who considered sending their children to a local secondary school. The vast majority of these local secondary schools use Cantonese as the medium for instruction and would be unsuitable for non-native speakers.

Local School Considered?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	8	9.3
No	78	90.7
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-1 Was a Local School Considered Among Choices?

Table 4-1 shows that approximately 9% of respondents did consider sending their child to a secondary school in the local system. This figure corresponds well with the 16% of respondents who identified Cantonese as their mother tongue and this shows that these parents have a wider choice than other parents. The next set of data looks at the proportion of parents who had considered sending their child to a secondary school overseas. Parents looking for an education which uses English as the medium of education can consider sending their children overseas and to this extent, Hong Kong international schools are in competition with overseas boarding schools.

Overseas School Considered?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	30.2
No	60	69.8
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-2 Did You Consider Sending Your Child Overseas?

The data presented in Table 4-2 shows that almost a third of respondents had considered sending their child to an overseas school. This figure indicates further competition to be factored into the international school market in Hong Kong. Just over 70% of respondents indicated that their child will spend some part of their education away from Hong Kong, a large proportion of these students being likely to attend overseas tertiary institutions.

Overseas Education?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	61	70.9
Maybe	23	26.7
No	2	2.3
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-3 Will Your Child Continue His/Her Education Overseas at Some Stage?

The next survey question asked parents to indicate how many secondary schools were considered during the choice process. Table 4-4 shows that the majority of respondents from School A chose between one or two schools. Fewer than 20% of the respondents considered more than two choices during their school choice process.

Number of Schools considered	Frequency	Percent
	3	3.5
1-2	64	74.4
2-3	15	17.4
3-4	4	4.7
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-4 Number of Schools Considered in Secondary School Choice

The next data illustrates the proportion of respondents who were able to obtain a place in their first choice school. Responses to this question would indicate the level of competition throughout the choice process. Table 4-5 establishes that the vast majority of respondents had successfully found a place in their first choice school.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	2.3
Yes	81	94.2
No	3	3.5
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-5 Is Chosen School First Choice?

In order to explore the perceived levels of competition among the respondents they were asked to indicate if they felt that they had real choice in the selection process. Table 4-6 shows that almost three-quarters of School A respondents felt that they felt real choice was possible in the international school market, although a quarter of respondent felt that the choice was limited to some degree.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	62	72.1
No	21	24.4
No response	3	3.5
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-6 Is there a Real Choice between International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong?

Reay and Ball (1998) demonstrated that school choice involved different combinations of parents, parents and pupils or just pupils on their own. Table 4-7 indicates that just over half (51%) of the respondent parents made the choice of secondary school without consulting their child but the other respondents involved their children in the choice.

Secondary School	Choice makers	Frequency	Percent
School A	Parents	44	51.2
	Parent and Child	42	48.8
	Total	86	100.0

Table 4-7 Choice of Secondary School

In the summary table 4-8, the respondent parents from School A were unlikely to consider sending their child to a local system school, although a higher proportion might consider sending their children to a secondary school overseas. A large majority of the respondents expected that their children would attend an overseas institution at some time during their education. School A respondents were most likely to consider one or two alternative schools during the choice process but some would consider more. The great majority of the respondents obtained a place in their first choice school and a significant majority considered that they were able to exercise choice. Children were involved in the choice of school approximately half the time.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
What is the nature of the School A market?	Large majority of pupils graduate from affiliated primary schools. Indicate early school choices. Majority favour international school over local school. Significant competition from overseas schools. Pupils most likely to go overseas for part of their education.	High proportion with English as mother tongue seeking English as language of instruction. Selection based upon need to go overseas.	Majority of parents are graduates and post-graduates with high expectations of performance.	Choice mainly restricted to one or two schools. Majority considering School A as first choice obtained a place. Majority indicated that choice was available. Children involved in choice in half cases.

Table 4-8 Summary of School A Market

4.1.2 The Marketing Responses of School A

The next section reveals the results of an interview with the Head teacher of School A, which focussed on the marketing activities and strategies adopted in the school.

Where appropriate the interview has been coded according to the conceptual framework matrix (Table 2-8). The Head teacher had been the head of the school for several years and had lived in Hong Kong for some time before that. The interview started by asking whether any marketing specialists worked at the school. There was no person or committee with responsibility for marketing apart from the Head teacher himself. However, he was acutely aware of the importance of marketing and promoting his school and stated that he spent a significant proportion of his time doing so. He said that, "*My awareness of the importance of marketing was prompted by a talk I'd attended in the United States.*" As a result the school had embarked upon a number of marketing activities; however, these activities were seen to be one of the duties of the Head teacher himself.

The next question asked if any budget was set aside for marketing activities, The Head teacher replied emphatically, "*No!*" In School A the Head teacher,

> "*had high expectations regarding the way the 'front office' and deputies related to parents and other visitors to the school. We want to create a friendly, open and welcoming face for the school.*" (Formal:People)[2]

This Head teacher made several references to 'relationships' with parents and the community. The Head teacher of School A felt that the results of promotional or marketing activities were apparent in terms of the students who were attracted to the school. As an example of this he had made conscious efforts to attract students from the Chinese, Japanese and the Korean community. He described these ethnic groups as, "*well known in Hong Kong for performing well at school, despite often entering English speaking environments with very few English skills.*" A robust English language support program was installed into School A to help members of these groups develop sufficient English language skills to prosper academically in the school. The Head teacher of school A had also actively cultivated a good relationship with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and reported, "*I am very pleased that the*

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[2] The coding of interviews derives from Table 2-8 in which the marketing activities are classified as planned, formal approaches, which are strategic in nature or unplanned, informal in character. The quotes are then characterised as a Product, Process, Performance or People marketing activity according to the relationship management model. Coding of Parent interviews does not make the formal/informal distinction.

make-up of the Association is predominantly Asian." Other examples of the awareness of the importance of school image and promotion were evident. He said,

> *"We don't test candidates for the school. We rely on the recommendations of other Principals and the Principals of primary schools. Some students who had been rejected by other schools have been accepted into this school and have flourished in the school. This has had a very positive effect on the image of the school."* (Formal:People)

He went on to describe that, "We offer places to second language speakers at year 10 and not just in year 7. This has had a good reception from some ethnic groups such as the Japanese community in Hong Kong." Also underlining the importance of the image of the school he was pleased to have a VIP among the students. *"The new Governor of Hong Kong has placed both his children in the school and this has been good for the image of the school. It's certainly done the school no harm!"* (Informal:People) The Head teacher of School A was very supportive of the need for promotion within the market and he had actively courted the local press and especially the Chinese language press. In the interview he stated that,

> *"I tried to promote the academic image of the school by encouraging entry into the Hong Kong Math Olympics and, after winning it for two years in a row, ensured that this was reported in the Chinese press."* (Informal:People)

He recommended that a school should be "open" with reporters and to form a positive relationship with them. This would have the effect of not only showing the school off to the public but also helped to blunt the effect of any bad news that may emerge from the school. The focus on Chinese language newspapers ensured that the local community was made aware of the existence of the school and that positive news was noted. Another of the study schools had also used the local press for promoting their school, but highlighted the potential problems of doing so.

The survey data and interviews with parents and the Head teachers of the study schools show that the relationships, especially with parents, were seen to be highly valued. This was indicated most strongly in the attitude, actions and comments of the Head teacher of School A. One of the features of a marketing strategy which places

great emphasis upon relationships is that customers or clients are often more willing to "forgive" mistakes or problems associated with the businesses they use. An example of this was described by the Head teacher of School A. The school had previously had a number of drug related incidents that gained some bad publicity. The Head teacher tried to make the whole affair, *"an open one, and we brought in the parents so that all stakeholders were actively involved in the remedy."* (Informal:People) He felt that this was very positive and made the community stronger. As a result, students at the school are now supported through issues such as these and not summarily expelled. This had, *"led to greater trust between the students and the school, and now information flows more easily between staff and students."* (Formal:People) This example underlines the characteristic of the relationship marketing approach and the belief that long term relationships lead to a degree of trust and that mistakes are more easily forgiven by customers. The drug problems which had developed in School A had not led to the withdrawal of significant numbers of students, a situation paralleled by 'customer churn' in the commercial world (Barnes, 2001). Customer churn is the term used when customers are only prepared to endure short term relationships with a product or service provider. Although schools often maintain customer relationships over long periods, 'customer churn' is not unknown, at least not among Hong Kong international schools. A sound relationship with customers would keep customer churn down to a minimum.

Further evidence of good relations with clients is illustrated by the number of employees who chose to send their own children to the school. The relationship marketing approach values the emphasis placed upon employee satisfaction, otherwise known as internal marketing. Satisfied employees are said to reflect this in the levels of service they are prepared to offer. A measure of the employee satisfaction might be evidenced by the number of staff sending their children to School A. The Head teacher was, *"pleased that a large number of teaching staff opted to send their children to our school,"* (Informal:People) and that a good number of teachers working for other schools in the group also sent their children to his school.

The Head teacher of School A admitted that no formal data gathering was employed by the school at that time but was conscious of the importance of sensing the environment. He related that,

"At one stage in the past few years, I'd been worried that popular commerce courses such as Business Studies, Economics, and I.T. would turn the school into a 'business school' but that was not the sort of school I wished to lead and it wouldn't have been popular among the schools clientele." (Formal:Process/Product)

As a result he made concerted efforts to enhance the academic status of the school. He went as far as promoting, using local newspapers, the achievements of graduating students who had gone to prestigious Universities worldwide. He also reported that similar environmental awareness had resulted in the establishment of English as an Additional Language and the inclusion of Mandarin as part of the MFL curriculum and was, *"among the first international schools in Hong Kong to do so."* (Formal:Process/Product) Also, in School A, the Music department was seen to be an area for development and accomplishing this had required, *"a great deal of searching for the right teacher."* But,

> *"as a result of increased emphasis in music there had been a number of concerts presented by student musicians and these had helped to form the basis of good public relations within the school community."* (Informal:People)

In School A, *"a teacher has been awarded an incentive point to construct and maintain the school website and is supported by members of the sixth form."* The web site had recently been revised.

Table 4-9 summarises the marketing approach of School A. Despite the absence of a formal strategic approach to marketing there was a clear acceptance that marketing was an important activity. Formal responses to the market took the form of curriculum change such as the addition of Mandarin as an academic study and EAL support. Courses and support processes were chosen based upon a clear knowledge of the local community requirements and needs. The marketing activities manifested themselves in active promotion, informal market research and an emphasis upon the forming of good relationships with the external community and the internal community as evidenced by a high proportion of staff sending there own children to the school. There was a belief that marketing was the responsibility of senior team members, particularly the Head teacher.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
The marketing activities of School A **Informal Approaches**	No budget set aside, no marketing personnel. Largely seen as senior management responsibility. Not a strategic approach but clearly aware of need for and importance of marketing. No formal market research but extensive informal knowledge of the local market. "In house" production of school web site.	Emphasis on music department and search for "right teacher". Emphasis on academic courses rather than vocational.	Not academically selective but promoted academic success through activities such as Math Olympics and aware of need for a solid academic reputation. Academic success promoted in media.	Emphasis on forming relationships. Good relationships with ethnic groups, e.g. Japanese, Korean, Chinese. Good relationship with media. Open approach. Important to "sense environment" to monitor community requirements. Internal marketing results in high proportion of staff children.
Formal Approaches	School newsletter. Brochures	Creation of courses such as Mandarin and English support programs. Formalised, though not extensive SEN support.	Regular publication of examination data in newsletters.	Open days

Table 4-9 Summary of Marketing Activities in School A

4.1.3 The Nature of the Choice Makers from School A

Table 4-10 shows that a small majority of the respondents children were male although there were no indications that School A tended to attract larger proportions of males than females into its population of students.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	47	54.7
Female	39	45.3
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-10 Gender Distribution of Respondent Students

A response rate of 7% of respondents who identified their children had special educational needs tallied well with figures reported by the Head teacher during interview (Table 4-11). The school did not have a selective approach to entry but did not cater specifically to students with special needs.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No response	1	1.1
Yes	6	7.0
No	79	91.9
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-11 Frequency of Students identifying Special Educational Needs

School A benefited from receiving the vast majority of its students from feeder primary schools which belonged to the same group as School A. Just over 70% of the respondent students in School A had attended one of the affiliated feeder primary schools for School A (Table 4-12). This figure was slightly below that recorded in an interview with the Head teacher of School A, where it was stated that approximately 90% of the Year 7 cohort (90%) came from affiliated sources.

Primary School	Frequency	Percent
Affiliated Primary	62	72.1
Non-affiliated Primary	14	16.3
Local HK	4	4.7
Overseas	5	5.8
No response	1	1.2
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-12 Primary schools attended

A minority (16%) of respondent students had attended non-affiliated primary schools and the Head teacher mentioned that one non-affiliated primary school on a nearby-island, had been actively targeted to obtain more students by providing buses between the school and the ferry terminal which linked the primary school to Hong Kong Island. The respondent data which indicated that almost 10% of students came from local or overseas primary schools did not reflect the comments of the Head teacher.

The respondents were asked to identify which language was their child's mother tongue and English was clearly the language most frequently identified. Cantonese was the next most frequently identified by 16% of the respondents, the lowest proportion of the three schools in the study. The data revealed that School A had

students using a wide range of mother tongue language and this variation has been grouped to display in Table 4-13. The "Other Asian" group contained Japanese, Korean, Indian for example.

Language	Frequency	Percent
English	61	70.9
Cantonese	14	16.3
Other Asian	5	5.8
Other European	1	1.2
Chinese	1	1.2
Other	1	1.2
Dual	2	2.3
No response	1	1.2
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-13 Mother Tongue Distribution of Respondents
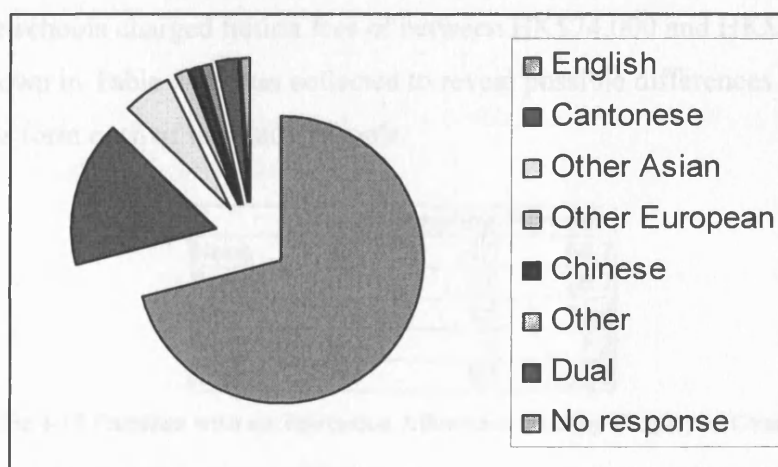
Figure 4-1 Mother Tongue Distribution

A simple look at the mother tongue data could be interpreted to indicate that the vast majority of the students attending School A were English. However, in an international context this picture might not be accurate and for this reason respondents were asked to identify their ethnicity. The data for the ethnicity of the respondent parents revealed that a small majority of respondents indicate they were of European origin whilst approximately one third of respondents indicated they were of Chinese descent, actually the lowest proportion among the three study schools (Table 4-14). This data on the one hand illustrates the influence of returning migrants into the international school market in Hong Kong but also shows that among the three study schools, it was School A that had most closely adhered to its traditional clientele who would have been almost exclusively British Europeans.

Secondary School		Frequency	Percent
School A	Chinese	29	33.7
	European	39	45.3
	N. American	3	3.5
	Asian	7	8.1
	Indian	5	5.8
	No Response	3	3.5
	Total	**86**	**100.0**

Table 4-14 Ethnic Origin of Respondent Parents

It is common practice for Hong Kong based expatriates to receive an education allowance as part of their salary package, some locally hired employees also benefit from such an allowance. The final table of data in this section illustrates the proportion of parents gaining an education allowance as part of their salary package. Each of the schools charged tuition fees of between HK$74,000 and HK$86,000 and the data shown in Table 4-15 was collected to reveal possible differences between respondents form each of the study schools.

	Frequency	Percent
None	47	54.7
Partial	23	26.7
Whole	15	17.4
No Response	1	1.2
Total	86	100.0

Table 4-15 Families with an Education Allowance Paid by Employer/Company

The survey found that approximately 43% of the respondents received either a partial or total allowance to pay for tuition fees and just over half of the respondents received no financial support for education fees in their salary package. These figures did not differ greatly from the other study schools.

A summary in table 4-16 of the data presented here reveals information about the profile of the choice makers and students attending School A. A typical student would be just as likely to be a boy or a girl but would most likely have attended a primary school affiliated to School A. Few would have special educational needs, and would most likely identify English as their main language although a large proportion might be of Chinese origin. Just under half of the parents would receive an educational allowance in their salary package.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
The Characteristics of the School A respondents	Mainly European clientele who want a school based upon England and Wales. Limited SEN requirements.	High proportion of respondents with English as mother tongue seeking English as language of instruction. Where English is not mother tongue English as language of instruction aids move overseas.	Middle class European and Asian choice makers. Majority of parent's graduates and post-graduates. Bring high expectation of performance.	Mainly European but high proportion of Asian, especially Hong Kong Chinese. Higher socio-economic group, substantial proportion with education allowance indicating expatriates. Majority graduates or post-graduates.

Table 4-16 Characteristics of School A Respondents

The next set of data looks at some of the choice processes which respondent parents have identified as a result of completing the survey questionnaire.

4.1.4 Choice Factors and Sources of Information Considered Most Important by School A Respondents

This section looks at which factors School A respondents indicated were most influential when choosing an international secondary school and also the sources of information they found most useful in arriving at their final choices.

The respondents had been asked to select factors which they considered to be most important when choosing an international secondary school. They were also asked to rank the 3 factors which they considered most important in the selection process. Table 4-17 shows a summary of those factors which appeared most frequently among the top three choices of the respondents.

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Academic Education	22	25.6
Head Teacher	10	11.6
Happy there	9	10.5
Caring Approach	8	9.3
Discipline policy	4	4.7
University	4	4.7
Exam results	3	3.5
Siblings there	3	3.5
Friends	3	3.5

Table 4-17 Frequently Chosen Most Important Factors in School A

Table 4-17 shows that an 'academic education' was the most frequently chosen factor by School A respondents, with just over 25% selecting this factor in their top three most important. For School A respondents the Head teacher was placed as the second most important choice factor whilst, the happiness of their children and the caring approach of the school were each selected by roughly 10% of the respondents.

Respondents were then asked to identify important sources of information and to rank the three most important. Table 4-18 displays a summary of these results. Visits to the school were ranked among the top three most often by School A respondents whilst other parents, personal experiences, siblings and friends were among the top choices.

Source of Information	Freq.	Percent
Visits	18	20.9
Other Parents	14	16.3
Personal experience	13	15.1
Sibling	11	12.8
Friends	10	11.6
Exam results	3	3.5
Other children	3	3.5

Table 4-18 Sources of Information Rated Most Useful When Choosing an International Secondary School

Table 4-19 shows the majority of School A parents selecting the school were influenced by the strong academic nature of the education provided there. But the Head teacher was also a strong influence in their choice, alongside the happiness of their children and the parent's perception of the caring environment presented by the school. Process factors were not ranked highly where offered but some of the process factors such as use of English as the medium for delivery have been omitted during school selection.

Many parents appeared to rely heavily upon visits to the school to gain information, whilst others relied on other parents, personal experiences, siblings and friends as important information sources. Brochures and web sites were ranked as less important sources of information. The next section of this chapter presents the data obtained from study School B.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Choice factors influencing School A respondents.	Factored out as a result of study school selection	Processes such as teaching, curriculum, did not rank highly. Certain factors omitted due to study school selection.	Academic performance as measured by examination results among most important factors.	Child happiness most important factor. Relationship with Head teacher seen as very important.
Important sources of information for School A respondents.	Brochures, web sites not ranked highly as sources of information during choice process.	Visits to schools were most important.	Did not rely on performance data but indications of tacit assumption regarding performance of school.	Other parents, personal experience, siblings and friends very useful sources of information. Word-of-mouth and grapevine greatly influential.

Table 4-19 Summary of Important Choice Factors and Information Sources in School A

4.2 Study School B

Also situated on Hong Kong Island, less than 10 Km from School A and fewer than 5 Km from School C, School B was another member of the HK government's Group A category of schools and belonged to the same large foundation of schools as School A. It was, at the time of writing, the newest member of the Foundation, having opened in 1991. According to the school web site, it had been situated on a temporary site until 1994 when it moved to its present purpose built location. Although a similar size to the previous school, the school buildings contrasted in appearance with those of School A because of their relatively recent construction. The facilities were very similar to those found in School A and it would be difficult to have described either school as less than well resourced even compared to prestigious private schools in the UK. The school enrolment had gradually increased throughout its operation and a new program of building expansion was just commencing at the time this study was carried out. Tuition fees at the time of the study were identical to those charged by School A, at HK$74,900 per annum and like School A, no debenture was expected (Unpublished School Document, 2001). Unlike the situation in School A, where the Head teacher had a long established connection with the school, the Head teacher in School B had been appointed just two years before the study. But, like the previous institution, School B operated in a catchment area which overlapped with areas close to School C. The following section shows the results obtained from the questionnaire regarding the

nature of the students attending School B as part of its Year 7 cohort. These results have been included to identify any specific biases which may or may not exist among the different populations of each school in the study. Like the previous set of data these results were shared with the Head teacher of the school to ascertain if any anomalous results might have been gained from the survey results.

4.2.1 The Nature of the Market - Levels of Choice among School B Respondents

The next set of data obtained from the questionnaire looks at the processes of school choice among the respondents from School B. Respondents were asked to indicate which schools they considered among their choices, how many schools they considered and were asked to respond to a series of questions in which they reported upon the level of choice and competition which existed in the secondary school choice process.

The first table (4-20) shows the proportion of respondents who considered a local Hong Kong secondary school for their children. Just fewer than 20% of the respondents had considered sending their child to a local secondary school, approximately double the proportion with a similar response from School A. This higher proportion of respondents considering local secondary schools correlates to the higher proportion of ethnic Chinese among the population of respondents in School B.

Local School Considered?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	11	19.6
No	45	80.4
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-20 Was a Local School Considered Among Choices?

Table 4-21 reveals that another potential choice for respondent parents is to send their child away to a school overseas and almost 40% of respondents from the school did consider this. This proportion is almost 10% higher than in School A.

Overseas School Considered?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	22	39.3
No	34	60.7
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-21 Did You Consider Sending Your Child Overseas?

Approximately 77% of the respondents indicated that their child would attend an overseas educational institution during some part of their education and a further 18% may be likely to (Table 4-22).

Overseas Education?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	43	76.8
Maybe	10	17.9
No	2	3.6
	1	1.8
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-22 Will Your Child Continue His/Her Education Overseas at Some Stage?

Table 4-23 shows that the majority of respondents only considered one or two schools during their choice process but nearly 40% considered two or more schools during their choice process.

Number of School Considered	Frequency	Percent
	2	3.6
1-2	32	57.1
2-3	18	32.1
3-4	2	3.6
More than 4	2	3.6
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-23 Number of Schools Considered in Secondary School Choice

Table 4-24 displays the proportion of respondents who identified School B as their first choice school. About 16% of the respondents indicated that School B was not their first choice school.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	47	83.9
No	9	16.1
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-24 Is Chosen School First Choice?

The respondents were then asked to indicate whether or not they felt that real choice did exist in the secondary school choice process. Table 4-25 shows that almost 70% of respondents considered that real choice did exist in the international secondary school market.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	39	69.6
No	15	26.8
No response	2	3.6
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-25 Is there a Real Choice between International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong?

The final table in this section is Table 4-26 which shows the distribution of choice-makers among the respondents from School B. The table shows that in the majority of cases the child was involved in the decision making process alongside the parents.

Secondary School	Choice makers	Frequency	Percent
School B	Parents	17	30.4
	Parent and Child	37	66.1
	Child	1	1.8
	No response	1	1.8
	Total	56	100.0

Table 4-26 Choice of Secondary School

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Nature of the Market for School B	Substantial proportion from non-affiliated primary school. Notable level of competition from local secondary schools and oversea schools. Large majority predict move overseas.	A high proportion of EAL requirements possibly to support need for overseas moves in future.	High educational attainment and socio-economic status of choosers indicate high academic expectations..	High proportion choosing between 2 or 3 alternatives. A higher proportion of choosers indicating failure to obtain place in first choice school. Large majority indicate that choice exists in the market but notable level of child participation in school choice.

Table 4-27 Nature of the Market - School B

Summary table 4-27 summarises the nature of the market in which School B operates. It experiences notable levels of competition from both local system and overseas secondary schools and this is further illustrated by parents including two or three alternative schools during the selection process. The high proportions of EAL speakers might demand support as they prepare to move overseas but the socio-economic make-up of the market would indicate a need to perform well academically.

4.2.2 The Marketing Responses of School B

In this section an interview with the Head teacher of School B was undertaken to establish the extent to which marketing activities and strategies were taking place in the school. The interview was carried out in the office of the Head teacher who was in his second year in the post, having moved from a school in the United Kingdom. The interview responses are coded using the categories generated from the conceptual matrix in table 2-8.

There was no marketing department or committee in School B and the Head teacher stressed that marketing was, "*one of the most important aspects of my job*" (Formal:Product). He had brought with him a range of strategies and experiences that he used to increase enrolment in his previous post, or as he put it, "*Bums on seats*" (Formal:Product). In School B however, the emphasis upon the need for more students was different because the school is adequately funded. He described that these marketing activities were in response to the image that the school had developed during the early part of its development. There was a feeling that the school was unapproachable, unfriendly and cold. This Head teacher had made it his priority to "*open up the school, to lower the drawbridge of the Fort and become more engaging*" (Formal:People). Although he reported that there was no formal marketing plan for the school, marketing was seen as an activity the Head teacher was involved with. Senior managers were also, "*encouraged to be aware of the school image, especially when meeting parents*" (Informal:People). With regard to marketing budgets, the Head teacher from School B reported that, "*There is no budget set aside specifically for marketing. Money is allocated as and when needed*" (Formal:Product)

This Head teacher felt strongly that part of his professional role was to form positive relationships with parents and would, "*devote a significant proportion of my time to personally meeting with parents and touring the school with them*" (Informal:People). He felt that the teachers at School B were generally supportive of these activities to the extent that they were, "*flattered by the arrival of visitors to their lessons*". As other examples of responses to parents the Head teacher of School B had made it a priority to enhance the sport, music and extra-curricular activities in the school. One particular example had been the efforts to improve rugby in the school. Rugby had

been given a much higher profile over the past few years after parents remarked that the school had no tradition in the sport. He said,

> "As a result of raising the profile of the sport in the school, we subsequently won the Hong Kong Schools rugby championships and this was seen by parents and students to be a good thing and had contributed to a better atmosphere at the school."
> (Informal:People)

School successes of this kind would be publicized in an updated newsletter, another issue given priority attention by the Head teacher. The Head teacher of School B felt,

> "it was important to maintain a relationship with a number of feeder primary schools by visiting them frequently. We also organize regular open days for prospective parents and students from the local feeder primary schools to visit us and look around." (Formal:People)

Interviews with parents who had chosen to send their children to School B showed clearly that these open days and visits, made when their children had been at primary school, had played an important part in influencing their decision making. For example, Mrs. L. had a very positive experience during visits to the school. She had found the teachers to be, *"helpful and friendly and communicative"*. Another parent was equally pleased by her impressions as a result of a visit to the school when her daughter had been in primary school. Mrs. M. considered the visits to School B were, *"useful and gave a very positive image of the school"*. She said that she felt, *"good about the teachers, the students and the overall school atmosphere."* (Informal:People) She was particularly impressed by the way the students interacted with her and the teachers, and how *"lively and confident"* they were, and how eagerly they appeared to answer her questions. She was pleased with the lessons they were invited to observe. Yet another parent (Mrs. W.) reported that she was pleased with the parent evenings and visits organised by the school. She found the teaching staff to be, *"helpful and polite."* (Informal:People)

Table 4-28 shows a summary of the marketing activities of School B. The table illustrates that informal, *ad hoc* marketing activities such as meeting parents or showing parents around the school were important activities, usually undertaken by

senior management or the Headteacher and, in response to parent demands, extra curricular activities, music and rugby had been emphasised and supported. These marketing actitivies tend to support the majority finding that schools often approach marketing as a "fire fighting" activity. Clearly the Headteacher of School B had identified a need to build a better relationship between the school and the community but there were few indications that this need had been formalised into a strategic plan. This was apparently an informal, although important requirement that had been identified. Strategic, formal approaches to marketing are characterised by budget and management planning and there was evidence that some strategic marketing was taking place although the majority of these approaches to marketing the school were restricted to the production of published material such as brochures, web sites and a newsletter.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Marketing Activities in School B **Informal Approaches**	Marketing among management duties of Head teacher. Senior managers encouraged to consider marketing. Funds allocated when needed.	Encouraged informal visits to classes. Responding to community requests (e.g. music and extra-curricular activities)		Activities in response to poor image of school. "lower the drawbridge of the fort." Head teacher and senior managers involved in meeting parents. Increased profile of Rugby at school as a direct response to parents.
Formal Approaches	No marketing department or committee. No budget available. School newsletter produced. Brochure and web site.	Regular open days.	Exam results published in newsletter	Relationships with feeder primary schools.

Table 4-28 Marketing Activities of School B

There was no dedicated marketing committee or personnel nor marketing budget available to suggest a strategic approach to marketing the school. However, there had clearly been strategic support of the traditional need to promote school processes through open days and to publish school examination results in the school newsletter and web site. Another strategic decision had been the need to build positive

relationships with primary schools who could recommend that pupils move to School B. Visits to these schools were planned and had become an important annual activity.

4.2.3 The Characteristics of the Choice Makers from School B

In the gender distribution in Table 4-29, a majority of male students are among those who responded to the questionnaire. However, the Head teacher of the school stressed there was no gender bias among the School B population according to school data.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	32	57.1
Female	24	42.9
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-29 Gender Distribution of Respondent Students

School B did not cater specifically to students with special needs and the figures in Table 4-30 were corroborated by the Head teacher of School B who commented that these results would have been a fair representation of the total figures for the school.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No response	1	1.7
Yes	3	5.4
No	52	92.9
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-30 Special Needs among Respondent Students

School B had only one affiliated feeder primary school in the area and it had not reached full capacity by the time of the study. For this reason, the feeder primary school only supplied approximately 55% of the respondent students into School B.

Primary School	Frequency	Percent
Affiliated Primary	31	55.4
Non-affiliated Primary	13	23.2
Overseas	8	14.3
Local HK	4	7.1
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-31 Primary Schools Attended by Respondent Students

The Head teacher of School B commented upon the need to attract students from a number of local international primary schools and this is reflected in the 23% of students from non-affiliated primary schools. Overseas students (those who had

attended primary school in a country other than Hong Kong made up 14% of the respondents (Table 4-32).

Language	Frequency	Percent
English	33	58.9
Cantonese	14	25.0
Other Asian	5	8.9
Other European	2	3.6
Chinese	2	3.6
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-32 Mother Tongue Data - School B

Mother Tongue use of respondents in Table 4-32 repeated a similar variation of languages shown by School A although there were a lower proportion of respondents who indicated that English was their mother tongue with just under 60% compared with over 70% in school A. Cantonese was also second in the table but with a higher proportion at 25% of the total compared to 16% in School A. These are clearly displayed in figure 4-2.
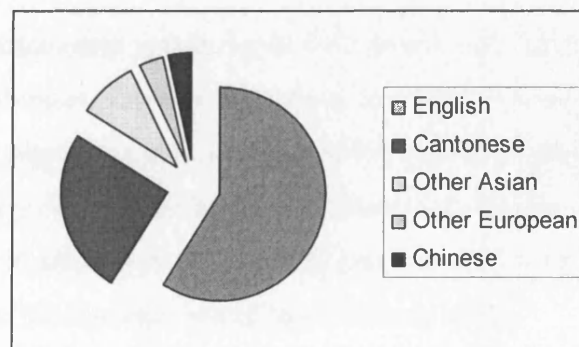
Figure 4-2 School B Mother Tongue Distribution

When ethnic origin figures of respondents are considered in Table 4-33, the data shows that more than half the students were of Chinese origin compared to approximately 33% of those in School A, although the percentage of respondents of European origin was similar to that found in School A.

Ethnic Origin	Frequency	Percent
Chinese	28	50.0
European	23	41.1
Asian	4	7.1
Indian	1	1.8
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-33 Ethnic Origin of Respondent Parents

As previously explained it is common practice for expatriate families to benefit from education allowances as part of the salary package of the salary earner(s). The data for those receiving no allowance, a partial allowance or a total allowance are shown in Table 4-34.

Allowance	Frequency	Percent
None	28	50.0
Partial	20	35.7
Whole	8	14.3
Total	56	100.0

Table 4-34 Families with an Education Allowance Paid by Employer/Company

The data reveals that approximately half the respondents received part of all of their education expenses as part of their salary package, a slightly higher figure than that found in School A (43%).

Summarising the respondent data in Table 4-35 shows that there is no significant bias in the gender distribution of School B students and that few would have special educational needs. Approximately a quarter of the students would have attended an international primary school which was *not* affiliated to the secondary school and, while the majority of students would identify English as their mother tongue language, a high proportion of the students would be of Chinese origin.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Characteristics of Choosers in School B	Majority Asian looking for School based upon England and Wales system.	High proportion of non-native English speakers indicates potential need for EAL support. Limited SEN requirements.	High proportion of Asians and elevated socio-economic groups indicate high academic expectation of school.	Most native English speakers but a large minority of Cantonese. Asian ethnic groups make up largest proportion. High socio-economic status and approximately half receiving full or partial allowance for education.

Table 4-35 Characteristics of the Chooser - School B

Approximately half of the families of the pupils attending School B would receive an education allowance of some kind in their salary package. The data indicates that this group of choosers display a number of different characteristics from those involved in School A and for this reason School B respondents might have differing motivations for making their selection .The next section presents the findings about factors deemed to be important when making a choice of secondary school.

4.2.4 Choice Factors and Sources of Information Considered Most Important by School B Respondents

The respondents were asked to select from a list, those factors they felt were most influential when deciding on which secondary school to select for their children. The respondents ranked the top three factors and the results have been consolidated into Table 4-36 which shows the most frequently selected factors ranked in the top three most important.

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Academic Education	15	26.8
Happy there	7	12.5
Teaching	5	8.9
Subject choices	4	7.1
Head Teacher	3	5.4
Atmosphere	3	5.4

Table 4-36 Frequently Chosen Most Important Factors in School B

The respondents were then asked to select which sources of information were most important when deliberating between schools. Table 4-37 shows that for more than 40% of the responses, visits to the school were deemed to be the most informative among the sources.

Source of Information	Freq.	Percent
Visits	23	41.1
Personal experience	9	16.1
Sibling	6	10.7
Friends	4	7.1
Exam results	4	7.1
Other Parents	2	3.6
Other children	2	3.6

Table 4-37 Sources of Information Rated Most Useful - School B

Other personal experiences of the school appear at the second position on the list.
Siblings, friends, other parents and other children were also identified as important
sources of information

Table 4-38 summarises the School B results for the most important factors and
sources of information when choosing a school. The Performance factor "Academic
achievement" was considered to be most important whilst child happiness (People
factor) and teaching and subjects (Process factors) were considered third most
important.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Most important choice factors School B	Some macro factors omitted due to careful school selection.	Teaching and subject choices was third important factor (<10%).	Approximately one quarter of respondents selected Academic Education as most important	Child happiness was second most important (12.5%)
Most important sources of information	Neither brochures nor web sites were selected by respondents.	School visits were identified as most important sources of information (41%).	Exam results were small proportion of important information sources	Personal experience of school (16%) and siblings (10%) were second and third most important sources of information respectively.

Table 4-38 Most important Choice Factors and Sources of Information - School B

In School B, visits to the school were considered the most important source of
information. This has been placed in the process column because the visits often
enable parents to get information related to the process of education at the school. The
People column accommodates the other sources of information deemed to be most
important by the respondents. The absence of brochures or web sites has been
included as a point of interest. The next section of this chapter looks at the data
obtained from School C.

4.3 Study School C

School C is one of several "elite" schools belonging to the Hong Kong government's
Group B category of schools and had tuition fees at the time of the study of

HK$85,500 and required that parents or companies paid a debenture of HK$90,000 (Unpublished School Document, 2001). Students were tested for English and Mathematical ability and would be required to attend interviews prior to acceptance in the school. Some 35 nationalities were represented at the school, although the largest ethnic group was Chinese.

A survey carried out for the school described the parents of the children as,

> "often high profile corporate professionals who have lived and worked in several different countries, operate in global businesses, travel extensively and have a global perspective."

(Unpublished School Document, 2001)

In many instances the parent's employers or the company they operate may fully or partially subsidize school fees. The same document described the school as having, "a large and growing percentage of local Chinese students." The school had a good academic reputation and, "high academic results are clearly the first priority of the (School C)" and that "(School C) has a long history of students achieving outstanding academic results," and, "over the years this reputation has attracted like minded parents who share this passion for academic development in their children." (Unpublished School Document, 2001) Certainly the external examination results are higher than UK schools. Table 3-39 shows A* to C GCSE exam results from 1994 to 1999 from School C against the national UK average.

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
School C	97%	95%	95%	96.5%	96.6%	95%
UK Average	53%	53%	54%	54.4%	54.7%	55.8%

(From an unpublished school document, 2001)

Table 4-39 Showing Pass Rates in School C for GCSE Examinations from 1994 to 1999

School C is actually split into two distinct streams, one offering a curriculum similar to that found in a European country and one "international" stream offering a curriculum similar to that found in England and Wales. The current survey was carried

out in the "international" stream of the school, which is co-educational and academically selective. The "international" stream which will hereon be termed the International Secondary Department (ISD) is required to offer significant curriculum resources to the teaching of the language of its partner stream and students are required to study that language. At the time of this study the school had been concerned about decreases in student numbers which were evident particularly in the secondary school (Unpublished school survey, 2001). Table 4-40 shows a rise in the international section of the school from 584 to 731 during the first half of the decade, despite the overall rise in international school students from 1995 to 1999 from 22,087 to 24,582, the numbers dropped back to 679 by the time the study was conducted (Unpublished school document, 2001).

School Year	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Student Numbers	584	603	648	707	731	729	719	709	679

(From an unpublished school document, 2001)

Table 4-40 Showing Student Numbers in School C from 1990 to 1999

4.3.1   The Nature of the Market - School C

This section presents the data related to school choice processes by School C respondents. When considering among secondary schools to send their children, respondents from School C considered local system schools in just over 13% of responses, the clear majority of 87% did not consider sending their child to a Hong Kong secondary school (Table 4-41).

Local School Considered?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	5	13.5
No	32	86.5
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-41 Was a Local School Considered Among Choices?

However, Table 4-42 shows that about 35% of respondents did consider sending their children to a secondary school overseas which suggests that overseas schools would be a potential source of direct competition with School C.

Overseas School Considered?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	35.1
No	23	62.2
No response	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-42 Did You Consider Sending Your Child Overseas?

The popularity of overseas education among the respondents is supported by the data in Table 4-43 in which approximately 92% of respondents said that they were likely or maybe likely to send their children overseas for some of their education at some stage in the future.

Overseas Education?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	24	64.9
Maybe	10	27.0
No	2	5.4
No response	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-43 Will Your Child Continue His/Her Education Overseas at Some Stage?

When involved with choices about secondary schools, respondents reported that they involved their children in almost 60% of responses whilst in the remaining 40% of responses the Parents made the sole decision about which school to send their child to (Table 4-44).

Choice makers	Frequency	Percent
Parents	15	40.5
Parent and Child	22	59.5
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-44 Choice of Secondary School

Table 4-45 reveals information regarding the number of schools that respondents considered when choosing between schools.

Number of Schools	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	5.4
1-2	21	56.8
2-3	10	27.0
3-4	3	8.1
More than 4	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-45 Number of Schools Considered in Secondary School Choice

The table shows that almost 57% of respondents made their choice of school after considering only one or two schools, whilst about 37% of respondents considered more than 2 schools during the choice process. In 87% of responses, School C was identified as the first choice school by School C respondents. This data in Table 4-46 shows that the great majority of respondents from this school gained a place in their first choice school.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	32	86.5
No	4	10.8
No response	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-46 Is Chosen School First Choice?

Table 4-47 indicates that about two thirds of School C respondent did consider that real choice did exist in the international secondary school market although almost one third felt that free choice did not exist.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	25	67.6
No	11	29.7
No response	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-47 Is there a Real Choice between International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong?

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Nature of the Market for School C	Selective on Mathematical and English language ability. Minimal competition from local schools but substantial competition from overseas institutions. Approximately two-thirds of respondents pupils likely to study overseas.	High proportion of non-native speakers seeking English as language of instruction to facilitate overseas move.	Majority of Asian and high socio-economic status indicates high academic expectations	Children were involved with choice more on more than half occasions. Almost two thirds of choosers selected from two or more schools. Substantial majority gained place in school they considered first choice. Almost one-third of respondents indicated insufficient school choice.

Table 4-48 Nature of the Market - School C

Table 4-48 summarises the findings for the market in which School C operates. School C operates in a market in which the majority of parents do not speak English but who want to send their children to a school which teaches in English. The need for English may well stem from the difficulties which returning emigrant Chinese have with local schools and weaker language skills but, just as likely is the need for these pupils to prepare to return overseas at some point in their education. Despite the majority of parents being ethnic Chinese and a large proportion of non-native English speakers, School C tends to experience little competition from local secondary schools but a greater threat appears to come from overseas schools.

The high socio-economic status of the market and the high education status of the majority within this market would also suggest that there would be high expectation placed upon good academic performance and examination results. The selective nature of School C would indicate that it would be well placed to satisfy this market requirement. There were indications from the respondents from this school that there was a high degree of competition from other schools although the majority of respondents showed that School C had ultimately been their first choice school. Despite this, the largest proportion of respondents indicated that there were insufficient choices available in the international secondary school market. In the next section marketing responses by School C are presented.

4.3.2 The Marketing Responses of School C

The Head of the International section of School C was interviewed to gain further information regarding the marketing activities of the school and in particular those activities which related most closely to the international section of the school. The interview data quoted here has been coded from the conceptual matrix framework presented in table 2-8. The existence of a marketing budget was explored and it was revealed that there was no formal budget set aside for marketing activities although, it was reported that money was often found for specific requests, although it was,

> "Not a substantial amount and it is not formally available for marketing. Some money has been made available for certain projects such as brochures, promotional material etc."
> (Formal:Product)

Of the three international schools in this study, School C was the only one with a committee dedicated to aspects of marketing. This public relations committee had existed for a number of years and was traditionally composed of volunteer parents and chaired by a member of the school's governing body. The sole function of this committee had been limited to the production of a bilingual (English and German), quarterly newsletter which was sent to all families connected with the school. The newsletter was a glossy, professional production which covered expenses incurred from printing and distribution by earning advertising revenue. The publication normally broke-even. According to the Head of the International Section,

> "Apart from the task of producing the newsletter, the role of the
> PR committee is confused and there is no shared interpretation of
> the tasks which the PR committee is involved in. There is also the
> added complication of having two distinct streams and the
> different needs of each stream." (Formal:Product)

Most recently, the activities of the PR committee had come under some scrutiny and they had been set the task of revamping the school brochure. At the same time, two members of the school teaching staff had been given time allowances to sit on the committee and offer advice on the content of the brochure.

Apart from the PR committee there was no other official group with responsibility for marketing in School C. The main marketing activity, apart from the production of brochures and the newsletter had been the recent initiative to hold an annual open day and,

> "The event was expanded to promote the school to the parents of
> students attending other primary schools and was publicised by
> sending invitations to the parents." (Formal:Product/Process)

It was the main opportunity for teaching staff to be involved with marketing the school,

> "staff are not really seen to be involved in marketing activities
> apart from the 'open day' in which staff put on activities that are
> meant to promote what the school offers." (Informal:Product)

As a response to the down turn in numbers due to the Asian economic crisis soon after 1997, the school expanded upon its 'open day' to include more primary schools. It was explained that as an additional promotional tool, visits to international primary schools were also organized where she spoke to the parents of primary school children. Such visits were not guaranteed to be successful however, and she recalled that one of those visits was considered to be less than useful because of a personal "*grudge*" by the Head teacher of the school being visited.

> *"She had been a teacher at (School C) but had left on less than positive terms. The visit to her school had proved 'difficult'."*
> (Informal:People)

This experience does highlight the important role that primary school teachers and managers may play in directing parent choice of secondary schools and also highlights the need for internal marketing and the maintenance of good relationships with employees! The advantage of a positive relationship with primary schools was highlighted in another incident. A parent had been invited along to a primary school to give a personal view of School C and the experience of her two sons in the school. Fortunately for the school, the woman's eldest son had recently been accepted into a prestigious University and she had been able to present the school in a very positive light. The talk had resulted in a significant increase in applications from parents of students who attended that primary school and filled almost half the Year 7 vacancies for that year. The value of personal testimonials by parents would seem to be a valuable promotional strategy.

It was the view of the Head of the international section of School C that there existed a general misconception that School C was the, "snobby school on the Peak". She described the feeling that the European nature of the school was seen by some to be a problem when trying to recruit Chinese students and said,

> *"Many parents were even surprised to find-out that an international stream existed in the school at all. Therefore the aim of any publicity or promotional activities had been directed at trying to change the image of the school by promoting the International Stream and letting people know that a large section of the school was taught in English and that we also offered*

Mandarin as an alternative foreign language (a popular feature
for Cantonese speakers). " (Formal:Process/People)

The Head of the International section of School C had a clear view of a niche market for the school. She saw the school's strength in English language use was vital to this market positioning. However, she highlighted problems associated with migration of European students away from the International section of the school.

"The Board was most anxious about the lower proportion of
Europeans and native English speakers in the student community.
A number of parents had also commented on the increase in the
number of Chinese students. " (Formal:Product)

The high percentage of Chinese students was leading to the perception that the use of English language among students was decreasing and that cultural difficulties might be felt by native English speakers joining the school. The effect of this was that fewer native English speakers were enrolling in the school and there had been an increase in the number of native English speakers leaving the school.

"The fears of a number of parents of European children were that
their children would be exposed to too much Cantonese, or feel
isolated if the number of English speaking students dwindled. "
(Informal:Process/People)

The low percentage of native English speakers in the school were also causing concern among some Chinese parents who felt that their non-native English speaking children would not benefit particularly from attendance at the school. They therefore tended to identify schools with a higher proportion of native English speakers as a preferable choice in terms of the potential benefits to the English language development of their children. As the data from the survey shows, local Chinese made up an increasingly large proportion of the intake at Yr. 7 and she was very complimentary about their work ethic and ability to do well in examinations, including English language examinations. However, as a way of redressing the ethnic balance of the school by increasing the number of, as she put it, *"blue eyed blondes"* in the school, she was quite prepared to offer increased Math support for Europeans who would otherwise have been refused a place because they failed the Math entrance examination.

Overall, numbers in the international stream of the school had been stagnant or were showing slight falls in some year groups and as a response to the falling numbers of students in 1998, School C had actively sought the attention of the media to try to alter perceptions of the school. Although some success was noted with an initial foray into this strategy, subsequent interaction with the media proved to be much less positive. For example a recent press release outlining the success of two students in a national search for outstanding young people, drew a good deal of interest from the media but the head of the international section felt, *"the school was unprepared to respond adequately to the interest shown by the press."* On a personal level she was not happy courting media attention and complained that the time and energy hosting media visits had rarely resulted in any positive feedback for the school. She supported the plan to hire a PR specialist who would have the experience, expertise and time, to interact with the media more effectively.

Of the three study schools, none of them had routinely used formal or structured data gathering methods. However, School C had recently undertaken a large market research project, conducted by the school board, in response to lower than expected student enrolment during the previous year. This school had also recently started to gather information in the form of an exit poll in order to explain a drop in student numbers. School C had engaged in marketing to the same degree until much more recently in the life of the school. It had, until the past few years, enjoyed good success based upon it's reputation as an academic school, however, gaps were starting to emerge in some areas of the school population and a general awareness of concern was evident in the actions of the schools governing body, who, during the time this study was undertaken, recruited a marketing agency to undertake a market research of the school community. School C had more recently begun to adopt activities which could be described as marketing in nature, despite the absence of a strategic marketing plan. Some of these activities had been instigated relatively recently, within the past three to five years. There had been a growing acceptance of the need to target other primary schools to fill a growing shortfall in the numbers of students moving up from the primary section of the school. The introduction of an open day was another recent marketing innovation. There were certain concerns about the image that the school was portraying and the sense that European students were looking elsewhere for a

school because of the increasing numbers of Cantonese speakers into the school. One such case can be highlighted as a result of an interview with a respondent from the school.

Their family had been associated with the school for a long time and all four children had been educated there. The eldest daughter had been with the school from primary age up to the sixth form and two further daughters attended secondary section and a younger brother had recently joined the secondary section from the primary department. This family's involvement with the school even extended to the Father's participation on the school Board. It was the withdrawal of the two middle daughters from the school that highlighted a problem to the other school Board members. Their initial decision to send their children to School C was, *"influenced by the school's strong reputation with languages."* Mrs. S. had attended school in Wales, *"and felt that I'd benefited from learning a second language from an early age. So we sent all the children to the school to learn German."* She had been pleased with their decision and was complementary about the role played by the school in improving her children's German language skills. Unfortunately, she noted,

> *"the number of students attending the most senior classes of the school were small and we felt that our older girls would be denied some of the sporting and community opportunities that a larger school could offer."* (People)

Mrs. S. also cited the cultural imbalance of the school as being a reason to move her family to a different school. Mrs. S. expanded on her concerns regarding the ethnic make-up of the school. She said that,

> *"we had concerns about Chinese parents' ideas of parenting and that they rarely coincided with our own expectations. They (Chinese parents) were either too strict and wouldn't let their daughters play after school, or were too busy and left their children do what ever they wanted under the supervision of Domestic Helpers."* (People)

Mrs. S. felt that there were more Europeans at the other schools and that there would be more opportunity to find like-minded parents. As a result of her concerns she moved her children to School A. This example supports the phenomena observed in

France by Broccolichi and van Zanten (2000) in their analysis of pupil flight in which they concluded that it led to, "an inexorable deepening of segregation". Here is clear evidence that the process of school selection can result in the isolation of some schools or lead to schools developing a reputation for having a particular group of students as typical of its population. In this case the presence of a large proportion of ethnic Chinese students using Cantonese to communicate at school and the cultural differences associated with parenting, led to flight by European and native English speakers to other international schools. However, the Head teacher of School C was very positive about the large numbers of Chinese students in the school.

Each Head of school had been asked about the production of their school brochures and each indicated that their school brochures were currently under-revision. In School C an effort to promote the cooperation between the two "streams" in early brochures had always included details of both sections of the school in one publication. However,

> *"there had been a feeling that the international nature of the*
> *International stream was not emphasized sufficiently and so a*
> *separate brochure was created for the International section of the*
> *school in 1995 as a response to parents frequently asked*
> *questions.* " (Formal:Product/Process)

More recently another new brochure was being produced by the PR committee and Senior Management Team which once again was designed to represent the whole school.

For the first time, a publishing and design company were involved in the creation of this new publication on a consultative basis, with a view to update the appearance and content of the brochure. The school web site had originally been produced by a teacher on a voluntary basis as an in-house project with a view to individual subject departments producing the content of the web site. However, few of the school departments had created any content and it was decided most recently to employ an outside company to create a new web site to provide, *"greater impact as a promotional tool."* Table 4-49 summarises the marketing activities of School C.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Marketing Activities of School C **Informal Activities**	Funds available for short-term projects. Market research project in response to low enrolment Web site created by staff member	Promotion of International section of school	Opportunity for media promotion of academic success.	Promotion to change community perceptions of "snobby school on the Peak".
Formal Activities	No marketing budget. Dedicated PR committee. Brochure. Newsletter. Selective	Open days. English as medium of instruction	Publication of exam results in newsletter.	Links with primary schools. Primary school visits.

Table 4-49 Marketing Activities by School C

Formal, strategic marketing activities were indicated by the presence of a PR committee and the publication of the newsletter and school brochure. There was also a clear and planned strategic decision made to maintain an academic selective process for all applicants to the school. Planned, regular "Open days" and the decision to offer English as the medium of instruction were also strategic decisions. Likewise, regular visits to primary schools were also strategic, formally planned marketing activities. Like many schools, School C also published exam results and academic performance in a newsletter and on the school website. Informal marketing activities were also in evidence. For example, a decision to undertake a market research project was a response to disappointing recruitment and there was a recognition that the international section of the school required promotion and the need to alter perceptions of the school among the community. Opportunities to promote academic excellence were also undertaken on an *ad hoc* and opportunistic basis.

4.3.3 The Characteristics of the Choice Makers from School C

There was no statistical significance in the gender distribution of respondent students in School C (Table 4-50).

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	17	45.9
Female	20	54.1
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-50 Gender Distribution of Respondent Students

Table 4-51 reveals that a great majority of respondents had no special educational needs. It should be remembered that School C was the only school with a selection policy.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	5.4
No	35	94.6
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-51 Respondent Students with Special Educational Needs

School C was the only one of the three study schools to have had a primary section as part of the same campus. The primary section of the school could provide about 66% of the secondary school Y7 cohort although as Table 4-52 illustrates, in this study approximately half the respondents had graduated into the secondary school from the affiliated primary section of the school with another 40% coming from non-affiliated primary schools. About 9% of the School C respondent students came from primary schools affiliated to the other two study schools.

Primary School	Frequency	Percent
Affiliated Primary	19	51.4
Non-affiliated Primary	14	37.8
Local HK	3	8.1
Overseas	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-52 Respondent Students Primary Schools by School

English was identified as the mother tongue language by just fewer than half the respondents whilst Cantonese was used as mother tongue by almost one third of the respondent families.

Language	Frequency	Percent
English	18	48.6
Cantonese	12	32.4
Other European	3	8.1
Chinese	4	10.8
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-53 Mother Tongue of Respondent Students by School

Figure 4-3 shows this data as a chart. Table 4-54 illustrates the root of a changing ethnic make-up of its students. In an interview with the Head of School C, it was stated that, "The school management had been concerned about the ethnic balance of the school for a number of years". The ethnic distribution shown in the table illustrates clearly the change in the nature of the students attending the school, which had been set up originally to cater to the needs of European expatriates.
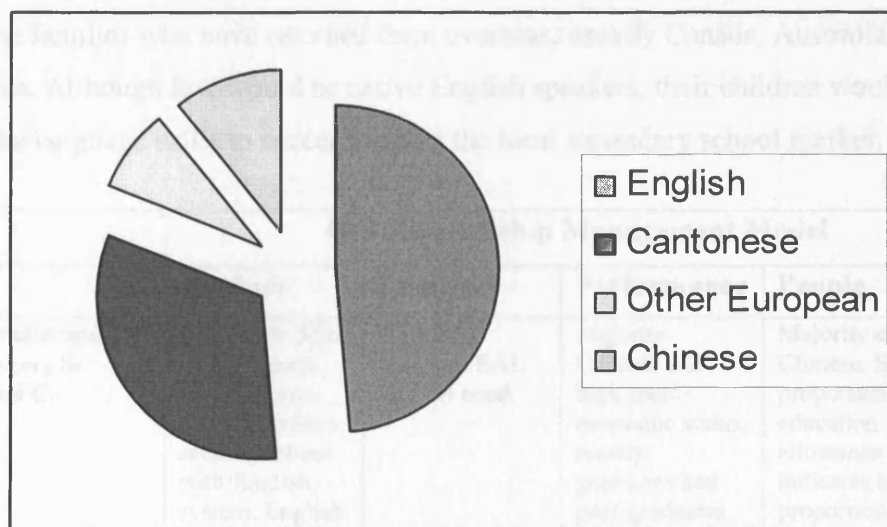
Figure 4-3 School C Mother Tongue Distribution

The high numbers of Chinese students had brought both benefits and challenges to the school and these are explored in greater detail in a later chapter.

Ethnic Origin	Frequency	Percent
Chinese	26	70.3
European	7	18.9
N. American	2	5.4
Indian	1	2.7
No Response	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-54 Ethnic Origin of Respondent Parents

Table 4-55 shows that more than 70% of the respondents had no education allowance as part of their family income. Expatriate families would normally expect to receive such a benefit as part of their income package.

Allowance	Frequency	Percent
None	26	70.3
Partial	6	16.2
Whole	4	10.8
No Response	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Table 4-55 Families with an Education Allowance Paid by Employer/Company by School

Table 4-56 summarises the characteristics of the choice makers from School C. The data indicates that this group tend not to be British expatriates but are most likely Chinese families who have returned from overseas, usually Canada, Australia or America. Although few would be native English speakers, their children would not have the language skills to succeed within the local secondary school market.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Characteristics of Choosers in School C	Negligible SEN requirements. Majority non-native speakers seeking school with English system. English as instruction to facilitate overseas move.	High EAL indicates EAL support need.	Majority Chinese and high socio-economic status, mostly graduates and post-graduates with high expectations of academic performance.	Majority ethnic Chinese. Smallest proportion with education allowance indicates high proportion of local based families. Under half with English as mother tongue

Table 4-56 Characteristics of Choosers - School C

They tend to form a well educated and affluent group who bring high expectations of academic excellence and an expectation that their children would move on to overseas universities, although the growth in the university sector within Hong Kong could offer an alternative. The desire for English as the medium for instruction would be strong and so might the need for support from EAL specialists.

4.3.4 Choice Factors and Sources of Information Considered Most Important by School C Respondents

In this section School C respondents indicated which factors were most important when choosing a secondary school for their child and also which sources of information about the schools were considered most important.

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Academic Education	18	48.6
Happy there	3	8.1
Caring Approach	2	5.4
Teaching	2	5.4

Table 4-57 Frequently Chosen Most Important Factors in School C

The top ranked important factors have been displayed in Table 4-57 and a clear majority of almost 49% of respondents indicated that the academic education was the most important factor in their choice of school for their child. The range of factors identified as important were smallest in School C respondents but the happiness of the children, the caring approach of the school and the teachers in the school ranked as among the most important factors. Sources of information about the school were also selected and ranked by the respondents and Table 4-58 show the results.

Source of Information	Frequency	Percent
Personal experience	6	16.2
Exam results	5	13.5
Other Parents	4	10.8
Visits to school	4	10.8
Sibling	4	10.8
Friends	3	8.1
Other children	3	8.1

Table 4-58 Most Important Sources of Information.

While personal experience was considered to be an important source of information by the majority of respondents the exam results were unusually high among the sources rated highly by the survey respondents from School C. The table does reveal the important role played by visits to schools and the so called "grapevine."

Table 4-59 summarises the most important choice factors and sources of information identified by respondents of School C. The Product factors were selected out through careful study school selection. Academic performance was selected by a very large majority of respondents and this indicates support for the academically selective nature of this school. The importance of published examination results as an important source of information also supported the apparent importance of academic achievement among respondents from School C. However, People factors were also deemed important, especially as sources of information, either from personal experience of the school, or through visits and other parents. Clearly a child's

happiness was still an important choice factor despite the emphasis placed upon academic achievement.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Most Important Choice factors for School C respondents	*Factored out by study school selection*	Caring approach and Teachers (both approx. 5%)	Academic performance the overwhelming most important factor. (Approx. 50%)	Child happiness second most important (<10%)
Most important sources of information for School C respondents		Visits to school (Approx. 10%)	Exam results were second most important (Approx. 14%)	Personal experiences of the school were most important (16%). Other parents were selected as third most important (Approx 10%). Siblings (Approx. 10%)

Table 4-59 Most Important Choice Factors and Sources of Information

In the next chapter the results are discussed and a cross school analysis is presented. The questionnaire data is supported by telephone interviews with respondents. The first part of the chapter looks at the nature of the market, the next examines the school choice processes and finally choice factors and information sources are considered.

5 A Cross School Analysis of the Data

By using questionnaires and interviews, data was gathered from the three study schools to provide a clearer view of the international secondary school market in Hong Kong, the patterns of school choice and the ways in which these schools had responded to the market. The data has been summarised using a conceptual framework matrix derived from the major marketing research themes and a model for an approach to marketing based upon the formation and maintenance of long-term relationships. Interview data referred to in this section has been coded according to the conceptual matrix framework described on page 76. The relationship management model (Barnes, 2001) emphasises four aspects of an organisation. Firstly, the product, the essence of what is offered to customers or clients; secondly, the processes involved in the delivery of the product; thirdly, performance, a measure of how successful the organisation has been with the product and its delivery; and finally, people, the nature of the relationships the organisation formed with its clients. The 4Ps model integrates other important aspects of the marketing rhetoric such as place and price (James and Phillips, 1995) into the areas described above. This chapter uses the matrix framework to enable a cross comparative analysis of the data collected from the three study schools. The application of this conceptual framework, facilitates the categorisation of the emerging themes.

The first section looks at the characteristics of the market by analysing the levels of competition by looking at the perceived levels of choice available to respondent families and the pupils attending the international secondary schools. The next section analyses the data regarding the formal and informal marketing activities undertaken by each of the schools. The third section analyses the characteristics of those engaged in the school choice process and then finally, the cross school analysis looks at choice factors and the sources of information deemed most important by the study school respondents.

5.1 The Nature of the Market

International schools were set-up in Hong Kong as a result of the need to educate expatriate British children and School A was among the first of these. School B is among the newest additions to the same group of schools. School C was originally created to cater to a very small group of German speaking expatriates but expanded to

accept other expatriate groups through the creation of an International section. The expansion in the numbers of international schools plus the uncertain nature of the economic and political stability of Hong Kong prior to the study had led tocompetition between international schools.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
The Nature of the School A Market	Large majority of pupils graduate from affiliated primary schools. Indicate early school choices. Majority favour international school over local school. Competition from overseas schools. Pupils likely to go overseas for part of their education.	High proportion with English as mother tongue seeking English as language of instruction. Selection based upon need for continuity as children return to schools in other countries.	Majority of parents graduates and post-graduates with high expectations of performance.	Choice mainly restricted to one or two schools. Majority considering School A as first choice obtained a place. Majority indicated that choice was available. Children involved in choice in half cases.
The Nature of the School B Market	Substantial proportion from non-affiliated primary school. Notable level of competition from local secondary schools and overseas schools. Large majority predict move overseas.	A high proportion of EAL requirements possibly to support need for overseas moves in future.	High educational attainment and socio-economic status of choosers indicate high academic expectations.	High proportion choosing between 2 or 3 alternatives. A higher proportion of choosers indicating failure to obtain place in first choice school. Large majority indicate that choice exists in the market but notable level of child participation in school choice.
Nature of the School C Market	Selective on Mathematical and English language ability. Minimal competition from local schools but substantial competition from overseas institutions. Approximately two-thirds of respondent pupils likely to study overseas.	High proportion of non-native speakers seeking English as language of instruction to facilitate overseas move.	Majority of Asian and high socio-economic status indicates high academic expectations.	Almost two thirds of choosers selected from two or more schools. Substantial majority gained place in school they considered first choice. Almost one-third of respondents indicated insufficient school choice. Children were involved with choice more on more than half occasions.

Table 5-1 The Nature of the Market for the Study Schools in the Conceptual Framework Matrix

It was considered to be important that an accurate picture of levels of competition and other characteristics of the nature of the market should be obtained. Table 5-1 has been produced by accumulating individual study school findings into one table for analysis and effectively shows a summary of the market characteristics for each of the study schools. For this cross-case analysis, the results will be analysed in the order in which the column headings appear in the table.

Product analysis reveals that competition could come from several alternative "products" and levels of competition for the schools were explored firstly by ascertaining the degree to which local system secondary schools were considered during respondents' choice process, whether or not overseas schools were considered, which primary schools were attended and how many other international schools were considered before a final choice was made. Table 5-1 indicates that School A had the lowest proportion of respondents considering a local system secondary school among their choices whilst School B had the highest proportion (nearly 20%). School C respondents also indicated lower numbers of responses when considering local system schools. School B encountered the most competition from this sector whilst School A faced the lowest levels of competition from that source. Data regarding ethnic origin and mother tongue language explains that the predominantly white European respondents from School A would be unlikely to include local system schools into their choices because of language difficulties, whilst the high proportion of returning emigrants who make up School C respondents also face difficulties assimilating into the local educational system. Table 5-2 shows that approximately 13% of the whole population of respondents included local secondary schools among their choices whilst 87% did not.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	155	86.6
Yes	24	13.4
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-2 Was a Local School Considered Among Choices?

This finding supports the view that as more Chinese have become involved in the international school market it is likely that a share of these will consider local

secondary schools among their choices thus increasing levels of competition with international schools.

Many respondents considering international schools have the option of sending their children to overseas boarding schools and so another potential source of competition from alternative school products was identified as coming from overseas schools. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had considered overseas secondary schools among their choices. Overall, the data showed that the vast majority of respondents would not consider an overseas school during their school choice process; however, table 5-3 reveals that 34% of respondents from the three study schools did consider sending their child to a school in a country other than Hong Kong.

Overseas School Considered	Frequency	Percent
No	117	65.4
Yes	61	34.1
No Response	1	.6
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-3 Did You Consider Sending Your Child Overseas?

The results for individual schools were consistently around one third for each of the study schools with School A the lowest with 30% and School B the highest with almost 40%. This finding demonstrates that international schools in Hong Kong do face considerable competition from overseas schools and there are a number of international education shows in which schools from the UK, the U.S. and Australia promote themselves as alternatives to Hong Kong schools. It is likely that the political and economic stability of the region can play a part in whether or not parents choose to send their child to an overseas secondary school. The lower figures obtained from School A once again highlighted the relative strength of the school within the market.

Respondents were asked if they thought their children were likely to spend some of their education abroad or not. This question was based upon the assumption that expatriates would most likely predict that their children would spend at least some of their education away from Hong Kong, but this question was included as a way of seeing if the increasingly ethnically Chinese market were using the international school system as a stepping stone towards allowing their children to go overseas to

further or complete their education. The highest proportion of parents indicating that they would most likely send, or consider sending, their child overseas was found in School A with almost 98%. The lowest proportion of respondents who said they may send their child overseas for part of their education was in School C with 82%.

The results for the whole population showed that the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated they would send their children overseas for at least part of their education. The data in Table 5-4 indicates that nearly 96% of the respondents would either definitely, or would be likely to, consider sending their child to an overseas institution for part of their education.

Overseas Education?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	128	71.5
Maybe	43	24.0
No	6	3.4
No Response	2	1.1
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-4 Parents Considering Overseas Schools/Colleges for Part of their Childs Future Education

This statistic will largely manifest itself in the number of students who leave Hong Kong to study in Colleges or Universities in other countries. Expatriates would most usually expect to eventually return to their homeland at some point during their children's school life or expect older children to attend University overseas. Attending college or university at an overseas institution is far from unusual among wealthier Hong Kong residents and attending an international secondary school would increase the opportunity for placement in overseas universities. For this reason an increasing number of local Hong Kong Chinese may consider this as a legitimate reason for selecting from within the international section of the market.

These results reflect the findings that the school with the highest proportion of ethnic Chinese would be least likely to look overseas for part of their child's education. A recent expansion in the University sector in Hong Kong could explain this. However, for a number of Chinese families, especially those who had returned from overseas, they were likely to re-emigrate and felt it was important to maintain an international

education for their children. Mrs. M. (School B) was ethnically Chinese but had lived in London before returning to Hong Kong. The family initially made the choice to expose their daughter to her mother tongue and therefore she was placed in a Cantonese speaking primary school. This was at the outset felt to be successful, but more recently her family was, *"making plans to return to the United Kingdom and so we made the decision to switch to an International school as preparation for that."*

The next set of data showed where the respondent students had attended primary school before joining their respective secondary school. This data had been obtained to gauge the degree to which parents were switching from the local system to the international schools and to see if affiliated primary schools were main sources of pupils. Overall figures for the whole of the respondent population (Table 5-5) confirm that by far the largest proportion of students (approximately 65%) of the respondents from the Year 7 cohort of the international secondary schools came from affiliated primary schools, with only 6% from local system primary schools. About 20% of respondent students came from non-affiliated international primary schools. Almost 8% of the respondent students had attended primary school in a country other than Hong Kong. Data for the study schools indicated that School A was able to gain the highest proportion (72%) of its Y7 intake from affiliated primary feeders whilst School B and School C obtained about 55% and 51% respectively. The importance of forming relationships with non-affiliated feeder primary schools was greater for Schools' B and C, whilst for School A it would be less critical.

Primary School	Frequency	Percent
Affliated Primary Schools	116	64.8
Other International	37	20.7
Overseas	14	7.8
Local HK	11	6.1
No Response	1	.6
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-5 Primary Schools Attended by Respondent Students

This analysis of the data which relates to the 'product' heading in the matrix paints a picture of a wide variety of groups active within a market displaying characteristics of competition originating from a number of sources. It also reveals that one of the study schools has been able to maintain a position of strength within this market by

maintaining higher proportions of its traditional market segment, relying upon a consistent supply of pupils from affiliated feeder primary schools, and being able to minimise competition from other sources more successfully than the other schools in the study.

An interesting picture also emerges when moving to the 'process' column of the matrix. The indication that School A maintained the highest proportion of the traditional expatriate clientele suggests that this group, who would have a clear view of the need to return to their country of origin, would be looking to School A to provide *continuity* in education processes such as language of instruction and curriculum and assessment so as to facilitate easy integration back into their home system. However, the differing nature of the clientele selecting the other study schools would be less likely to follow such a well defined path because of their different backgrounds. In other words, these groups would be looking for a school that could provide a *compromise* international school process which would allow future integration into *roughly* similar schools overseas, those using English as the language of instruction for example. They might also select international schools in Hong Kong that offered internationally recognised curricula or examinations so that their children could successfully gain places in overseas schools not necessarily based upon the same system as the international schools in Hong Kong. The analysis reveals that the various groups of choosers active in the market would have widely different motives for taking up places in the study schools. The necessity for parents to select schools which support their need to move abroad also influences their requirement for schools to pay attention to 'performance' issues. The desire for quality schools which can enhance future applications for overseas schools and the cultural and socio-economic indicators which identify the respondents as choosers who place great importance upon academic success both place enormous emphasis on the performance of the study schools. The final aspect of the analysis of the nature of the market data focuses more fully upon the 'people' aspects of the educational market and the role and perceptions of those actively involved in making choices between the study schools.

Smedley (1995) claimed that parents will exercise choice when choice is available and the first part of this section of the analysis explored respondent perceptions of the degrees of choice that were present in the Hong Kong international school market and

looked at their choice activities. Although School A and School B operated in zoned

areas and could only admit students from their specific area, choice makers within

those zones could choose to send their children to schools outside of those zones if

they wished. As a way of assessing levels of choice, respondents were asked to

indicate how many different schools were considered during the choice process.

Table 5-6 shows the overall data and the vast majority (65%) of respondent parents

made their choice after considering just one or two schools. 24% of respondent

considered two or three schools whilst only 7% considered three or more international

schools.

Number of Schools Considered	Frequency	Percent
1-2	117	65.4
2-3	43	24.0
3-4	9	5.0
More than 4	3	1.7
No Response	7	3.9
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-6 Number of Schools Considered in International Secondary School Choice

Cross-case analysis of the study schools reveals that whilst 75% of respondents from

School A chose from one or two alternatives, School B and School C had the lowest

proportion of respondents who included one or two schools in their choices with 57%

each. Although no statistically significant difference between schools was shown with

a chi-squared test at the 0.95 confidence level, the data suggested that schools B and C

faced a higher degree of competition than school A because parents were typically

including a higher number of schools in their choices. This supports the results of the

earlier analysis of parents considering different types of school product. But apart

from

The next group of data looked at respondents being able to obtain places in their

preferred school. The question was asked to shed some light on the nature of the

international secondary school market in Hong Kong and whether or not it was

difficult to obtain a place in a first choice institution. Respondents from School A

reported the highest number obtaining a place in their first choice international school.

School B respondents showed that only 84% had gained a place in their first choice

school which does suggest that obtaining a place in a secondary international school is

not always easy. If competition to obtain an international school place was great, then we might expect to see a number of disappointed parents, unable to secure a place for their children in the school of first choice, however, almost 90% did secure a place in the school of first choice (Table 5-7). We might also expect to see that higher proportions of respondents who have had to settle for a school other than their first choice would indicate that they could not get into the school of first choice. In fact Schools B and School C do show higher proportions of respondents not obtaining a place in their first choice school (16% and 11% respectively) and School A showing the lowest proportion (4%). These figures suggest that the Hong Kong international schools are seeing some competition but School A appears to be first choice among the majority of respondents.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	160	89.4
No	16	8.9
No Response	3	1.7
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-7 Was Chosen International Secondary School Your First Choice?

Interviews with the head teachers of each school revealed that the schools A and B were full and plans to expand the size of school B were to be started the year following this study. School C was full in parts of the lower secondary section but still had some places in Year 12 and 13. One head teacher had indicated that all international schools were full and that one of Hong Kong's largest international schools could no longer guarantee places for debenture holders at the school.

In a further exploration about the degree of competition which existed in the international school market, the parents were asked to give their opinion as to how much real choice there existed in Hong Kong when choosing an international secondary school for their children (Table 5-8). About 70% of respondents felt that they had a real choice among international secondary schools whilst 26% indicated that they felt they had little or no real choice. The respondents who indicated that they had little or no choice were asked to give reasons why they felt this was the case. Those who gave reasons reported that the restricted choice was due to the zoning policy employed by two of the study schools.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	126	70.4
No	47	26.3
No Response	6	3.4
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-8 Is there a Real Choice between International Secondary Schools in Hong Kong?

The data for each of the schools in the study showed little variation; with around 70% of respondents from each school indicating that they felt they were able to exercise real choice between international secondary schools Hong Kong.

Reay and Ball (1998) showed differences in the patterns of parental involvement for working class and middle class parents in the UK. Working class parents tended to support the child's choice whilst middle class parents appeared to yield more influence. The questionnaire included an item which obtained data on who was included in the choice making process. School B showed the highest percentage of respondents indicating that they chose their international secondary school in cooperation with their child (66%) but there were no statistically significant differences in a chi-squared test at the 0.95 confidence level. One interview with a parent demonstrated a high degree of democracy and child involvement. Mrs. W. (School B) chose between 3 schools. She had heard that two of the schools had excellent academic records but her daughter was especially keen to join the third option because her friends would be there. Mrs. W said,

"Although I was a bit disappointed by my daughter's choice, I felt that she would get a good education from that school and agreed to send her there". (Product/Process)

Table 5-9 contains the results for the whole population of respondents. The results from the survey show that secondary school choice usually involved parents with their children and that School A had the lowest proportion indicating pupil involvement. The study of the 'people' aspects of the international school market hint at a situation in which free choice is the perception of the majority of choice-makers and that School A once again showing indications of holding a strong position within the market by appearing to be first choice among a large number of respondents with fewer schools considered as an alternative. However, School C also emerges as a first

choice among those successfully obtaining a place in the school, which implies that this school might be successfully targeting a niche segment of the market.

Involved	Frequency	Percent
Parent and Child	101	56.4
Parents	76	42.5
Child only	1	.6
No response	1	.6
Total	179	100.0

Table 5-9 Individuals Involved in Choice of International Secondary School

This section of the chapter has reported upon the nature of choice and competition within the Hong Kong international school market, a market in which the vast majority of respondents indicated that a satisfactory degree of choice among the international schools existed. If satisfactory levels of choice between schools is observed, then it follows that a degree of competition is likely to exist between the international schools operating in Hong Kong, a level of competition which would likely increase as numbers of viable clients decreased. The data suggests that School A commanded the most secure position among the study schools. This was indicated by the lower impact of local or overseas alternatives considered by the respondents. This observation was also supported by the data which showed fewer alternatives being considered by parents during the choice process and the fact that the highest proportion of respondents from that school indicated that they had obtained a place in their first choice school. Where respondents showed that they had not obtained a place in their first choice school it indicated that the school they had obtained a place at, was not their first choice! School A was also most frequently the first choice of parent choosers as opposed to the schools which were more popular among combined parent and pupil choosers. This may be explained by the influence of reputation on parent choice makers. Now that a clearer view of the market begins to emerge, the next section looks at the ways that schools respond to the market through their marketing activities.

5.2 School Responses to the Market

The matrix framework for marketing activities has been used to summarise the approaches of each of the study schools (Table 5-10).

4P's Relationship Management Model					
		Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
The marketing activities of School A	Informal Approaches	Largely seen as senior management responsibility. Not a strategic approach but clearly aware of need for and importance of marketing. Extensive informal knowledge of the local market. "In house" production of school web site.	Emphasis on music department and search for "right teacher". Emphasis on academic courses rather than vocational.	Not selective but promoted academic success through activities such as Math Olympics and aware of need for a solid academic reputation. Academic success promoted in media.	Emphasis on forming relationships esp. with ethnic groups, e.g. Japanese, Korean, Chinese. Good relationship with media. Open approach. Sense environment to monitor community requirements. Internal marketing recruits high proportion of staff children.
	Formal Approaches	No budget set aside, no marketing personnel. No formal market research. School newsletter. Brochures	Creation of courses such as Mandarin and English support programs. Formal but not extensive SEN support. Open days		
Marketing Activities in School B	Informal Approaches	Marketing among management duties of Head teacher. Senior managers encouraged to consider marketing. Funds allocated when needed. In house production of web site.	Encouraged informal visits to classes. Responding to community requests (e.g. music and extra-curricular activities)	Academic achievement through parent visits to school.	Activities in response to poor image of school. Head teacher and senior managers involved in meeting parents. Increased profile of Rugby at school as a direct response to parents.
	Formal Approaches	No marketing department or committee. No budget available. School newsletter produced. Brochure and web site.	Regular open days.	Exam results published in newsletter	Relationships with feeder primary schools.
Marketing Activities of School C	Informal Activities	Funds available for short-term projects. Market research project in response to low enrolment Web site created by staff member	Promotion of International section of school	Opportunity for media promotion of academic success.	Promotion to change community perceptions of "snobby school on the Peak".
	Formal Activities	No marketing budget. Dedicated PR committee. Brochure. Newsletter. Academically selective	Open days. English as medium of instruction	Publication of exam results in newsletter.	Links with primary schools. Primary school visits.

Table 5-10 Summary of the Marketing Activities of the Study Schools

The marketing activities are divided into the two approaches, formal and informal.

The formal activities are those activities characteristic of a strategic approach to

marketing whilst the informal activities are characteristic of a more ad hoc, add-on approach. This cross school analysis of the marketing activities of the schools looks firstly at the formal, strategic marketing activities and secondly at the informal ad hoc activities.

5.2.1 Formal Marketing in the Study Schools

Product marketing can be effectively achieved through formal, planned approaches, otherwise known as strategic marketing. There was little evidence of strategic marketing approaches, which, according to Foskett (1998), would be fully integrated into the management of the school and might include a marketing budget, marketing personnel, marketing training and evaluation of marketing activities. The study schools had no planned marketing approaches, regular market research, specialist personnel, budgets, training or evaluation of marketing activities within any of the schools. In some aspects of its approach, School C demonstrated the most formal marketing approach among the study schools, evidenced by the existence of a PR committee. The impact of this committee upon the marketing of the school appeared to be diminished, however, due to a poorly defined role. Despite the absence of strategic approaches to marketing there were indications of several formal marketing activities. Formal process marketing was evidenced by each school in their responses to market requirements for particular language courses such as the inclusion of Mandarin in the curriculum. Formal process marketing was also evident by the scheduling of regular 'open days' as opportunities for parents to witness the ways that the schools operated. Open days are good opportunities to promote both the product and process aspects of the school and can be a good opportunity to form positive relationships with people. Performance issues, particularly in terms of academic achievement, were promoted by each of the schools through the use of newsletters and web sites. Clearly of great importance in School A and School B, were the visits made by parents. The Head teachers of each of these schools saw such visits as a chance to form closer relationships with parents and great emphasis was placed upon their responsibility and the responsibility of senior managers in this activity. School C did not report the same level of importance on parent visits.

The requirement to pay particular attention to forming good relationships with primary schools was especially noted by the Head teachers of School B and School C.

They acknowledged the essential role which primary schools played in directing pupils to their secondary schools and whilst he need for initiatives such as these may well have initially been set-up in response to difficulty with the maintenance of student numbers, they had now become institutionalized over three or four years and they had been integrated into school life. What were once short term crisis management activities have now become examples of a more strategic approach to marketing. Both Head teachers described regular visits to these feeder organisations and it was clear how damaging a bad relationship with a primary school could be. School B also organized open days for prospective parents and students from the local feeder primary school in order to promote ties with the parents. It was suggested by Smedley (1995), that secondary schools should start to raise parent's awareness of their image during the last four terms of a child's primary school, and the use of open days has been demonstrated to be particularly effective in influencing choice. Contact with parents during such events allowed for increased discussion and enabled parents to ask questions and to become more familiar with the Head teacher of the secondary school. Creating links with primary schools through staff visits or by inviting primary students and their parents along to view a secondary school were also recommended as possible attractions for choosing a secondary school. It was no surprise that in two of the study schools an important part of their approach was to make contact with feeder primary schools. School A appeared less dependant upon the independent primary schools for its pupils and made no reference to specific promotion activities with primary schools.

5.2.2 Informal Marketing Activities in the Study Schools

The majority of data obtained for this section revealed a picture of school marketing in which short term informal marketing activities such as promotions had been employed in order to solve crises or to anticipate problems with recruitment. Table 5-10 shows that these informal approaches had been used to market all four aspects of the matrix framework. Each of the Head teachers indicated that they had no formal marketing policies in place, although it was equally apparent that all had been actively involved in the use of some promotional marketing activities. The marketing role of the Head teacher was particularly apparent in School A and School B but less so in School C. In School A, the Head teacher reported that, "*I spend a significant proportion of my time*

promoting the school." His interest in marketing was prompted by a talk he had attended in the United States. The Head teacher of School B stated that,

> *"There is no formal marketing plan devised for the school. I see marketing as one of my main activities, but I also encourage senior managers to be aware of the school's image especially when meeting parents. "* (Informal:Product/People)

In school C, it was reported that,

> *"the school has a PR committee that is made up of a board member, two members of the teaching staff, and some volunteer parents. But there are now plans to hire a PR specialist. "*
> (Formal:Product)

Whilst there was no formal marketing plan in School C, there had been,*"a response to the drop in numbers just after the 1997 hand-over, and more efforts were made to publicize what the school was about."* (Formal:Product) None of the schools provided marketing training within their schools. Marketing was not seen by any of the schools to be a school-wide activity and was usually the responsibility of the Head teacher or, perhaps, the senior management team. The Head teachers were asked to indicate if they evaluated the effectiveness of marketing activities carried out in their school. None of the schools had a formal method of gauging the effectiveness of marketing activities. The Head of School C indicated that feedback may come from the number of applications to the school.

The role of marketing in education has sometimes been viewed with doubt and suspicion (James and Phillips, 1995) and so the existence of dedicated marketing personnel within schools has been rare in the UK and the findings from the study schools in Hong Kong revealed a similar picture. There were a number of examples of informal marketing approaches within the three schools and in two of the schools marketing was seen to be one of the most important activities carried out by the senior managers, including the Head teachers. The Head teacher of School A had a clearly developed intuition of marketing aspects of the school but admitted to the absence of a formal plan. The approach might be described as opportunistic and *ad hoc* and such activities were mainly the responsibility of the Head teacher. He had definitely courted the attention of the local population, including expatriate groups from Korea

and Japan. He was tuned to the need to relate with the newspapers, even the local Chinese language press. A similar picture emerged from School B, where marketing activities were largely the responsibility of the Head teacher who felt that these activities were among the most important aspects of his job. He was particularly preoccupied with responding to the school community and rebuilding relationships which had broken down during the previous administration.

There was strong evidence of the importance that School A's head teacher put upon promoting the school's image among different expatriate groups within the Hong Kong population, particularly the Chinese, Korean and Japanese. These students usually displayed rapid improvement in their English language abilities and often gained very good academic results from international schools. He was also very pleased with the involvement of Asian parents in the PTA. Indeed, his approach to marketing showed many of the characteristics one might associate with the creation of long term relationships with customers and clients. Although far from strategically planned, it illustrated that even an ad hoc approach to the relationship marketing approach can pay dividends in terms of referrals, loyalty and ultimately the quality of service. Conversely the dangers of attracting too many students from one ethnic group were highlighted by the head teacher of School C who commented on the perception of parents that English skills among students suffer as a result. These concerns were evident among the Chinese parents also. Interviews with parents supported these comments. Responses to this kind of pressure included offering increased academic support for particular students to correct the balance of native English speaking students.

The head teacher of School A emphasized the benefits of using the local press and of making contacts with community groups as a way of promoting the school. The interviews with head teachers from the study schools showed that media experiences could be both positive and negative. On the one hand School A had been able to develop a positive relationship with the local press, despite some adverse publicity regarding student drug abuse. This good relationship extended to the Chinese language press and would have targeted Chinese parents considering sending their children to international schools. On the other hand School C felt unprepared to deal with the media and took a more guarded approach.

Where the management of relationships appeared to falter or were given less significance then there was evidence of recruitment difficulties, higher numbers of alternative schools considered during the choice process, worsening of reputation and pupil withdrawals. The management in School C was aware that the school reputation had been increasingly coming under attack by parents and a public relations and marketing investigation was underway in the school during this research. Another example of the management of relationships was demonstrated by the Headmaster of School A, who was very conscious of the importance of the media and actively courted their attention when positive aspects of the school were reported. He felt that a good relationship with the press meant that bad news was less likely to be published, but when bad news was published it was with a more "balanced" view of the school. Again, this contrasted the approach School C who had experienced a negative relationship with the media. Each of the interviews with Head teachers showed that they felt marketing activities tended to be their prerogative or perhaps that of some members of the senior management team although School C did have a PR committee and were making plans to hire a PR specialist.

Both Weindling (1997) and Waring, 1999, stressed the need for reliable information, highly necessary in a rapidly changing setting, and emphasised its value in strategic decision-making. They further argued that the strategic planning process needed to be embedded within a culture of information, in which an institution constantly searches for, and reacts to, developments in its external environment. To a degree, each of the study schools had relied upon sensing the environments in order to survive. The changing emphasis from European to Chinese expatriates, the introduction of English language support, and Mandarin as an additional language, have been obvious consequences of accurate, although informal, sensing of the market. None of the schools had routinely engaged in the sort of formal data gathering activities which might be described as market research but most recently, and as a result of pressure caused by falling numbers, School C had been involved in the collection of data from the school community. All of the schools showed evidence of using connections to primary schools as a means of recruiting interest in their own schools. All of the head teachers interviewed committed valuable resources in terms of time, effort and finances to the production of brochures and web sites and at the time of the study all

schools were involved in the revamping of these information sources. School C was the only school which used a public relations committee but there did appear to be some confusion over the role of the committee beyond the production of a newsletter. The involvement of this committee in the production of the new brochure and the inclusion of teaching staff on the committee had been a very recent change. The next set of questions looked at the use of promotional materials such as brochures and web sites and especially what resources were needed to produce them and what personnel were required to create them.

Although none of the study schools had formal or planned marketing strategies, each of the schools had used marketing or promotional tactics in response to crisis circumstances or as a response to school weaknesses. The Hong Kong market has been shown to have changed markedly over the previous decade, with fewer European expatriates looking for schools but with significant increases in the number of Chinese families looking for English medium education for their children. Each of the schools had adapted to this situation in some way and had obviously responded to the changes in the market. However, these responses could not easily be described as strategic in nature although they were marketing activities nonetheless. The Head teachers of School A and School B showed they were most aware of the importance of marketing for their schools and both commented on the importance of their own role and that of their senior management team in marketing activity. Marketing was predominantly an activity undertaken by head teachers or senior managers. Even where a PR committee existed, its role was confused and any impact on marketing considered minimal. Head teachers from schools A and B highlighted the importance of contact with parents during visits to schools and commented upon the significant amounts of time they would devote to this. Creating links with the parents of the primary school children was achieved through visits to the primary schools or by holding 'open days' in the secondary school to which primary parents were invited. Interviews with parents supported the results obtained in the survey and demonstrated clearly how important their perceptions of a school's head teacher could be. This appears to be particularly important in a relatively close society such as Hong Kong. Relationships within the school community were also significant and the head teacher of School A mentioned how important he felt it was for teachers to feel confident enough in the school to send their own children there. This provided evidence of internal marketing

within the school. The Head of School A tended to be most active in terms of marketing activities and had embarked upon several project-based marketing schemes in response to changes in the external environment brought by the change of sovereignty and the increased interest in the school by alternate ethnic groups in the community. School C responded to a drop in expatriate numbers by increasing publicity when opportunities presented themselves. Marketing by these schools has been largely restricted to publicity campaigns and has not become part of a strategic plan linked to staff development or budget.

5.3 The Characteristics of the Choice Makers

The nature and characteristics of those involved in the school choice process has a significant effect on school choice. Culture, socio-economic and educational experiences can influence the choices that are made. For these reasons, the ethnic, linguistic, professional and educational backgrounds of the choice makers were studied. Although the three schools offered essentially similar educational products, an analysis of the respondents revealed different characteristics among choice makers for each school. The characteristics of the choice makers have been placed into the matrix structure using the product, process, performance and people headings from the relationship management approach to marketing (Table 5-11). This has assisted the analysis of the choice makers and any potential influences which the nature of the choice makers might have on school choice.

The data suggests that School A choice makers were predominantly British, native English speakers, and this school had the lowest proportion of parents who were ethnic Chinese (34%). School B and School C had much larger proportions of Chinese choice makers and in the case of School C, ethnic Chinese made up the largest group (70%) with the lowest proportion of European parents (19%). Each of the other two schools had more than double the proportion of European parents than School C. School A had the highest proportion of respondents who indicated that English was their mother tongue (71%). In School B, 59% of respondents indicated that English was the mother tongue language, whilst School C showed the lowest percentage (49%) of respondents indicating that English was the mother tongue. School C

showed the highest proportion of mother tongue Cantonese among its respondents with 32%, School B showed 25% and School A the lowest with 16%.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
The Characteristics of the Choice Makers School A respondents	Mainly European clientele who want a school based upon England and Wales. Limited SEN requirements.	High proportion of respondents with English as mother tongue seeking English as language of instruction. Where English is not mother tongue English as language of instruction aids move overseas.	Middle class European and Asian choice makers. Majority of parent's graduates and post-graduates. Bring high expectation of performance.	Mainly European but high proportion of Asian, especially Hong Kong Chinese. Higher socio-economic group, substantial proportion with education allowance indicating expatriates. Majority graduates or post-graduates.
The Characteristics of Choice Makers School B respondents	Majority Asian looking for School based upon England and Wales system. Some SEN requirements.	High proportion of non-native English speakers indicates potential need for EAL support.	High proportion of Asians and elevated socio-economic groups indicate high academic expectation of school.	Most native English speakers but a large minority of Cantonese. Asian ethnic groups make up largest proportion. High socio-economic status and approximately half receiving full or partial allowance for education.
The Nature of Choice makers School C respondents	Majority non-native speakers seeking school with English and Welsh system. English as instruction to facilitate overseas move. Negligible SEN requirements.	Highest proportion of non-native English speakers indicates EAL support need.	Majority Chinese and high socio-economic status, mostly graduates and post-graduates with high expectations of academic performance.	Majority ethnic Chinese. Smallest proportion with education allowance indicates high proportion of local based families. Under half with English as mother tongue

Table 5-11 The Characteristics of the Choice Making Respondents

Figure 5-1 illustrates the inverse correlation between English and Cantonese mother tongue identified in the schools. These figures reflect the concern voiced by the School C management that the proportion of students using English as their mother tongue was diminishing and students with English language difficulties were replacing those students using English as a first language. The difference between mother

tongue language in School A and School C was statistically significant as tested by a chi-squared test at the 0.95 confidence level.
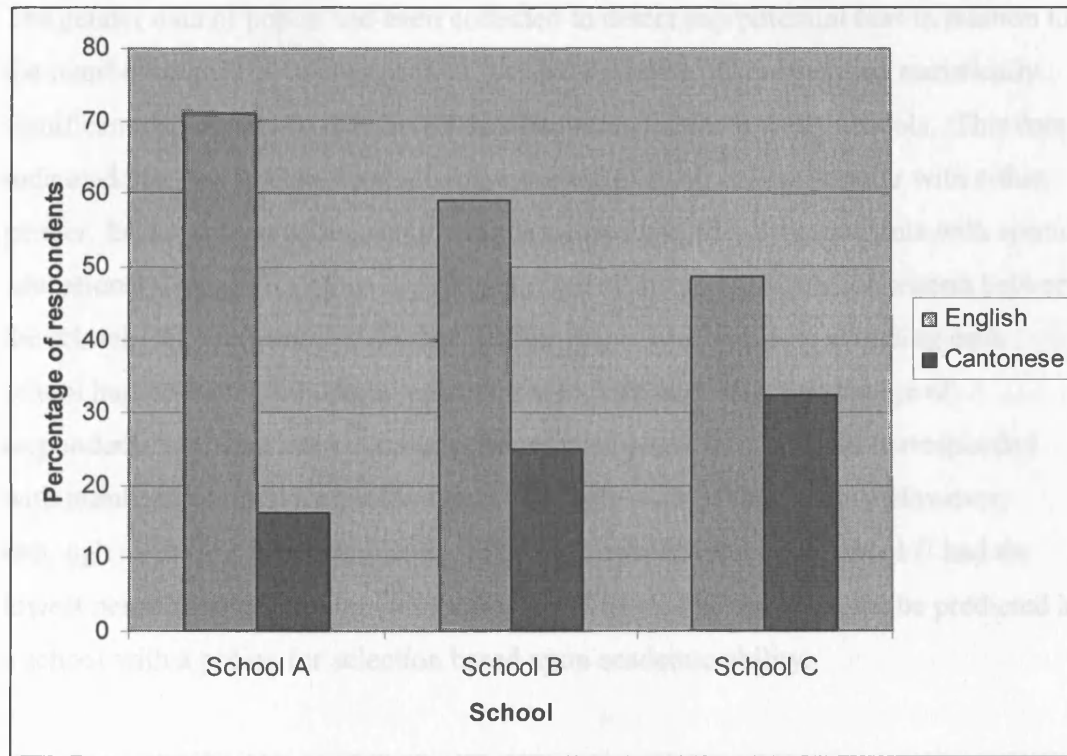

Figure 5-1 Showing the proportion of respondent mother tongue language

Further differences emerge when looking at educational allowances in salary packages of respondent parents. Each of the schools in the study required parents to pay tuition fees of several thousand Hong Kong dollars per month (several hundred pounds). At the time of the study it was quite common for expatriate families to receive an education allowance as part of their salary package to cover whole or part of the tuition fees of the school. School A had the highest proportion of parents who received an education allowance which paid all or part of their children's school fees. School C had the lowest proportion of parents receiving an educational allowance as part of their salary package and this might reflects a lower proportion of expatriate families. When such an allowance is absent, it is mainly wealthier members of Hong Kong society who have access to the international schools. This data suggests that School A has a higher proportion of expatriate families in their school population than the other study schools and that School C would appear to have the lowest proportion.

This finding is supported by other results for mother tongue language and ethnicity results.

The gender data of pupils had been collected to detect any potential bias in relation to the number of girls or boys at each of the study schools. There were no statistically significant differences in the gender distribution in the three study schools. This data indicated that none of the three schools were either more or less popular with either gender. Equally, none of the study schools catered specifically to students with special educational needs (SEN) thus negating another of the potential choice criteria between the schools. The responses indicated that the majority of students attending each school had no identified special educational requirement. The percentage of respondents who indicated that their children had some form of SEN corresponded with numbers reported by the Head teachers from each of the schools. However, although no statistically significant difference could be detected, School C had the lowest percentage of children with a diagnosed SEN. This result might be predicted in a school with a policy for selection based upon academic ability.

Clearly the choice makers in the Hong Kong international secondary school market were from a well-educated, middle-class socio-economic group evidenced by the large number of graduates (38%) and post-graduates (53%) among main income earners of respondent families. The vast majority of the main income earners in the study held senior jobs normally associated with high incomes and of these, approximately 42% received partial or full tuition fee remission as part of their salary package. The respondents indicated that almost 43% of parents were solely involved in choosing their children's secondary school although 56% involved their children in the decision making process. These results support similar conclusions found in UK studies such as that by West (1992) which showed that middle-class choosers tended to be influenced by academic performance, and Reay and Ball, 1998 and Reay and Lucey, (2000) who described the strong role that these middle class parents played in the decision making process. It is apparent that despite the bias of the respondent population towards a predication to choose a school along academic lines, that the results of the survey indicated strongly that people factors were very important when deciding between schools with similarly academic credentials. These results have implications for the marketing approaches which international schools employ.

All three Head teachers had reported an increase in the number of local Hong Kong Chinese students applying for their schools and the finding that 6% of students came from local primary schools provides some evidence of this. A number of Chinese parents who were interviewed had transferred from the local primary system into the International school sector and one particular interview with Mrs. L. illustrated the reasons why Chinese parents had started to consider the international sector for their children's education and also revealed some of the concerns and misgivings that the switch to international schools could produce. Mrs. L. was Chinese and her daughter had transferred to School B from one of Hong Kong's most prestigious local primary schools. As her daughter progressed through the local school system there had tended to be, "*an increasing emphasis on examination preparation*" and the amount of drill and practice homework began to concern Mrs. L. She also stated that her daughter had begun to feel increasingly discouraged by her experiences in the local school and so it was decided that a transfer to the international sector might be appropriate. Mrs. L. and her husband are both educators and knew something of the international school sector and felt, "*that less emphasis was placed on examination preparation and that international schools had a more interactive learning approach*". They also wanted their daughter's English language skills to develop further than they had been able to do in the local school, despite the reputation the school had developed through its use of English. They visited a number of international primary schools and were happy with the child's choice of an International primary school near their home. The child had elected to remain in the international sector for her secondary education and her decision to join School B was based upon her appreciation of its, bright, nice environment described as "*fresh, sunshine*". Mrs. L contrasted the communication, support and apparent feeling of "*partnership*" demonstrated by the international school staff, with the aloofness and uncommunicative approach of the teachers and Head teachers in the local system. However, Mrs. L. also highlighted some of the "*cultural baggage*" which a decision to switch systems can produce. She explained that, having made the switch to the international school system, she now felt troubled by the untidy appearance of some of the international students in School B, explaining that, "*their skirts were too short and their t-shirts were never tucked in properly*". She felt that the local secondary schools were more careful about their student's appearance. Mrs. L. also criticised School B for being too "*liberal*" or loose with

some of its procedures, especially with regard to informing parents about extra-curricular activities. Despite these concerns, she felt that there were greater demands for the students to use initiative than was evident in the local schools.

The evidence gained from the three study schools paints a picture in which Chinese families play an increasingly significant part in the international school market. In contrast to School C, it is clear that School A has maintained a higher proportion of the traditional European client base and there were fewer concerns in this school regarding the potential for deterioration of English language skills among its pupils. There was for each school a considerable proportion of Asian families making up the market choosers and the implications of this are explored later in the thesis. In the next section the cross school analysis discussion turns towards a summary of the findings about the school choice process. In the next section of this chapter, a closer look is taken at the factors which influence parents most significantly when choosing between similar international secondary schools. As with previous sections this sections makes use of interview data gathered from parents in support of the questionnaire responses.

5.4 Choice Factors and Sources of Information Considered Most Important

Choice criteria can be analysed in different ways. For example Gorard (1999a) identified 5 general criteria, which affected school choice.

- Situational criteria – convenience of travel, although this criterion is less well defined among more affluent parents (Hammond and Dennison, 1995).
- Selective criteria – this could be based upon gender, religion, attainment etc.
- Academic criteria – easily quantifiable and comparable because of certification, is the belief that children will fare better academically in some schools than in others.
- Organisational criteria – the ethos of a school, probably based upon a school's tradition or reputation.
- Security criteria – the general well being of the child.

For the purposes of this study, Gorard's five general criteria are included within the Product, Process, Performance and People headings from the relationship management model (Barnes, 2001). Situational and selective criteria are included within the Product heading by equating Product to the general description of the nature of the curriculum on offer and the nature of general selective criteria such as gender or religion and have been factored out in the selection of the schools. The *academic, organizational and security* criteria which Gorard (1999a) found to be important are re-categorised under the headings Process, Performance and People and this can be more clearly seen in Table 5-11 which shows the factors selected by the study respondents as they relate to Gorard's list of criteria and Barnes's relationship management model of marketing. The 4Ps model of Relationship Management is therefore used as the tool for the analysis of choice factors.

Factor	Gorard's Criteria	Barnes 4P's Model
Academic education	Academic	Performance
The child's happiness	Security	People
Exam results	Academic	Performance
A caring approach	Security	People
Teachers/Teaching	Organizational	Process/People
Head teacher	Organizational	People
School atmosphere	Organizational	People

Table 5-12 List of Factors most influencing International School Choice and related to Gorard's Criteria and Barnes Relationship Management Model

Smedley, (1995) and Ellison and Davies, (1993) showed that the reasons for rejecting a school were often easier to define than reasons for selecting a school. In general, bad reputation, bad behaviour, low academic standards and poorly motivated teaching staff were found to be the main reasons parents would cite when rejecting schools. However, when considering more positive influences on school choice, Petch (1986) found that a supportive school atmosphere was important while Smedley (1995) wrote of the influence of siblings, other parents, discipline and good relationships with caring teachers. Whilst some studies have shown that academic performance has not

been a major factor in school choice (Webster et al, 1993), West (1992) and Farley (1993) both showed that middle class parents viewed the academic performance to be a dominant concern, whilst Asian parents were also seen to rate academic factors most highly.

The findings in this study indicated that the respondents selected a wide variety of factors as being important. Of the 32 options included on the questionnaire 30 different factors appeared at least once among those considered most important. These results illustrate that the respondent parents had a diversity of ideas about what factors were important in school choice and the data underlined that it is not always easy to identify just one or two factors that are important when selecting schools. Table 5-12 summarises the findings obtained from each of the study schools. It has already been pointed out that macro product factors have been omitted because of the similar nature of the schools selected for the study. The remaining micro factors form the focus of this analysis. Overall, the study revealed that performance factors were deemed most important when selecting a school. School C respondents valued academic performance with overwhelming importance reflecting the academic selective character of the school. School B respondents also rated academic performance as their most important choice factor.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Choice factors influencing School A respondents.	Macro choice factors omitted due to careful study school selection	Processes such as teaching, curriculum, did not rank highly.	Academic performance as measured by examination results among most important factors.	Child happiness most important factor. Relationship with Head teacher seen as very important.
Most important choice factors School B	Macro choice factors omitted due to careful study school selection	Teaching and subject choices was third important factor (<10%).	Approximately one quarter of respondents selected academic education as most important	Child happiness was second most important (12.5%)
Most Important Choice factors for School C respondents	Macro choice factors omitted due to careful study school selection	Teachers (5%)	Academic performance the overwhelming most important factor. (Approx. 50%)	Child happiness second most important (<10%) Caring approach (5%)

Table 5-13 Most important choice factors

When considering academic standards, many of the parents believed it to be an important factor in school choice, but the basis upon which respondents judged the academic standards of the schools were not always supported by facts and figures. Frequently the academic performance of a school was based upon hear-say or an impression gained from visits. For example, Mrs. L. judged the academic performance of school B to be good after she saw the text books, and was further impressed purely by the fact that records of student achievement were kept by the school. Mrs. S had, *"heard from friends that School B had a good academic record"*, but she said this seemed to be confirmed by the school newsletters and the exam results information. Another parent was, *"impressed by the academic reputation of* (School C) *and I have been very pleased with the progress of my eldest daughter at the school"*. She felt that the expectations were high and that her children were lucky that they could both cope in the environment. However, relying upon hearsay can give a false impression, and Mrs. M. stated that the arranged visits and text books initially gave a good impression of the academic standards of the school but she felt that this impression had not continued. She felt her child was under challenged by much of the homework and complained of, *"insufficient pressure."* Overall, the finding that academic performance was the most important factor selected by the respondents supported work done by West, 1992, in which factors affecting choice of schools among middle class parents in the UK were studied. School A respondents indicated that academic performance was the second most important choice factor but placed child happiness as most important. School A was also different in placing the influence of the Head teacher as the third most important factor when making a choice of school. For School A process factors were not selected as important but the other two schools process factors such as teaching and subject choices appeared in the top three choices.

The choice factors which have been considered under the people heading were important for all the study schools but for respondents in School A they were of particular value. This indication might be explained by the value placed on relationships by the Head teacher of School A. As has been seen from the interviews the Head teachers of School A and B were active marketers of their schools, even though neither considered these activities to be planned or strategic in nature. The inclusion of the Head teacher among the important factors vindicates the decision to

be actively involved in marketing activities. It shows that these activities can make a difference, and positively influences parental choice. Smedley, 1995, found that the opportunity for the parents of primary school children to visit a secondary school was a good chance to assess the atmosphere of the school and particularly to *"weigh up"* the Headmaster. Two of the interviews with School A respondents, illustrated why they rated the Head teacher very highly in their choice making. Mrs V said that,

> *"I had heard a number of positive comments about my son's Head teacher, which were confirmed later when I met him."* She described him as, *"personable with parents"* and as, *"having a personal and caring approach and seemed to know all the students in the school."* (Informal:People)

She put this down to the fact that he taught some lessons. This complimentary view was in stark contrast to her experience with the Head teacher at her son's primary school, whom she described as, *"cold and uncaring"*. The influence of the Head teacher upon decision making is hugely subjective however. Mrs. Ri related the fact that the wife of the Head teacher of School A had taught her son in primary school and that her teaching had impressed her. These positive impressions were extrapolated to the husband, and were subsequently reinforced by comments she heard from other people. These impressions of competence contributed to the selection of School A as her son's secondary school. The inclusion of the Head teacher's *wife* into the equation is perhaps rather far-fetched but it illustrates the complex and often emotional nature of school choice decision making.

Although not included among important choice factors in the questionnaire, interviews highlighted another subjective, emotional response, as being influential. This was the importance put on the atmosphere in a school. This factor is difficult to define and what constitutes a *"good atmosphere"* in a school might differ largely among parents. Smedley, 1995, identified school atmosphere or ethos as being particularly important among middle-class parents, so called 'active choosers'. Some parents regard a "traditional" ethos of a school as being important, probably based upon their own experiences of school (Gorard, 1998) others refer to 'good discipline'. What aspects were regarded as positive about a particular school atmosphere was not explicitly explored but its importance in the school choice process was evident. Some

clues about the nature of school atmosphere were gained by interviews with the respondents of the survey questionnaire who showed that school atmosphere could be gauged in a variety of ways. Mrs. V., who had visited School B felt that, "*the other students in the school contributed to a, positive school atmosphere*" (Informal:People) and that they appeared friendly and, "*the teachers were helpful and cooperative*". These comments demonstrate that Mrs. V. was getting her information about the atmosphere of the school from a variety of sources, including other students and teachers and the way they interacted with her. Another parent, Mrs. Ri, sampled the school atmosphere on "Fair days" and Open days and was very impressed by what she saw. Her observations of those days influenced her to agree with her daughter's choice of school. The importance of teachers and the way in which teachers dealt with parents was also expressed by the comments of Mrs. Ch. (School B). She was impressed by the, "*openness of the school and the teachers made themselves available when needed,*" (Informal:People) she also felt that the school had been, "*proactive in solving problems*". She was particularly pleased that the school had taken the initiative by phoning her with regard some questions she had expressed through her daughter. Here, further reference is made to the importance of staff working in the school. It would appear that internal marketing can play an important role in the external marketing of a school.

The 'domino effect', as stated by Gorard, (1998), is the tendency for parents to place younger siblings in a school in which an older sibling has had a positive experience and there was evidence that information about school atmosphere was obtained through their own children. Mrs. S., for example, was pleased with the progress and the positive comments of her older children at her first choice school. In another example Mr. A. was clearly influenced by his older daughter who had attended School C and felt that she had gained a great deal from the experience. His youngest daughter was promptly enrolled in the same school. Part of what might be considered the atmosphere of a school is the school's attitude to discipline. Mrs. W. (School C) switched her child from a nearby international school to School C because she felt there was better discipline there. She accused the first school of being, "*too unstructured and random*" in its approach to education. She said that,

"students in (School C) tended to, run around less and it was more structured and the desks were placed in a more orderly fashion. " (Informal:People)

In summarising the analysis of the choice factor data it should be emphasised once more that performance factors were considered most important by the majority of respondents from the study schools. However, people factors have also been shown to be very important factors and should not be ignored. The use of the Relationship Management model for the analysis of these influential factors has been useful in identifying this. When considering individual schools, School C respondents indicated the greatest bias towards performance criteria whilst School B and particularly School A respondents valued people factors more equally with performance factors. This result was perhaps not surprising given the academic selectivity of School C compared to the other two schools. This form of selection had no doubt helped to concentrate a population of parents who valued academic performance above other factors, whilst a broader range of responses might have been expected from the other non-selective schools. This may confirm findings that specialisation through selectivity in this way might potentially narrow down a schools appeal to a smaller audience.

In the next section, respondents of the survey were asked to indicate which sources of information they found to be most important when making selections among international secondary schools for their children. Respondents had been asked to indicate which sources of information they had found most important during their school choice process and were also asked to rank which of those sources they felt were first, second and third most important respectively. Whilst a full list of selections can be found in the appendix, the tables of results shown here only the show the sources of information selected by more than one respondent. A summary of results from all of the schools have been placed in the framework matrix and are included in Table 5-14. Interestingly 'product' information in the form of brochures and web sites were deemed to be least valuable among sources. West *et al* (1995), also wrote that a significant number of parents either do not particularly value or do not read school prospectuses. The appearance of the brochure being selected among the second or third important sources of information highlights that brochures alone are unlikely to form the sole source of information when selecting a school. Despite the finding that school brochures and web sites were often less valuable sources of information about

schools, interviews with Head teachers of the study schools stated that a large amount of effort has been put into producing quality brochures.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Most Important information sources for School A respondents	Brochures, web sites not ranked highly as sources of information during choice process.	Visits to schools were most important.	Did not rely on performance data but indications of tacit assumption regarding performance of school.	Other parents, personal experience, siblings and friends very useful sources of information. Word-of-mouth and grapevine greatly influential.
Most important information sources for School B respondents	Neither brochures nor web sites were selected by respondents.	School visits were identified as most important sources of information (41%).	Exam results were small proportion of important information sources	Personal experience of school (16%) and siblings (10%) were second and third most important sources of information respectively.
Most important information sources for School C respondents	Brochures nor web site selected among choices	Visits to school (Approx. 10%)	Exam results were second most important (Approx. 14%)	Personal experiences of the school were most important (16%). Other parents were selected as third most important (Approx 10%). Siblings (Approx. 10%)

Table 5-14 Important Sources of Information

Unlike the requirements in the United Kingdom (Knight, 1992), schools operating in Hong Kong were under no obligation to produce brochures, but most did. Each of the study schools had recently updated, or was in the process of updating their own brochures. This was particularly true in the case of School C which had hired a PR company to assist in re-vamping the latest version of the school brochure. Each of the Head teachers interviewed revealed that a good deal of effort was also being put into the production of school web sites, although the results shown by the survey questionnaires showed that school websites were rarely selected by respondent parents as a useful source of information about the schools. In School A the web site had recently been revised and a teacher had been awarded an incentive point to construct and maintain the school website and was supported in this endeavour by members of the sixth form. In School C, a teacher volunteer had originally produced the web site

as an in-house project with a view to individual subject departments producing the content of the web site. This approach had never proved successful and was a task accepted by no more than two or three departments. More recently School C had employed an outside company to create a new web site to provide greater impact as a promotional tool.

Visits to schools and parental experiences were clearly seen by the respondents from each of the study schools in this survey to be the most valuable sources of information when selecting a school but in School B this was particularly so. Clearly the opportunity to visit a school or to have personal experience of the school provided parents with a good deal of information other than that gained from written sources and this may be the reason why it was selected by so many respondents. Interviews with the Head teachers of each of the schools revealed that they were all, to varying degrees, aware of the importance of visits to schools and the experience which was gained from these visits. This finding underscores that information about the educational processes which occur in schools are helpful indications for parents making choices between schools. Sources of information pertaining to performance were less evident as important information sources, an unusual finding given the dominance of performance factors in school selection. However, there was evidence that a tacit acceptance of academic performance among the schools existed and that respondents did not therefore perceive it as necessary to refer specifically to performance data separately. Where performance data was valued, this was apparent among School C respondents and the value of performance information was rated more highly than in the other two study schools, underlining the effect of the academically selective policy of that school.

The significance of visits, personal experiences and word-of-mouth recommendation of international schools in Hong Kong is difficult to ignore and these findings highlight the importance of people and the interactions between people, when selecting schools. The value of information from other parents and friends was a significant source of information across each of the study schools. These sources of information when compared to formal sources such as exam results and brochure content may be deemed as 'informal' sources of information. The evidence supports the observation that informal discussion among groups is very important. These

findings reflect those found by Ball and Vincent (1998) and support the importance of the 'grapevine' as a source of information about schools. It also maintains Lamdin and Mintrom's (1997) argument that the uninformed could get information from other choosers who would provide clues about which choices would be the most popular.

5.5 Summary of the Emergent Issues

This chapter used a cross school analysis of data gained from the survey questionnaire and interviews with Head teachers and parents from three study schools in order to identify significant emergent issues in the marketing and responses of international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong. This has been facilitated using a matrix derived from a conceptual framework constructed from the major educational marketing issues and a relationship management approach to educational marketing. Firstly, the analysis of the nature of the Hong Kong international school market revealed a situation in which competition exists not only between international schools in Hong Kong but also from local system schools and overseas schools. However, levels of competition have not undermined the general perception that free choice existed within the market and there is evidence that many parents were active choosers. It was apparent that whilst some schools were facing increased challenges as a result of the competition in the market, others had been able to minimise the effects and maintain a relatively strong position.

It was also evident that the different groups who made use of the international schools in the study had different motives for selecting them. Some expatriates chose international schools because they offered continuity of educational experience for families prior to their return home. For other expatriate and local groups these schools provided a compromise system in which English was the medium for instruction and provided a quality of experience which assisted integration into new overseas destinations.

The marketing responses of these study schools were characterised by their informality but there was ample evidence that marketing was considered an important management responsibility. This responsibility was not evident lower down the school structures however. Where formal marketing was observed, the activities tended to be

restricted to school open days or through the maintenance of relationships with primary schools and their communities. It was apparent also that the formation of good relationships with school communities was of significant importance. Where study schools had created successful relationships with their community they were seen to benefit through stable pupil numbers and positive referrals.

The analysis has also revealed that the traditional groups engaged in choice within the international school market in Hong Kong had changed with different ethnic groups increasingly dominant. These cultural changes and the socio-economic and educational status of these groups influences the kinds of product, process, and performance requirements of the schools and the importance of knowing the characteristics of those active in the school choice processes are brought into focus.

The analysis has also identified that performance is among the most important factors when considering a school. Good academic credentials were seen to be crucial in the selection process. However, people factors such as child happiness and caring approaches were also ranked highly, while abstract concepts such as school atmosphere can play a role. The analysis showed that the Head Teacher can also be a powerful influence for parents within the Hong Kong international school market. Finally this analysis has demonstrated that parents identify visits to schools and personal experiences of schools to be their preferred sources of information about schools during the choice process. The study has highlighted the importance of informal sources of information known as the "grapevine." For some parents, information about exam results were also important sources but this tended to be true within an academically selective environment. The study also acknowledges that brochures and web sites were infrequently identified among the most important sources of information for parents and cautions the tendency to extend large amounts of resources upon the production of these items. At the very least schools should closely understand the purposes for which brochures and web sites are used. The final chapter formulates conclusions based upon the analysis of the findings presented in this study.

6 Conclusions and Implications

This thesis explores the Hong Kong international secondary school market with the aim to identify whether marketing activities adopted by these schools have played a part in determining the success of their operation. This research is unique and original in that although the use of relationship marketing has been recommended by other writers, this research takes a specific model of relationship management outlined by Barnes (2001) and adapts this model to the educational context and further, uses it to develop a conceptual matrix as a tool for analysis. This matrix is used to present the research data obtained from three similar study schools and provides a framework for a cross-case analysis of the findings. It also enables a logical construction upon which to draw conclusions about the successful marketing approaches observed within these schools. The research is also unique and original in that this has been carried out on international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong. The research used international secondary schools operating in Hong Kong because of the unusual opportunity they presented to investigate fundamentally similar schools operating in an environment facing increasing levels of competition due to drastically changing economic and political change. The hypothesis for the research is that good relationships formed between school and community not only provides a sound basis upon which to manage a successful and effective school, but they also provide schools with a competitive advantage over other schools which fail to successfully manage relationships.

The marketing of schools has come under closer scrutiny as market models of education provision have been adopted. The emphasis upon a market model of provision has created an environment in which choice is more likely to be exercised as parents enact their preferences for their children's education. However, marketing in educational organisations and particularly in schools, has not always been easily accepted (Foskett, 1999, Farrell, 2001, Thrupp and Willmott, 2001) and the complex nature of the educational context has meant that marketing it has lacked coherence, (James and Phillips, 1995) has been relatively unsophisticated (Gewirtz *et al* 1995, Giles, 1995, James and Phillips, 1995, and Glatter *et al*, 1996), and ambiguous (Bell, 1999). Despite calls for more strategic approaches to marketing schools, the evidence suggests that these activities tend to be *ad hoc* and usually as a short term response to difficulaties (Foskett, 1998).

Gray (1991) described a marketing "mix" for businesses based upon Product, Place, Price and Promotion. This model was adapted and expanded upon by James and Phillips (1995) to become more appropriate for the educational context. In this model People, Process and Proof were added to Gray's original marketing mix. In 1999, Middlewood wrote of the importance of managing relationships with parents but this was not linked directly to marketing educational organisations. More recently Barnes (2001) has suggested a relationship management approach to marketing that was derived from a service industry and small business context and which focused upon the creation and maintenance of long-term relationships. In this model, Product, Process, Performance and People are the essential ingredients. This relationship marketing approach has been used in this thesis to form the basis of a conceptual framework to investigate educational marketing. In this thesis, elements of Gray's model and James and Phillips's model have been subsumed into the Barnes relationship management model. For example Price has been considered an integral part of Product and Proof has been incorporated into Performance. In this way, the relationship management approach can provide an acceptable, unambiguous and coherent approach to the marketing of schools. The conceptual framework for the research utilised a matrix concept suggested by (Smyth, 2004) has been built up by using the relationship management model and the research questions which stem from the research literature on school marketing. These are explored in more detail later in this chapter but are listed here:

1. What is the nature of the market?
2. What are the marketing activities of schools?
3. What are the characteristics of the choosers?
4. What factors influence school choice?
5. What sources of information are most valuable?

As a result of these general questions which emerge from the literature, it was necessary to establish the nature of the Hong Kong secondary international school market by looking at the levels of competition and the degree to choice existed within the market. Secondly, the range of school marketing responses were explored. Thirdly, it was necessary to determine the characteristics of those involved in the Hong Kong international secondary school choice making process. Finally, it was

important to identify the factors which would influence choice making decisions and to ascertain which sources of information proved most useful when engaging in the process of making choices between the international secondary schools. These research questions appear in the conceptual framework matrix which is shown below in Table 6-1. This conceptual framework matrix has proved useful throughout this research study and is presented as a tool for use by school managers wishing to analyse marketing aspects of their own school. The table shows how the small business focus of the model has been re-interpreted to suit the educational context. This construction has been used to present the research conclusions described in this chapter.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Business/Service Industry Context	*Essence of what is offered to the customer*	*System and activities that support provision of service*	*Providing the product as promised – getting it right*	*Interaction - how customer is treated in the encounter*
Educational Context	*Nature and type of school and curriculum, public examinations*	*Approaches to Teaching and Learning, Spending on resources, buildings*	*Criteria by which product can be assessed, e.g. Inspections, public examinations*	*Customer, clients, pupils, parents, employees, LEA stake holders*
Nature of the Market				
Marketing activities of schools				
Characteristics of choosers				
Factors influencing school choice				
Sources of Information				

Table 6-1 Conceptual Framework Matrix

6.1 The Nature of the Hong Kong International School Market

The characteristics of educational markets can be described as lying upon a continuum between closed, state provision at one end and an open autonomous provision at the other. Truly open markets rarely exist even in economic markets which profess to be open, and this is true of educational markets in which some form of state involvement

is observed. These semi-open markets may be referred to as quasi-markets (Vandenberghe, 1999) and, whilst a degree of state control might exist, such markets support a degree of choice for parents to decide which type of school to send their children to. The presence of choice, coupled with a measure of autonomy for institutions operating within the market should lead to the availability of a variety of different schools, catering to a number of groups. However, as Walford (1996) and Broccolichi and van Zanten (2000) caution, this is not an inevitable consequence of markets of this nature as polarization of the market occurs and schools who target the same segments of the market develop.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Nature of the Market	Local system schools and overseas schools among choices.	Need for English as medium of instruction but demand for EAL support. Addition of Mandarin adopted early indicates sound knowledge of needs.	Expectations of high academic achievement.	General perception that choice is available in the market. Schools may have higher levels of competition with large proportion of choosers considering 2-3 schools among choices but this lowers where relationships with community valued.

Table 6-2 Nature of the Market

Summarised in table 6-2, the study of the Hong Kong international school market indicates that the majority of parents do perceive a reasonable level of choice within the market environment and this finding also supports the notion that a quasi-market exists. Coincidental with this range of choice is the perception of a degree of competition between schools, particularly as they are targeting the same groups of choice makers. With insufficient numbers of their traditional target group available, the international schools have survived because they have looked to a new customer base which has a need for English language schools and is made up of returning Hong Kong Chinese migrants, other expatriate groups, and by an increasingly disaffected local Chinese population looking for alternatives to an exam heavy local education system. The availability of an education delivered in English not only facilitates the need to relocate overseas, but also provides a degree of status within the community (Bray and Ieong, 1996). Because of these demands, many of the international schools

have been able to charge high tuition fees which effectively close out large sections of the community. The prestigious international schools which had once catered to the large numbers of British expatriates in Hong Kong have broadened their appeal to alternative expatriate and local groups by providing English language support and by promoting some Asian languages in their modern foreign language departments. This study has shown however, that the client base has broadened, and so to have the sources of competition.

This research demonstrates that as a result of larger numbers of Chinese choice-makers active within the international secondary school market the inclusion of local schools among their range of choices has become a more significant threat and that competition from these local schools is added to the competition already evident from the other international schools. The appeal of local schools has also been supported by the recent expansion in the number of tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, which, by reducing the need to travel overseas for tertiary education, further strengthens the potential competition from local schools. However, despite local competition, the local schools and other international schools operating in Hong Kong are not the only sources of competition within the international school market. The evidence from the study indicates that overseas schools are considered among alternatives and that these add to an already wide choice for parents. As international schools increasingly aspire to offer a product similar to that found in the best overseas schools they become more like the overseas schools they try to emulate. By becoming more like these overseas schools, there is the danger that overseas schools become a viable alternative for parents engaged in the school choice process. The need to travel vast distances to overseas institutions is often of no consequence for the expatriate groups whilst the upwardly mobile local groups would see the opportunity to travel overseas as an end in itself.

The evidence gained from this study reveals that informal sensing of the local needs and aspirations of the community through the creation and maintenance of good relationships can provide the basis upon which to differentiate from competitor schools, both locally and overseas. It is suggested that persistent striving for quality coupled with a more human centred, relationship management approach, schools can foster the trust and confidence in their clientele which effectively reduces competition

from other sources. The international schools must be aware of these alternative sources of competition through a sound knowledge of the market and should position themselves to differentiate from these competitors. The international schools situated in Hong Kong would need to use the characteristics of their product and processes as an advantage over local alternatives, and their closer proximity and opportunity to form close relationships, as an advantage over overseas schools. They can become differentiated from their competitors through the quality of relationships that are created with the community and, for this reason, a closer understanding of the needs of the various community and stake holder groups are important. This research has found that where good relationships with a community exist, then parents consider fewer alternative schools during their choice process.

6.2 Marketing Activities

It has been shown that marketing and education have not always been easy bedfellows and despite calls for more strategic responses to marketing, schools rarely adopt such approaches, even in more competitive environments. The relationship management approach to marketing has been suggested as a more human, emotional basis upon which to build an educational marketing strategy. Barnes's model of relationship management is used as a framework for the research and analysis of marketing among Hong Kong international secondary schools and the marketing activities have been divided into the four headings; product, process, performance and people (4Ps). Relationship management is based upon the need to foster long term relationships rather than short term transactions which characterises some product centred marketing. It is argued here that this relationship approach to marketing can help schools and their stake holders to establish respect, understanding, confidence and trust by focusing attention upon the 4Ps. For the purposes of this thesis educational marketing has been categorised as either formal, strategic activities or informal *ad hoc* activities. Table 6-3 outlines a summary of the marketing activities found in this study. None of the schools had formal marketing strategic plans, specific marketing budgets or specialist marketing personnel or training which tends to characterise strategic marketing approaches however, a number of formal marketing activities were evident. Formal marketing responses included promotion of product through

newsletters, brochures, web sites and open days. Performance data was also formally published alongside inspection data. Formal, planned marketing of process and people aspects were also evidenced by school open days. However, the majority of the marketing activities of these study schools mirrored those most often described in the UK literature whereby marketing activities had tended to be informal, or "bolted-on" as Foskett (1998) described. None of this is perhaps surprising but a closer analysis of the findings revealed that the study schools most active in the widest range of these activities appeared to be most strongly positioned within the market and a look at the product marketing activities demonstrates this.

	4P's Relationship Management Model			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Marketing activities of schools	Informal, *ad hoc* marketing, Sensing market for needs and wants, irregular promotion through web site and newsletters	Informal school visits, strengthening extra-curricular activities and sport activities. Academic rather than vocational courses.	Promotion of academic successes through media	Visits by parents, internal marketing responsiveness, community relationships, senior management role. Active enhancement of relationships.
	Formal strategic marketing Newsletters, brochures, web sites, open days, links with Primary schools	Open days, parent evenings,	Published inspection reports, exam results.	Open days, links with Primary schools
Emotional dimensions engendered	Respect through dialogue and valued input	Understanding through dialogue and sharing	Confidence through good performance and quality	Trust through partnership

Table 6-3 Summary of the Marketing Activities of the Study Schools and the Emotional Dimensions of Good Relationships

In one study school, the Head teacher had a very thorough knowledge of the communities the school served and had been able to respond quickly to the wants and needs of a range of groups by manipulating the character of the product on offer. In contrast, the school which had increasing concerns over its place in the market had just launched into a large scale market research activity because there were signs that it had lost touch with its community. This shows the importance of informal sensing of the environment where it can be done sensitively and where an empathy with the

community is the result. However, reliance upon the informal sensing of the community by one member of the school is a restricted approach to this need. It is a contention that informal sensing of the environment should be an activity carried out by a wide range of the school employees and that this information may be collated to form a more accurate picture of the wants and needs of the community. This kind of market sensing can also be supported by more formally planned market research such as exit polls or questionnaires to confirm informal perceptions. Once a clear picture of the wants and needs of the community is obtained, the nature of the product can be adapted to fit. This leads to a greater respect for the product by the community because of the dialogue which has taken place. This emotional stance can be further developed when looking at the marketing responses to process, performance and people.

Process relates to the way in which the product is delivered and has been interpreted here as including curriculum, approaches to teaching and learning, and teaching and learning philosophies. Although there is little specific attention paid to the marketing of this aspect of education and no overt reference is made to it in the study schools, the use of open days and school visits by parents does allow for the promotion of processes within the school. Interviews revealed that within each study school there was an awareness of the influence which school visits had upon parents and this was particularly evident in two of the schools where the Head teachers took personal responsibility to organize and be present at school open days and to make time to be with parents when they visited the school. Attention to processes was also evidenced by the responses of one of the study schools to community demands for an expanded extra-curricular activities program and by another's reluctance to offer vocational courses as a replacement for more academic courses. Once again there is evidence that dialogue leads to a better understanding by the school, of the processes that the community desires and to a more complete understanding by the community, of the process stance which the school takes.

Performance is a measure of the quality and success of the school to deliver its product. James and Phillips (1995) might have called this 'proof'. Data pertaining to this area is commonly published in the form of pupil examination results and school inspection reports and this practice was demonstrated by the three study schools. The

value placed upon the quality, and particularly on academic success was clearly evident from all stake holders and this is discussed later as an important factor in the secondary international school choice process. However, this kind of academic prowess appeared to be *tacitly accepted* by the communities of these schools. Each of the schools could publish data which demonstrated good academic achievement by their pupils. From this point of view, there was very little difference between the schools. This lack of differentiation could explain why parents considered this kind of published data of very little use as an important source of information about a school. It indicates that parents were looking for more than just general statements about quality and academic success. This finding points to the reality that parents are most interested, not in the performances of other children, but specifically in the performance of their own child. They search for a level of confidence that their own child will achieve individual academic success and they do this through listening to other parents, siblings, teachers and other sources. The evidence suggests that parents may look to the Head teacher to ascertain the leadership qualities which they believe will lead to and maintain the academic quality the parents crave. If this is indeed the case, then schools should not concentrate merely upon blanket statements of quality (although these are useful and important initial indicators) but should look at their pupils as individuals, each capable of different achievement. By doing so, parents become confident in the school's ability to succeed and contribute their voices to a chorus which sings praise and builds a good reputation.

The final aspect of marketing to be highlighted here comes under the people heading and once again the human/emotional responses to relationships are underlined. According to the relationship management approach, an important aspect of marketing occurs at the interface between the organisation and the community of stake holders. Good experiences at this interface can often constitute 'value added' experiences which promote the desire for a long relationship. This must be particularly true of schools. There has long been a debate about the status and definition of 'customer' in education but it is the contention here that this debate has no relevance if *all* stakeholders in a schools' community are treated with the same status. A comfortable relationship between two people usually entails mutual respect and trust, often involving dialogue through two-way communication. Where the relationship

management approach to marketing is particularly strong is in its attention to this dimension.
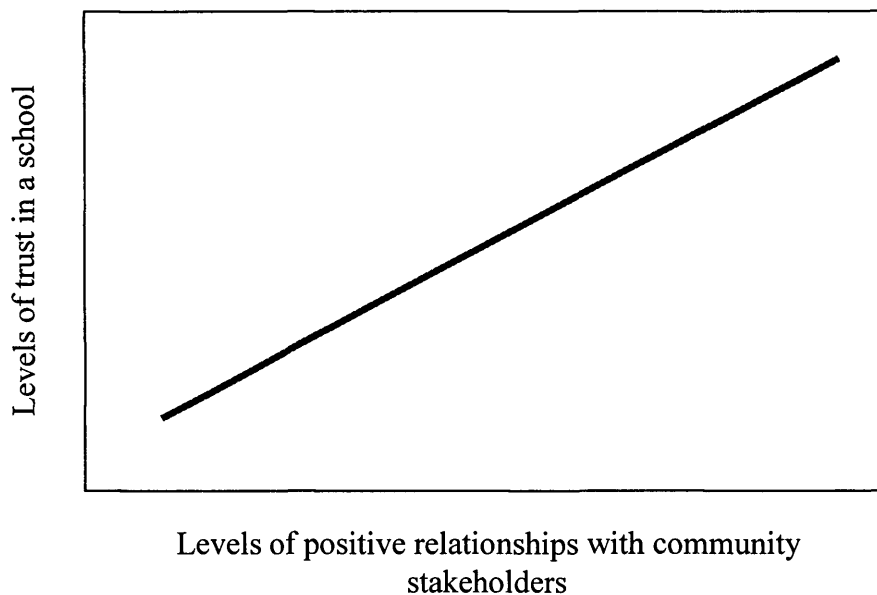

Figure 6-1. showing the potential link of good relationships with trust

The evidence from the study suggests that where the quest to form good relationships with community stakeholders was given most support from the Head teacher, then there appeared to be an increased level of confidence and trust in the school as evidenced by referrals within communities, local media support, Head teacher esteem, a lower number of alternative schools by choosers, higher numbers of staff children. Whilst there is insufficient quantitative data available from the study to plot a graph of the degree of attention to relationships against levels of satisfaction with a school, it is possible to represent the point with the diagram in Figure 6-1 which illustrates that as positive relationships with the community grows there is a corresponding growth in trust in the activities of the school

The indications from the study are that paying careful attention to relationships with all community stakeholders both outside and within a school (internal marketing) are important facets of a marketing approach. It follows that this attention should come not just from senior management but from all employees. Whole school understanding of the importance of good relationships with community stakeholders helps to engender trust among that community. This research study has emphasised that a

relationship management approach to marketing can enable a school to encompass not only traditional product marketing activities such as market research and promotion but also the human and emotional dimensions. The next section discusses the importance of school to develop a sound knowledge of the community who make up the potential choice making group.

6.3 The Characteristics of Choice Makers

The socio-economic status of choice makers (Reay and Ball, 1998), local environment (Herbert, 2000) parental education experiences (Gorard, 1998) and ethnicity (Smedley, 1995) have all been shown to affect the way parents choose schools for their children and for this reason a knowledge of the choice makers is important to schools operating in competitive environments because they can refine the product, process, performance and people aspects of their school. This study endeavoured to gather information about the nature of the choosers in the Hong Kong international school market and to see how school managers gathered their own knowledge of the characteristics of the choosers and how they used it in their marketing.

The survey revealed that the choice makers in the international school market shared several general characteristics. Typically they were high income, high status professionals and highly educated (majority graduates or post-graduates) parents. The survey also clearly revealed that the British expatriate group which had traditionally been associated as the target group for the three study schools were no longer the largest group. Only one of the three study schools had maintained a majority proportion of that market, whilst another had all but lost that segment. Where numbers of British expatriates were reducing they had been replaced by other expatriate groups or by returning Hong Kong Chinese migrants and to a smaller degree, local Hong Kong Chinese. Ironically the Head teacher of the school which maintained the highest proportion of the traditional segment was most ardently committed to creating and maintaining relationships with these alternative expatriate and local communities. Equally ironic was the finding that the school most reliant upon the newer market segments appeared to have an increasingly uneasy relationship with parts of those groups, evidenced by disquiet among parents of those groups who felt that English

standards were dropping and by British parents who had withdrawn their children because of the cultural imbalance. The evidence suggests that there might be a mismatch between the needs of the community and the understanding of the school personnel.

Table 6-4 indicates that these different groups each had different motives for choosing the product offered by each of the study schools. Interview data supported this claim. The common consent among all the groups was the desire to move overseas at some point in the future.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Characteristics of the Choice Makers	British expatriates require system similar to 'home' system for easy reintegration. Other groups look to stepping stone to facilitate integration into overseas schools.	English as medium of instruction for native speakers. Language support for EAL.	High academic expectations. School performance supports claim to move to 'good' school overseas.	Reduced 'traditional' choice makers. Other expatriate groups, returning emigrants unable to integrate into local system, local HK Chinese. Highly educated, professional/management, high salary plus education allowances.

Table 6-4 Characteristics of the Choice Makers

British expatriate groups would, therefore, choose these schools because of the need to re-integrate back into their home education system when returning to the UK. This need for future integration would necessitate the international school's strict adherence to the systems they offer, for example in the ways they externally asses or in the syllabuses they choose. However, for other non-British groups, the motivation for choosing these schools was more as an intermediate step towards identifying an overseas destination which may or may not have an educational system similar to the chosen international school. As a result, these groups may not support such a strict interpretation of the school system they have chosen. In fact for some of these active choice making groups a liberal interpretation would benefit. Knowledge of the choosers can highlight the different needs of each of the groups for the product each school provides.

Knowledge of choice makers also impacts upon a school's processes because a school can manipulate what it does to support the product and become a better school, more accurately attuned to the needs of the choosers. An example of this is the approach to the medium of instruction. A common feature found among the disparate ethnic groups making up the population of choice makers for the study schools was the desire for English as the medium of instruction. But, once again the motive for this choice differs between the groups. Native speakers for example, require different language support mechanisms from non-native speakers and schools that recognised this variety in requirement and who are able to respond quickly and effectively to the requirement would carry a market advantage because they can offer a more effective learning environment. This is just one example of how a better understanding of those people involved in choosing schools can enable those schools to refine activities and support processes to provide a better school which more effectively caters to the needs of its community.

The characteristics of the choosers in Hong Kong indicate that high academic achievement would be a high priority in their selection process and all the Head teachers of the study schools demonstrated a conscious awareness of this. A sound knowledge of choice makers has enabled each of the schools to focus upon the need for strong academic performances and for the need to publicise academic success in order to build a reputation which appeals to choice makers who are characteristically supportive of high academic achievement. In one study school this was taken to the point that they adopted a policy of academic selectivity as a response to the importance which the choice makers placed upon academic reputation. However, it would be important not to lose sight of this factor because a slip in academic performance would not be viewed sympathetically and, as Smedley (1995) found in the UK, parents would reject a school if its reputation was bad or perceived to be bad. The other potential drawback of such a policy is that some parents might object to selection based upon ability and might reject the school as an option and lessen the market segment size. Whilst it is not the intention of this study to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of an academically selective approach, the study does highlight some of the potential dangers of adopting such an aggressive stance. It is suggested here that such a policy could be divisive and that a more acceptable stance

would be to recognise the academic potential of all pupils and support those pupils to achieve to the best of their ability. This approach would appeal to all segments of choosers who see academic performance as a key choice factor.

This research has provided substantial evidence that relationships can play an important role in marketing educational organisations. Through the relationship management approach there is a vital importance placed upon the need to acquire a good knowledge of the school choice makers and their communities. Through this understanding comes greater potential to forge long term relationships based upon a deeper understanding of the needs, and desires of the communities so that product, process, performance and people issues can be targeted more effectively through dialogue. The two-way nature of the relationship is also a vital ingredient so that school personnel understand the needs of the communities they wish to serve and the communities know the ways that the school personnel are responding to those needs. This is another indication of how important it is for *all* personnel within a school to be cognisant of the relationship management process and to be involved in its implementation. A marketing approach based upon this model would be most effective when all school personnel were involved. Through this concerted approach school personnel would also need to be aware of the factors which the choice makers value most highly when choosing a school for their children and the next section draws some conclusions about these.

6.4 Factors and Information Sources Considered to be Important when Choosing a School

School choice research, especially in the UK has been widespread (West and Varlaam, 1991, Hammond and Dennison, 1995, Gorard, 1997, Reay and Ball, 1998, Woods *et al*, 1998a, Herbert 2000) and has largely been carried out in response to reforms in the educational system there. Coldron and Boulton, (1991) and more recently Gorard (1999), have highlighted the complex character of the choice process. Dennison (1989) proposed a number of factors which could provide a competitive edge for schools and Gorard (1999a) identified general criteria which characterised school choice. But once these choice factors are identified, it must be ascertained how parents

find out whether or not a school posses the desirable characteristic. Therefore, alongside school choice research there has also been other studies into the sources of information parents find most useful. Ball and Vincent (1998) explored the importance of the grapevine of word-of-mouth recommendation whilst Lamdin and Minstrom (1997) identified that informed parents were valuable sources for less informed parents. More recently still, investigations have also been carried out to establish the value of web sites as potential sources of information (Gomes and Murphy, 2003).

Research into choice factors and sources of information has not been as evident in the Hong Kong context and the findings of this study are relatively unique for this reason. A questionnaire used in one large scale UK study (Woods *et al*, 1998a) was adapted for use in this study of parents making choices between Hong Kong international secondary schools. Respondents were asked to identify choice factors and information sources they considered to be important and to place the top three in order. Table 6-5 summarises the findings from the study of the Hong Kong international school context. When the findings are considered in this relationship management matrix, it is possible to categorise the important choice factors and information sources.

	4P's Relationship Management Model*			
	Product	**Process**	**Performance**	**People**
Choice factors	*Macro* factors such as gender selection or denominational factors negated as a result of school selection	Teaching, subject choices,	Academic achievement most important by between ¼ and ½ of respondents from each school.	Child happiness was most or second most important in all schools. Caring teachers.
Information Sources	Brochures, newsletters or web sites selected as important sources of information.	Visits to schools were identified as important sources of information.	Some selected exam results as a useful source of information	Personal experiences of school, siblings, other parents – word-of-mouth and "grapevine"

Table 6-5 School Choice Factors and Information Sources

Careful selection of the study schools meant that certain potential choice factors such as choosing a school based upon religious or gender selectivity or upon location, have been removed. These choice factors have been termed as *macro* choice factors for the

purposes of this study. By removing these macro choice factors it was possible to focus in upon the more subtle choice factors which parents consider when choosing between similar schools. These are referred to as *micro* choice factors in this research. When considering these micro choice factors, the study found that academic education, a factor which falls under the *performance* heading of the relationship management model, was selected by the majority of respondents as the most important factor when choosing a school. These results mirror those found for middle-class and Asian groups of parents in the UK (Reay and Ball, 1998 and Smedley, 1995), and are unsurprising given the characteristics of the choice makers in the Hong Kong international school market. Interviews with respondents further supported the results of the questionnaire. This apparent importance placed upon academic achievement as a reason for choosing a school justified decisions by the Head teachers of the study schools to maintain the "academic nature" of their schools and minimise possible perceptions that a school might be less academic or even, vocationally biased. One study school was actively selective upon academic performance and respondents from this school showed the highest proportion selecting "academic standards" as the most important factor. Once again, this finding supports the stance they have taken but as discussed earlier, there are potential difficulties which accompany such a bias. With some contradictory evidence found in the study regarding the relatively low importance placed upon the publication of examination results as a source of information about a school, the survey raises questions about how the respondents measured the academic success of their choice school. Clearly a reputation for academic success develops in some schools and interviews with respondents showed that "academic standards" were sometimes passed on by word of mouth or by the "progress" made by siblings or other students. Some parents also mentioned the nature of the textbooks provided by a school as an indication of the academic standard of the school. Glover (1992) showed that reputation has an important role in school choice processes and particularly how reputation might lag behind current realities but the nature and source of perceptions of academic reputation among parents may be an area of further study. It is speculated here that a shared expectation of academic achievement might play an important role. However, despite the overall importance placed upon academic standards, other factors were also identified as important when choosing between schools.

West and Varlaam (1991) have written about how the happiness and security of children was an important factor in choosing secondary schools in the UK. For a large proportion of respondents from each Hong Kong school, and for a majority in one of the schools surveyed, child happiness was deemed to be the most important factor in the school choice process. This factor has been categorised in this study as a *people* factor in the relationship management model matrix. Child happiness is a highly subjective response and one child's happy environment might be very different from another. This survey focused upon parent respondents and so it was the parent's *perception* of a happy environment for their child that was significant. How parents develop this perception before sending their children to a school is not explored in this research but certainly it demonstrates how important it is for schools to build the kind of environment in which this is fostered. But this kind of secure and happy environment can only happen through building a relationship based upon trust and shared values within a community. A reputation as a secure environment where students are happy is greatly valued, sometimes more valued than purely academic thoroughness.

So, what factors would contribute to the happiness of a secondary school student? One might conclude that the state of the environment such as sports, music, arts and ICT facilities would be a factor. The "atmosphere" of the school, classmates, staff and curriculum might also influence a child's "happiness" at school. But factors such as facilities, atmosphere and friends were not highly rated by respondents, although, other *people* factors such as a "caring approach" and "caring teachers" were among the top rated factors influencing school choice. This finding supports Smedley (1995) who noted the importance of the Head teacher. This is supported by the present investigation which identified the Head teacher as particularly important in one study school. Interviews with parents and survey data revealed that the reputation of the Headmaster could be particularly powerful in influencing parent decision making when selecting a school. The relationship of the Head teacher with parents was clearly indicated as an influential factor in school choice and international schools with a charismatic leader could be at an advantage. Charisma may be only part of the mix for good leadership however, and this study indicates that a leader who is able to empathise with a community both inside and outside of the school is likely to be of

considerable benefit. Among the remaining important factors which should be mentioned here, were the quality or teaching and the range of subject choices.

These have both been included among *process* factors in the relationship management matrix and their inclusion among those most often selected as important, indicates that schools who are able to pay attention to all aspects of their organisation may claim to have a competitive advantage over schools that do not. Processes, those activities which support what is the essence of the school, are arguably among the most neglected aspects of school promotional activities, although they may be made explicit during school visits or open days. Further research into the ways in which such processes are understood by external communities and the degree of influence that they would have on school choice might also prove rewarding. No attempt was made in this study to see why parents rejected certain schools, but this would be a fruitful future research area.

The results of this investigation into identifying important information sources has provided further evidence of the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations and the "grapevine" as sources of information during the school choice process. These were seen to be more important than information about exam results for example, in most cases. Other important sources of information selected by respondents were by visiting schools or through personal experience of a school. The results also indicate that the influence of brochures, prospectuses and even online sources such as web sites were of limited value. This finding brings into question the considerable time and resources which can be devoted to their production. Each of the study schools were in the process of either a major revamp of their brochure or were updating an existing product. The relatively unimportant status of the school websites at the time of the study did justify the in-house production of each of them as a way of reducing costs; however, Gomes and Murphy (2003) have indicated the increased value of such sources of information for international schools. The importance of word of mouth recommendations, the "grapevine", school visits and personal experiences as sources of information selected by respondents to be important during the school choice process, support the notion that relationships between school and community are important. If the pupil experience is safe, secure and productive and the parents have

confidence and trust in the ability of the school personnel then they are more likely to favourably recommend a school to others.

6.5 Further Research

This research has explored an area which is of interest to school managers, especially those who find that they are operating in rapidly changing or competitive environments. This is the first such research focusing on Hong Kong international schools and further research would be of great value. Research which replicates the methodologies outlined here could be carried out on other Hong Kong schools or in other countries where clusters of schools operate and if such research generates findings similar to those obtained in this instance then the knowledge base may be widened and external validity sufficiently established to make more valid generalisations about marketing policies in schools.

Further research into school choice and marketing could also be made using alternative methodologies, the underlying purpose being to extend methodological triangulation and thereby achieving greater convergent validity through additional research. For example it could be extended to include perspectives of groups not included in this methodology. One possible approach might be to include primary school parents as part of the survey cohort. It is difficult to know when the secondary school choice process begins and there are indications that the decision-making process begins well before the last year of a student's primary education. Access to parents of primary school children could yield interesting insight into when the choice making process begins.

This study into Hong Kong schools has adapted the use of a survey tool employed in a large UK based study which required parents to select important choice factors and information sources from lists of options. A word of caution about the use of such tools has been mentioned in the methodology chapter and it may benefit researchers looking into these aspects of international school marketing to avoid using similar research tools, despite the advantages identified in this earlier chapter. As an alternative, more time could be spent obtaining first-hand information from parents using face to face interviews to gather such information. Finally, future school

marketing research should be carried out in schools who have adopted relationship management approaches as marketing models in order to ascertain whether this model is really a useful marketing approach for schools. Oplatka and Hermsley-Brown (2004) have recently highlighted the need for further research into marketing in education and have further suggested that relationship marketing, internal marketing, school quality, marketing ethics and the influence of word of mouth reference among parents would be areas of particular interest.

6.6 Responding to the Market: Relationship Management and Schools

Evidence from this study lends weight to Foskett's (1998) view that relationship marketing is a useful marketing approach for schools to adopt and underlines the value of Barnes's relationship management model (Barnes, 2001). Derived from a model of marketing which is suitable to small businesses, relationship management is most effective when applied to form long-term, rather than short-term transactions and by schools operating in a situation where different organizations offer essentially similar products. The significance of word of mouth information, the influence of the Head teacher, and the importance of open days and parent's perceptions of teachers and pupils, as well as contacts with feeder primary schools, all indicate that managing relationships effectively in response to the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders is an important issue for schools. Relationship marketing or, relationship management, (Barnes, 2001), looks beyond the notion of service or product as all encompassing and embraces the relationships with its customers as being equally important. The notion of customer satisfaction is a complex issue which has been explored elsewhere in this thesis, but there is little doubt that perceived customer satisfaction is significant in a school/ parent/ pupil relationship. Then again, the prolonged wrangling about definitions of 'customer' in educational organisations becomes a redundant argument because in the relationship management approach *all* stake holders, both those within and without the organisation, would be viewed as customers. It has been shown in this study that the relationship management model is an appropriate approach to marketing schools, and especially those operating within a competitive environment where the school choice process is active. This becomes more especially true where relatively

similar schools make up the alternatives. This was certainly the case among the international secondary schools studied in Hong Kong.

Geographically close, offering similar products, processes and performance, these schools displayed an absence of obvious differentiation apart from the selective policy of one of the schools. It became apparent that the school displaying most characteristics of a relationship management approach to marketing was more successful by certain measures than its competitors by forming better relationships with its community members. The relationship management approach, if applied correctly, provides differentiation where it might not be otherwise evident. A relationship management approach enables a school to consider every aspect of its operation, from product, to process, to performance, to people. The emphasis of this marketing approach is placed upon customer retention through quality in all aspects of the organisation.

An argument was presented which suggested school managers be cautious of the claims made about strategic planning as a concept, but there are indications that a conscious relationship management *approach*, centred upon the quality of the educational product, could be crucial to establishing trust between an educational provider and consumer and having the effect of strengthening the position of the organisation. Once that trust is established and a two-way dialogue becomes a normal part of the relationship then this dialogue assists in the maintenance or further improvement of the quality (some might argue, the effectiveness) of the product (in this case the school). Once a good product is established then positive word-of-mouth recommendations lead to high enrolment by target students which, in-turn, leads to continued improvement.

Also central to the relationship management approach towards marketing is the importance placed upon internal marketing to employees. Figure 6-2 shows the connection between internal marketing and the subsequent benefits derived from customer satisfaction.
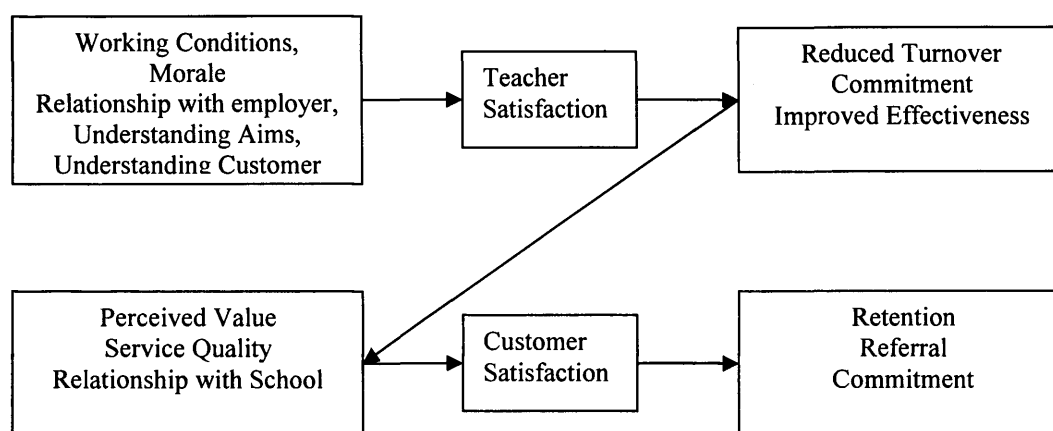
Figure 6-2. Showing the relationship between Internal Marketing and Customer Satisfaction in the Relationship Management Model

Adapted from Barnes, (2001)

A further benefit is also gained from a healthy relationship with consumers because the resultant positive dialogue can help in bringing to the fore aspects of school effectiveness which otherwise might escape notice, particularly aspects of schooling which are to be praised but which are rarely published in school brochures or examination results for example. This dialogue could help in revealing these "hidden" aspects which can make up effective schooling. However, this cycle of improvement can be broken if lack of dialogue leads to diminished quality and a drop-off in trust. This situation results in a reduction in word-of-mouth recommendations and fewer students and ultimately the possibility of reduction in quality. The establishment of good relationships means that in times of great change, trust can create the inertia upon which a good school can maintain its position. The relationship management approach offers schools a valuable model upon which to base their marketing approach. In order to be effective relationship management would need to be a planned approach involving all layers of an organization, an approach shared by all members of an organization is recommended (Barnes, 2001).

The research supports the view that schools which set out to create and maintain good relationships with all members of a community can be most successful in attracting students likely to flourish within the environment they offer. Relationship

management is offered as an approach to marketing which sits more comfortably within the education context than a purely transactional approach has tended to. This is because of the need to offer value, engender trust and commitment, and maintain two-way dialogue. The 4 Ps model of traditional marketing paradigms, is updated here and Processes and Performance join Product and People in the relationship management model. Figure 6-3 illustrates this model. Product, viewed as the curriculum, facilities and teachers, are central aspects. Processes form the next layer and include teaching activities and the provision of learning experiences. Performance enables a quality assurance layer or the opportunity for process to be assessed, and finally the outside layer of the approach is concerned with People and with the interactions of the organization with employees, students, parents and the community.
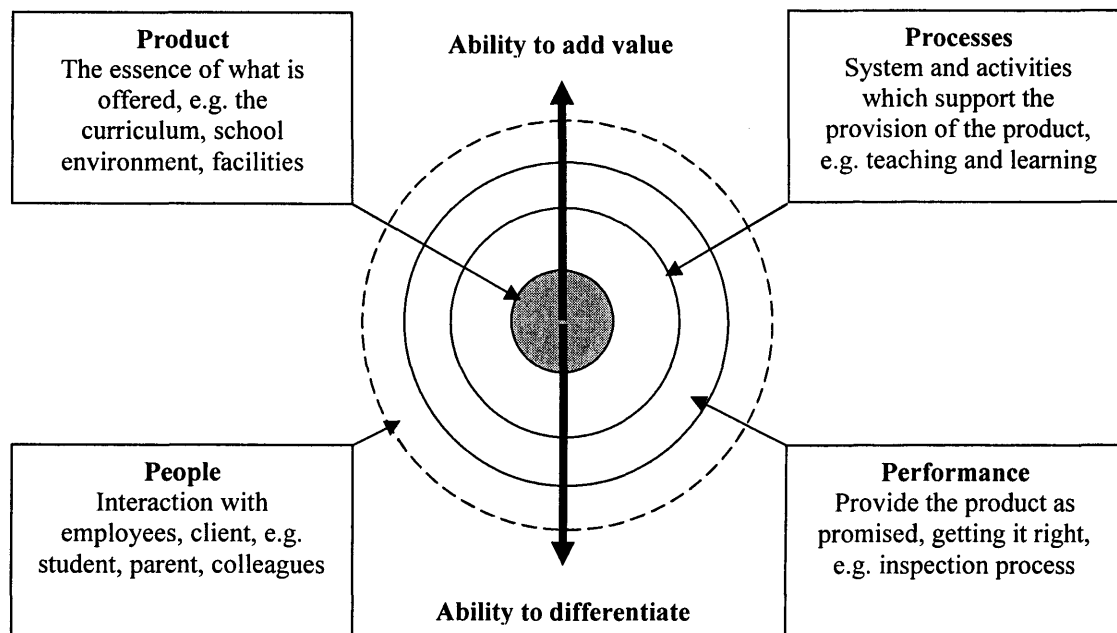

Figure 6-3 The Relationship Management Approach

(Adapted from Barnes, 2001, p.15)

Relationship management is an approach to marketing which diverts an organization away from a philosophy that is merely concerned with making the core product look attractive, or by aiming the core product at a niche market need. More than this, it establishes the need for quality in a whole range of activities which schools take part in. But even more than that is predicated. Moving beyond the basic tenets of quality is the need for schools to provide more than might reasonably be expected by the

stakeholders. This might be characterised by the school, "going the extra mile". It is in the value-added areas of a schools performance that relationship management dominates.

A close relationship with the community enables a school to identify those aspects of its educational product which, when properly developed, appeals to the community the most. Whilst relationship management approaches still demand that schools look to quality of product and school effectiveness, it necessitates that schools focus upon that which has always been a crucial aspect of education: *people*. The benefits of the relationship management approach to schools are that good relationships lead to customer satisfaction and retention of customers, leading to increased customer referrals and to quicker recovery when mistakes are made or when quality does not match customer expectation. It also enables schools to differentiate themselves from other schools and to provide a concrete basis upon which school choice can be made. This marketing approach supports the ways in which schools can effectively respond to a market.

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix I

Survey Tool and Associated Documentation

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

CHOOSING YOUR CHILD'S SECONDARY/HIGH SCHOOL

Please seal the completed questionnaire in the envelope and mail it as soon as possible.

Please tick ☑ answers (except where requested to write answers in)

YOUR CHILD AND SCHOOL CHOICE

1. Is your child a Boy or a Girl?

   Boy ☐   Girl ☐

2. Does your child have special educational needs?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

3. What is your child's Mother Tongue?

   ----

4. At which primary school did your child study before joining this secondary school?

   ----

5. (a) Did you consider a local Cantonese speaking school for your child?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   (b) Did you consider sending your child to a secondary school overseas?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

6. Is your child likely to study overseas at a later stage in his/her education?

   Maybe ☐   Yes ☐   No ☐

7. Who decided which school to choose? (Tick one answer)

   Parents ☐   Child ☐   Parents and Child ☐

REASONS FOR CHOOSING YOUR CHILD'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

8. Thinking about the school that you have chosen, what influenced your decision to put it first?
Please:

(a) **tick everything that did influence you**

(b) out of those ticked, show the **three most important** by putting in the relevant bracket 1 against the most important, 2 against the next, and 3 against the third most important.

The secondary school's head teacher	( )	Exam results	( )
The secondary school's staff	( )	Use of technology in the curriculum	( )
Pupils' behaviour in the school	( )	Policy on discipline	( )
What school teaches/subject choices	( )	The other pupils at the school	( )
Way lessons are taught	( )	School's attitude to parents	( )
School atmosphere	( )	Nearness to home/convenience for travel	( )
Way the school is managed	( )	Other preferred schools were full	( )
School uniform	( )	Child has special educational needs	( )
External state of buildings/grounds	( )	Child will be happy there	( )
Facilities (rooms, equipment, books, etc.)	( )	Child preferred the school	( )
Size of classes	( )	Older brother/sister is/was there	( )
Size of school (i.e. total number of pupils)	( )	Child's friends will be there	( )
School's caring approach to pupils	( )	Other school(s) not acceptable	( )
Standard of academic education	( )	No other school(s) to choose from	( )
Standard of education in other areas (personal, sport, art, etc.)	( )	Universities which school graduates attain	( )
Ethnic/racial make-up of the school	( )	Anything else? (specify below)	
School fees are acceptable	( )		

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOLS

9. What sources of information did you use when deciding on which school should be first preference?
   Please:

   (a) **tick all used**

   (b) out of those ticked, show **three most useful** by putting in the relevant bracket 1 against the most useful, 2 against the next, and 3 against the third most useful.

Personal experience of school(s)	☐ ( )	Visits to schools(s)	☐ ( )
Local newspapers	☐ ( )	School brochures/booklets	☐ ( )
Neighbours	☐ ( )	Information on exam results	☐ ( )
Friends	☐ ( )	World Wide Web pages	☐ ( )
Parents with secondary school children	☐ ( )	Secondary school staff	☐ ( )
Parents of other children starting secondary school	☐ ( )	Brothers/sisters at the secondary school	☐ ( )
People at work	☐ ( )	Other children at the secondary school	☐ ( )
Government sources	☐ ( )	Anything else? (specify below)	

----

10. How many Hong Kong international secondary schools did you consider before you made your final choice?

    1-2 ☐   2-3 ☐   3-4 ☐   4+ ☐

11. Is your child's secondary school your first choice?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    (a) Do you consider that you had a real choice between international schools

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    (b) If NO, please comment

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This information will help to explore how people's experience of choosing a secondary/high school differs.
Information supplied will be treated in the strictest confidence.

12. In which country did you attend the *majority* of your secondary schooling?

Mother .... Father ....

13. How would you describe the nature of the secondary school you attended?

	Private	State
Mother	☐	☐
Father	☐	☐

14. If you attended University, in which country did you attend the *majority* of your University education?

Mother .... Father ....

15. Please indicate the following for the **main income earner.**

Level of education

Secondary ☐ Graduate ☐ Post-graduate ☐

(a) Job title ....

(b) Nature of work

....

(c) Do you get an education allowance for your child's secondary education

None ☐ Partial ☐ Whole ☐

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Cont.)

16. How would you describe the **main income earner's** ethnicity? For example, Chinese, European, Indian, etc.

....

17. What passport does the **main income earner** hold?

....

18. Who completed this questionnaire?

Mother ☐   Father ☐

PERSONAL INTERVIEW

I would like to interview some parents in order to find out more about how parents choose secondary schools for their children. This would be entirely voluntary. Parents would be contacted in advance in order to arrange a convenient time.

If you would be willing to be interviewed (in confidence) about your choice of school, at a time convenient to yourself, please fill in the following.

Name _____ Address _____

....

Telephone _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CO-OPERATION

Dear Parent,

It would be greatly appreciated if you could dedicate a few minutes to fill out the enclosed questionnaire about choosing your child's secondary school. This questionnaire has been produced as part of a wider study on international secondary schools in Hong Kong. The information you provide is very important and of great value to the study.

I would like to stress that this study has not been initiated by your child's secondary school and is not part of a market research project. Your child's school has been kind enough to support the study as you might do now. I should also point out that the school does not see the results of individual questionnaires. These are treated in the **strictest confidence** and will only be seen by the researchers.

The questionnaire can remain completely anonymous unless you would be prepared to be interviewed, in which case please fill-in your contact details. Once the questionnaire has been completed please seal it in the addressed envelope provided and put it in the mail as soon as is convenient. I should like to get your valuable response back as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and co-operation.

Yours Sincerely,

Martin Watts.

Dear Colleague,

Your Principal has been kind enough to allow me to survey all Year 7 students in your school as part of a research project that is looking at the international secondary school market in Hong Kong. This is a very important survey that replicates a similar, although larger scale survey, carried out in the United Kingdom. I hope it will yield interesting and useful data.

Your assistance is greatly appreciated and I would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes of your time to distribute these survey forms to your Year 7 students.

Could you explain briefly that these questionnaires are:

1. Addressed to their parents
2. Very important documents
3. To be treated with care.
4. To be completed as soon as possible.

I would appreciate if you could point-out to the students that they can translate the covering letter if their parents are not used to using English and, finally, thank them in advance for their help.

I do hope that this will not cause you too much inconvenience and I would like to extend my own thanks to you for your time.

Best regards,

Martin Watts

Dear Parent,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who completed the questionnaires about international school choice that were circulated before Christmas. The responses I have received will contribute valuable information to the study.

If you have not had the chance to complete the questionnaire yet I would still welcome further responses even at this stage.

Those who have indicated they would be willing to participate in a short interview shall be contacted shortly.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Watts

December 13, 2000

Dear Parent,

One week ago you received a questionnaire that forms part of a wider study into the international secondary school market in Hong Kong. The response from parents has been very positive and a wealth of valuable data has already been collected from returned questionnaires.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank parents for returning completed questionnaires so promptly. Several of you have indicated that you would be interested in assisting further by taking part in short interviews. I shall contact those people soon.

There are still some questionnaires yet to be returned, so may I please remind those of you who have not had time to complete the questionnaire that your responses are most valuable and would appreciate a response at your convenience.

Merry Christmas and thank you,

Martin Watts

8.2 Appendix II

Semi-Structured Interviews with Head Teachers

Interview Schedule and Detailed Summary of Interviews

The schedule for semi-structured interview with the head teachers of the case study schools

From Foskett, N. H. 1998 School and Marketization: Cultural Challenges and Responses, Ed Man and Admin. Vol 26 (2) 197-210.
Foskett, (1999), Smedley (1995), Giles (1995)

Barnes, J.G. 2001 Secrets of Customer Relationship Management: its all about how you make them feel McGraw-Hill, USA

Marketing

1. Is there a marketing/promotion committee/manager in your school?

2. What is the role/task of the marketing manager/committee?

3. Do you have a marketing plan?

4. Do you have a budget set aside for marketing?

5. How do you evaluate the success of your marketing program?

6. Is there any marketing related training given to staff?

7. Have you mounted any campaigns to attract students?

8. Have you mounted any campaigns to retain students?

9. Have you ever conducted a market research project?
    a. What prompted the research?

10. Have you carried out any research designed to assess the needs of students or parents?
    (If none then go to question 15)

11. Have you implemented any reforms in your school that were inspired by parent or student needs/want?

12. How would you define marketing in the educational context?

Collecting Information

13. Do you collect information from new students?
    a. Students who are leaving? (An exit poll)
    b. Applicants?

14. Do you use any of the data you collect for marketing purposes?

Relationship Marketing

15. Is there any relationship management training offered for teaching or administrative staff?

16. Have you gained feedback about parent/student interaction e.g. have they ever had an experience which went beyond their expectation? Or below?

Brochure

17. When was the brochure first produced?

18. When was it last revised?

19. What is the purpose of the Brochure?

20. Is the brochure produced in-house or by an external agency?

World Wide Web Page?

21. What is the purpose of the WWW site?

22. Who created it and who maintains it?

Summary of Semi-Structured Interviews with Case Study School Head Teachers

Marketing

1) *Is there a marketing/promotion committee/manager in your school?*

   School A There is no person or committee with responsibility for marketing apart from the Principal himself. Mr. J., however, is acutely aware of the importance of marketing and promoting his school and spends a significant proportion of his time doing so. His interest in marketing was prompted by a talk he had attended in the United States.

   School B No - Marketing activities done by Mr. D. who feels that this is one of the most important aspects of his job. He had brought with him a range of strategies and experiences that he used to increase roll, "Bums on seats" in his previous position in the UK. In HK however, the emphasis upon the need for more students is different because his school is adequately funded.

   His activities are in response to the image that the school had developed during the early part of its development. There was a feeling that the school was unapproachable, unfriendly and cold. Mr. B. has made it a priority to open up, "to lower the drawbridge of 'Fort (School B)' and become more engaging".

   School C The school has a PR committee that is made up of a board member, two members of the teaching staff, and some volunteer parents.

   There are plans to hire a PR specialist.

2) *What is the role/task of the marketing manager/committee?*

   School A No marketing manager/committe

   School B No marketing manager/committe

   School C The role of the PR committee has been confused and there is no shared interpretation of the tasks which the PR committee is involved in. There is also the added complication offered by the existence of two distinct streams and the different needs of each stream.

3) *Do you have a marketing plan?*

   School A Although there is no marketing plan, Mr. J. is very proactive as far as recognizing potential problems or benefits and marketing his school to advantage. This is not done in a cynical attempt to maintain student numbers "bums on seats"

however, the motivation is more driven by what he perceives as the needs or desires of the community. There are several examples of this.

During the period around the hand-over of sovereignty, the large numbers of expatriates who left Hong Kong affected all international schools and numbers tumbled. As a result of this Mr. J. realized the possibility for local or returning Chinese to fill the gaps. In response to this the school introduced English as an Additional Language to support those students who did not have English as their mother tongue, and introduced a strong Mandarin language section to the school.

Recognising a potential source of students from the Japanese section of the community Mr. J. was pleased to accept invitations to speak at functions organized by Japanese groups. This is an example of active marketing of the school to this group.

Mr. J. courts the local press and especially the Chinese language press. He has managed to promote the academic image of the school by encouraging entry into the Hong Kong Math Olympics and, after winning it for two years in a row, ensures that this is reported in the Chinese press. He advises that a school should be open with reporters and to form a positive relationship with them. This will help to blunt the effect of any bad news that may emerge from the school. The focus on Chinese language newspapers ensures that the local community are made aware of the existence of the school and positive news is noted.

Overall, there is an ad hoc approach to marketing but the creation and maintenance of strong relationships with parents and students is consistent.

School B There is no formal marketing plan devised for the school. Marketing is seen as an activity the Headteacher is involved with. Senior managers are also encouraged to be aware of the school image especially when meeting parents.

School C has no formal marketing plan but in response to the drop in numbers just after the 1997 hand-over more efforts were made to publicize what the school was about.

MRS. P. has a clear view of a niche market for the school. She sees the schools strength in English language use as being key to the market positioning.

MRS. P. also identified the problems associated with migration of Europeans out of the school. The Board is most anxious about the lower number of Europeans and native speakers within the student community. A number of parents have also commented on the 'ethnic imbalance' of the school. This imbalance is also detrimental to the perceptions of Chinese parents who also have expectations that their child is mixing with children of other cultures. A large number of native English speakers in an international school is considered desirable.

MRS. P. is far from pessimistic about large numbers of Chinese faces in the school. Local Chinese make up an increasingly large proportion of the intake at Yr. 7 and she is very complimentary about their work ethic and ability to do well in examinations, including English language examinations.

However, as a way of redressing the ethnic balance of the school by increasing the number of "blue eyed blondes" in the school MRS. P. is quite prepared to offer increased Math support for Europeans who would otherwise have been refused a place because they failed the Math entrance examination.

4) *Do you have a budget set aside for marketing?*

School A Emphatic "No!"

School B There is no budget set aside specifically for marketing. Money is allocated as and when needed.

School C Not a substantial amount and it is not formally available for marketing. Some money has been made available for certain projects such as brochures, promotional material etc.

5) *How do you evaluate the success of your marketing program?*

School A No structured way but the results of promotion/marketing are apparent in terms of the students who are attracted to the school

School B There is no formal evaluation of the success of a marketing program.

School C Where marketing activities have taken place the success is usually seen in the increase of applications for the school.

6) *Is there any marketing related training given to staff?*

School A None. Mr. J. has high expectations regarding the way the "front office" and his deputies relate to parents and other visitors to the school. This is an overt attempt at creating a friendly, open and welcoming face for the school. Mr. J. referred more than once to 'relationships' with parents and the community.
School B There is no marketing related training given to the staff.

School C There is no marketing related training. Teaching staff were not really seen to be involved in the marketing activities apart from the "open day" in which staff put on activities that are aimed at promoting what the school offers.

7) *Have you mounted any campaigns to attract students?*

School A Efforts have been made to attract students from the Chinese community, the Japanese and the Korean community. The students from these ethnic groups are well known in Hong Kong for performing well at school. Mr. J. has also

actively cultivated a good relationship with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and is pleased that the make-up of the Association is predominantly Asian.

School B Mr. B. maintains a relationship with a number of feeder primary schools by visiting them frequently. WIS organizes open days for prospective parents and students from the local feeder primary.

Mr B. devotes a significant proportion of his time personally meeting with parents and touring the school with them.

The staff are generally supportive of these activities to the extent that they may even be flattered by the arrival of visitors to their lessons.

Mr. B. has made it a priority to enhance the sport, music and extra-curricular activities in the school.

Mr. B. publicizes school successes in a revamped newsletter, another issue given priority attention.

School C It is the view of MRS. P. that there exists the general misconception that school C is the "snobby school on the Peak". The aim of any publicity or promotional activities have been on trying to change that image and also to let people know that the school teaches in English and offers Mandarin as an alternative foreign language at the school. The feeling of the school board was that many people had pre-conceived ideas about the school and it was necessary to alter those perceptions.

As a response to the down turn in numbers due to the Asian economic crisis soon after 1997, the school expanded upon its "open day". Originally intended to provide information to parents of School C primary students, it was expanded to promote the school to the parents of students attending other primary schools. The open day was publicized in a number of international primary schools by sending invitations to the parents of the students. Visits to international primary schools were also organized and Mrs. P. spoke to parents. Such visits are not guaranteed successful however and Mrs. P. recalls that one of those visits was considered to be less than useful because of a "grudge" by the Headteacher of the school.

Of more value had been a talk given by a School C parent to an international primary school (Singapore International School) during an information evening. The parent (from Singapore) had been asked to give a personal view of school C and the experience of her two sons in the school. Fortunately the woman's eldest son had recently been accepted into a prestigious University and she was able to present the school in a very positive light. The talk had resulted in a significant increase in applications from parents of students who attend that school numbering almost half the potential Year 7 vacancies for that year.

As a response to the falling numbers of students in 1998, MP actively sought the attention of the media to try to alter perceptions of the school. Although some success was noted with an initial foray into this strategy, subsequent interaction with the media proved to be much less positive.

MRS. P. is now not happy courting media attention and complained that the time and energy hosting the visits had rarely resulted in any positive feedback for the school. MRS. P. supports the plan to hire a PR specialist who would have the experience, expertise and time to interact with the media more effectively.

For example a recent press release outlining the success of two students in a national search for outstanding young people drew a good deal of interest from the media but MRS. P. felt the school was unprepared to respond adequately to the interest shown by the press.

The headmaster would rarely be involved in any of the promotional activities listed.

8) *Have you mounted any campaigns to retain students?*

School A Not asked

School B Not asked

School C Not asked

9) *Have you ever conducted a market research project?*
   a) What prompted the research?

   School C Apart from exit questionnaires (which were not identified as marketing activities) there were no market research activities performed by the ISD. However, the school has been through a large scale market research process which will be dealt with in a separate section.

10) *Have you carried out any research designed to assess the needs of students or parents?*
    (If none then go to question 15)

   School A Mr. J. was anxious that the increasingly popular commerce courses such as Business Studies Economics and I.T. would turn the school into a 'business school'. He felt that this was not the sort of school he wished to lead and made concerted efforts to enhance the academic status of the school and alter the image to that of an academic school. He has promoted in newspapers the achievements of graduating students who have gone to top Universities worldwide.

   School C A large market research project was undertaken by the school board as a

result of lower than expected student enrollment during the previous year.

11) *Have you implemented any reforms in your school that were inspired by parent or student needs/want?*

School A EAL and Mandarin. Music department was developed after a great deal of searching for the right teacher. (The significance of the music department has been mentioned by parents who have been interviewed). There have been a number of concerts presented by student musicians and these form the basis of good public relations with the school community.

School B Rugby has been given a much higher profile over the past few years after parents remarked to Mr. B. that theirs was the only school which had no tradition in the sport. The higher profile had resulted in School C winning the Hong Kong Schools rugby championships in the study year. This was seen by parents and students to be a good thing and had contributed to a better atmosphere at the school.

School C Not asked

Collecting Information

12) *Do you collect information from new students?*
    a) Students who are leaving? (An exit poll)

        School A
        School B
        School C Yes

    b) Applicants?

13) *Do you use any of the data you collect for marketing purposes?*

    School A
    School B Not specifically
    School C No

Relationship Marketing

14) *Is there any relationship management training offered for teaching or administrative staff?*

    School C No

15) *Have you gained feedback about parent/student interaction e.g. have they ever had an experience which went beyond their expectation? Or below?*

School C No

Brochure

16) *When was the brochure first produced?*

School A

School B

School C A new brochure has recently been produced for the whole school. A separate brochure was created in 1995 as a response to parents frequently asked questions. The contents are updated annually and inserted into the new whole school brochure.

17) *When was it last revised?*

School A The brochure is currently being revised for publication soon.

School C 2001 by the PR committee and SMT.

18) *What is the purpose of the Brochure?*

19) *Is the brochure produced in-house or by an external agency?*

School C A publishing and design company were involved on a consultative basis for the first time in-order to update the appearance and content of the brochures.

World Wide Web Page?

20) *What is the purpose of the WWW site?*

21) *Who created it and who maintains it?*

School A A teacher has an incentive point and is supported by sixth formers. The web site has recently been revamped.

School C A teacher volunteer originally produced the web site in-house and individual subject departments would produce the content of the web site. This

was never successful and did not become accepted by more than two or three departments.

More recently the school has employed an outside company to create a new web site to give more impact as a promotional tool.

Miscellaneous

1. Mr. J. is pleased that a large number of teaching staff send their children to the school and that a good number of teachers working for the ESF also send their children to his school.
2. Mr. J. does not test candidates for the school. He relies on the recommendations of other Principals and the Principals of primary schools. Some students who had been rejected by other schools were accepted into school A and had flourished in the school. This had had a very positive effect on the image of the school.
3. The school had previously had a number of drug related incidents that gained some bad publicity. Mr. J. tried to make the whole affair an open one and brought in the parents so that all stakeholders were involved in the remedy. He felt that this was very positive and made the community stronger. Students are now supported through issues such as these and not summarily expelled. This has led to greater trust between the students and the school and now information flows more easily between staff and students.
4. Offers places to second language speakers at year 10 rather than only in year 7 this has had a good reception from some ethnic groups such as the Japanese community in Hong Kong.
5. The school provides a very wide range of extra-curricular activities and this is one of the corner stones of a successful school along with a good academic reputation and good relationships with the community.
6. The new Governor of Hong Kong placed his children in the school and Mr. J. was aware of the effect that this had on the image of the school. It certainly did the school no harm!

7. An interesting fact
   The Hong Kong government is very concerned about the lack of international school places available for expatriates and have therefore blocked the allocation of international school places for local residents.

8.3 Appendix III

Semi-Structured Telephone Interviews with Parents

Interview Schedule and Detailed Summary of Interviews

Interview instrument for parents

Warm-up questions

1. Which international secondary school does your child attend?
2. Where does your family originate?
3. Which language is used most at home?
4. Is your child a boy or a girl?
5. Does your child have an older sibling?
6. Which school does the sibling attend?

Reasons

1. What were the three most important reasons for selecting your current school?

School Choice Process

1. When did you first start to consider secondary schools for your child?
2. Who took part in the process of choosing a school?
3. Had your child expressed a definite preference?
4. What reason had the child given for their choice?
5. Which schools did you consider?
6. What factors were most important as you considered schools?
7. Were there any schools you decided would definitely not be acceptable for your child/children? (Which schools and why?)
8. Did you have to compromise over your choice of school or did you get into the school of your choice?
9. If you had compromised, which school would you have ideally liked?
10. Would you have made different choices if your child had been different sex?

11. Had your experience with an older sibling affected your choice of school?

Information about school

1. Did you discuss choice of schools with your friends?
2. What sort of information did you search for?
3. Did you look at school brochures or prospectus?
4. Did you visit any schools?
5. Did you get any information about schools from any other sources?
6. Did you find-out information about examination results?
7. Did you find-out about Universities that graduates of the school attended?
8. When did you actively start seeking information about secondary school?

Telephone interviews with Respondent Parent Volunteers

Of the 179 replies, 26 parents (14%) indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed to give more information regarding their choice of school. Of those who volunteered, 18 parents were contacted by telephone and were engaged in a short semi-structured interview. Most of the interviews were comparatively short in length, around five or six minutes but one or two extended to be longer than this. One interviewee (Mrs. G) spoke for about twenty minutes about her experience with school selection. Parents were asked to expand on the reasons why they made a particular decision about which school to choose as their child's secondary school. On each occasion the parents were reminded of their responses to the questionnaire and were prompted to provide more information.

Where parents had transferred from the local Hong Kong system to the international sector, they were prompted for some background to their decision. Lastly, where a parent had changed from one school to another, they were asked to provide reasons for the change.

Summaries of the interviews are presented here under subheadings derived from the factors which the parents indicated were important when selecting an international secondary school for their child.

Head Teacher

Mrs V (School A). said that she had heard a number of positive comments about her son's Head teacher, which she said were confirmed when she met him. He was personable with parents. She described him as having a personal and caring approach and that he seemed to know all the students in the school. She put this down to the fact that he taught some lessons. This was in stark contrast to her experience with the Headteacher of her son's primary, who she described as cold and uncaring.

Mrs. Ri (School A) The wife of the Headteacher of School A taught her son in primary school (Kellett) and the wife's teaching of her son impressed her. Her positive impressions extended to the husband and were subsequently reinforced by comments she heard from other people. These experiences contributed to the selection of School A as her son's secondary school.

Discipline

Mrs W. (School C) Mrs. W. switched from a nearby ESF school to school C because she felt there was better discipline. She accused the first school of being too unstructured and random in its approach to education. She said that students in school C tended to run around less, it was more structured and the desks were placed in a more orderly fashion.

Convenience

Mrs V. (School A) had been informed (wrongly) that her son's primary school (situated on an outlying island of Hong Kong) was a feeder to School B. She has decided that School A is more convenient because the bus journey from the ferry terminal was shorter and that they have more options about walking to the terminal if it ever became necessary.

School Atmosphere

Mrs. V. (School B) felt that the other students in the school contributed to a positive school atmosphere and that they appeared friendly and the teachers were helpful and cooperative.

Mrs. L. (school B) had a very positive experience during visits to the school. The teachers were helpful and friendly and communicative.

Mrs. M. (school B) considered the visits to school B were useful and gave a very positive image of the school, the teachers, the students and the overall school atmosphere. She was particularly impressed by the way the students interacted with her and the teachers and how "lively and confident" they were, and how eager they appeared to answer her questions. She was pleased with the lessons they were invited to observe.

Mrs. W. (school B) was pleased with the parent evenings and visits organised by the school. She found the teaching staff to be helpful and polite.

Mrs. S. (school B) was pleased with the progress and comments of her older children who were also attending the school.

Mrs. Ri (school A) Sampled the school atmosphere on "Fair days" and Open days and was very impressed. Her observations on those days influenced her to agree with her daughter's choice.

Mrs. Ch. (school B) was impressed by the openness of the school and that teachers made themselves available when needed and she felt that the school had been proactive in solving problems. She was particularly pleased that the school had taken the initiative by phoning her.

Subjects Taught

Mrs. MG put her child into School C because of the emphasis it placed upon European languages. Her older daughter was also in the school.

Standards of Academic Education

Mrs L. (School B) judged the academic performance of school B to be good after she saw the text books and records of achievements in the school.

Mrs. M. (School B) said that the arranged visits and text books gave a good impression of the academic standards of the school but she felt that this impression had not continued. She felt her child was under challenged by much of the homework. Insufficient pressure.

Mrs. S (School B) had heard from friends that school B had a good academic record. This also seemed to be confirmed by the school newsletters and the exam results information she said.

Mrs.MG (School C) was impressed by the academic reputation of School C and was very pleased with the progress of her older daughter at the school. She felt that the expectations were high and that her children were lucky that they could both cope in the environment.

Transfer to International Sector

The interview with Mrs L. illustrates the reasons why a number of Chinese parents have considered the international sector for their childs education and the interview also reveals some of the concerns and misgivings that the switch to international schools can give rise to.

Mrs L. (School B) was Chinese and her daughter was studying in one of Hong Kong's most prestigious local primary schools but as her daughter progressed through the school there tended to be an increasing emphasis on examination preparation and the amount of drill and practice homework concerned Mrs. L. Her daughter was also feeling increasingly discouraged by her experiences at school and decided that transfer to the international sector might be appropriate. Mrs L. and her husband are both educators and knew something of the international school sector and felt that less emphasis was placed on examination preparation and that international schools had a more "interactive learning approach". They also wanted their daughters English skills to develop further than they had been able to do in the local school despite the reputation the school had developed through its use of English.

They visited a number of international primary schools and were happy with the child's choice of an ESF primary school near their home. The child has elected to remain in the international sector for her secondary education.

The international secondary school was selected partly as a result of a few days summer school experience in one of the international schools which was to be considered. The impression of that school was not positive, due to a rather "gloomy" environment. However the choice school had a bright, nice environment described as "fresh, sunshine". This had an influence upon their final decision.

Mrs. L contrasted the communication, support and apparent feeling of "partnership" demonstrated by the International school staff with the aloofness and uncommunicative approach of the schoolteachers and Headteachers in the local system.

However, Mrs. L. explained that there were some concerns that she now felt, having made the switch to the international school system. Mrs. L. and her daughter were troubled by the untidy appearance of some of the international students in school B. The skirts are too short and the t-shirts are never tucked in properly. She felt that the local secondary schools were much more careful about their students appearance.

Mrs. L. also criticised school B for being too "liberal" or loose with some of its procedures, especially with regard to informing parents about extra-curricular activities. She felt that there were greater demands for the students to use initiative than was evident in the local schools.

Mrs. M (school B) was ethnically Chinese but had lived in London. They initially made the choice to expose their daughter to her mother tongue and was placed in a Cantonese speaking primary school. This was successful but more recently her family is making plans to return to the United Kingdom and so made the decision to switch to an international school as preparation for the move.

Choice Between Schools

Mrs. W. (School B) chose between 3 schools. Two of the schools she had heard had excellent academic records but her daughter was especially keen to join the third option school because her friends would be there. Although disappointed by her daughters' choice, Mrs. W. felt that her daughter would receive a sufficiently good education from the school and agreed to send her daughter there.

Mrs. S. (School B) would like to have sent her child to one of the other large international schools but she felt that the school fee's were too expensive and chose School B.

Mr. A. (School A) had had an older daughter attend the school and felt that she had gained a great deal from the experience

Mrs. Ri (School A) chose between the "Big 4" HKIS, FIS, GSIS and ESF.

Mrs. MG chose school C because of its emphasis upon European languages and the high level that students were able to attain. It was a good start to life if students learned more than one language.

Mrs. Ch. (School B) originally placed her son in Canadian International School soon after they had arrived in Hong Kong. Unfortunately they were not happy with the education and therefore transfer was considered. Some other schools were considered but Mrs. Ch thought that a "snobbishness" existed in the (CIS) schools. Friends, contacts and visits convinced her that school B was the correct choice.

Mrs D. (School C) spent a good deal of time researching schools and moved near to one of the ESF schools (Shatin Junior) in anticipation of acceptance. Unfortunately she found the school to be rather unhelpful and was informed quite late on that there would be no available space for her daughter. She was recommended another ESF school but this also failed to materialise and she was referred to yet another school even further away. Eventually Mrs. D chose an independent international school. JIS. Mrs. D. elected not to send her daughter to the Shatin senior school (because of the

large number of Chinese speakers and the poor sports facilities) and her daughter did not like the large ESF alternative Kowloon (she actually cried after the visit). The daughter had attended a gymnastics club at school C and was familiar with the school and had made one or two friends from the school. Mrs D. was impressed by the sports facilities and the lack of afternoon schooling.

Mrs S. (School C) was influenced by her own schooling in Wales where she felt that she benefited from learning a second language from an early age. For this reason she had sent all her 4 children to the school to learn German. However, she has subsequently removed her three eldest daughters to attend other international schools. Her reason for this change was partly influenced by the cultural balance of the school and partly the increased sports and social opportunities which larger schools would offer the girls.

On a cultural level, she felt that Chinese parent's ideas of parenting rarely coincided with her own parenting expectations. The Chinese parents were either too strict and would not let their daughters play after school, or too busy and left their children do what ever they pleased under the supervision of Domestic Helpers. Mrs. S. felt that there were more Europeans at the other schools and that there would be more opportunity to find like-minded parents.

The other reason for removing her older daughters was that the schools she chose are larger and were more capable of catering to the needs and interests of her children. The wider range of sporting activities and social opportunities of larger schools were noted as part of the reason for transferring.

Ms, G. (School A) is Chinese and a single mother following divorce from her European husband. Her daughter has been educated in a Cantonese speaking primary school but Ms. G. was searching for an international secondary school in which to continue her daughter's education, partly upon the insistence of her ex-husband. Ms. G. had originally chosen a Cantonese environment for primary school because of the difficulties associated with learning Chinese reading and writing as a child gets older. This is a typical dilemma for Chinese parents who aspire to an international education

but who recognise the difficulty that older children will face learning Chinese later in their school career.

Her husband preferred that their child is sent to a school that teaches his native German, but Ms. G. was concerned that the strong emphasis placed on the acquisition of that language could hinder her daughters English development which she saw as of prime concern following her child's largely Cantonese primary school experience. Also, the school her husband preferred has a very academic reputation and Ms. G. felt that this would not suit her daughter's more creative nature.

Ms. G.'s other options for secondary international secondary schools included a well-established ESF school on the Kowloon side of the harbour. Her daughter would be eligible for entry into this school because she lived within the catchment area of the school. Ms. G. is concerned that this particular school accepts too wide an ability range and that there have been rumours of drug abuse among pupils attending the school. She also felt that the buildings were not attractive because of the age of the school.

She had applied to enter another international school which taught Mandarin as the main "foreign" language, but her application had been unsuccessful, although she was not sure of the reason for her daughter's failure to be accepted for that school.

Ms. G's personal choice of school for her daughter is the large American system school. Despite it's high school fees, this school would provide the creative atmosphere her daughter would benefit from. Ms. G. felt she had very little choice among the schools available and was finding it difficult to choose a school that would be the right one for her daughter. She also had the conflicting desires of her ex-husband to further complicate her choice. Her ultimate choice was a compromise but she felt she had made a good choice.

Mr F.A. (USA) (School C) Girls older sister had attended the school and had a good experience and achieved a place in a prestigious University he hoped the same would be true for his second daughter. He described the school as very academic and that they had consistently shown high examination grades although he did admit to having some concerns about some negative feedback he had heard over the past year. He felt

confident that if there were any issues, then they would probably be sorted out. He appreciated the multicultural ethos of the school and felt that mixed-race children like his own would be completely accepted by the other students. He liked the atmosphere in the school which he described as, "relaxed yet business like."

Mrs V.G. (British) School A said that she realized her daughter would be attending School A because the primary was a feeder. She was perfectly happy, knew the reputation of the school, her daughter would have friends there and Mother and daughter had both enjoyed their visits to the school.

Mrs. T. C. (School A) (Chinese) had heard good reports about the school for a long time and, it was an easy choice to place their daughter into an international school because the ESF was close-by. Mrs. T.C. felt that her daughter would be happy there and knew the school had a reputation for attaining a good academic standard and that it provided a healthy environment for the students. She had heard that School A had a good Head Teacher but was unable to recall any specific comments about him. She had been happy with the school choice and her daughter was very happy there.

Mrs. W (School B) (UK). Had seen the school, knew it had good facilities, knew the parent organisation had a reputation for good schools and liked the convenient location. Mrs. W. felt that School B would provide the academic support her daughter needed and that visits to the school during open days had confirmed her choice. She liked the Head Teacher and Staff at the school and liked the friendly atmosphere and new campus. Mrs. W. said that some of her daughters friends from their apartment had gone to the school and so she knew her daughter had friends there.