

**UNITED BY OUR DISPARITIES:
THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT BODY AT THE
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF STAVANGER**

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When I was searching for a thesis subject in American studies last spring, I thought at first that I would tackle some large and burning topic such as the widening political and cultural rift between America and Europe. After a couple of months' desultory reading on the subject, it occurred to me that it could be far more interesting to write about something closer to home, more precisely about the American students at the International School of Stavanger (ISS), which is located at a five minute car drive from where I live. My thesis advisor Dr. Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein enthusiastically welcomed the idea and told me that over the last few years quite a few students had written theses about American expatriates living in Norway. As I started working on the project, I decided on two changes of focus. First, I would study only the ISS high school since I myself teach *videregående skole* and so am familiar with the age group. Second, since the high school is quite small, I chose to study the entire high school student population.

In writing this thesis I have been helped by many people. First of all I must thank Dr. Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein for all her encouragement and guidance. When we first started this process there was more than a touch of the greenhorn in me, but through Deborah's patient efforts, that greenish tinge has become noticeably less pronounced. Former ISS sophomore Ann Katrine Leadholm and her mother Karin Leadholm shared insider knowledge during the planning stages. My colleague at *Lundehaugen videregående skole* Ren Powell has throughout acted as an invaluable sounding board and counselor in the elements of style. Marianne Aarre and Tore Grødem taught me statistics for beginners and initiated me in the mysteries of minidisc recording.

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INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD OF ISS

This thesis is a study of the high school student environment at the International School of Stavanger (ISS). No one knows better how the students interact than the students themselves, and so the study reflects to a large extent the thoughts and opinions volunteered by the students through questionnaires and interviews.

I. International Schools and Their Student Populations

The International School of Stavanger is multinational, multicultural, and multilingual. One would find many thousands of schools with large multicultural student populations in most major cities around the world. Usually such schools are part of their respective national school systems. What are on the other hand the characteristics of schools that call themselves “international”? According to Mary Langford, there is “much debate about what exactly constitutes an ‘international school’ and an ‘international education.’...”¹ One reason for this problem of classification cited by Mary Hayden is that the growth of such schools has been

relatively *ad hoc*, so that for the most part the body of international schools is a conglomeration of individual institutions which may or may not share an underlying educational philosophy.² While a number of attempts have been made to categorize or define them ... such schools remain, despite a number of groupings including the United World Colleges, ‘Shell Schools’, ‘IB Schools’, ECIS-accredited schools and so on, a disparate group.³

¹ Langford, Mary. “Global nomads, Third Culture Kids and International Schools.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 28.

² Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson. “International Schools and International Education: a Relationship Reviewed.” *Oxford Review of Education*, 21, 3, 1995: 327-345.

³ Hayden, Mary. “International Education in Practice.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson, eds. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 3.

Helen Fail discusses the difficulties of distinguishing international schools from comparable national schools and provides a set of negative characteristics to identify what international schools are not:

Are there certain characteristics which define an international school, and if so what are they? Is it because children from several nationalities attend? If so, then many schools in Britain could be described as international. Is it determined by the curriculum? If so, then only the schools offering the International Baccalaureate would qualify. There are many schools overseas offering a U.S. or UK. Curriculum or another mixture which would presumably [result in their being] rated as national schools overseas. It may well be that many schools overseas consider themselves and indeed call themselves international yet never consider that while teaching an international curriculum to a group of students from many different nationalities, the teaching faculty is 95 percent British or American and inevitably they perpetuate certain national cultural values.⁴

In Fail's narrow classification, schools that are explicitly tied to a particular school system are not international schools. On the other hand, the international school concept may be defined so widely that any national school that serves expatriates abroad may call itself "international" if it so desires. Ian Hill provides a more inclusive description a typical international school:

An international school is usually established to cater for students from a wide variety of cultures who are likely to be internationally mobile as their parents move from country to country, often in the employ of UN organizations or private international companies. The staff also represent a mixture of nationalities, usually with no particular nationality predominating. Such schools normally teach an international programme of study or one or more national programmes (but not generally of the country in which they are to be found) or a combination of both. They are usually private, fee-paying schools and are situated all over the world. They cater for parents (mostly foreign but also local) who want for their children a programme other than the national programme of the country in which they reside.⁵

Robin Pascoe, an expatriate mother, underlines the primacy of English in many schools:

Most [international school] students are English-speaking children living in foreign countries with their parents. They come primarily from Western countries like Canada, the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. ... Children from as many as 40 or 50 other countries will also be enrolled in these local

⁴ Fail, Helen. *Some of the Outcomes of International Schooling*. Master's thesis. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University, 1995: 8. Quoted in Pollock: 228.

⁵ Hill, Ian. "Internationally-Minded Schools." *International Schools Journal*, November 2000: 25-26.

international schools since many traveling families of other nationalities often wish their children to be educated in English.⁶

The opportunity to be educated in one of the dominant world languages is key to the attractiveness of many international schools for host country nationals. While local students are not of the same nationality or culture as the expatriate students, they often belong to the same socio-economic class, and are so able to pay the often high fees charged by such schools. Many schools will be inaccessible to most host country nationals. Richard Pearce writes that

For some local families who use ... [the international schools], assimilation [into the foreign socio-economic elite] may be the purpose of joining. In many less developed countries the local American, British, French, or international school, according to the region's traditional sphere of influence, is a route for the privileged into more developed country economies, or offers an accepted schooling for the socio-economic elite.⁷

Several countries, including France and the United States, transplant their home school systems to countries across the world in order to provide their citizens with the near equivalent of national schools. The French ministry of foreign affairs for instance operates more than four hundred French language schools in 125 countries. These schools educate 158,000 students, 65,000 of whom are French.⁸ In an article on American international schools, Warn D. Gillies writes that

Nearly a quarter of a million American children attend schools located outside the United States. The children of military personnel primarily attend schools operated by the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS), while civilian dependents attend privately operated, independent schools. ... Many of the [private] overseas schools receive financial aid and support from the U.S. Department of State....⁹

⁶ Pascoe, Robin. *Culture Shock! Successful Living Abroad: A Parent's Guide*. Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 2000: 136.

⁷ Pearce, Richard. "Developing Cultural Identity in an International School Environment." *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 46.

⁸ Source: http://www.lfh.gr/html/fr/1.LFH/1.2.abroad_edu.htm One such school is located in Stavanger, Norway.

⁹ Gillies, Warn D. "American International Schools: Poised for the Twenty-First Century." *Education*, Vol. 122 issue 2, 2001: 395.

The US Department of Defense currently oversees the education of 102,600 military dependents in 13 foreign countries and in several states and territories.¹⁰

An essential element of the international school system is peer review through the accreditation system. It is very much in the interest of the schools to cooperate on the development of curricula and other standards in order to be perceived as legitimate by their expatriate core customer bases. Many international schools are accredited by the European Council of International Schools (ECIS). Martha Haldimann writes that “ECIS, the membership organization for approximately 450 international schools in 90 countries around the world, is the oldest and largest association of international schools worldwide.”¹¹ A number of schools, including International School of Stavanger, are also accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools & Colleges. Quite a few international schools often offer the rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which is accepted by institutions of higher education all over the world. Indeed, 96 percent of all international school graduates go on to college.¹²

International schools are often quite small, with an average of 553 students in a typical school.¹³ Many schools offer both primary and secondary education, which means that there will be relatively few students in each grade. Such small environments can be felt to be socially constricting, especially if many expatriate students do not involve themselves in the host culture. English language international schools tend to function as community centers for expatriate families. Warna Gillies notes that

¹⁰ Source: <http://www.dodea.edu/communications/dodeafacts.htm>

¹¹ Haldiman, Martha. “Special Learning Needs in International Schools: The Optimal Match Concept.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson, eds. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 132.

¹² The ISS Directory of International Schools 2002-2003. 22nd edition. Princeton: International Schools Services, 2002: ix

¹³ The ISS Directory of International Schools 2002-2003: ix

The overseas school typically plays a large role in the lives of English speaking communities abroad.¹⁴ School activities are usually well attended and supported. This unique interplay between the school and the community is typified at the American School in Luxembourg; which was described as “playing a bigger role in the English speaking community than that of a school. In a sense it’s the hub of English speakers in Luxemburg.”¹⁵

How many international schools are there worldwide? Since there is no agreed-upon classification, calculations will vary depending on which criteria are being used. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson estimated in 1995 that there were about one thousand such schools.¹⁶ The International Schools Services 2002-2003 Directory on the other hand lists 540 English language international schools in 152 countries. Among these, 121 are situated in Western Europe, 138 in East Asia, 48 in Eastern Europe, and eleven in North America. In the 2002-2003 school year, international schools educated 299,040 students, of whom 65,473 were American, 18,994 British, 115,040 host country nationals, and 103,999 students of other nationalities.¹⁷ According to the Directory, in a typical English language international school, host country nationals comprise about a third of the student population, and constitute a language block some percentage points larger than that of American and British students combined. In terms of staff, however, American and British teachers account for 47 percent of all international school faculties. 11,751 teachers are US citizens, 5,012 are British, 10,845 are host country citizens, and 7,943 come from other countries.¹⁸

In sum, international schools are typically private, multicultural schools that are set up by major companies or foreign government agencies in order to provide education for the children of their expatriate employees. These schools are transplanted into the host culture

¹⁴ Osborn, A. “Luxembourg: American School, European Education.” *Europe*: 1997, 39: 29-30. Quoted in Gillies: 399.

¹⁵ Gillies 397.

¹⁶ Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson. “International Schools and International Education: a Relationship Reviewed.” *Oxford Review of Education*, 21, 3, 1995: 327-345. Quoted in “International Education in Practice.” Mary Hayden. *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson, eds. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 2.

¹⁷ The ISS Directory of International Schools 2002-2003: ix

¹⁸ The ISS Directory of International Schools 2002-2003: ix

and are alien to it, even though significant numbers of local students may attend. International schools may choose to tie themselves strongly to a particular national school system, or they may opt for a school profile based on several school systems. The generally small size of international schools, their multicultural student populations, their generally affluent client families, their similarity to private college-preparatory American schools, and the frequency with which English is the language of instruction tends to foster the development of a specific international school expatriate culture that may be encountered across the world. According to one ISS teacher, “It is often said that international schools have very similar environments, at least when it comes to schools of the same size.”

Compared to most local national schools, international schools are studies in contrast. These schools are neither part of the host culture in which they are located, nor are they closely connected to the several home cultures of their community members. Student populations are at once heterogeneous in terms of culture, nationality and language, and homogeneous in terms of socio-economic class. Student transience is the norm, not the exception in international schools. One would think that these fascinating worlds apart would be well described in the literature, particularly considering that global mobility is on the rise. There has however not been much academic writing on international schools.

Mary Hayden observes that

One of the striking features of the field of international schools and international education is the dearth of written material available within the public domain. ... It is difficult to envisage many other professional contexts where a determined search through databases, whether paper based or electronic, would yield such a low return of relevant sources as is the case when the key words “international school” are the focus of the search.¹⁹

The literature that has been produced has often been written by international school professionals or academics connected to the international school world. One of the richest

¹⁹ Hayden, Mary. “Preface.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson, eds. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: xii.

sources of literature is the *International Schools Journal*, which is published twice a year by ECIS. This journal addresses itself primarily to faculty and staff at member schools, and the articles are often written by practitioners in the field.²⁰ Studies of international schools are also generated at the Centre for the Study of Education in an International Context (CEIC) at the University of Bath through its master's and doctorate programs. The mission statement on the CEIC homepage asserts that

CEIC's major functions in relation to its work in the field of international education are: Research into international education, through personal research, research projects coordinated by CEIC and research degrees of MPhil, PhD and EdD engaged in on a part-time basis by teachers and administrators in different parts of the world; publishing the outcomes of research relating to international education....²¹

Two of the leading lights at CEIC, Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson, have in addition to other publications edited two useful collections of essays on international schools.²²

Furthermore, a small number of doctoral dissertations have been written in the United States and in Great Britain on international schools, on international school student populations and on student environments. Finally, both ECIS and CIS maintain informative websites, which give the interested reader a good sense of what goes on in the international school community.²³

The literature cited above for the most part concerns itself with challenges facing international schools. Outside of the academic world, a number of books have been written for the large number of internationally mobile families. These works are often handbooks for families new to the expatriate lifestyle or collections of personal memoirs by former internationally mobile children. *Hidden Immigrants: Legacies of Growing Up Abroad* by

²⁰ Confirmed in an email from Dr. Duevel: "Yes, most of the articles in [ISJ] would have been written by folks connected with the international school circuit." 9 August 2004. Dr. Duevel is the ECIS chair.

²¹ The statement was found on the institute's homepage at <http://www.bath.ac.uk/ceic/>

²² Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson, eds. *International Education: Principles and Practice*. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998.

---, eds. *International Schools & International Education: Improving Teaching, Management & Quality*. London: Kogan Page Limited, 2000.

²³ The addresses are www.ecis.org and <http://www.cois.org/>

Linda Bell is a collection of reminiscences by thirteen former child expatriates. Bell's rationale for publishing the book is that

Those who have lived an internationally mobile childhood will be anxious to read about themselves. Younger ones will get a glimpse of what might lay ahead. Those responsible for these children overseas, whether parents, educators, or personnel offices, will gain insights which should help in making decisions affecting the lives of these children.²⁴

Carolyn D. Smith's *The Absentee American: Expatriates' Perspectives on America* is in a similar vein. It is "based on responses to a questionnaire distributed among a sample of [three hundred] American adults who lived outside the United States as children ... and then returned and settled here..."²⁵ Karen Curnow McCluskey's *Notes from a Traveling Childhood: Readings for Internationally Mobile Parents and Children* is an anthology of writings of interest to expatriates, including Ruth Hill Useem's and Richard D. Downie's seminal 1976 article on third culture kids.²⁶ Expatriate mothers Robin Pascoe and Monica Rabe have written practical guides for expatriate families.²⁷ Pascoe's book in particular contains much valuable information on international schools written from a parent's point of view. *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* by Mary Edwards Wertsch concerns itself with a subset of nationally and internationally mobile children, military dependents.²⁸ According to David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken,

Military children who have never moved outside their countries may also share many TCK characteristics. The military subculture ... is quite different from that of the civilian population around it. When military parents return to civilian life, their children often experience many of the same feelings that internationally

²⁴ Bell, Linda. *Hidden Immigrants: Legacies of Growing Up Abroad*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Cross Cultural Publications, Inc., 1997: x.

²⁵ Smith, Carolyn D. *The Absentee American: Expatriates' Perspectives on America*. New York: Aletheia Publications, 1994: ix.

²⁶ McCluskey, Karen Curnow, ed. *Notes From a Travelling Childhood: Readings for Internationally Mobile Parents & Children*. Washington D.C.: Foreign Service Youth Foundation, 1994.

²⁷ Pascoe, Robin. *Culture Shock! Successful Living Abroad: A Parent's Guide*. Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 2000.

Rabe, Monica. *Culture Shock! A Practical Guide: Living and Working Abroad*. Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 2000.

²⁸ Wertsch, Mary Edwards. *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*. Paperback reissue. New York: Aletheia Publications, 1996.

mobile TCKs [third culture kids] describe when they return to their passport countries.²⁹

There is also some literature aimed at the general reader written by academics.

Undoubtedly the best known of these books is David Pollock's and Ruth Van Reken's *Third Culture Kids*, from which the above extract is taken.

International school student populations are typically a mix of expatriate students and host country students. Expatriate dependent children have been the focus of scholarly investigation since at least the 1950s, when Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem labeled such children third culture kids (TCKs). Pollock and Van Reken note that

Two social scientists, Drs. John and Ruth Useem, coined the term *third culture* in the 1950s, when they went to India for a year to study Americans who lived and worked there as foreign service officers, missionaries, technical aid workers, businessmen, educators, and media representatives. ... They realized the expatriates had formed a lifestyle that was different from either their home or their host culture, but it was one they shared in that setting. To best describe this expatriate world, the Useems defined the home culture from which the adults came as the first culture. They called the host culture where the family lived ... the second culture. They then identified the shared lifestyle of the expatriate community as an *interstitial culture*, or "culture between cultures", and named it the third culture. The Useems called the children who had grown up in that interstitial culture *third culture kids*.³⁰

Pollock and Van Reken go on to explain that since the 1950s the term has been expanded to take into account the realities of today's world. The authors write that

The Useems did their research when most Western expatriates lived in specific communal systems such as military bases, missionary compounds, and business enclaves. Identifying a visible, local expatriate community was relatively easy. However, the world has changed since then. Today, many expatriates no longer live in defined communities. ... Because there are frequently no well-marked expatriate enclaves anymore, some argue that the terms *third culture* or *third culture kid* are now misnomers.³¹

²⁹ Pollock, David C. and Ruth E. Van Reken. *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*. Trade paperback edition. London: Nicholas Brealy Publishing/ Intercultural Press, 2002: 29.

³⁰ Pollock 20.

³¹ Pollock 21.

In 1993, Ruth Useem defined third culture kids simply as “children who accompany their parents into another society.”³² In her foreword to *Third Culture Kids*, Norma M. McCaig, founder of Global Nomads International, warns against broadening

the definition of TCK to include the children of refugees, immigrants, and those whose experience is domestic, not global. ... The term risks being diluted beyond use for both researchers and TCKs themselves. If researchers are to be able to exchange research data without contamination, they need clarity on who it is they have been researching.³³

Many students at international schools are per definition TCKs, regardless if one chooses to define the term narrowly or widely. That the term can be felt to be imprecise is exemplified by an article that John Bastable, the principal of Mercedes-Benz International School in India, wrote for *International School magazine*:

If you are looking for a Third Culture Kid where would you look for one? How would you identify one? ... [TCKs] were found to be four times more likely to graduate with a Bachelor’s Degree than non-TCKs.... Is the academic success attributed to TCKs the result of other variables such as a privileged upbringing, a financially advantaged status, a stable family background and the stimulating experience of travel and new places? ... Is every mobile student of modern ECIS-recognised schools automatically a TCK...? Visit an international school and try to identify the TCKs from the non-TCKs.³⁴

By studying at an international school one may in one sense become a TCK by default, regardless of whether one is an expatriate student or host culture student, since the mesh of cultures found at international schools constitute a new culture for all students. In Pollock’s and Van Reken’s view, however, TCKs live at some physical remove from their parents’ culture:

A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life

³² Useem, Ruth Hill. “Third Culture Kids: Focus of Major Study.” *Newslinks*, Newspaper of the International School Services 12, 3, January 1993: 1. Quoted in Pollock: 21.

³³ Pollock xv-xvi.

³⁴ Bastable, John. “Are Third Culture Kids Just an Illusion?” *IS International School magazine*, Volume 6, issue 2 (Spring/Autumn 2004): 22-23.

experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.³⁵

The authors add that “Members of specific third culture communities may be more directly conscious than peers at home of representing something greater than themselves – be it their government, their company, or God.”³⁶ Indeed, one parent who was interviewed for this thesis said that her husband’s employer, a major oil company, was a lifeline for the family’s very mobile life. An alternative term for internationally mobile children is “global nomad”. This term was coined in 1984 by Norma McCaig.³⁷ According to Mary Langford it is used interchangeably with “third culture kid.”³⁸

While there is a good deal of literature on internationally mobile children, little has apparently been written about the local students who attend international schools. When discussed, this student group is most often obliquely referred to in articles concerned with other issues. In one article written for *International Schools Journal*, Chamnongsri Hanchanlash, a grandmother of six international school children, discusses the long-term effects of studying at an international school on host country nationals. Andrew Bartlett, the chair of the Parent Association at an international school in Thailand, told her that

Over the last 40 years or so, Third Culture Kids (sometimes called ‘Global Nomads’) have been the subject of PhD theses, conferences, popular books and websites. Much less attention appears to have been given to what happens when local children attend international schools.³⁹

Hanchanlash suggests that host country students become “Forth Culture Kids [who] acquire knowledge, attitudes and values that make them feel ‘at home’ with foreigners, but [that those values] can also set them apart from the majority of children of their own

³⁵ Pollock 19.

³⁶ Pollock 23.

³⁷ Pollock xi.

³⁸ Langford: 30. In all my interactions with ISS students I have consistently used the global nomad term rather than third culture kid, as I wanted to address myself to them as young adults, not as children. In the thesis proper I use the neutral “internationally mobile [student]” term rather than global nomad or TCK.

³⁹ Hanchanlash, Chamnongsri. “International Cultural Overpass: Its Relation to and Alienation from Indigenous Culture.” *International Schools Journal*, April 2004: 9.

nationality.”⁴⁰ Host country students may well on daily basis travel between quite distinct cultures, that of their homes and that of the international schools. Indeed, Bastable questions whether “third culture kids really differ from other affluent local kids attending the same [international] school ... [and if in fact] these students also live a TCK existence during the school day...”⁴¹

There has also been done little academic work on the student environments in international schools. Books for the general reader sometimes touch on the subject, but of the authors cited above, only Pascoe, Pollock and Van Reken devote considerable space to it.⁴² Commenting on the apparent dearth in academic writing on these environments, ISS high school student counselor Dr. Rick Cameron said that

I have thought a little bit too about why there is not a lot of literature on the international school environment and the effect on students. ... Many international school directors, principals, and to a lesser extent, teachers, are holders of terminal graduate degrees and have experience in conducting scholarly research. Encouraging these educators to conduct research on various aspects of the international school environment would seem a logical first step in addressing the shortage of relevant research literature.⁴³

A small number of doctoral dissertations on international school student environments have been published by Melkonian, Ochs, Straffon, Willis and others.⁴⁴ One dissertation runs on somewhat parallel lines to the present study. Susan Carole Pettibone studied of the

⁴⁰ Hanchanlash 13.

⁴¹ Bastable 22.

⁴² Pascoe: Chapter 6, “International School Daze”: 132-159. Pollock: Chapter 13, “Meeting Educational Needs”: 215-236.

⁴³ All statements by Dr. Cameron found in the thesis come from an interview conducted on June 7th, 2004, and are therefore not given separate endnotes. ISS Director Dr. Duevel has provided information on several occasions before and after her interview on June 14th, 2004. When statements are quoted that she made during the interview, no endnotes are given, but statements she made on other occasions are given individual endnotes.

⁴⁴ Melkonian, Michael *The effect of an International School Environment on the Perception of Self and Others: a Study of Expatriate Students in The United Arab Emirates*. Southampton: The University of Southampton (United Kingdom), 1993.

Ochs, Terry David. *Explicit and Implicit Culture in the International School: an Ethnographic Study of Cultural Diversity and its Educational Implications*. Southampton: The University of Southampton (United Kingdom), 1990.

Straffon, David Atwood. *Assessing Intercultural Sensitivity Levels of High School Students in an International School*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2001.

Willis, David Blake. *A Search for Transnational Culture: an Ethnography of Students in an International School in Japan*. Iowa: The University of Iowa, 1986.

values, beliefs, and attitudes of students at an international high school, using a survey questionnaire and conducting interviews with students. She wrote that

Educators concerned with student values and character education in culturally diverse educational settings may find it worthwhile to examine the values and beliefs of international school students ... [because of] their emphasis on positive intercultural relations based on cooperation, respect, responsibility to the community, compassion and concern for the welfare of others, tolerance, and cultural awareness and understanding ...⁴⁵

In conclusion, the study of international schools and their students constitute a fresh and exciting field of academic enquiry. Apart from Kjartan Hoem's 1980 thesis on the Stavanger American School (SAMS), now the International School of Stavanger, and a recent thesis on bilingual children at the Biralee International School in Trondheim, very little has for instance been written about international schools located in Norway.⁴⁶ Nor is there much literature on international schools in general. This thesis intends to bridge a gap not only in the literature on international schools in Norway, but also in the study of international schools in general and of international school student environments in particular.

II. The Present Study

This is an examination of the high school student environment of one particular international school in Stavanger, Norway. The study constitutes disinterested academic research. ISS has given me privileged access to the school, but the thesis is not written for the school. The following pages are written by an outsider looking in, not by an insider

⁴⁵ Pettibone, Susan Carole. *A study of the values, Beliefs, and Attitudes of Students at an International High School*. Boston: Boston University, 2001: abstract.

⁴⁶ Hoem, Kjartan. *The Stavanger American School 1966-1979*. Hovedfagsoppgave in Pedagogy. Oslo: University of Oslo, 1980.

Odland, Annika S. *We Aren't Really Supposed to Speak in Norwegian – But We Do Sometimes Anyway: 10-13-åringers Tospråklighet på en Internasjonal Skole i Trondheim*. Hovedfagsoppgave i nordisk språk. Trondheim: Institutt for nordistikk og litteraturvitenskap, The Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2003.

I wrote to all international schools in Norway to enquire whether any had been the subject of studies. It seems that apart from a few newspaper articles, no studies except Hoem's and Odland's theses have been done.

having a look around. Three major questions were focused on over the course of the research period: How does student heterogeneity factor into the high school student environment? What is characteristic of the student environment in this private, international school? How do students feel about studying in a relatively small, somewhat closed-off school community?

Before accounting for the research process, it might be useful to provide some information about the school. ISS is one of nine English language international schools in Norway, and one of six such schools to offer secondary education.⁴⁷ Stavanger is atypical for Norway in that three schools catering to expatriates are located there, of which ISS is by far the largest.⁴⁸ The reason for this concentration is that since the 1960s the city has been the center of the oil industry in Norway. ISS was founded in 1966 as Stavanger American School (SAMS). As a consequence of the change in nationalities of expatriates coming to work in Stavanger, the school in 1990 changed its name to Stavanger International School. ISS Director Dr. Linda M. Duevel, who started teaching at SAMS in 1975, explains how the school has evolved:

In Stavanger the oil industry has changed. It used to be that there were only American companies, and that most of the specialists who were brought over here were primarily American. That has changed completely. ... It just makes sense that if this had stayed an American school, it wouldn't exist anymore, because there would only be ... a couple of hundred students. There would not be the need for a functioning and vibrant high school if we didn't have many students.... When the school first started with IGCSEs and A-levels, it only made sense in 1990 that we should also change the school's name to fit the program that we were offering. I see all of this as very positive things. The school adapts to the market.

In 1994, NATO established the Joint Headquarters Allied Forces North Europe base outside of Stavanger. According to Dr. Duevel, this new source of students was a welcome buffer against the fluctuations in the oil industry:

⁴⁷ Source: http://www.cois.org/directory/gen_schoolSearch.asp

⁴⁸ The other two schools are the British International School of Stavanger and the French lycée. The latter school is an integral part of the French national school system. In addition, the Children's House offers pre-school day-care.

NATO came in 1994, and it was a good time for them to come in. During the time that NATO has been here, there have still been peaks and troughs in the oil industry. In 1999, we lost quite a few students. That was the year that Exxon bought Mobil and BP bought Amoco. There have been a lot of rationalizations and mergers. This had a negative impact on our student enrolment. We finished the year with just under 500 students. Before that last set of takeovers took place we had about 625 students. But the school is set up to be flexible and to expand and contract as we need to.

In the 2003-2004 school year, 26 nations were represented in the ISS student body. 475 students were being taught by 68 full-time faculty members. The ISS student population is made up of expatriate oil company and NATO dependents, a sizable percentage of local students, and the children of ISS employees.

The study was conducted from late April to early June, 2004. Prior to meeting with the ISS administration I had drafted a questionnaire and interview guides, using as guidelines the surveys written by Elisabeth Hveem Hvattum for her study of the American Lutheran Church in Oslo.⁴⁹ David Pollock's and Ruth van Reken's *Third Culture Kids* was a further source of inspiration. The authors suggest that questionnaires be written with the particular characteristics of TCKs in mind:

Perhaps because [growing up as a TCK] is such a highly paradoxical experience, it is hard to measure the "both/andness" in any quantitative survey. For those interested, we would suggest that any survey designed for TCKs and ATCKs [Adult TCKs] take into account the inherent paradoxes and leave room for open-ended responses as well as those designed to gather statistical data.⁵⁰

Drafts were given to an ISS high school student and her mother whom I know privately for comment. I then met with Dr. Duevel several times in order to discuss practical issues and the parameters of the project. She kindly gave permission for the distribution of questionnaires to all high school students and for students to be interviewed at the school during school hours. However, she would only allow for the distribution of the questionnaire if the school had final say in what questions were to be asked. She felt that

⁴⁹ Hvattum, Elisabeth Hveem. *Ethnic and Religious Identity: The American Lutheran Church in Oslo*. Hovedfagsoppgave in English. Oslo: University of Oslo, 2003.

⁵⁰ Pollock 303.

asking a person to check whether he or she is ethnically Norwegian would be inherently discriminatory and could cause offence. Moreover, questions about the perceived social status of this or that subgroup, about race, or about financial issues could be divisive and hence inappropriate in a questionnaire that would be seen by all high school students and their parents. In addition, I was advised not to include questions such as “Where do your parents work”, since some parents might consider such questions to be impertinent and consequently refuse to sign the release forms. However, in the more personal interview setting I would be free to ask what questions I felt were appropriate.

The first distribution of the surveys took place in the ISS cafeteria during lunch on April 23rd, 2004. In the school newsletter published on the same day, Dr. Duevel informed parents and students about the project.⁵¹ Parents were asked to read through the questionnaire and then sign the release form if they found it acceptable. The students were then to fill out the questionnaire anonymously, seal it and the release form in an envelope provided, and drop the envelope off at the ISS front office. By May 23rd, 36 percent of all students had handed in the forms. In order to increase the response rate, fresh forms were mailed to students who had not responded the first time. By June 3rd, the last day of school, a total of 65 forms had been returned, which means that 48 percent of the student population responded. Three students returned the questionnaires without including a signed release form. Since the students were minors, those questionnaires had to be discarded. This is regrettable, since two of the three students had different views than most students, and therefore could have given important outlier information about the student environment.

A 48 percent return rate is a fairly respectable figure, but it would be useful to know just how representative the opinions of those 65 students are for the entire 136 member student

⁵¹ Duevel, Linda M. “From the Director.” *The Informer*. Published by ISS as a Community Newsletter. Stavanger: ISS, 23 April 2004: 1-2.

body. In calculating representability for gender, grade, nationality and duration of stay at ISS, information volunteered by the students were crosschecked against figures provided by ISS. In the 2003-2004 school year there were 65 girls and 71 boys in the high school. Fifty-eight percent of all girls responded, while only 38 percent of boys did so. The female students' response is therefore more likely to be representative than that of the male students. Forty-three percent of 9th grade students responded, while the figures for the 10th, 11th and 12th grades are 54 percent, 54 percent, and 38 percent, respectively. Norwegians made up 27.2 percent of the student population. 51.3 percent of this group turned in the questionnaire. Americans constituted 22 percent of the population, and 26.6 percent of this group responded, while the corresponding figures for the British students were 21.3 percent and a 53.4 percent response rate. These were the largest population groups at ISS High. In the interest of respondent anonymity, the remaining twelve nationalities are presented as an aggregate. These students made up 29.5 percent of the population, and their response rate was 48.7 percent. In sum, Norwegian students, British students and students from smaller nation groups are quite well represented, while Americans are less so. It is especially pleasing that the response of students from smaller national groups is representative, as this thesis aims to represent the full diversity of the ISS student experience. Representability in terms of duration of study at ISS seems to be an almost perfect match. Forty percent of all high school students have attended ISS from less than one year up to two years, and 35 percent of respondents have done so. Correspondingly, 31 percent have attended ISS for three to four years, while 34 percent of respondents have done so. Finally, 29 percent have attended ISS from five to twelve plus years (a few students have attended ISS kindergarten in the same building), while 31 percent of respondents have done so. Unfortunately, representability according to student sponsorship

could not be measured since the school would not allow this type of question to be put in the questionnaire.

The survey responses appear to be fairly representative for the student body. The researcher however needs to evaluate whether the material is trustworthy, and must try to establish if responses have been given in good faith. After reading all the forms closely and repeatedly, I am left with the impression that opinions have been shared candidly, and that students have amused themselves in only one or two cases, and then in only one or two questions. One student had however written a sizable text of quite negative comments on the last blank page of the questionnaire. Afterward he had almost entirely erased the comments and written a much toned-down version on top of the original text. He explained during his interview that he thought the parents had to read through the questionnaire *after* the students had filled them out, and that his own parents had found the comments too negative and asked him to change them. It is nowhere stated on the survey prospectus or in the questionnaire that parents should do so, nor were the students told so at the lunchtime presentation. Parents were asked to read through the forms *before* students filled them out to make sure that this survey was something they wanted their children to participate in. It is impossible to guess how many if any other students shared this student's beliefs. Indeed, after the presentation some students began filling out the forms right away without the benefit of parental guidance.

Interviews with students, faculty, staff, and parents began a few days after the distribution of the survey, and the series finished up with Dr. Duevel on June 14th. In order to provide context for the student responses, it was necessary to interview ISS community members who are not part of the student environment but who observe the students on a daily basis. ISS Director Dr. Duevel was a natural choice to interview because of her position as school director, but also because she has worked at the school since 1975 and

probably knows the ISS community better than most. Conversely Dr. Cameron had at the time worked at ISS for only ten months and thus observed the community with new eyes. In addition, as part of his position as guidance counselor he is a student advocate, and consequently knows many students from a different side than that of other faculty and staff. When asking other staff and parents for interviews I aimed for a balance of nationalities. None of those who were approached declined to be interviewed. One student even volunteered. Only those students who had handed in signed release forms and questionnaires were legally available for interviews.

The students who were asked for interviews were chosen according to three criteria. First, students were selected for the intrinsic interest of their responses. Second, it was necessary that respondents with divergent views be interviewed, in order that the outliers in the student population would be represented. Third, a balanced selection from the various national and cultural subgroups at the school was sought after. The interviewees included

- at least one student from each grade
- at least one student with dual citizenship
- at least one student whose mother tongue is neither English nor Norwegian
- at least one Norwegian scholarship student
- at least one American student with a parent who works for an oil company
- at least one non-American student with a parent who works for an oil company
- at least one American with a parent who works for NATO
- at least one non-American student with a parent who works for NATO
- at least one British student
- at least one student from one of the smaller national groups at ISS
- at least one private pay student
- at least one student who has attended ISS for more than five years
- at least one student who first enrolled at ISS in the fall of 2003

In the ISS high school, many students share in several of the characteristics above. The students interviewed identified themselves as adhering to several faiths and major religious organizations. Most but not all were Caucasian.

For each interview I prepared an interview guide based on what the students had written in the questionnaires. In addition, all interviewees were asked to comment on

certain key topics of interest that developed as research progressed.⁵² According to Idar Magne Holme and Bernt Krohn Solvang, interview guides are designed to be springboards for conversation, and not scripts that must be followed slavishly:

Standardized questionnaires are not used for the qualitative interview. This is because one does not want too great a degree of control on the part of the researcher. On the contrary, it is desirable that the points of view expressed are arrived at as a result of the interviewees' own understanding. It is therefore important that they themselves to the greatest possible extent control the development of the interview.⁵³

Many students seemed to enjoy talking about their lives at ISS. One student even said that "This is better than studying." The interviews were recorded on minidisc. In transcribing the statements, language has been clarified when necessary. Translations from Norwegian to English have been done silently in order not to compromise respondent anonymity.

All information shared by members of the ISS community has been given on condition of anonymity. In a small environment such as ISS, people may be easily identified by other characteristics besides their names. One student said that "Everyone knows everything about everyone here. It happens because there is so few of us." For this reason, students, staff and parents who were interviewed are not identified in the primary sources section of the bibliography, nor have their statements been given individual endnotes. Even labeling participants student A, teacher B and so on would make it relatively easy for an ISS insider to crosscheck the statements made by for instance student A and have quite a good guess at who that particular person is. Only Dr. Duevel and Dr. Cameron will be identified in the thesis, since they expressly gave their permission to be quoted by name.⁵⁴ In addition to Dr. Duevel and Dr. Cameron, ten community members were interviewed, but in order to further safeguard respondents' anonymity, the exact number of students, of staff, and of parents interviewed will not be disclosed.

⁵² A composite student interview guide is given in the appendix.

⁵³ Holme, Idar Magne and Solvang, Bernt Krohn. *Metodevalg og metodebruk*. 3rd edition. Oslo: Tano, 1996: 95. Translated from the Norwegian by the author.

⁵⁴ Dr. Duevel and Dr. Cameron were sent complete transcripts of their interviews for review and approval.

At the end of the research period I had amassed 65 questionnaires and fifteen hours of interviews. In order to put this rich quantitative and qualitative source material in a proper context, it was necessary to analyse it against hard data on the students held by ISS. In response to very specific questions, I was given confidential information about students and staff. The material was provided on the strict understanding that it would only be used to construct aggregate numbers, and that it would be destroyed once the thesis had been approved. Information was provided about all students' citizenship, school fee sponsorship, and duration of stay at ISS. Furthermore, ISS specified which students had siblings at the school or parents working there, and who left ISS at the end of the 2003-2004 school year. Information was also provided about high school teachers' nationalities and the length of their employment at ISS. In addition, the school made available photocopies of a variety of relevant school documents. It is hoped that by triangulating all this material a representative picture of the student environment will emerge.

The thesis suggests that three main factors are important in molding the student environment. Chapter One considers the significance of student heterogeneity. Chapter Two analyses the cultural climate and academic profile of the school. Chapter Three discusses the size of the ISS community and the community members' relation to the host culture. The conclusion considers all these factors as a whole and suggests further research.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ISS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT BODY

We are united by our disparities.⁵⁵

It is reasonable to assume that the students' cultural identities are important in how they interact in the ISS community. This chapter explores student identity in the aggregate by using data supplied by the school and information volunteered by the students through questionnaires and interviews. While the present chapter is mostly concerned about cultural heterogeneity, subsequent chapters examine the impact powerful homogenizing forces have on the student environment.

I. Origins

In local schools in Norway or elsewhere, what kind of jobs your parents have is usually not a very significant identity marker. Not so for the expatriate child. According to Ruth Hill Useem and Richard D. Downie,

The parents' sponsor in the overseas area is crucial in determining the specific part of the third culture in which the TCKs live, the kind of school they attend, the host nationals and third country nationals they will know, and the languages they will learn. These children even have labels that reflect their parents' sponsors – “Army brats”, “MKs” (missionary kids), “biz kids”, and most recently, “oil kids.” Overseas, one of the first questions a TCK asks a new arrival is “What does your father do?” or “Who is your father with?” The answer helps to place young people socially.⁵⁶

ISS is primarily a school for expatriate dependents. Forty percent of ISS high school students have parents who work for an oil company, and seventeen percent are military

⁵⁵ Questionnaire response. The student responded to question A46: “What are the most positive and the least positive aspects about studying at an international school?”

⁵⁶ Useem, Ruth Hill and Richard D. Downie. “Third Culture Kids.” *Today's Education*, September-October 1976. Rpt. in *Notes From a Travelling Childhood: Readings for Internationally Mobile Parents & Children*. Ed. Karen Curnow McCluskey. Washington D.C.: Foreign Service Youth Foundation, 1994: 66.

dependents. All these students are expatriates. In addition, 28 percent of the student body are private pay students, and six percent are ISS scholarship students. These students are single or dual passport Norwegians, or have lived in Norway for a minimum of three years. Finally ISS provides free tuition for the children of employees, who make up nine percent of the student population.

Fifteen nationalities are represented in the high school student body. Twenty-seven percent of students hold dual citizenship. Norwegian students constitute the largest nationality group with 26 single and 22 double citizenship students. The American group contains 24 single and twelve double passport holders, while the third largest group, the British students, has 22 single and fourteen double citizenship students. Besides the “big three” nationality groups, there are in descending order Canadian, German, Dutch, Polish, Swedish, French, Danish, Australian, Indian, Italian, Iranian, and Turkish nationality groups, who are represented by 27 single and 26 double citizenship students. The sum total of all the national groups ends at 173, while there are in fact only 136 students in the high school. The reason for this is that in these calculations the dual citizenship students are counted twice. There are for instance nine British-Norwegian students and three Swedish-American students in the high school. By far the most students who hold dual citizenship are half Norwegian. All but three of all nationality groups listed above are represented by at least one part Norwegian student.

Why are there so many students with dual citizenship at ISS? Robin Pascoe writes that most international schools have a high percentage of their enrollment from mixed-marriage families.⁵⁷ Possibly children of parents from different countries will naturally congregate at ISS, especially if the family is or will be internationally mobile. Moreover, there are

⁵⁷ Pascoe 93.

students at ISS who came to Norway at a young age who have acquired a second Norwegian citizenship. Keith Allen, an international school administrator, thinks that

It clearly does not help to think of expatriates as a single group. More helpfully, they can be considered to fit on a scale related to the extent to which they are distinct from the host community. This scale intermeshes with the length of time they have lived in the country and their cross-cultural skills. Even characteristics such as 'nationality' are far from distinct. Many individuals are bicultural or have multiple nationality.⁵⁸

There are ISS students who have lived almost their entire lives in Norway and think of Norway as their home, but who do not hold Norwegian citizenship, single or dual. When students were asked what nationalities the students in their inner circle of friends were, in some instances respondents listed nationalities that are not among the fifteen listed above. Students may in some cases and in some contexts identify themselves to others and possibly also to themselves differently than that indicated by their passports.

International schools often cater to affluent expatriate families and to the socio-economic elite of the host country. Keith Allen writes that "Although international schools typically have students with high 'national' diversity, they [the students] are generally uniform in their socio-economic origins."⁵⁹ Robin Pascoe notes that tuition at international schools is often extraordinarily high.⁶⁰ However, the private pay rate at ISS is currently slightly more than fifty thousand Norwegian *kroner* a year, which makes ISS affordable for virtually all interested local families.⁶¹ ISS does however have a long waiting list for potential private pay students.

⁵⁸ Allen, Keith. "The International School and Its Community: Think Globally, Interact Locally." *International Schools & International Education: Improving Teaching, Management & Quality*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 2000: 128.

⁵⁹ Allen 133.

⁶⁰ Pascoe 137.

⁶¹ Company rates are three times as high.

II. Languages

The student composition of an international school can be broken down according to the student's degree of familiarity with the language of instruction. Michael Matthews observes that international schools typically attract:

- expatriates who are native speakers of the language of instruction (normally, but not exclusively, English);
- expatriates who are not native speakers of the language of instruction, but want to learn it; and
- local students who want to learn the language of instruction, *or* who are attracted by the prestige of an international school, *or* who do not fit into the local system.⁶²

Questionnaire respondents typically gave more than one reason when asked why they and their families had chosen ISS, but the one reason indicated by the greatest number of respondents, forty percent, was that ISS is an English language school. Twenty-five percent wrote that it was the best choice or the only possible choice. It is reasonable to assume that ISS being the only possible school has much to do with English being the language of instruction.

Students can probably get by quite well at ISS without knowing any Norwegian, but new students who are less than fluent in English will experience not only academic problems, but also social difficulties, since many students will have a hard time communicating with them. Of the two main languages at ISS, Norwegian is useful, but English is essential. Edna Murphy, former editor of the *International Schools Journal*, thinks that

One of the major attractions of an international school is its language offerings - English, to non-English speakers, and its other school language, to everyone. For the majority of schools calling themselves 'international', English is the language of instruction and is therefore the language of the classroom, and frequently of the corridor and playground as well. The second school language is usually, but

⁶² Matthews, Michael. "The Uniqueness of International Education: Part II." *International Schools Journal*, 17: 7-17. Quoted in Allen, Keith. "The International School and Its Community: Think Globally, Interact Locally." *International Schools & International Education: Improving Teaching, Management & Quality*. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 2000: 128.

not always, the language of the host country, and one would be forgiven for thinking it much easier to pick up because it is everywhere to be seen in the student's surroundings outside of school. Non-native [English] speakers do ... learn English. It is not always true that native English speakers learn the school's second language to the same degree.⁶³

High school students collectively speak at least fourteen languages. All students are fluent in English. According to Dr. Duevel, there are not “many kids in the high school who speak poor English. There are a few who have come to us without much English, but that is a real rarity.” Forty-seven percent of respondents report that they can make themselves understood in Norwegian. Thirty-one percent can do so in Spanish, 31 percent in French, and 31 percent can make themselves understood in one or more of the following languages: German, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Japanese, Swedish, Danish, Turkish, and Hindi.⁶⁴ Sixty-five percent of all questionnaire respondents consider themselves bilingual. Twenty-five percent do not consider themselves to be so, while the remaining ten percent write that they are almost bilingual.

At least nine languages are represented by mother tongue speakers in the high school, with English and Norwegian having by far the most speakers. All respondents who belong to the smaller language groups (German, French, Dutch, Hindi, Turkish, Italian, and Polish) consider themselves bilingual, as do almost all Norwegian mother tongue respondents. There is a large monolingual group. Forty-one percent of English mother tongue students, 23 percent of all respondents, consider themselves to be monolingual. In addition, sixteen percent of English mother tongue students consider themselves almost bilingual. It seems fair to conclude that English native speakers are the student group with the least linguistic resources. Indeed, in an article in *International Schools Journal*, Peter

⁶³ Edna Murphy was the editor of the *International Schools Journal* in 1997. The excerpt is her introduction to the following article: Parker, Pat. “Towards Bilingualism”. *International Schools Journal*, April 1997: 24.

⁶⁴ The fact that 31 percent of respondents can make themselves understood in Spanish or French or both cannot be not entirely due to the size of the French-speaking and Spanish-speaking student population, since these languages are being taught in school.

MacKenzie poses the somewhat paradoxical question whether it is “possible to argue that our English-language schools are ... disadvantaging these native English speakers.”⁶⁵

Why learn Norwegian if your whole life centers around ISS and you might soon be leaving anyway? It is perhaps not necessary, but if you do want to “go native”, it is certainly an advantage. When I asked a student if he knew any Norwegians outside of ISS, he said no. When asked why, he replied “I don’t speak Norwegian.” A longtime ISS student said that

I speak enough Norwegian to get by. I understand more than I speak. Some people come here for short periods and speak English in school every day, so the necessity of speaking Norwegian falls away. But some people really want to learn and take classes outside of school – it’s not really offered here.⁶⁶

ISS does offer Norwegian language instruction in primary and middle school, but not in high school. Another student who has lived in Norway for a few years said that

I’m one of the few non-Norwegians in my grade who has learned Norwegian. I think there are five people who have bothered to learn Norwegian. The others just pick up a few words here and there.

Guidance counselor Dr. Cameron observes that he has

seen certain students who have developed connections with Norwegian students in the area and have put a lot of effort into connecting with that community. They have been lamenting the fact that they don’t have the kind of language opportunities in Norwegian that they might like.

The longer non-native Norwegian language students remain in Norway, the more likely it is that they learn Norwegian. Seventy-four percent of students who have lived in Norway for less than three years report little Norwegian language ability, but only 22 percent of respondents who have lived here between three and six years do so.

Forty percent of non-native English language respondents wrote that they have sometimes felt that native English speakers enjoy a distinct advantage academically. A

⁶⁵ MacKenzie, Peter. “Bilingual Education: Who Wants It? Who Needs It?” *International Schools Journal*, November 2001: 55-56.

⁶⁶ More than one student who has studied at ISS for several years was interviewed. The reader should not assume that all opinions attributed to “a longtime student” are held by one person.

further 31 percent ticked off “it depends”, while 29 percent did not think of themselves as disadvantaged. According to Dr. Duevel, “None of the four ISS finalists of the *Unge Forskere* [Young Scientists] award this year were ‘pure’ English mother tongue kids.” Norwegian students certainly seem to be thriving academically. Ninety-two percent of Norwegian respondent reported that they are very comfortable with English being the language of instruction. According to one high school teacher, Norwegian scholarship kids are often among the best students.⁶⁷ I asked Dr. Cameron if he thought non-native English speakers are being well served by being educated in the English language rather than in their mother tongues:

I think that a great many students recognize that, given their young age, there’s every hope that if they continue on in English education, as many of them will, they will be in just as strong a position as any native speaker. I think they recognize it as a process, and they have excellent examples, usually someone from their home countries, say a country with 4-5 five students here. They’ve seen them go through the system. They have good role models. Students from for instance China can be just as conversant in English, just as achieving in this English-speaking environment as any native speaker. In many ways, I think that they feel advantaged, because it’s not as if the majority culture masters their own language, their own unique contribution.

Indeed, while some students wrote that they feel that they lose touch with their own culture, one reason why so many students feel lucky studying at ISS may be that they get to add something to their already existing cultural store, that they are advantaged as bi-culturalists in relation to monoculturalists.

English dominates ISS social life as well. Seventy-five percent of respondents write that their closest friend studies at ISS. When they are alone with their best friend, 67 percent of respondents wrote that they speak English together, twenty percent speak English and Norwegian, while thirteen percent speak Norwegian. In one respondent’s experience,

At ISS it is not common for people to feel compelled to bond with someone of the same nationality. As long as they speak English, they make friends with anyone. Even though there is a language barrier, in some cases people learn the

⁶⁷ These students however make up only a small part of the total Norwegian student population.

language (English) and make friends with someone English speaking even before they are confident in English.

III. Groups

Language it appears will not long check the blooming of friendships at ISS. Will difference in nationality? Forty-seven percent of respondents answered that their first contacts at the school were easier with fellow nationals, but when students were asked if their current circles of friends made up of mostly others from their own countries, only 23 percent checked “yes”. Sixty-three of 65 respondents noted at least three different nationalities when asked to list the nationalities of the students in their inner circle of friends. The 64th student did not make a list, but wrote instead: “The school is so small that there is no ‘choosing’ nationality. If you have an inner circle, it will be a third of the grade.” Another respondent wrote elsewhere that “My group of friends is nothing to do with nationality, but based on interest and points of view. There are people of my own nationality that I never talk to.” One continental European student wrote: “Well, my girlfriend is British, which is sort of weird, plus I have Dutch and French friends.” The questionnaire responses confirm what I was told again and again during interviews: students do not establish friendships based on nationality.

ISS community members were asked if they felt that one or more particular groups dominated the student environment. A parent thought that “There is a tendency that the American students may have a little bit of an upper hand.” Dr. Cameron said that

As a person on the outside of the student world looking in, I know which one of the cultural groups would serve as the magnet for certain kinds of activities that are engaged in. It would tend to be North Americans, Americans in particular. I think the language is just one particular representation of that.

Commenting on the cultural balance between American and British students, he said that

It’s very subtle, but I take as one indication of that, that U.S. students have about the same percentage here as U.K. students, but when you listen to the English that

is spoken, it is much more likely that U.K. students will adjust their English to have U.S. inflections. I have never heard it go the other way around.

An American student did think that there is probably some cultural dominance from the Americans, “but it’s more of a melding, a melting pot, a big boiling cauldron of everything mixed together.” One American student felt that Americans are too dissimilar to exert any great cultural influence:

If you add the Americans, English, Scots and the English-speaking Canadians, you get 40 to 50 percent of the school’s population right there. There are Iranians and such, but not in sufficient numbers to be influential. The Americans don’t really feel like a group. Among them, there are so many half and half. –Swedish, -French. ... But they count themselves as Americans.

A non-American student said that “Americans’ points of view will be similar in some aspects, but they don’t very much stick together as a group. For lots of people, their best friend is of a different nationality.” Some students feel that American and British students’ tendency to lead may be due to language and culture. One non-native English speaker said that

Americans [lead] because it’s easier for them to speak English, and it’s easier for them to express themselves. ... If you have an argument with somebody, and if you have a hard time expressing yourself, it will be more difficult.

A Norwegian student said that “In comparison to the Americans and the British students, the Norwegian scholarship students are more reserved. They [the American and British students] don’t consider the consequences, they just do it. They are more extroverted and spontaneous.”

There is some difference in opinion between the people that were interviewed and the 65 questionnaire respondents as regards the question of cultural influence. Seventy-two percent of respondents wrote that they do not think that students tend to look up to and take leads from particular national groups, and a further 83 percent wrote that they personally did not do so either. It might be interesting to establish which student groups hold which opinions. In order to avoid the convoluted tangle of first and second citizenship this time,

student opinion has been crosschecked against mother tongue. English mother tongue students come most often but not always from the United States, Great Britain and Canada. Nineteen percent of English native speaker respondents thought that students take leads from certain national groups. Thirty-three percent of Norwegian native speakers agreed, as did 57 percent of French and German native speakers.⁶⁸ It is remarkable that perception of cultural dominance increases inversely with group size. The “big three” national groups do not see much sign of cultural dominance, but the smaller groups do. Of those English mother tongue respondents who thought that certain groups dominate, 72 percent thought the Americans did, fourteen percent thought the British students did, and fourteen percent thought the Norwegians did. For Norwegian native speakers, half thought the Americans dominated, and the other half thought the Norwegians did. The German and French mother tongue students were all of one mind. All who thought there was some degree of cultural dominance wrote that it came from the Americans.⁶⁹ In answer to a separate question, only eleven percent of Norwegian students felt that the Norwegian students’ numerical strength translates into influence.

If cultural influence were only a question of student mass, American and British students together could be said to be fairly dominant simply by virtue of their number. In addition, it is surely significant that of the 72 percent of all respondents who have lived in other countries besides Norway, 31 percent have lived for a minimum of one year in the USA, and an equal number have lived in Great Britain for at least the same amount of time.⁷⁰ These figures are in both cases some ten percentage points higher than the percentages of American and British students at the school, which means that many

⁶⁸ Thirty-seven of 65 percent of respondents give their mother tongue as English, making that group larger than all other groups put together. Since the Norwegian language group consists of twelve students and the French and German group of only nine, not too much statistical significance should be read into these figures.

⁶⁹ Again, the number of students whose opinions are being discussed here is very small. What may seem as dramatic figures can be dependent on the opinions of four or five students.

⁷⁰ This was an open response question, and that many students have written several countries, some both the United States and Great Britain.

students who do not hold American or British citizenship have lived in one or both of these countries for an extended period. It seems fair to assume that the twenty students who have lived in the USA and the twenty that have lived in Great Britain are influenced by American or British culture or both, and that that influence carries over into the school. In the opinion of one American student, “The Norwegians in the school are very Americanized,” but this student also wrote in the questionnaire that “Norwegians that think they are American irritate me greatly.”

Some non-American respondents and students perceive Americans fresh from the United States differently than they do those who have settled in or those who have been internationally mobile before enrolling at ISS. One internationally mobile American student observed that for Americans moving abroad for the first time, “It’s a huge transition to come what they’re coming from to such an international community. I’m sure it’s a shock to them.” One student felt that first-tour Americans were inflexible:

There’s a great deal of difference between Americans who have come straight from America to those who have moved around a bit. The first group are much more “this is how I’ve always done it”. The second group is more open and willing to try stuff.

If one is used to an international school environment where students by virtue of necessity have to show respect for other students’ divergent points of view, new students who come from culturally homogenous environments can seem to be out of tune with the student environment. A student who has attended several international schools explained how she had reacted to the political viewpoints of two new American students:

There were two new American kids straight from the US that I had trouble with because they were very set in their opinions and were not aware of a lot of things that were going on outside the US. They’re coming with limited global knowledge. I was incredibly irritated by their blindness.

An internationally mobile American student thought it was all to the good that his fellow Americans became part of an international school community:

I think it's very healthy for them to adapt. My friend who moved here straight from the states has adapted a bit, but after a certain point, you get set in your ways. My friend has adapted to a degree, but he's still primarily American. There are certain things that he does, that I, as a Europeanized... He is loud in a certain time and place where I would be very quiet, and I'm like "oh man". It's because the American is ingrained fiercely into him I suppose. There's definitely a clear difference.

A student described how his beliefs and perceptions may have changed as a result of living several years abroad:

In this school, people tell me that I'm very American in my viewpoints. An American girl I met in ... told me that I was not American in my viewpoints, but very European, and very liberal compared to a lot of Americans. I think the view of me depends a lot on the perspective of where the person is coming from. Depending on who's looking at me, I seem either more European or more American, and I'm a blend of that, I guess. But my primary focus is American. I ticked off global nomad because I'm not an ordinary American.

This student went on to make a very interesting comment as regards European conceptions and misconceptions:

I think that the Americans who come here get a greater cultural experience than Europeans who come here. These Europeans have a lot of misconceptions of America. While an American, if you have misconceptions about Europe, you're forced to confront them here day by day. But the Europeans who are here aren't forced to confront misconceptions about America, and the Americans they meet here are not typical Americans usually, and so it's a much more eye-opening experience for the Americans.

Seventy-two percent of the high school student body has lived for at least a year in two countries or more. The global nomad group is thus the largest subgroup at ISS, and it is one that cuts across nationality. Forty-seven percent of single or dual Norwegian citizenship students are internationally mobile. The corresponding figures for Americans are 92 percent, for British students 70 percent, and for the smaller nation groups the aggregate is 84 percent. Seventy-one percent of internationally mobile respondents did not think that there is a distinct global nomad group at ISS. According to one student who has spent eleven of his seventeen years outside his home country, there may be a question of definition here: "My friends come from different locations, but I don't know how many

would actually view themselves as global nomads. Each person views themselves as very distinct and separate.” Sixty percent of internationally mobile students write that they have seen friendships form at ISS that they would have considered unlikely, and fifty percent write that they themselves have been part of such a group of friends. One student commented that “Most students have a multicultural background and this provides a bond in friendship.” Several authors agree that one of the plus sides of growing up as a global nomad is a greater acceptance of cultural difference. McCluskey writes that

The constant exchange with a myriad of cultures may encourage a deeper tolerance for and acceptance of differences among people. Richard Johnson observes, “These children have no strong prejudices.” “I do not think these children, “ Dr. Rigamer adds, “are as quick to think in racial stereotypes as children who live in one place.” Connie Buford offers an explanation, “Since they have friends from all over the world, they are more tolerant, more open, kinder.... Our kids have one advantage: they know how to travel, they know the world. They hit their freshman year of college and see their U.S.-based counterparts as less mature.”⁷¹

Thirty-nine percent of students who have lived in more than one country consider themselves primarily to be citizens of their home countries. Thirty-two percent consider themselves primarily to be global nomads, while 29 percent crossed off “something in between.” One respondent wrote that “I do not feel I have a specific “home””, and another student wrote that “I am at home everywhere, at home nowhere.” Indeed, this diminishing sense of identification with one’s country (or countries, in the case of dual passport children) is typical of the global nomad. Nina Killham writes that

On the average, a Global Nomad has lived in six different countries by the time he is 18 years old – his cultural identity becoming gradually unglued from that of his monocultural parents and forming into a new sensibility.⁷²

Forty-five percent of internationally mobile respondents wrote that they relate more easily to global nomads than non-global nomads. Thirty percent did not think so, and 25 percent

⁷¹ McCluskey: 26. Richard Johnson, Dr. Rigamer and Connie Buford were interviewed by the author.

⁷² Killham, Nina. “Word-Wise Kids: Special Qualities Mark These Global Nomads.” *The Washington Post*. 17 February 1990. Rpt. in *Notes From a Travelling Childhood: Readings for Internationally Mobile Parents & Children*. McCluskey, Karen Curnow, ed. Washington D.C.: Foreign Service Youth Foundation, 1994: 56.

answered that they did not know. One respondent saw a connection between studying at ISS and being a global nomad:

Although I have only lived in ... and Norway, I feel as though I have traveled the world by through all of the people I have met. I am able to relate to all sorts of people and places. It is extremely difficult to relate to people who have lived in one place all their lives or have attended public schools, it is impossible for them to understand what our lives are like – and I feel that they do not interest me at all.

An internationally mobile American student said that

I connect better with those who have international experiences. This is why I consider myself to be a global nomad. ... We have a common bond because there are not many people who have experienced.... When I got back to America, I met people who hadn't left their state. It's so hard to connect to these types of people because I have such a different view. If I was living there, given time, I would change enough to connect and adapt.

Another American student agreed: "I do identify with global nomads, and when I go back to the States I see that kind of narrow vision that they are known for. I do look for a more open, international environment." Repatriates interviewed by Smith "say that although they identify themselves as Americans, they feel comfortable only when they are between cultures or with others who share their experience."⁷³ One respondent who identified herself both as a ... national and as "something in between" perceptively commented that how she identifies herself "depends on the setting plus the people around me." Global nomads are cultural chameleons who can be many things to many people. Surely such multicultural people will find it easier to adapt to the various monoculturals they encounter through life rather than constantly display their whole panoply of multicultural experience.

While growing up as a world citizen has many advantages, Monica Rabe notes that

Many children will lose part of their national identity and sometimes develop a rootlessness which may cause problems later on in life – a phenomenon also called 'the global nomad syndrome'. The feeling of home is not as clear to them as it naturally is to youngsters growing up in their native country. They may also be afraid of forming strong relationships as they have found that they seldom last for long periods of time.⁷⁴

⁷³ Smith 77.

⁷⁴ Rabe 76

One way to entirely avoid cultural influence when living abroad is to lead one's life within the confines of the expatriate community. Mary Wertsch writes that

Most American military people live on bases or in housing areas that are walled off from the indigenous population. It is an oddly isolated life, one in which it is possible to delude oneself that one is still on American soil....⁷⁵

ISS NATO dependents however attend an international school rather than a Department of Defense Dependents School (DoDDS), and so are exposed to a range of nationalities and cultures at the school. One American NATO student compared studying at an international school with his previous experience of Department of Defense Dependent Schools:

This is the first time I've been to an international school. I'm taking away interesting perspectives. I've gotten to know more Europeans. Even though I lived in ... [other European countries], I didn't actually have much close contact with the ... [the host country nationals], but here I've had a lot of contact with other international students. Even the fact that I've gone to international school and gotten contact with those people has broadened the perspective.

NATO students comprise only seventeen percent of the high school student body. People who were interviewed were asked if they thought there was a marked civilian/military cultural divide in the high school student environment. An American NATO student thought that "There's an oil subculture and a military subculture, but it's not heavily pronounced." Dr. Cameron has not noticed any remarkable differences between NATO and civilian students:

You really can't tell the difference between the students whose parents work for NATO and those whose parents have civilian jobs. When you think about the profile of the NATO personnel that are based here, it is customarily someone who may be a career-person in the military or someone with a record of achieving. I do think that when parents hold out to you what it means to achieve something, that the kids do internalize some of that, by being in that kind of environment. Just as you have the oil families that are in management that are being transferred here and that have a certain philosophy that they impart to their children, one of accomplishment, I believe that anyone whose government sees them fit to send abroad at their expense is probably someone who has a record of accomplishment. I don't think it's too much of a stretch to expect that the kids would be accomplishing students as well. So we see no difference.

⁷⁵ Wertsch 330.

Dr. Duevel concurs:

NATO and the oil companies cooperate through the school. I don't see civilian or military kids as being separate from one another. To what extent the individual kids will respond back on how they see that is one of the things that will be interesting to read in the thesis.

Most of the NATO students and the civilian students who were interviewed see things in much the same way. An American NATO student said that "As a military dependent, I share unique bonds with other dependents. But this is not the most important criterion, and I form friendships with others as easily." An American civilian student agreed that

There is no distinct division between civilian and military kids. It's more mixed together. It's overall more important that my friend and I are global nomads than that we are military and civilian. NATO kids have the same global nomad quality to them.

A non-American civilian student did not think that there is a specific NATO group:

No, I don't think it makes a difference in the school. After school, a lot of the NATO families do stuff together, but the children don't normally hang together in school. ... It doesn't matter if the global nomads are civilian or NATO. There's no prejudice at all. I agree that NATO kids have a special bond, but for them it's probably just as easy to make contacts with a civilian kid. NATO kids find support within each other. When NATO kids start at school, they have a lot of people they and their parents know from out of school. It makes it easier for them to start at school. It gives them a lot of support, but the school is good about support anyway.

One non-American NATO student does not think there is a separate NATO subgroup either, "but sometimes conversations are easier because we can talk to each other more easily, for instance about what we can buy at the NATO store. We have a separate life at Jättå."⁷⁶ One American NATO student has

wondered before about how many NATO dependents there are from other nations, but I have never bothered to find out. The ... [various squadrons] hold their activities. There is rarely a NATO-wide activity. They are NATO, but I don't talk to them as NATO usually. I talk to them as students at the school.

⁷⁶ NATO operates at tax-free store for its personnel at the Jättå NATO base outside of Stavanger.

When asked if the military personnel generally were reposted more often than oil personnel, he replied that

Oil kids don't necessarily move less often than military kids. It depends on the company. The military have common locations. The oil people have different locations like Dubai and Jakarta.

About the absence of national and institutional cohesion he made this comment:

I don't know why we don't cohere around our nationalities, but there is not a really strong thing to focus on. There are military students like me. Because we have certain activities at base, we cohere in that way, but in the high school there are only five American NATO students. The NATO base is so small. ... The American military presence is not large enough for you to cohere around. The American oil and military are radically different. We're all Americans, but we've had radically different experiences. We don't view that as being cohesive.

IV. World Events

It appears that there is one issue that more than any other divides the student body, and that is the war in Iraq. How do you carry yourself at school when your country or your parents' employer is constantly and unfavorably in the news? One NATO student was a little embarrassed when I brought up the war:

Normally we don't talk much about it, about politics. Sometimes in history class. ... We don't normally joke around about these things. I don't talk to my friends about this. I don't have time to watch the news, I have to do the homework.

A non-American civilian student became a bit worked up when asked about the Iraq crisis:

It's not fair of me to do that. One of my very best friends is half-American, another is all-American. Some Americans are just as open and aware of their surroundings as everybody else. There are just some that aren't. I hate the way that the war started. I have to work very hard not to discriminate, but I really dislike their president right now. ... NATO kids are somewhat defensive about Iraq. Sometimes other kids attack them a lot and I know I do it subconsciously because I feel so strongly about it. One of my best friends is a NATO student. Sometimes I talk pretty sharply to her about it. But she lets me speak, even if it might hurt her because her father is with NATO. Also she argues sensibly. People watch the news and there are sensible discussions going on. I don't think personal conflict arises from that.

One American NATO student talked about an Amnesty poster that was displayed at the school last year:

There is a thread of anti-Americanism in the school. Last year, during the build-up to the Iraq war, posters were going up on the school saying that the war in Iraq was for oil. ... There was an Amnesty International poster picturing a guard at Guantanamo hauling off a prisoner. It was so obviously a propaganda photo, and I was talking to fellow military compatriot, and she was upset about them having it up because it was clearly biased. How would they have gotten there to take the photo? It got torn down so many times “accidentally” that it finally got removed.

ISS is a school for students from many nations. It is essential that loud and provocative statements, whether oral or visual, be removed or neutralized. Dr. Duevel explained that the school reacts swiftly to prevent conflicts among the students over political or cultural issues:

Students are not allowed to put stuff on their lockers that are for or against this or that issue. Students know that if they put such material up, it is taken down quickly. It is important that every student in this school feel that they are secure and that their friendships will not be based on what their passports say. We have had plenty of Amnesty posters displayed in the school. I haven't seen the one you mention. If the context had been such as I would have found a particular poster damaging, I would have taken it down. The interior of the school isn't a battleground. We have to take a very neutral attitude here. ... It is important for the school and the staff to be apolitical. In any given conflict around the world, we are going to have kids who have grandparents on both sides. We have kids who have grandparents in Baghdad, and also plenty of kids whose parents work for NATO. Last year, just before the war broke out, I brought all the staff into the theater before school hours and reminded everyone that it is important for us as individuals not to be expressing any kind of opinions one way or the other. That doesn't mean that I am censoring people. Our mission says nothing about ISS being pro this or pro that. Outside of school your opinions are your own. In school it is important that you do not give any kind of opinion toward this upcoming war. The students will want to know and will be pushing you how you feel about this or that. Part of the reason that it is important that we stay in a non-political point of view is that once you have shared that information, it is impossible to pull it back in. It then becomes very difficult for you to be able to teach in that kind of a situation. We don't expect that students will not want to discuss the war, because they are bright students and it is an important part of current events. But when those discussions are going on in the classroom, teachers should lead and facilitate the discussion, but keep their own opinions to themselves. We do that when there is any kind of situation going on.

While it was vital the neither the school nor the teachers should appear to take sides for or against the war, one teacher also thought that it was important to make sure that students treated each other respectfully in class:

What we see with NATO students is that they are very vulnerable when it comes to international politics right now, because they take it very personally. Their parents have been set to execute the policy determined by the United States and Great Britain. They are easily hurt when somebody cracks a joke. ... The NATO students are absolutely willing to discuss the crisis in class, but when somebody makes a cheap joke, we see that they feel very vulnerable. No jokes of that kind are allowed in the classroom.

A civilian student referred to one particular classroom discussion when the students who were against the war had the upper hand:

The teachers are very good in balancing statements students make in class. If a student says this or that, teachers are quick to point out the opposite view. They don't tell us what their personal opinions are. One time we talked about the war in class. There are some students in my grade who are very much against the war and are very good at debating it since they are so knowledgeable. There were some NATO students there who didn't say anything and who came to me afterwards and told me that they felt really bad sitting there. They felt that there was nothing they could say to convince the other students, so they just had to sit there and take it.

International schools house heterogeneous student populations, and consequently will face greater challenges than schools with homogenous student bodies in controlling friction over cultural or political issues. Pascoe writes that

International school teachers are always quick to point out just how harmonious ... the school atmosphere [is] given the number of nationalities. It's true that children do learn how to live with others from different cultures and become more tolerant. But it can be equally true that they are quick to defend their own cultures and history in no uncertain terms.⁷⁷

One civilian student thought that "All the NATO kids here incredibly politically open. They are not centered on that everything NATO is doing is right, and often they don't agree with what NATO is doing." A NATO student said that

When America is attacked I do feel defensive of it. ... The military people here are open. I'm always willing to discuss things. I do feel constrained to defend

⁷⁷ Pascoe 145.

America at times. But then when I meet Americans I bring up some of the same objections. They're valid, whether a European is saying them or an American is saying them.

V. Religion, Race

Since there were no questions about religion and race in the questionnaire, and since ISS does not maintain any kind of records of students' religious affiliation or race, this section is based on interviews with members of the ISS community. On a scale of contentiousness, the war in Iraq ranks at the very top, followed by religion a good way down on the incline. Racial issues hardly seem to register at all at the school, but since several races are represented in the high school student body, race ought also to be considered as a factor in student relations.

ISS will not discriminate according to religion, race, nationality or culture. If a particular subject is seen as divisive, such as the Iraq war or religion, ISS will stay above it.

A student who is a Christian observed that

In order not to focus on racial and religious difference, these subjects are left out. They are not brought to table, period, and then you don't learn anything from mistakes. I think I could have learned more about other cultures if the teachers were challenged to openly talk about their religion and their points of view. ... At ISS, you're allowed to have whatever religion you like, as long as you don't talk about it.

Christianity is most likely the religion of the majority at ISS, but since the school has students who are adherents of at least five different religions, it is very important for the school that it does not appear to favor any particular religion. Dr. Duevel explained that

Religion is something that is very individual. In a school with a number of nationalities we have a huge amount of ethnic diversity and a huge amount of religious diversity as well. The only religious studying that takes place here is the study of world religions that will come about in some topics and in some grades, though not in the high school, but in middle school. In Norway there is a state religion, so it would make sense that there would be some religious instruction in the public schools. Here we don't do that. We have Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and other religions in the school. We have atheists who

don't go along with any religious beliefs. As a school, because we don't discriminate for or against any religion, we stay above it. Certainly we acknowledge and respect the fact that all of our students here and our staff have their individual rights to their beliefs whatever they are. It is also an individual choice on their part how they share or do not share that with their classmates. It wouldn't surprise me that someone would feel very comfortable and some less so in sharing their conviction. It is a healthy thing for teenagers to be able to have a chance to have discussions that are tied in with more than what they're wearing. These are very bright, curious students who come from very intellectual families. Many of them will have a very important part of their life connected to their religion outside of school. ... Students are not allowed to organise prayer meetings before school on a regular basis. ISS in no way sponsors religion at the school. We have plenty of kids in the school who are very active within their international faiths, but ISS has made the decision that that is an individual choice on their part and is not something that has an impact on our curriculum or on what happens within their daily lives between 08.30 and 15.15.

Religion is somewhat of a hot button at ISS according to one student:

Arguments about religion would make a distance between people. I thought some guys were super cool and then I heard that religion was super important in their lives. I didn't feel the same way as I felt before. There are some people at school that I don't want to talk to about religion, because I know I can get into big arguments, long discussions. I don't want that, can't convince them. ... I know there were some people who were trying to form groups just to talk about religion. Some people want to get you in really bad, in my grade as well.

High school students are at an age when as part of the process of finding one's own identity it seems important to make statements for or against particular cultural, religious, or political views. One student mentioned student harassment in connection with religion:

There is very little student harassment at the school. A big part of the student body has lived in several cultures and know that they just have to respect each other. ... The only thing I see is a group that calls themselves atheists who are very disrespectful towards religion, and not just Christianity. I myself am a Christian and find it oppressive. There are a couple of other Christian students in my grade who like to discuss the larger questions. They are very much looked down upon. I hear that when I walk in the corridors. They're saying like "he's probably there praying". ... A friend of mine and I have tried to organise prayer meetings, but we've found out that it's not possible to get rooms here for religious activity. I know about a couple of Christian teachers who have offered to open their rooms early in the morning for bible groups. The school is very afraid to make any kind of statement of policy when it comes to religion. If the school is blind toward religion, that means that no religion is recognized as legitimate.

Does ISS delegitimize religion by not allowing religious activity within the school? This appears to be a minority view among members of the ISS community. Another student said that

Religion is an important part of many students' lives. I know of most people's religious beliefs. ... I don't think people for the most part feel like talking about religious beliefs. It gets a bit too deep for most people.

What surely is the most important for ISS is that students can feel comfortable and secure at the school, possibly all the more since ISS functions as a community center and major point of stability for many expatriate students. According to Dr. Cameron,

Religion is not very visible at ISS. The school is non-sectarian in that the students can have any conversation that they like. I believe that students feel free to be who they are. It's quite easy for them to talk about their religious affiliations. I've been surprised by people saying "I love Christ" or this or that. I think that students should have the freedom to say that.

One student said that

This is an international school. Tolerance is imperative. Otherwise, what do we have? The teachers and the school stand very strongly for tolerance above all. They take it very seriously if some kind of religious remark [is made], much stronger than anything else. I'm very happy that they're doing that. Of course there's the occasional joke, but that's part of tolerance too.

The relationship between religion and race at ISS seems to be curiously inverse: because the school is so small and everybody knows at least of everybody else, students' views on religion can on occasion clash. ISS high school students are smart and at an age when all of the bigger questions come under scrutiny. What their peers and what their teachers think becomes intensely interesting. When it comes to race, school size works differently. According to one student, the student body is simply not big enough for ethnic and racial groups to cohere:

I can count the number of blacks I know here on one hand. It's very hard to generalize about race here. Race is an issue, but it's not so much an issue overseas as it is in the States, maybe. ... I don't view it as a big issue at all, it doesn't really enter my.... Maybe that's not an issue for us because they [blacks] aren't here. We don't really have many people of color here. ... I think the school

is too small for racism to be a problem. It could be a problem if the school were bigger.

Another student agrees: “It’s easier to be different at ISS because everybody is open and everybody is different. In a school I visited in England, the ethnic minorities were mainly hanging out by themselves.” Another student observed that

I don’t see any difference in what social groups black and white kids hang out in, not academically either. In our grade there are some students of color, but I hadn’t really thought about it before you asked. The Americans that come here are very careful when it comes to race. Most people who have moved around a bit have a healthy attitude towards race. You have to recognize in a constructive way that that some people’s skin color is different.

Finally, one long-time ISS student said that “At this school I haven’t observed anything that seems remotely racist.”

VI. Transience

Like any school, ISS is continually in a state of becoming. What makes ISS different from most schools is that students often do not attend a full middle or high school time span, and that students sometimes have to leave the school at very short notice.

Paradoxically there are also some ISS students who have gone to school in the same building from Kindergarten through high school. To ground this discussion of institutional transience it might be useful first to establish some key facts. Seventy-one percent of high school students have studied at ISS between one to four years, while the remaining 29 percent have been at the school for five years or more. The average period of stay for all students is 3.8 years, while the median value is three years. Seventy-two percent of all questionnaire respondents, including Norwegian single and dual citizenship students, have moved to Stavanger from abroad. It should be noted that students were not asked when the move took place. From information volunteered elsewhere in the questionnaires, it becomes clear that some students came to Norway at a young age. For respondents who

have moved to Stavanger from abroad, the aggregate estimate of their probable length of stay in Stavanger is 5.2 years, while the median value is 3.72 years.⁷⁸ Eighty-one percent of Norwegian citizenship students wrote that it was unlikely that the family would move abroad in the near future. A further eleven percent amended the form to indicate that moving abroad, presumably for studies, was likely for themselves, but not for their families. Going into the 2004-2005 school year the grades remain relatively intact, as only ten percent of students in the three lower grades, eleven students, leave the school before getting their high school diploma. Seventy-two percent of all respondents plan to graduate from ISS. Twelve percent do not, and sixteen percent wrote that that depends on many factors.

Seventy-two percent of all high school students have lived in at least one other country besides Norway, and must for that reason be familiar with what one student called “the concept of the move”. If they are not familiar with it before enrolling at ISS, they soon will be. One global nomad student explained that

Moving around is a common bond and experience. The concept of the move remains the same. That may be what the glue is, although there are a lot of people here who don't move around a lot. ... There is the undergirding philosophy that everyone is moving on except for the few people who aren't. The fact that they stay means that they have to get used to the nature of the transition, so it's a school in transition constantly. I think everyone lives with that beneath the surface. That philosophy I would have taken away from here if I hadn't gotten it earlier. Everyone here lives with the knowledge that it's not going to last. There are specific time limits. Next year is going to be different. People are going to be gone.

One respondent wrote that “You have to be resilient as the school environment changes so often, friends are torn away from you and you must learn to embrace the opportunity of

⁷⁸ Results are to a degree skewed by the fact that some respondents moved to Stavanger when young, and that their families have made Norway their permanent home. If one is to arrive at a more correct figure for students who do not intend to stay for more than a short period, the students who responded eight years or more probably would have to be taken out of the calculations. However the aggregate data are not complete enough for reliable analysis, and an attempt would probably lead into speculation.

meeting new people.” A military dependent saw both benefits and disadvantages to moving:

If I had to leave now I'd be sad – losing all my friends *again*, losing my girlfriend too. I'd think about how much fun I'd had here and that I'd have to start all over again at a new school. When you get attached to the people it's harder. If I stay a couple of years I become good friends with people and it will be much harder. It can be good in a way if you've had a bad reputation in a school. Then at the new school you're brand new. It also makes you find out who your real friends are, the right ones that you'll stay in contact with.

One expatriate student had the drill down flat:

For me, disconnecting means that I emphasize to myself when I'm leaving, the timeframe that I'm leaving in, and I emphasize what I need to get done. I evaluate how close I am to certain people. For a lot of people, I'm not close enough to have to make a conscious disconnect. If they're really good friends, I won't disconnect right away. The disconnect will have to be much later, like right before I leave. I find it easier to move around like that. Once I've gone, I usually try to sever most of my ties. I'm in contact with one person from ... and no one from I just do it more consciously than most people, I plan it. I think everybody disconnects, but they just don't realize it.

Expatriates who stay longer than the usual three years experience transition stress as well.

One longtime expatriate student said that

I have gone through about three cycles of friends. You're constantly making new friends. It's hard. The first time it happened it was hard, and I still keep in touch with my old friends who are in the States, but that's different than from seeing them every day. It's kind of hard to let the old ones out and the new ones in. But it's good. It's one of the aspects of the school that helps you out a lot.

In a way, the ones who stay behind suffer as much or more than the ones going off into the world, since those that do not leave do not share the adrenalin rush of leaving. Karen

McCluskey comments that

Missionaries, some foreign service corps and some private sector companies choose to send their staff to one location for long periods of time.... While these families may not face the issues of upheaval and loss normally associated with more frequent moves, they nonetheless have to learn to deal with frequent transitions and change, as they see good friends moving in and out of their lives every few years. In some ways, this may be even more difficult than having to make the change. ... Norma McCaig, now Director of Global Nomads International, says: "... As part of the expatriate community, those who are rooted for a longer period of time are still exposed to very high turnover. There is

something very painful about the dynamic of being left, because you don't have the excitement to help you through the transition."⁷⁹

Another student said that "I most definitely feel like a global nomad, and I think it's a good thing". To this student, moving was very familiar:

Moving is exciting. I know that I really wanted to leave ... after living there for four and a half years. That was just too much. I was like, I want to go, I'm bored. Right now I don't want to leave, because high school is a lot of work and I want to get through it. I'd like to be here to the end. We cope quickly with moving. It's like an adrenaline rush. You can keep good contact with your friends over the internet. ... I'm staying, but we never know when we're going to be leaving. The shortest time I had to move was a week and a half. Sometimes we are lucky and they tell us a month or so early. My dad leaves first and finds a house etc., and then we follow when school lets us. You don't want to leave the IGCSE exams hanging. The school really wants you to finish the 10th grade. Sometimes it's hard to move between schools when you're halfway through your exams. One kid I know is staying behind a year, even though her parents are moving. She's staying with friends of the family. But it's tough to move between exams.

Mary Wertsch writes about the anxieties one set of mobile children, military teenage dependents, experience when having to move during the high school years:

Moving during high school is by far the most difficult. By that time the stakes in social status are much higher, and it takes longer to establish one's self in the new place. ... The daughter of a Navy lieutenant commander told of feeling very upset when, in the middle of her sophomore year, her father received orders to go overseas for three years. Her relief was correspondingly enormous when her parents decided the family would not go with him. As much as she loved her father, it was easier to say goodbye to him for three years than to face being uprooted from high school.⁸⁰

All students eventually leave ISS. In anticipation of that event, some students seem to distance themselves purposely from their friends and their school. One internationally mobile student explained that

I've gone to school and met people who are attached to the school itself. I'm not attached to schools in that way because it's not my school, it's a school I'm attending. The alternative to standing to the side and observe is to get immediately involved and then uproot. Not doing so can make you more passive and defensive. One thing I do learn from it is that everything will pass. If I'm having a crisis and a problem, I go "six months left and I move". If something is overwhelming, I count down to when I'm going to be out of here. It's a worry, but that's something I'll deal with later. If it is a problem, then I'm going to need

⁷⁹ McCluskey 11.

⁸⁰ Wertsch 255-256.

help in healing. But I'll worry about that later, because I got the priority now just to keep the course. Taking root is a conscious choice.

Wertsch writes how mobile military dependents may inure themselves emotionally:

By the time a military brat ... reaches adulthood, the lesson has been well learned: Don't invest heavily in relationships. It's painful not to, but the pain isn't as acute as that of investing and losing. Using the mask of denial, which military brats have so readily to had, it is a relatively simple matter to convince oneself that close friendships aren't necessary anyway.⁸¹

Writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, Stephen Buckley notes that

Counselors and parents recognize that children, especially teenagers, often experience profound stress with such constant movements. ... [A TCK] said that when her family moved to Kyrgyzstan, "I said, I'm not going to make friends because I'll just have to say good-bye again. I'd already sold everything I own - twice."⁸²

Dr. Cameron as guidance counselor observes the effects of student transience at close hand, and explained that

Most families in the senior class have experience with joining international communities and international schools and leaving them. You develop a certain amount of thick skin in that process, and so they have almost these antiseptic disconnections. They seem emotional enough and pleasant enough in that they say "I'll miss you", but the underlying message that you sense is that "I was here for a purpose because my parents were assigned here or whatever reason, and I need this diploma to go on to university". I believe that a great many of our students are guarded, given the tendency for these families to move around. I certainly wouldn't say that I see a lot of emoting this year, but rather a kind of surgical, rather logical way of viewing it. "ISS has served its purpose, but now it's on to university, and I thank you for the support you've given me while I was here, but let's not shed tears over that, because it's come to an end." ... This would not necessarily lead to a cold environment. There are two levels on which that could happen. You could have someone who is not buying into a school, who for whatever reason is overtly disconnected from it. Maybe they feel that they are going to get connected to someone and they'd have to leave friends and so on. They don't want to have anything that begins to approach connecting with someone for fear that they are going to have to leave it at some point. This does not necessarily result in psychological damage. It can just be a coping mechanism. They go elsewhere to find their friends, friends that are going to be around for awhile. In this way, they don't get these questions as to whether or not they are befriended by someone for reasons of convenience. You have someone else, who may have the same psychological and philosophical viewpoint, that is that school is here for a purpose, and I know that I'm going to be leaving these

⁸¹ Wertsch 267.

⁸² Buckley, Stephen. "Returning 'Home' for College/Neither Refugees Nor Immigrants: Some 'Third-Culture Kids' Uncertain Which World Is Really Theirs." *International Herald Tribune* 6 June 2000.

people and I probably won't see them again for the rest of my life. But that same student can engage in all of the same high school behaviors, enjoy the high school Prom and make connections, but always against this backdrop knowing that I can't invest my heart into this relationship, although I'm engaging in all of the typical high school behavior. I think that these students, given their experiences, have perhaps logically, perhaps subconsciously, recognized what it takes for them to get through a system successfully. Moving around is not ideal, especially during this critical period that students are going through in their teenage years. Even if you're stationary, teenage years are hellish. And then we're asking them to move here, there and everywhere, to fall in love with someone for six months, and then perhaps leave them? I think it is a testament to their adjustment that they are able to put on a strong face and defer their gratification even in this regard, waiting with making strong social connections until they are in a more predictable environment. ... Given the options students are faced with of either following their family around the world or being put in boarding school, I think students are making the best of a less than ideal situation. I think this reaction to it is the healthiest and positive one they can have.

Smith thinks that internationally mobile teenagers are at risk for some psychological damage:

A paradoxical aspect of returnees is that, despite their adaptability and ease in forming friendships overseas, they may be slow to form lasting friendships or emotional attachments after returning to the United States. They have too often experienced the "gut wrenching" that occurs when they, or their close friends, have left one post for another, and they may be unwilling to make the effort to make new friends. "I would get so sad when I had to leave my friends," one teenage returnee says. "And each time you do it, it gets harder and harder. ... Saying good-bye is so hard because you know you'll probably never see these people again. ... You get to the place you don't want to make friends anymore." Psychologists have devoted some attention to the difficulties experienced by repatriates in achieving intimacy. ... It appears that frequent moves during the teenage years can have a detrimental effect on the ability to maintain intimate relationships; the young person has not developed the skills to maintain such relationships.⁸³

Leonard L. Lefkow cites a survey of internationally mobile youth that may hold some welcome news for parents who feel guilty over dragging their children across the world:

Are mobile youngsters more prone to psychological disturbances than their rooted peers, or less? ... A 1993 study, completed for the [US] State Department ... reviewed three decades of professional literature on the subject. ... The study found no significant psychological differences between mobile youngsters and their domestic counterparts.⁸⁴

⁸³ Smith 71-72.

⁸⁴ Lefkow 76.

Having to leave a school community in which one has established a certain security and comfort zone can be devastating. Internationally mobile teenagers are thrown back on their parents as their only emotional support at a time in their lives when they are in the process of gaining their independence. Wertsch writes that one group of internationally mobile students, “American military children ... do not have kinship networks to anchor them. The constant change is not balanced by social stability. For the military brat, each time the family moves, the work dissolves and is swept away.”⁸⁵ All students leave eventually, but many surely take away from the school fond memories, some emotional ballast, and not least thick address books. More than sixty percent of respondents wrote they feel socially comfortable at ISS.⁸⁶ One student wrote that although she considers the school “at bit small for me now ... it has been a valuable experience that I will carry with me forever.”

⁸⁵ Wertsch 252.

⁸⁶ This figure is computed from the free responses to question A24: “How do you feel now [at ISS]?”

CHAPTER TWO

ATTENDING A PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

ISS is known as the ultimate nerd school.⁸⁷

Chapter one examined how student heterogeneity helps shape the student environment. The present chapter examines how the student environment is molded by the school's cultural climate. Which cultural values does ISS promote, explicitly and implicitly? To what extent can the school's user groups, the students and their parents, influence the running of the school? ISS promotes a challenging high school academic program. How does such a strong academic focus impact on students' daily lives? This chapter, then, turns the spotlight away from the students and on to the high school itself. Students do not interact in a vacuum. The school is one of the strongest cultural determinants in their lives.

I. Cultural Climate

ISS is a non-profit foundation owned by the major oil companies that operate in Stavanger and by NATO. Final authority rests with the Board of Trustees and the Director. The school is not supervised by the Norwegian state. Such a structure is according to Robin Pascoe not atypical for international schools:

One of the most substantial differences in schools overseas from those at home will be the absence of outside 'watchdog' agencies. ... Most international schools function independently and may be answerable only to an elected or appointed board or to a local embassy.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Questionnaire response. The student responded to a question in the section for Norwegian single and dual citizenship students: "What do Norwegians outside of the ISS environment think of you studying at the school? Are they typically positive, negative, or indifferent?" The student checked "positive" and added the comment quoted in the text.

⁸⁸ Pascoe 138.

ISS exists primarily to serve the needs of expatriate families. Ernest Mannino and Keith Miller, both of the U.S. Department of State, recommend that expatriate parents engage themselves in their children's international school, "Meet the teacher(s); attend parents' night; get involved with the PTA [Parent Teacher Association]; whenever possible, get involved on the school board."⁸⁹ At ISS parents do have real influence, since at least two parents are represented on the Board of Trustees. The ISS Board of Trustees by-laws state that

The Board shall consist of nine voting members. Exxon Mobil and Phillips, as companies who participated in the founding of ISS, will each have a representative on the Board. There will be one parent-elect; this member will be elected by parents of ISS students. There will be one member who has a child enrolled at ISS as a private pay student. The remaining five members will represent companies that have significant numbers of students at ISS: BP, NATO, Schlumberger, Shell, and Statoil.⁹⁰

The five representatives that are elected by the major companies do not necessarily have children in the school. Parents also work directly with the school administration through the very active Parent Association. In addition, parents may influence the board and the school informally. One parent who was interviewed thought that parents were able to exert influence by talking with community members at social events.

Students may influence the school informally by talking with faculty and staff on a daily basis, but they also formally represented through the high school student council. According to one student who has been a member of the council, students enjoy some small degree of influence:

Minor changes can happen. The student council meets with the administration once a year. It's a viable channel of communication, because we've seen some changes, minor ones. I think it works fairly well.

Dr. Duevel explained that the student council is important in running social activities:

I think the Student Council in the high school is a wonderful organization. They organize all kinds of things for the kids. There are a number of improvements that

⁸⁹ McCluskey 21.

⁹⁰ By-laws, Board of Trustees, International School of Stavanger.

have taken place in the school because of things that they have asked for. The Student Council has a treasury, but the school does not put money into that. They get money from different activities that they have that they earn money from. The Parent Association has a big carnival and they give a percentage of the proceeds to the Student Council.

Like any school, ISS has a hierarchical structure, and this structure is clearly articulated through the school rules and through the level of deference to the staff that is expected. In the section on conduct and discipline, the High School student/parent handbook states that

Only those students who cooperate with the rules and regulations of the school, as designed by the faculty and administration, will be permitted to attend the International School of Stavanger. ISS is a privilege, provided at considerable cost, not a guaranteed right.

Students are to address faculty and staff “by the appropriate title: Dr., Mr., or Ms.”⁹¹

When students were asked what cultural values and civic virtues they thought the school tries to teach, one respondent commented that “Teachers and authority figures are to be respected.” ISS is very clear about the level of discipline it requires. Dr. Duevel said that

If we write rules down, we mean it, and if we write it down, we follow through. Kids need to know what the boundaries are, and if the boundaries are fuzzy, then kids will always try to stretch those boundaries. It is important that if we are serious about something, that we write it down and that we follow it.

One expatriate student said that “I think at times the administration is harsh.” A respondent wrote that “Life at ISS is great, but it’s strict and educationally demanding.” In commenting on discipline issues, Dr. Cameron noted that

The strict discipline is very typical of an American school. You’re responsible for these kids while they are on your watch, and you want to minimize the opportunities of anything going wrong for them, because parents would hold you responsible if a child’s safety were in jeopardy. I think it comes from a culture where larger schools have had discipline problems. The best way to get around that is to just let students know what the rules are in advance, and to articulate the rules in very clear ways so that students don’t find ways around them.

Such a degree of discipline is not only typical of American schools. Monica Rabe, a Swedish expatriate mother, writes that “School discipline in the international schools is

⁹¹ ISS High School 2003-2004 Student/Parent Handbook: Conduct and Discipline: 8.

fairly strict in comparison to the Scandinavian school systems, for example.”⁹² Discipline problems in international schools may not be much of a problem initially in any case, given that most students come from families from a higher socio-economic bracket who value education. Robin Pascoe, a Canadian expatriate mother, writes that expatriate children

spend a lot more time in the company of adults. This translates in a positive way into classroom behavior where the international school teacher will likely be afforded much more respect than teachers back home receive. International teachers say that they spend a lot less time disciplining a classroom, which contributes to more time on direct teaching....⁹³

Many respondents wrote that they feel lucky studying at ISS because the school gives them a good education. Students who focus on their studies are unlikely to enjoy or approve of unruly classroom behavior. Dr. Duevel said that

Very little of my or the principals’ time is taken up by matters of discipline. That isn’t because we have big sticks, but rather because there is a general environment of studiousness. The kids behave not because we make them behave, but because the kids feel comfortable in that kind of environment.... I have taught public school in the U.S. and in a private school in England. There were students in the public school classroom who were there not because they wanted to learn, but because they had to be somewhere. Rather than learning, their goal was to attract attention and distract the rest of the class. That is no fun for the teachers and the other kids in the class. Very often it is no fun for that particular student either, but it can happen if there is a vacuum of not having a structure. We have seen it happen over and over again that kids have had issues and discipline problems in other schools. When they come here and see that the students are open to what the teacher has to say and that the teacher shows respect for the students, the kids fall in line with that. That probably has something to do with why teachers like teaching in this school as well.

Discipline and courteous behavior is in everybody’s interest. Students who do decide to test how far they may go will soon be met with a swift reaction from the school.

It is important to many ISS students that they succeed academically. Such an attitude may not be common in local schools back in their home countries. Pascoe writes that

Back home, it may be considered cool behavior to hang around and tease kids who study too hard. Bookworms are definitely out in local schools. But that is not

⁹² Rabe 82.

⁹³ Pascoe 144.

the case in the international school system. Children take their studies seriously, and the cool kids can be those who succeed, not fail.⁹⁴

In April 2004, four ISS seniors became finalists in the national *Unge Forskere* (Young Researchers) competition and were interviewed on local radio. They said that “In our school it’s cool to be a nerd”, and that fellow students are supportive and give them ideas. One student said that he had been attending another school where teachers did not seem to care very much, but that the teachers at ISS push students and give lots of individual guidance.”⁹⁵ Not all students are however equally dedicated to their studies. One student said that there are students in the high school that he considers to be in the drop-out category. They do as little schoolwork as possible, but do not cut classes since the school reacts sharply to truancy. Dr. Duevel said that

If students are absent without cause from classes they are called in to see the principal. If this happens several times, they can be suspended for three days. If there is a need for someone to be expelled, I have to make a recommendation to the board of trustees, and they are the ones who expel students. This does not happen very often.

26 percent of all questionnaire respondents have attended a local Norwegian school, and more than half of students with single or dual Norwegian citizenship have done so. One student who had attended a local Norwegian school commented that

In the first class I had at ISS the room was completely silent. I asked myself, “Is this the right school for me?” Everybody was working much more than what I was used to. If some people don’t pay attention to what’s going on, at least they don’t disturb the others.

One respondent currently in the high school commented on her first weeks in the ISS middle school: “I hated it. I had detentions all the time, because I was used to Norwegian school where we hardly ever listened to the teacher.” Dr. Duevel said that:

I feel that the rules are fine for this school. I don’t know that this school and our rules are fine for every student. A number of times over the years Norwegian

⁹⁴ Pascoe 145.

⁹⁵ Kjetland, Maryana, Charlotte Thorstvedt and Ravi Vissapragada. These senior students were interviewed on local NRK radio on the occasion of their winning Norwegian National Young Researcher finalist places. Stavanger: *NRK Lokalen* 21 April 2004.

students have come to us who have been used to a looser situation in Norwegian schools and who have transferred back. That's O.K. I don't hold that against them or the Norwegian schools. But we don't try to hide what our rules are.

Some friction may have its roots in cultural differences. One Norwegian student said that "I think that some teachers are taken aback by that Norwegian teenagers expect more respect from their teachers than what they are used to." A teacher agreed: "There is a huge cultural difference in how kids behave towards adults in the US and in Norway."

ISS was established in 1966 as the Stavanger American School (SAMS). As the American presence has lessened in the Stavanger oil industry over the last two decades, the school has adapted to the changing market by metamorphosing into an international school. Nevertheless, some respondents and students think that the school is too strongly influenced by the American school system and culture, and that it is too closed to the host culture. One respondent wrote that "though this school claims to be international, American standards are being communicated, which I think is not appropriate in Europe."

A non-American respondent wrote that

I think it is important to be aware that ISS used to be an American school. There is still very much one-sided influence from the States. To some extent it poses the problem that Americans are (generally) internationally disinterested, undereducated and oblivious. Many of our American books show that very clearly. I don't mean to speak against any Americans in our school. Both teachers and students (generally) try very hard to become international. The quality of American material is just a bit dubious to me in this (technically) international environment.

This student's comments were echoed by a continental European respondent:

It is also sad that this school fails to understand that we are in Europe/Scandinavia and not in the USA. Just because there are a couple of Americans in our school doesn't mean that they are not able to adapt to a different culture. A lot of students have problems with the American standards. As for most of us, they do not reflect the cultural background from people mostly being raised with European values.

Both these students have attended other international schools, and so are in a position to compare schools. Internationally mobile students were the ones who most often

commented on what they felt to be a too strong American cultural influence, but there were some British and Norwegian respondents who thought so too. One British student wrote that “American [values are being taught] oh so too strongly! It should be toned down.” An American student who has studied at the school for several years felt that there had been a real change in the cultural climate during his stay at the school:

The American presence at ISS has really dwindled off in my time here. A lot of that is due to the huge mergers in the oil industry and people getting laid off. That was a huge drop. NATO coming in compensated for that somewhat, but then again, NATO is coming from all over. Probably the most obvious sign that the school is getting less American is that they changed the name of the elementary school to the primary school. Overall the feel is less American. Also, in the high school they’re really focusing on the IB, which is definitively not American.

Keith Allen thinks that “A school that proclaims itself to be ‘British’ and has a significant proportion of UK citizens may be fine. But for an ‘international’ school to have a bias towards one group is problematic.”⁹⁶ It is outside the scope of this thesis to try to establish the degree to which ISS is an international rather than an American international school, but it is relevant to note that some non-American students feel that the school is too American. According to Dr. Duevel, there has been a substantial reorientation at the school over the last few years:

The school has become less Americanized over the last few years. That has been the goal. This is not an American school. It is an international school. The school is a Norwegian foundation located in Norway. Norwegians are the second largest national group in the school. We have tried to put together the best program that we can, picking out the best aspects of lots of different national education systems. But it is always interesting to me, because I know that we will have American families and kids who say that the school is too Norwegian or too British or too European. The British kids will say that it is too American. In actual fact, from my way of thinking, it is the best of a lot of different national systems, but it certainly doesn’t intend to be categorised as any of those. I agree with those students who say that the school was much more American before. Certainly from the time I came, it is a very different school. It is a much more interesting school because it has got many different nationalities. I hope that the school has become less Americanized over the last seven or eight years. From my point of view, the more international the school is, the better it is.

⁹⁶ Allen 129.

Although many students feel that there is a marked American influence at ISS, one American respondent wrote: “[There is] not much of my own culture present: negative. I often feel like I’m missing out on a real high school experience.” Another respondent thought that there was a larger bias at work: “They try to keep [the school] culturally open to all. But a Western, developed culture dominates.” Dr. Duevel commented that

National cultures are celebrated at the school. The fact that we have so many nationalities is a huge advantage. One of the things we could do a better job of is of tapping into the resources of the different nationalities even better than we do now. We do lots of things in the different classes. The more that we can tap into the nationalities that have fewer students in the school, and not just the three big ones, the U.S., Norway and the U.K., the more we can weave pieces of their cultural identities into the school. The more we do this, the better it is for everyone, not just for those students, but also for students from the big national groupings in the school. That expands their international understanding as well.

Some of the cultural dominance perceived by students may be attributed to the composition of the faculty: Of the 31 teachers who teach high school, 55 percent, seventeen teachers, are American, 16 percent are British, 13 percent are Canadian, 13 percent are Norwegian and one teacher is Spanish. An international school’s cultural climate is also in large part determined by the composition of the student body. In the ISS high school, fifteen nationalities are represented, but the largest groups are made up of English mother tongue students and local Norwegian students. ISS probably has little maneuvering room in its policy of being an international school as opposed to being an American international school when it comes to the nationality composition of its students. All children who have good enough grade transcripts and who are sponsored by the companies that own the school are admitted to ISS, naturally without any regard as to nationality. In the 2003-2004 school year, these students, making up 57 percent of the high school student population, were primarily American and British. One student who has attended another international school outside Europe said that “At the school in ... there were many more nationalities represented. Here it’s all oil and NATO. That restricts it

quite a lot.” Where ISS has some maneuvering room is in how many local students it will admit. Dr. Duevel said that the school could easily accommodate another hundred students, and that the school has a cap on how many private pay students it will accept. This limit is undoubtedly set in part because of sound financial considerations, since private pay rates are at one third of company rates (about 50,000 Norwegian *kroner* as opposed to about 150,000 *kroner*). It is however possible that considerations of national composition come into play. Such calculations are important in other international schools. Richard Pierce, a former international school teacher, thinks that “National mix [in an international school] is certainly a matter for careful consideration [because] it is a common experience within a class that a co-cultural or co-lingual group can form a refuge from the larger group.”⁹⁷

The Norwegian single and dual citizenship students constitute at the largest nationality group in the high school with 27 percent of the total population, but the English mother tongue students combined make up over half the student population. The degree to which local students are admitted to international schools is important part of the individual schools’ identities. Keith Allen cites two other schools who have about the same percentage of local students:

Having a school with a large proportion of host-country national raises specific problems: expatriates, for instance, could view the school as ‘local’ rather than ‘international’. There are also educational implications. Large proportions of any cultural or linguistic group affect the operation of the school. ... What proportion of the student population of an international school should be from the host culture? The United World Colleges aim specifically for about 25 percent of their student body to represent the host nation,⁹⁸ and at NIST [New International School of Thailand] we had the same target figure. I know of schools which much higher proportions (up to 90 percent) and they found it hard to attract expatriates. On the other hand, I also know of several schools with lower ‘quotas’. In many cases, these seem hard to justify as the schools enrolled high proportions of other nationals. In a few cases, the school admitted a carefully

⁹⁷ Pearce, Richard. “Developing Cultural Identity in an International School Environment.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 57-58.

⁹⁸ Wilkinson, D. “International Education: a Question of Access.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 230.

selected handful of host nationals in order to gain influence with the host community.⁹⁹

Nationality balance is important not only for pedagogical reasons. Students have parents, and expatriate parents often take great interest in their children's international school.

Richard Pierce writes that

With substantial groups of students come substantial groups of parents. They too can achieve critical mass at which they can sustain their home culture and create an enclave in which national expectations are unchallenged, remaining remote from local life. ... The Parent Teacher Association, or the school, can come under fire from national groups that ... cling to the validation system – and hence the values – of home. It seems vital for the school to offer its own values and to share these as effectively as possible with their families.¹⁰⁰

An international school's cultural climate is not only determined by the balance between the various nationality groups within the school, but also by the school's degree of participation in the host culture. Some students do not think that ISS as a school engages very much in the host culture. A student from one of the smaller nation groups at ISS compared the school to another international school she had attended:

The school says that it's international and everything, but there are a lot of things we do that are only American or only British. I personally don't think that we do enough Norwegian things. In ... we engaged much more in the community, doing beach clean-ups and stuff. Here it's mostly sports. We played volleyball against all the schools around here, and that was a load of fun actually. But academically, the only thing I've heard of is the IB students working with local mentally handicapped children.

If it is correct that ISS as a school does not engage very actively in the host culture, it is at least not the only international school that does not do so. Keith Allen writes that

Research suggests that links with the local community have not been seen as important for either international school students or teachers. ... While international education aims to expose students to 'culture, language and people in a way which engenders the ability to judge and understand others by their standards rather than one's own',¹⁰¹ it is all too frequently the case that the school sees these aims being fulfilled *within* its own student body, rather than by interaction with the external community. ... In many schools (especially those

⁹⁹ Allen 129.

¹⁰⁰ Pearce, "Identity" 58.

¹⁰¹ Hayden, Mary and Jeff Thompson. "International Schools and International Education: a Relationship Reviewed." *Oxford Review of Education*, 21, 3, 1995: 327-345.

with a low percentage of host nationals), the student body can easily become focused on the life of the expatriate community. If we are to utilize the possibilities of *real* cross-cultural fertilization, international schools need to look outside their walls. As McKenzie reports,¹⁰² however, ‘so few schools ... have any genuine or sustained contact with their ambient society.’¹⁰³

A Norwegian respondent wrote that “It’s strange to have so little contact with Norwegian culture in school.” Another Norwegian student referred to what he had heard said about other international schools:

ISS certainly could be a bit more Norwegian. People who have been at other international schools say those schools usually try to make use of the location and the local culture to make themselves distinctive as an international school.

Engaging more with the local host culture as well as with the local expatriate community can also be beneficial for the school’s long-term stability. Keith Allen writes that

The fluidity of the expatriate population can also be problematic, although the impact of this fluidity can be reduced by having a significant students body from the local community, whether the host country nationals or long-term expatriate. Again, the school must be aware of the dangers of influence skewed towards these sectors solely because of their ‘permanence’.¹⁰⁴

When I asked a parent if she thought that the school reached out very much to the local community, she said: “No, not really. There’s a lot of volunteering and fundraising going on, but that’s international.”

II. The Pursuit of Excellence

ISS is accredited by the European Council of International Schools (ECIS). This process of peer review and benchmarking looks at every aspect of the school, including academic performance. For the high school, ISS offers the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) for students in the 9th and 10th grades, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program for the junior and senior grades. It is essential to the school’s

¹⁰² McKenzie, Malcolm. “Going, Going, Gone ... Global.” *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 250.

¹⁰³ Allen 133.

¹⁰⁴ Allen 133.

mission and indeed continued existence that it offer programs that are recognized by a wide variety of educational systems in secondary and tertiary education worldwide. Dr. Duevel explained that

The curriculum is written and presided over by the staff. We believe that we know what is required for our students in order for them to succeed and to continue educational programs. That means what it takes to get into universities around the world. It could be what it means to get back into their home country's school if they get transferred before they graduate, or what it means to get into another international school. That is part of the reason why we have such close ties to other international schools. Being a member of such an organization such as ECIS is absolutely essential for us.... That means that we are not just guessing what the kids' best interests are, and that we are able to put together a program that doesn't just meet the needs of the person who shouts the loudest, but rather meets the needs of the entire student body. ... Most of our students go to university in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. The U.K. is our biggest university destination. Some go here in Norway. A few will go elsewhere. This year we have some going to Denmark, Prague and Australia as well. All of this is very doable because we are doing the International Baccalaureate, which is common currency around the world.

The IB program has been running at ISS for seven years, and during that period, the pass rate has been on an average of 95 percent.¹⁰⁵ Clearly the IB program has been a great success for the school. One student thought that

The school is moving more and more towards all students doing the IB. Some people do struggle. Some people don't need it as it's not recognized in the States. The diploma isn't really recognized, but the individual courses are. A lot of people do normal high school curriculum here and that works fine for them when they transfer. Half of the Americans in the senior grade do IB. I don't think there's peer pressure to take part in the IB program. It's mainly from the school. But again, the parents know that it's the most challenging program and therefore want their children to do it.

Another student said that "About 90% of the junior class is doing IB. I know of 5 people who aren't doing it, and everyone else is." Students at the ISS high school do not have to do the IB, but they are very likely to. One student thinks that the reason for this is the way the school presents the IB program:

¹⁰⁵ Park, Lynn. "News from the Exams Coordinator." *The Informer*. Published by ISS as a Community Newsletter. Stavanger: ISS, 27 August 2004: 4. Back issues of the *Informer* are found on the ISS web site.

They say that this is the right choice, but if you don't feel like working, that you don't want anything in life, then you can take the regular diploma. If you do the IB and don't even do that well, you're in for an advantage.

Previous exam results are advertised on the school's web page and periodically in the school newsletter. One student felt that the rigorous program is pushed more for the good of the school than for the students:

The school takes great pride in the results the graduating students achieve. The teachers often say that the seniors last year achieved such and such an average. I feel that this is more because of the school spirit than because of the ambitions of individual teachers.

Although ISS exists primarily to educate oil company and NATO dependents, the school reserves the right to decide whether or not it thinks prospective students have what it takes to succeed academically at the school. According to an expatriate student,

ISS is considered a private school with a very high level of education, and most people who come here are informed of that fact, and if their children are not capable, they're not usually put in this school.

ISS can deny entry to any prospective student because it is a private school. Dr. Duevel explained the process by which potential students are evaluated:

We have a very rigorous academic program here, and if someone has poor grades or we feel that there would be an issue on them being successful here, we would tell them no. Public schools can't do that, but this is a private school. You have to have good grades to get into ISS. We have to feel that you could be successful here, because if we think you couldn't be successful here academically, we're not doing you any favors by admitting you. The local Norwegian schools have to take them by law. If somebody is a resident here, the Norwegian schools will have to take them. What often will happen is that families will choose not to bring the children and will leave them at home.

Local potential scholarship and private pay students go through the same screening process as the expatriate dependents. Each year, ISS makes available up to four scholarships for Norwegian students to do the equivalent of Norwegian *videregående skole* at ISS.

According to Dr. Duevel, "The scholarship competition is quite fierce. We get some of the best students in the community every year I think." In addition, there are quite a few Norwegian private pay students are admitted. Dr. Duevel explained that

Getting a spot here as a private pay student is not easy, because we have a long waiting list of potential private pay students. ... This year, we turned down about 130 students who wanted to come here as private pay students.

ISS is known locally as a very good and a very tough school. Dr. Cameron thinks that Norwegian students and their parents are attracted to the academic rigor offered by ISS:

The families have to buy into this kind of arrangement, and not only the families that would obviously place their students here because they're being transferred from job post to job post, but also the local families that come here. When applicants for scholarship places are interviewed, they say that they want to sign on for more rigour. That is obviously the message that has gotten out to the community, that it's a bit more rigorous here.

One expatriate student said that

My Norwegian friends who have come here mostly talk about a change in work load. One Norwegian student said that he considered Norwegian school the longest vacation of his life. At ISS he really had to up it. I had a Norwegian friend who pulled out of the school because that the workload was so heavy and she went back to a Norwegian school.

A scholarship student said that the transition from the Norwegian lower secondary school to ISS was less a culture shock than a shock in terms of the work load. Still, in that student's opinion, "ISS can be for everybody. You can work at the pace that suits you and get the grades that you want." The net result of the screening process is a high school student population of bright students with a history of academic success. These students themselves often have high-achieving parents who value education. Dr. Cameron compared ISS to typical American public schools:

The high school has a profile that you are not going to find at an average U.S. public school. When you think about the types of families that are being transferred to a place like Stavanger or to any other international school for that matter, it's usually someone in management, usually someone who has financial resources. What the literature tells us about families operating at a certain income level is that that they are able to afford their children more opportunities in school than you might expect from families in an inner city environment, where the emphasis might be more on just surviving. This is not an issue for the average family here. These are families that value education by their own accomplishments and have those same expectations of their kids.

Fifty-seven percent of questionnaire respondents wrote that they feel lucky to be studying at ISS.¹⁰⁶ The reason mostly frequently given was that students consider ISS to be a very good school that provides them with a good education. One student wrote that he felt lucky to study at ISS because the school “is a very competitive and successful academic preparation. It’s like a pre-university.” There were also quite a few students who commented negatively on the academic pressure. One respondent wrote that “the school has very high academic standards, which can make life difficult.” Another wrote that there is “No free time without major guilt.” Yet another student wrote that “You don’t have a choice in ISS, if you don’t care, you can’t make it.” ISS high school students have to work very hard, but for some, academic success comes more easily than it does for others. One student said that “We’re all pretty smart, but we don’t dedicate our lives to academics.” I asked one teacher if all the students in the high school were highly intelligent since the school achieves such good results. The teacher did not think so, but explained that “Even the least academically gifted students get passing grades because they sit up until midnight with homework.” Despite the school’s screening process, there must be students at ISS who are of average intelligence and ability. Pascoe writes that

The majority of overseas parents [are] high achievers themselves, ... [and] will not easily admit of having a child of average, ordinary intelligence. But psychologists and teachers point to distinct academic problems for children who range in the average level of basic intelligence. International schools are tougher, no doubt about it. With smaller classes and often more resource facilities like computers, children are challenged much more. ... In some cases, such a stimulation environment may enhance the average child’s performance, but professionals agree that many of the children facing constant emotional problems belong to the ‘average intelligence’ category.¹⁰⁷

Those students who struggle more than others or who have special educational needs can receive a great deal of assistance at the school because the student population is so small.

Dr. Cameron explained that

¹⁰⁶ A further 29 percent wrote that they felt “O.K.” about studying at the school. Only two students checked that they would rather not study at ISS.

¹⁰⁷ Pascoe 149-150.

In those instances where students have learning challenges such as dyslexia, the school does have in place means to support those students. ISS does have an English as an additional language specialist and a psychologist with a background in those kinds of support that the students need. Those kinds of services would be used on an individual basis to help students to function in this demanding academic environment. Because of the small student population, it is possible to support students on a case by case basis, without the school having to have a special program that addresses special needs.

Dr. Cameron went on to address more generally the students who struggle with the academic pressure:

Not every student here is achieving at the highest level, but on average, the performance is quite high. We have a percentage of students who are going through their own struggles. The school has resources in place to help those students along. What I have noticed is that there are certain students who might be classified as struggling in this environment and who wouldn't even be on the radar screen of another school, given their accomplishments.... I have been trained in inner city schools, and I know how bad it can get. Trust me, it is nowhere near that, even our worst case of a student struggling is nowhere near the normal you would see in a public school. ... My role is that of an advocate for students, and I have set up many student-teacher conversations. Teachers have come in on week-ends for extra coaching. It's all focused on getting students through the program.

In the high school there are 136 students and 31 teachers. Although some of these teachers also teach in the primary and middle schools, the student-teacher ratio is very high. One student felt that teachers take great interest in students' individual academic development because they have so few students to work with:

If I have problem with maths or physics I can meet with a teacher before or after school. I can get extra help from any teacher anytime. Many teachers are very willing to help out and ask students to come for help. I know that teachers have offered to come to school during the summer vacation in order to help students to set up experiments and such. I think teaching is more personal for them since the classes are so small.

If students fall behind, slowing down the class is not an option, but these students will find teachers and the school offering all the extra tuition that is needed. One student said that "ISS is very academically challenging, which is kind of a killer. But it's easier because it's small, because it's a lot more personal. Certain teachers are really willing to help you out."

ISS strongly motivates students to do well academically. One of the ways in which it does that is to run a local chapter of the American National Honor Society. One student who is not a member of the society said that

If you get above a B+ average, then you're in the honors. Then there are these lunchtime meetings, and that's most of the grade. I'm not in it, and there are a few people who are not in it. We definitely work hard enough. It's a bit embarrassing because they separate the smart from the challenged ones and those who just don't care. I'm extremely conscientious, so it's frustrating just not being able to come across like the teachers require.

In addition to study-related activities, ISS offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These are undoubtedly important in making the relatively small ISS community cohere and give expatriate students something to do after homework is done, but such activities also function as rewards. According to Dr. Cameron, "Students will not be allowed to take part in extra-curricular activities if they are in jeopardy, if their grade averages are below C+." Extra-curricular activities are especially important at international schools that are to some degree culturally isolated from their sister schools. One of the benefits that ISS enjoys by being part of ECIS is that the school can send student sports and academic teams to compete against other international schools abroad. However, participation in the National Honor Society, in extracurricular activities, and in going on trips abroad are all contingent on students doing their best academically. It seems safe to assume that a student may soon feel that his or her entire school existence comes crashing down once the grades start to slide. Sometimes students do struggle with motivational problems. Dr. Duevel explained that

These students receive failing grades, and if they get too many failing grades, they won't graduate, won't finish here. Most of our kids won't find that happening, but from time to time, external things will come along and create stress for the student. Sometimes it happens that they will take an additional year and do high school in four years instead of three. The school is quite open to having that happen. There is plenty of informal extra tuition going on. Because the teachers know the students so well there is a very good relationship between the teachers and the students.

One student said that "The school takes action when students are in danger of dropping out, but some students do exactly enough to maintain a C average, which is not really bad."

It is a recurring comment among questionnaire respondents and members of the ISS community that I interviewed that the academic pressure strongly cuts into students' social lives. One student who takes his studies very seriously said that

My friends are shocked that I'm not studying right now and that I'm going to the gym afterwards [three days before an exam]. Even if it's a Friday and I go to the movies, I sit agonizing about what I should study. I try to keep Sundays for work and stare into madness. Sometimes I tell myself that it would be so good if I went to a Norwegian school. I wouldn't have to worry about this, I could do stuff with my friends, but I'd never imagine myself take actions and making that happen. I make time for work.

It seems that quite a few students suffer from some degree of anxiety as regards their studies. According to Dr. Cameron,

In this particular school, it's a very driven population. Given the average standardized test scores of ISS and the way that those compare to other international schools and other high schools in general, you have a certain kind of family and a certain kind of student here that are aware of the expectations that are placed on them. Knowing those expectations, I believe that students are driven a bit more to stay on top of their studies and perhaps not have as much of a social existence as I might have seen in other high schools, especially in the U.S. where I come from.

Strongly motivated students will produce excellent work, which is all to the good, but many respondents comment that the degree of work expected can be problematic. One teacher thought that

What's characteristic of the student environment is that many students are strongly motivated academically and work hard. Some students enjoy the challenges they are given, while other students find that it's tough. Ninety percent of the juniors do the IB. The administration believes that the IB program can be for everybody. Not everybody can get top grades, but most students can pass the exams if they work hard enough.

A parent agreed that many students are academically driven, but she thought that

That's normal, also in American schools. Do the best that you can do, that's expected. A couple of Norwegian scholarship parents I know have a hard time understanding why their son is spending so much time with homework. He's not

spending more time than the average student, but his parents are used to the Norwegian system.

Many ISS Norwegians have transferred to ISS from local Norwegian schools. One such student was not only challenged by the greater academic expectations of ISS, but also by what he felt to be “nerdy” classmates:

When I first got here, I saw some horrible nerds in my grade, and I thought “how am I going to survive this?” even though they were all open to me. After a while, you get used to it, and then you discover that either they have become cool or I’ve become a nerd too.

The teenage years are crucial in a person’s development, and some students may feel that they are being squeezed by school work and social desires. One respondent wrote that “There is no denying that ISS is a very good school, but it seems that everything revolves around grades and this can be detrimental to some students.” Another respondent thought that a major challenge of studying at ISS was “Time management – a major challenge for a lot of people (homework vs. having a life)”. Yet another respondent commented that

This international school is a good school academically. However, this school doesn’t appreciate that we need vacation and some free time, as over vacation there is usually a fair amount of homework, while weekends are literally packed with them.

Child psychologist Kirsten Herh agrees:

High school students at international schools often complete college-level assignments. I have no quarrel with their intellectual abilities to perform at grade levels above and beyond their years, but the question is, how does this affect their personal development? It is my belief that the hours devoted to researching and writing too difficult assignments would be hours better spent in the development of a teenager’s emotional and spiritual maturity.¹⁰⁸

Dr. Cameron thinks that students who enrol at ISS may in many cases be quite willing to give up some social free time in return for later success:

In many ways, the demands of a school like this kind of takes one’s mind and focus over from the social milieu. They aren’t so much focused on what parties are going on this week-end, which tend to be fewer than would exist in a school environment where you might have more free social time.... You could question

¹⁰⁸ Pascoe 16. Dr. Herh has written the introduction to Pascoe’s book.

whether the academic pressure pushes the social life away, or if students pre-select themselves because they have a certain mind-set and philosophy. It may be the kind of person who has not given their social life paramount importance in the first place. However they get here, in my experience, the social scene seems to be dampened a bit and kept in check in ways that I have not seen in the average public school in North America. I believe this is because of the academic focus.

In some respondents' answers a note of resentment could be felt. One student wrote that "At ISS people don't get out much and there is nothing to do so you have more time to revise as there is nothing better to do." When I asked Dr. Cameron to comment on such statements, he said that

There are other things you could do at home like computer games. I would say that that student has probably in ways that he or she is not even aware of, bought into the philosophy of their families and this school, which places certain expectations on them, that they don't even use free time to goof off.

One striking characteristic about the questionnaire responses was the frequency with which students referred to deferred pleasures. One respondent was told before enrolling at ISS that "It was going to be very difficult, but I was assured it would all be worth it later in life." Another wrote: "It's hard when you social life becomes limited, however it might be worth it in the future." Dr. Cameron said that

This is what is talked about around dinner tables at home, that you need to get good grades in order to put yourself in the best position possible to get yourself into the schools that you want to. That is the message that students consistently get here. Being in an environment like that, you soon sign on to the philosophy that doing well here translates into doing well twenty years from now.

Pascoe, the wife of a diplomat, writes that

Overseas, parents typically place a higher than average emphasis on academic achievement. This should come as no surprise, given the demographics of most foreign communities. An unusually high number of offspring of over-achieving, highly educated parents are brought together in the international classroom. It doesn't matter from what part of the world they come, but a cross-section of parents living abroad would likely reveal an abnormally high number of successful individuals, many holding more than one university degree. Naturally, this sense of achievement and emphasis on higher education filters down to the children, and eventually into the international classroom.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Pascoe 141-142.

Possibly more than most teenagers, many ISS students plan ahead. One teacher said that

Students feel a strong pressure from home that they have to do well. Many students are proud of what their parents have achieved. They would like to be as successful or more so than their parents, and they know that the key is a good and solid education.

If a class consists mostly of hard-working over-achieving students, this can lead to a sameness in the student environment that can be socially unhelpful. Pascoe feels that

A student population of over-achievers is not necessarily a bad thing if it spurs on high academic achievement. At the same time, it robs the classroom of a mainstream flavor. That is, everyone is more or less at the same level, despite the different nationalities. Sometimes, it does a child good to have a broader academic cross-section of classmates. However, the multi-culturalism of the classroom offers positive compensation.¹¹⁰

One student felt that being successful academically can hurt people socially:

I think that most of those students who do very little, or even more so those who do very much are not very comfortable socially. I know that some of those who get the best grades can't speak Norwegian after having lived here for many years. They don't have any Norwegian friends.

In conclusion, two distinct factors may help explain why ISS succeeds with such a rigorous academic program. First, students tend to have parents who value education. Second, many students depend on the school for most of their social lives. The school thus finds itself with a student body that is bright and which enjoys a limited set of social options. In the following chapter the effect that the small and relatively closed social environment has on the high school student environment will be examined.

¹¹⁰ Pascoe 142.

CHAPTER THREE

WE ARE FAMILY

ISS is a way of life.¹¹¹

The International School of Stavanger is really much more than a school. For many students the ISS community is almost like an extended family. The International School is small, but comprehensive: children from the ages of three to eighteen go to school in the same building, which makes ISS a natural focal point for expatriate families. The social environment is restricted and transparent. New arrivals are greeted with intense interest. The Norwegian language and other less tangible cultural barriers reinforce the inward looking character of the community. When ISS community members look outwards, they are likely to be looking beyond Norway's borders.

I. A Nexus for Expatriates

A large percentage of ISS students are internationally mobile. Their parents have temporary jobs in Stavanger and do not mean to stay for long. When families with children arrive, typically the salary-earning parent at once locks into his, or sometimes her, job at one of the oil companies or NATO, the children are enrolled at ISS, and the spouse is left with all the really hard work: networking, shopping, driving, surviving. The family can connect locally to one of the several international churches or to organizations like the Stavanger Partner Information Network as well as to the wage-earner's company, but for many expatriate families, ISS will be the major hub. According to Dr. Duevel, it "often

¹¹¹ This is an expression current in the ISS community. Dr. Duevel wrote in an email that: "Yes, I have heard that phrase used - in the cases where I have heard it used, it has been in a positive context." 6 September 2004.

happens in international communities that the school takes on an important role in being ‘the center of civilization.’”¹¹² For many, that center is a good place to be. One parent said that her first impression of ISS was that “The school seemed very welcoming and very warm. In the cafeteria, students and parents and teachers were all mingling. It was a very relaxed atmosphere.” The school is very happy to welcome parents into its day to day life, and for several reasons. In an article in the *Informer*, the school’s bi-weekly newsletter, primary school principal Dr. Linda Zielinsky wrote that

We have a very active Parent Association here at ISS and appreciate the many volunteers who participate in many different activities at our school. We invite ALL parents to become an active part of our Parent Association. The most basic statement that can be made about parent and family involvement in education is that when it happens, everybody benefits. Research has conclusively shown us that parent involvement in education benefits students, parents, teachers and schools whether the program is at the pre-school, elementary or high school level.¹¹³

Parent involvement improves the chances of the children doing well in school, but since ISS wants to be so much more than a school, a small army of voluntary unpaid workers is essential to help organize various activities and social events. The degree of parent involvement is described in a February, 2000 article in *Stavanger Aftenblad*:

At the International School of Stavanger the parents' collective volunteer work matches that of several full time employees. Sally Morse is an American with three children at the International School of Stavanger. She calculates that she spends about ten hours a week on voluntary work at the school. ... “Our reward is to be able to help make the school the way we want it to be. Since I don’t have a job, I have time to do so. We could of course have stood outside and complained instead of contributing, but that wouldn’t have made things better.” ... At the school there are two kinds of parent organizations, the Parent Association and the Parent Volunteers. The former contributes mostly money. By arranging carnival and bingo nights they raised over seventy thousand *kroner* last year. The latter group consists of parents who volunteer at the school. Some of the parents are assistants to the teachers, while others copy and deliver the bi-weekly newsletters. Some parents coach basketball and baseball or stand in the kiosk that sells books, writing material and soft drinks. About one hundred persons make themselves available. “There is a core of about thirty people that we can call day or night, no matter what”, says the president of the Parent Association Antonia

¹¹² Email received from Dr. Duevel. 6 September 2004.

¹¹³ Zielinsky, Linda. “Primary School News”. *The Informer*. Published by ISS as a Community Newsletter. Stavanger: ISS, 23 April 2004: 12.

Kreston. She does not think that Norwegian parents contribute markedly less than expatriate parents. ... [Primary school] principal George Graham thinks that the volunteers are very valuable for the school. "We could of course have managed without them, but it would not have been the same kind of school."¹¹⁴

One ISS parent said that "People don't demand that you volunteer, but it's expected."

When new parents come to the school, they are invited to coffee in the cafeteria. A representative of the PA board tells the parents about the various groups that "we would love for you to be a part of". The parent went on to explain that

There is a group of parents called Hospitality, which organises breakfasts and luncheons for the teachers. They send letters to each home, and then you make a tray full of cheese and fruit for instance. Every time there's a party for the students, which is once every three months at least, you're expected to bring in homemade baking goods. During lock-ins [when many students spend the entire night at school] parents make pancakes and such.

Quite a few non-working expatriate spouses have time on their hands and are willing to invest some of it at ISS. Many parents of local students however are working and consequently any commitment to ISS comes out of their after-work time. One teacher said that

It can be a bit annoying for some people when both parents are working full time, and the people putting pressure on them don't. But the important thing is that it's all done for the kids. The PA is very good at focusing on the kids. They want the student environment to be as positive as possible, and they're very good at that. I think this is more characteristic of international schools than of specifically American schools.

Many international schools do in fact see themselves as service institutions not only for expatriate children, but also for their parents. The family is seen as a unit. If one or both parents are unhappy in the new location, the children will suffer. According to Langford,

It is important to be sensitive to parents' anxieties and to be aware that the successful transition of the pupil is strongly related to the attitude of the parents. Snowball believes 'Schools should do a great deal to make not only the child, but the whole family, as comfortable as possible, as quickly as possible.' Gellar recognizes this, saying that international schools must help the family integrate into the local community. 'You can be the best school in the world, but if you don't have all kinds of activities to involve the parents, you are in trouble. They

¹¹⁴ Sædberg, Leif Tore. "Jobber gratis for skolen". *Stavanger Aftenblad* 21 February 2000. My translation.

need to be able to mix and mingle and so on.’ Related to this is a willingness on the part of the international community to accept the fact that in some instances it becomes a lifeline for the expatriate community.¹¹⁵

Keith Allen finds that parents who put a lot of time into the international school that their children attend may expect to be rewarded with influence:

Many teachers and administrators feel that they have the expertise and experience to make valid educational decisions. However, owing largely to their socio-economic background, many international school parents expect to be empowered. This wish for empowerment is heightened by the high fees required for most international schools, and the situation becomes even for critical with parents who have extra time on their hands, as is often the case for non-working spouses of expatriate families. ... These ‘expatriate mums’ (as they often are) are willing and able to devote their time to the school, but will usually expect this devotion to be rewarded with influence. ... ‘Inclusive’ international schools need to build partnerships with parents, while taking care over issues of influence to ensure that this is not skewed in favour of those groups with the time, the interest or the cultural background to become involved.¹¹⁶

One parent said that it is hard for a Norwegian student she knows to make his parents understand that they ought to come and take part in school activities.

The students, expatriate or not, are clearly the winners here. When expatriate students were asked if ISS was more or less important to them personally than school would be in their home country, one respondent wrote that ISS is more important to her “because all of my friends are at ISS and my extended family are not in Norway so my entire social life revolves around school.” Expatriate parents will be acutely aware of this predicament, and there are many such who actively try to make the best of the situation. Expatriate mother Robin Pascoe recommends parents to “take an active role in extracurricular activities in an international school since they may be the only recreational outlet a child has....”¹¹⁷ In any case, involving oneself in the children’s English language school may seem ever so much easier and more natural than engaging in the host culture.

¹¹⁵ Langford: 38. Snowball and Gellar are international school professionals interviewed by the author as part of a 1997 survey of 287 international school professionals in 41 schools.

¹¹⁶ Allen 131-132.

¹¹⁷ Pascoe 155.

II. New Students

New students seem to be about the most exciting thing that happens at ISS, and the fun starts long before new students actually arrive. Dr. Duevel said that

Students love it when new students are coming. This is something that is very different and very welcoming here, and I give loads of credit to the students for it. I remember when I was going to school. I lived in the same town all my life. It must have been very difficult for new students to join us. There weren't many first of all, and this was a group that had grown up together, whereas here, the kids are always very welcoming for new kids coming in. I think a lot of that is because that they all know that they very easily could be the ones who could transfer out next.

Smith notes that

Having moved so often, the Absentee American [an internationally mobile American child] has had to learn how to be included and accepted. Having been the new kid of the block over and over again, he or she has eventually translated the need to be accepted into a willingness to accept. Sharon Anderson [in an interview with Carolyn Smith said that] ... "in a DOD [Department of Defense] overseas school you are the new kid for a day or two. In a civilian school [in the United States] you are the new kid all year long because these kids have formed their cliques in kindergarten!"¹¹⁸

McCluskey writes that "Unlike less transient students in domestic schools, students in international schools have a tremendous sense of empathy for new kids since almost everyone has been new at one time or another."¹¹⁹ Dr. Duevel explained that ISS tries to make the transition easier by hooking new students up with students at the school:

Very often we will send the email address of a student who is their age and gender and with similar interests, so that the kids can start emailing back and forth too. We don't expect ISS students to help out with this, but there is always a group of students who are quite willing to do that.

One questionnaire respondent wrote that "I had some email contact with ISS students, which was helpful." According to a parent, students get really excited when the teachers tell them that there are new students coming. One student mentioned other channels of information besides the teachers:

¹¹⁸ Smith 68-69.

¹¹⁹ McCluskey 20.

We usually get to know a lot about people who are coming in. The teachers rarely say much, except their names, and we immediately think “I bet she’s beautiful, I bet...” The students look into it. Students connected to NATO and the oil companies usually come from schools all over the world and would know somebody who would know that person, so they usually get a lot of information through that. The Norwegians are more out of the loop. We know when somebody new is coming two months in advance. We might even know at the beginning of the year that somebody’s coming at the end of the year. Sometimes there are countdowns during the last two weeks. I’m serious! It’s a big deal.

Once the new arrivals come to school, they are met with a tremendous amount of positive energy. One parent said that “ISS is very welcoming to new students. It’s almost overwhelming for a new student, because everybody wants to talk to them.” A student thought that “The students are very good at involving new students. On the ISS bus on the way to school for the first time people started talking to me right away. It can be a bit overwhelming at first.” Students do think of their school as being welcoming: Ninety-one percent of questionnaire respondents consider “ISS mostly welcoming for new students”. I asked Dr. Cameron why he thought new students were such a big thing. He answered that

In this small environment, you become very familiar with very few people very soon. That can invite a bit of monotony and sameness into the students’ lives. How do you shake that up a bit, other than introducing something new? ... I’ve heard about this exoticism that new kids bring and the attention that is lavished upon them. They are even feeling that different groups and cliques are competing for their time. “Please come and join our group. We’re the really cool group.” This is more typical of the 9th grade, but you will find it also in the other grades. I don’t think there’s any maliciousness involved. It’s just that you have a certain group that you usually move around the school with. Those group boundaries are not firm and can break down. People have different friendship clusters. I know of stories about students who have come in and been new to the process and have felt that attention. At some point, there is the expectation from the students that are actually at the school that you reciprocate and make known your allegiance, who you’re going to hang out with at the cafeteria table.

For a teenager who moves to a foreign country where he or she will have to start afresh academically and socially, being met by a tidal wave of warmth and curiosity on the first day at ISS can be a very positive or a less positive experience. A parent said that “Being a new student and shy, one can close off, and then after a couple of days, people stop trying to get hold of you. If you don’t respond, they back off.” A teacher observed that

It can be a big problem if new students don't respond. They may also choose not to join in extra-curricular activities and get to know other people. You have to make an effort yourself. People don't go around waiting for you to take an initiative.

In the opinion of Richard Pearce,

Adjustment of the child to the new international school takes time. Given that the average stay is commonly two to three years, most children can be said to be 'adjusting' most of the time.... While many children are helped by being 'buddied' with acculturated co-nationals or with members of the sponsoring culture, some may prefer to avoid the pitfalls of unfamiliar interpersonal manners, and withdraw into a behavioral 'silent phase' while they observe and learn.¹²⁰

According to a student, no one is ever dropped entirely:

There's no one stuck. If there's no feedback at all, then you start calming down. But then, during that calming down period, that's usually a point where those shy people will make their own initiatives. They're never disowned from the group or anything. We always acknowledge that they're new.

When students were asked how they had felt after a few weeks of settling in at ISS, 37 of 65 respondents wrote that they felt comfortable at a welcoming school; eight students experienced social difficulties; six students reported homesickness and culture shock. Three students had at first difficulty communicating with other students because of their limited English language skills; four students found it difficult to adjust to an international and/or American school; seven students were stressed because of the workload. Several writers affirm that changing schools during adolescence can be very stressful. Pascoe considers that

Older children, from about 12 years of age and up, generally have the toughest time making the transition to an overseas school. ... Teachers who confirmed this for me say that part of the problem for these children is that they have already established a school pattern and don't relish making changes which can affect their self-esteem and self-confidence. Younger children are still open to change because it is all a pretty new game to them. But children approaching puberty are coping with many changes in their bodies and minds.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Pearce, Richard. "Developing Cultural Identity in an International School Environment." *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Ed. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 56.

¹²¹ Pascoe 148.

Kay Branaman Eakin writes that

Even in the most stable of environments, adolescence is often a traumatic time, both for the teenager and the parents. Moving is an emotion-filled period in which teens must give up old friends, worry about whether they'll like their new school and whether they'll ever be able to find new friends.... It looks pretty ominous – new home, new school, no friends. They usually do end up making new friends and fitting into their new life, but it may take much longer than expected, and in the meantime, they may be pretty unhappy.¹²²

When students were asked how they felt at the school at present, 41 of 65 respondents wrote that they felt well adjusted socially, while nine students were not socially comfortable. Reasons cited were primarily school size and a feeling that homework leaves no time for a social life. Thirteen students wrote that they were well adjusted academically, and eight students that they were not. One student wrote that he thought that the school was “super cool” after having been there for a few weeks. When I talked to him later, he said that “I have been moving every two or three years. Normally it takes a couple of years to be accepted in a school, but here in the first year I feel totally accepted. I feel part of the school.” Dr. Cameron said that in his capacity as guidance counselor

It is very important for me to know how students feel that their adjustment has gone. What they will report usually is that yes, there was this difficult period of two to four weeks where they felt a little out of the loop, especially if it was their first international experience. Those who have been in several environments know how to navigate the friendships and such because they've been set down in communities many times in their short lives. They develop special skills in connecting very quickly with the student population. Even those that are new to this experience get here and say “wow, there are other people here who are different, fresh like me”. I find that they make the best of the situation.

Students who have been at the school for many years sometimes see new arrivals as threatening to their own status. A longtime student explained that

Some people feel very threatened by the notion of new people coming. Certain people have been here like their whole life, and they feel like they're kind of ahead of the grade. No matter who the new person is, they are going to be pushed away a bit because the new people will get more attention because they're new. The people who have been here a long time and are still popular have really been

¹²² Eakin, Kay Branaman. *The Foreign Service Teenager - - At Home in the U.S.: A Few Thoughts for Parents Returning with Teenagers*. Washington, D.C.: Overseas Briefing Center/Foreign Service Institute, Department of State, 1988. Quoted in McCluskey: 16-17.

fighting for it, because if you don't try to stand out and give yourself a positive image, you won't last very long as a popular person. ... Global nomads love it when people come from where they've stayed before, because that gives them an advantage, especially if it's the opposite gender. Then they can also use that to regain some popularity. That's a distinct advantage being able to become that person's friend quickly, so that when other people come by, you can immediately stand beside them. It's high status to make friends quickly with new person, because then you're right up there with the very popular person. New people are popular by default because they're new and mysterious.

III. A Small Community

In the 2003-2004 school year, ISS housed 475 students and about 110 employees. If one adds to those figures the large number of parents who are perhaps to an unusual degree involved in school life, one arrives at an aggregate figure of probably between seven and eight hundred people. Commenting on school size, Dr. Duevel noted that

For an international school, ISS is not all that small. There are plenty that are a lot smaller than us. ... Would I like for the school to be bigger? We could easily have another hundred kids in the school without putting a strain on anything. If we had a hundred more kids that would, from an academic point of view, mean we would have more sections of classes that students could choose from, so from that point of view it would be nice. It doesn't mean that what we have now does not get them what they need, but they have relatively few choices. Socially it would be the same: If there were more kids, there would be more choices for them in forming friendships. Does it work the way it is now? Yes, and there are some advantages to the small size. There are very intense friendships in these very small classes, particularly in the senior class.

The seeming largeness of the community is undercut by the fact that students are bound together by many criss-crossing personal and institutional ties, and that students are at very different levels of maturity. Ten percent of high school students have parents who are working at ISS. Furthermore, 57 percent of high school students have parents who work for the oil companies or for NATO. Many of these families have undoubtedly developed private social networks and also associate in the framework of their respective companies. Moreover, 64 percent of all high school students have siblings at ISS, and 28 percent have siblings in the high school. Since the entire school is housed in one building, siblings can

see each other during the school day. The student who commented that “Everyone knows everything about everyone here” cannot be entirely correct, but it is perhaps understandable that the student feels that way.

High school students are not always happy with running into primary and middle school students. One expatriate student explained that

Three schools [primary school, middle school, and high school] in one is not common anywhere I know. We’re in a separate area of the building, and we’re kind of secluded for classes, but the cafeteria where everybody hangs out is often littered with a bunch of second-graders. It’s good for the community because they have one school for everyone to go to, it’s good for all the expats. It can be oppressive as well because they are so different in maturity from us. It’s a compromise.

Sixteen year olds will not have that much in common with thirteen year olds and may wish to distance themselves from the younger students. One freshman student said that “My [younger] brother’s locker is opposite my chemistry room. That’s kind of scary.” She also explained that

Physically it is not very separate at ISS, but we still make the separation. Sometimes we have to share classrooms that are also used by the middle school. I don’t think there’s any contact with the elementary school except for the breaks, because they have the same break as us.

Another student said that “There are lots of little kids on my bus. Sometimes that’s fun on a Friday when you’re hyper and need to release some energy, but sometimes it’s a real pain.”

Age differences do narrow down social opportunities. High school students are at an age when what their peer group thinks and does is of paramount importance. In the 2003-2004 school year, there were less than forty students in each of the three lower grades, and in the senior grade there were only 23 students. One respondent wrote that “ISS is so small, relationships can be a challenge.” Another student wrote that “The school is very small compared to what I am used to. I would prefer a larger school.” Forty-five percent of respondents wrote that the school they attended before ISS had been larger, 21 percent

wrote that it had been smaller, 25 percent about the same, and nine percent answered that they had attended no other school than ISS. There are 37 students in both the 9th and the 10th grades. In the 11th grade there are 39, while in the graduating class there are only 23, in total 136 students. High school covers the ages from fourteen to eighteen. Students are at different levels of maturity, which probably explains the rise of a perhaps natural grade hierarchy. According to one ninth grader,

Yes, it's evil. Freshmen are looked down on. People say "oh, they're just out of middle school, they're just little kids". And then they all pick on them. The next year, the tenth graders are like, "Oh, we can pick on someone", so they go and pick on the ninth graders. We're made fun of, we're never asked for our opinions.

Many students said that there is strong cohesion within the grades, but much less so between the grades. A teacher observed that "11th and 12th graders don't go out with 9th and 10th graders." An eleventh grade student said that

There is much more interaction between the 11th and 12th grades than between the 11th and 10th grades. The reason is that there are a couple of 11th graders who are really good friends with 12th graders. Also because of basketball where there are a lot of seniors.

One tenth grader thought that "Age difference within grades can get annoying." An eleventh grade student who was interviewed had a younger sibling in the grade immediately below, although that sibling was two years younger.¹²³ According to the age and grade distribution of questionnaire respondents, all fourteen-year-olds are in the 9th and 10th grades, fifteen-year-olds are spread across the three lower grades, sixteen-year-olds attend the three higher grades, and eighteen-year-olds are found only in the 11th and 12th grades.

Many students thought there were definite social advantages to being part of a small student environment. One student said that

¹²³ These two students had last studied in a different school system. When students come to ISS from another educational system, the school places them in the grade that the school finds will most likely benefit their development. Such considerations affect the age composition of the grades.

I think the small size of the high school is good, because that means that nobody will be left out, like they could have been at a bigger high school. There, people will probably go into groups, and there'd be people left out. Since it's small, it's almost forcing people to make friends with people they wouldn't usually make friends with.

Smith writes that “In many overseas communities and schools there is little choice about group membership, and it is almost impossible to form cliques.”¹²⁴ Smith also refers to

an Absentee American whose childhood was spent in a variety of overseas settings [who said that] “Overseas, the foreign communities were small and everyone new was welcomed and accepted. It was okay to dress differently or have different norms because everyone had come from such diverse places. Socioeconomic background didn't seem to matter either.”¹²⁵

One expatriate student who had attended a larger school elsewhere said that

I think the reason that I don't have so much trouble here is that ... was a much harsher social environment. This school has groups, but there, there was a lot divided by ethnicity, jocks, and punks. You don't find that at ISS because it's small. You can't really form solid groups.

In her interview with Smith, Nancy Blackmore noted “that children who attend overseas schools tend not to perceive one another in terms of group membership, in contrast to the situation in American schools.” Smith goes on to comment that “repatriates often express surprise at the cliquishness of American schoolchildren.”¹²⁶ One student thought that:

People tend to be more intrigued by people who are different and want to understand them. When you're in a big high school, there are so many people and so much difference that you're just one person in a big bunch. In a small school, people are really going to be interested or try to discover more about that person.

One student very much felt his grade to be an extended family:

The student environment in the ... grade is very strong, very positive. We have to live together as a family since there are so few of us. Like most teenagers we like to get into cliques, very small groups. No matter how many people there are, we'll always find people that we share more interests with than others, so there will always be certain groups. But in general, we always stick together. At the end of the summer, people call each other up and our whole grade goes to the beach, and that won't have anything to do with the teachers. We treat each other like family.

¹²⁴ Smith 71.

¹²⁵ Smith 67-68.

¹²⁶ Smith 68.

International schools are a bit like airports or ocean liners. One's dearest friend may suddenly jump ship or fly off somewhere. Is it possible to build strong relationships in such unstable places? In one parent's experience, "Students [in the ISS high school] do form very strong relations." George Walker finds that

The school's staff and students will often provide the substitutes for the stable adults and the siblings who play such a vital role in family life and which many international families lack. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that student-teacher and student-student relationships formed in international schools are unusually strong and enduring.¹²⁷

One reason that such strong relationships are formed between students and teachers in international schools is undoubtedly that these schools are small, which allows teachers to devote much time to each individual student. When it comes to student-student relationships, strong friendships may be fostered by the fact that student face foreign cultures and sometimes difficult conditions together. According to McCluskey,

Parents disagree on the effect international living has on their children's ability to make friends. One parent commented that the friends her children made "will be their friends forever, whether they correspond or not. They'll probably be better friends than the ones they meet here in the U.S. because they went through some times together overseas that are difficult." Another parent observed superficiality in friendships, especially among the more transient children.¹²⁸

For her doctoral dissertation on intimate friendships among internationally mobile adolescents, Melisa Marie Secola surveyed students at "two private coeducational college preparation high schools: an American international school in Thailand, and a school in the Midwestern United States." She found that internationally mobile [IM] "adolescents have a higher level of intimacy in best-friend relationships than adolescents who have never been abroad. Non-IM U.S. adolescents have more stable and longer term friendships."¹²⁹ Sixty-eight percent of respondents thought that it was generally easier to meet people and make

¹²⁷ Walker, George. "Home Sweet Home; A Study, Through Fictional Literature, of Disoriented Children and the Significance of Home. *International Education: Principles and Practice*. Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson. London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998: 25.

¹²⁸ McCluskey 18.

¹²⁹ Secola, Melisa Marie. *Intimate friendships among internationally mobile adolescents*. Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1993: abstract.

friends at ISS than at a large high school, while 31 percent, twenty students, thought it was more difficult.¹³⁰ I asked a teacher to comment on these figures:

There are two levels here. When expats come into the school, they get to know lots of people quickly at a very shallow level, and it seems as if they fit right in. The second level comes after six months or so. When they finally start getting to know the people they're spending time with, they may discover that it's not a full match, and then tensions might arise. Meeting people is easy, but making real friends can be more problematic.

One student who had checked "easier" later explained that: "I think that it's easier because everyone is open and ready, everyone is waiting for you. No matter what, they're going to take you in and have as much fun with you as possible." One expatriate student had definite views on the concept of an inner circle of friends:

You're making the assumption that you need to have an inner circle. I have the philosophy that an inner circle... I don't lower my standards just because there are fewer kids. I will say, if only one person out of these 40 can make it in, then O.K. If none of them can make it in, then O.K. Loneliness a risk, but you can compensate in various ways. If you work with the assumption that you must have an inner circle of 12 people, and there are only 40 people, then you must let everyone into your inner circle. I think you carefully need to clarify friends and close friends. I have a lot of friends, but as for close friends, a very small number.¹³¹

Outside of classes, high school students mostly hang out in the cafeteria or (quietly) in the high school library. The limited number of places where students can relax together affords excellent visibility in social terms. Eighty-five percent of respondents checked that they find it easy to attract attention at ISS in both good and bad ways. One expatriate student thought that students quickly take stock of and categorize fellow students. According to this student, "After the first month, they know what you're all about. 'We'll just place you in that group.'" When asked if she thought "small is beautiful" when it comes to school size, a parent said that

It depends. I would say that it's beneficial in the younger years. When you get into high school, it's a problem because they like to have a bigger group of people to choose from. This is what I have heard: In some way it's easier to be

¹³⁰ One student skipped this question.

¹³¹ We were discussing question A 29: "What nationalities are the students in your inner circle of friends?"

odd in [a larger school], because there are other odd people that you can hang out with. Whereas here, you might be the only one in the class that's a little bit of a loner, so it's a bit more lonesome to be very different here.

There are 136 students in the ISS high school. In a typical Norwegian *videregående skole* there will be about five hundred students, and in many American high schools there may be two thousand students. The social opportunities are plainly greater at larger schools.

Nancy Piet-Pelon writes that

When a school or community is small, there are clear disadvantages. A class of 12 children may have an advantage in unity and “family feeling”, but on the days when one child is “odd man out”, he or she will experience enormous pain because there is no maneuvering room. There are no other groups to move into, no other friends to select from. Especially for teenagers, who need to sort out their values and make decisions for their own lifestyle, a small environment can be deadly. ... A child [in a small overseas school] is easily typed. If he or she is going through a rebellious period, a child can find it more difficult to break out of that pattern in a small environment.”¹³²

School size is an important factor in student relations. According to one teacher,

The school is terribly small. Some people can't stand that and some think it's great. Unfortunately that's the way it is when you only have 140 students from the 9th to the 12th grade. Some of the Norwegian students have their interests outside of ISS, and so the social environment gets even smaller. Also you can never be anonymous here, everybody knows who you are. Even the quietest person gets noticed.

Nine percent of the high school student body have parents working at the school, and most students have siblings at ISS. The resulting sense that everybody is part of the same family can be felt both to be comforting as well as constricting. One student thought that the small community was challenging:

You get desperate looking for friends in the grade. You're always nice to everyone, because you can't afford to be mean to anyone. If you're mean to somebody, that person's friends are offended, and it becomes a chain reaction and then you're out. It's a small grade. What you say to somebody comes straight back to you within five minutes. The grade will break apart if not everybody is nice to everybody. You're in the same place at the same time with the same people every single day, so to find some variation, there will have to be a certain number of people, so you're picking out which people you can talk to, because

¹³² Piet-Pelon, Nancy. “Why We Worry about Raising Kids Overseas.” *The Foreign Service Journal*, April 1988. Rpt. in *Notes From a Travelling Childhood: Readings for Internationally Mobile Parents & Children*. Ed. Karen Curnow McCluskey. Washington D.C.: Foreign Service Youth Foundation, 1994: 51.

you're trying to change things as much as possible so that you don't go crazy. People aren't desperate to form friendships, but desperate for change, so the more people you have, the more people you can talk to, people you can rely on to be there.

While in a larger school students can simply move from group to group if problems arise, at ISS students are bound together in small grades. Unlikely friendships will occur at least in part because there are so few people to connect with. Dr. Cameron thinks that the narrow social opportunities may be troubling for some:

One student told me "I don't know if I make friends. We all need friends to survive in an environment like this. Perhaps they are friends of convenience, and if they are friends of convenience, are they really friends?" In a school with a thousand students, there's bound to be someone there with whom your interests and philosophy align perfectly. So you are more likely to find a soul mate in a population that affords you more choices. But here, I think students sometimes second guess themselves and ask themselves the question "since there are only 15 people in my classroom, would I like these people if they were in a student body of a thousand?"

Teenagers spend much of their waking hours trying to find out who they are, who they should hang out with, and what is stylish and cool. In itself that is a natural and positive process, but there is a negative side to that as well. Pascoe writes that

Friendship for the teenager is serious business. It combines not only social interaction, but the more critical issues of self-image and self-esteem as well. Making friends becomes part of how the teenager is being perceived, accepted, and even in which social set ('in' or 'out' crowd) he or she belongs.¹³³

There seems to be some jockeying for position between ISS high school students, and given that some students are popular, others are being classified as less desirable to spend time with. One ninth grade respondent wrote that during the first few weeks at ISS, "I found that people had dumped a problematic student on to my back, because I was willing to spend time with her, when no one else would." According to one 11th grade student,

9th graders are always thinking about being popular and being cool. There's some harassment and jockeying for position. It's quieter in higher grades, because everybody knows everybody. It would be less so in a large American high school.

¹³³ Pascoe 44.

A teacher said that

In the current ninth grade it seems as if students don't respect each other to the same extent as students do in the other grades because of immaturity. There are cool and not so cool cliques. ... When some students aren't invited to certain parties, they don't see that it's not because that they're unpopular, but that it's because they're not a part of that particular group of friends.

Quite a few respondents checked that they have heard of or experienced student harassment/intimidation at the high school. However, readers should note that students were not asked about incidence rate, and consequently, a "yes" would cover repeated behavior over time as well single incidents. Half of 9th grade respondents wrote that that they had heard of or experienced harassment; for the 10th, 11th and 12th grades, the figures are forty percent, 29 percent, and 37 percent, respectively. Eight respondents thought that student harassment occurred because of people's insecurity, because of jealousy, because of egos, and the jockeying for popularity. One tenth grade respondent thought the smallness of the school and the grade was a factor: "It is like being in a small room together every day. We are bound to get on each other's cases." Among other reasons cited, three respondents indicated nationality, two students race, one student religion, and two students thought that harassment occurred because of personality issues. One parent also thought that such behavior was due to personality clashes: "Nationality is not so important. It's more of a personality thing." One respondent who had seen harassment at school commented that "This happens at all schools naturally at some point. [There is] very, very little at ISS in comparison to other schools, not anything to do with nationality." ISS community members who commented on this issue generally agreed that there is very little student harassment in the high school. One student said that "At ISS you expect that no one is going to be mean to you." A student who has also attended a local Norwegian school felt that

Compared to Norwegian schools I don't think that student harassment is a problem at all at ISS. There are a lot more people in Norwegian schools....

People are mean, especially if there are a lot of friends who feel the same way about a person. Kids in Norwegian schools have a lot more time on their hands as well.

The student was referring to the commonly held perception that ISS students are under sustained academic pressure that tends to limit free time, and that children in Norwegian schools are considerably less so pressured. One teacher noted that

Like most schools, ISS has zero tolerance for bullying, but such a policy is much easier to maintain in a school with five hundred students than in one with two thousand. It also depends on school mentality, whether there's a tolerance for a mentality that allows you to look down at other people.

Many high school expatriate students come from affluent families, while some, particularly local students, probably have parents who earn average salaries. Commenting on the socio-economic balance in the student environment, Dr. Duevel said that

I know that we have students here whose parents have a fair amount of resources at home. We also have students whose parents have real sacrifices in order to send their children to this school. When we do the scholarships, that has nothing to do with family funds. That is strictly on an academic basis.

People that were interviewed generally agreed that even though some students have affluent parents, they do not show off in front of the other students. According to one teacher,

Lots of students have wealthy parents. ... Students are given different amounts of money to spend, but I don't feel that this is reflected in the way students look at each other. That's just the way it is, and it's not because of Norwegian cultural influence.

One possible reason why students do not show off material possessions could be that ISS is such a small community. Any behavior that would be seen as divisive would by common consensus be discouraged. One parent who was interviewed had observed that some families do have a lot of money, but she did not feel that individual wealth is very visible at the school:

I've worked as a volunteer in the kiosk and have noticed that in the lost and founds there were some winter clothes that I couldn't believe that people would not have picked up, because they must have cost very much. ... I don't have a

sense of that there is a lot of money floating around in the school. Compared to America it is not something I notice here. ... You don't get a lot of credit for having a lot of money. Once I was working in the kiosk, a new student was buying cokes for everybody and showing everybody how much cash he had. Just a couple a weeks later he had calmed down, probably because he had seen that this was not acceptable behavior.

One student thought that certain students enjoy showing off:

Flaunting money? Absolutely! Some girls really like to show off all the clothes they buy and all the shopping that they do. I see this as a trend because it influences a lot of people. A lot of girls are a bit challenged by this. ... We all help each other out with money like for lunch and stuff. This is a private international school. Most of the people here have a lot of money. That's the impression that I get.

Another student said that the amount of money wealthy families have at their disposal is not necessarily reflected in the amount their children get in pocket money:

The rich kids don't stick out. I'm sure there are rich kids, but I don't think "this is a rich kid". The kids themselves don't usually have that much money to spend. I knew one kid last year who had a lot of money because of his parents, and he would flaunt it. It isn't generally well received in our grade to flaunt your money at all. ... It wouldn't be the same in an American high school. Part of the reason is that here you can't drive until you're 18. In the states you can drive earlier, and if you can buy a flashy car... A flashy car is a sign of status. Clothes are not an issue here, but in the States there's a preppy set and so on. Here, I don't think material possessions are as important for school status.

In the high school student population as a whole there are slightly more boys than girls, but when the aggregate number is broken down by grade, another reality emerges. In the 9th and 11th grades the sexes are almost equally well represented, but in the 10th grade there are 26 boys to only eleven girls, while in the 12th grade there are eight boys to fifteen girls. In the search for boyfriends or girlfriends, both boys in the 10th grades and girls in the 12th grades might have to look outside their grades and age groups. Dr. Cameron thought that

[The high school student environment is] a very small community that has all kinds of connections. You don't have a lot of options, and you make the best of those small numbers. Given the fact that the senior class is a small class, they can't divide evenly, even presuming that everyone wanted to date one of their age mates. The pickings are slim. If you don't speak the language of the community, if this is all that you're faced with, it behoves you to put yourself in a position of having more choices. How do you have more choices other than being willing to look above or below your grade?

Just as small grades mean that students will make friends with students they might not have connected with in a larger setting, so the small high school student environment means that 12th grade girls who would normally look for older boys to date look for dates in the lower grades. One 10th grade student enthusiastically explained that

There's been a major change this year in the history of ISS: a lot of guys in this grade are dating up. That's a very big deal. That's very cool. It's a very interesting experience, because then you're immediately taken in by them as well. But then some people that don't date up feel like, "are you trying to leave us?" Then you can get some kinds of sparks. You have to go back to your roots once in a while. It's the ultimate "friend" and "girl": "don't let that girl get between us."

Boys in the higher grades might choose to date "out" rather than "up". A student said that

That's why so few girls in our grade date up, because most of the older guys are interested in girls they go to parties with. This is their base, but they look for girls at parties.... Norwegian parties consist of a lot of girls. There are enormous Norwegian parties that 11th and 12th graders go to.

An alternative to dating people outside of the school environment is dating people who are enrolling at ISS. An expatriate student said that "Every guy who's come from a Norwegian school this year has had a girlfriend who's been here for a while." A Norwegian student agreed that Norwegian, preferably good-looking scholarship male students are attractive boyfriend material. One girl observed that

In the ninth grade there's only one couple now. Last year there were a lot more. In our grade there hasn't been much change in students. We've all known each other a while now. People are just "uh, this is not interesting anymore". In the higher grades there are a few couples. In the eleventh grade there are quite a few, and in the tenth grade there are two or three that I know of. I know that three people in the ninth grade have Norwegian boyfriends or girlfriends outside of ISS that they've met in some other way.

Dr. Duevel thought that students are more likely to engage in group activities rather than in dating:

My sense is that there is less dating going on here than you would find in lots of other schools, mainly because it is a very small group. There also tends to be a lot of group stuff going on. A gang will go to the movies together rather than there being couples per se. There are always a few couples, but I can also say from

going to the Prom year after year is that there will only be a few couples who go together. This is something that I see as very positive. Kids don't have to have a date to go to the Prom here. What happens here at the International School is very different than from happens in typical American high schools.

Students are generally happy to study at ISS, but when it comes to dating, school size is felt to be a definite disadvantage. A teacher said that "Students often tell us when they're leaving that they look forwards to getting to a bigger place where the dating opportunities are better." One Norwegian student thinks expatriate students have problems in this respect "because they don't involve themselves outside of the school and meet people."

IV. Relations to the Host Society

The ISS community's relations to the host culture can only be understood in conjunction with how community members relate to the third culture that is centered on ISS. Charles Gellar notes that

Many international schools have taken on the additional role of being community centres to support the many families adjusting to life in a foreign country. But in assuming such a role, it encourages children and parents to immerse themselves only in the school and to withdraw into what all too easily becomes a ghetto mentality.¹³⁴

Enrolling their children at ISS rather than at a local school where they would be legally guaranteed a place is a conscious choice made by expatriate parents. According to Smith,

Rarely do Americans stationed overseas send their children to local public schools. Those who do tend to do so as part of an explicit desire to become immersed in the local culture.¹³⁵

Most families who move to Stavanger for a limited period of time undoubtedly feel that it is more important for their children to be able to easily reenter their respective national school systems than for them to soak up the local culture. In an interview with McCluskey,

¹³⁴ Gellar as editor of ISJ is introducing the following article: Hobson, Daphne P. and Stuart Carroll. "Learning Through Community Service in International School Settings." *International Schools Journal*, November 2000: 66.

¹³⁵ Smith 15.

Dr. Rigamer [of the U.S. Department of State] maintains that, despite some parents' desires to have their children learn other languages through their schooling option, most children will want to go to the school that has other children from their passport culture.¹³⁶

Students who have lived in American compounds outside of the U.S. may experience a culture shock when enrolling at an international school. One such student said that

Once [I was] traveling downtown on the bus, and realized that I was the only American on the bus. It was just very odd to me. I was surrounded by Norwegians and international students. At a Department of Defense Dependents School, you can live on the base and exist in an environment that is practically American. Here at ISS it's much harder to maintain that nationalistic stance.

Smith writes that

For American children living on military bases in places like Wiesbaden, Germany, participation in the life of the American community is almost total. They have been described as living in an American "cocoon". ... Although they may study the language of the country in which they are stationed, they have few opportunities to use it in everyday conversation. ... For the most part they are discouraged by peers from interacting with host country nationals.¹³⁷

Wertsch writes that some American military families do reach out to the host cultures:

One of the most intense outsider experiences lived out by military brats comes when their families are stationed overseas. ... Some families take real advantage of the opportunity – tour quite a lot and learn the language. ... An Air Force colonel's son said his family benefited enormously from their stay in Italy, although their decision to move off base into the Italian community drew criticism from those who remained on base. ... Most of the Americans, this son said, refused to take advantage of the opportunity they had to get to know another culture. "A lot of my friends [from the dependent school] left Italy after four years without being able to speak one word of Italian or having eaten anywhere outside of the local pizza joint and the officer's club."¹³⁸

One Norwegian student thinks American and NATO students could do more to involve themselves in the Norwegian host culture. He thinks that

The degree of influence that foreigners get from Norwegian society is much less than I would wish. When I move somewhere, I try to absorb as much as possible: learn the language, eat local food. Most NATO-Americans only eat American food except Norwegian bread that they can buy at the NATO base. NATO organises their compounds so that employees can live an American life in the

¹³⁶ McCluskey 20.

¹³⁷ Smith 12.

¹³⁸ Wertsch 327-328.

country that they're living in without having contacts with local society unless they want to.

If the ISS nexus provides for all your needs, why then engage in the host culture? An expatriate student told me that "I don't have a need to go outside the school activities, really, and learn the language." Another student felt the same way:

I don't know very many people outside of ISS. There's a Norwegian sports club that I go to, but I have so much to do that I don't normally go there. When I have too much work to do and too much sports to do, I don't go, and that's why it's not important to me. ISS is enough for me.

One expatriate student said that she had no Norwegian friends outside of ISS. The reason was that she already had to keep up with three sets of friends, most of whom were no longer living in Stavanger.

When students who have moved to Stavanger from abroad were asked to describe their personal contacts with Norwegians outside ISS, 23 percent answered that they know many Norwegians quite well, 26 percent that they know some quite well, 23 percent that they know some people, but not very well, and 28 percent wrote that they hardly know any Norwegians outside of ISS. Twenty-five percent of internationally mobile respondents wrote that they have contact with kids in their neighborhood, while 75 percent answered that they spend time with mostly with people that they know from school.¹³⁹ One student said that "Only very few expats that haven't been here for like six years have outside contacts." According to a Norwegian student,

There are a few expats who make contacts with people in their neighborhood, but there aren't very many. Most are a bit isolated from Norwegian society. Is that O.K. with them? I haven't heard them complaining about them at least. I guess they get what they need here.

One expatriate student who has been living in Stavanger for some years explained that

I know some Norwegians outside of ISS, mostly from the neighborhood, more so when I was younger, but we've moved since, so I've lost contact with them. Most

¹³⁹ Source: Questionnaire responses. It should be noted again that students who have moved to Stavanger from abroad includes dual citizenship Norwegians who have moved here at a young age.

of my Norwegian contacts are when I go out on weekends with my friends. I meet Norwegians at parties – we're not too close.

An American student said that

I recently went to a party and talked to this American guy. He said “the American thing is not very cool anymore.” Since Bush. The impression that I got was that Norwegians didn't see the difference between Bush and America: they saw Bush as America, and that all Americans were for Bush. I was a bit nervous at the last party. Normally when somebody asks where I'm from, I say “Hey I'm from America”, but that didn't work too well then. It has changed since the war.

Do ISS community members to any extent think of the host culture as an obstacle course? One questionnaire respondent thought that one of the least positive aspects of studying at ISS is that “We all live quite far from each other.” The school is located just outside Stavanger, but students live over a fairly large area. According to a parent, for social get-togethers students are mostly dependent on their parents to drive them around. Expatriate ISS students may be more dependent on their parents than would be the case if they were living in their respective home countries. Monica Rabe writes that

On the whole, one might say that a teenagers' existence is usually more guarded and sheltered while living abroad. Parents play a much more dominant role in a teenager's life internationally. The accompanying teenager's only retreats might be their schools and the activities there.

Even supposing that ISS provides for every need, what further reasons for not engaging are there? There appears to be three major reasons against engaging in Norwegian society: the language barrier, the perception that Norwegians are reserved and difficult to talk to, and the perception that Norwegian kids are rude and undisciplined. Language is certainly a central factor: One questionnaire respondent wrote that ISS is more important to her than school would be in her home country because “It is difficult to make friends outside of school due to the language barrier.” Another student said that

Once when I rode the bus I met a group of drunken Norwegians who tried to practice their English with me. I don't know if it's true or not, but it's commonly held that most Norwegians don't like people who speak a foreign language and don't come up with some Norwegian. They get very irritated. Most Norwegians can speak English to me if I go and talk to them, but I don't usually go to them

because there's the perception that they would not be happy for me coming to speak English with them. So I don't do that.

Dr. Cameron knows of students who have taken a more active approach:

I have seen certain students who have developed connections with Norwegian students in the area and have put a lot of effort into connecting with that community. They have been lamenting the fact that they don't have the kind of language opportunities in Norwegian that they might like.

Some expatriate students try to break through the language barrier. One student explained that

One of my American friends at the school played with the kids around here, and the first time he tried to speak Norwegian, the kids saw that as good, so they were helping him speak Norwegian, while he was helping them speak English.

According to Smith, "Most Absentee Americans learn one or more foreign languages while overseas. At the very least, they learn enough words and phrases to get around town...."¹⁴⁰ To one internationally mobile student not learning the local language seemed almost like an act of self-preservation:

It all comes down to me not learning the language, and that was a deliberate choice I made when I moved here. It's the timing factor. If I'd learnt the language I think I'd be more involved. It's a lot of work to involve yourself, and if you do that every place you go and then you leave... It's the attachment thing. If you attach yourself so frantically, you're pulling out roots each time. I guess it's self protection.

One widely traveled student explained how her family sets up operations in a new country:

Mom speaks Norwegian. The first thing she did when we got here was to take a Norwegian language course. Within a year and a half she spoke the language fluently and has gotten a job and everything. We've gotten used to getting around in the outside society because we've lived in so many places. She's always encouraged my brother and me to go outside. Mom makes all the contacts and my dad does a lot of travelling. He's not fluent in Norwegian.

The language barrier is not the only reason for not connecting. Some feel that Norwegians might not be that desirable to spend time with anyway. One non-Norwegian student who has attended a local Norwegian school commented that "I found Norwegian

¹⁴⁰ Smith: 17. On page ix she defines an Absentee American as someone who has "lived outside the United States as children because their families were living overseas, and then returned and settled here."

school extremely “cliquish” with groups of “cool” and “nerdy” people and generally the kids were disrespectful and unkind – I’m happy to be at ISS with open and warm people.” According to a teacher, “American parents are often shocked by the behavior of Norwegian teenagers.” One student who thought there was a marked difference in behavior said that “In North America kids are more disciplined. Parties are different here. Alcohol is everywhere. We didn’t have that [back home]. It’s not as strict here. It’s a different culture.” On the other hand one student said there was a perception among expatriates that “Norwegians are definitely very reserved.” One teacher commented that

Many students are not very willing to make the effort of making contacts outside of the school, and don’t want to face that they really ought to do it. They know that they’re only here for a short time and they relate only to this island of English-speaking students. There is a bit of a compound mentality here. Students do of course move physically outside the school, but some connect to it to a very small degree. The few times that students have tried, it quickly gets around that Norwegian kids are really rude. It doesn’t take more than three stories before those that are a bit shy don’t even bother trying.

An additional reason for not engaging might perhaps be that internationally mobile students and their families see Norway as a temporary stop only, and that there might be a cultural anxiety against having to let go of some of one’s own culture in order to accommodate that of the host culture. According to McCluskey,

Parents, children, and education and mental health professionals disagreed most strongly on the issue of what Norma McCaig calls “cultural confirmation.” On one end of the spectrum are those who believe that parents must provide a cultural identity for their children based primarily on the parents’ home culture. At the other end are those who believe just as strongly that an exclusive insistence on the parents’ home culture in fact invalidates and devalues the multicultural nature on internationally mobile youth. ... Dr. Rigamer ... [says]: “A sense of roots ... a sense of connection with the extended family and the home culture are all very important. You cannot give these up. The children really need to be rooted or grounded in their home culture.”¹⁴¹

For one longtime ISS student, Norway simply is not home:

¹⁴¹ McCluskey 24.

I'd like to come back to Norway to visit sometime in the future, but not to live. [Why?] The things that aren't here that are in the States. Television, the sports, food, the whole cultural difference.

Then there are other students who have lived here all their lives and presumably to some extent have embraced Norwegian culture. One non-Norwegian respondent wrote that she considers Stavanger to be "home", because "Even though I have a ... citizenship, I have lived here my entire life." Smith, writing about expatriate Americans, explains that "Absentee Americans who spent a large portion of their childhood in a single country often developed a strong identification with that country."¹⁴² McCluskey notes that

Some believe that an exclusive or very strong focus on raising a child in their parents' culture may be confusing and frustrating for children. Norma McCaig maintains, "Early on there needs to be a recognition of the fact that the children are going to be of a different culture than the parent...." ... [Those that agree with McCaig and others think that] The greatest causality of an exclusive insistence on the parents' culture is the child's self-esteem.¹⁴³

Some expatriate students do miss the opportunity to connect more. One expatriate respondent wrote that students "don't mix as you would if [you were] in an English speaking country, [there is] not much connection to Stavanger."

Is ISS a bubble environment? The school provides schooling from 8.30 to 15.15. There are a whole range of extra-curricular activities such as sports and theatre that students can take part in after school hours. Parents are strongly urged to take part in the community.

Language and the expatriate culture are strong cohesive factors. One student who seemed to be very comfortable at the school said that

That is why I use the word family. This is the only school in Stavanger that Americans or people from anywhere in the world can attend if they want to study at an international school. They don't have any life outside of ISS. Their life is their friends at ISS, and that's not very many people. I'm very happy that I have a certain amount of friends outside the school.

Leaving one's home country and entering the Stavanger expatriate society centered on ISS must be a challenging transition. Expatriates who do not wish to involve themselves in the

¹⁴² Smith 76.

¹⁴³ McCluskey 25.

host culture must turn to the ISS community for their emotional needs. In the opinion of Dr. Cameron,

You'd expect that this English-speaking environment has to be everything for them, provide all of their academic activities during the day, and even some extra-curricular things that can keep their social lives going as well.... In many ways, it's kind of living in a bubble kind of existence, which might not be [suitable] for some students. ... Calling ISS a bubble environment does not so much refer to the smallness of the school as to this group of students moving around like a unit in the Norwegian environment. Students sense it when they go into the city. It's the same group of students that you study with and are hanging out with.

If ISS is a bubble environment, then there are students to whom that bubble is more permeable than it is to others. Twenty-seven percent of the student population, 48 students, hold single or dual Norwegian citizenship. All those respondents described their Norwegian language ability as being mother tongue or fluent. These students have at least an opportunity to engage more easily than other students in the host society. It should be noted that ISS Norwegians like ISS Americans are a fairly heterogeneous group. Some have had little previous contact with the expatriate community, while others are dual citizenship TCK Norwegians. Sixty-one percent of Norwegian respondents have attended a Norwegian public school. Nevertheless, when these students were asked if they knew most of their friends from ISS or from outside the ISS community, 69 percent answered that they know most of their friends from the school. Forty-six percent of ISS Norwegians belong to Norwegian organizations such as sports clubs or choirs. Sixty-three percent of those respondents, eight students, answered that these organizations were very important to them.¹⁴⁴ One student told me that she considers ISS and her home environment to be two different worlds, and that she had only taken an ISS student home once.

Forty-two percent of Norwegian respondents checked that Norwegians were typically positive as to them studying at the international school, nineteen percent that they were

¹⁴⁴ With such small number of respondents it is doubtful if any statistically viable conclusions can be drawn.

mostly negative, while 39 percent wrote that people were typically indifferent. One dual citizenship student who had checked “negative” explained that

It’s a social thing. They always come to me like you know, “why do you go to ISS?” A teacher asked my mom if she didn’t think Norwegian school was good enough. I always have to give them the standard answer: “I got the opportunity, so I took it.” I could never ever say to them: “I hear the education is better there.” You don’t want to say those things, because that will hurt your friendship.

There is a small group of students for whom ISS perhaps functions more as a school and less as a significant emotional identifier. Twelve ISS Norwegians first entered the school in the tenth grade as scholarship students. They have no siblings or other family members at the school. Their parents may be working for an oil company and possibly have contact with other ISS parents, but apart from that, these students are probably the ones who have the strongest foothold and a separate identity outside of ISS. One such student said that

I’ve told people who are thinking about applying for a place here that it’s very important to have a circle of friends elsewhere. There are students here who aren’t interested in spending time with you because they know that they’ll have to leave soon anyway. ... If I hadn’t had the social balance I have in being part of a strong Norwegian social network, I think I would have had problems.

Seventy-seven percent of Norwegian students think that ISS more important to them personally than a regular *videregående* would be. The reason most often given is that they think ISS gives them a good education. One student wrote that “It is an opportunity to improve my chances to get into whatever university I want to. I intend to use the opportunity.” Another respondent explained that “It prepares you for studying abroad more than what a Norwegian *videregående* school does in my opinion.” One respondent felt emotionally connected to the school “because I have made so many good friends from all over, and I now have friends that have moved all over the world. Also because it is so small and pleasant that it really means something to me – I am attached to it.” Another student also answered in the affirmative and explained that it is “because it is such a close community.” One of the few students who checked “no” explained that it was “Because I

would have more fun at a regular *videregående* school, while getting educated at the same time.” Eighty percent of ISS Norwegians checked that they in some respects feel that they think differently than non-ISS Norwegian teenagers. One such student commented that “I am very focused on school and I am very ambitious. I think about my future a lot.”

Another student gave as reasons “the different cultures we’re exposed to and because of how much is expected of us academically.” One respondent thought that “I have become very Americanized/ internationalized.” Sixty-nine percent of ISS Norwegians, eighteen respondents, answered that they thought that studying in an international community shaped their perceptions of the political and cultural role Norway plays in the world. A student who crossed off “yes” stated that “I think I have a more international perspective on Norway than most Norwegians.” Another student commented that

I receive a much more worldly view of Norway from other people, but I think mostly my perceptions are affected because I don’t learn enough about Norway’s role in the world, so it is hard to place it with the other countries I do learn about.

One respondent wrote that: “Not so nationalistic. Not as biased, seen from lots of angles. Not very focused on Norway at all, but other countries that dominate global politics like US, UK, France, China.” Many ISS Norwegians are very conscious of the choice they have made academically when choosing ISS. There is also a pervasive sense in the questionnaires and in the interview material that these students feel that they have chosen a better path than their non-ISS peers, but that they are often aware of a certain risk there is of losing touch with their own culture. ISS is a private English language international school. Students enter it on the school’s terms.

CONCLUSION

THE ISS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT ENVIRONMENT

This thesis has aimed to show that the remarkable heterogeneity of the ISS high school student population is counterbalanced by several strong homogenizing forces. Seen outside of the ISS context, students are dissimilar, but together they constitute a student environment which several students think of as an extended family. Since the high school is fairly small, it is not possible to sustain “us” and “them” categorizations as regards nationality, race, and socio-economic status. Factors such as age, grade and common interests are more important in shaping student relations, which is exactly what one would find in local schools with homogenous student populations. Student heterogeneity thus becomes an instrument of homogeneity. The student fabric will only hold together if everybody accepts each other. As one respondent put it, ISS students “are united by our disparities.”

Furthermore, the school itself contributes towards homogeneity of the student environment, both before new students enter the school and while students are at the school. As an elite private school, ISS is highly selective in admitting students. New students are likely to have a history of academic success, parents who value education, relative financial ease, and strong connections to or interests in more than one culture. The fact that these characteristics will be shared by many students helps students bond together harmoniously at the school. In the opinion of Dr. Cameron,

You have to recognize that it's a certain kind of student, even from the local community, that would be selected out of the many that apply. ... You can imagine that they would have had to buy into the [ISS educational] philosophy to a certain extent.... This is not just for the school's benefit, but we want students here who can receive some benefit from an education here. And so it's a certain

kind of student that ends up here. Regardless of their background, they usually melt into the stereotypical kind of ISS student.

Moreover, while at the school, students are subject to a sustained academic pressure. The many extra-curricular activities, the strong interest and presence of parents in school life, and the location of the school in what for many students is a foreign country further works to unite the student body.

How do students feel about studying at ISS? Dr. Cameron said that

Overwhelmingly, students are happy to study at ISS. When writing college admission essays, everybody compares their international educational experience to when they were students in their home countries, and the evolution they have experienced as a result of sitting in an environment where all your education doesn't come from your interaction with your teacher, but also as a function of having someone different sitting next to you.

Many questionnaire respondents did write that they think meeting other teenagers from many different nations is one of the chief benefits of studying at an international school.

One student described the student body as “a big boiling cauldron”, while senior Brenna Lewis in her June 3rd, 2004 salutatorian speech compared the student body to a changing set of crayons with which the ISS student environment is painted anew each school year.¹⁴⁵

The environment may also be likened a kaleidoscope. Students enrolling at ISS come face to face with rich cultural patterns for a limited time and in a limited space. Those patterns can however change dramatically on short notice, as friends are suddenly reposted in another part of the world, and as grade compositions can change dramatically from one school year to the next.

What do students think are the most positive and least positive aspects of studying at an international school? One respondent wrote that that what is most positive is “the different cultures you learn about. Least positive is having to deal with the really hard cultural differences.” Cultural assimilation and tolerance may only go so far. Another respondent

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, Brenna. IB Salutatorian Speech. June 3rd, 2004.

wrote a succinct sketch of the environment that many students might agree with: “Positive: Interesting people, good education, welcoming to new students, many good sports activities and class choices. Negative: Good friends move away, limited amount of students, very demanding work, less connection with outside Norwegian environment.”

This study of an international school located in northern Europe takes part in the continuing exploration of the international school phenomenon. While there will be many structural similarities between the various international schools, there will also be significant differences, principally due to the fact that these schools function in widely different host cultures. ISS caters to expatriate oil company families, but so does the American International School in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁶ It seems reasonable to assume that although these two schools and their students have much in common, they also face many different challenges. Consequently this thesis may be usefully considered together with the studies of Willis, Melkonian, and Straffon on various aspects of international school student environments in schools in Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and South-East Asia, respectively.¹⁴⁷

The literature on all aspects of international schools is not extensive, but according to Mary Hayden, “the literature base in the field has been developing rapidly.”¹⁴⁸ While internationally mobile children have been the subject of research over the last five decades, little has apparently been written about one segment of the international school student bodies, host culture students. As much as any international school student, these students have to perform complicated cultural gymnastics on a daily basis. They are of the host

¹⁴⁶ Information about this school will be found at the CIS website at http://www.cois.org/directory/Directory_Page.asp?School_ID=SAUARA

¹⁴⁷ Willis, David Blake. *A Search for Transnational Culture: an Ethnography of Students in an International School in Japan*. Iowa: The University of Iowa, 1986.

Melkonian, Michael *The effect of an International School Environment on the Perception of Self and Others: a Study of Expatriate Students in The United Arab Emirates*. Southampton: The University of Southampton (United Kingdom), 1993.

Straffon, David Atwood. *Assessing Intercultural Sensitivity Levels of High School Students in an International School*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Hayden, “International Education” 3.

culture, but are educated outside it. In a sense, they become as much third culture kids as the foreign nationals they encounter in the school. Future research could well be conducted to determine how host country nationals negotiate their identities in the culturally rich international schools they attend.

It seems appropriate to close the book on ISS for now with the words of a student whose time at the school came to an end this June: “I really appreciate the opportunities and experience at ISS. It opens up a lot of opportunities and gives you a lesson not only in education, but also in cultural differences, tolerance and things like that.” When asked if he would rather have gone to school back home if that had been possible, he answered that “I don’t think I would have traded this in. I think it’s a great place.”

APPENDIX A

The High School Student Body at the International School of Stavanger

Stavanger, April 22nd 2004

Dear Students and Parents,

I am a Norwegian who teaches at Lundehaugen videregående skole, a performing arts high school in Sandnes. I am also pursuing a Master's degree in American Studies at the University of Oslo. For my thesis, I have elected to write about ISS.

This is an invitation for all ISS high school students to take part in a study of the high school student environment. Using questionnaires and interviews, I will try to learn how teenagers from different nations interact in an international school setting. I am also interested in how the students' identities and cultural perspectives are challenged by studying at ISS.

I will carry out the research under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Kitchen, my thesis advisor. The project has been reviewed and approved by *Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskaplig datatjeneste AS*, a Norwegian ethics committee for scientific research. Although ISS has given permission for my survey to be distributed, this research is in no way conducted as part of an ISS program. All personal information gathered will remain confidential. Raw research will not be made available to ISS.

Parental permission is necessary for those students who are under 18. Those over 18 must sign the release forms themselves. All participation is entirely voluntary. Students may at any point and without giving any reason withdraw from the project and have all personal data erased.

Identification numbers will be used to link individual release forms with the questionnaires. I will hand out the release forms and the questionnaires at the same time and ask that they be returned together. Should a student return a completed questionnaire without a corresponding signed release form, the questionnaire cannot be used and will be destroyed. During the course of the study, the documents will be kept at separate locations to ensure confidentiality. The code will only be used again when I decide which students to ask for interviews.

Students will be urged not to give names of other students or staff at ISS. Should such information be given, it will immediately be deleted. No names of students or staff will appear in the finished thesis unless express permission has been given. The school will be presented with a copy of the thesis once it is finished and approved by the university, presumably in December 2004. At that time, all research data will be anonymized.

Once the forms have been completed, please seal both inside the envelope provided and put them in the box set up at the ISS front office.

Please turn in the forms by Thursday April 29th 2004.

If you have any questions at any time about the questionnaire or the project generally, please call me at [...] or email me at [...]. Thanks for participating!

Sincerely,

Halvor Skaar



APPENDIX B

The High School Student Body at the International School of Stavanger

Questionnaire offered to all ISS high school students

ID NUMBER: *Please DO NOT write your name.*

Date received by researcher:

It will take most students about 30 minutes to complete the form. At the end there are separate sections that address themselves to the different groups of the student population. Please respond only to the questions in the sections that apply to you. ISS is used as a shortened form for the ISS high school. Please do not discuss personalities or name names.

A. Questions for all students

1. Age

2. Sex

male

female

3. Grade

9th

10th

11th

12th

4. Where were you born (town/country)?

5. What is your citizenship?

6. Do you carry a dual passport?

yes

no

7. If yes, what is your other citizenship?

8. What is your mother tongue?

9. What languages can you make yourself understood in?
.....

10. Do you consider yourself bilingual?

yes

no

almost

11. Norwegian language ability:

mother tongue

fluent

some ability

little ability

12. Have you lived in Norway almost all of your life?

- yes
- no

If no, what other countries have you lived in, and for how long?

.....

.....

.....

13. How many years have you lived in Norway?

14. Why did you and your family decide to enroll you at ISS?

.....

.....

.....

15. As of April, how many years and months have you been studying at ISS?

..... years months

16. Which grades have you attended at ISS?

17. Do you plan to graduate from ISS?

- yes
- no
- That depends on many factors

18. Where did you last attend school?

- in my home country:
- in another country:

19. Have you ever attended a local Norwegian school?

- yes
- no

20. If yes, what grades did you attend?

21. What had you heard about ISS before you enrolled?

.....

.....

22. Did you know any ISS students before you enrolled?

- yes
- no

23. How did you feel after a few weeks of settling in at ISS?

.....
.....
.....

24. How do you feel now?

.....
.....
.....

25. Do you find the ISS to be a mostly welcoming school for new students?

yes
 no

26. When you enrolled at ISS, did you find it easier at first to make contact with students of your own national group?

yes
 no

27. When you enrolled, what factors were most important to you in making first contacts?

.....
.....
.....

28. Is your circle of friends made up of mostly others from your own country?

yes
 no

29. What nationalities are the students in your inner circle of friends?

.....

30. What nationality is your closest friend living in Stavanger?

31. What is his/her native language?

32. Does he or she study at ISS?

yes
 no

33. What language(s) do you speak when you spend time alone together with your closest friend?

34. If you are a non-native English speaker, have you sometimes felt that native English speakers enjoy a distinct advantage academically?

- yes
- no
- it all depends

35. Do students tend to look up to and take leads from particular national groups?

- yes
- no

If yes, which groups?

.....

36. Do you tend to take such leads?

- yes
- no

37. Do you find it's easy to attract attention at the ISS, in both good and bad ways?

- yes
- no

38. Have you heard of or experienced student harassment/intimidation at ISS?

- yes
- no

If yes, why do you think this was going on?

.....

.....

39. The ISS high school is quite small. Was the last school you attended

- smaller
- larger
- about the same size?
- ISS is the only school I have attended.

40. Do you think it is generally easier or more difficult to meet people and make friends at ISS than at a large high school?

- easier
- more difficult

41. As a student at ISS, you may have made friends with people from all over the world. Do you try to keep up with friends once they have moved?

- yes
- no

42. Do you feel obliged to do so?

- yes
- no
- it depends on how well I know the person.

43. What cultural values/civic virtues do you think the school is trying to teach?

.....
.....

44. How do you feel about studying at ISS?

- lucky
- O.K.
- it depends
- would rather not study at ISS

Feel free to add extra comments:

.....
.....
.....

45. What special challenges and opportunities do you think the ISS environment offers?

.....
.....
.....

46. What are the most positive and the least positive aspects about studying at an international school?

.....
.....
.....

B. Questions for students who have moved to Stavanger from abroad (includes both Norwegian and non-Norwegian citizens)

1. Why did your family move to Norway?

.....
.....

2. How many years do you think you will be living in Stavanger all in all?

- years
- do not know

3. How many years if any have you lived in your home country?

..... years

never

4. Is ISS more or less important to you personally than school would be in your home country?

more

less

about the same

Why?

.....

.....

5. Did you last attend

a school where most students were culturally similar,

a school with a multicultural student population?

ISS is the only school I have attended

6. If you have attended other schools, how did you find the transition to the ISS?

.....

.....

.....

7. Do you take part in activities organized locally by fellow countrymen not related to ISS?

yes

no

8. If you answered yes to the previous question, how important to you are these activities?

very important

quite important

not very important

9. Have you made some good friends during your stay in Stavanger?

yes

no

10. Do you have much contact with kids in your neighborhood

or do you tend to spend time mostly with people that you know from school?

11. Describe your personal contacts with *Norwegians* outside the ISS environment.

I know many people quite well

some quite well

I know some people, but not very well

I hardly know any

12. Do you belong to any Norwegian organizations such as sports clubs or choirs?

- yes
- no

13. If yes, how important to you are these organizations?

- very important
- quite important
- not very important

C. Questions for students who have grown up in more than one country (global nomads)

1. Is there a distinct global nomad group at ISS, students that have formed friendships based on their shared multicultural experience?

- yes
- no

If yes, please elaborate:

.....

.....

2. Have you personally seen ISS students form friendships that you would have thought would have been unlikely to happen, given cultural and national difference?

- yes
- no

3. Have you yourself been part of such a network/group of friends?

- yes
- no

If yes, please elaborate:

.....

.....

4. Do you find that you relate more easily to fellow global nomads than to students who do not have such a background?

- yes
- no
- do not know

5. What do you feel in your bones: that you are

- an (*nationality*)
- a global nomad
- something in between?

6. Have you attended other international schools than ISS?

- yes
- no

7. If yes: Is the international school system important as a “lifeline” in your life?

- yes
- no

Please elaborate:

.....

.....

D. Questions for Norwegian students/Norwegian students with dual citizenship

1. Is Stavanger “home” to you?

- yes
- no

Feel free to add comments:

.....

.....

2. Is it likely that you and your family will be moving abroad any time soon?

- likely
- unlikely

3. Have ever attended a Norwegian public school?

- yes
- no

If yes, what do you think are the main differences between ISS and Norwegian public schools?

.....

.....

.....

4. Do you have the impression that ISS is more or less academically demanding than most local videregående schools?

- more
- less
- probably about the same

5. How comfortable are you with English being the language most classes are taught in?

- very comfortable
- quite comfortable
- it can be a problem

6. Norwegians make up one of the two largest nationality groups at the ISS high school. Do you feel that numerical strength translates into influence?

- yes
- no
- do not know

7. Do you belong to any Norwegian organizations such as sports clubs or choirs?

- yes
- no

8. If you answered yes to the previous question, how important to you are these organizations?

- very important
- quite important
- not very important

9. Do you know most of your friends

- from ISS
- from outside the ISS environment?

10. Is ISS more important to you personally than a regular videregående would be?

- yes
- no

Please elaborate:
.....

11. Do you in any respect feel that you think differently than non-ISS Norwegian teenagers?

- yes
- no

If yes, please elaborate:
.....
.....

12. Do you think studying in an international community shapes your perceptions of the political and cultural role Norway plays in the world?

- yes
- no

If yes, please elaborate:
.....
.....

13. What do Norwegians outside of the ISS environment think of you studying at the school?

Are they typically

- negative
- positive
- indifferent?

If you would like to share any thoughts about ISS life that has not been addressed in the questions above, please feel free to write them down on the next page.

Thank you!

APPENDIX C

COMPOSITE STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

The individual student interview guides were written after I had read the questionnaires and selected students for interview. While all students were asked a set of similar questions, many specific questions were asked in order to clarify what students had written in the questionnaires. In the interest of protecting students' identity I here present a composite student interview guide. Questions that could reveal students' identities have been removed or altered. Most interviews lasted about an hour. For the most part students were given the guides to read immediately before we started, but they were not given copies to keep, as that could compromise the integrity of the interviewing process.

- Describe the ISS high school student environment from your own point of view, and then from the points of view of your grade and your nationality group.
- You write that you have great friends among the students in your grade. How would you characterize the grade?
- Is there much vertical communication between the grades?
- Do you feel that there is a global nomads/non-global nomads divide?
- For internationally mobile students: Tell me a little about how you relate to
 - Other global nomads at school
 - Students straight out of their home countries
 - Norwegian students who have never lived abroad
- Is there a NATO student/civilian student cultural divide?
- Is there a Norwegian/American cultural divide?
- Do NATO students move more often than civilian students?
- Who most often sets the tone of the different nationality groups?
- Do you think that your self-identification as a global nomad is more or less important than your identity as a military dependent when it comes to forming new friendships?
- What kind of influence in school life does the student council have?
- According to some sources, ISS is striving to become less Americanized and more international. How do you see this?
- You write that ISS is “technically” international in outlook, but that American viewpoints tend to be the more important ones, for staff, teachers and some students. Please comment.
- Some students comment that they feel that the curriculum is not international enough. What is your take on this?

- You write that you think it is more difficult to make friends at a smaller school than at a larger school. Please comment.
- Some students comment on the small size of the high school. How do you feel about it?
- Are you active in extracurricular activities such as theater, sports etc? Are many students in your grade active?
- What binds ISS high school students together? What is the glue?
- What pulls students apart? Please comment on:
 - Different nationalities
 - Different cultural norms
- How do you think the school tries to bring the students together socially and academically?
- You write that you are soon moving and that you are “disconnecting”. Please describe the logistics and the emotional processes you’re going through. How do you deal with unfinished business?
- Does school change get easier or more difficult the more you do it?
- Do you have a lot of homework? Too much? Parental/school/peer pressure. Explain.
- You write that ISS “does not care for our social lives, or encourage our social life”. Please explain.
- Please describe your contact with non-ISS Norwegian society.
- You write that you “lose some of my culture and social life”. Please give examples.
- You write that “the school means a lot to some students who have rich parents/want to “get far”. Is this also true of the average ISS high school student?
- You yourself seem to be very interested in doing well academically and “get far”. On the other hand you express in the questionnaire that this conflicts with other parts of your life. Please comment.
- You write: “You don’t have a choice in ISS; if you don’t care, you can’t make it”. What about those who don’t succeed academically?
- You write that ISS is “very strict.” Compared to what?
- You are one of two students to comment on religion in the questionnaire. In your case the comments are tied to student harassment. Please enlarge.
- You write that you as a non-native English speaker feel that native English speakers enjoy an academic advantage. Please comment.

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All 136 ISS high school students were given the same questionnaire from April 23rd, 2004 on. By the end of the school year, 65 students, 48% of the student body, had returned the questionnaires and the release forms. A further three questionnaires were handed in without release forms. Those questionnaires had therefore regrettably to be discarded.

B. Oral interviews

From the end of April to the beginning of June 2004 I conducted 12 interviews with students, ISS staff and parents, totalling fifteen hours of material. The participants were interviewed on the understanding that they would not be named in the thesis unless they expressly gave their permission to be identified. Dr. Cameron and Dr. Duevel did agree to be quoted by name, and so their interviews are listed below.

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