

School Bullying and Power Relations in Vietnam

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Linköping University
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science No. 541
Department of Thematic Studies – Child Studies
Linköping University

Linköping 2011

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science • No. 541

At the Faculty of Arts and Science at Linköping University, research and doctoral studies are carried out within broad problem areas. Research is organized in interdisciplinary research environments and doctoral studies mainly in graduate schools. Jointly, they publish the series Linköping Studies in Arts and Science. This thesis comes from the Department of Thematic Studies – Child Studies.

Distributed by:
Department of Thematic Studies – Child Studies
Linköping University
581 83 Linköping

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Edition 1:1
ISBN 978-91-7393-081-9
ISSN 0282-9800

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Cover Design: Paul Horton
Print: LIU-Tryck, Linköping 2011

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Acknowledgements

You don't look back along time but down through it, like water.
Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes
nothing. Nothing goes away (Atwood 2009, 3).

As I scan the surface of the past few years, I am reminded of the support that I have received during my time as a doctoral candidate. The writing of this dissertation has spanned not only a number of years, but also a number of countries and a number of institutions, some of which have been the focus of study and others of which have been places of study. While none of the people who have assisted me throughout this journey will be forgotten, it is possible that I may miss someone in the somewhat murky water of time.

I would firstly like to thank the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)/Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) for generously financing my research during the past five years. Without such funding this project would not have been possible. I would also like to thank everyone at the Vietnam National Institute for Education Sciences (VNIES) whose support facilitated my project, particularly Tran Thi Kim Thuan, Nguyen Loc, Bui Thanh Xuan, and Bui Thanh Tu. Thanks also to Nguyen Thu Hien for her boundless enthusiasm, invaluable insights, and helpful assistance, and to my assistant Thuy for re-subjecting herself to lower secondary school and for putting up with my inane questions and peculiar routines. The principals and vice-principals of the two schools at the centre of this study also deserve thanks for being supportive of my research.

Thanks to Nguyen Tung Lam and the staff and students of Dinh Tien Hoang private high school in Hanoi for the thought-provoking discussions about school bullying in Vietnam. Thanks to

Jesper Moller and Julie Bergeron at UNICEF for their support and assistance during the early stages of my fieldwork, and for sharing their reports with me. Thanks to the people at Save the Children in Hanoi for providing me with relevant information and to Sarah Dyer at Beatbullying in the UK for providing me with permission to utilise Beatbullying's Cybermentors advertisement.

I reserve special thanks for my main supervisor Helle Rydstrøm for her continuous support and encouragement throughout the years. I could not have wished for a better supervisor. Thanks also to my second supervisor Jeff Hearn for his insightful comments and suggestions, and to my earlier supervisor Jan Kampmann for his guidance during the early stages of my doctoral journey.

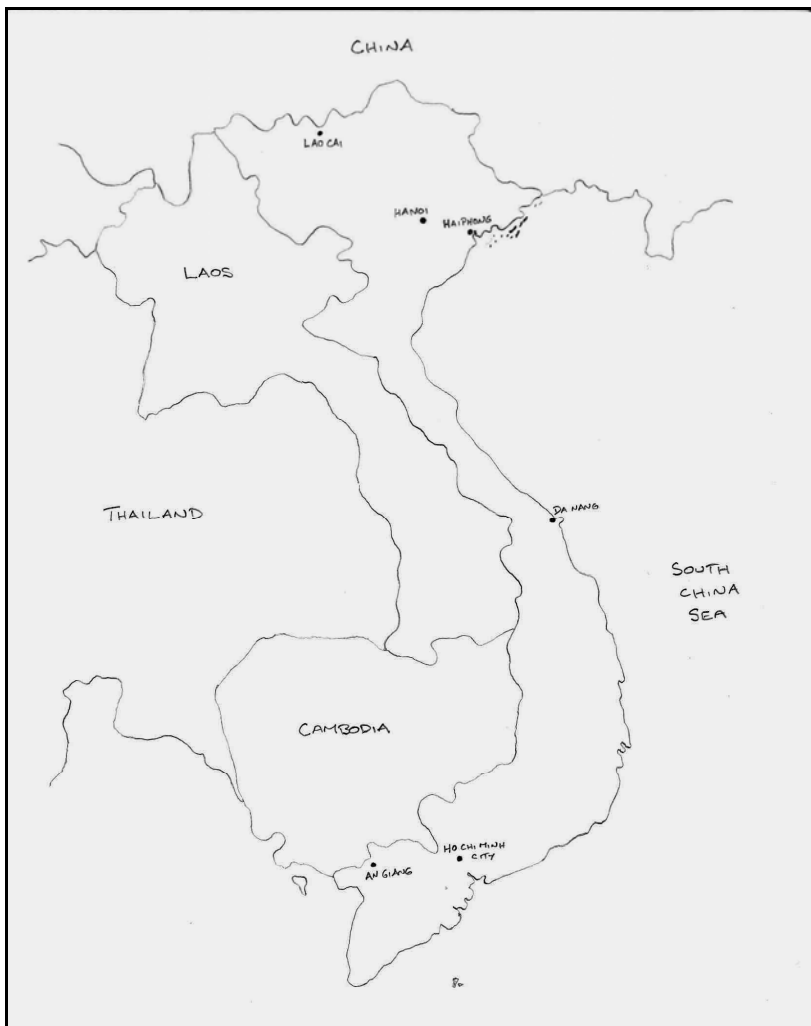
Many other people have also provided me with insightful comments and suggestions throughout the writing process. In this regard I would like to thank my past and present colleagues at the Department of Child Studies (Tema Barn), as well as my earlier colleagues at the Department of Psychology and Educational Studies at Roskilde University in Denmark, where I first flirted with the idea of writing a doctoral dissertation. Special thanks also to Ulla Ambrosius Madsen, Robert Thornberg, Margareta Hydén, Ulf Mellström, Alexandra Kent, Nguyen Huu Minh, Per Wickenberg, Nguyen-vo Thu-huong, Robert Morrell, Jean La Fontaine, Susan Danby, and Lisa Drummond. Thanks also to Christina Lärkner, Eva Danielsson, Ian Dickson and Lotta Strand for their patient support with all things bureaucratic, administrative, and technological.

I am thankful to a great number of friends who have sustained me with their support, humour and assistance during my doctoral studies. To them I would like to say a big thank you. I would particularly like to thank Kjerstin Andersson, Åsa Pettersson, Johanna Sjöberg, and Tobias Samuelsson for their assistance with the more practical, linguistic, and bureaucratic aspects of Swedish academic life. I would also like to say a heartfelt thanks to Sandra Brisenman for reading through my text, for putting up with my increasingly

egocentric ramblings, and for bringing a sense of calm to what might otherwise have been a stressful final six months. Thanks also to my family for their support and encouragement throughout the years.

I would like to thank all my friends and neighbours in Haiphong who helped me settle into life there and who made the whole experience a memorable and life-changing one. Particular thanks to Tuan, Thai, Lan Anh, Trang, Anh, Toan, and their families, for making my time in Haiphong so enjoyable and comfortable. I am grateful to the teachers at Pho Chieu and Du Hang schools for their openness to my questions and especially the teachers of classes 9A and 9B for putting up with my presence at the back of the classrooms. Finally, I would like to wholeheartedly thank the students of classes 9A and 9B who shared their experiences with me. This dissertation is for them.

Sketch of Vietnam



1

Introduction

I would like to begin this study by recounting a conversation I had with a fourteen-year-old boy on a beach in north-eastern Vietnam in June 2007. This was the first time I had had the chance to speak to a Vietnamese school student about schooling in Vietnam, and this conversation thus provided my introduction into the Vietnamese school system. Reflecting on this conversation four years after it took place, it is striking the extent to which the conversation covered a number of the same issues that are the focus of this study.

The boy is the cousin of a good friend of mine and he had accompanied us to the beach together with his older brother. We were sitting in beach chairs on the sand and eating dried strips of beef when I began asking him about his school. I was interested to hear what his take on school was and whether he enjoyed his time there. He was currently on summer holiday and told me that he was bored. I mistakenly thought that if he was bored he must be looking forward to returning to school so I asked him what he thought the best thing about school is. He replied quite bluntly that there is nothing good about school.

He told me that he went to a co-educational lower secondary school and that he had fourteen teachers for all the subjects he had to learn. He was in a class of 52 students and was happy about having so many classmates as it meant it was easier to talk in class because the teachers could not hear over the din, especially those students sat at the back of the classroom. His seat was at the back of the classroom and he told me that his teachers often got angry with him because he continued to talk in class despite the teachers' demands that students

not speak to each other during lessons. Sometimes some of the teachers got so angry about his talking that they would hit him in class.

Our discussion about schooling raised a number of the same issues that are central to this study and influenced the way in which I located myself in the classrooms I studied. While this is an ethnographic study of school bullying, it differs from most studies looking specifically at school bullying in the extent to which it emphasises the importance of schooling to school bullying. As is apparent from the above conversation, students do not necessarily enjoy being at school. I believe that this is important for understanding the school bullying that occurs in schools, as too is the contextual specificity alluded to in the conversation by reference to the number of subject teachers, the number of students in the class, demands that students not speak, and the use of corporal punishment.

This study was conducted in the specific context of two lower secondary schools in the north-eastern Vietnamese port city of Haiphong. This contextual specificity is important for understanding the particular nuances in the bullying interactions that are discussed within the following pages, and many of the discussions raised within this study will be equally pertinent for studies considering other realms of Vietnamese social life. However, while my findings are very much dependent on the Vietnamese school context within which they were collected, this is not to say that they are not important for bullying research and anti-bullying work being conducted in other geographical and cultural contexts. Indeed, this study broaches many of the same questions raised by bullying researchers in those contexts. The importance of this study may be precisely that by broaching these questions in a setting where hitherto little research has been conducted, some of the common assumptions about school bullying may be questioned.

Researching School Bullying and Power Relations in Vietnam

My main motivation for researching school bullying is to gain some understanding into why so many school children continue to be subjected to bullying at school despite the attention that has been given to its negative consequences. Extensive research into the issue of school bullying around the world has highlighted the negative effects of bullying, and bullying has been linked to loss of confidence, low self-esteem, social anxiety, depression, distrust of others, psychosomatic problems, suicide, and even homicide (Boulton and Hawker 1997; Due et al. 2005; Kim, Koh, and Leventhal 2005; Olweus 2003; Rigby 2008; Rigby and Slee 1999; Smokowski and Kopasz 2005; Vossekuil, Reddy, and Fein 2001). Such effects have also been highlighted in anti-bullying campaigns, training programmes, and the popular media through recent movies such as *Bully* (Clark 2001), *Elephant* (Van Sant 2003), *Mean Creek* (Estes 2004), and *2:37* (Thalluri 2006).

The vast majority of research that has focused specifically on the issue of school bullying has done so through the use of quantitative questionnaire surveys, and there has been much less use of qualitative research (Atlas and Pepler 2001; Duncan 1999; Mishna 2004; Smith and Brain 2000). The focus has tended to be on determining the extent of the problem, its prevalence and location, and the types of individuals involved. However, restricting the focus of research to reports from students and teachers may be of limited value for understanding the practices that influence the prevalence and perpetuation of bullying in schools. Shifting the focus away from individual behaviour and towards a more in-depth understanding of such practices involves not only a theoretical shift of focus but also a methodological shift of focus away from seeing bullying as a universal problem to seeing bullying as contextually situated and

linked to power relations within the institutional setting within which it occurs.

I take seriously the oft-made claim that power relations are central to school bullying (Dixon 2011; Olweus 1993; Rigby 2008; Smith 2011), and seek to elaborate specifically on the interconnectedness of school bullying and power relations within the specific context of two Vietnamese lower secondary schools. In doing so, I utilise the work of Michel Foucault and particularly his theorisation of power. I draw much of my conceptual framework from Foucault's 'tool box', utilising those concepts that I find most useful for explaining the power relations involved in school bullying. As Foucault (2003, 243) himself argued, his theorisations "ought to be taken as 'propositions', 'game openings', where those who may be interested are invited to join in – they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left en bloc." I utilise some of Foucault's theorisations about power in an endeavour to better understand the interconnectedness of school bullying and power relations in Vietnam. I focus in particular on some of his work after 1975, as that was when he dealt most specifically with how power is experienced in practice (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Heller 1996; Jardine 2005).

Shifting the focus of research from the individuals involved to the power relations involved in school bullying requires another sort of data than that most commonly collected. Indeed, an understanding of the power relations involved in school bullying requires the clarification of a number of interactive practices, which the answers provided in questionnaire surveys are not able to illuminate. It is necessary to "bring some sense of the messiness, contradictions and confusion that real actors experience and must somehow negotiate to survive" (Duncan 1999, 6). One way in which this can be achieved is by 'being there' (Geertz 1988, 23), by participating in the daily lives of students in schools. In attempting to understand the interconnectedness of school bullying and power relations in the

context of Vietnamese schools, I conducted an ethnographic study of bullying in those schools. Using an ethnographic approach to researching bullying in schools, this study seeks to provide some form of understanding of the various practices that influence bullying within schools in Vietnam.

As Frank Wai-ming Tam and Mitsuru Taki (2007, 373) argue, “existing knowledge about school bullying and its prevention is mainly derived from research conducted in Western countries.” While research has been conducted in non-Western countries, most notably *ijime*¹ research in Japan (Morita et al. 1999; Taki 2001a, 2001b; Tam and Taki 2007; Tanaka 2001; Yoneyama 1999; Yoneyama and Naito 2003), the findings from such research have had surprisingly little impact on discussions about bullying in the West. In the case of Japanese school bullying, it has often been considered to be referring to a different phenomenon altogether.

There has until now been almost no research about school bullying in Vietnam (Tran Han Giang 2004), or indeed in any Southeast Asian context.² In the case of Vietnam, a UNICEF study conducted in 2003 found that verbal abuse and bullying were common in schools in the three provinces of An Giang, Lao Cai and Hanoi, with 24.8 percent of respondents stating that they had been bullied, and 35.7 percent stating they had experienced verbal abuse (Michaelson 2004). Such findings suggest that bullying is an area of concern in Vietnamese schools, although there has until now been a lack of focus on the issue, and it is not clear what constitutes bullying in the Vietnamese school context. *Bat nat* is the term most commonly used to refer to bullying in Vietnam (Gian Huu Can 2008). While I use the term ‘bullying’ throughout this study, my understanding of what bullying entails is based on how *bat nat* was explained to me by students and teachers during my research. Thus my use of the term bullying is more for the intention of relating my study to wider discussions about school bullying, and is not intended to reduce the discussion to a universalistic account of what constitutes bullying.

Indeed, I seek to anchor my study of bullying firmly in the Vietnamese school context within which it was conducted.

Vietnam was the first country in Asia and the second country in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. By ratifying the convention, the Vietnamese government indicated a political commitment to addressing the issue of school bullying in Vietnam, as according to Article 19 of the convention:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989).

Likewise, such commitment was also illustrated by the Vietnamese government's decision to adopt UNICEF's Child-friendly School initiative. The introduction of the Child-friendly School initiative suggests that while Vietnamese schools are not perceived as 'friendly' at the moment, this model is being put forward as something to aspire to. UNICEF began their Child-friendly School initiative in Thailand in 1997 in an attempt to bring educational practice in the region in line with the UNCRC, and it was initially applied experimentally to 50 Vietnamese primary schools. According to UNICEF (2004), a child-friendly school must involve the following five dimensions:

1. Proactively inclusive, seeking out and enabling participation of all children and especially those who are different ethnically, culturally, socio-economically and in terms of ability;
2. Effective academically and relevant to children's needs for

- life and livelihood knowledge and skills;
3. Healthy and safe for, and protective of, children's emotional, psychological and physical well-being;
 4. Gender-responsive in creating environments and capacities fostering equality;
 5. Actively engaged with, and enabling of, student, family and community participation in all aspects of school policy, management and support to children.

By promoting inclusion and equality, protecting emotional, psychological and physical well-being, and engaging students, family and community in such issues, it is clear that a central component of child-friendly schools is “the promotion of a culture of non-violence” (Save the Children Sweden 2002). Indeed, as Save the Children Sweden (2002) state, “bullying (psychological and/or physical) and corporal punishment are not allowed” in child-friendly schools.

In 2008, the Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister, Nguyen Thien Nhan, issued a directive, whereby the child-friendly school model would be incorporated into a nationwide education programme called “Building Friendly Schools and Active Students”, a key component of which was the incorporation of ‘life skills’ and ‘values’ training into the curriculum (Tran Thi Kim Thuan 2011; *Vietnam News*, May 16, 2008). In 2010, the Student Affairs Department of the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) set up seven inspection groups to oversee the implementation of the programme. While the Student Affairs Department provides general guidance to schools for dealing with school violence, however, they have yet to implement any explicit policies or measures for dealing with such issues (Tran Thi Kim Thuan 2011).

While the government has indicated a political commitment to dealing with the issue of school bullying, little is yet known about the problem and as yet no anti-bullying policies have been put in place to deal with it. Until now there has been no information about bullying in

schools in Haiphong, and indeed very little is known about Haiphong more generally because until now there have been relatively few studies situated in Haiphong; something which was pointed out to me while seeking permission to do research in the city (see Committee for Population, Family and Children and UNICEF 2005; Le Bach Duong 2002; and Le Minh Hai 2004 for examples of studies conducted in Haiphong).

The Research Setting

Haiphong is Vietnam's fourth largest city - after Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Da Nang - and is an urban setting in a state of rapid economic and social change following the shift to *doi moi* ('renovation'), which was introduced in 1986 as a means of combining socialism with an opening up to the market-oriented economy (Rydstrøm 2003, 2006b; Salomon and Vu Doan Ket 2007). Haiphong is located in the north-east of Vietnam, approximately 100km east of the capital, Hanoi, to which it is connected by road, river, and rail networks. Haiphong was founded as An Bien hamlet by the Vietnamese general, Le Chan³, and the name Haiphong derives from its perceived strategic position. During Le Chan's reign, the area around An Bien hamlet was called *Hai tan Phong thu* (defensive coastal area) and the name Haiphong was later adopted to emphasise the village's strategic position at the entrance to the Red River Delta, as Haiphong means Guardian of the Sea (Hai Phong Portal 2011; Kleinen 2007). Haiphong's location has meant that the city has long played a central role in Vietnam; politically, militarily and economically. Haiphong was the second capital of the Mac Dynasty, which ruled Vietnam from 1527-1592, and was established as a city in 1888 under a French presidential decree⁴. The French colonialists recognised the importance of Haiphong and focused on developing the rail, river, road, and air networks, in the process turning Haiphong into

the main transport hub of northern Vietnam (Haiphong Office of Tourism 1994; Hai Phong Portal 2011).

The perceived strategic importance of Haiphong Port has meant that Haiphong has often been the focus of military operations. An attack by the French naval ship Suffren on November 23, 1946, for example, is reported to have killed more than 6,000 Vietnamese civilians and been a key factor in the outbreak of the First Indochina War (Hy Van Luong 1992; Jamieson 1995; SarDesai 2005). While French forces withdrew from the city in May 1955, it was not long until Haiphong was once again the target of attack, as the US government ordered sustained aerial bombing of the city during the war between the US and Vietnam (1964-1975). Highlighting the perceived importance of Haiphong to Vietnam, US President Richard Nixon ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbour in the early 1970s in an attempt to stem the flow of Soviet supplies to northern Vietnam and ordered intensified bombing of the city itself (SarDesai 2005).

The US government agreed to help clear the mines from Haiphong Harbour in 1973 as part of the Paris Cease Fire Accords, and today Haiphong is Vietnam's second major port city, after Ho Chi Minh City. There are now 30 ports in the city, including 50 docks, which together total 5 kilometres in length. 25-30 percent of all seaborne goods are loaded and unloaded at Haiphong ports, which in 2007 totalled 24.1 million tonnes; an annual increase of 46 percent (*Vietnam News*, May 27, 2008). Haiphong is a largely industrial city built on a reputation for shipping and cement production, and Haiphong's five central urban districts (Le Chan, Hai An, Ngo Quyen, Hong Bang, and Kien An) encompass an area of 56.37 square kilometres and are home to more than 700,000 people. Haiphong is currently attracting a large amount of foreign direct investment (FDI), and the population of the city is expected to expand in the next ten years to exceed 1.3 million inhabitants (Hai Phong Portal 2011; *Vietnam News*, April 1, 2008).⁵ To cope with such expansion, numerous infrastructure, tourism, and housing expansion projects are

underway, including the development of resorts in Do Son and Cat Ba Island; the 43.5 hectare US\$85 million Our City urban development project (*Vietnam News*, May 13, 2008); and the building of the new US\$1.5 billion Hanoi-Haiphong expressway (*Vietnam News*, May 20, 2008).

This large foreign investment has served to emphasise the increasing economic disparity in Vietnam post *doi moi*, as the job sector has become increasingly stratified, with two-thirds of the population of Haiphong employed in agriculture and labouring (Commission for Population, Family and Children 2005). Economic disparity is an issue not only in the city but also between the rural and urban areas; an issue compounded by increased migration of young people from the countryside to the city (Le Bach Duong 2002; Le Minh Hai 2004). While urban unemployment has been rising steadily, rural unemployment during non-harvest periods is also high, prompting migration to the city. Rising population and low wages has led to many people being forced to find alternative income, including work in the sex industry. Indeed, the problems of prostitution, gambling and drug addiction (labelled 'social evils' [*te nan xa hoi*] by the Vietnamese government) are seen to have become an increasing problem (Horton and Rydstrom 2011; Koh 2001; Le Bach Duong 2002; Le Minh Hai 2004).

While increasing economic disparity was readily noticeable in Haiphong, it is not enough to speak about a working class district vis-à-vis a middle-class district in contemporary Haiphong as such change has taken place recently and at pace. I lived in Haiphong from October 2007 to August 2008, and during most of that time I lived in a house in a relatively poor part of the city, Cat Bi. Cat Bi is situated in the southeast of the city in Hai An district. Many of the people in the area work in manual labour, selling wares from the front of their homes, or are unemployed. However, not far from Cat Bi, major developments were taking place in Hai An district, including the recently opened, and increasingly popular, Big C supermarket and Parkson Plaza

shopping mall and apartment complex. While I saw few cars on Cat Bi Road, it was common to see luxury cars such as Porsche, Mercedes and Lexus pulling into the parking lots of Parkson Plaza and Big C.

Similarly, the two schools where I conducted my research were both located in the same district, but were reflective of very different levels of investment. Du Hang School⁶ is one of the largest in the district, and at the time of my research, there were 2,280 students, 122 staff (117 female and 5 male) and 50 classes with an average class size of 45. This was slightly lower than the average class size in Haiphong lower secondary schools, which was 48 (Commission for Population, Family and Children 2005). Du Hang School is centrally located in a relatively wealthier part of the city characterised by wide boulevards, shopping centres, travel agents, and restaurants. The school is located next to a busy street and is relatively space restricted due to its proximity to other buildings. The school has a good reputation within the city, and I was told by numerous people that it is one of the better schools in the city.

Pho Chieu School, in contrast, is a smaller school, and at the time of my research there were 700 students, 58 staff (the vast majority of whom were also female) and 20 classes with an average class size of 35 (i.e. significantly lower than the Haiphong average). Pho Chieu School is located in a poorer area, down a narrow market street, which was often congested with slow moving traffic. The area is reputed to have a significant drug problem, and there is a small police station outside the main walls of the school, which was introduced to deal with problems on the street. The school also has a guard house at the entrance, which I was told was introduced in 2007 as a solution to a problem with fighting and incidents involving knives, and to protect the school from theft.

However, it would be simplistic to suggest that Du Hang School is a middle-class school while Pho Chieu School is a working-class school. At Du Hang School, I spent my time with what I was repeatedly told was 'the worst' 9th grade class (Class 9A) in the

school, which initially had 45 students. Class 9A was notorious for its ‘bad’ behaviour, and I was told by teachers that it was the worst class they had had for a number of years. By the time I left the class it only had 42 students, as one student had been expelled and two others had been suspended. A number of the students were from families where one or more of their parents were either unemployed, living abroad, deceased, or incarcerated. Two of the boys in the class had previously been caught stealing, and a number of the students’ parents worked selling wares on the street or from their home.

At Pho Chieu School, on the other hand, I spent my time in what I was told was ‘the best’ 9th grade class (Class 9B) in the school, which had 47 students. Class 9B was a ‘selected’ class and thus the largest at the school as the school attempted to place all the highest scholastically achieving students in it.⁷ A number of students from the class won prizes at school and regional competitions, and came from better-off families where the parents were in steady employment as lawyers, or civil servants, for example.

Outline

My findings are derived from long-term fieldwork conducted in Haiphong within the two lower secondary schools introduced above. The ways in which I conducted my research have implications for my findings. In Chapter Two I discuss how I gained permission to conduct research in the two schools, and how the ways in which I positioned myself, and was positioned, affected my relations with my informants. I then outline the research methods I used, as well as how the research data was textualised.

In Chapter Three I outline the theoretical framework for the study. As the title of this study suggests, the focus is on the importance of power relations to bullying. Power relations are something which school bullying researchers agree are central to

school bullying, but which they have been somewhat ambiguous about in their theorisations of bullying. In Chapter Four I introduce the educational context within which the study was conducted, discussing the schools not only as the ‘settings’ but also as institutions which over time have been invested with disciplinary power.

In Chapter Five I elaborate on a number of episodes of bullying in order to illustrate the complex ways in which school bullying is intertwined with the disciplinary power invested in schools. In doing so, I seek to move beyond a focus on individual typologies and instead demonstrate how the power relations that are central to school bullying cannot be isolated from the relations of power around which schooling is organised. In Chapter Six I consider the role of teachers and the teacher-student opposition which is often a distinguishing feature of schools. I argue that such an opposition has implications for the ways in which teachers and students interact with one another, and hence also for the extent to which they are involved in bullying and their ability to deal with it.

In Chapter Seven I highlight how the power relations involved in schooling and school bullying serve to promote a code of silence surrounding the issue of bullying and discuss the implications such silencing has for those who are bullied as well as those whose responsibility it is to deal with school bullying. In Chapter Eight I bring the earlier discussions together in order to draw conclusions and make tentative suggestions for how to address the problem of school bullying in Vietnam without losing sight of the power relations that underpin the bullying.

Notes

¹ *Ijime* is the Japanese equivalent of school bullying.

² When referring to Southeast Asia, I am referring to those ten countries that are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2009).

³ Le Chan served as a general for the Trung queens and is remembered for her heroics in evicting the Chinese Han Dynasty from Vietnam. There is an imposing statue of her on the main boulevard in Haiphong, and Nghe Temple is dedicated to her.

⁴ The French claimed possession of Haiphong in 1874.

⁵ Depending on which source, the entire population of Haiphong province is approximately 2 million.

⁶ Pseudonyms have been given to the schools and the class numbers 9A and 9B have been used to distinguish the two classes. Du Hang and Pho Chieu are the names of two of the largest pagodas in Haiphong.

⁷ I was informed in 2010 that ‘selected’ classes and ‘gifted’ schools no longer exist.

Researching School Bullying and Power Relations in Vietnam

Researchers have sometimes faced difficulties obtaining the necessary permission to conduct their research in Vietnam, especially when researching politically sensitive issues or when conducting research in geographically sensitive areas (Hy Van Luong 2006). Helle Rydstrøm (1998, 2003), for example, describes the time-consuming negotiations and surveillance which accompanied her fieldwork in a rural commune in the northern province of Ha Tay. John Kleinen (1999) likewise writes about the police surveillance of his village fieldwork in Hay Tay province and the influence this had on his choice of field site. Oscar Saleminck (2003) elaborates on the surveillance which accompanied his fieldwork in the Central Highlands and how he was refused permission to enter one province. While researchers have tended to face fewer difficulties conducting studies in large urban settings (Hy Van Luong 2006), gaining access to conduct research in educational settings in Vietnam has also proved problematic for some researchers (Madsen 2008).

My request to research school bullying in a country with a proud educational tradition and a stated commitment to socialist schooling raised initial misgivings amongst some officials about my research project because of the perceived sensitivity of the issue (Tran Thi Kim Thuan 2011). That I was given permission to conduct long-term ethnographic research in two lower secondary schools and that I was able to begin my fieldwork little over a month after entering the

country speaks volumes about the helpful assistance I received during the early stages of my research.

Throughout the process of gaining access, I was strongly supported by people at the Vietnam National Institute for Education Sciences (VNIES) in Hanoi.¹ VNIES assists the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in mapping out education development strategies and programs, and proposes research projects and programs to that end. The help of people at VNIES was thus crucial for facilitating my research, and I travelled to Vietnam for the first time, for a period of five weeks during June and July of 2007, to meet with them. In a meeting with officials from VNIES, I formally introduced the project, and I later provided them with a written outline of what my research would entail. This project outline was subsequently translated into Vietnamese and used for gaining the necessary permission. Despite initial reservations about the sensitivity of my proposed research, I was granted permission to conduct my research, and officials from VNIES assisted me in the process of obtaining a long-term research visa.

Once I received my visa, I returned to Vietnam on 15 October 2007, and once again made contact with officials at VNIES in Hanoi, who helped me gain permission and assistance from Haiphong Province's Department of Education and Training (DOET).² In an effort to smooth the process of gaining access to the schools, VNIES established a bullying research group to conduct interviews about bullying in schools in Hanoi and Haiphong, and I was told that loosely affiliating my own research with this research group would help with the issue of access. Having arranged a meeting with officials in charge of secondary education in Haiphong, my main contact at VNIES and I provided them with a proposed schedule and the outline of my research project. In the outline I requested permission to conduct my research at two inclusive lower secondary schools of differing socio-economic status with a mix of ethnicities and abilities for an entire school year. My request to conduct long-term ethnographic fieldwork

was met with a degree of confusion as to why I wanted to spend so much time in the schools. This probably reflects the extent to which education research in Vietnam has tended to have a more quantitative focus.

I chose to focus on two schools for a longer period of time in order to provide some form of comparison as to how the situation may be different in another school, while still allowing the necessary time for the creation of potentially important relationships with students and teachers. Focusing on two schools also meant that I could observe patterns of behaviour over an extended period of time, and thus I was able to consider how these patterns change and may not be as static as a shorter observation period may suggest. Spending longer periods of time at the same schools meant that I was also able to take into account my own changing perspective on what I was seeing, once what was 'foreign' became more 'normal' (Bernard 2006; Delamont 2002; Fetterman 1989).

I had also initially wanted to consider possible racial bullying and the possible bullying of students with disabilities. However, while two schools of differing socio-economic status were subsequently nominated, I was informed by the Head of Secondary Education at the relevant district's Bureau of Education and Training (BOET) that there were no ethnic minority children and very few children with disabilities in the schools they had decided upon. Indeed, according to the Vietnamese Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPFC) (2005), there were no ethnic minority children enrolled in lower secondary schools in Haiphong during the 2003-2004 or 2004-2005 school years.

Following a meeting in Haiphong with officials from VNIES and BOET, and the principals and vice-principals of the two schools where I would be conducting my research, I was invited to begin my fieldwork a week later on 21 November 2007.

Conducting an Ethnography of School Bullying and Power Relations

Ethnography is well-suited to a study of school bullying and power relations, as a key aspect of ethnographic research is ‘being there’ (Geertz 1988). Being there allows the ethnographer to observe the exercise of power in practice. However, when observing the exercise of power, the ethnographer also needs to be reflexive about his/her own role in those power relations and how being there may serve to shift the locus of power. My connections with people at the Vietnam National Institute of Education Sciences (VNIES), for example, directly affected the ways in which I was perceived at the beginning of my fieldwork, and also facilitated a shift of power in the two classes I was allocated. Although both school principals received the same translated information about my project from VNIES and BOET, the difference in the introductions I received at the two schools was stark.

Prior to beginning my research at Pho Chieu School, I was invited to attend a special teachers’ meeting about school discipline, and was asked to judge the English competence of students and award prizes at the school’s English gala. The Principal of Pho Chieu School also invited me out to several social events with teachers from the school. These initial social gatherings, organised at the behest of the school Principal, ensured that I was introduced to a number of the school’s teachers in a somewhat informal manner. The Principal also ensured that my project was introduced to the entire school at an assembly the month before my research began at the school.

The timing of my introduction into Du Hang School meant that the month’s school assembly had already occurred and the Principal did not arrange a special one at which to introduce my research. I took it somewhat for granted that the Principal had explained my presence to the school’s teachers, and I introduced myself to the homeroom teacher of Class 9A and to the students of the class. However, the class English teacher informed me after a couple of weeks that some

of the school's teachers were not fully aware of why I was at the school. The initial perception of me at Du Hang School as a foreign researcher looking at education practices meant that some teachers initially seemed quite nervous in my presence, as they assumed that I was there to research the ways they taught their classes and whether or not they used corporal punishment on the students. The uncertainty about my own position and my links to VNIES meant that my first teacher interview was not recorded, as the teacher was worried that the recording might be given to education authorities or end up on the internet.³ It took the intervention of the English teacher to convince other teachers that the interviews would remain confidential. I had spoken to the English teacher at length about my project and had assured her that I took the issue of confidentiality very seriously.

The way in which I positioned myself within the school also affected the ability of teachers to discipline students. As the majority of my informants were students, I strove to spend my time in the schools much like the students themselves, engaging in a number of the same activities and sharing the same spatial and timetabled confines of the institutional setting, in the hope of gaining some understanding of their everyday experiences in school. In order to better participate in the daily schooled lives of the students, it was necessary to make it clear to the schools at the outset that I was at the school as a researcher and not as a teacher⁴, and that I would not assist the school in controlling or disciplining the students and should not therefore be asked to look after the class while teachers were not there (Epstein 1998a; Mandell 1991; Thorne 1993). This was necessary as I did not want to be seen as another figure of authority in a setting where students have little authority over their own lives (Davies 1999). I therefore made a point of spending my time as close to the students themselves as possible. Doing so appeared to break down significant barriers between me and the students, and seemed to distinguish me from the other adults at the school.

However, while I had made it clear that I would not help in controlling or disciplining classes, my mere presence in the classroom made issues of discipline and control more challenging for teachers, as students often engaged me in their clandestine in-class activities, leaving many teachers unsure as to how to react. While this also happened in Class 9A, it was most apparent in Class 9B as it was a generally 'better' behaved class. When I returned to Pho Chieu School for my third month of research there I was told that teachers were not looking forward to me being there, which highlighted the perceived effect I had on the class dynamics. One teacher even went so far as to add my name to the class notebook during one lesson, writing that "the morality of the students diminishes when Mr Paul is in the classroom." The teacher was subsequently reprimanded by the Principal for writing about me in such a way, but her comments highlighted the opinion that some teachers had about my 'disruptive presence'. My presence appeared to not only disrupt classes, but also offered some degree of power to the students, as they were able to engage in certain activities with less risk of disciplinary action if I was directly involved.

A potential problem in undertaking ethnographic research in schools is that adults are often perceived as 'knowing', especially when age is an important precursor to daily interaction. However, the suspension of the notion of adult superiority was helped by my role as a Western researcher. The peculiarities of my own body (e.g. size, skin colour, linguistic inabilities) not only obviously made it impossible for me to pass as a Vietnamese school student, but also marked me out as a 'different' kind of adult, one that was not wholly competent and could thus ask what might otherwise be considered stupid questions (Fine and Sandström 1988; James 2007). My own position as a 'Westerner' (*tay*) opened up possibilities for turning the adult superiority/child inferiority notion on its head. My relative lack of knowledge of the particular social setting of the Vietnamese school and associated Vietnamese norms, customs etc. allowed me to take the

position of 'learner', with students then positioned as more knowledgeable. In this way I was allowed to gain the students' own views on issues that may otherwise have been taken as given while also allowing me to notice things that may otherwise have appeared 'ordinary' and 'normal' to Vietnamese researchers.

At the same time, aligning myself with students helped to dispel some of the aura around being a Westerner, as it highlighted that I was willing to engage directly with the students. Doing so aided my incorporation into the day-to-day school life of the students. However, my incorporation into the everyday life of the students meant that the barriers between me and the students were also brought down in unsuspected ways. It was not merely a one-way process whereby I gained access to the students, rather I was incorporated in such a way as to open myself up to the students too (Epstein 1998a). Certain events served to challenge me in surprising ways, and I became aware of what Barrie Thorne (1993, 12) refers to as a "jangling chorus of selves", whereby at certain times I felt like a ninth grader again, and at others I felt very much like a frustrated adult in the presence of children. As an adult researcher I was not able to react to challenges in the same way as the students themselves (e.g. through fighting, threatening, and verbal sparring), and sometimes reverted instinctively back to my privileged position of visiting researcher. On two occasions with two different boys, I reacted to perceived provocations by threatening to inform the school Principal about their actions. On one occasion, this was because a boy repeatedly called me stupid, and on the other it was because a boy marked my face with a permanent marker pen after repeatedly tapping me on the shoulder.

These episodes both occurred at times when I was frustrated with the research process, and both episodes were illuminating in the sense that they allowed me to turn the ethnographic lens back on myself (Emond 2005). As Paul Rabinow (1997, 154) argues:

Interruptions and eruptions mock the fieldworker and his inquiry;

more accurately, they may be said to inform his inquiry, to be an essential part of it. The constant breakdown, it seems to me, is not just an annoying accident but a core aspect of this type of inquiry.

While it was not easy to stand back and look at such episodes with a critical eye, these episodes nevertheless critically informed my research. Indeed, both of the episodes not only gave me first hand insight into the ways in which these boys interacted with their peers, but also served to illuminate the relations of power within which the interactions occurred. By threatening to inform the school Principal I unwittingly highlighted not only my own privileged position but also the privileged position of teachers, from which they are entitled to discipline the behaviour of students.

In conducting an ethnographic study of school bullying and power relations, I utilised a variety of research methods for collecting the data, including student questionnaires, participant observations, and informal and formal interviews with students and staff. I will elaborate about each of these methods in turn.

Student Questionnaires

Quantitative questionnaires have often been used as a means of collecting data about school bullying and there has been much less use of qualitative methods (Goodwin 2002; Mishna 2004; Smith and Brain 2000). This is problematic because quantitative questionnaires used on their own “reveal only a frozen tableau of actors in *a priori* roles and categories developed from the researcher’s repertoire of expectations” (Duncan 1999, 5). The question of language is also pertinent, especially when researching bullying in different linguistic and cultural contexts. The terms used in various languages have subtle differences in terms of which kinds of actions are or are not included

(Smith et al. 2002). This has implications for how people respond to questions about these terms. However, even within the same language, respondents may understand the terms very differently, even when an explicit definition is provided (Smith et al. 2002).

Numerical tabulation of data also tends to lose the unique experiences of the participants involved, and instead they become figures in a broader depiction of the problem (Duncan 1999). Findings from quantitative and qualitative research may also differ significantly; even when investigating the same phenomena (Gillborn 1993). I used questionnaires in this study in conjunction with more qualitative methods in order to gain a broader picture of issues related to bullying and related student concerns, which could then be further explored through observations and interviews.

Questionnaires were sent out to classes at each school level (grades 6-9) at the two schools. 1,000 questionnaires were given to the schools to administer and 906 usable⁵ questionnaires were returned: 502 from Du Hang School (264 girls and 238 boys) and 404 from Pho Chieu School (195 girls and 209 boys). Class 9A was not administered with questionnaires but Class 9B was, meaning that 47 of the 906 respondents came from one of the classes I was observing. I was present when the questionnaires were administered to Class 9B, which, while this was not planned for, meant that students in that class were able to address questions to me while filling in the questionnaire. On the whole, however, students largely went about filling in the questionnaire much in the same way as they completed most tests: by talking and comparing with the students around them. I was not present when the questionnaires were administered to other classes.

Participant Observations

While often the problem for school ethnographers is making the familiar strange, as opposed to the anthropologist's task of making the

strange familiar, I needed to do both as many aspects of school life were immediately recognisable while others took me a long time to make sense of as they were specific to the Vietnamese setting (Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma 2007). My assistant, Thuy⁶, and I spent five days a week conducting participant observations in the two classes for a period of six months (three months at each school). Participant observations were central to my research, because I was interested in the ways in which bullying was interconnected with power relations within the specific school settings. At the beginning of my research I thus tried to note down everything about the context, while also focusing more specifically on interactions between students, and between students and teachers.

It was important to contextualise “the structure of social relationships” so as to gain some knowledge about the contextual setting and the social relationships within it before being able to delve deeper into the participants’ own perspectives through the use of interviews (Davies 1999, 107). Participant observations allowed for an understanding of how and why relations between students and between students and teachers changed over time, rather than relying on informants retrospectively incorporating such events into their interview or questionnaire answers (Delamont 2002; Tudge and Hogan 2005). In interviews, incidents may be left out because of the inability to recall them, but as Michael Agar (1996) points out, informants, much like ethnographers, may also have their own personal motives and may thus choose to leave out or stress certain aspects.

The majority of the observations were conducted in the classroom setting, because the structure of the school day meant that this was where students spent the majority of their time. In the classroom, I decided to sit in what Ira Shor (1997, 12) terms ‘Siberia’, the back of the classroom: the area furthest from the surveillance of the teacher. As I mentioned in the introduction, a fourteen-year-old student at another Haiphong lower secondary school had earlier

suggested that one of the good things about large classroom sizes is that it makes it easier to talk, especially if sat far from the teacher. The back of the classroom thus seemed like an ideal vantage point for observing in-class interactions and also served to reduce the extent to which my presence ‘disrupted’ the class. While students were undoubtedly aware of my presence in the classroom, students at the front of the classroom were less able to interact with me during lessons as it was physically difficult for them to do so and would also be more obvious to the teacher. This position at the back of the class helped immensely in hearing and seeing more of what was happening amongst the students, and was the start of my fascination and subsequent learning about the note passing that was such a ubiquitous part of classroom life.

The observations were noted down in two field notebooks: my own notebook and that of my assistant, Thuy. The notes taken had different focuses due to my linguistic limitation, with Thuy concentrating more on the verbal interaction. My field notes included not only specific observations but also thoughts, reminders and frustrations. I thus used my field notes as both a means of recording the data that I was collecting and as an outlet for my feelings in a way that could be recollected at a later date. Rather than making a distinction between data and feelings, therefore, I saw these as inextricably connected because “what the ethnographer finds out is inherently connected with how she finds it out” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1996, 11). Field notes thus provided a means of recording not only the observed activities as close to the moment of occurrence as possible, but also the thoughts and feelings that were both evoked by the observations and which influenced what was observed. By noting down feelings related to the observations, it also became possible to look back at the field notes at a later time with a better idea of what was occurring off scene. However, once written, field notes become subject to the literary style in which they were produced, as does the identity of the researcher who wrote them down (Geertz 1988). Later

interpretation is therefore subject not only to the ways in which observations were interpreted at the time but also to the literary ability of the researcher who wrote them down in the first place (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2007).

A benefit of taking two sets of field notes is that the same observations were often ‘framed’ in different ways, while at other times the field notes reflected two different sets of observations altogether. The effects of taking two sets of field notes also highlight the processes of selection and interpretation involved in conducting ethnographic fieldwork (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1996, 2007). During the fieldwork, I took Thuy’s notebook home every evening in order to have time to compare notes and to see what kinds of interactions she had been focusing on. While this did not get rid of the literary issues, it did allow me to ask Thuy about anything I did not understand before it was too late for her to recall what had occurred. In addition to our field notes, I also video-recorded a large number of lessons with a video camera placed in the front corner of the classroom by the teacher’s desk, although this was removed from Class 9A due to student concerns about being filmed.

I wanted to juxtapose my perspective with those of the participants I was observing. This was necessary because, as Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw (1996, 13) argue, “fieldnotes provide the ethnographer’s, not the members’, accounts of the latter’s experiences, meanings and concerns.” The need to juxtapose different perspectives is important when writing about a context that is not one’s own, so as to avoid being ethnocentric, which may occur if the researcher does not distinguish “between normal behaviour which does not conform to Western values and that which violates the moral codes of the society concerned” (La Fontaine 1985, 17). For these reasons I conducted interviews with students and staff members at both schools.

Student Interviews

I interviewed students in groups and individually, and all of the interviews were semi-structured so as to allow flexibility and the ability to alter the questions dependent on the responses of the informants. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the respondents themselves to digress from the line of questioning and introduce their own concerns, meaning that their responses were “open-ended, in their own words and not restricted to the preconceived notions of the researcher” (Davies 1999, 95). All of the interviews were audio recorded so as to easier allow for later recall of what was said.

I chose to conduct the group interviews before the individual interviews for a number of reasons. First of all, I wanted to make students less wary about the interview experience and to offer them a setting where they may feel better able to challenge and disagree with my interpretations of the interactions I had been observing in the schools than if interviewed alone (Davies 1999). Secondly, I was interested in the interactions between students in the interviews, and the group interviews therefore allowed for a form of informal observations. Semi-structured group interviews also allowed students to direct the interviews to a greater extent as students reacted to one another’s answers and raised issues that I had not previously considered (Davies 1999). This was especially the case in one group interview at Pho Chieu School where the girls involved largely restructured the interview, speaking in length about issues they wanted to talk about. This particular interview had to be conducted in two parts, at the students’ request, because it took too long to talk about everything the students wanted to talk about the first time around.

In selecting the groups for the group interviews, I aimed to get a good cross-section of the students in the two classes so as to gain the perspectives of ‘ordinary’ students (Duncan 1999). In doing so, I consciously selected students based on the friendships they had because I wanted to conduct the interviews with groups of friends so

as to “help create a non-threatening, trusting and comfortable atmosphere” (Renold 2001, 372). The questions for the group interviews were more general than the more personally directed questions for the individual interviews as I did not wish to unwittingly exacerbate the situation for students by accidentally getting caught up in a discussion of particular students. However, while I was not looking for personal revelations in the group interviews, students were often surprisingly open amongst their friends suggesting that the use of friendship groups was beneficial (Duncan 1999). At Du Hang School, I interviewed two groups of boys and two groups of girls, while at Pho Chieu School I interviewed three female groups, one male group, and two mixed groups.

While the group student interviews were quite general in focus, the individual student interviews were much more focused on the experiences of the individual students being interviewed. Each interview was tailored towards that particular student and was aimed at better understanding that student’s own perspective of events that had directly involved them, without their peers being privy to the discussion. This is important when discussing a sensitive issue like bullying because of the possibility of reprisals and the related possibility that students’ answers to the questions could have been very different in front of peers (Phoenix, Frosh, and Pattman 2003). This was highlighted during an interview with one male student, Minh⁷, who continually checked to see if anyone was outside the meeting room door listening in. While he appeared very forthcoming in his answers, it was obvious that he perceived answering questions about his social situation as risky.

I conducted 30 individual student interviews; 14 (7 boys and 7 girls) at Du Hang School and 16 (8 girls and 8 boys) at Pho Chieu School. In selecting the students for the interviews, I attempted to get a range of perspectives from those students who bullied, those who were bullied, and those who were perhaps not directly involved but had some insight as to why it may have occurred. In doing so, I also

selected those students with whom I had a good rapport and who would thus be more likely to be good informants (Agar 1996). I was not concerned with asking the same questions to all the students, as I accepted their answers “as complementary perspectives and [did] not seek a single version of the ‘truth’” (Greene and Hill 2005, 7). It is therefore not possible for me to say whether what I was told in the interviews was ‘true’ or not, merely that this is what was told. As Tobias Hecht (2006, 8) argues, “like cinema, ethnography remains outside and at most can evoke a person’s thoughts, but such evocation never escapes the realm of conjecture.”

Staff Interviews

I also conducted interviews with staff, as it soon became apparent that interviewing teachers would provide a relatively quick introduction into the classroom dynamics, as teachers appeared to have a good deal to say about not only the in-class behaviour of their students but also about the students’ home lives, friendship groups and personal backgrounds. I was also interested in teacher’s own understandings of bullying in schools. I thus decided to interview four teachers at each school, selecting teachers who had a direct working relationship with the students in the classes I was observing. As there was only one male teacher at the time of interviewing, seven of the eight teachers were female. I tried to select teachers from a range of subjects, including both homeroom teachers and the Vice-principal of Pho Chieu School. Homeroom teachers were selected because they are the teachers who have closest contact with the students and their families and are the ones who are responsible for controlling their classes.

I also aimed to interview a nurse and a security guard at each school in order to gain their perspectives about the interactions of students. While I did interview both a security guard and the clinic nurse at Du Hang School, I was unable to interview either the security

guard or the clinic nurse at Pho Chieu School because the security guard had health issues and had been hospitalised, while the clinic nurse had taken maternity leave.

Just as was the case with the student interviews, all of the staff interviews were semi-structured and were audio recorded, with the exception of one teacher interview which was not recorded at the teacher's request.⁸ The interviews were directed at the specific teachers with no two teacher interviews being exactly identical. For example, the questions I asked the Vice Principal at Pho Chieu School differed from those I asked the homeroom teacher of Class 9B. I did, however, ask most teachers certain general questions about the class's behaviour as a whole, about seating arrangements, about friendship groups and so on.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting ethnographic research in schools obviously involves numerous ethical considerations. While the school was an ideal setting in that it provided access to the lives of large numbers of students in a spatial setting where bullying often occurs, it is also important to be reflexive about the ethics of such access (Greene and Hill 2005; James 2007; Norman 1998). While the relevant authorities and schools were informed of my research aims and chosen methodology, and I thus received informed consent to conduct my research in the schools on that basis, the consent given may have had as much to do with my own status as a researcher who was introduced to the school by VNIES and BOET. The schools may have therefore felt obliged to consent to the research, as may the teachers and students who were the focus of my research (James 2007). Indeed, both teachers and students may have feared the disciplinary repercussions of refusal to cooperate.

In conducting my research, I took both a consequentialist and a deontological approach to the ethics involved. The deontological

approach to ethics meant that I respected the decisions of research participants and aimed to treat them equally whenever possible (Murphy and Dingwall 2007). For example, I asked not only the teachers' permission to video-record classes but also the permission of the students themselves, and removed the video camera from Class 9A after a number of students stated that they were not happy being recorded. I also accepted students' decisions not to be interviewed, and a couple of students were not interviewed for this reason. However, this did not mean that I did not try to convince students to participate.

All the informants (staff and students) were told at the start of the interviews that any information they gave would be treated confidentially and would remain anonymous, that they would be assigned a pseudonym, that the interview was being recorded for research purposes and would not freely be given to third parties, and that they were free to stop the interview at any time (Duncan 1999; Hill 2005). In a number of interviews I asked students whether they wished to stop when it seemed that the topic of discussion was very personal and sensitive. The students themselves seemed happy to talk and one girl insisted that she wanted to tell me about her traumatic home situation, and it seemed to be a relief for her to talk to someone about it (Hill 2005).

The consequentialist approach to ethics, on the other hand, meant that I sought to avoid harming the participants with my research and also aimed to provide some benefits from the research (Murphy and Dingwall 2007). In attempting to minimise the possible negative effects of my research, I ensured anonymity to the schools and the students and teachers within them by providing them with pseudonyms and by omitting any information that would make it easy to identify who they are. This means not only providing pseudonyms but also being careful about the information I provide about the specific geographies of the school settings and the particular backgrounds of the students and teachers at the centre of the study

(Hill 2005). This is only possible to a certain extent, as there were numerous people involved who knew which schools the research was being conducted in and also which classes the research was focusing on. It is, therefore, possible that informants are identifiable from certain observational episodes and particular interviews (Murphy and Dingwall 2007). However, while some researchers have allowed their informants to select their own pseudonyms, I opted to choose pseudonyms for the students involved so as to better ensure anonymity, sometimes to the disappointment of the students (Epstein 1998a).

Conducting research into bullying in schools also requires a consideration of the consequences of the interactions being observed. The sheer prevalence of incidents of teasing, fighting and bullying led me to decide that I would only intervene if I judged the potential consequences to be such that a student was obviously going to get physically injured or if the student became visibly distraught. For example, on one occasion I intervened to stop two boys teasing a girl in Class 9B, as she was visibly distraught by the continuous teasing she was being subjected to and had begun to cry. I also intervened on the behalf of a boy in Class 9A a number of times after he had been knocked to the ground. These interventions did not appear to adversely affect my relationship with other students, and actually appeared to be almost expected of me. This is not necessarily only because of my position as an adult researcher, but perhaps also because I had friendly relations with these students, and helping them was thus something a friend *should* do (Epstein 1998a). That I did not report the students involved to a teacher appeared to leave my relations with those involved unscathed.

In taking a consequentialist approach I judged the research to be of enough importance to children's lives in Vietnam as to justify conducting it (Murphy and Dingwall 2007). At the same time, I am conscious that my research may potentially be used as a means of reinforcing the power of schools to discipline students rather than as a

means to challenge the power relations involved in bullying. Previous research in Vietnam has highlighted the unintended and sometimes tragic consequences of detailed ethnographic research (Salemink 2003). However, I am hopeful that my findings will open up for a broader discussion of Vietnamese students' and teachers' experiences of bullying in schools, and lead to strategies being put in place to address the power relations which underpin bullying.

Interpretation

All of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and because of time restraints it was not possible to have the interviews verbally interpreted as they were being conducted. This was done for the first recorded interview but took far too long, meaning that there was not sufficient time for all the questions to be answered. The interviews were thus conducted largely in Vietnamese, with Thuy often only verbally interpreting additions that I introduced to the interviews. Instead, Thuy took notes to the answers in English as the informants were speaking, allowing me to follow what was being said and allowing me to interject with clarification or additional questions.

While using an assistant in interviews was far from ideal, it was certainly preferable to trying to conduct the interviews in English, as Thuy's level of English proficiency was far better than that of my informants. However, using an assistant in the interviews meant that I was not only reliant on her for words but also for perspective, mediation, and interpretation (Davies 1999; Wadensjö 1998). Reliance on an assistant meant that my own ability to communicate directly was limited, meaning that the possibility of miscommunication was perhaps greater. The perceived risk of miscommunication may also have meant that Thuy sometimes sacrificed accuracy of translation in an attempt to minimise potential miscommunication (Wadensjö 1998). While miscommunication can occur in any verbal interaction, my

position as an outsider relying on an assistant meant that it could occur at numerous stages in the interview process.

First of all, the questions were translated from English to Vietnamese, meaning that Thuy needed to interpret what I wished to convey in the questions. Secondly, the questions were interpreted by the respondents themselves. Thirdly, the informants had to interpret their own experiences so as to make them communicable. Fourthly, the answers were interpreted by Thuy, who had to translate from Vietnamese into English (either through written or verbal medium). However, this was somewhat offset by my ability to refer to Thuy's original written notes and sections where Thuy translated verbally into English in the interview. Finally, the interviews were also interpreted by me, as I tried to make sense of the grammatical and rhetorical formulations within the answers received. As Clifford Geertz (1973, 9) argues, then, "right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications."

Issues of Textualisation

All of the interviews were also transcribed from Vietnamese into English. I was aware that group interviews can be much more difficult to transcribe than individual interviews due to the cacophony of often overlapping voices (Davies 1999). Thuy therefore transcribed the group interviews as soon after the interviews as possible in order to minimise the risk of us forgetting whose voices were whose. While this does not ensure that confusion does not arise, it was certainly preferable to getting a third person to do the group interview transcriptions. While the group interviews and some of the individual interviews were transcribed by Thuy, most of the individual interviews were transcribed by another Vietnamese translator who typed the spoken interviews out into English transcriptions. As

multiple transcripts are possible from the same interview recording, this means that I was also dependent on this translator for her interpretation of what was being said (Davies 1999; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1996; Wadensjö 1998).

In order to analyse the data, I coded it according to emergent themes that appeared to be recurrent. While these themes were partially decided by my research focus, and the subsequent focusing of my interview questions and field notes, some of the themes only became apparent after going through the data. This highlights both the selectiveness of memory recall and the importance of coding. In coding the field notes and interview transcriptions, I utilised the software NVivo 8. This involved typing the field notes and transcriptions into the NVivo 8 software, reading through them and then selecting extracts of them into themes relevant to the extract in question. Most extracts were coded into a number of different themes, such as a person's name, 'truancy', 'corporal punishment', and so on, meaning that the same extract would appear in numerous coded sections. This meant that rather than then being unnecessarily restricted by my coding decisions, I attempted to instead have different possibilities for analysing the data.

As James Clifford (1988, 484) argues, textualisation is central to interpretation: "It is the process through which unwritten behaviour, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, and ritual come to be marked as a corpus, a potentially meaningful ensemble separated out from an immediate discursive or performative situation." The process through which the data collected during the research process is written into text is thus important for understanding the knowledge that is proffered as the result of the research. Through this process, small pieces of a larger whole, which were focused upon as interesting, are pieced together again in order to provide a picture of the whole from whence they were drawn.

Doing so involves interpreting what may be personal experiences, and hence requires a certain degree of reflexivity about

one's own role in the construction of the knowledge produced, as well as some form of system for selecting what is to be included. In order to do justice to the experiences of those involved, I aim to not only provide an assessment of school bullying in Vietnamese lower secondary schools, but also to provide an intimate view of the schooled lives of those students and staff for whom the bullying was an everyday part of their lives at school.

There is a great deal of power exercised in writing a text, and also a great deal of responsibility involved in writing about the experiences of others. During the writing of this text, I have been fortunate enough to have had numerous opportunities to return to Vietnam, to speak with students, teachers and people involved in the field of education in Vietnam. This has allowed me to pose follow-up questions, to clarify uncertainties about particular policies and practices, and to present some of my findings and receive feedback about the terms used throughout this text. In this way, I hope that my particular textualisation has not travelled too far from the field wherein the research was conducted.

Notes

¹ VNIES was initially called NIESAC (National Institute for Education Strategy and Curriculum), but changed to VNIES during my stay in Vietnam.

² While the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has responsibility at the national level, each province has a Department of Education and Training (DOET) and each district has a more local Bureau of Education and Training (BOET).

³ This had apparently happened to someone previously, and was a concern for a number of my informants.

⁴ I did, however, offer my assistance to teachers for English language help.

⁵ Numerous questionnaires were returned blank, as the number of questionnaires given to the schools was an estimate of how many they would need for the number of classes. More questionnaires were provided than necessary to ensure that all the students in the classes received one.

⁶ Just as with my informants, I have chosen to provide my assistant with a pseudonym to ensure her anonymity.

⁷ Minh was subjected to almost constant abuse in Class 9A and was much smaller than most of his peers. The homeroom teacher had also intervened on his behalf after a serious fall and had warned students about their conduct with him.

⁸ I did, however, speak to this teacher at length informally.

3

Theorising School Bullying and Power Relations in Vietnam

Contextualising School Bullying

The term bullying, as this chapter will highlight, is too often taken to be a universal phenomenon, and thus equally explainable in all contexts, despite the fact that the research underpinning it has been conducted not only in specific geographical contexts, but also specific institutional contexts and from within specific academic fields. In considering bullying in Vietnamese schools, however, it is pertinent to consider the ways in which bullying has been explained in those other contexts; not in order to universalise the experience of bullying, but rather to better contextualise and locate bullying as a context-specific phenomenon.

Research focusing on school bullying began in earnest in Sweden and Norway in the late 1960s and early 1970s within the field of aggression psychology. Researchers within this field received funding in 1983 for large scale quantitative research into bullying, in the wake of the suicides of three 10-14-year-olds in Bergen, Norway in late 1982. This research, headed by the Swedish psychologist Dan Olweus, led to the development of the now widely used Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, and also greatly influenced research beginning to be undertaken in other countries (Rigby, Smith, and Pepler 2004). As the UK children's charity Barnardos (2002, 12) noted, for example, "School bullying remained a low-key issue in the UK well into the 1980s. Public and media attention became focused on the issue in 1989-1990, when books and articles began to appear

and surveys revealed the extent of bullying.” Not long after the suicides in Norway, the suicides of 16 pupils in Japan in 1984 and 1985 led to Japanese school bullying (*ijime*) being seen as a nationwide problem for the first time (Yoneyama and Naito 2003). Following on from these earlier deaths, the suicide of Shikagawa Hirofumi in 1986 was particularly significant in that this student left a suicide note in which he referred to his experiences of bullying (Yoneyama 1999). While the school bullying research being undertaken in Scandinavia was focusing on the aggression of the individuals involved, the research being undertaken in Japan at the same time was focusing on the institutional setting of the school.

There have been numerous attempts to define what bullying is, but the definition still most widely used is that put forward by Olweus (1993, 9), where he equates bullying with victimisation: “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative acts on the part of one or more other students.” In explaining the negative acts involved, bullying has tended to be split into direct and indirect bullying. Direct bullying involves both physical bullying, which includes more direct physical actions such as hitting, pinching, and kicking, and non-physical bullying (often called verbal bullying), which includes actions such as name calling, threats, gestures, and mocking. Indirect bullying, on the other hand, is perceived to be a less visible form of bullying, and includes the spreading of rumours, exclusion, isolation, and note passing (Olweus 1993; Rigby, Smith, and Pepler 2004; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004).

Some researchers have argued that Japanese school bullying is different to school bullying in the West in that the term *ijime* refers to less physical (and indirect) acts. Mitsuru Taki (2001a, 2), for example, argues that the concept of bullying in the West has tended to be more focused on physical forms than the concept of *ijime*, and states that “*ijime* (Japanese bullying) is similar not to bullying in the West, but to girls’ bullying in the West.” This distinction refers to the common

view that girls and boys differ significantly in the ways in which they bully, with boys seen to be more physical (and direct) than girls (Andrews and Chen 2006; Olweus 1993, 2003; Rigby 2008). While findings do suggest that indirect *ijime* is more common than direct *ijime*, to state that *ijime* solely takes this form is an oversimplification of the differences between bullying and *ijime*. Indeed, Fukaya (1996, cited in Tanaka 2001) makes distinctions between three different types of *ijime*, similar to the distinctions made between types of bullying in the West. She distinguishes between direct physical *ijime*, direct non-physical *ijime*, and indirect *ijime* (what Takeo Tanaka calls 'shunning').

While the aggression-based explanation for bullying has been used to explain bullying in numerous contexts, *ijime* refers specifically to the bullying that occurs in institutional settings in Japan. The focus on the institutional settings and the behaviour of 'ordinary' children within them has led to different explanations for why bullying may occur in the Japanese school context. I would suggest that this is not only because of the different contexts, but also because of the different parameters within which such bullying is understood. One major difference between these different paradigms has been the extent to which they have focused on aggressive intentionality.

School Bullying and Aggressive Intentionality

Peter-Paul Heinemann is often credited with being the first to theorise bullying in his 1972 book *Mobbning*, wherein he defined bullying as "the group's collective aggressiveness towards an individual or group of individuals who provoke or attract this aggressiveness" (Heinemann 1972, 7).¹ Heinemann argued that bullies are not deviant children *per se*, but rather ordinary children who partake in bullying in particular group situations. Olweus (1978) drew on Heinemann's theorising but questioned the perceived coherent nature of the mob as

outlined by Heinemann, and instead sought to distinguish between the various roles of those involved. Olweus (1978, 4) wanted to highlight precisely those individuals “who take the initiative and who, in a sense, are largely responsible for the situation’s arising at all.” While Heinemann was interested in understanding how particular situations made bullying more likely to occur, Olweus shifted the focus and placed more emphasis on the behavioural characteristics of those involved (Roland 1993).

While definitions of bullying may differ in how they are formulated, most of them are similar in their focus on aggressive intentionality (Espelage and Swearer 2003; Horton 2011). Indeed, school bullying has often been perceived as ‘proactive’ aggression (Olweus 2003). This view of bullying as proactive aggression has meant that the intention of bullying has usually been taken as given, and when bullying researchers have discussed intentionality, it has usually been to refer to aggressiveness and the intention to cause harm. This is highlighted by Delwyn Tattum’s (1993, 8) definition of bullying as “the wilful, conscious desire to hurt another and put her/him under stress.” By emphasising the aggressive intentionality of bullying, the focus has tended to be on bullying as a breakdown in the social order, with some students engaging in what is perceived as evil-minded behaviour, and others inviting it in some way; either passively or provocatively (Olweus 1993). Rather than a focus on the social order, the focus has instead been on what Neil Duncan (1999, 146) refers to as “the new folk devils: ‘the bullies’”. The label bully speaks not only to what those who bully *do*, but also to who they *are* (Horton 2006), and ‘bullies’ are thus commonly portrayed as deviant, extraordinary children who are more aggressively inclined, who lack empathy, and who are ‘morally disengaged’ (Almeida, Correia, and Marinho 2010; Thornberg 2010).

The view that bullying is intentionally and proactively aggressive stems from the aggression focus of much school bullying research. Questioning the aggressive intent of bullying allows for a

consideration of the social processes involved in bullying and opens up for the possibility that the intention of bullying may not necessarily be evil-minded. Research into Japanese school bullying (*ijime*), for example, has tended to focus on the situation as the cause of bullying, and Taki (2001a, 119) states that “Japanese bullying is considered not as specific behaviour conducted by extraordinary children with problematic backgrounds, but as the behaviour of ordinary children.” In line with the work done on Japanese school bullying (Taki 2001a, 2001b; Yoneyama 1999; Yoneyama and Naito 2003), a number of Scandinavian based researchers (Kofoed and Søndergaard 2009) have begun to consider the possibility that bullying is conducted by ‘ordinary’ children, during social processes of group inclusion and exclusion.

If, as research figures suggest, school bullying is a prevalent problem involving large numbers of students, then it seems incomprehensible that bullying emanates from the behavioural characteristics of individuals. Indeed, rather than assuming that large numbers of students are proactively aggressive, or evil-minded, it may be more useful to understand bullying as a social phenomenon involving ordinary children and adults in particular situations and within particular group contexts (Bansel et al. 2009; Schott 2009; Søndergaard 2009). If school bullying is not about extraordinary, aggressive or deviant children but rather ordinary children, then it becomes necessary to ask not what is wrong with those children who bully, but rather why do those children do what they do? Rather than starting from the starting point that the intention of bullying is necessarily aggressive, it is pertinent to instead question the intention of bullying and the role it performs in power relations in particular contexts.

A child is not just aggressive, passive, or provocative, but rather has to navigate a range of power relations. The ways in which she/he does this may have profound implications for the extent to which they are involved in bullying. Restricting the discussion of

school bullying to one of aggressive intentionality downplays the power relations within schools and within the wider society. Rather than perceiving bullying as a breakdown in the social order, it may be more useful to see it as a “sign of a struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies of identity and power” (Moore 1994, 154; see also Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985). Bullying may say less about the aggressive tendencies of those involved than it does about the relations of power within which it occurs.

School Bullying and Power Relations

While a number of school bullying researchers have emphasised the power relations involved in bullying, this has seldom been elaborated on and has been somewhat ambiguous in its usage (Horton 2011; Mishna 2004). Olweus (2003, 12) states that bullying involves an “asymmetrical power relationship”, wherein those being bullied find it difficult to defend themselves. Ken Rigby, Peter Smith, and Debra Pepler (2004, 5) refer to bullying as a “systematic abuse of power”, which involves less powerful individuals being unfairly targeted by more powerful individuals. In both of these explanations, there is a perceived difference in the power of the person(s) doing the bullying and the person(s) being bullied. However, it is not clear what this power difference entails. Olweus (2003, 12) suggests that such power asymmetry equates to “an imbalance in strength”, and argues that the term bullying does not apply if the interaction involves students of similar psychological or physical strength. Ken Rigby (2008, 23) takes the power discussion further to provide a list of the types of “power differences” found in schools:

- Being able to physically hurt others
- Being numerically superior
- Being more confident, more assertive than others

- Having greater verbal dexterity – more specifically the capacity to hurt or threaten by one’s choice of words and how one speaks
- Having superior social or manipulative skill – the capacity to turn people against someone or get them excluded
- Having greater status and the corresponding capacity to impose on some others

However, these ‘power differences’ do not explain the power relations within which bullying occurs, but rather I would suggest that they are the effects of social relations. A student’s greater confidence, assertiveness, verbal dexterity, or social or manipulative skill is most likely contingent on their position within the social relations of which they are a part. Rather than only investigating the effects of social relations, it is necessary to instead investigate how the social relations themselves may be the effects of power (Foucault 1980b, 1998). As Michel Foucault (1998, 93) argues, “Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.” It is precisely this ‘strategical situation’ that needs illuminating if a study of bullying is to adequately take into account the power relations involved. Doing so has important consequences not only for understanding what constitutes bullying, but also for understanding the intention behind it.

Power and Differentiation

An individual’s ability to exercise power is dependent on how they are positioned and position themselves in relation to the system of differentiations² that is prevalent within a particular society, whether in terms of their official position within an institution as students or teachers, their age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or other differentiating

categories such as ‘deviant’, ‘victim’, and so on (Foucault 1980b, 1982, 1998; Heller 1996; Whitehead 2002). It is therefore important to consider how bullying relates to such differentiations, within groups, within institutional settings, and within the wider society, because while incidents of bullying may be condemned and deemed unacceptable, the differentiations which they serve to police and reiterate may be widely accepted (Bansel et al. 2009). Researchers writing about racial bullying in the Dutch and UK contexts, for example, highlight the importance of difference and its centrality to bullying when they suggest that any attempt to address racial bullying must also address the racial structure of those societies (Gillborn 1993; Verkuyten and Thijs 2002). Indeed, in considering bullying, it is pertinent to question the extent to which those involved were contesting, conforming to, or upholding distinctions which are used in the ordering of society more generally (Bansel et al. 2009).

One particularly central differentiating category to school bullying is that of gender. Research suggests that boys are overrepresented both in terms of engaging in bullying and in terms of being bullied (Eriksson et al. 2002; Hanish and Guerra 2000; Ohsako 1997; Rigby 2008; Smithers 2004). While researchers have questioned the ‘separate worlds’ of girls and boys and the associated assumption that boys are more aggressively inclined and girls are more ‘pro-social’ (Besag 2006; Evaldsson 2007; Goodwin 2002; Simmons 2002), researchers still suggest that direct physical bullying is more common amongst boys, and that indirect non-physical bullying is more common amongst girls (Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000a, 2000b; Simmons 2002; Smith and Brain 2000; Tam and Taki 2007). Indeed, the dichotomy between physical and non-physical bullying has often been mapped onto distinctions between the bullying involving boys and girls, and often the gendered distinctions put forward to explain physical and non-physical bullying are given in general terms, suggesting that this is the tendency for boys and girls precisely because they are boys and girls. Girls are thus often portrayed as

‘relational’, while boys are portrayed as ‘physical’ and more aggressively inclined.

Tam and Taki (2007, 376), writing about school bullying in Hong Kong and Japan, illustrate the perceived difference between the bullying conducted by girls and boys when they state that:

Male bullies tend to threaten to hit or take things from peers, tend to be physically stronger than their victims, and have a need to control others. Female bullies, on the other hand, use nasty, dismissive glances and gestures, start and spread rumors, gossip, send intimidating notes, threaten others with social exclusion, play mean games, manipulate friendships, and/or leave a classmate out of the group.

In the US context, Rachel Simmons (2002) argues that non-physical and indirect forms of bullying are more pervasive amongst girls because, while boys are expected to demonstrate aggression as a masculine trait, aggression in girls is considered unfeminine and girls have to thus maintain a veneer of ‘niceness’ while bullying their peers. As Simmons (2002, 18) explains, “females are expected to mature into caregivers, a role deeply at odds with aggression.” Here, Simmons alludes to wider gendered discourses about the appropriate behaviour for girls and boys. Such discourses are central to the system of differentiations but should not be mistaken as forms of ‘sex role’ to which individuals merely adhere. Even if such gendered expectations are placed on girls in the US, this does not necessarily mean that all girls accept or subscribe to them. Individuals are not merely the objects of power but are also its subjects, and it is thus important to distinguish between such gendered expectations and what people actually do in practice.

Duncan (1999, 128), for example, highlights the oft-made distinction between the physical bullying of boys and the relational

bullying of girls and challenges the extent to which this is observable in English schools:

A clear assertion by the research into bullying has it that boys bully physically and girls bully emotionally. Little explanation is offered regarding why it should be so, but it is claimed that boys use their physical power to hurt and dominate both sexes, whilst girls use rumour and withdrawal of friendship for the same ends – but almost exclusively within their own sex. I feel there is strong evidence to dispute this view. Boys and girls are very obviously not homogenous groupings, and hard girls emerge as dominating even some hard boys.

As Duncan highlights, researchers have too often appeared to accept that boys and girls behave as expected. This has left the direct physical bullying conducted by girls under-researched, while the indirect bullying of boys has been overshadowed by incidences of direct physical bullying. Even when researchers have focused specifically on the bullying conducted by girls, they have tended to focus solely on relational forms of bullying, even when it is clear that direct physical bullying has been found to occur (see for example Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000a; Simmons 2002).

Power and Resistance

Power is not unidirectional, but rather is “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault 1998, 94). Power is not only top-down, but rather also comes from below. Power refers to the ability of individuals to influence the actions of others, or to govern the conduct of others. Thus power is neither inherently positive nor negative, but rather the medium of change. This more relational understanding of power

allows for recognition that where there is power, there is also resistance, as power and resistance are essentially two different names for the same capacity. Resistance is used politically to refer to the power exercised by those who are less able to exercise power, such as 'students', 'deviants', 'victims' and so on (Foucault 1980b, 1998, 2002a, Heller 1996).

Understanding the power relations involved in bullying thus also necessarily requires understanding the resistance involved. Removing the resistance of the person being bullied from the power dimension of bullying may itself be a violent act, because in concealing the resistance the repetitiveness of the actions that were undertaken in the face of that resistance may also be concealed (Wade 1997). Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2009), for example, highlights the confusion that arises when less visible forms of bullying are resisted by the person being bullied, and how visible resistance reduces the perceived applicability of the bullying definition as it is most commonly defined. Rather than involving a bully and a victim of unequal psychological or physical strength, it may become seen as a more two-sided form of conflict, and therefore not bullying as it is oft-defined. However to write off such an episode based on the notion that the individuals involved were evenly matched ignores the power relations within which the bullying occurs.

The multiplicity of differentiations available within the organisation of daily life means that while one student may be bullied because of the colour of her skin, another student in the same class, whose skin colour is similar to those doing the bullying, may be bullied for having red hair, for being 'gay', for being 'weak', or for studying too hard. A student who was once bullied may also begin to later bully others, and thus become what has been termed a 'bully-victim' (Olweus 2003). Likewise, while teachers are generally in an official position to exercise power over students, this may not be the case in practice. Some teachers may bully some students, some teachers may not be in a position to stop the bullying of some

students, and some teachers may even be bullied by some of their students. A teacher may be bullied by students for being 'queer', or a teacher from Pakistan, for example, may be bullied by students for being a 'paki' (Gillborn 1993). This is possible precisely because power is not held, but rather is exercised from innumerable points.

Intentions and Effects

While critiques of Foucault's understanding of power relations often point to his claim that power is non-subjective, and that he thus downplays individual agency, what such critiques tend to downplay themselves is Foucault's emphasis on intention (Heller 1996). Indeed, Foucault (1998, 94) argues that "power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective". I understand the non-subjective aspect of power relations as meaning not only that power circulates within the system of differentiations and is thus out of the personal control of individuals, but also that because of this there is an inevitable disjunction between intentions and effects (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Heller 1996). Foucault (1998, 95) states quite clearly that power relations "are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims or objectives". However, the way in which most bullying researchers have theorised power, as something held by a more powerful individual or group, ignores the multiplicity of power relations and thus the extent to which power is also non-subjective. Intentions may be thwarted by other relations of power or by acts of resistance. The overwhelming focus on individual aggressiveness has tended to downplay the context within which bullying occurs and hence the multitudinous relations of power involved. Rather the intentions and effects of bullying have been directly linked together, leaving the intention to do harm as the only possible intention, as intentions are seen to lead simplistically to their intended effects.

It is sometimes questionable to what extent the person(s) doing the bullying is aware of the consequences of their actions, and often the one accused of bullying will argue that they did not mean to do it (Cullingford and Morrison 1995). As Foucault puts it, “people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does” (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 187). The potential distortion between intentions and effects is well highlighted by the link between bullying, suicides, and homicides. Research worldwide suggests a link between bullying and suicide (Kim, Koh, and Leventhal 2005; Rigby and Slee 1999; Stephensen and Møller 2004), and indeed it was suicides that put school bullying firmly on the agenda in the first place. However, it is highly questionable whether the bullies whose actions may have caused some young people to take their own lives had intended to do so much damage, just as it is questionable whether bullies would intend for their victims to go on shooting sprees at their schools (Boulton and Hawker 1997; Horton 2007a; Vossekuil, Reddy, and Fein 2001).

When considering school bullying, it is not enough to speak of the power relations between individuals, as if power is exercised in a contextual vacuum. Those same individuals are also subject to the disciplinary acts of power exercised within schools, and it is therefore also necessary to consider the role of such disciplinary acts of power (including techniques of surveillance, techniques of control, and normalising techniques) and how such disciplinary acts may contribute to the relations of power involved in bullying. It is important, in other words, to consider the ways in which power is exercised within the institutional settings of schools. However, it is necessary to analyse the school from the standpoint of power relations and not vice-versa, as “the fundamental point of anchorage of the [power] relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution” (Foucault 1982, 222).

School Bullying and Disciplinary Power

It is surprising that so little consideration has been paid to the institutional setting of the school, when by definition this is where *school* bullying occurs. As Shoko Yoneyama and Asao Naito (2003, 318) argue, an analysis of the relationship between bullying and schooling “is seriously lacking in the discourse of bullying in general. It has not gone much beyond analysis into such things as school size and location.” Likewise, Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer (2003, 377) state that “virtually no studies have examined school climate variables and bullying.” While a number of researchers have alluded to the school setting, and many have discussed where bullying occurs most frequently (Behre, Astor, and Meyer 2001; Matusova 1997), few have taken this further to examine the links between bullying and the disciplinary acts of power within schools (Horton 2007a, 2011). Schools provide not only the ‘setting’ for school bullying, wherein individuals bully or are bullied, but also the disciplinary framework within which school bullying gains currency.

Disciplinary power is used here to distinguish a particular form of power utilised within the institution of the school to train individuals. It indicates a shift from treating the body as a singular entity to be punished after a transgression towards coercively influencing its very mechanisms through the disciplining of movements, behaviour, attitudes, and so on (Foucault 1991; Gawlicz 2009, Gore 1998; Jardine 2005). When writing about schools, Foucault tended to focus more on the disciplinary acts of power than on the resistance of those being disciplined. Thus he often referred to students’ bodies as ‘docile’, upon which disciplinary power was exercised. However, Foucault was consistent in his assertion that where there is power, there is also resistance, and argued that such resistance needs to be understood in ‘strategic’ and ‘tactical’ terms (Foucault 1980a, 163). While students are certainly in a position to exercise less power than school staff, for example, they do still

exercise power, either by utilising the disciplinary framework or by adjusting their behaviour accordingly.

Writing about asylums, Erving Goffman (1991, 172) refers to such adjustment as secondary adjustments, which he defines as “any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization’s assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be.” As Goffman (1991, 56) points out, these strategies are not usually directly confrontational but allow students “to obtain forbidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means.” Bullying may be both a means of secondary adjustment and a means of enforcing complicity. Students who refuse to collude with their peers, or who otherwise challenge that solidarity, may be bullied as a response to undermining the ability of others to circumvent the disciplinary demands of schooling. As Goffman (1991, 61) writes about inmates, “the expectation that group loyalty should prevail forms part of the inmate culture and underlies the hostility accorded to those who break inmate solidarity.” In considering disciplinary power, it is important to consider not only how disciplinary power operates but also how it is resisted through the use of various strategies, as students are not docile but also actively seek to exercise power within the disciplinary framework of the school, and it is precisely this strategic situation that is of interest to a study of school bullying.

Techniques of Surveillance

Björn Eriksson et al. (2002) have pointed to the institutional setting of the school as an arena for bullying, and suggest that there are a number of important factors linking schools to other arenas for bullying such as workplaces, prisons, and the military: individuals have limited power to choose who they spend their time with; they are

there for a long time, or an unspecified amount of time; and they cannot leave the arena without great cost. Eriksson et al. (2002) thus point to the importance of the institutional setting, not merely as the site of bullying but also as an arena imbued with power relations. Indeed, as Eriksson et al. (2002) point out, schooling is characterised by enclosure and distribution, and the students at the centre of most school bullying studies are required to remain in the arena in which they are bullied. Disciplinary power requires that those subjected to it are enclosed within a definable space (i.e. in a school) and that they are precisely distributed (in grades, classes, and groups, for example). This is so they can be seen. As Foucault (1991, 143) argues, “One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation [...]”. Surveillance is thus a central component of disciplinary power.

Schools and the buildings within their grounds are generally designed in such a way as to enhance the surveillance of students by school staff. Schools are often designed in a panoptic style, which allows for easy monitoring of student movement and behaviour by staff (Foucault 1991). However, as Foucault (1991, 205) points out, the Panopticon, upon which the panoptic mechanism is based, should be seen as an ideal form, “abstracted from any obstacle, restriction, or friction.” The Panopticon consists of a ring-shaped perimeter building surrounding a centrally located watchtower with large windows looking out over the perimeter building. The perimeter building is divided into cells, which have windows at both their inner and outer walls, and in which individuals are solitarily separated from one another. Light is filtered through the cells from the outer window, making the cells and the individuals inside visible to the watchtower (Foucault 1980a, 1991). As Foucault (1980a, 147) puts it, “All that then is needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy.”

What is important to understand is not the specific architectural form of the Panopticon but rather the formula of power that it provides. The Panopticon provides a “formula of ‘power through transparency’, subjection by ‘illumination’”, with which to solve the problem of surveillance (Foucault 1980a, 154). Through the spatial arrangement of buildings, playgrounds, walls, balconies, windows and doors, the panoptic mechanism makes it possible for school staff to see what is going on within the boundaries of the school and to recognise those involved. Within schools, however, students are not provided individual cells, there is no all-seeing watchtower, and the perimeter is often not wholly circular or visible. The disciplinary gaze is thus obstructed, allowing for even greater resistance of those under surveillance.

Indeed, a number of researchers have highlighted that bullying most often occurs in those spaces of schooling that are outside the disciplinary gaze of teachers (Behre, Astor, and Meyer 2001; Matusova 1997; Stoudt 2006). For example, Silvia Matusova (1997, 99) argues that bullying in Slovakian schools “usually takes place in rest rooms, cloakrooms and other areas outside the teachers’ control.” In attempting to explain why bullying occurs in some areas of schools more than others, Olweus (1993, 25) suggests that bullying prevalence is directly related to teacher density, and states that “the greater the number of teachers (per, e.g., 100 students) supervising during break periods, the lower the level of bully/victim problems in the school.”

That much bullying occurs in those spaces outside of the disciplinary gaze illustrates the ways in which students are able to resist the disciplinary techniques of schooling. Shoko Yoneyama (1999) highlights the possibility of resistance by arguing that the increased surveillance that came with anti-*ijime* measures in Japan in the 1990s actually made schools more stifling and led to the problem of *ijime* worsening. This possibility is also suggested by Peter Blatchford (1993, 116) when he states that “there is a danger that too heavy a hand can lead to an over-constrained environment and the

possibility of a counter-reaction once the supervisor's back is turned – creating conditions when unacceptable and covert activities like bullying can flourish.”

Techniques of Control

While school bullying may occur most often outside the disciplinary gaze of teachers, it still occurs within school, and may often be facilitated by the techniques of control that discipline students' use of space and time. Within school, students cannot simply move from one place to another, but rather are expected to follow a pre-determined timetable dictating where and when they should be in which places accompanied by which people (Eriksson et al. 2002; Foucault 1991; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). Thus their movements are heavily restricted and when bullying occurs it may not be easy to avoid (Andrews and Chen 2006; Hansen and Christensen 2003; Smith and Brain 2000). In schools where students are in the same class all the time, this effect may be magnified because of the lack of space and the perceived permanence of the situation (Schott 2009; Yoneyama 1999). The ways in which students are assigned to groups (for example in grades, classes, and class groups) may also have a profound impact on relations of bullying within those groupings. A student may not relate well to the other students in his/her class, year, or even school, but may need to if his or her time at school is not to be a decidedly abject experience (Schott 2009).

The techniques that teachers employ in attempting to control student conduct in class may also contribute to the bullying that occurs. A number of researchers have highlighted links between boredom and bullying (Hamarus and Kaikkonen 2008; Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000b; Willer and Hansen 2004; Yoneyama and Naito 2003) and curricular content and bullying (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997; Martino 1997), suggesting that non-dialogical teaching methods and

non-inclusive curricula may negatively impact relations within classrooms. At the same time, large class sizes and increasing demands on teachers to get through required course content may mean that teachers have less time for dealing with relational issues because of such institutional constraints (Osler 2006; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Simmons 2002).

Demands on teachers to adhere to examination based curricular content, together with non-dialogical teaching methods, may mean that teachers resort to punishing those students perceived to be misbehaving on a piecemeal basis rather than addressing the power relations within the class (Simmons 2002; Yoneyama 1999). Some forms of punishment may even take the form of bullying as teachers attempt to maintain control of their students' conduct, with those punished being positioned as 'deviant', 'abnormal', 'troublesome', and so on. Punishment, regardless of how it is implemented, is based on comparison, differentiation, hierarchisation, homogenisation, and exclusion. In other words, it is normalising, as those who are punished are punished precisely because they are perceived to be contravening what is considered 'normal' (Foucault 1980b, 1991; Rose 1991).

Normalising Techniques

Normalising techniques are central to the disciplinary acts of power exercised within schools, and schools are structured around various norms about what is considered appropriate according to a particular stage, in terms of attitudes, behaviour and knowledge (Foucault 1980b, 1991; Gore 1998; Rose 1991). The ability of students is made visible through normalising techniques that test such ability through the use of assignments, examinations, homework, and the imperative to answer questions when asked by the teacher. Often students are acutely aware of how they are doing in relation to their classmates, and in relation to what is considered normal for their age.

Such knowledge about the ability of students contributes to who they are perceived to be, whether they are perceived to be 'learning disabled', 'gifted', 'brainy', or 'dumb' (Rose 1991; Sleeter 1986), and this knowledge may be used in the bullying that occurs in schools. Taki (2001b) argues that stress is the most important factor behind Japanese school bullying (*ijime*), and that study is the highest stressor for both Australian and Japanese school children. In stark contrast to much school bullying research, Taki (2001b, 120) states that "ijime is caused mainly by stress rather than aggressive character or culture." Yoneyama and Naito (2003) are critical of what they see as a simplistic link between stress and study, and argue that such stress is not only related to pressure to achieve scholastically, but also pressure to achieve socially in a setting they cannot leave. Asao Naito (2001, cited in Yoneyama and Naito 2003, 323), for example, suggests that students in Japan are not only expected to perform scholastically but must do so while navigating the often conflicting expectations of peers and teachers. It may be in negotiating the conflicting demands for social conformity and demands for scholastic engagement that bullying is used to sanction perceived non-conformity.

Students may be bullied for not being very good at studying (Børnerådet 1999; Rydstrøm 2006a; Swain 2002), for being too scholastically engaged (Børnerådet 1999; Kehily and Nayak 1997; Martino 1999; Renold 2001), or both, in which case they may intentionally aim to get average grades (Horton 2007b). The perceived acceptability of scholastic engagement may be particularly gendered, with school work linked to femininity, and boys may be more likely to be bullied for being 'nerds', 'geeks', 'swots', and so on (Connell 2000; Epstein 1998b; Mac an Ghail 1994; Martino 1999). Debbie Epstein (1998b, 97), for example, argues that some boys' attempts to avoid being perceived as scholastic are simultaneously attempts to avoid being targeted as 'gay', and that often those subjected to homophobic bullying were bullied because they were perceived as scholastic (see also Duncan 1999). Emma Renold (2001) argues that it

is possible for boys in settings where scholasticism is devalued as feminine to blur gender boundaries by being studious, if they also engage in other activities seen as particularly masculine, such as certain sports, fighting, or explicit heterosexuality (see also Connell 2000).

Normalising techniques are facilitated through the compartmentalisation of schooling into age-based groupings, including different levels of schooling (for example primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary), and different grades at each level. In some schools, this may be formalised through the allocation of different uniforms for different age groups, and the delegation of formalised authority to senior students. Numerous researchers have highlighted how age relates to school bullying. Rigby (2008), for example, suggests that there may be an increase in the number of students who are bullied in the first year of secondary schooling because the students often come from different primary schools, and thus have to establish a new pecking order in a setting that may be much larger and less supportive of difference. At the same time, Olweus (1993, 16) argues that fewer students in the first grade of secondary school are involved in bullying others because the transition between schools means that those students are once again the youngest and smallest and thus have less “access to suitable victims.”

However, Duncan (1999) also shows that such age-based hierarchy does not necessarily mean that all older students are capable of bullying younger students. Duncan’s research demonstrates how some younger students’ family ties may provide them with the status to bully older students, and how some younger students may be groomed by older students to challenge another older student to a fight. As Duncan highlights, such a challenge could be extremely risk-laden for the challenged student, who would face humiliation both if they refused to accept the challenge and also if beaten up by the younger student. The younger student, on the other hand, would not

lose face if beaten because of the age-difference but would gain a lot of status if known to have beaten up a student in an older grade. Duncan's research highlights how power may be exercised dependent on a student's age, but also how the age hierarchy itself may be challenged.

A number of researchers suggest that the prevalence of bullying generally decreases with age. Olweus (1993), for example, states that less bullying occurs in higher grades of schooling, and that bullying is more prevalent at primary schools than secondary schools. Likewise, Rigby (2008, 37) argues that bullying tends to decline with age, and that there is less bullying in higher age groupings because the students have 'matured' and are thus less likely to want to hurt each other. However, if we consider that much bullying research has been conducted through the use of questionnaires, with students reporting whether or not they bully or have been bullied, it could be that students who have been at school for more years are less likely to consider something bullying, and rather see such behaviour as 'normal'.

The more bullying that occurs, the more the threshold of what counts as bullying may rise, meaning that many forms of interaction that were previously considered bullying are no longer perceived as bullying at all (Hearn and Parkin 2001). Certain forms of bullying may instead be seen as 'harmless', 'deserved', or 'necessary', depending on the person(s) involved and how they are perceived. Responsibility may thus be transferred to the person(s) being bullied, who is then blamed for failing to fit in, and the bullying may even be portrayed in a positive light, as something that is in that person's best interests (Horton 2007b).

School Bullying and Teacher-Student Opposition

Despite the vast amount of research about school bullying, there has been relatively little written about the bullying of students by teachers or the bullying of teachers by students. Some researchers, however, have argued that teachers often bully students (James et al. 2008; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004), and that teachers are also often bullied by their students (James et al. 2008; Pervin and Turner 1998). The finding that students may bully their teachers illustrates that power is not held but rather that it is exercised strategically. Within schools, teachers and students are located within the same disciplinary framework (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Foucault 1991; Jardine 2005), and even though teachers are given authoritative positions from whence to conduct the conduct of the students under their charge, not all teachers are likely to command the same degree of respect from students.

Some teachers may struggle to maintain their authority. A teacher's perceived authority, or lack of, may determine the extent to which they are able to control student behaviour. Substitute teachers and those teachers who are new to the school may be more likely to be bullied because of their lack of knowledge of the class and/or their perceived lack of authority. The ways in which teachers manage their classes may have important implications for bullying. Ian Rivers, Neil Duncan, and Valerie Besag (2007), for example, suggest that the ways in which teachers do or do not respond to what is said and done in class sends messages to students about what is tolerable or not (see also Browne 1995). Likewise, Keith Sullivan, Mark Cleary, and Ginny Sullivan (2004) state that teaching styles utilised by teachers may promote bullying. They argue that overly permissive teaching styles may allow bullying to occur in schools and to continue unchecked. Likewise, they suggest that authoritarian teaching styles may not be too dissimilar to the interactions which characterise

bullying and may thus provide a model for such interactions (see also Browne 1995).

Yoneyama (1999) argues that there are two dimensions of teacher-student relations in Japanese schools which are directly relevant to school bullying. The first is the alienating quality of the relationship, which is built up through the use of non-dialogical teaching methods whereby students are expected to remain silent and listen to their teachers, and through teachers' focus on maintaining in-class order while ignoring the content of the disorder. The second is what Yoneyama (1999, 87) refers to as the 'dehumanising' treatment of students by teachers who yell at students, hit students, and who unfairly punish some students differently to others.

Both of the dimensions outlined by Yoneyama (1999) may serve to reinforce a teacher-student opposition within schools. Foucault (1982) points to a number of oppositions which exist within society and suggests that these are not merely anti-authority struggles but rather struggles against the effects of power relations. A particularly relevant opposition to school bullying and power relations is opposition to the power of teachers over students. The teacher-student opposition makes communication between teachers and students less likely and thus has direct implications for the ability of schools to effectively deal with bullying, as students may be reluctant to speak out about the bullying they are subjected to.

School Bullying and Silencing

Research suggests that students are often reluctant to report school bullying and that such reluctance becomes more pronounced the longer students are at school (Frisén, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson 2008; Novick and Isaacs 2010; Smith 2011; Smith and Shu 2000). Such reluctance is influenced by the ways in which teachers interact with students. Debra James et al. (2008), for example, found that students

are unlikely to tell teachers who bully students or teachers who are bullied by students, while Rona Atlas and Debra Pepler (2001) and Wendy Craig, Debra Pepler, and Rona Atlas (2000) likewise argue that students are unlikely to tell teachers who are perceived to be unwilling or unable to stop bullying. At the same time, teachers may be less likely to intervene if students do not report that bullying is occurring (Novick and Isaacs 2010).

Research has also found that teachers may also remain silent about bullying in their classes for fear that speaking out will negatively affect their own position as teachers, especially those teachers who are bullied by their students (James et al. 2008; Pervin and Turner 1998). School principals may also downplay the prevalence of bullying in their school in the knowledge that acknowledging the bullying may have negative implications for their school's reputation (Education 2008; Lightfoot 2007), and hence their own reputation as head of that school.

Such findings suggest that silence may be utilised in the exercise of both power and resistance (Foucault 1998; Hearn 2004). Silence may be utilised by those in a position to exercise more power in order to maintain the power relations wherein they themselves are positioned favourably. They may also even seek to silence those who might otherwise speak out, and in this way silencing may be a form of bullying which is used to enforce the silent complicity of others. Those who are bullied may remain silent about the bullying they are subjected to for fear of being targeted further for being the type who 'tattles', 'blabs', or 'squeals'.

School Bullying In Vietnam

Defining Vietnamese School Bullying (bat nat)

Bullying is often understood in terms of its actions, and is separated into different forms of bullying (such as physical/non-physical

bullying and direct/indirect bullying) which incorporate a wide range of actions. When teachers and students at Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools explained *bat nat*, they also suggested that it could take many forms, including teasing (*treu nhau*), hitting (*danh*), kicking (*cu da*), exclusion (*tay chay*), verbal abuse (*xi va*), and threatening (*de doa*).

A number of students and teachers also explained that *bat nat* involves using various actions (such as hitting, kicking, and threatening) to get someone else to do something they would not otherwise do. A Class 9B teacher, for example, explained that bullying is when “one student is not being fair to another in order to achieve a goal or attain power, to prove themselves to students.” Likewise a Class 9A teacher explained that bullying is “when one student can get people to do his will, can tease or hit and there is no reaction.” Indeed, this explanation was reinforced by a large number of students, who explained in the questionnaires that bullying involves “forcing others to do something they don’t want to do.”

These explanations allude to the power relations involved in bullying and suggest that the intention of bullying may not necessarily be to cause harm. A number of teachers and students also highlighted the disciplinary acts of power in school, suggesting that bullying may be used to circumvent disciplinary power, as a means of secondary adjustment. A Class 9B teacher, for example, gave the following example of bullying: “If he has to clean the blackboard, he’ll ask another student to do it in his place, or to take his bags home for him.” Likewise a Class 9A teacher explained that “bullying is when people ask classmates to do what is not suitable according to the rules, such as asking them to change seats.” A large number of students also wrote about ‘asking’ others to do particular tasks, but also suggested that the ability to ‘ask’ was related to size, strength, gender, and age. For example, one ninth grade girl at Du Hang School explained bullying in the following way: “notice that a girl is gentle, always ask to do this thing, that thing, keep asking, if she doesn’t she gets hit or cursed.” When I enquired whether asking someone to do something is

understood as bullying, a number of students explained that it begins with asking someone, but will escalate to shouting or hitting, for example, if that student refuses.

Some students and teachers also suggested that bullying may be used as a means of enforcing complicity. A Class 9B teacher, for example, alluded to the ability of the person bullying to enforce silence in the following example of bullying: “If he tells other students to do anything, they do it, and if he does anything wrong, they don’t tell on him.” Likewise, an eighth grade girl at Du Hang School illustrated the ability to enforce silence and linked this to the emotions that are evoked by bullying. She noted that bullying involves “distinguishing that makes the bullied lose self-confidence, lose their right, and become scared so they don’t talk.” Indeed, many of the students wrote about the feelings evoked by bullying, and suggested that bullying invokes fear, feelings of insecurity, lack of confidence, and timidity.

The Prevalence of Bullying in Du Hang and Pho Chieu Schools

In my questionnaires I asked students at both schools whether they had been bullied (see tables 3.1 and 3.2). I did this in an attempt to get a rough picture of whether bullying was perceived to be a problem in the two schools. At the beginning of my research it was unclear to me whether I would even find bullying in Vietnamese schools, so the questionnaires gave me a foundation upon which to further investigate what was going on in the schools.

TABLE 3.1: GIRLS' EXPERIENCES OF BEING BULLIED

	All the time	Everyday	More than once a week	Occasionally	Never
Grade 6 (N=124)	0	0	3.2	41.1	55.6
Grade 7 (N=92)	0	3.3	1.1	52.2	42.4
Grade 8 (N=121)	0	5.8	4.1	56.2	33.1
Grade 9 (N=122)	1.6	4.1	4.1	56.6	32.0

TABLE 3.2: BOYS' EXPERIENCES OF BEING BULLIED

	All the time	Everyday	More than once a week	Occasionally	Never
Grade 6 (N=106)	2.8	3.8	0.9	38.7	51.9
Grade 7 (N=99)	1.0	4.0	5.1	49.5	40.4
Grade 8 (N=110)	2.7	9.1	3.6	34.5	50.0
Grade 9 (N=132)	4.5	7.6	2.3	46.2	38.6

Taken together, these findings would seem to suggest that bullying is a large problem within the schools, with 56.8 percent of students reporting that they have been bullied. A higher percentage of students at Pho Chieu School (59.2 percent) reported being bullied than students at Du Hang School (55.0 percent). A higher percentage of girls (59.5) reported being bullied than boys (54.1), although more

boys reported being bullied in grades six and seven, and the frequency with which boys reported being bullied was significantly higher.

The problem of comparing questionnaire data is that the terminology used to refer to bullying may differ significantly (Smith et al. 2002). However, in order to provide some sort of idea as to the size of the problem in the two schools, it is useful to consider bullying prevalence findings from other countries. An international comparative study conducted across 28 countries in 1997-1998 found a wide range of prevalence. In Sweden, where least bullying was reported, 5.1 percent of girls and 6.3 percent of boys indicated they were bullied sometimes or weekly. In Lithuania, where the most bullying was reported, 38.2 percent of girls and 41.4 percent of boys indicated they were bullied sometimes or weekly (Due et al. 2005). While it is not possible to directly compare my findings with these international findings, it does highlight that 56.8 percent is a very high prevalence rate.

While more boys reported being bullied than girls in 26 of the 28 countries (Hungary and Russia being the exceptions), my findings suggest that girls are more commonly subjected to bullying than boys in the two schools. My findings also suggest that more bullying is reported in the later grades, especially amongst girls where there is a clear increase in the number reporting bullying from grades six to nine. Amongst boys, however, while there is a clear increase from grade six to grade nine, there is also a marked decrease from grade seven to grade eight. These findings are thus in contrast to some researchers' assertions that bullying decreases with age and 'maturity' (Rigby 2008, 37).

When considering who reports bullying others (see tables 3.3 and 3.4), my findings generally reinforce the finding that boys are more commonly involved in bullying others (Eriksson et al. 2002; Hanish and Guerra 2000; Ohsako 1997; Rigby 2008; Smithers 2004). While, in the ninth grade, more girls than boys reported bullying others, in all other grades more boys than girls reported being

involved in bullying. Boys also reported a significantly higher frequency of involvement in bullying their peers.

TABLE 3.3: GIRLS' EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING OTHERS

	All the time	Everyday	More than once a week	Occasionally	Never
Grade 6 (N=124)	0	1.6	0.8	20.2	75.0
Grade 7 (N=92)	4.3	1.1	2.2	42.4	50.0
Grade 8 (N=121)	0.8	1.7	2.5	28.1	63.6
Grade 9 (N=122)	0	1.6	3.3	43.4	50.8

TABLE 3.4: BOYS' EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING OTHERS

	All the time	Everyday	More than once a week	Occasionally	Never
Grade 6 (N=106)	0	3.8	0.9	22.6	67.0
Grade 7 (N=99)	3.0	6.1	1.0	45.5	43.4
Grade 8 (N=110)	4.5	4.5	2.7	27.3	58.2
Grade 9 (N=132)	4.5	6.1	3.0	32.6	52.3

However, this information about the reported prevalence of bullying is not enough in itself, and tells us very little about what is involved in the bullying. As I have illustrated above, the term *bat nat*,

which was used in the questionnaires, is not necessarily understood in the same way as how bullying has been explained in most of the literature about school bullying. It would thus be unwise to draw any conclusions from this data without first attempting to understand what is going on within these schools. If, as I have argued, power relations are central to understanding school bullying, then it is necessary to first of all consider the power relations within which the school bullying occurs.

Notes

¹ My translation.

² Foucault (1980b, 98) refers to this system of differentiations as a 'net-like organisation'.

Disciplinary Power and Schooling in Vietnam

Before considering in more detail the ways in which school bullying is imbued with power relations, it is necessary to first of all consider the specific relations of power which are invested in the two schools within which the bullying occurs. While the two schools are invested with relations of power, this is not to suggest that these power relations merely represent the successful enactment of any singular centralised plan. Rather, as this chapter will illustrate, the tactics and strategies that brought them into play were devised in response to local conditions and particular needs and gradually took shape over an extended period of time (Foucault 1980a, 2002b). As Jonathan London (2007, 2011a) has also pointed out, to understand schooling in contemporary Vietnam it is thus necessary to first of all consider Vietnam's educational history.

Schooling and Morality

Morality education has long been a central component of schooling in Vietnam, and the educational system has been reformed on numerous occasions in response to perceived moral challenges. Chinese domination of Vietnam (in what is today the Red River Delta) during the first to tenth centuries led to an increasing emphasis on Confucian morality, which was promoted through the teaching of Confucian classics (London 2011a; Marr 1981; SarDesai 2005). Following the expulsion of Chinese forces in 939, Vietnamese ruling dynasties

continued to promote the teaching of Confucian classics and to use Chinese inspired civil service examinations for the recruitment of students to administrative positions (London 2011a; SarDesai 2005).

Until the nineteenth century, formal education in Vietnam was dominated by an elitist and male-centred enrolment policy, whereby student enrolment was largely restricted to the sons of royalty and mandarins, and those boys considered to be especially ‘gifted’ (Huu Ngoc and Lady Borton 2003; Pham Minh Hac 2000; SarDesai 2005). These elite students were educated in state-run provincial schools, and enjoyed an elevated status because they were perceived to play “a vital role in the moral leadership and ideological formation of society” (Hy Van Luong 1992, 70). While the formal education system catered only to a small fraction of students, informal village schools followed the same formal curriculum and were also elitist and male dominated (London 2011b). Morality studies were central to this curriculum, and morality lessons constituted the first few months of studies (Huu Ngoc and Lady Borton 2003; Nguyen Thi Thu Ha 2010).

While some European missionary schools were already present in Vietnam in the eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century and French colonialism that any major changes occurred in the Vietnamese education system (London 2011a). Following the creation of the Cochin China colony in southern Vietnam in 1860, the French colonial government began establishing Franco-Vietnamese primary schools in 1861. With the later establishment of protectorates in Annam (central Vietnam) and Tonkin (northern Vietnam) in 1884, the number of Franco-Vietnamese schools in the country gradually increased until a more formalised Franco-Vietnamese school system was established in 1917 (London 2011a; Pham Minh Hac 2000). Schools teaching in Chinese were abolished and teaching was instead conducted in the Romanised Vietnamese language (*quoc ngu*) (London 2011a; Pham Minh Hac 2000). The Franco-Vietnamese school system was intended to further French colonialism by educating Vietnamese students to serve the colony without threatening

French colonial dominance, and the education system continued to be elitist for that purpose (London 2011a).

However, the exclusionary nature of the Franco-Vietnamese school system also served to exacerbate anti-colonial sentiment. In an attempt to quell such sentiment, the colonial government promoted formalised moral instruction, and incorporated increasing numbers of morality texts into the educational curriculum. However, the moral message being put forward in these texts was often mixed, as many of the texts were essentially translations of texts used in metropolitan France and contradicted the experiences of the Vietnamese students in the colony. The notions of 'liberty', 'equality', and 'fraternity', which were promoted in metropolitan France at the time, did not sit well with French colonial practices in Vietnam (Hy Van Luong 1992; London 2011a; Marr 1981). In putting forward such morality instruction, the French drew heavily on Confucian understandings of the five hierarchical relationships between superior and inferior: the ruler and the ruled, the father and the son, the husband and the wife, the elder brother and the younger brother, and between friends, one of whom is always older (Marr 1981; Rydstrom 2003). The French often portrayed France as a father/teacher, whose role it was to educate the Vietnamese son/student, who in turn should demonstrate gratitude and diligence (Marr 1981).

In an attempt to deal with the contradictions between colonisation and the promotion of morality, the French colonial education authorities expanded the official curriculum to include civics education in the 1930s. Moving beyond the five hierarchical relationships, civics education was designed to provide linkages between each individual citizen and the wider society (Marr 1981). Thus rather than a focus on the relationship between the teacher and student, for example, the focus shifted to the rights and responsibilities of individuals as citizens of colonial Vietnam.

Outside the official Franco-Vietnamese education system, education became increasingly central to the anti-colonial

independence struggle which was being led by a number of those few Vietnamese students who had succeeded in gaining a secondary education at one of the three secondary schools located in Hue, Hanoi, and Saigon (London 2011a). One of these students was Ho Chi Minh, who would later proclaim the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in 1945 as its President. Literacy and Marxist-Leninist ideology were promoted in clandestine schools during the independence struggle, as literacy was seen to be crucial for the spread of revolutionary morality (London 2011a; Marr 1981). On 3 September 1945, one day after the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, President Ho Chi Minh stated that education would be an integral part of the development of the nation, because as he put it, “an ignorant nation is a weak nation” (cited in Pham Minh Hac 1991, 28). Literacy training was thus made compulsory in the new republic, as it was perceived to be necessary for the development of socialist morality. Socialist morality was deemed to be crucial for the building of socialism, because as President Ho Chi Minh argued, “In building socialism, we first need socialist persons” (cited in Pham Minh Hac 1991, 42). This prioritisation of literacy training demanded that both males and females be educated, and thus partially sought to move beyond the Confucian prioritisation of males (Rydstrøm 2003).

The initial objectives of the education system and the subsequent education reforms in 1950, 1956 and 1981, reflect the political context within which they were implemented, and also highlight the role of education in governing the moral conduct of the populace. The first education reform in the DRV, in 1950, saw schooling expanded to incorporate nine grades (i.e. grades 1-9). This reform was implemented in the midst of the on-going war between the DRV and the French colonial power and was thus limited to those areas not under French control. Former education minister Pham Minh Hac (1991, 29) argues that the objective was “to educate the young generations to be citizens loyal to the Fatherland, qualified physically and morally to serve the country.” Loyalty was thus put forward as a

moral issue, and the role of education was to provide students with the necessary moral qualification for serving the country.

Following the end of French colonialism in northern Vietnam in 1954, a second education reform was introduced in 1956. This reform expanded schooling to ten grades, and had the following objectives:

To train and foster young people and children into all-round developed people, good citizens loyal to the Fatherland, good working people, good cadres, both talented and virtuous, to advance people's democracy, eventually to build socialism in our country and, at the same time, to achieve national reunification on the basis of independence and democracy (Pham Minh Hac 1991, 31).

Once again, the focus was on loyalty and socialist morality, and schooling was seen as a means to govern the moral development of students so as to be better positioned to advance the socialist cause.

The third education reform, in 1981, saw the addition of grades 11 and 12, and came six years after the end of the war between Vietnam and the US, and national reunification in 1975. The reform slogan was 'good teaching, good learning' (*day that tot, hoc that tot*), a slogan which still adorns school buildings across the country today (Tran Kieu 2002). National reunification was perceived to present particular moral challenges, and the education system was reformed in response to such challenges. There was a concern that the capitalist way of life under the American-backed regime in the south would also have a negative effect on the morality of the Vietnamese populace in the north (Blanc 2005; SarDesai 2005). Tran Kieu (2002, 14-15) argues that this reform thus regarded education as "part and parcel of the ideological and cultural revolution" and emphasised the importance of "forming modern and comprehensively developed citizens" (see also Achen and Rydstrøm 2006; Duggan 2001).

However, the debilitating effects of the war with the US, combined with Vietnam's military expenditure during conflicts with China and Cambodia in 1978-1979, the cessation of economic assistance from the Soviet Union, a US-embargo – which meant the Vietnamese government was unable to seek financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the Asian Development Bank – and a succession of natural disasters which destroyed food crops, together brought on a deteriorating economic situation and led the government to introduce a policy of *doi moi* (renovation) in 1986 (Hayton 2010; SarDesai 2005). *Doi moi* was introduced as a means of maintaining socialism while opening up the country to increasing marketisation (Rydstrøm 2003; Salomon and Vu Doan Ket 2007).

While the shift to *doi moi* has seen major improvements in the living standards of many Vietnamese citizens and an increasing array of job opportunities for those with the relevant qualifications, there has been a growing concern about the social consequences of *doi moi* with regard to the younger population (Hayton 2010; SarDesai 2005; Valentin 2007, 2008). In the early 1990s, the government established the Steering Committee on Elimination of Social Evils, and in December 1995 the government initiated a campaign against 'social evils' (*te nan xa hoi*) and 'poisonous culture' (*van hoa doc hai*). A vast array of social practices come under the label 'social evils', including prostitution, pornography, gambling, drug addiction, homosexuality, superstition, and violence, and participation in social evils is perceived to demonstrate 'polluted' morality. Much as was the case with perceived increasing levels of immoral behaviour following reunification, the rise of 'social evils' is often portrayed as being linked to increasing Western influence following Vietnam's opening up to the market economy (Horton and Rydstrom 2011; Koh 2001; Nguyen-vo Thu-huong 2008; Rydstrøm 2006b; SarDesai 2005).

More recently, considerable focus has been placed on the potentially deleterious effects of the internet on youth, as the internet

has become increasingly accessible in urban areas through the establishment of internet cafes, and increasingly popular with school aged children (Bui Hoai Son 2006; Ngo, Ross, and Ratliff 2008). The Vietnamese Ministry of Information and Communication has attempted to restrict access to sites deemed ‘unhealthy’ by installing a national firewall. This has recently included the blocking of the social networking site Facebook, amongst others, and, as research by OpenNet Initiative suggests, the sites most likely to be blocked are those with politically or religiously sensitive material rather than those with pornographic or violent content (Hayton 2010). Recently the Ministry of Information and Communication also ordered the closure of internet shops located within 200m of schools because of concerns over the numbers of school-aged children skipping school to play online games (*Vietnam News*, September 2, 2010), and instructed internet providers to block access to on-line games between the hours of 10pm and 8am in an attempt to reduce the amount of time children spend playing online games (*Vietnam News*, February 21, 2011).

Governmental concern about the potential moral pollution of the younger population has ensured that morality education has remained a central objective of the Vietnamese education system. Article 27.1 of the 2005 Education Law illustrates the centrality of morals to general education:

The objectives of general education are to help pupils develop comprehensively by acquiring morals, knowledge, physical health, aesthetic values and other basic skills, develop personal ability, flexibility and creativeness, with a view to forming the socialist Vietnamese personality, to building the civic conduct and duty, to preparing them for further studies or entering the work force, participating in the building and defending of the Fatherland (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005, 10).

In achieving such objectives, morality studies and civics education have remained central components of the school curriculum.

At the primary school level, students are required to attend morality studies as part of their timetabled curriculum, gaining instruction in how to conduct themselves in a good moral way. Primary school students aged 6-9 years who demonstrate moral and intellectual acumen may be selected as Small Star Pupils, while students aged 9-14 may be selected as members of the Pioneers' Organisation (*Doi Thieu Nien Tien Phong*). Young Pioneers are allocated red scarves to wear to make visible their achievement. The Pioneers' Organisation is affiliated to the Youth Union (*Hoi Thanh Nien*), which is a youth branch of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Hayton 2010; Madsen 2008; Rydstrøm 2003; Valentin 2007, 2008).

At the lower secondary level, students are required to attend civics education as part of their timetabled curriculum, and moral and intellectual acumen is rewarded with Pioneers' Organisation membership for those under 15, and Youth Union membership for those in their final year (i.e. grade 9) (Hayton 2010; Valentin 2007, 2008). However, while membership to the Youth Union is designed to be highly selective, as a means of selecting a moral vanguard made up of those who are capable of providing a good moral example, it seems that membership is increasingly offered to all youths. *Doi moi* has brought with it a flourishing of opportunities for youth leisure activities, which challenges the centrality of the Youth Union's organised activities (Valentin 2007).

While it is estimated that only 15 percent of Vietnamese youth are members of the Youth Union, the Youth Union appears to be relaxing its membership criteria in the hope of maintaining interest. This was made clear by the Youth Union Board when they began implementing revised membership criteria on October 1, 2010. From that date onwards anyone between the ages of 15 and 30 could be admitted to the Youth Union upon payment of a monthly fee of 2,000VND for non-salaried members and 5,000VND for salaried

members. While I was repeatedly assured by education officials at the time of my fieldwork that Youth Union membership was free and based on merit, whether in terms of grades, behaviour, and/or family background, for example, in class students were expected to pay 25,000 Vietnamese Dong (VND)¹ for their Youth Union badges and all students were expected to be members.

The Youth Union in each school is a smaller unit of the Youth Union at other levels, including the commune level, the district level, the provincial level, and the national level. The various Youth Union units appear to fit into each other much like a Russian nesting doll, with the national Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (*Doan Thanh Nien Cong San Ho Chi Minh*) providing the frontispiece. Schools are rated according not only to scholastic results but also to the morality of their students, and a school's ratings may be negatively impacted by low Youth Union membership as Youth Union membership remains synonymous with good moral character. Similarly, the rating of a class will be negatively affected by low Youth Union membership, with classes docked points for having students who lack membership. A class's rating in turn may reflect poorly on the teacher's ability to educate their students.

Teachers and Authority

Article 15 of the 2005 Education Law states that “Teachers play the decisive role in ensuring the quality of education” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005, 7). This decisive role stems from the perception of teachers as moral cultivators who are expected to have “good moral, mental and ideological qualifications” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005, 31). At school, teachers are expected to act as ‘bright moral examples’, and to help “form and nurture the personality, moral qualities, and abilities of the citizen” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1992). As Helle

Rydstrøm (2003) highlights at the primary school level, this perception of teachers as moral cultivators positions them in such a way as to also be able to instruct parents how to better morally educate their children. Children, in turn, are expected to respect their teachers, not only because of their perceived moral leadership but also because of notions of piety and the associated age-based hierarchy that entails (Hy Van Luong 1992; Rydstrøm 2002, 2003).

However, this is not to suggest that all teachers enjoy the same position of power in schools. Schooling is organised around a system of differentiations, not only between students and teachers, but also between the various teachers and staff who work within the schools. At the top of the organisational hierarchy is the school Principal, who essentially has the final say on matters of importance for the school as a whole. The Principal does not have much face-to-face interaction with students except for at school assemblies or special occasions. Immediately beneath the Principal in the hierarchy is the Vice-principal. The Vice-principal works with the Principal in administrative and organisational matters, but may also often work as a subject teacher. The Vice-principal at Pho Chieu School, for example, was also a subject teacher for Class 9B and students were generally well behaved during her lessons precisely because of her position of power.

Each class has a homeroom teacher, and only teachers who have taught at a school for at least a year are considered for positions as homeroom teacher. Students explained that they were better behaved in the presence of the homeroom teacher because the homeroom teacher has direct contact with both the school Principal and, perhaps more importantly, the students' parents. The homeroom teacher is also directly responsible for attendance, class grades, and class-related problems, and on numerous occasions the homeroom teacher would turn up unannounced to a rowdy class, instantly quietening the class merely with her presence. Indeed, whenever the homeroom teacher visited the classroom, students appeared to become

wary that they might get caught out. While misbehaving in class may lead to students being punished in terms of having their names noted down, being told to leave class, or being made to stand, misbehaving in the presence of the homeroom teacher appeared to more easily lead to students' parents becoming involved, by being called to school, or by the student being suspended or expelled. The change in student behaviour is thus indicative of the different status that teachers are afforded by students based on the perceived consequences of misbehaving in their presence. Sometimes teachers would ask the homeroom teacher for assistance with a rowdy class, as they were aware that the homeroom teacher's presence was often enough to quieten the class.

Generally students had a different teacher for each subject where possible, although some teachers in both classes 9A and 9B taught more than one subject because of a shortage of teaching staff. Some teachers did not appear to have much authority in the classrooms, especially those who were either new to the school or who were only filling in as a substitute for an absent teacher. This is partly because of their lack of knowledge of the classes and the particular student relations therein, which adversely affects these teachers' ability to survey the classes.

Techniques of Surveillance

Once in school, students were not free to leave the school premises and the school gates were locked during break time to ensure students did not leave. Both Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools were enclosed within walls and had one gated entrance/exit with a guard house attached, which students had to pass by on the way in and out of school. The architectural designs of the two schools also meant that while inside the school premises, students who were not in class during the designated class times were often very visible to staff. The

classroom buildings at both schools were located around the edges of the rectangular playground. Both schools were thus designed in a panoptic style and even when there was no teacher present, students were aware that they could get caught out if they did not maintain their vigilance. This did not mean that students did not behave differently when teachers were absent, but rather that they were vigilant when doing so, as they could never be sure of whether they would get caught ‘misbehaving’.

However, highlighting the ways in which the panoptic mechanism may be restricted, the architectural layout of the schools ensured that certain places were under less direct surveillance. Class 9B was located on the ground floor in the middle of the main teaching block and had large side windows and two double doors which were usually open. While this made it easy for anyone walking past to see what was happening inside the classroom, the inside of the classroom was not easily observable from afar. While the Panopticon was enclosed and designed so that each individual cell was illuminated by light coming through the outer window from outside (Foucault 1980a, 1991), the classrooms at both schools provided shade from the often strong sunlight outside (see photographs 4.1 and 4.2).

PHOTOGRAPH 4.1: CLASS 9A



PHOTOGRAPH 4.2: CLASS 9B



Class 9A was even less observable as it was located on the first floor and close to the corner of two teaching blocks. The Class 9A classroom also only had one door, and both the door and the windows

were smaller than those in Class 9B, and the classroom was thus somewhat more concealed from the surveillance of staff.

The canteens at the two schools were also differently located and thus subject to differing degrees of surveillance. At Du Hang School, a teaching block from an adjoining high school protruded between the canteen and the playground, meaning that to get to the canteen students had to go around the high school building and walk between that building and a teaching block used for music lessons and science laboratories. The path to the canteen was very narrow, as that was also where students' bicycles were parked (see Photograph 4.3).

PHOTOGRAPH 4.3: VIEW FROM DU HANG SCHOOL CANTEEN



The school canteen at Pho Chieu School, on the other hand, was at the back of the guardhouse and was much more open to the school playground and could thus be seen from other school buildings (see Photograph 4.4).

PHOTOGRAPH 4.4: PHO CHIEU SCHOOL CANTEEN



The students' toilet blocks at both schools were also subject to less surveillance than the classrooms or playgrounds. The student toilet block at Du Hang School was located behind a teaching block and to get to it, students had to go down a narrow passage passing between two teaching blocks. Similar to the school canteen, access in and out was also somewhat restricted by parked bicycles (see Photograph 4.5). The student toilet block at Pho Chieu School was also located behind a teaching block and was thus not directly visible (see Photograph 4.6). To see what was happening at the school toilets, teachers would have to walk behind the school buildings.

PHOTOGRAPH 4.5: TOILETS AT DU HANG SCHOOL



PHOTOGRAPH 4.6: TOILETS AT PHO CHIEU SCHOOL



The visibility of students was enhanced through the demand that all students wear uniforms, while boys and girls were easily distinguishable because of different requirements on appearance. Appearance was regulated at both schools, although much more strictly and consistently at Du Hang School, where regular checks were conducted not only by the homeroom teacher but also by a group of student teachers wearing red armbands who would visit the classrooms during civics education lessons and check whether students had tucked themselves in, whether they had the correct uniform, whether they were wearing their Youth Union badges, whether they were wearing cosmetics of any kind, and whether their hair and fingernails were cut.

Boys were required to keep their fingernails and hair short and would be threatened with having their fingernails or hair cut if they did not comply. This was not an empty threat, and on one occasion the homeroom teacher of Class 9A took three boys out of class and chopped off the back of their hair with a pair of scissors, having previously warned them to get their hair cut. The majority of girls, in contrast, had at least shoulder length hair as it was commonly considered unfeminine for females to have short hair. Such differentiation between the accepted norms of appearance for male and female students, and punishment for non-compliance, illustrates how disciplinary power is distinctly gendered (Gawlicz 2009).

Techniques of Control

Students were assigned to classes, within which they remained during their time at school. Students not only spent their time together with the same classmates but also, with the exception of some music and physical education classes, in the same classrooms. Students were also expected to follow a set timetable for each semester, stating when they should focus on which subjects. In an attempt to cope with large

increases in school attendance in the 1990s, teaching in schools began to be conducted in two separate shifts in order to accommodate the large number of students (Duggan 2001; Hamano 2008). At Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools, this meant that students in grades 8 and 9 attended school in the mornings from 7am until 11.15am and grades six and seven attended in the afternoons. The students were expected to attend school six days a week, from Monday to Saturday, and were expected to be in class ten minutes before the start of class. The students had five subjects a day, each allocated 45 minutes, with a 15 minute break between the second and third classes. For both classes, the curriculum was divided into 12 subjects (Literature, English, History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Technology, Physical Education, Art/Music, and Civics Education). At the beginning of my research at Pho Chieu School, the timetable for Class 9B (which was similar to Class 9A's timetable) consisted of the following curricular content:

TABLE 4.1: INITIAL TIMETABLE FOR CLASS 9B

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7.00	Form ²	PE ³	Art	PE	English	History
7.45	Literature	English	Physics	Maths	Biology	Literature
8.30						
8.45	Biology	English	Literature	Physics	Chem	Literature
9.30	History	Geog	Maths	Literature	Civics	Extra ⁴
10.15	Chem	Literature	Maths	Maths	Maths	Tech

Each stage of the timetable was announced by the use of a signal indicating which activity students should now be undertaking. At Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools, particular drum beats were used to indicate the beginning and the end of classes. Students were expected to have learnt the code of the signals and to respond appropriately to them. The signals also indicated to students when

they should prepare themselves to enter or leave. While both schools used drum beats as signals, Du Hang School's proximity to a neighbouring high school meant that students in Class 9A received advanced warning from a bell that rang at the neighbouring school five minutes before the drum beat.

The control of student conduct was enhanced through a system of disciplines that allowed school staff to know when a student was or was not in the classroom, and to control their ability to leave the classroom. The attendance for each class was written on the blackboard every morning, at the side of the blackboard closest to the door, and a staff member would then only have to walk past the classroom and note down the number of students in the role book to know how many were in attendance. Likewise students were obliged to ask permission from the teacher in order to leave the classroom for any reason. As Goffman (1991, 45) argues, writing about asylum inmates, "This obligation not only puts the individual in a submissive or suppliant role [...] but also opens up his line of action to interceptions by staff." Indeed, students were positioned as suppliant and were not free to come and go. Rather they were expected to gain the permission of teachers, who were afforded the authority to grant or refuse permission as they saw fit.

While there has been official recognition of the need to make changes to the teaching methods employed within classrooms across the country, Tran Kieu (2002, 71) argues that "for a long time, the teaching methodology at schools has remained imposed by teachers", which students are expected to 'learn by heart' (*hoc thuoc long*) (see also Achen and Rydstrøm 2006; Rydstrøm 2010; Rydstrøm 2003). Although President Ho Chi Minh was critical of teaching methods that promoted 'parrot-like' rote learning, and argued that students should be taught to relate what they learn to their everyday lives (Pham Minh Hac 2000), Le Van Tac (2000, 5) states that students are still seen as passive recipients of knowledge, which is to be passed on to them via teachers and textbooks:

In general the teaching methods are fixed and connected to the text in the textbooks that are provided by school authorities. Children are seen as passive recipients of knowledge, as an audience for the teacher's performance. School principals and teachers see the curriculum as a narrow statement of teaching and practice and very little or no individual initiative and creativity is possible.

Focus has tended to be on increasing the numbers of those enrolled rather than on educational practices within schools. In 2002, however, a new curriculum was introduced that involved not only revised curricular content, but also a revision of long-used teacher-centred teaching methods (Hamano 2008; Salomon and Vu Doan Ket 2007). This new curriculum involves a move away from rote learning to 'child-centred learning', whereby "the new curriculum places children, the learners, in the centre of the learning process" (Hamano 2008, 401). Rather than learning by heart, therefore, Tran Kieu (2002, 31) argues that "the educational methodology must bring into play pupil's activeness, self-discipline, initiative and creative thinking". This shift in focus is also illustrated by the challenges set out in the National Education for All Action Plan 2003-2015; one of which is the move from quantity to quality of education (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003). This shift away from non-dialogical teaching methods has also been enshrined in Article 5.2 of the 2005 Education Law:

Methods of education must bring into full play the activeness, the consciousness, the self-motivation, and the creative thinking of learners; foster the self-study ability, the practical ability, the learning eagerness and the will to advance forward (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005, 3).

Despite the numerous critiques of rote learning, curricular reforms, and the demands of the Education Law (Hamano 2008; Pham Minh Hac 2000; Tran Kieu 2002), rote learning remains the main method of teaching in Vietnamese schools and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (2006) has argued that there is a need to modernise education methods. Rote learning was the main method of teaching used in both classes and students were often tested on their ability to ‘learn by heart’ from their textbooks.⁵ Students were generally expected to sit still unless required to stand to answer the questions of teachers, and often when a student did not give the appropriate answer, they were told that their answer was incorrect and another student was asked to answer the same question. In this manner students were expected to behave in a ‘parrot-like’ fashion by repeating answers they had learned were correct. Students were also often made to remain standing if they failed to answer a question correctly and would be able to sit again once they answered a later question correctly.

The examination focus of the ninth grade makes it difficult for teachers to vary the subject content, and one teacher in Class 9A stated that while it was possible to go outside of the curriculum with some classes, it was virtually impossible with Class 9A as they had difficulty answering the questions from the text book. The large numbers of students in each class also meant that teachers often focused on the answers of one student while ignoring the rest of the students, who in turn became disinterested in the lesson being given. The disinterest of those students not being asked a question was probably also not helped by the lack of insulation in the classrooms, which meant that there was often a lot of noise from outside and from neighbouring classrooms, and when a student stood to speak, it was often difficult to hear what they were saying from the back of the classroom, meaning that many students may not have even heard the answer the student being asked was giving.

Reflecting the dominant form of teaching style used in the classes, both classrooms were arranged so that all students were facing the front of the classroom in rows of desks in three columns (see Photograph 4.7). The teacher's desk in each classroom was in the front corner of the room, opposite the main door to the classroom and the front of the classroom was raised up from the rest of the classroom, allowing teachers to look out over the students assembled before them.

PHOTOGRAPH 4.7: CLASSROOM LAYOUT



The assignment of seating was done by the homeroom teacher, and when students were assigned seats they were expected to continue sitting in their designated seats unless reassigned seats by the homeroom teacher. The seating arrangements generally reflected the perceived character of those students and were distinctly gendered. A teacher at Pho Chieu School, for example, explained that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ students were seated together so that the ‘good’ students could help the ‘bad’ students with their work. In practice, this usually meant that girls and boys were seated together, so that girls could help

control the behaviour of boys. This is highlighted in figures 4.1 and 4.2, showing the allocation of seating to males (M) and females (F).

FIGURE 4.1: INITIAL CLASSROOM LAYOUT FOR CLASS 9A⁶

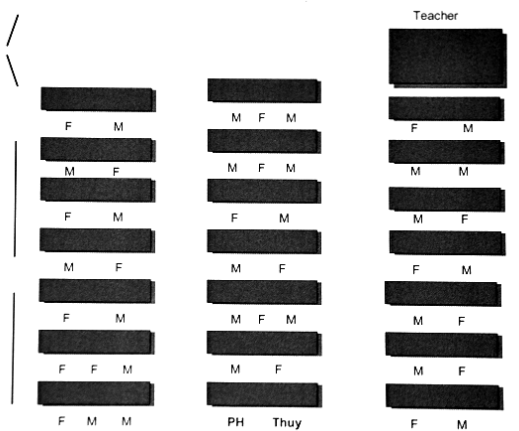
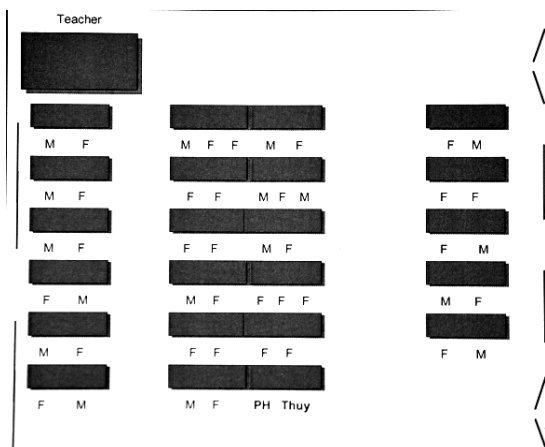


FIGURE 4.2: INITIAL CLASSROOM LAYOUT FOR CLASS 9B



Students and teachers told me that if boys were allowed to sit together they would misbehave more than if they were seated next to a girl. The perceptions of girls and boys in class are thus directly linked to the belief that girls and boys have inherently different characters, with males perceived as ‘hot’ (*nong*) and females perceived as ‘cool’ (*lanh*). This view stems from the belief that female and male bodies are linked with the complementary forces of *Am* (*Yin* in Chinese) and *Duong* (*Yang* in Chinese). Thus males and females are believed to have different bodily forces. While *Am* (and hence female bodily force) is associated with cold, passivity, and introversion, for example, *Duong* (and hence male bodily force) is associated with heat, activity, and extroversion (Rydstrøm 2003, 2004, 2006a). Boys are thus expected to be naughty, mischievous, active and hard to control, while girls are expected to be gentle, obedient, sweet, and easy to control. This has implications for how boys and girls are dealt with by teachers, because as Rydstrøm (2003, 130) argues, “If a little boy shows disobedience, he will not necessarily be scolded or punished. A girl who does not show obedience is another matter altogether.”

Some students were afforded positions of power within their class, and each class had one class monitor and one vice monitor, all of whom were girls. Class monitors, and vice-monitors when the monitor was absent, carried out a number of class-related tasks at the behest of teachers: reporting attendance and absences to the homeroom teacher; checking students’ appearance and Youth Union badges; checking students’ books and bags; reading aloud for other students to copy down; taking charge of the class when the teacher was not there; collecting sick notes; running various errands for the teacher; and even disciplining fellow students when the teacher was absent, either by writing instructions on the blackboard, verbally warning students, or by writing down the names of offending students on the blackboard or in the teachers’ book. Teachers also sometimes asked class monitors for their opinions about other students’

appropriateness for certain competitions and about the behaviour of particular students.

Each class was also split into groups, which were designed to make it easier for teachers to manage and monitor the conduct of students. There were six groups in Class 9A and four groups in Class 9B, the composition of which were decided by the homeroom teacher. Each group was assigned a group leader, all ten of whom were girls. One of the class monitors and both vice-monitors were also group leaders, and the group leaders had a number of responsibilities in the class. Group leaders were expected to comment on the behaviour of students in their group and each group leader had a book which had to be filled in with the following details: the number of the student, the student's name, the name of the exercise, whether they raised their hand in class, their appearance, their marks, other comments, their total mark, their moral rank, and their numerical rank in the class.

Normalisation

Students were graded in class according to a ten point system, wherein 10 was the top mark possible, 7-10 was considered a good mark, and 5 was a pass. Often lessons began with students being selected by the teacher to stand at the front and have their homework notebooks checked. This meant that the entire class was aware of how each student was doing. Students were also sometimes asked to evaluate the performance of their classmates, which sometimes led to arguments between students or to students praising or mocking some students about their marks. As a boy in Rydstrøm's study (2006a, 343) highlights this may lead to some students being bullied because they are seen to be struggling scholastically: "They also bully me because I don't study so well and get bad marks."

The education system has long had a very competitive focus, as highlighted by the annual Olympiads that have been a feature of the

educational landscape since the Ministry of Education introduced them in the 1962-1963 school year (Tran Kieu 2002). Those students who were to compete in the Olympiads were those deemed to be particularly ‘gifted’ in particular subjects, which at the time of my fieldwork included the various sciences, mathematics, literature and English, which were deemed more important subjects (Duggan 2001; Pham Minh Hac 1991). The designation of ‘gifted’ students was institutionalised in 1981, when the third educational reform introduced specific classes for ‘gifted’ and ‘disabled’ students for the first time (Tran Kieu 2002, 15). As already mentioned, Class 9B was a selected class, and a teacher at Pho Chieu School told me that the school’s best teachers were selected to teach Class 9B to ensure the level was maintained. While there is no entrance examination for lower secondary schooling, students are streamed into lower secondary school classes based on their grades from primary school, and their results at lower secondary school determine where and whether they attend upper secondary school. While lower secondary school students are streamed according to their results at primary school, the allocation of teachers to the different classes ensures that distinctions between the classes are maintained. Many students in both classes were worried about their forthcoming upper secondary school entrance examinations and teachers stressed the importance of their results to their futures. However, while students in Class 9B were concerned about which school or class they would be in at upper secondary school, many students in Class 9A were concerned about whether they would even get into upper secondary school.

Pressure to succeed scholastically has meant that students’ parents are willing to pay more money to send their children to extra tuition (London 2011a, 2011b; Madsen 2008). The 2005 Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY) found that 78 percent of urban youths (aged 14-21) in Vietnam had received extra tuition outside of regular school hours, and suggests that reasons for such high levels “could include the improved economic situation of

families, increased pressure and competition to succeed at school, the quality of student performance and tutoring as a de-facto salary for teachers” (Ministry of Health 2005, 30). Extra tuition, while officially optional, was perceived to be obligatory by the students because the tuition was seen to be necessary if they hoped to do well in, or pass, their upper secondary school entrance examinations (see also London 2011b; Madsen 2008). In class, it was noticeable that some students sometimes struggled because they had missed the extra tuition where the exercise had been explained more thoroughly.

Some students may not be able to attend extra tuition because of work commitments or other commitments within the home, such as child care. This may mean that students from more financially secure households may be more able to attend such tuition, while boys may also be more able to attend than girls, as girls are more likely to be required to do work in the home when help is needed, especially if they are perceived to be struggling scholastically (Bélanger and Liu 2004; Nguyen Phuong L. 2006; Oxfam GB, UNICEF, and Save the Children Alliance 1998). As Bélanger and Liu (2004, 24) argue, “research on child labour points to the substantially higher proportion of girls working, compared to boys, and to the fact that working girls are more likely to exceed 42 h per week than boys” (see also Oxfam GB, UNICEF, and Save the Children Alliance 1998).⁷

Punishment

The teacher’s need to meet the demands of the examination-based curriculum, combined with a teaching form that promotes inattention amongst large numbers of students in the classroom has obvious implications for in-class bullying. As Simmons (2002, 34) suggests, “Like an emergency room doctor, the teacher must perform triage on her discipline problems. Disruptions are met on the fly and met with swift punishment.” Punishments used by teachers ranged from getting

students to clean the blackboard, taking away their Youth Union badges, sending them out of class, writing their names on the blackboard or in the teacher's notebook (which was checked by the homeroom teacher and sometimes the Principal), making them stand up and answer questions, calling their parents, suspension, and expulsion. The homeroom teacher of Class 9A also introduced a series of fines for disciplining students, the money for which was to be used for paying for the class end of year picnic. The following fines were introduced: moving out of seat without permission (2,000VND), truancy (5,000VND), not tucking in shirt (5,000VND), not doing homework (10,000VND), group leaders protecting friends (10,000VND), and dancing in class (50,000VND).⁸ During my final month in Class 9A, there were numerous negotiations between students and the homeroom teacher, as some students could clearly not afford the sum they were being told to pay. One boy, for example, disputed the class monitor's claim that he owed 50,000 VND (approximately US\$2.50), and instead insisted that he only owed 5,000 VND.

Some teachers at both schools also used corporal punishment in disciplining students, something which was apparent on the first day of my observations at Du Hang School when a student in Class 9A asked me whether teachers at my school ever hit students. I observed varying degrees of corporal punishment used by teachers at both schools, including hitting students over the head with their school books, slapping them on the head or face, pulling their hair, pinching them, and twisting their ears. Discussions with a number of teachers and students confirmed that teachers were teaching their classes differently because of my presence. Teachers explained that they refrained from being as strict as they normally were because they feared that I would expose that corporal punishment was being used. The 2005 Education Law does not explicitly prohibit the use of corporal punishment, but it does state in Article 75.1 that teachers are forbidden to "Disrespect the honour, dignity of learners, hurt or abuse

them physically” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005, 32). That teachers were quite open about their use of corporal punishment perhaps partially reflects the argument put forward by Save the Children Sweden (2006, 86) that “corporal punishment is accepted at all levels of society [in Vietnam].”

When teachers have been interviewed about their reasons for administering corporal punishment to students in Vietnamese schools, frustration and pressure have been put forward as explanations. A history teacher from Ho Chi Minh City, interviewed by a newspaper reporter about why teachers corporally punish their students, reasoned that “Sometimes, classes are noisy like a market ... The classroom is so cramped and hot. The teacher is tired from too much work and worries about daily life. You know, no one can be sweet at such times” (Vietnamnet 2009). During my observations, all incidents of corporal punishment were directed at male students. This suggests that while girls may be punished more readily than boys for perceived infractions, boys may be subjected to corporal punishment more readily than girls. While both male and female teachers administered corporal punishment to boys, students in Class 9A stated that their only male teacher at that time was the teacher who most readily hit students. Corporal punishment may thus be gendered both in terms of who is punished and in terms of who administers such punishment. As Rydström (2006, 334) states, “Bringing up boys by using physical punishment epitomizes patrilineally structured ideas about male power.” Through the use of the corporal punishment of boys, teachers not only differentiate between girls and boys but also reinforce notions about the appropriateness of violence in particular situations.

Disciplinary Power, Resistance, and Bullying

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the disciplinary acts of power that are central to the functioning of the two schools, and thus

provide the context for this particular study of school bullying and power relations. However, it is necessary to realise that just because disciplinary acts of power are exercised within schools, this does not mean that those subjected to them do not resist. Techniques of surveillance, control and normalisation do not necessarily succeed in their intended aims, but rather may be distorted in the interplay of power relations. If, as I argued in the previous chapter, power is neither inherently positive nor negative but rather a medium of change, and where there is power, there is also resistance, then it is necessary to consider in more depth precisely how students exercise resistance, and how such resistance (as a form of power) is also used to govern the conduct of others. In particular it is necessary to consider how the ways in which students adjust themselves to the disciplines of schooling may take the form of bullying.

If, as I suggested in the previous chapter, bullying in the Vietnamese context often involves the use of various negative actions, and the threat of such actions, in order to get someone to do something they would not otherwise do, then it is necessary to consider in more depth what things those being bullied are made to do and how this relates to the disciplinary acts of power within schools. This is the focus of the following chapter.

Notes

¹ Approximately US\$1.25.

² Form class was every Monday and was taken by the homeroom teacher, and dealt with practical issues such as money collection, competitions, examinations etc. Often, however, it was used as an extra lesson to teach either literature or mathematics.

³ Physical education classes.

⁴ 'Extracurricular' lesson was often used as an extra mathematics or literature lesson.

⁵ Some teachers did have different teaching styles, and one teacher at Pho Chieu School, in particular, was considerably more dialogical in her teaching style and appeared to have less disciplinary problems as a result.

⁶ The seating positions of my interpreter (Thuy) and I (PH) are in bold.

⁷ This is in contrast to findings about *paid* work, which suggest little gender difference (Ministry of Health 2005).

⁸ It is unclear to me why dancing in class was included as a punishable offence. I never witnessed anyone dancing during class, although the extent of the fine suggests that it had occurred and was perceived to be very disruptive.

School Bullying and Disciplinary Power

The majority of research that has focused specifically on the issue of school bullying has tended to underestimate the importance played by the educational context within which school bullying occurs (Espelage and Swearer 2003; Horton 2007a, 2011; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). It is within school that school bullying occurs, and it is thus necessary when analysing the intersections between school bullying and power relations to consider the role played by the disciplinary power invested in schools. The ways in which students' use of space and time is governed within schools, and the ways in which students are evaluated through normalising practices, place a great deal of pressure on students to adhere to spatial and timetabled demands and to live up to the norms according to which they are judged. In dealing with such pressure students may develop various strategies, wherein bullying may gain currency.

Moving beyond the categorisation of those involved in bullying as particular types, this chapter considers in more depth the interplay between disciplinary power and bullying strategies. As I will illustrate, rather than merely consisting of negative acts intended to cause harm, bullying may provide the means by which students strategically adjust to the demands of schooling, and through which they attempt to break up the monotony of their daily schooled lives. The resistance of those who are subjected to bullying may also be strategically calculated so as to reduce the extent to which they are hit, kicked, teased, and so on.

Moving beyond Individual Typologies

The majority of school bullying researchers have tended to categorise those students who are subjected to bullying as either provocative or passive victims (Carney and Merrell 2001; Olweus 1993, 2003; Pikas 1989; Smokowski and Kopasz 2005; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004). Provocative victims are understood to have provoked the bullying through their own socially inappropriate behaviour and are believed to account for roughly fifteen to twenty percent of all victims (Carney and Merrell 2001; Olweus 2003; Tattum 1993). Passive victims, on the other hand, are said to account for the majority of victims and are understood not to have done anything to provoke the bullying they endure but rather are believed to be targeted because of their perceived weakness and submissiveness (Carney and Merrell 2001; Halse 1993; Olweus 1993; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004).

However, the majority of school bullying researchers have tended to restrict their understanding of the power relations involved in bullying to the interpersonal level. This has meant that a simplistic link has often been made between intentions and effects, because if the majority of students who are subjected to bullying are understood not to have done anything to provoke the bullying they are subjected to, then the bullying must logically be the result of the 'proactive' aggression of those doing the bullying. The students doing the bullying have thus been cast as proactively aggressive or evil-minded individuals whose intention is to injure or otherwise cause harm to those they are bullying (Carney and Merrell 2001; Espelage and Swearer 2003; Larsson 2003; Olweus 1993; Smokowski and Kopasz 2005; Tattum 1993). As some school bullying researchers (Duncan 1999; Galloway and Roland 2004; Yoneyama and Naito 2003) have also noted, anti-bullying initiatives have thus tended to be focused on changing the behaviour of those who bully, or on the bystanders who allow it to occur, rather than on addressing the broader context of schooling. The school often tends to disappear into the background,

and becomes little more than the setting within which school bullying occurs.

Within their definitions of bullying, researchers have included direct physical acts such as hitting, kicking, biting, and scratching; direct non-physical acts such as teasing, name-calling, and threatening; and indirect non-physical acts such as gossiping, note passing, and exclusion (Olweus 1993; Rigby, Smith, and Pepler 2004; Smith 2011; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004). Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan (2004) suggest that damage to property and theft can also be understood as forms of bullying, while Tattum (1993) includes extortion as a form of bullying. The inclusion of extortion as a form of bullying is notable in that it hints at a different kind of intention. It is unlikely that someone extorts money or school supplies from someone else with the sole intention of making them feel bad. Rather, it may constitute a form of ‘servicing’ (Mahony 1985, 50), which refers to some students getting other students to service their needs, whether in terms of giving them money, going to the school canteen for them, providing them with paper, books, stationery or answers to examinations and tests, or doing their chores or homework for them.

If a central component of school bullying in the Vietnamese school context, as it was explained to me by students and teachers, is getting someone to do something they would not otherwise do, then servicing would appear to be a quite clear form of bullying. If this is the case, then it is perhaps not surprising that those who are most often bullied are those who are perceived to be weak or submissive, as there is no-one easier to get to do something they otherwise would not do than those who offer little in the way of retaliation. A number of students at both Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools explained that bullying is usually directed at those who are ‘meek’ (*hien lanh*). In an interview with a group of girls from Class 9B, for example, one of the girls told me that “bullying is when those who are bad bully those who are meek.” Indeed, when explaining what would happen to someone who refused to do someone’s bidding, even after being hit for

example, a number of students explained that then the bullying would be directed at someone who would not retaliate.

Students' suggestions that those who are 'meek' are bullied precisely because they will not retaliate would appear at first glance to be in line with the passive victim typology often put forward by school bullying researchers. However, those students who are bullied may not *be* meek but rather meekness may be a strategy whereby they do what they are told in order to avoid being hit, kicked, teased, or gossiped about, for example. Likewise, the intention of those doing the bullying may actually be incongruent with the effects felt by those being bullied. To understand the intention behind the bullying, it is necessary to understand what it is that some students are made to do that they would otherwise not do. In order to understand the importance of such actions, however, it is first of all necessary to consider the disciplinary context of schooling within which such bullying interactions take place and wherein they gain currency.

Disciplinary Power and Bullying Strategies

As I have outlined in the previous chapter, disciplinary power is utilised within Vietnamese schools in order to train students into well-rounded individuals with the attributes that are perceived to be necessary for advancing the Vietnamese government's goals for the nation (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005). Disciplinary power operates not by merely punitively punishing the conduct of students after they have already transgressed, but rather by seeking to conduct the very conduct of students. Through the disciplinary use of space and time, schools seek to control where students should be, when they should be there, with whom they should be there, and what they should be doing while there.

Normalising techniques are central to the disciplinary power of schools, as it is according to certain pre-established norms that the

training of students is measured. Students are measured in terms of their deviance from such norms through the use of examinations, tests, homework assignments, in-class exercises, and the incentive to speak when directly asked a question by a teacher. The marks that students are given for their performances in such assessments are considered especially important in the ninth grade precisely because they contribute to determining where, and in some cases whether, those students go on to attend upper secondary school. Such assessments are thus potentially highly stress-laden.

A number of researchers have made direct links between stress and school bullying, suggesting that school bullying may not necessarily be 'proactive' aggression but may actually be 'reactive' (Taki 2001a, 2001b; Tam and Taki 2007; Terefe and Mengistu 1997; Yoneyama 1999; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). However, as Yoneyama (1999) and Yoneyama and Naito (2003) also argue, the links between stress and bullying can only be understood in connection with the disciplinary power of schooling. The disciplinary allocation of space and time means that students themselves have very little say over how their daily schooled lives are structured and students are thus restricted in their ability to relieve the stress associated with schooling. Bullying may provide a means by which some students are able to strategically adjust to the demands of schooling and in doing so make it a less disciplined place to be.

Absenteeism

As I have discussed in previous chapters, the panoptic mechanism of schools is designed to make those enclosed within the boundaries of the schools permanently visible and instantly recognisable. If the panoptic mechanism functioned perfectly, bullying would most likely not occur within schools. This is because a central component of the Panopticon is the partitioning off of individuals from one another

(Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Foucault 1980a, 1991). Students would not have any contact with their peers and would only be visible to the person overseeing their activities. Within schools, however, students are not separated from one another but rather spend a great deal of time in close proximity to large numbers of other students. In Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools, half-day schooling meant that students were expected to spend the vast majority of their time at school within the classroom under the direct surveillance of a teacher.

Some students resisted the demand that they spend their time in the classroom by skipping class and sneaking off to spaces of the school outside the disciplinary gaze of teachers, such as the school toilets and the school canteen, which were effectively blind spots in the panoptic mechanism. Despite the number of students present in class being written on the blackboard every morning, I often noted that the number on the board was different to the actual number of students in the classroom. However, the large number of students made it difficult for some teachers to tell if someone was missing a particular lesson. Some students managed to skip entire days unnoticed by getting the student responsible for writing the number of students on the board to include them in the figure. While some students may have willingly helped to cover for their truanting classmates, others may have been bullied into doing so with the threat of punishment for non-compliance.

The Du Hang School canteen was a popular place for some students to go when skipping class precisely because of the lack of teacher surveillance there. The popularity of the canteen and the lack of teacher surveillance were apparent one Saturday morning when I took the opportunity to leave class while Class 9A was having a literature test. I walked down the stairwell from the first floor to the playground. The playground was deserted and as I walked across it the security guard gave me a wave from his seat at the other end of the school yard. I walked around the corner between the main teaching block and an adjacent building, heading towards the school canteen.

As I walked around the corner, I heard a boy exclaim “oh my God!” (“*oi gioi oi!*”). I had just stumbled across a game of football being played during class time. There were six boys involved, who, after a moment of hesitation, resumed jostling with one another, vying for the ball and at the same time expansively dominating the space at the base of a stairwell, outside the currently unused music room, and at the start of the path to the school canteen, which led between two rows of bicycles.

Shopping at the School Canteen

The Du Hang School canteen was not only a popular place during lesson time but also during break time. Students only had one 15-minute break per day and some students appeared to attempt to maximise the time allocated to them. For some students this involved going to spaces outside the disciplinary gaze of teachers, such as the school canteen, while for others it involved spending the break in and around the classroom while getting other students to do things for them that they did not want to spend their break time doing themselves. Some students argued that the school canteen was a safe place to spend breaks because of the lack of teacher surveillance. As one girl in Class 9A explained, “There is no teacher there so it is safe.”

However, the Du Hang School canteen was also considered unsafe for those students who feared being targeted. One boy from Class 9A, Hoan, for example, explained that teachers never went to the Du Hang School canteen and that conflicts often occurred there. The absence of teachers thus meant that it could be unsafe for those students who were perceived as meek as they risked being targeted out of sight of school staff. As one girl in Class 9B explained, certain spaces were considered unsafe by some students precisely because of the risk of being targeted:

When they are so meek that it's easy for them to be bullied, then they are scared of going into places where particular students are because they don't feel safe there. Because particular students usually go there and when they see the meek students they really want to bully them.

While a number of school bullying researchers have found that bullying most often occurs in those spaces of schooling that are outside the disciplinary gaze of teachers (Behre, Astor, and Meyer 2001; Matusova 1997; Olweus 1993; Stoudt 2006), the research that such findings are based on has tended to rely on questionnaire findings using a term (i.e. bullying) that is most commonly understood to consist of actions such as teasing, gossiping, hitting, and kicking. However, bullying may sometimes involve getting some students to enter those spaces where they are more likely to be hit, kicked and teased in order to circumvent the disciplinary techniques of surveillance and control which are designed to manage students' use of space and time at school. Thus the bullying itself may begin in an area of the school (i.e. in or around the classroom) under the most direct surveillance of teachers.

Hoan, who told me about the risks associated with going to the canteen, often got another boy in Class 9A, Minh, to go to the canteen to buy things for him. During one break, for example, I observed Hoan take 5,000 VND out of the wallet that Minh was carrying in his pocket and tell Minh to go and buy his breakfast from the canteen for him. This occurred outside the classroom door, and when I later asked Hoan to explain what I had observed, he told me that it was his wallet but that Minh carried it for him. Students were not allowed to carry much money, and certain students were periodically searched as they were suspected of stealing. Minh, however, was not likely to be searched by the homeroom teacher and thus by getting Minh to carry his wallet for him, Hoan was able to circumvent the homeroom

teacher's regulation about carrying money. Hoan was thus able to bring his wallet into school and even if he was searched in class, the teacher would not find any money on his person.

Hoan made Minh carry his wallet as he thought that Minh was too meek to refuse. Indeed, Hoan told me that "it's easy to ask him for help. He may be afraid that if he doesn't go [to the canteen] he'll get hit." Hoan told me that his classmates had been bullying Minh for a long time and explained that "everyone in the class hits Minh, but he doesn't dare to hit back. If he hit someone, they would hit back at once."

When I asked Minh to explain what I had observed, he told me that he carried Hoan's wallet at school so that the homeroom teacher would not find it if she searched Hoan. However, while Minh explained that he carried Hoan's wallet so that Hoan would not get searched, it was apparent that Minh was quite scared of Hoan. Furthermore, Hoan was not the only student to get Minh to go to the canteen for him. On one occasion, I observed a girl in Class 9A, Chi, hand Minh 2,000 VND and tell him to go to the canteen and buy something for her. Minh initially refused, but then Chi yelled at him and threatened to hit him, and he then went.

While Minh went to the canteen for Hoan and Chi to avoid being hit by them, he also went to the canteen for students who could offer him some degree of protection from being hit by other students. As Minh explained:

For example if Chau [the female class monitor] asks me to go and buy something for her, if big guys like Luong or fat Lam want to hit me, Chau will say "leave him alone! Let him go and buy things for me, hurry up!"

A number of students, including Chau, told me that Chau's nickname was 'elephant' (*voi*), which referred to her large frame, as she was larger than most of her classmates. Her size appeared to make others

in the class wary of her, and Chau told me that in earlier grades she had hit some of the boys in her class. While she told me that she no longer hit boys for fear of getting hit back, she also said that they were afraid of getting hit by her. “You can ask anyone, the boys are also afraid of me, the boys in this class are nothing.” In contrast, Minh was one of the smallest students in the class and Chau suggested that Minh was bullied because he was so small and did not dare to retaliate. If Minh went to the canteen for Chau, she would thus provide a form of protection by intervening to stop other students from hitting Minh.

By getting Minh to go to the canteen for them, Hoan, Chi and Chau increased the likelihood of Minh being targeted, as every time Minh went to the canteen he had to run the gauntlet between the bikes parked on either side of the path, out of view of school staff. While going to the canteen was risk-laden, however, the risk was less immediate than the punishment that would be meted out by his classmates and Minh may therefore have decided that going to the canteen was preferable to being hit by his classmates. As Hoan highlighted, any attempt by Minh to retaliate by hitting back would most likely lead to him being hit even more. Indeed, when I asked another boy in Class 9A, Quan, what would happen if Minh retaliated by hitting people back, he said that “the whole class would join in and start hitting him.”

Rather than simply understanding Hoan, Chi, and Chau’s bullying of Minh as proactive aggression intended to cause harm, their bullying of Minh can be understood as a strategy through which they adjusted to the disciplinary techniques of surveillance and control by getting Minh to go to the school canteen for them. Not only were they themselves then able to avoid any potential risk associated with going to an area of the school with little surveillance, they were also able to maximise their fifteen minute break time, which otherwise would have largely been spent going to and from the school canteen.

Removal Activities

In both schools, the classroom was the space where students were timetabled to spend the majority of their time. The time that students spend in the classroom is supposed to be useful time, which students use for learning the lessons they are taught by their teachers (Foucault 1991; Jardine 2005). It is in classrooms that students are under the most constant surveillance of teachers and where student interactions are most subject to techniques of control. In both Class 9A and Class 9B, students were generally expected to sit still, to concentrate on the lessons being taught, and were expected not to talk unless invited to do so by the teacher. Despite critiques of ‘parrot-like’ learning, the prevalent teaching method used in both classrooms was a form of ‘banking’ education, whereby the knowledge the students were supposed to learn was deposited into them, as if they were but empty receptacles (Freire 1974, 72; see also Dewey [1907] 2010; Freire and Shor 1987; Shor 1997). Students were not expected to question the knowledge proffered but were rather expected to be able to ‘learn by heart’ (*hoc thuoc long*) (Achen and Rydstrøm 2006). Much of the permitted talking in the classroom was done by the teacher, and a number of teachers spent a large amount of time reading exercises aloud for students to write down. In Class 9A, the class monitor was also sometimes instructed to read the exercises aloud at the teacher’s behest.

This dominant non-dialogical form of teaching was accompanied by an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) communication pattern whereby the teacher would initiate the teacher-student exchange by asking a particular student to stand and answer a question about, or recite, something they had been taught, to which the student was expected to respond so that the teacher could then evaluate the extent to which learning had occurred (Heath 1983). During these teacher-student IRE exchanges, those students not engaged by the teacher were expected to sit quietly, concentrating

either on what was being said or on their own work, which they were expected to get on with without interacting with those around them. Despite sitting in a room full of their peers, students were thus expected to behave as if they were in isolation and many students were expected to remain silent for entire lessons (Jackson 1991).

In an attempt to gauge to what extent some students were included in lessons by teachers more than others, I noted down the number of times students in each class were asked to stand and answer questions over a ten day period. I found that teachers usually selected particular students to answer their questions, while other students were expected to spend the lesson in silence and were thus partially excluded from learning. One student in Class 9A was not asked to answer a single question during that ten day period, while eleven students were called upon less than five times. The class monitor of Class 9A, in contrast, was asked to answer 90 questions, or 14 percent of the questions asked during that ten day period. In Class 9B, three students were not asked to answer a single question during the ten day period, while twenty-three students were called upon less than five times. The class monitor of Class 9B was asked to answer 51 questions, or 13 percent of the questions asked during that ten day period. In general, those students who were asked questions most often appeared to be asked based on their perceived ability to answer the questions, as a form of rewarding their attainment of knowledge and to serve as an example to the others, whereas students who were caught misbehaving in class would be asked a question as a means of disciplining them.

The IRE communication pattern is especially ill-suited to large class sizes, as it means that large numbers of students are not engaged in the exchange and may become bored as a result (Blatchford, Edmonds, and Martin 2003). Indeed, one effect of the dominant banking style of teaching and IRE communication pattern was boredom, and sleeping was a common occurrence in both classes. Teachers would sometimes walk around the class waking students up

by physically raising their heads from their desks, or by slapping them on the back of the head or on the face. Some students were probably tired from working at home in the mornings before school while others had evening jobs. In combination with extra tuition in the afternoons and evenings, this made for a long day for many students. On one occasion, a Class 9A teacher commented on the low energy level in Class 9A, to which some students responded by arguing that it is because they have to go to school so early and do not have time to eat breakfast. However, student engagement tended to differ significantly according to which subject they were being taught and which teacher was teaching it. Two girls in Class 9A, for example, told me that they enjoyed science but not literature and that they thus always felt sleepy in literature lessons.

Whenever students were expected to write down what the teacher, or the class monitor, was reading aloud, it soon became apparent that many students had stopped writing altogether. As Thuy (my assistant) highlights in her field notes from Class 9B:

The teacher is reading out loud and a lot of students are fed up with writing it down. Tuyet and Huyen are lying on their desk. Huyen seems to be sleeping soundly. Yen is bored with the lesson. She isn't writing it down anymore. She asked me whether I have any stories or anything to read. I said no, so she asked Dao, who also said no. Yen said "so boring".

Yen's search for something to read illustrates how in-class boredom may encourage students to engage in 'removal' activities (Goffman 1991, 67), which provide a measure of entertainment in an otherwise boring lesson. Indeed, while some students slept during lessons, others engaged in a multitude of removal activities, including playing noughts and crosses, listening to music on their mp3 players, reading the student magazine (*hoa hoc tro*) or Japanese *manga* comic books, drawing, making origami, throwing paper planes, flicking rubber

bands, note passing, and hitting, slapping, pinching or kicking one another. Some removal activities took the form of verbal sabotage, such as singing, teasing, gossiping, or otherwise talking, which makes it more difficult for the teacher to teach in a didactic manner as it interrupts the verbal transfer of knowledge (Freire and Shor 1987). It was noticeable that the noise level in the classes increased whenever a teacher was writing on the board with their back to the class, as at those moments the teacher was unable to see who the cause of the verbal disruption was.

Bullying may provide a form of removal activity as it may provide a form of entertainment in an otherwise boring lesson, involving plenty of drama and allowing for the potential involvement of numerous people. Such a finding is supported by the findings of researchers in other countries (Blatchford, Edmonds, and Martin 2003; Hamarus and Kaikkonen 2008; Hansen and Christensen 2003; Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000b; Willer and Hansen 2004; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). A teacher's insistence that students sit quietly may merely add to the entertainment value of in-class bullying, because as Raewyn Connell (2000, 135) puts it, "trouble has its attractions and may be courted."

Teacher-designated Seating

Large class sizes meant that it was often not possible for teachers to see what was occurring in the classrooms or to recognise who was involved. In order to better facilitate teacher surveillance and control of students in class, students were allocated seats according to teacher-designated seating plans. Teacher-designated seating plans facilitate the techniques of surveillance and control which allow teachers to more readily control student behaviour in the classroom by designating where particular students should be seated and with whom. The allocation of seating enhances teachers' ability to see what

is happening within classrooms, as they are able to find a particular student amongst a crowd of students by looking to the seat that student was allocated. The allocation of seating also enhances teachers' ability to control the behaviour of students within classrooms, as it allows teachers to seat some students next to students who may assist them or help control their in-class behaviour, and enables teachers to control the extent to which students are able to communicate with their friends and to engage in removal activities.

Students were expected to face the front of the classroom where the teacher's desk was located, and the homeroom teacher of each class decided in which particular seat each student should be seated. When students were assigned seats they were expected to continue sitting in their designated seats unless reassigned seats by the homeroom teacher. Students in Class 9A often attempted to influence the homeroom teacher's seating plans by verbally making suggestions about where they should be moved, in the hope of being able to sit next to friends or to avoid being seated next to someone they did not like. Such attempts highlight the importance of seating to students and illustrate how students in schools normally do not have any input into decisions about the classmates they will be spending the majority of their time with (Yoneyama and Naito 2003). However, the extent to which someone is bullied may depend upon which classmates they are assigned and which students they are expected to sit beside in class (Schott 2009).

At the beginning of my fieldwork at Du Hang School, Minh was seated next to a girl called Dao, and it was common to see Dao hitting Minh in class. During one lesson, for example, I observed an episode which began with Minh making fun of Dao. Dao responded by slapping Minh in the face, pushing him off the end of the bench and onto the floor, and then pinching him hard in the back, causing him to squeal. Minh tried to get back onto the bench three times, but each time Dao pushed him back onto the floor. The third time, Minh hurt his leg when he fell, and sat on the classroom floor rubbing it.

The teacher noticed that Minh was sitting on the floor and told him to stand up and remain standing; a common form of punishment in both classes. Minh's leg was obviously sore, and he continued rubbing it. When the teacher was not looking, Minh slapped Dao on the shoulder, and Dao responded by poking Minh in his sore leg. Minh, in turn responded by verbally provoking Dao, who each time responded by targeting Minh's sore leg, until she eventually appeared to have given him a dead leg.

What is interesting to note is that while Minh may have initiated the interaction, Dao certainly had the upper hand. The teacher responded by reprimanding Minh, who was most visible in the interaction, and who was also the boy in the interaction. The belief that the characters of boys and girls are inherently different (Rydström 1998, 2003, 2004) generally meant that girls were seated next to boys in the hope that they would help control the behaviour of boys, and it appeared to be generally assumed that if anything happened between a boy and a girl, it was usually because of the boy's 'hot' character, especially by those teachers who were new to the class or substitute teachers who were only covering for an absent teacher. The teacher had not been at the school very long and did not know the students very well. If she had understood the classroom dynamics, she would have known that Minh was often bullied by his classmates and was often hit by Dao.

When writing about provocative victims, some researchers have alluded to the school context, although without elaborating on its importance. Olweus (1993), for example, suggests that provocative victims may have problems with concentration. During my time in Class 9A I very rarely saw Minh doing the class work he was supposed to be doing and he told me that he could not do the exercises. While Minh certainly did not concentrate on the lessons being taught, his lack of concentration may have been promoted by teaching methods which did not engage him in any meaningful way. I never once observed a teacher helping Minh with his exercises and

also do not recall Minh being asked to answer any lesson-related questions by teachers.

Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan (2004) suggest that provocative victims may invite the bullying they are subjected to because it offers some form of attention which they might not otherwise get. Minh told me that he did not have any friends and that his teasing of Dao was “just for fun.” Indeed, provoking Dao in class may have provided Minh with some form of removal activity, while Dao may have likewise pushed, pinched, poked and slapped Minh as a means of alleviating the boredom of lessons wherein students are expected to remain silent and still unless explicitly asked to stand up and answer a question by the teacher.

During my second month in the class, the homeroom teacher moved Minh so that he would no longer be sitting next to Dao, but rather in the corner of the classroom next to Chau, the class monitor. Chau explained that this was in the hope that Minh would study better and get bullied less. Minh told me that he was happy with this arrangement because Chau did not hit him like other students and was also often busy doing other things for the homeroom teacher, which meant that Minh often had the desk to himself. The homeroom teacher recognised that she had made a mistake seating Minh and Dao together, and by moving Minh illustrated how seating can have a direct impact on the well-being of students in classrooms.

Negotiations involved in seating arrangements may also bring about bullying. Minh, for example, told me that the bullying to which he was subjected began when his mother had intervened to stop the teacher seating him in a particular group in the class. Minh explained that when he had earlier been seated in that group other students in the group had not let him do his work and his grades had suffered as a result. Minh explained that two of the students in the group had not been happy about his refusal to swap seats and had begun to bully him as a result. This had since escalated and a number of students in the class had since begun bullying Minh. The mother’s reasoning not to

allow Minh to be seated in that group was obviously well-intentioned. However, it seems that Minh's mother's refusal to allow him to move seats, in the hope that his grades would not deteriorate, had been a factor in the subsequent bullying that Minh was subjected to.

Seat Swapping

While students are expected to remain in the seats allocated to them, students did not always adhere to their seating allocation and often swapped seats, especially when they had a substitute teacher who did not know their names or faces. Not knowing the names or faces of the students in the classroom renders teacher-designated seating plans impotent, a fact which students appeared to recognise and use to their advantage. When a student decides to move seats to sit next to another student in the classroom, this usually also entails another student moving seats to accommodate such a change. That student must either give up their seat and thus become implicated in the seat swapping, or resist the request/demand to swap. Refusing to swap seats and conforming to the official demands of the teacher may put that student in opposition to the student(s) wanting to swap. In line with the way bullying was explained to me, forcing someone to swap seats thus constitutes a form of bullying whereby refusal to swap seats is likely to be met with teasing or hitting, for example.

When I was leaving Class 9A at the end of school one day, I noticed a girl called Hien wiping tears away from her eyes with the sleeve of her school blouse. Uyen, the vice-monitor, was standing next to Hien, obviously trying to console her, when I walked over and asked what had happened. While Hien did not appear willing to tell me, Uyen explained that a boy called Van had promised to give money to another boy, Tuan, if he successfully managed to make Hien cry by the end of the day. By continuously taunting Hien throughout the lesson, Tuan had succeeded in reducing a normally quiet and

studious girl to tears. The taunting had occurred during a lesson, with all three students sitting directly in front of the teacher in the middle of the front row. Hien was allocated the seat between Van and Tuan, and as a girl she was expected to utilise her 'cool' character to control Van and Tuan's 'hot' characters (Rydstrøm 1998, 2003, 2004). However, despite teacher designated seating arrangements, Tuan often made Hien swap seats so that he and Van could sit next to each other. It was while sitting in these unauthorised positions that Van had offered to pay Tuan to make Hien cry. This did not appear to be an isolated incident. As Hien explained, "I can't stand it, they pull my chair, my arms, my hair, they don't let me study; they just like to sit and tease me." Likewise when I interviewed Tuan, he explained that "I tease her excessively, until she cries. I sit and tease her. Van and I sit together and Van asks me to tease her. Hien is gentle and easy to make cry."

Hien was perceived to be overly gentle, and hence easy to upset. She was also perceived to be something of an outsider in the class because she never socialised with the other students outside of school and appeared to spend all of her time in class concentrating on her studies. Hien had the responsibility for opening up the classroom in the mornings and was therefore the first student in class each day. Most mornings before class and during the break, Hien could be found sitting quietly at her desk, usually alone. One girl in Class 9A, My, told me that Hien spent her time studying because she had no-one to play with and thus had nothing else to do. Hien never retaliated when teased or when Tuan pulled her hair or arms, but rather attempted to avoid Tuan. However, teacher designated seating arrangements made this impossible, and in one lesson, for example, I observed Tuan repeatedly moving closer to Hien only for her to move away from him each time, until she was sitting right on the edge of the bench. Hien did not tell the teacher about what had happened, and Van and Tuan continued sitting next to each other until the homeroom teacher noticed that Tuan and Hien had swapped seats and separated Van and

Tuan by assigning Tuan a new seat. In doing so, the homeroom teacher, perhaps unknowingly, stopped the bullying Hien was being subjected to.

The bullying of Hien illustrates the ways in which bullying may be used by some students to resist the disciplinary use of space and time. By making Hien swap seats, Van and Tuan were able to challenge the teacher's disciplinary use of space and were thus able to easier communicate with one another during lessons. It was such communication that facilitated the further bullying of Hien. Making Hien cry provided a form of removal activity for Van and Tuan, whereby Hien was forced to provide them with in-class entertainment. Hien was thus made to engage with Van and Tuan, something which she otherwise appeared reluctant to do.

Sharing

The disciplinary use of space and time means that students are supposed to remain seated and are expected not to collaborate with their classmates unless explicitly told to do so. This means that every student is required to have the necessary books and stationery for completing the assigned school work. However, the majority of students in the two classes did not have the full set of required books and stationery. The stress caused by demands to perform scholastically may lead students to bully others by demanding that they service them with the necessary answers to pass assessments or with books and stationery so that they can answer the exercises and the questions posed by the teacher.

Teachers sometimes conducted random checks to ensure that all the students had the necessary books and school supplies, and these checks were always characterised by a flurry of activity as students attempted to clandestinely pass, throw, or slide books and stationery to

their classmates after having already been checked themselves. As Thuy noted in her field notes:

The Homeroom teacher is checking their stationery because the Maths teacher met her and informed her that “he finds it very hard to teach in the trigonometry lesson”. Thien asked Thanh “hey Thanh, hey Thanh, do you have two erasers?” Chinh is asking for Thien’s pen because the teacher has already checked Thien’s stationery.

In this way, students adjusted themselves to the demands that they have a certain amount of books and stationery by colluding with one another through the sharing of supplies. On occasions when neither student at a desk had the necessary supplies, they would either not be able to follow the lesson or would attempt to borrow, take, or buy someone else’s. During one Class 9A music lesson, for example, Quan bought a music book from a girl in the class, paying more than the normal price (10,000 VND instead of 7,000 VND). Quan often appeared not to have the required books, and he was suspended from school for a week and instructed to apologise to Minh’s parents after having taken Minh’s textbook home without permission.

During tests, students in both classes were often reminded that they were not allowed to talk or look at other students’ answers. However, many students obviously perceived it to be necessary if they were to pass the test. Certain students were thus regularly asked to share their answers with some of their classmates during tests, meaning that they themselves had less than the allocated time in which to do the required work. During a 15 minute English test, for example, neither Quan nor the girl next to him, Thanh, had the necessary book. Towards the end of the test, Thanh got the answers from a girl in the row in front of them and then borrowed a book from a girl who had finished so that she could check the answers, which Quan then copied from her.

Yoneyama (1999, 170) argues that one of the reasons often given by students for bullying in Japan is that the victims were “selfish, egotistical, [or] self-centred”. The same appeared to be true in the context of Class 9A and Class 9B, and one of the justifications students in Class 9A and Class 9B gave for why some students were bullied was that they refused to share. When I asked a group of girls in Class 9B, for example, whether anyone in their class deserved to be bullied, a number of the girls said that Tuyet deserved to be bullied because she did not share with other students. One girl, Huyen, gave an example of Tuyet’s refusal to share with her:

I wanted to borrow her coloured pencil and to borrow an eraser, but she wouldn’t lend them to me. Oh my God. I borrowed her coloured pencil and then she looked round and searched for it and screamed out. She searched for her coloured pencil and then asked me ‘why do you always take my things?’

While not sharing is put forward as a justification for bullying, forcing others to share can be understood as a form of bullying in itself, and some students may not feel able to refuse demands to share. Minh, who was often called upon to service some of his classmates by going to the canteen for them, was also expected to service them with paper or stationery, and did not appear to be able to refuse, as doing so meant risking being hit, as highlighted during one lesson in Class 9A when Minh was targeted by three other students because he refused to service them with writing paper. Just as the lesson was starting, Tai threw his jacket over Minh’s head and hit it hard with open palm a number of times. This appeared to cause Minh to cry. A girl sitting behind Minh then grabbed hold of Minh’s coat, while another boy, Chin, threatened him verbally. Minh was still crying, but wiped his eyes, took a notebook out of his bag, tore out some pages and gave them to Tai and Chin.

This example illustrates how hitting and threatening, for example, may be used to bully someone into doing something they are otherwise unwilling to do. Servicing itself may thus be understood as a form of bullying whereby some students are forced to service their classmates, with the threat of being hit or teased used to ensure compliance. The intention behind such bullying may be less about causing harm than about successfully adjusting to the demands of schooling and the normalising gaze under which students are judged according to certain criteria. Those students who refuse to service other students and hence facilitate their secondary adjustments may be hit, teased or taunted, for example. Such actions may be used in order to sanction non-complicity and thus to bully those who refuse to comply into changing their behaviour.

Note Passing

In getting around the demands that students remain silent and do not move out of their designated seats, a number of girls in both classes engaged in note passing. Indeed, in both classes I noted that a clandestine postal service was in operation and that it was predominantly used by girls. When I asked a group of girls from Class 9A why they wrote things down on paper rather than just saying them aloud, the class monitor, Chau, replied that it was “because in the classroom we are not allowed to talk.” Another girl, Dao, explained that seating arrangements also often made it necessary to pass notes:

If we are sitting far from each other, we can't just talk without doing it loudly so it is not convenient, so we have to write things on paper. If you speak you have to be careful or else the teacher may make you stand up and ask you about what you said.

As Chau highlights, teachers generally expected students to sit quietly in class unless asked to stand and answer a question posed by the teacher. Furthermore, as Dao explains, students were expected to remain in their designated seats unless given permission by the teacher to move. The risk of getting caught speaking in class thus meant that note passing was utilised as a form of secondary adjustment whereby students could communicate without the teacher hearing. As a girl from Class 9B, Loan, explained, “[My friends] are sitting so far from me so I have to use notes to contact them. If I need to borrow a pen from them, I have to write to them.”

However, the regularity of note passing was not the same in the two classrooms, with much more note passing observable in Class 9B than Class 9A. The prevalence of note passing thus appeared to be directly linked to the class’s perceived status. Class 9B’s status as a ‘selected’ class meant that greater expectations about in-class behaviour were demanded of students, as they were expected to be able to govern themselves, while Class 9A was often characterised by a cacophony of student voices around which teachers navigated and over which they attempted to teach. In Class 9A, notes generally seemed to be written about more secretive issues that girls did not want the rest of the class to know about, while non-secretive issues often tended to be volleyed verbally across the classroom. In Class 9B, students were expected to be more diligent in their studies and thus any form of verbal communication risked being punished by the teacher.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, girls were generally expected to control not only their own behaviour but also to help control the rowdy behaviour of boys, as evidenced by boy-girl seating arrangements and by the fact that both class monitors, both vice monitors, and all ten group leaders were girls. I asked a group of girls from Class 9A whether they ever passed notes to boys, but they said that while they may ask boys to pass on notes, they do not send notes to them. As Valerie Hey (1997) has also argued, note passing

appeared to facilitate girls' attempts to get around their teachers' gendered expectations about the different characters of boys and girls.

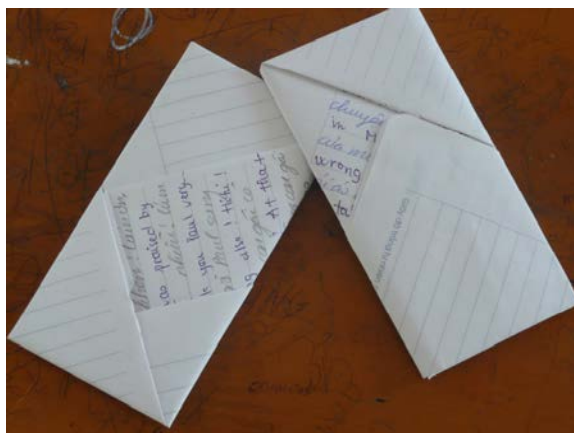
The regularity with which notes were passed around the classrooms suggests that a significant amount of daily communication between girls occurred through the medium of note writing. While some notes consisted of single commentaries, it was common to see the same scrap of paper travelling back and forth between the same two girls a number of times, with each girl replying to what the other had written. Chau, the class monitor of Class 9A, suggested that this form of note exchange acted like a diary of the students' day, showing what they had been engaged with that day. Indeed, a number of girls explained that the content of notes could be about almost anything, suggesting that note passing was used as a strategy by girls to get around demands that they keep quiet in class.

Some notes were sent long distances across the classrooms. Some students simply wrote notes on pieces of paper before screwing them up and throwing them across the room, while some folded them in the form of paper airplanes and flew them across the room. Most commonly, however, notes were passed by hand from student to student, with students waiting until the teacher was not looking to pass a note on to the next student. This sometimes involved a large number of students, and on one occasion I noted seven students involved in the passing of a single note. Note passing not only involved those writing the notes, therefore, but also other students who acted as couriers. While Hey (1997, 59) suggests that boys would not be "able, or indeed interested" in cooperating in the passing of notes, my own findings illustrate that boys are indeed often involved in the passing of notes. However, boys did appear to use the threat of not passing on a note as a way of teasing and provoking girls, and on a number of occasions in Class 9B I observed boys pretending that they were not going to pass a note on. While I never observed an episode where a student did not forward a note, on one occasion a girl did state her irritation at being continually asked to forward notes for Loan. Loan

responded by passing her notes via someone else. I asked a group of girls what would happen if someone decided to keep a note instead of passing it on, and they stated that it was necessary to “watch them”, and Dao said that opening a note that was destined for someone else would lead to retaliation: “If they open and read a note, they will obviously get a sandal in the face.”

Confidentiality was an issue, and girls were not only worried that other students might read their notes but that they might also be read by teachers. Notes were thus sent in various guises. While some notes were written on the outside of folded pieces of paper, other notes were folded in half a number of times so as to conceal the contents of the writing inside. Some notes were elaborately folded in an origami style so as to not only prevent others from reading the note but also to ensure that if they did they would not be able to refold the note (see Photograph 5.1).

PHOTOGRAPH 5.1: ORIGAMI-STYLE NOTES¹



As Loan explained, only a few students were capable of folding notes in this way:

In my class, there are only two or three people who know how to fold notes like this. This ensures that the note cannot be easily opened. Only the right person can open it. People who want to read it cannot read it without permission.

When writing about someone, Loan and her friends also utilised a form of coded language. As Loan explained, “For example, if we want to write about someone, we don’t use their name but rather call her something that everyone knows.” When some notes were finished, girls would rip them into small pieces so that they would not be found and read by someone later.

Note passing has obvious implications for the ability of teachers to deal with bullying, especially if, as research suggests, girls most commonly bully indirectly (Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000a, 2000b; Simmons 2002; Smith and Brain 2000; Tam and Taki 2007). Highlighting the extent to which in-class relations may be transferred into written form, one girl in Class 9B, Tram, elaborated about an incident that occurred in class when a misunderstanding escalated to the point of her being excluded by her friends. Having been told by her parents that she needed to get an average of 9 out of 10 in her class work if she wanted to stay at the same school as her friends, she reacted to being told that she got 8.8 in a test by saying out loud “the more you study the more stupid you are”. Her friend sitting next to her assumed she was speaking to her and reacted by saying “how can you say that!?” and then went and told their other friends what Tram had said. Those friends then later sent a note forward to Tram asking “Did you insult her? Why did you do that? No matter how you are feeling you must not insult her.”

Tram reacted by screwing up the note and throwing it back to them. One of the girls confronted Tram in the break about what she had said, but Tram refused to talk to her. During the next lesson, however, Tram wrote a new note apologising to her friends, but her wording merely served to infuriate them further. Tram wrote “Now, I

apologise to you all. It's up to you whether you forgive me or not. Whatever." They in turn responded by writing a longer note, wherein they stated that they would no longer be friends with Tram. Tram was excluded by her friends because of her perceived unwillingness to apologise for insulting one of the girls. The threat of exclusion was thus wielded in an attempt to get Tram to do something (i.e. apologise) she otherwise appeared unwilling to do.

While many school bullying researchers have argued that non-physical and indirect forms of bullying are more pervasive amongst girls (Owens, Shute, and Slee 2000a, 2000b; Simmons 2002; Tam and Taki 2007), little consideration has been given to the ways in which the behaviour of boys and girls is disciplined within schools. The use of note passing by girls illustrates how girls may adjust themselves to demands about their use of time and space as well as expectations about the 'normal' behaviour of girls in classrooms. That some girls use less direct strategies for bullying says more about the gendered nature of disciplinary power than it does about those girls' inherent 'relational' tendencies.

Indeed, this episode illustrates the importance of the educational context within which the bullying took place. The stress associated with assessment-related demands and the pressure from parents for their children to succeed framed the interaction. Tram's parents' expectation that Tram get an average of at least 9 out of 10 led to Tram's initial outburst while her friend's reaction to Tram's comment also highlights the pressure caused by being under a constant normalising gaze. The transferral of the disagreement to note form was strategic in that the girls were then able to admonish Tram and subsequently inform her of her exclusion from the friendship group without attracting the attention of teachers who might otherwise punish them for verbally disrupting the lesson.

Class Monitors

Large class sizes, curricular demands and obligations outside the classroom mean that it is not possible for teachers to see everything that is going on in the classroom. It is for this reason that teachers use some students as ‘relays’ in their attempts to maintain order and govern the conduct of students in class (Foucault 1991, 174). Relay positions are afforded to group leaders, vice-monitors, and monitors, who are then expected to relay information about their classmates to the teacher. Class monitors in particular are delegated a substantial degree of authority to discipline their classmates, and a group of students at a private school I visited in Hanoi told me that class monitors are known as ‘hunting dogs’ (*cho san*) because they are perceived to be hunting on the behalf of teachers.

Class monitors are selected based on their perceived exemplary morality, and class monitors are thus expected to act as moral examples to their classmates. The class monitors of Class 9A and Class 9B were both members of the Youth Union and were also both girls, highlighting the extent to which female and male students are often perceived to be ‘good’ and ‘bad’ students respectively. When students in the classes failed to do something they had been instructed to do, or when they misbehaved while the teacher was absent, the blame was often placed on the class monitor for failing to remind students or for failing to control their conduct. The expectation that class monitors should help monitor and conduct the behaviour of other students in their class positions many of them in a difficult position where they are caught between loyalty to their fellow classmates and the expectations that come with being a class monitor. As the class monitor of Class 9A, Chau, explained:

For example, the teacher might ask me to go to the board and write the names of classmates who made noise. If I write them, I have to write all of them. If I don’t write the names of classmates

I like, I'll be told off immediately. But if I write their names, they will get annoyed. And if something happens in class and the teacher asks about it, I'm dead if I tell her and dead if I don't.

Chau appeared to be popular amongst her classmates because, as her comment above illustrates, she only appeared to report misbehaviour when directly instructed to do so. I would suggest that this is a key reason why she was perceived much better by her classmates than the class monitor of Class 9B was perceived by her classmates.

The class monitor of Class 9B, Le, appeared to take the role of class monitor very seriously and one day she even went so far as to reprimand Thuy for talking to students in class. Le told me that being a class monitor had a number of advantages, including gaining the trust of teachers, who she said would tell her gossip about other students in the class, and allowing her to participate in more school activities and to establish relations with people that could be "very useful for later life". However, she also explained that her position as class monitor caused her problems with her classmates, who resented her for telling the teacher when they misbehaved. She said that they would then tease her and gossip about her behind her back. This appeared to happen often and Le suggested that this had had an adverse effect on her school life.

Unlike Chau, who appeared reluctant to tell the teacher when her classmates were misbehaving, Le appeared to embrace the role of class monitor and the perks that came with the role. What is more, she appeared to try to keep a friendly demeanour, despite then reporting those students at whom she was earlier smiling. In this way she was thought to be two faced (*hai mat*) and fake (*gia tao*) and she was teased by other girls in the class for this reason. As one girl told me, "I always curse her right to her face, all the time, but she keeps on smiling." The teasing and gossiping that Le was subjected to in school can be understood as a form of bullying whereby other students sought to reduce her apparent willingness to 'hunt' for the teacher and

in doing so make it easier for them to get around the disciplinary power of schooling.

School Bullying and Disciplinary Power

Understanding the power relations involved in school bullying requires an understanding of the educational context within which the bullying occurs. The power relations that are central to school bullying cannot be understood in isolation from the relations of power that are invested in schools. As I have illustrated, bullying provides a means by which students are able to strategically adjust to the demands of schooling by getting some students to do things that they would not otherwise be willing to do. Rather than understanding those doing the bullying as evil-minded, they can instead be understood as school students who engage in a variety of strategies for navigating the demands of schooling, some of which take the form of bullying.

Taking a more relational view of power means acknowledging that individuals do not hold power, but rather that they exercise both power and resistance in strategic situations. In bullying other students, those doing the bullying not only exercise power over the students they are bullying but also exercise resistance to the disciplinary power invested in schools, wherein students are subjected to techniques of surveillance, control, and normalisation. While bullying may involve various actions such as hitting, kicking and teasing, it would be erroneous to understand bullying purely in terms of such actions. Rather than beginning with the assumption that bullying is intentionally aggressive and focusing on which actions constitute bullying, it is perhaps more fruitful to start with the assumption that bullying can involve any number of actions which are used to force someone into doing something they would otherwise not be willing to do. Understanding bullying in this way brings the context of the bullying (i.e. the school) into sharp focus as rather than the focus

being on the actions involved, the focus is instead on those things that those students who are bullied are forced to do. Rather than trying to understand which types of individuals bully, therefore, it becomes necessary to ask why some students bully.

Understanding bullying as strategic, rather than pathological, raises questions about how bullying should be addressed. While it is no doubt easier to focus on the behaviour of the individuals who bully, such a piecemeal approach to dealing with bullying fails to address the power relations within which bullying gains currency. As I will illustrate in the following chapter, addressing the educational context of bullying has implications not only for students but also for the teachers who are afforded the responsibility for controlling the conduct of students in schools.

Notes

¹ The notes in the photograph were sent to me with every second line left blank so that Thuy could translate them into English for me.

6

School Bullying and Teacher-Student Opposition

When considering the interconnectedness of bullying and power relations within schools, it is important to keep in mind that it is largely teachers who are responsible for the exercise of disciplinary power. This is important, not because teachers should be simplistically blamed for failing to stop the bullying that occurs, but rather because of the opposition that is built up between teachers and students which teachers must negotiate in their dealings with students. Teachers are often considered the most important individuals in dealing with bullying as they are believed to have the power to affect change in their schools. However, while teachers are in positions to exercise more power than students, this does not mean that teachers hold power, or that they are outside of power relations. In school, both teachers and students are located within the same operations of disciplinary power and the ways in which teachers and students interact, therefore, are influenced by the disciplinary school structure (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Foucault 1980a, 1991; Jardine 2005; Yoneyama 1999). It is thus necessary to consider the ways in which teachers interact with students, not merely as interactions between individuals, but as interactions influenced by and connected to the exercise of disciplinary power.

As I will illustrate in this chapter, teachers utilise various disciplinary techniques in trying to successfully meet the demands placed on them as educators. These same disciplinary techniques serve to reinforce a teacher-student opposition within schools, around which

teachers must navigate through the use of various strategies. Despite the best intentions of teachers, the strategies that teachers use to navigate the demands placed on them as educators and the potential opposition of students can take various forms and may lead to some teachers being bullied by their students, to some teachers being unable to prevent the bullying of students, or even to some teachers bullying their students.

Considering the Role of Teachers

Despite the extensive amount of research on the issue of school bullying, few researchers have specifically examined the bullying that occurs between teachers and students (James et al. 2008), or the ways in which teachers deal with cases of bullying when confronted with them (Bauman, Rigby, and Hoppa 2008; Rigby and Bauman 2010). Even when anti-bullying programmes advocate a whole-school approach to dealing with bullying, the focus tends to be on changing the relations between students rather than the relations between teachers and students (James et al. 2008; Pervin and Turner 1998; Sharp and Smith 1993). However, findings suggest that teachers themselves are often bullied by their students (James et al. 2008; Pervin and Turner 1998) and that teachers also often bully students (James et al. 2008; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004). Such findings illustrate that bullying not only occurs between students but also between students and teachers. Some researchers have also made links between the in-class behaviour of teachers and classroom climate, suggesting that teacher behaviour directly influences whether or not bullying is likely to occur (Browne 1995; James et al. 2008; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004).

As I have already argued in previous chapters, researchers have tended to treat the school as the ‘setting’ for school bullying without

adequately considering how schooling is related to the bullying that occurs. Likewise, few researchers have adequately considered the position of teachers in schools and the pressures and demands they face as educators within the educational framework within which they work. This is important because even with the best of intentions teachers may feel compelled to utilise disciplinary strategies which encourage bullying because of the demands on them to control their classes and to meet particular assessment-related targets (Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007). In Vietnamese schools many teachers also have to contend with large class sizes, overloaded curricula, and have to do so while being paid relatively low wages (Biddington and Biddington 1997; Duggan 2001; Ministry of Health 2005).

Rather than assuming that teacher authority means that teachers hold power, it is necessary to consider how teachers assert their authority as teachers in the face of student opposition to such authority. While Rigby (2008) equates student opposition to teachers with developing independence and rebellion against the authority of grown ups, I argue that such an opposition is more than merely an anti-authority struggle; it is a struggle against the effects of disciplinary power to which students are subjected (Foucault 1982). It is not teachers *per se* that students struggle against but rather the effects of the disciplinary techniques which teachers utilise in their interactions with students. Teachers represent school for students as they are the individuals who tell students that they must sit quietly, that they must do the required work and that they have answered incorrectly, and are also the individuals who punish students for perceived misbehaviour.

As I will illustrate, such an opposition has important implications for bullying as the more student opposition manifests itself in the classroom, the more punitive and *ad hoc* teachers may become in their attempts to maintain their authority. The *ad hoc* ways in which some teachers punish perceived student misbehaviour serves, in turn, to perpetuate the teacher-student opposition, and thus create a

climate wherein bullying is more likely to occur. It may even lead to students bullying teachers and teachers bullying students.

Teacher Authority

In schools in Vietnam, students largely only interact with two groups of people: their fellow students and their teachers. These two groups are defined by their ability to exercise power, with teachers afforded positions wherefrom they are expected to conduct the conduct of students in school. The distinction between teachers and students is made visible through the regulation of student dress, deportment, and manners, all of which are subject to the judgement of teachers. Students are easily distinguishable from teachers through the allocation of student school uniforms, and through their timetabled spatial location. Students are expected to demonstrate respect to teachers by standing when they enter or leave a room, by demonstrating deference in the face of teacher demands, and by requesting permission for even the most mundane activities, such as leaving or entering a room, going to the toilet, and talking (Goffman 1991; Jackson 1991).

Seen as *in loco parentis*, teachers are placed in a position of power to not only discipline students within their school, but also to discipline the parents of those students when it is perceived by teachers to be necessary. Students, on the other hand, are expected to show respect for their teachers by diligently learning their lessons. However, while students may demonstrate respect for some teachers, this is certainly not always the case, and often appears to be reserved for those teachers who students fear will retaliate with punishment. Indeed, while the Confucian ideal suggests that students respect teachers out of piety and moral obligation (Marr 1981; Rydstrøm 2003), it would seem that students most commonly demonstrate

respect for teachers in order to avoid the repercussions of not doing so.

As already mentioned in Chapter 4, students in both classes were particularly well-behaved in the presence of their homeroom teacher, precisely because of the homeroom teacher's central role in the disciplining of students. Students in Class 9B were also particularly well-behaved in the presence of their mathematics teacher, who was also the Vice-principal of the school. The link between this teacher's role as Vice-principal and the behaviour of the class was pointed out in the feedback received by the Vice-principal from students in Class 9B. One student, for example, wrote: "Because you are Vice-principal your lessons are always kept in silence and you conduct the class very strictly", while another student wrote: "You are the Vice-principal so your management has no problem (you also manage other teachers). When you are out, the class is still quiet." A number of students also linked this in-class behaviour with fear of the Vice-principal. One student, for example, wrote "The whole class is scared of you. Therefore, we dare not make noise", while another student wrote "We are very scared of you so we still keep quiet when you are out the classroom."

While the homeroom teachers, and the Vice-principal of Pho Chieu School, were often able to affect the conduct of students in class merely by being present, precisely because of the threat of punishment, some teachers did not appear to have much authority in the classroom. Indeed, some teachers seemed incapable of controlling the classes, and on numerous occasions I noted teachers in both classes sitting at their desks with their head resting on their hand, looking thoroughly fed up. As Thuy (my assistant) noted in her field notes, on one occasion a teacher even refused to teach Class 9A:

Hoan and other students said "teacher, let's teach" because the teacher doesn't want to teach anymore. The class is too noisy, she's really irritated. She said "I am sick of this class, I won't

teach anymore, read from the textbook!”

Nguyen Thu Hien (2010) has argued that even at the primary school level students sometimes demonstrate a disrespectful attitude towards part-time staff and teachers from other classes. Indeed, the authority of substitute teachers is often contested and challenged. A substitute teacher’s lack of knowledge of the class makes it more difficult for them to survey the class and thus to control the conduct of students. Their status as substitute also means that students are aware that they are unlikely to be in the class for an extended time. A number of students in Class 9B, for example, stated that they enjoyed having one particular substitute teacher taking the class because she was “easy to bully”. As a substitute teacher, she did not know most of the students’ names and also did not have an understanding of the class dynamics.

In one lesson, for example, she shouted at a girl called Hue for using a textbook during a test. A number of other students in the class laughed because Hue’s name was obviously one of the few names the teacher knew, and many of the other students were also using their textbooks. The students’ laughter appeared to anger the teacher, which led to students then quite openly making fun of her ‘sharp eyes’ (*mat sac*). Two girls, Loan and Han, turned around to me and said that the teacher looks like she is squinting. She appeared to attempt to compensate for her lack of authority as a substitute teacher by being overly serious in her demeanour, and a number of students commented on her ‘sharp eyes’. She appeared to attempt to appear overly serious in the hope that doing so would make the students take her seriously. However, by overcompensating for her lack of perceived authority as a substitute teacher, she inadvertently made her position even less tenable as students teased her about her ‘sharp eyes’, and commented on her eyesight as she sometimes seemed like she was squinting.

It is likely to also take new teachers time to assert their authority, as they get used to their new surroundings, and the peculiarities of the particular relations within it. They may not yet be confident in their own teaching ability and may lack experience in dealing with issues such as bullying (Pervin and Turner 1998). This may be especially the case when class sizes are such that teachers are less able to interact on a one-to-one basis with students. One Class 9A teacher, for example, had only recently joined the school and told me that class size was an important factor in the ability of teachers to control their classes. She told me that compared to her last school, students in Class 9A were harder to control. She said that the size of the class made it more difficult to control, as while classes at her previous school had 30-35 students, Class 9A had 45 students. This explanation about the size of the class was reinforced in her interview by another teacher who was also present, and serves to question Olweus' (2003) assertion that class size has no consequence for bullying in schools. While Olweus (2003) dismisses the links between class size and the prevalence of bullying, a number of researchers have suggested that class size has direct significance for the culture of a class, as teachers in smaller classes have more time to spend developing relationships with their students (Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Smithers 2004; Yoneyama and Murphey 2007).

The students of Class 9A often seemed to disregard their new teacher's position of authority, by not standing when she entered the classroom, by continuing to talk after she had asked for their attention, and by giving her disdainful looks when entering the class late, rather than the expected explanation about where they had been. During some lessons, this teacher seemed at a loss as to how to get the students to listen or to do the assigned work. During a particularly raucous lesson, Thuy noted the following comment in her field notes: "The poor teacher. It's a chaotic class. The students are shouting and screaming at each other."

Addressing teacher targeted bullying in a London school, Kauser Pervin and Anthony Turner (1998) posit that teacher targeted bullying can include swearing at or mocking the teacher, ignoring the teacher, and making personal comments about the teacher. Likewise, James et al. (2008) found in their Irish study that students reported name-calling, ignoring teachers, disruptive behaviour, and insubordination as forms of teacher targeted bullying. Pervin and Turner (1998) suggest that students bully teachers in an attempt to undermine the teacher's confidence. They also found that 12 percent of teachers who were bullied dealt with the bullying they were subjected to by making the class work students were expected to do easier. That such a strategy was reported to successfully put a stop to the bullying suggests that the intention of teacher targeted bullying may be to get the teacher to change their approach. Teacher targeted bullying may thus be understood as a strategy whereby students are able to circumvent the demands placed on them in the classroom by undermining the teacher's disciplinary authority.

A teacher's lack of authority in the classroom may not only have consequences for the teacher, but also for students involved in bullying. A number of researchers have found that in-class bullying may often occur in the presence of the teacher who may either not see what is occurring or may choose to ignore it (Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). During one Class 9A lesson, for example, students were running all over the classroom while the teacher was sat at her desk, seemingly at a loss as to what to do. One boy, Bich, was particularly active and grabbed Minh and slammed him into the wall at the back of the classroom a couple of times. The second time Minh's head hit the concrete wall and he then led on the classroom floor crying. While the teacher was present, she did not even attempt to intervene, despite obviously witnessing the incident. The teacher did not appear to have much authority in the classroom and may have decided that not intervening was preferable to

intervening and risking having her authority challenged further. However, by not intervening, the teacher not only signalled that such interactions would not be dealt with, and were thus permissible in her class, but also possibly perpetuated Minh's sense of alienation and helplessness (Yoon 2004).

Maintaining Order

In general, teachers appeared to attempt to maintain order by punishing misdemeanours which threatened to disrupt the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. The competitive focus of education ensures that schools are predominantly concerned about those aspects of education which are most measurable. Schools are judged on the grades and ability of their students, the highest scholastically achieving of whom are selected to represent the school in local, regional and national competitions (Tran Kieu 2002). Teachers are thus judged on their ability to transfer the necessary knowledge for students to do well and on their ability to control their classes so as to facilitate the transfer of knowledge.

The fines introduced by the homeroom teacher of Class 9A reflect the focus of punishment. While students were fined for not tucking in their shirt, for moving out of their seat, or not doing their homework, for example, fighting, teasing and bullying often appeared to only be dealt with if it was perceived to be disruptive to teaching and often in an *ad hoc* fashion. When I asked one teacher of Class 9A what the biggest challenge to teaching her class was, for example, she told me that "the biggest challenge to teaching is the students talking in class and not concentrating on the lesson." As the dominant method of teaching requires that students sit quietly and concentrate on the knowledge being proffered to them, not sitting quietly and not concentrating were the misdemeanours teachers spent most time dealing with.

Indeed, this was highlighted during a Class 9B lesson when the teacher asked the students what problems should be discussed. Some students raised their hands and suggested drugs and violence, no doubt expecting this to be the answer expected by the teacher. Drugs and violence are considered ‘social evils’ (*te nan xa hoi*) and are thus often the topic of civics education lessons. The teacher, however, appeared to be irritated by the noise level in the classroom and instead stated that “making noise deserves to be discussed.”

Rather than discussing student concerns during class, many teachers instead attempted to get through the required curricular content by utilising banking forms of education and associated Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) communication patterns. The examination focus of lower secondary schooling in general, and the ninth grade in particular, meant that teachers had little scope for dealing with interactions between students in anything other than a punitive fashion. Rather, as one Class 9A teacher explained, some teachers felt compelled to focus on the textbook in the hope that students were able to memorise enough information to pass the high school national entrance examination. While one teacher in Class 9A suggested that this was particularly the case with Class 9A because of their low level of scholastic ability, a teacher of Class 9B suggested that there was even more pressure on her because of the class’ ‘selected’ status. Indeed, while this Class 9B teacher told me that the behaviour of students in her class was better than other students because they were the best class in the school, she also told me that this ‘selected’ status increased the pressure on her to maintain that level:

When you get a class that is already the best class, the pressure on the teachers is that you have to ensure the quality and especially with the ninth grade this year. The pressure is very big, it means knowing how to teach them to pass the national high school entrance exam.

Test results were regularly publicised by the teacher in class, meaning that students were generally well aware of how they were doing vis-à-vis their classmates. The teachers' announcements of individual test results sometimes provoked teasing and laughter, while they also sometimes provoked emotive responses from those students who were unhappy with their marks. This was demonstrated during a lesson in Class 9B when a girl who had just been told that she had received a mark of 4.6 out of 10 in a test burst into tears and appeared to be inconsolable, despite the best efforts of her friend to comfort her. Students may also be under pressure from their parents to succeed (London 2011a, 2011b; Ministry of Health 2005), as was evident when Tram berated herself for being stupid after she scored 8.8 in a class test. Her parents had apparently demanded that she get at least an average of 9 out of 10.

Similarly, teachers regularly asked students to stand and answers questions. The threat of being asked a question was used by teachers to get students to focus on the lesson being taught and to do the required work. Often when a student failed to answer a question correctly they were told that their answer was incorrect and they were instructed to remain standing until they correctly answered a different question posed to them or until the teacher told them to sit down. In some cases, students were made to remain standing throughout an entire lesson, and students could be seen shifting their weight from foot to foot and leaning on their desks to support themselves. Getting students to stand and answer questions makes them particularly visible, not only to the teacher but also to the rest of the class. The imperative to speak is thus risk-laden as it forces students to publicly demonstrate the extent to which they have or have not learnt the required work. Students who are told to stand and answer a question not only face the normalising gaze of teachers, but also that of their fellow students. Students who cannot answer the questions posed to them not only risk being punished by the teacher but also risk being

mocked or derided by their classmates. The use of such IRE communication patterns may thus place students in experientially excluding situations where they are mocked and derided by their classmates (Rydstrom 2010).

One girl in Class 9A, for example, was often mocked by her classmates after answering a teacher's question. When she answered a question incorrectly she would be greeted with a chorus of "urgh, urgh", while when she answered a question correctly some students would say "oh my God" (*oi gioi oi*) as if it was unusual for her to get a question right. This girl was often teased by her classmates about her hair, and the use of this IRE communication pattern was thus particularly excluding as it provided those same students with the opportunity to comment about her ability in a very public manner. Likewise, a boy in Class 9B was often laughed at by his classmates when he answered a question incorrectly, although he appeared to be asked by the teacher precisely because he was expected to be able to give the correct answer. In student feedback given to the Vice-principal, one student complained that the teacher favoured this boy in class, and it was perhaps his good relation with the teacher that led to him being laughed at when he could not answer a question.

Teachers generally did not discuss the comments made by students about their classmates' answers or grades and thus tacitly allowed a climate of competition to develop in the classrooms, wherein derision was common place. As some researchers have also noted, such a climate may be conducive to bullying, as competition and differentiation may become normalised (Browne 1995; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Terefe and Mengistu 1997). Perceived lack of teacher intervention may also lead to feelings of anger and frustration, and serve to reinforce the teacher-student opposition within schools.

Sarcasm and Derision

I observed numerous lessons in both classes where the teacher openly mocked students or was sarcastic towards them, and a number of students also spoke in length about how some of their teachers were sarcastic towards them and derided them in front of the rest of the class. One group of girls from Class 9B explained that one of their teachers often spoke to them in a sarcastic (*mia*) way, and that she insulted (*xi va*) them, reviled (*lang ma*) them, and shamed them badly (*xuc pham*), while another teacher was also sarcastic towards them and sniggered (*cuoi khay*) at them. These girls spent a considerable amount of time discussing which teacher they disliked most. The comments these teachers made about students' inability to answer their questions appeared to exacerbate the opposition between teachers and students, with some students demonstrating a significant degree of animosity towards these teachers. One girl explained that one of their teachers "has a way of smiling, sniggering", before adding "I hate her a lot."

Teachers in both classes sometimes laughed at students' answers to their questions and commented on their inability to answer questions or recite passages. On one occasion, for example, a teacher in Class 9B stopped a boy from reading and commented that his monotonous rhythm was making the rest of the class feel sleepy. This comment caused the rest of the class to laugh. During one Class 9A lesson, the teacher responded to a boy's inability to answer the question the teacher had posed by stating "your brain appears to be empty." Likewise, in a number of lessons a Class 9A teacher commented about a student who had not understood what she said by saying "he does not understand anything" and "he doesn't understand what I mean."

Perceived minor offences were also often dealt with verbally by making comments about the offending student's character, morality, gender, sexuality, ability, or by otherwise attempting to

embarrass or shame them. When teachers caught students laying their heads on their desks, for example, they would often respond verbally by asking who the student had been dreaming about or by making sarcastic comments about the student's work ethic. Rather than making direct reference to the perceived offence, teachers often made links between the offence and that student's character. When a teacher of Class 9A caught a boy looking at himself in a vanity mirror rather than concentrating on his work, for example, she confiscated the mirror and then asked him "you are a boy, why are you looking at yourself in a mirror?" The boy had a bloody lip after having earlier been hit by a classmate. Rather than addressing why he had a bloody lip the teacher instead questioned his use of the vanity mirror by making a distinction between appropriate behaviour for boys and girls in Vietnam. Likewise, when the same teacher caught Tuan sitting in Hien's seat, next to Van, she asked Van why he was so eager to hold Tuan's hand: "Are you gay or are you pretending that it is Hong's hand?" By bringing Van's sexuality into question, the teacher shifted the focus away from the actual offence of moving seats to a more personal questioning of Van's sexual preference.

James et al. (2008) argue that teachers' use of sarcasm and denigrating statements constitutes a form of bullying (see also Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004). If we understand bullying as the use or threat of negative actions to get someone to do something they otherwise would not do, then the use of sarcasm and derision would appear to be a form of bullying which teachers utilise in their attempts to conduct the conduct of students under their charge. While directed at particular students, the teachers' comments are also directed at the rest of the class and serve as a warning as to how they may be treated if they do not do as they are told (Yoneyama 1999). As highlighted by the girls' discussion about which teacher they dislike most, the use of sarcasm and derision also serves to reinforce the teacher-student opposition by highlighting a degree of unfairness in the power exercised by teachers over students. Perceived teacher unfairness may

have implications for the extent to which bullying occurs in schools, because it may suggest to students that such behaviour is an appropriate means of exercising power (Santinello, Vieno, and De Vogli 2011) and may lend itself to a general ethos that allows bullying to occur more easily (Browne 1995; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007).

Grade Manipulation

Perceived teacher unfairness was also noted by students talking about the consequences of missing the extra tuition provided by some of their teachers. While extra tuition was supposedly optional for those students whose parents were prepared to pay extra for them to get some extra tuition, some students told me that some of their teachers tried to force them into attending. One group of girls I interviewed at Pho Chieu School, for example, spoke about the consequences of not attending one of their teachers' extra tuition and explained that this teacher in particular would often speak badly about those not in attendance and would punish them by making them stand in front of the class and answer exercises which had only been explained during the extra tuition. Despite Article 75.4 of the 2005 Education Law stipulating that teachers are forbidden to force students to take extra tuition for money (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005), low teacher wages mean that many teachers need to supplement their income by charging for extra tuition (London 2011b; Madsen 2008).

Getting as many students as possible to attend is financially beneficial and teachers may thus teach some of the official curriculum exclusively in such extra tuition so as to encourage student attendance. In class it was noticeable that some students sometimes struggled because they had missed the extra tuition where the exercise had been explained more thoroughly. Article 86.1 of the 2005 Education Law

stipulates that students have the right “To receive respect, equal treatment and full provision of adequate information concerning their own learning and training by schools or other educational institutions” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005, 36). However, some teachers appeared to withhold some information as a means of treating those students who did not attend their extra tuition unfairly.

While Article 75.2 of the 2005 Education Law stipulates that teachers are prohibited from manipulating student results (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005), this sometimes occurred in the classrooms if the student was perceived to have misbehaved in some way. For example, in one Class 9B lesson a girl who had been called to the front with her books the previous day was called to the front of the class again. While she had done more work than the girl who was called up before her, the teacher gave her a lower mark than that girl because the teacher believed that she was surprised to be called up again, and had not done as much work precisely because she was unlikely to be called to the front. Despite the girl’s claims to the contrary, she was thus punished with a lower grade because the teacher believed she had tried to resist the teacher’s demands about doing homework despite having done the work required for a higher grade. While teachers may manipulate student grades in order to get their students to do more work, or to try harder, the perceived importance of grades may mean that grade manipulation by teachers is perceived very negatively by students.

Inconsistent Punishment

Perceived teacher unfairness may be further reinforced by the ways in which teachers administer punishment inconsistently. Sometimes teachers may initially reprimand a student for a perceived infraction but when challenged by the student may ignore further infractions

from that student. This may have particularly negative consequences for students who are subjected to bullying and may make it less likely that they will approach the teacher for help with the bullying they are subjected to.

During a lesson in Class 9A, for example, three students, Tai, Minh and Dao, were sitting at the desk two rows in front of me. The teacher noticed that Dao was pinching Minh in the leg and responded by shouting at Dao. Dao then shouted back that Minh was annoying her, and the teacher then treated the incident as if it had not occurred. Dao and Tai then responded by thumping Minh twice in the back and Tai then flicked Minh hard in the ear. Later in the lesson, Minh turned around and picked up Thanh's glasses off her desk and laughed at her. Thanh responded by slapping Minh in the face. These interactions were clearly audible and visible, yet the teacher did not intervene. The teacher sat at her desk and did little to stop Minh being targeted by his classmates. When the school drum was beaten, signalling the break, there was a rush as a number of students, including Dao and Tai, chased after Minh.

While the teacher initially intervened by shouting at Dao, the teacher did not follow this up in any way. Rather she seemed to ignore what subsequently occurred, perhaps in the hope of minimising the disturbance caused to the class. In doing so, the teacher appeared to provide tacit approval for Minh being hit and slapped. Somewhat ironically, through her initial intervention, the teacher also publicised what was occurring, as other students were then also made aware of what was happening. The teacher thus provided tacit approval and ensured that the interactions occurred in front of a wider audience. The teacher's initial verbal intervention also appears to have been the reason for Minh being thumped in the back by Dao and Tai, as he was seen to have gotten Dao in trouble with the teacher. Inconsistency in the administering of punishment may thus serve to provoke more of the same interactions to occur in retribution for that student being told off in the first place.

Teachers may also sometimes punish some students for retaliating to actions that the teacher did not see. In another Class 9A lesson, for example, I observed one boy, Doi, hit another boy, Nam, in the face. When Nam then retaliated by punching Doi in the back the teacher intervened and told Nam to stand up. Nam stood up but challenged the teacher's decision, saying "only me?" before saying "fuck you!" in English. Nam was then made to remain standing throughout the remainder of the lesson, but no further action was taken by the teacher. It seems that the first time the teacher became aware of something happening between Nam and Doi was when Nam retaliated by punching Doi in the back.

Nam's apparent indignation about being punished for something that appeared to have been instigated by Doi led to Nam seeking retribution during the break. After the teacher had walked away to the staff room, Nam ran after Doi and slammed him a number of times into a metal gate separating the balconies of two teaching blocks. Doi then retaliated and succeeded in pushing Nam onto the balcony floor. Noting that Nam was on the ground, two other boys then jumped in and also hit Nam. Nam was visibly infuriated, and as the next class was starting, he head butted one of the boys who had joined in. This occurred directly in front of the teacher of the next lesson who was by then sitting at her desk. She verbally reprimanded both boys and told them to sit down.

Neither teacher appeared to take what occurred to be of enough importance to discuss what was happening between Doi and Nam. The first teacher had apparently not seen Doi hit Nam in the face, while the second teacher was unaware of what had occurred earlier. Both teachers treated the incidents as separate incidents that were potentially disruptive to their teaching of the class, with both teachers seemingly most concerned about maintaining order so that they could teach the class. However, from the perspective of the students involved, and those who witnessed what happened, the teachers'

interventions may have seemed somewhat *ad hoc*, random, and essentially unfair.

Teacher-Student Bullying

Sometimes teachers also appeared to punish some students more readily than others. While a student who committed a perceived minor offence would most commonly be verbally scolded or made to stand, on some occasions teachers reacted by slapping a student, or threatening to slap them. When a girl in Class 9A, for example, tried to help her friend answer the question posed to her by the teacher, the teacher responded by slamming her hand onto her desk and warning the girl “you dare to help her? I will slap your face hard!” The inconsistency in the type of punishment meted out for the same offence tended to be related to particular students’ relations with the teachers meting out the punishment. Indeed, the ways in which certain students were punished vis-à-vis their classmates serve to question the distinctions between punishment and the bullying of students by teachers.

Some teachers punished some students much more often and strictly than other students. In Class 9A, it appeared that some teachers had lost patience with a couple of the boys in the class. One boy, Hoan, often seemed to be punished more strictly than other students in the class. In one lesson during my first month of fieldwork, Hoan was lying face down on his desk when the teacher of the lesson walked over and slapped him five times hard on the back of the head. This caused a lot of students to turn around and look at me, suggesting that the teacher’s actions were considered excessive by the students. While teachers sometimes slapped students who laid their heads on their desks, the force with which the teacher slapped Hoan appeared to shock students in the class almost as much as it shocked me at the start of my fieldwork. Corporal punishment is not permitted in Vietnam

even if it is widely practised (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005; Save the Children Sweden 2006).

Later in my fieldwork, a teacher caught Hoan using a mobile phone in the classroom during the morning break. The homeroom teacher had earlier explained to me that students were not allowed to bring phones to school because it disrupted the lessons when they used them to text message in class. When the teacher noticed Hoan had a mobile phone, she reacted by confiscating the phone and then slapping Hoan four times around the side of the head. Hoan looked shocked and angry about being slapped and responded by saying something under his breath and walking out of the classroom. When he returned for the start of the next lesson, the same teacher slapped him on the top of the head with an exercise book a few times and asked him “do you dare to talk back to me?!”

Even when a number of students were involved, Hoan sometimes appeared to be the one to whom blame was apportioned, despite some of the other students trying to defend him. At the start of one lesson, for example, a number of the students ignored the pleas of the teacher for them to sit down, and instead ran around the classroom kicking a plastic football. When the homeroom teacher suddenly appeared at the classroom door, students rushed to get to their seats. Hoan, who had kicked the ball just as the homeroom teacher arrived, was pulled out of class and verbally reprimanded by the homeroom teacher just outside the open door to the classroom. Despite the efforts of three other students to convince the homeroom teacher that it was not only Hoan kicking the ball in class, the homeroom teacher suspended Hoan and called his father to school.

Hoan appeared to be treated differently from many of the other students in the class, with some teachers apparently fed up with his in-class behaviour. While teachers most commonly responded verbally to students who talked or slept in class, and confiscated phones and mp3 players from students who brought them to school, Hoan was corporally punished by some teachers for the same offences. Even

when a number of students were involved in an incident, Hoan was sometimes the only student to be punished. Hoan told me that while he was initially annoyed about being hit by teachers, he said that he now agreed with the punishment because he had been disobeying the teacher's demands. He thus considered the hitting to be justified because of his refusal to do as he was told.

Hitting students because they do not do what they are told constitutes a similar pattern to how bullying was explained to me as the use of hitting and other actions to get someone to do something they otherwise would not do. By wielding the threat of physical punishment for non-compliance teachers thus model the same forms of interaction that characterise bullying (Browne 1995; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004). In doing so they also suggest that such interaction is justifiable in certain strategic situations, in much the same way as bullying is often justified by those doing it (DeRosier and Mercer 2009; Horton 2007b; Thornberg 2010).

Another boy in Class 9A who seemed to be punished more strictly and regularly than other students was Tai. When I requested permission to interview students in Class 9A, the homeroom teacher told me that I was allowed to interview anyone except Tai. The homeroom teacher explained that she did not want him being interviewed because it would not be good for my research, as he was liable to make things up. It was very clear that nothing I could say would change her mind, and despite requesting permission to interview him on a number of occasions, my requests were declined. Tai seemed excited about being interviewed, but I decided not to interview him so as to maintain my relations with the school, which were crucial for my ongoing research. However, because of my inability to interview him, I noted interactions involving him with particular interest.

Tai was obviously considered to be a disruptive presence in the classroom, and he was often reprimanded, told to stand, or was otherwise corporally punished. He was also suspended on a number of

occasions and was eventually expelled from school. Tai often appeared to be the 'class clown', making practical jokes which other students then also got involved in. One example was when he stuck a sticker on the back of a boy in front of him while pretending to pat him on the back. This idea spread throughout the class and other students were soon trying to do it to those near them. However, this does not mean that Tai was a popular student in the class, and his behaviour seemed to give students a negative impression of him. Other students in the class often pointed to him and said "crazy!" to me in English, and in doing so included me in their derision of him. I for my part often talked to him and we seemed to get on well. My own impression of him was of a boy who was bored with school, and he often asked me about football and football players, and asked me to list the best starting elevens for the Chelsea, Manchester United, and Liverpool football squads.

Tai often skipped classes or came to class late, and on a number of occasions I saw him waiting outside the classroom for the bell to ring so that he could attend the next lesson. I often observed him hitting Minh, and rarely saw him doing his class work. Sometimes he spent entire lessons with his head on his desk, sometimes even with a jacket over his head. Sometimes other students would try and get the teacher to make him answer a question. For example, when the teacher had asked the class a question, the class monitor, Chau, said "Teacher, Tai knows, he raised his hand." Tai responded by verbally threatening Chau: "You dare say that? You want to die?" However, sometimes I also observed Tai actively trying to participate in the lesson. On these occasions, his attempts to participate tended to be met with surprise or amusement by his classmates, and suspicion by the teacher. During one lesson, for example, Tai and three other boys were told to leave their seats and stand at the back of the classroom for the remainder of the lesson. Realising that he had left his stationery at his desk, Tai walked back to his desk to get them, presumably so that he could keep up with the

exercise the teacher was writing on the board. The teacher stopped him just as he was returning to the back of the room, reprimanded him, and told him to put his stationery back on his desk. The teacher appeared to have lost patience with Tai and no doubt did not believe that he wanted to do the exercise anyway.

Indeed, all of the Class 9A teachers appeared to have lost patience with Tai and he was rarely asked to answer any of the teachers' questions. The frequency with which he was reprimanded by teachers also appeared to escalate during the time I was in Class 9A. He was also corporally punished for misdemeanours in class which other students were only verbally reprimanded for. For example, when he turned around in his seat to take a book from the girl behind him during one lesson, the teacher rushed forward, grabbed him by the hair and forcibly turned his head around so that he was again facing the front.

The homeroom teacher threatened Tai repeatedly with suspension if he did not change his behaviour and start doing his class work, and on a number of occasions did suspend him for a number of days. Not long before Tai was expelled from the school, he was suspended by the homeroom teacher for misbehaving in class. Tai told me that he was worried about being suspended because his father would "punish" him. A teacher had previously explained to me that Tai's father had once beaten him for stealing money, so it is possible that the punishment he feared receiving involved being beaten by his father. As Rydstrøm (2006a) has illustrated, it is not uncommon for fathers in Vietnam to physically discipline their sons. Despite his concern, Tai responded by telling the homeroom teacher that it was then pointless to ask him any questions that day, as he was suspended anyway and would not be at school the following day. As Thuy noted in her field notes:

Tai seems to be very scared and sad since the first lesson after being informed that he will be suspended, even though he spoke

back to the teacher saying “no need to ask me anything, it’s pointless to ask me because tomorrow I won’t come to school.”

Having already punished Tai by suspending him, the homeroom teacher then involved the entire class in deciding what further action would be taken against him. The homeroom teacher told the students (while Tai was in the classroom) that anyone who had a problem with Tai should write it down on a piece of paper and give it to her so that she could deal with it. She also asked the leaders of the groups about Tai’s behaviour, and asked the opinions of the class monitor and the vice monitor. Tai responded by saying quietly that “there is no need to say anything. I will stay at home tomorrow.” The homeroom teacher then asked students to raise their hands if they would want Tai to sit next to them when he returned to school. No-one raised their hand, and when Tai did return to school, he was made to sit in the aisle on a small plastic stool near the front of the classroom. This caused amusement amongst his classmates who teased Tai about being “crazy”. He was also given a special notebook which was to be filled in every lesson by his teachers, who were to write about his behaviour and whether he behaved in class. After a week of being treated like the class dunce, Tai stopped coming to class, and when I asked where he was a few days later, I was told by a teacher that he was not welcome at school. Tai’s expulsion from school meant that he would be unable to sit the high school entrance examination and would thus not be able to go on and get a high school education and would thus be highly restricted in his future job opportunities.

Tai appeared to leave his teachers at a loss as to how to deal with his in-class behaviour. While the homeroom teacher’s presence in the classroom generally resulted in the class being quieter, she also seemed unable to change Tai’s in-class behaviour. Even after having been threatened repeatedly with suspension and having been suspended a number of times, Tai continued to talk, sleep, and hit other students during class. While Tai’s eventual expulsion was

perhaps consistent with the rules of the school, the homeroom teacher's in-class treatment of him appeared to be inconsistent and unfair. Indeed, the ways in which both Tai and Hoan were punished by some of their teachers can be understood as bullying whereby their teachers utilised various punishments, including various forms of corporal punishment, and the threat of such punishments, to get these two students to do things (i.e. sit quietly and concentrate) they otherwise would not do.

If, as I have argued, bullying (*bat nat*) in the Vietnamese context is understood as the use of negative actions or the threat of such actions to get someone to do something they otherwise would not do, then such *ad hoc* use of punishment by teachers to punish specific students can be understood as a form of teacher-student bullying. Teacher-student bullying not only has implications for those being bullied by the teacher but also for the broader climate of schooling as some teachers' use of bullying may signal to students that bullying is acceptable in certain situations (Browne 1995; Rivers, Duncan, and Besag 2007; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004).

However, what should also be noted are the demands placed on teachers to get through the official curriculum and to maintain order in their classrooms. Homeroom teachers, in particular, are responsible for the behaviour of their class and having what is perceived to be a poorly behaved class will thus reflect negatively on the homeroom teacher's ability to control his/her students. It is perhaps for this reason that the homeroom teacher of Class 9A, which was reportedly the worst class in Du Hang School, blurred the boundaries between punishment and bullying in her increasingly *ad hoc* treatment of Tai.

School Bullying and Teacher-Student Opposition

Power should not simply be understood as something applied by those at the top (i.e. teachers) to those at the bottom (i.e. students) of an

institutional power hierarchy, but rather as a strategic situation within which both teachers and students must engage. The stark differences in the positions of students and teachers in schools, whereby teachers are given positions of authority wherefrom they are allowed to discipline students for perceived misbehaviour create an opposition between students and teachers. Teachers become representative of school and the disciplinary power invested within it, and it is this power relation that students oppose. Such opposition is especially evident for new teachers who must then attempt to assert their allocated authority.

Demands on teachers to get through the required curricular content so that their students may pass national entrance examinations, coupled with expectations that they control the behaviour of their students, place teachers in a difficult position vis-à-vis students. In their attempts to meet the demands placed on them, teachers may utilise a variety of strategies, the effects of which may bring them into increasing opposition with some of their students. This opposition may have consequences not only for teachers, especially those perceived by students to lack authority, but also for the ways in which students interact in school. Lack of agreed standards of behaviour, for both teachers and students, may lead to teachers administering punishment in an increasingly *ad hoc* fashion, especially in the face of continued student opposition. This may lead to some teachers blurring the boundaries between fair punishment and that which takes the form of teacher-student bullying, and may serve to further exacerbate the teacher-student opposition.

Rather than restricting the discussion surrounding teachers to one of teaching styles or teacher types, it is necessary to consider the demands placed on teachers and the educational framework within which they work. Large class sizes, low pay, overloaded curricula, and lack of training and support may leave teachers struggling to manage classes, which in turn may serve to create a climate wherein bullying

is more likely to occur and wherein student opposition to teacher authority is most vociferous.

As I will illustrate in the following chapter the teacher-student opposition, and the strategies with which teachers attempt to manage it, also has important implications for the likelihood of those being bullied, or indeed those who witness bullying, telling anyone about the bullying they are subjected to. A code of silence may instead prevail, whereby silence is rewarded and ‘squealing’ condemned and punished.

School Bullying and Silencing

School bullying researchers and anti-bullying organisations have regularly highlighted the silence of victims, and bystanders, as a significant hurdle to bullying prevention (Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000; Friends 2001, 2008, 2011; National Centre against Bullying 2011; Smith 2011). However, in line with dominant understandings of bullying as the intentionally negative acts of individuals, the focus has predominantly been on the relations between the individuals directly involved while the institutional context of the school has faded into the background.

Silence should not only be understood as an effect of bullying but also as a means through which the power relations underpinning bullying are upheld, reinforced, challenged and contested (Foucault 1998). Silence may be utilised to reinforce and uphold certain relations of power and thus provide a ‘shelter’ for power relations (Foucault 1998, 101). Those who might otherwise contest such power relations through speaking out may be bullied into remaining silent. In other words they may be silenced. Silence may also be utilised to challenge and contest certain relations of power as a form of resistance, and may provide a strategy for minimising the extent to which someone is subjected to bullying. Silence may thus be used to exercise both power and resistance and may occur at various levels (Foucault 1998; Hearn 2004). In this chapter, I will consider the relations between school bullying and silencing at the various levels at which the silencing occurs.

The Silencing of Individuals

School bullying researchers consistently point to a reticence amongst students to tell anyone about the bullying they are subjected to (Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000; Drouet 1993; Erling and Hwang 2004; Frisén, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson 2008; Houndoumadi and Pateraki 2001; Oliver and Candappa 2003; Rigby and Bauman 2011; Rigby and Slee 1999; Smith 2011). The findings from such research have led to anti-bullying initiatives recognising silencing as a significant hurdle to affecting change. Awareness campaigns, such as the United Kingdom's Anti-bullying Week and Australia's National Day Against Bullying and Violence, have become a regular feature of the annual calendar in a number of countries (Bullying. No Way! 2011; Smith 2011) and various organisations have launched video advertisement campaigns urging students to speak out about bullying (Cybermentors 2011; Friends 2008). Indeed, one of the most common pieces of advice given to students who are bullied is to tell someone about it (Bullying UK 2011; Friends 2011; National Centre against Bullying 2011). Telling teachers is seen to be especially important because bullying is believed to occur in those spaces which are unsupervised by teachers (Behre, Astor, and Meyer 2001; Matusova 1997; Olweus 1993; Stoudt 2006), while teachers are believed to be more likely to intervene if students report being bullied (Atlas and Pepler 2001; Novick and Isaacs 2010).

However, research also suggests that many students do not have faith in the ability of adults to stop bullying (Atlas and Pepler 2001; Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000; Houndoumadi and Pateraki 2001), and in a number of countries, help lines and/or help forums have been established to assist precisely those students who do not feel able to tell anyone about the bullying they are subjected to (BRIS 2007, 2011; Cybermentors 2011; Friends 2011; La Fontaine 1991). In 2011 the UK anti-bullying organisation Beatbullying released a controversial video as part of their Cybermentors project, in which a

girl is shown sitting in front of a mirror sewing her own lips shut with a needle and thread (see Photograph 7.1). The caption at the end of the video reads “you can speak out now”, referring to the newly established Cybermentors online chat forum (Cybermentors 2011).

PHOTOGRAPH 7.1: CYBERMENTORS ADVERTISEMENT¹



The recent proliferation of such advertising campaigns reflects an increasing recognition that students may feel afraid to speak out about bullying because of the possible consequences of doing so. Indeed, telling about bullying is seen to be an extremely risk-laden strategy which may backfire and may merely exacerbate the extent to which that person is bullied. Some students argue that telling adults actually makes the situation worse and is thus self-defeating (Mishna 2004; Rigby and Slee 1999). Recognizing that the fear of retaliation may stop students from speaking out, some anti-bullying campaigns have actively sought to provide suggestions for students about how best to speak out discreetly. In a video for their Don't Suffer in Silence campaign, for example, the UK Department for Education and

Skills (DfES) (2006) outlined a number of creative ways for students to tell their parents, teachers, and other school staff indirectly about the bullying they were subjected to by leaving written messages in various forms.

Some researchers have shown that the willingness of students to tell teachers about bullying is also influenced by the ways in which teachers interact with students (Atlas and Pepler 2001; Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000; James et al. 2008), that students are increasingly unlikely to tell a teacher about bullying the longer they are at school (Frisén, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson 2008; Novick and Isaacs 2010; Smith 2011; Smith and Shu 2000), and that teachers and school principals also often remain silent about bullying (James et al. 2008; Pervin and Turner 1998).

Such findings suggest that it is not only necessary to promote students to speak out about bullying but also to address those aspects of schooling that promote the silencing of students and teachers in schools. As I have argued in previous chapters, both students and teachers are located within the same operations of disciplinary power and their silence thus needs to be understood in light of such location. It is not enough to breach the silence surrounding individual acts of bullying, but rather it is necessary to unmask the power relations which promote silencing and which silencing challenges and upholds.

Authoritative Silence

Until now, there has been little focus on the issue of school bullying in Vietnam. Focus has tended to be on the quantity of education, in the form of enrolment and literacy rates, rather than on more qualitative issues such as student relations. While the government has indicated a political commitment to addressing school bullying, by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and through the promotion of the education programme 'Building Friendly

Schools and Active Students' for example, the Ministry of Education and Training's Department of Student Affairs has yet to implement any policies directed at dealing with or preventing bullying in schools. Instead the focus has tended to be on more explicitly violent threats such as the carrying of weapons and organised fights (Tran Thi Kim Thuan 2011).

Schools in Vietnam therefore do not have guidelines for how to deal with school bullying, or even what precisely constitutes bullying, and teachers are therefore not trained in how to recognise or deal with bullying when it occurs. The role of teachers as 'moral cultivators' may also mean that reporting bullying may not be perceived to be in the best interests of teachers as it may serve to question their competence as teachers. Teachers may downplay incidents of bullying in their classes in order to maintain a perception of themselves as good teachers who are able to control their students, especially if they are accorded classes dependent on their perceived ability to teach. As I was told by a teacher at Pho Chieu School, the 'best' class in the school was allocated with the 'best' teachers to ensure that the high standard was maintained. Teachers who are perceived to be unable to control their classes would most likely not be considered the best teachers and would thus not be given the best classes.

Teachers who are themselves bullied by students are even less likely to be considered good teachers and may therefore keep silent about the bullying to which they are subjected for fear of being perceived as failures by their peers (James et al. 2008; Pervin and Turner 1998). A teacher with whom I had regular contact and who expressed considerable interest in my research was reportedly bullied by some of his students. During my numerous informal conversations with him he never once expressed a concern about his own school experience, preferring instead to portray himself in a positive light. However, I was told by another member of staff that this teacher was regularly bullied but rather than reporting the bullying to the school

Principal the teacher had sought help from a colleague. The teacher may have felt that reporting the situation to the school Principal would raise question marks about his ability as a teacher.

Teachers who speak out about bullying may also face censure for harming the school's reputation, and it is perhaps for this reason that teachers at Du Hang School were initially wary about being interviewed about the topic. Indeed, while the reforms of *doi moi* have led to increasing openness about issues such as school bullying, many educators may still not feel comfortable raising the issue as it may suggest that their school has a problem that is unusual for Vietnam's otherwise socialist schools (Khuat Thu Hong 2004). School principals, in particular, may not be eager to speak out about school bullying because of concern about the potential repercussions of doing so.

These are not concerns that are unique to Vietnam. In a study of teacher targeted bullying in an inner-city school in London, England, Pervin and Turner (1998) found that 15 percent of teachers who reported being bullied received no support after reporting it but instead were made to feel ineffectual as teachers. Recent reports in England also suggest that school principals may keep silent about bullying in their schools in an attempt to protect the reputation of their schools (Education 2008; Lightfoot 2007).

Indeed, competition for enrolments and financial support may promote school principals to keep silent. Education is highly centralised in Vietnam and school funds are distributed from the Ministry of Education and Training to local city and provincial authorities who distribute them to schools dependent on the reports submitted by school Principals at the end of each semester or school year. Principals are thus expected to report on their school's achievements and the quality of education that is being offered to their students (Nguyen Thu Hien 2010). The linking of quality of education to government funding suggests that principals may not perceive reporting bullying to be in the best interests of their school.

The concern of school principals about their school reputation was highlighted during my fieldwork when the Principal of Du Hang School realised that I had been allocated a ‘selected’ class at Pho Chieu School while she had allocated me the ‘worst’ class at Du Hang School because she believed that observing such a class would be most useful for my research. She subsequently approached me and suggested that I change classes to get a view of the school as a whole and told me that she was concerned that my findings would portray Du Hang School in a negative light. Pho Chieu School was reported to be an up-and-coming school with relatively less resources, so it was undoubtedly also a strategic decision by the Principal of Pho Chieu School to suggest that I spend my time in their ‘best’ class. The principals of Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools both deserve credit for opening up their schools to my research at a time when school bullying was yet to be considered a major problem in Vietnam. In doing so, they have helped to breach the silence surrounding the issue and have made it possible for students to speak out about something which they otherwise appear unwilling to tell anyone about.

Telling about Bullying

In order to gauge the willingness of students to tell about bullying, I asked students at each level (grades 6-9) of the two schools to indicate in the questionnaires who they would tell if they were bullied at school (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2). In line with other research, students tended to be increasingly less willing to tell adults, or those assigned relay positions (i.e. monitors), about bullying the longer they were at school (Frisén, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson 2008; Novick and Isaacs 2010; Smith 2011; Smith and Shu 2000). This increasing unwillingness to tell anyone about being bullied after the first year of lower secondary schooling may indicate a number of issues. Firstly, that telling is increasingly perceived to do little to help the situation.

Secondly, that telling is increasingly perceived to exacerbate the situation. Thirdly, that bullying is increasingly seen to be a normal part of schooling. All three possibilities are disconcerting when considering how schools can deal with bullying, as they suggest a lack of trust in the ability and/or willingness of adults to intervene in an appropriate manner (see also Atlas and Pepler 2001; Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000; James et al. 2008; Novick and Isaacs 2010).

TABLE 7.1: TO WHOM GIRLS WOULD REPORT BULLYING

	Grade 6 (N=124)	Grade 7 (N=92)	Grade 8 (N=121)	Grade 9 (N=122)
Principal	0.8	1.1	0.8	0.8
Homeroom Teacher	23.4	4.3	8.3	2.5
Teacher	21.0	5.4	8.3	2.5
Monitor	13.0	2.2	0.8	0.8
Parent	35.5	14.1	19.8	13.9
Older Sibling	48.4	18.5	27.3	16.4
Friend	41.9	52.2	52.1	54.9
No-one	11.3	15.2	14.9	15.6

TABLE 7.2: TO WHOM BOYS WOULD REPORT BULLYING

	Grade 6 (N=106)	Grade 7 (N=99)	Grade 8 (N=110)	Grade 9 (N=135)
Principal	5.7	1.0	1.8	0
Homeroom Teacher	15.1	3.0	5.5	2.2
Teacher	16.0	6.1	7.3	6.7
Monitor	5.7	3.0	1.0	0
Parent	31.1	11.1	11.8	4.4
Older Sibling	27.4	18.2	19.1	9.6
Friend	39.6	43.4	42.7	43.0
No-one	14.2	30.3	33.6	39.3

While this questionnaire data offers information about tendencies, and is thus interesting in itself, it does not explain why students are more or less reluctant to tell particular people about the bullying they are subjected to. By combining such questionnaire data with observations and interviews, however, it is possible to further explore the reasoning behind students' decisions not to tell anyone about the bullying to which they are subjected. Doing so allows for a consideration of the importance of power relations and serves to question the overwhelming focus on the actions of particular types of individuals.

In exploring silencing, I will consider each of the above categories (i.e. Principal, homeroom teacher and so on) in turn in order to illustrate the ways in which these individuals are located within the same disciplinary framework and how students' reasons for not telling them may be connected. Rather than merely stating that school principals, teachers, and parents should make themselves more approachable to students who are being bullied, it is necessary to

understand why students are not willing to tell them they are being bullied.

Telling the School Principal

The person to whom students indicated they were least likely to report being bullied was the school Principal. While roughly 1 percent of girls at each grade level indicated they would tell the school Principal, there was a marked decrease in the percentage of boys who would tell the Principal, from 5.7 percent in grade six to none in grade nine. This suggests that school principals are not seen to be approachable for help with such issues. However, as the people with the most authoritative position in the schools, they are perhaps the best positioned to do something about it; a point not lost on students. When I asked Minh, for example, what he thought should be done about bullying in schools he suggested that someone should “tell the Principal to talk to them, to punish them [i.e. those doing the bullying].”

Student reluctance to tell the school Principal is perhaps not surprising considering the hierarchical order of the schools and the delegation of authority to vice-principals, homeroom teachers, and teachers. The school Principal does not have much day-to-day contact with students, and this may mean that students do not feel capable of approaching the Principal for help. That some students in Class 9B expressed their fear of the Vice-principal of Pho Chieu School also suggests that students may be afraid to approach the school Principal about problems because of his/her authoritative position.

Telling a Teacher

Students are significantly less likely to tell a teacher about being bullied in grade nine than at any other time during their lower secondary schooling. While 23 percent of sixth grade girls and 15 percent of sixth grade boys indicated they would tell the homeroom teacher if they were being bullied, this decreases substantially in grade seven to 4 percent of girls and 3 percent of boys. While there is a slight increase in grade eight to 8 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys, the percentage of students who indicated they would tell their homeroom teacher decreases again to reach a low of 2 percent of grade nine girls and boys. Likewise, while 21 percent of sixth grade girls and 16 percent of sixth grade boys indicated that they would tell a teacher about being bullied this decreases significantly to just 2 percent of ninth grade girls and 7 percent of ninth grade boys.

These findings appear to support the assertion in bullying research that boys are generally less likely than girls to tell a teacher about being bullied (Erling and Hwang 2004; Frisé, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson 2008; Smith 2011), at least in the early grades. However, the willingness of girls to tell a teacher decreases substantially to reach the same level as boys in grade nine, and even lower in the case of telling a subject teacher.

That increasing numbers of students are unwilling to tell a teacher if they are being bullied is perhaps not surprising when one considers the disciplinary techniques utilised by teachers in schools. As illustrated in previous chapters, teachers need to navigate the demands placed on them to teach the curriculum and often find that the easiest way to do this is to resort to banking style teaching methods and Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) communication patterns. Banking style teaching methods and IRE communication patterns serve to (re-) enforce the silence of students, as students are expected to sit quietly unless directly invited to speak by the teacher and teachers tend to punish students most readily for disrupting

lessons. Speaking out thus becomes associated with misbehaving and punishment, and it is therefore unlikely that students will talk to their teachers about their relations with other students. This situation is certainly not unique to the Vietnamese education system. Yoneyama (1999, 66), for example, found that 72 percent of Japanese students “indicated that it was *never* easy to discuss their personal problems with teachers.” However, in the same study Yoneyama (1999) also found that 70 percent of students would most like a teacher with whom they could discuss such issues.

Students are silenced by teachers in class so as to make it easier for teachers to exercise power. Such silencing facilitates the techniques of surveillance and control which are central to the disciplinary power of schools. However, such silencing also reinforces the opposition between teachers and students, and leads to some students resisting such silencing through verbal sabotage, talking back to the teacher, and note passing. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the more such opposition is expressed, the more teachers may feel it necessary to punish particular students, and increasingly *ad hoc* punishment may in turn reinforce the teacher-student opposition. Indeed, the ways in which teachers interact with students (by using sarcasm, bullying, and corporal punishment, for example) and the lack of intervention by some teachers makes it unlikely that students will feel that the teacher is the best person to talk to about bullying. Students may thus opt to remain silent.

Teacher intervention may even serve to exacerbate the situation. This was illustrated by the example of Minh who was afforded protection by the homeroom teacher of Class 9A following an incident when he was knocked to the ground by some of his classmates and hit his head on the tiled floor of the classroom. The incident was deemed serious enough for him to be sent to hospital to check for concussion and according to one girl in the class, Thanh, the homeroom teacher reacted to the incident by telling “the whole class that she would defend Minh.” Thanh told me that Minh misread the

situation and that his subsequent reaction to being afforded protection had actually made things even worse for Minh: “After that he cursed all the students who hit him before. He thought nobody would dare to hit him. But the whole class couldn’t stand it anymore, so they all joined in and started hitting him.” A boy in the same class, Hoan, explained that the homeroom teacher’s offer of protection made little difference, because Minh would not dare to tell the homeroom teacher if his classmates ignored the homeroom teacher’s warning.

While homeroom teachers are afforded positions from which to exercise power over many facets of student life, this does not mean that homeroom teachers are necessarily able to stop certain students from being targeted by their peers. Just like other teachers, homeroom teachers are not present all the time and thus their ability to survey and control the conduct of students is severely limited. While students may have refrained from targeting Minh in the presence of the homeroom teacher, there was little Minh could do to stop himself from being targeted when she was not around. Indeed, the teacher-student opposition ensured that Minh’s ability to report such bullying was severely restricted as doing so would make it even more likely that he would be bullied.

‘Barn Owls’ and Squealing

Telling the teacher was perceived negatively by most students and it is thus unsurprising that only a relatively small percentage of students suggested that they would be willing to tell a teacher about bullying. When I asked a group of girls from Class 9B whether anyone deserves to be bullied they explained that some students deserve to be bullied if they tell on other students to the teacher. They referred to these students as ‘barn owls’ (*con chim lon*). The direct translation of the term *con chim lon* is ‘pig bird’, which refers to the noise that barn owls make. Unlike other owls which ‘hoot’, barn owls make a

squealing noise, believed to be similar to that of a pig. The girls' use of the term 'barn owl' is illustrative of how those labelled 'barn owl' are expected to behave. The label 'barn owl' was thus given to those students who told the teacher, or in colloquial terms, to those who 'squealed'. Barn owls have long been the subject of superstition and are thought to be the harbingers of bad luck, and even death. While barn owls eat vermin and thus provide a service to farmers, their delivery of misfortune questions their purpose. Much in the same way, girls explained that 'barn owls' are believed to be two-faced (*hai mat*), and therefore not to be trusted. Barn owls are suspected of behaving in a fake (*gia tao*) manner and of divulging information to teachers while at the same time pretending to be friends with those students they have told on.

A number of students in Class 9B told me that one girl, Huong, was bullied because she would tell the teacher when someone did something wrong. Le, the class monitor of Class 9B, told me that Huong was often bullied because the students bullying her "think that every secret of the class that the teacher knows about is told by Huong." On one occasion, I intervened to stop two boys in the class from teasing Huong, as she had become distraught because of the teasing and had begun to cry. When I asked one of the boys, Tu, why he teased her, he explained that "she always tells on me to the teacher. She definitely knows that the teacher dislikes me, but she often tells on me anyway." Tu said that he had been friends with Huong from grades 1-8, but had been bullying her since the eighth grade. He said that Huong had told the teacher about the bullying but that two other girls, including the class monitor, had defended him and had told the teacher that Huong was exaggerating. Hence no action was taken by the teacher, and Huong continued to be bullied by her classmates.

While I was told that Tuyet was bullied in Class 9B because of her perceived refusal to share, like Huong she was also bullied because of the perception that she would tell the teacher. Tuyet was relatively new to the school, having moved to Pho Chieu School the

previous year, and suggested that she did not get along with many of her classmates. Tuyet appeared to be perceived very much as an outsider in the classroom, and she explained that she only spent time with other students who paid attention to their studies, and that she could not really interact with others because her parents did not let her go out very often. The bullying she was subjected to made it increasingly unlikely that this status could change, as befriending her would risk being bullied by association. Tuyet explained that other girls in the class often behaved angrily towards her for no apparent reason, and also asked her to go to the canteen for them; something which Tuyet felt obliged to do.

While Tuyet's newcomer status, her parents' strictness, and her own study focus certainly cannot have helped, it seems that a major reason for Tuyet being bullied was because other students perceived her as a 'barn owl'. Indeed, they believed that she would tell the teacher if students did something they were not allowed to. This was highlighted during a Class 9B lesson when Thuy asked whether a girl in the class, Huyen, was not worried that the vice monitor, Ninh, would tell the teacher what she had said. As Thuy noted in her field notes:

After listening to her cell phone, the teacher ran quickly out of the room. Huyen looked at me and used her hands to describe her. She said "Thuy, her butt is like that." I asked whether she isn't afraid that Ninh will tell the teacher. She and Phuong slapped Ninh on the back, which seemed to hurt Ninh, and Phuong said "No, she is on our side! Our whole group is on one side." Huyen pointed at Tuyet and said "Her, that's her. She'll tell the homeroom teacher!"

It is unclear whether Tuyet had ever actually told the teacher, but it was enough that she was deemed to be the type (i.e. a 'barn owl') to

tell the teacher, as this provided the legitimacy for the bullying she was subjected to.

Another girl in Class 9B, Loan, joined the class in grade 6 having been at a different primary school to the rest of her classmates, and she emphasised the difficulties associated with joining a new school. Loan explained that it takes time to get to know the characters of the students in the class: “I didn’t know their characters, I didn’t know how to get along with them, and they didn’t understand me.” Loan suggested that her classmate Tuyet was bullied because she did not do enough to try and fit in, and because she interfered in the business of others by telling the teacher. While Loan told me that she was also initially bullied, Loan demonstrated an understanding of the social order of the classroom and appeared to have been accepted by her classmates as a result.

When Loan joined the class, she soon made friends with another girl in the class, Yen. However, her friendship with Yen caused unexpected problems for Loan after Yen told the teacher what some of the boys in their class had been talking about. While it is unclear exactly what the boys had been talking about, it seems clear that Yen reported their discussion to the teacher. As Loan explained, “Yen told about their stories to the teacher and they spoke ill of her behind her back.” Telling on the boys resulted in those boys gossiping behind Yen’s back about her being a ‘barn owl’. Loan defended her new friend by confronting the boys, telling them to stop talking about Yen behind her back, and when they did not stop, she hit them. As Loan explained, “I told those boys that it was not good for boys to speak ill of others like that, and then I jumped in and started hitting them. So they hit me back.”

Loan explained that for three months she was then bullied verbally by the boys and she often retaliated by hitting them, and they in turn hit her back. However, a teacher then realised what was happening and intervened on Loan’s behalf. In class, the teacher asked Loan if the boys were bullying her. By asking Loan in class, in front

of the students who had been bullying her and the rest of her classmates, the teacher placed Loan in a difficult position vis-à-vis her classmates. However, Loan responded by standing up and telling the teacher that the boys were not bullying her. By refusing to tell the teacher about the bullying, Loan demonstrated that she was not the kind of student who tells the teacher. She was not a 'barn owl'. As Loan explained, "I stood up and I didn't tell the truth, I said that they didn't bully me. Since then, they haven't bullied me anymore. Also since then, they have looked at me in a different way and they understand that I was protecting them."

Indeed, it appears that Loan's decision not to tell the teacher was a turning point in her relations with her classmates. While she was bullied for associating with, and defending, someone who was believed to tell the teacher, her demonstrated refusal to tell the teacher about the bullying she was subjected to put an end to the bullying. Loan told me that her classmates now saw her as someone who was loyal and who would protect a friend at any cost; something which was seen as a positive trait and of which she was very proud. It would have been understandable if Loan had taken the opportunity to tell the teacher in the hope of stopping the bullying. However, by not telling the teacher the truth, Loan demonstrated an understanding of the power relations within the classroom. It is likely that telling the teacher in such a public way would have resulted in the bullying getting worse rather than better. Her decision not to tell the teacher, on the other hand, put a stop to the bullying as it countered attempts at legitimising the bullying (i.e. being associated with a 'barn owl', and thus a 'barn owl' by association).

This episode illustrates that the ways in which teachers discipline their students directly impact the extent that students will be willing to tell a teacher about the bullying they are subjected to. The marked decrease in the percentage of students who would be willing to tell a teacher if they were bullied after grade six suggests that increasing numbers of students may keep quiet in the hope of avoiding

being perceived negatively as the kind who would ‘squeal’. As Yoneyama (1999, 86) puts it, “To say nothing is a survival skill.”

Telling a Class Monitor

In classes certain students are given responsibility to help govern the conduct of their classmates, and one could imagine that these students are ideally placed to deal with issues such as bullying amongst their peers. However, while 13 percent of sixth grade girls and 6 percent of sixth grade boys indicated that they would tell their class monitor about being bullied, only 2 percent of seventh grade girls and 3 percent of seventh grade boys indicated they would tell, while less than 1 percent of ninth grade girls and no ninth grade boys indicated they would tell their class monitor. This suggests that even in the sixth grade the vast majority of students are not willing to tell a class monitor about bullying, while in the ninth grade almost no students would tell their class monitor if they were being bullied. Student reticence to tell the class monitor about bullying reflects the role that class monitors play in the disciplining of students. Rather than being perceived as a means of supporting other students and giving voice to student concerns, class monitors play an essentially punitive role in schools.

As I have already argued in Chapter 5, class monitors are expected to relay information about their classmates to their teachers, and for this reason they are known as ‘hunting dogs’ (*cho san*). This perception of class monitors as ‘hunting dogs’ illustrates the perceived links between the class monitors and the teachers, and suggests that telling the class monitor is just perceived to be a less direct way of telling the teacher. The class monitor has no real authority to deal with bullying but rather an obligation to tell the homeroom teacher, and thus telling the class monitor differs little from telling a teacher directly.

As I illustrated in Chapter 5 with the example of the class monitor of Class 9B, Le, class monitors who embrace their responsibility and relay information about bullying to teachers may themselves be bullied for siding with teachers against their fellow students, and may be considered two-faced and fake for this reason. In classes where the class monitor is targeted for being a ‘hunting dog’ it is perhaps even less likely that students who are bullied will seek help from them, as they themselves have little influence over the conduct of their classmates.

Telling a Family Member

In line with other studies, students at the two schools indicated that they were more likely to tell a parent than a teacher if they were being bullied (Erling and Hwang 2004; Frisén, Holmqvist, and Oscarsson 2008; Houndoumadi and Pateraki 2001). However, while 35 percent of sixth grade girls and 31 percent of sixth grade boys indicated that they would tell a parent, these figures decrease to 14 percent of seventh grade girls and 11 percent of seventh grade boys, and in the ninth grade only 14 percent of girls and just 4 percent of boys indicated that they would tell a parent if they were being bullied. While 48 percent of sixth grade girls and 27 percent of sixth grade boys indicated that they would tell an older sibling, these figures also decrease significantly by the seventh grade to 18.5 percent of girls and 18 percent of boys. In the ninth grade, 16 percent of girls and 10 percent of boys indicated a willingness to tell an older sibling about school bullying. These findings thus suggest that students are increasingly unlikely to tell a family member about being bullied after the sixth grade.

The increasing reluctance to tell a family member about bullying may indicate that doing so is increasingly perceived to do little to stop the bullying. Minh, for example, told me about an

incident when he was walking home from school with a friend, and another boy, Tai, started kneeing him in the thigh. His friend at the time, who later stopped being friends with Minh, did not intervene but later told Minh to tell his mother about what had happened. Minh told his mother, who then spoke to Tai's mother. However, as Minh told me, "Tai's mother defends him a lot", and Tai continued to target Minh. A girl in Class 9A, Duyen, who was regularly teased about having head lice, and hence about having the disease Typhus (which may be transmitted by head lice), told me that she had told her father about the teasing she was subjected to but that he did not do anything to stop it. As Duyen explained, "I told my father already but he said nothing and didn't intervene. I was so disappointed about that." When considering Duyen's explanation that she told her father about being teased, but he did not do anything about it, and Minh's explanation that he told his mother about being kneed repeatedly in the leg but nothing changed in his relations with Tai, it is perhaps not surprising that students are increasingly less likely to tell a parent about bullying.

Students may also refrain from telling a parent or older sibling because of the links between the school and home. Telling a parent or older sibling may lead to that family member contacting the school and leaving the issue in the hands of the homeroom teacher. The homeroom teacher may suggest that the student is exaggerating, may place the blame on the student being bullied, or may indiscreetly address the issue in class, which may merely serve to exacerbate the situation as that student may then be negatively portrayed as someone who tells the teacher (i.e. a 'barn owl'). Familial pressure to succeed at school may also make it less likely that students feel comfortable talking to their parents or older siblings about the problems they are facing at school.

School Bullying and the Student Code of Silence

The above findings suggest that students are increasingly unlikely to tell someone in a position of authority about bullying if it occurs. Such unwillingness makes sense when one considers the disciplinary power invested within schools. The hierarchical structure of schooling means that some staff members are most likely perceived to be unapproachable by students, who are instead expected to speak to their class monitor or homeroom teacher. The non-dialogical teaching practices predominantly utilized within schools mean that student silence is not considered to be anything unusual but rather is expected. It is somewhat paradoxical to expect students to speak to their teachers about problems they are having when speaking is most commonly treated as a punishable offence by those same teachers.

Teachers represent school for students and the teacher-student opposition that develops within schools means that contact with the teacher is generally perceived negatively. Students who are believed to tell the teacher about incidents involving other students are likely to be bullied more rather than less as they are considered ‘barn owls’ who cannot be trusted because of their perceived willingness to ‘squeal’. Telling the teacher may thus be perceived as a highly risk-laden strategy. Likewise, as inter-student issues such as bullying tend to be the remit of homeroom teachers, telling a class monitor or family member may be perceived to be little different from telling the homeroom teacher directly, as it is the homeroom teacher to whom class monitors and family members are expected to turn.

Those teachers who administer corporal punishment, who punish in an *ad hoc* fashion, who bully students, who are bullied by students, or who simply do not intervene to stop bullying are unlikely to be considered approachable by students seeking help with similar issues. Rather, their behaviour is likely to suggest that telling them about bullying will do little to make the situation better and may actually serve to exacerbate the extent to which the bullying occurs.

Students are more likely to turn to friends, if they have any, and my findings suggest that students are fairly consistent throughout the four grades about their willingness to tell a friend, and this willingness actually seemed to increase, perhaps as students saw this as the only avenue left open to them. The percentage of girls who indicated that they would tell a friend about being bullied increased from 42 percent in grade six to 52 percent in grades seven and eight and 55 percent in grade nine. The percentage of boys who indicated that they would tell a friend increased slightly from 40 percent in grade six to 43 percent in grades seven, eight, and nine. Thus while students' willingness to tell a school authority figure or a family member decreases throughout the years, and significantly so between the first two years, their willingness to tell a friend remains relatively constant, and even increases significantly in the case of girls.

Some students may not feel they have anyone to turn to, and Minh for example confided to me that he did not have any friends to whom he could turn for help. While more girls than boys indicated that they would tell a friend if they were being bullied, significantly more boys than girls indicated that they would not tell anyone, especially after the first year of lower secondary schooling. While the percentage of girls who indicated that they would not tell anyone if they were being bullied increased from 11 percent in grade six to 15 percent in grades seven and eight and 16 percent in grade nine, the percentage of boys who indicated that they would not tell anyone more than doubled from 14 percent in grade six to 30 percent in grade seven, 34 percent in grade eight, and 39 percent in grade nine.

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, students told me that those students who are most likely to be bullied are those who are perceived as 'meek' (*hien lanh*). As I also mentioned in Chapter 4, girls and boys are generally believed to have different characters. Female characters are linked to the force of *Am* and are hence perceived to be 'cool' (*lanh*), while male characters are linked to the force of *Duong* and are thus believed to be 'hot' (*nong*) (Rydstrøm 1998, 2003, 2004).

Being bullied, and thus perceived as ‘meek’, has further implications for boys as being ‘meek’ runs contrary to the supposedly hot, active, and extroverted character of boys. Boys may therefore be even more reluctant than girls to tell anyone about being bullied as doing so might bring their masculinity and/or sexuality into question. Such a possibility was suggested by a group of boys who told me that ‘gays’ are bullied the most because they are seen to be even more gentle than girls.

Taken together, the above findings about who students would tell if they were being bullied suggest an alarming trend towards a code of silence about bullying in schools, particularly amongst boys, whereby students who are bullied feel increasingly incapable of telling anyone about what is happening. When considering the recent spate of student suicides in Vietnam, the student code of silence surrounding bullying is particularly alarming.

Silencing and Student Suicides

While I have yet to read about any school bullying related suicides in Vietnam, bullying research worldwide has long pointed out links between bullying and suicide. Indeed, the links between bullying and suicide go back as far as bullying research itself (Burgess, Garbarino, and Carlson 2006; Kim 2004; Olweus 2000; Rigby, Smith, and Pepler 2004; Yoneyama 1999; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). Studies conducted in Finland and Norway, in 1999 and 2002, for example, found that both bullies and victims were more prone to suicidal thoughts than those not involved in bullying (Stephensen and Møller 2004). Likewise, a study undertaken in South Korea in October 2000 reported that “victims, perpetrators, and victim-perpetrators all reported higher rates of suicidal/self-injurious behaviours and suicidal ideations, in all time sequences, when compared with students who were not involved in bullying” (Kim, Koh, and Leventhal 2005, 359).

The finding that students are increasingly less likely to tell anyone about bullying the longer they are at school should thus be cause for concern, as suicide may be used as a cry for help when no-one is otherwise perceived to be listening.

In recent years, student suicide has become a pervasive problem in contemporary Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh City Paediatric Hospital alone treats between thirty and forty 10-16-year-olds who have attempted to commit suicide annually (*Vietnam News*, March 9, 2010). Newspaper reports suggest that the reasons for many of the recent student suicides and attempted suicides have been directly related to the demands of schooling. In Hanoi, for example, an eighth grade boy committed suicide by hanging himself after reportedly regularly being told off by his teacher for disturbing lessons. As a newspaper reporter explained, the boy continued to talk to his friends in class despite being repeatedly reminded by his teacher to keep silent. The teacher then spoke to his parents, who in turn admonished him and banned him from playing football with his friends. Prior to his death, the boy reportedly told his parents that they would no longer have to bother about him (Nguyen Nam Thanh 2006).

On 25 March 2005, a seventh grade boy also committed suicide in Ha Long City after his mother had been called to see his teacher about his reportedly disruptive in-class behaviour, while on 18 October 2006 an eleventh grade girl attempted to commit suicide in Ho Chi Minh City after being reprimanded about her mathematics homework. The teacher had reportedly given her a mark of 0 for the answer she provided to a mathematics equation “despite the teacher’s reluctant admission that it was another correct way to the right answer” (Vietnamnet 2006). Vietnamnet (2006) reported that the girl’s classmates were grateful to the girl for bringing into focus the scholastic demands they face in school and the potential consequences of such demands.

Collective suicides and suicide attempts have also become increasingly common phenomena in contemporary Vietnam. On 7

October 2005, for example, three sixth grade students in Ben Tre attempted to commit collective suicide by taking sleeping pills but were revived at hospital. The three students had earlier been instructed by their teacher to write self-critical reviews about their poor study results and then take the reviews home for their parents to read. Rather than show their parents their poor grades they instead attempted to take their own lives (Minh Tien 2006). Likewise, on 16 February 2006, five seventh grade girls in Hanoi also attempted to commit collective suicide by taking sleeping pills and had to be revived at hospital. The decision to take their own lives was apparently taken after one of the girls received a low grade and was subsequently scolded by her parents. Her friends then made a suicide pact to commit suicide with her (Thu Hoai 2006).

On 24 May 2006, five seventh grade girls committed collective suicide in Phuong Hoang commune by tying their hands together with Pioneer's scarves and drowning themselves in a river. In letters left by the girls they wrote about the pressure to succeed scholastically and about being scolded by their parents for not concentrating sufficiently on their studies. Four of the five girls regularly got good grades and all five were members of a group called 'Eight Tears' (*Tam Le*), which originally included eight girls and which had initially been set up as a study support group. Parents of the girls expressed their regret about being 'excessive' in their reactions when the girls did not concentrate sufficiently on their studies (Mai Tam 2006; Minh Tien 2006). The Principal of the school which the girls had been attending acknowledged that the school may have been better able to prevent the situation but rather than addressing why the girls did not talk to their teachers suggested that restricting the girls' ability to gather in a group may have prevented the tragedy:

In this case, it is partly the school's fault for letting the children be free to gather in a group, and to develop such negative thoughts without being able to intervene in time (cited in Mai Tam 2006, 9).

Reports suggest, however, that it was not the girls' ability to gather that produced the negative thoughts but rather educational pressure and associated parental expectations (Mai Tam 2006; Minh Tien 2006). On the day of the suicides, the girls reportedly passed a note to each other in class, upon which was written "Try not to cry and think of something cheerful instead, otherwise they may notice" (Minh Tien 2006, 2). As I highlighted in Chapter 5, girls commonly pass notes in class as a means of getting around demands that they remain silent in class.

What all of these suicides and attempted suicides point to is a lack of communication between students, teachers, and parents about issues which students take seriously enough to consider ending their lives over. Rather than being promoted to discuss such issues, students are instead expected to remain silent in class unless directly asked a question by the teacher. The school Principal's comments in the wake of the death of the five girls illustrates that student communication is often perceived to be the problem, rather than lack of communication. However, as Nguyen Kim Quy, an advisor for a national children's helpline² in Vietnam, has argued, these suicides and attempted suicides can be understood as cries for help that were not sufficiently heard by teachers and parents (cited in Pham Hong 2006, 8).

The child helpline project was launched in 2004 as a joint initiative by the child rights organisation Plan Vietnam and the Vietnamese Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPFC). Between 2004 and October 2006, the helpline received an estimated 126,203 calls (Plan Vietnam 2011). Many of the children who call the children's helpline call to talk about suicide and of the total calls to the helpline, approximately 5-7 percent of calls are

related to dissatisfaction with school, 15-20 percent of calls are related to family issues, while 20 percent of calls are related to relations with peers (Pham Hong 2006). It thus seems that many students do not feel able to talk directly about their troubles, while a high percentage of children who call the helpline appear to need to discuss problems at school and with their peers. Commenting on the suicides of the five girls in Phuong Hoang in 2006, Nguyen Kim Quy (from the national children's helpline) linked the girls' deaths to abusive teaching practices in schools and argued that teachers "need to be re-trained about how to teach children and pupils" (cited in Pham Hong 2006, 8).

Continued authoritative silence about bullying could exacerbate the problem and actually increase the likelihood of suicide being used as a means to be heard. As recent events in Japan have illustrated, perceived refusal to deal with the issue of school bullying can have tragic consequences. In early November 2006 the then Japanese Education Minister, Bunmei Ibuki, received nine anonymous letters from school-aged children threatening to commit suicide if the Japanese government did not do anything about bullying (*ijime*) in the nation's schools (*China Post*, November 14, 2006). The letters came at the same time as a number of bullying-related suicides in the country, and forced the government to take action (*Guardian*, November 10, 2006). The first letter was believed to be from a male junior high school pupil, who stated that he was the victim of bullying and that "if nothing changes, I'm going to commit suicide" (McLeod 2006). The second letter was believed to be from a female second-year high school pupil, who stated that she would kill herself "along with the people who have bullied me. I can't forgive the people who bullied me. I will kill them, kill them, kill them – and die" (*Guardian*, November 10, 2006). After the first letter was received, the then Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, stated that "it's necessary for the school, the education boards, and families to unite to deal with the bullying problems. We have to make sure that children who think they are being bullied can easily talk to counsellors" (McLeod 2006).

At present, very few schools in Vietnam have school counsellors or school social workers to whom students can go when they are being bullied (Vietnamnet 2011). As part of the Ministry of Education and Training's Building Friendly Schools, Active Students education programme the issue of school violence is being addressed through the incorporation of 'life skills' and 'values' training into the national school curriculum. Such 'life skills' and 'values' are going to include everything from teamwork, accident prevention, behavioural skills, and the removal of violence and 'social evils' from schools (Tran Thi Kim Thuan 2011). However, participants at a recent conference on social work organized by Ho Chi Minh City Open University and UNICEF were critical of the focus on teaching 'life skills', arguing that teachers are already overburdened by teaching demands and that the incorporation of life skills would require trained social workers (Vietnamnet 2011). As I have illustrated in this chapter, not only will the addition of 'life skills' and 'values' training add to the burden of teachers, it will also add to the burden of students and will also do little to address the power relations which underpin bullying unless the ways in which lessons are taught by teachers are also addressed.

School Bullying and Silencing

While promoting students to speak out about bullying is necessary for breaching the silence surrounding bullying, greater consideration also needs to be given to why some students and teachers may feel that remaining silent about bullying is in their best interests. The fact that help lines and help forums receive large numbers of calls and messages from students who feel a need to speak to someone about the bullying to which they are subjected suggests that many students do not feel able to speak directly to those individuals who are entrusted with the care of students in schools. As I have argued,

silencing may actually be promoted through the hierarchical management structure of schooling, the use of non-dialogical teaching methods, the teacher-student opposition, and non-discreet teacher-parent and teacher-student communication.

Silence is indicative of the power relations in schools and is used both to exercise power and to exercise resistance. Silencing plays a key role in the maintenance of the power relations involved in bullying, as it reduces the extent to which principals, teachers, family members, and students are able to speak out about bullying. School funding is connected to the school reports submitted by principals, which means that school principals may be loathe to acknowledge bullying as a problem in their schools. Likewise, teachers may also be concerned about the consequences of speaking out, as doing so may have negative implications for their positions as teachers. Students have little opportunity to speak out in schools as talking out of turn is often treated as a punishable offence.

Silencing can also be understood as a form of bullying, whereby the threat of being hit, kicked or teased, for example, is used to ensure that those being bullied do not tell. Those who do tell the teacher are liable to be perceived as ‘barn owls’ or ‘hunting dogs’ by other students, meaning that the bullying to which they are subjected may be seen to be deserved. Even when a teacher does attempt to intervene, students who are bullied may refuse to tell the teacher that they are bullied in the knowledge that doing so will exacerbate rather than stop the bullying to which they are being subjected.

While links have yet to be made between student suicides and school bullying in Vietnam, findings from other countries suggest that such links are alarmingly common. In light of recent school-related student suicides in Vietnam, and the finding that school bullying appears to be common in schools in Vietnam, the links between suicidal ideation and school bullying should be cause for concern. Suicide may be used as a means for students who are bullied to be heard in a particularly loud manner.

Notes

¹ Reproduced with permission from Beatbullying.

² This helpline is free of charge and can be contacted on 18001567 within Vietnam.

Conclusions

In this study I have sought to illuminate the interconnectedness of school bullying and power relations in the specific context of Vietnamese lower secondary schooling. It is not possible to understand such interconnections without situating the study of bullying within the context in which it occurs. Researching the interconnectedness of school bullying and power relations means moving beyond student reports about bullying to more contextually situated studies whereby school bullying is researched within the context in which it occurs and gains currency. Rather than relying solely on the answers of students and teachers to questionnaires, therefore, I combined the use of questionnaires with observations and interviews with students and teachers in an ethnographic study of two Haiphong lower secondary schools. Ethnography is well suited to studying school bullying and power relations as it allows for the observation of power in practice.

While this study was conducted in the specific context of two Haiphong lower secondary schools, the findings serve to question a number of common assumptions about school bullying, while also alluding to ways in which the problem of school bullying may be addressed more comprehensively. Thus, in this concluding chapter I not only emphasise the importance of my findings for Vietnamese educational policies but also outline how my findings add to knowledge about school bullying more generally and the implications this has for anti-bullying initiatives.

Understanding Vietnamese School Bullying and Power Relations

My findings suggest that school bullying is prevalent in Vietnamese lower secondary schools, with 56.8 percent of students in the two schools indicating that they had been bullied. However, student understanding of what constitutes bullying in Vietnamese schools appears to differ significantly from definitions of bullying commonly used in other studies, particularly with reference to the intention behind the bullying.

School bullying is most commonly understood in terms of specific types of actions, and is often separated into different forms - including physical and non-physical bullying, as well as direct and indirect bullying. When students and teachers at Du Hang and Pho Chieu schools explained bullying (*bat nat*) in questionnaires and interviews, they suggested that it could take a variety of forms, including teasing (*treu nhau*), hitting (*danh*), kicking (*cu da*), exclusion (*tay chay*), verbal abuse (*xi va*), and threatening (*de doa*). However, while the aggression focus of most school bullying research has meant that the intention of bullying has largely been understood as the intention to do harm, my data suggests that it is useful to understand bullying as a strategic means by which someone is able to get someone else to do something they otherwise would not be willing to do. Such an understanding of school bullying shifts the focus from the specific actions involved to the power relations behind the actions, and raises questions about what it is that some students are bullied into doing and why.

Such an understanding of school bullying also opens up for a wider discussion of power relations. While school bullying researchers have consistently argued that school bullying involves an unequal power relation, their discussions of that power relation have tended to be focused on the interpersonal level, as if bullying occurs in a contextual vacuum. As I have argued, a Foucauldian analysis of

power relations requires understanding power not as something which is held but rather as something which is exercised strategically. While certain individuals may be in positions to exercise more power than others in given situations, this does not mean that they hold power over others. Where there is power there is also resistance, as power and resistance are two sides of the same coin, termed differently in order to reflect the differential positions wherefrom power/resistance is exercised.

Acknowledging the resistance involved in power relations is important for understanding the use of specific actions such as hitting and kicking, as it is when resisted that the power exercised in bullying may take its most basic form (Foucault 1982). Hitting, kicking and other specific actions may be used to enforce the power relations in order to ensure compliance. It is thus not the specific actions which constitute bullying but rather bullying involves a power relation wherein someone seeks to conduct the conduct of another (i.e. to get someone to do something they otherwise would not be willing to do), by wielding the threat of those specific actions for non-compliance.

Bullying may be used to exercise both power and resistance. Bullying may be used to exercise power over others by getting them to do things they would not otherwise do, and it may also be used to exercise resistance to the disciplinary power invested in schools. In order to better understand bullying, therefore, it is necessary to consider the role of schooling. The school is by definition where *school* bullying occurs. However, most school bullying researchers have paid little consideration to the role of schooling and the disciplinary power with which schools are invested. Rather than merely providing the setting for bullying, the school should instead be understood as an integral part of the power relations involved in bullying, as bullying may be utilised by some students to strategically adjust to the disciplinary power to which they are subjected in schools.

School Bullying and Schooling

If bullying involves getting someone to do something they otherwise would not do, then it is necessary to consider what those who are bullied are bullied into doing and why. As I have illustrated in this study, bullying may be utilised strategically by students as a means for facilitating their adjustments to the disciplinary demands of schooling. Techniques of surveillance, control and normalisation may be resisted by students who utilise bullying as the means to facilitate their resistance.

Bullying may provide a form of removal activity in what is otherwise a highly disciplined environment, and thus provide some students with a form of entertainment in what might otherwise be perceived as boring lessons. Some students may be bullied into going to the school canteen, covering for students who are truanting, keeping lookout while teachers are out of class, swapping seats, and sharing books, stationery and answers to tests and examinations. It is revealing that students who did not share were perceived by other students to deserve the bullying to which they were subjected. Students who refuse to share challenge the ability of other students to get around the disciplinary demands of schooling.

Some students may also be bullied in an attempt to stop them from telling the teacher. Students who tell the teacher relay information to teachers and thus challenge the ability of other students to get around the demands placed on them within school. Those who tell may thus be perceived as ‘barn owls’. The affordance of extra responsibility to some students in their roles as class monitors may also mean that they are bullied for being ‘hunting dogs’, as they are perceived to be hunting on the behalf of teachers.

By emphasising the importance of the disciplinary power invested in schools, I am not suggesting that schools should necessarily increase the number of disciplinary tools at the disposal of teachers. Increasing the amount of surveillance in schools, ‘cracking

down' on student behaviour and punitively dealing with those students who bully others is likely to do little to address the power relations underpinning bullying in schools. While a common response to bullying is the call for more surveillance of playgrounds through the installation of closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras (*BBC News*, November 11, 2003; *Manchester Evening News*, February 7, 2007), for example, such a response fails to acknowledge the relations between power and resistance. It is unlikely that increasing the amount of surveillance in schools will do anything to fundamentally alter the power relations involved. Indeed, as Blatchford (1993) and Yoneyama (1999) have also argued, increased surveillance may lead to even more bullying in response to an increasingly punitive school environment. The locations of bullying may merely shift in relation to the focal point of cameras or the bullying may be conducted in more subtle ways. Increasing surveillance may thus lead to bullying becoming less open and instead being conducted through other mediums such as note passing, text messaging, and online forums, for example.

Likewise, increasing curricular demands without addressing the ways in which the curriculum is taught will most likely do little to address the prevalence of bullying. While the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has reportedly spent a considerable amount of money incorporating 'life skills' and 'values' training into the national curriculum, such an initiative does little to address the ways in which such training is given, or the already demanding workloads of teachers (Vietnamnet 2011). Despite former President Ho Chi Minh's longstanding critiques of 'parrot-like' learning, and subsequent calls for changes in teaching methods, non-dialogical rote learning was the norm in classes 9A and 9B. As I have illustrated, non-dialogical teaching methods and communication patterns promote inattention and lead to those students who are bored in class engaging in removal activities, some of which may involve bullying.

Gendered expectations that girls should help control the behaviour of boys and otherwise remain silent in class mean that a significant amount of communication between girls is done through the medium of note passing. As has been highlighted by recent collective suicides (Mai Tam 2006; Minh Tien 2006), such silencing may have particularly tragic consequences as it may make it much less likely that teachers are aware of what is occurring within their classes.

Rather than restricting students' ability to speak, perhaps it is more important to promote dialogue between teachers and students in class. This would require a shift from banking style education and Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) communication patterns to more dialogical means of educating, a shift from seating plans designed to stop student-student communication to seating plans designed to promote in-class communication, as well as a shift from an overwhelming focus on inter-student competition to one of inter-student collaboration.

Improving the dialogical nature of education will no doubt serve to improve the relations between teachers and students and thus reduce the amount of teacher-student opposition within schools. However, before such communication can be improved the demands currently placed on teachers need to be addressed. Improving teacher-student communication means not only changing the ways in which teachers teach their classes but also addressing the curricular demands on teachers. Rather than adding more subjects to an already demanding curriculum, it may be more useful to allow teachers more scope to address off-topic issues in class without stressing about whether or not they are getting through the required amount of work for their students to pass their upcoming examinations.

School Bullying and Teacher-Student Relations

As I have illustrated, the teaching demands placed on teachers mean that teachers tend to most readily punish misdemeanours which threaten the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. The opposition of students also means that teachers may become increasingly *ad hoc* in their punishment of such misdemeanours, while such opposition may be reinforced by the ways in which teachers treat students in class. Teachers' use of sarcasm and derision may lead to increasing animosity felt by students towards their teachers while also providing a climate within which such comments are considered acceptable. Likewise, inconsistency in the punishment meted out to students, including the use of corporal punishment and bullying as disciplinary strategies by teachers, may serve to exacerbate the teacher-student opposition while suggesting that such ways of interacting are acceptable means of exercising power.

Schools should have clearer guidelines as to what constitutes accepted forms of punishment for which kinds of misdemeanours, as well as what constitutes a punishable offence. This would not only make it easier for teachers to know how to punish students appropriately but also make it clearer to students what kind of behaviour is not accepted and what kinds of punishment are considered acceptable. Regardless of the offence, corporal punishment should not be used by teachers in schools, as the use of corporal punishment promotes violence as an acceptable means of exercising power. It also runs contrary to both Vietnam's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 2005 Education Law (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989).

It also needs to be recognised that teachers are placed in a difficult position in schools and that the inconsistent punishment some teachers mete out may be symptomatic of the demands placed on

teachers to successfully manage their classes. The competitive focus of education means that in-class disruptions cannot be adequately discussed by teachers, who instead address such disruptions as irritations rather than potential educational material to be addressed with students. Rather than ignoring those interactions which do not necessarily disrupt the transfer of knowledge but which may be detrimental to the welfare of students, such interactions need to be addressed as central components of the education of students. Rather than having particular subjects dealing with issues such as bullying, these issues should be continually addressed in schools. Indeed, the silence surrounding such issues needs to be breached.

School Bullying and Silencing

As I have shown in the previous chapter, students who are bullied are increasingly less likely to tell anyone about the bullying they are subjected to the longer they are at school. Teachers may also remain silent about the bullying of students in their classes and/or the bullying they themselves are subjected to out of concern for their own positions as teachers. Until now, there has been a relative lack of discussion about the issue of school bullying in Vietnam, so it is perhaps not surprising that school bullying has been silenced.

Students are more likely to speak out about bullying if they believe that the bullying they are subjected to is not generally acceptable or justifiable and if they feel that teachers will deal with the problem constructively and where necessary discreetly. As I have argued, there is a student code of silence surrounding bullying in schools. Students may not trust their teachers' ability or willingness to do anything to stop the bullying, while the risks associated with being perceived as a 'barn owl' may also prevent students from speaking out. Keeping quiet about bullying may sometimes be perceived as a better strategy than speaking out about it, especially when students are

asked about bullying in front of their classmates, and particularly in the presence of those students who bully them.

The finding that boys are increasingly less likely than girls to tell anyone about the bullying to which they are subjected suggests that gendered differentiation between the different characters of boys and girls has implications for how students experience bullying. Boys may be even less likely than girls to tell anyone because of the links between being bullied and being 'meek' (*hien lanh*). It is worthwhile noting that the recent collective student suicides and suicide attempts in Vietnam have involved girls, while boys have committed suicide alone. Girls may be more willing to share their negative school experiences with their friends while boys may keep them to themselves out of fear that their own character will be questioned because of their perceived inability to retaliate with 'heat'.

Schools need to facilitate the ability of students to speak out about bullying confidentially without the risk of retaliation for 'squealing'. This does not mean merely encouraging students to speak to teachers, but rather requires the promotion of more dialogical forms of learning, as well as consistency and clarity in the use of punishment by teachers. The finding that students are considerably more willing to speak to a teacher in the sixth grade than in any other grade of lower secondary schooling suggests that students may be willing to speak to teachers if teachers promote dialogue and if teachers are trained to deal with bullying more constructively. Perhaps the introduction of trained school social workers or counsellors who do not have teaching roles would make it easier for students to speak out about bullying. As the interviews in this study have highlighted, students do appear to be willing to talk about bullying as long as what they say is treated seriously and confidentially.

Implications for Anti-bullying Initiatives

This study into the interconnectedness of school bullying and power relations in the context of Vietnamese lower secondary schooling has a number of implications for how bullying is understood and dealt with. There is a vast array of anti-bullying intervention plans used in schools to deal with bullying worldwide (Galloway and Roland 2004; Smokowski and Kopasz 2005; Sørensen and Thomsen 2005). While the anti-bullying intervention plans differ in approach, they tend to be somewhat similar in their focus on the aggressive actions of individuals (Horton 2007a). Many researchers appear to agree that a school's anti-bullying intervention plan needs to form part of what is called a 'whole school' approach, whereby all of the members of the school community are involved in agreeing on what bullying is and how it should be addressed (Eriksson et al. 2002; Olweus 1993; Rigby 2008; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004).

A key component of the whole school approach is the regular use of anonymous questionnaire surveys in order to gather information about the problem. However, as I have already argued, questionnaire surveys are of little use in gaining knowledge about the power relations involved in bullying. The continued focus on student answers to questionnaire surveys reflects the focus of the whole school approach. Despite the name, the whole school approach to school bullying tends to ignore the role of the school in school bullying. Instead the focus is on the actions of those involved in the bullying, whose behaviour is to be countered by the school's chosen intervention program (Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan 2004). Rather than focusing on the power relations involved in bullying, then, the whole school approach focuses on the effects of those power relations and is largely punitive in its approach (Rigby 2008). The punitive approach stems from the assertion that the intention of those doing the bullying is inevitably aggressive and deliberately harmful.

If, as I have argued, school bullying is inextricably intertwined with the disciplinary power invested in schools, then it is not enough to address the actions of those students who do the bullying (i.e. the 'bullies') in a piecemeal fashion. Rather, it is necessary to address the role of schooling, as it is the relations of power within schools which make bullying a contextual strategy for some students. Doing so does not detract from the negative consequences of bullying for those subjected to it but does help to better illuminate the power relations within which school bullying gains currency.

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Glossary of Bullying-related Terms

<i>Bat nat</i>	Bullying
<i>Cho san</i>	‘Hunting dogs’ – term used to refer to class monitors
<i>Con chim lon</i>	‘Barn owls’ – term used to refer to those who tell
<i>Cu da</i>	Kicking
<i>Cuoi khay</i>	Sniggering
<i>Danh</i>	Hitting
<i>Danh nhau</i>	Fighting
<i>De doa</i>	Threatening
<i>Gia tao</i>	Fake
<i>Hai mat</i>	Two-faced
<i>Hien lanh</i>	Meek
<i>Lang ma</i>	Reviling
<i>Mat sac</i>	Sharp eyes
<i>Mia mai</i>	Sarcasm
<i>Tay chay</i>	Exclusion
<i>Treu nhau</i>	Teasing
<i>Xi va</i>	Verbal abuse
<i>Xuc pham</i>	Shaming badly

Abbreviations

BOET	(District level) Bureau of Education and Training
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
DOET	(Provincial level) Department of Education and Training
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
IRE	Initiation-Response-Evaluation
MOET	Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training
SAVY	The Vietnamese Ministry of Health's Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VCPFC	Vietnamese Commission for Population, Family and Children
VND	The Vietnamese currency Vietnam Dong
VNIES	Vietnamese National Institute of Educational Science and Curriculum

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