A grounded theory: Realising family potential through choice of schooling

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A GROUNDED THEORY: REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL THROUGH CHOICE OF SCHOOLING

Angela McCarthy

This thesis is presented as part of the requirements of the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Notre Dame Australia

December 2006
Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is the candidate’s own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate’s knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

_________________________   _____________________
Candidate’s Name              Date
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Peter Murray AOM, who had a deep passion about Catholic Education, from the 1960s when he fought vigorously for State Aid, until his death in 2005.
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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to develop a substantive theory that would explain the process through which a family makes educational choices in Western Australia. The grounded theory method was chosen for this research.

The participants in the study were mainly parents of children in Catholic schools who were invited to assist in the research through purposive sampling. Further theoretical sampling extended the parental informant group to include parents of children in the government sector as well as in non-government schools other than Catholic schools. The data were primarily obtained through formal interviews. The analysis of the data was conducted through the use of the constant comparative method, memo writing and drawing of schema to express the theoretical development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). NUD*IST™ 6 and 7 were used initially to help manage the data until categories were firmly established. Inspiration® was used to draw schema to visualise category development.

The study showed that parents were challenged to choose outside the education provided by the government for three types of reasons: specific needs of the child, availability of schooling, and/or family imperatives. To resolve this concern they entered the process of realising their family potential. This process had two different phases. The initial phase was making the choice and involved three stages: refining family imperatives, framing their options and making a match. The second phase was managing the choice and involved two stages. The process in the first stage was reviewing and justifying the choice and in stage two was resolving the issues. The result of this part of the process was to change the choice or maintain the choice. If the choice was to change they returned to the first phase to make a further choice.

The study lies within a historical, political, sociological and theological context and is further informed by the review of different forms of decision-making models. Since no other substantive studies on this subject were discovered in the searches undertaken in Australian, the present study is considered to be an original contribution to the wider field of knowledge about school choice.
… writing comes to represent
the footprints of our thoughts
as they progress over time
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Schooling is matched only by the family as a central educational and socialising institution. Australian children, from the age of five or six, spend the next ten to 13 years at school. What happens to them in this crucially formative period will influence their capacities, their personalities, their conduct, and the rest of their lives. For parents, the educational quality of their child’s school and the extent to which it reinforces their views of acceptable conduct are matters of the highest importance.

Barry Maley, 2001, Director
Taking Children Seriously Programme

Foundation of the Study

The issue of school choice has been the focus of much recent discussion in political and educational arenas, as well as in the news media. Although substantial quantitative research has been completed, little has been done in Western Australia using a qualitative research paradigm that tries to uncover the meanings present behind the choices that a family makes in regard to education, whether these are choices about particular schools or choices between the available schooling systems.

The following anecdote describes a foundational incident that prompted the development of the present study. It instigated a line of thought that led to a questioning of the understandings presented in previously available research.
At a school where I was employed in the 1990s, there were workmen on site for an extended period of time who were able to observe the activities of the school that took place outside the classroom. Over a considerable time working on the school location, one of the plumbers was so impressed by his first view of a Catholic secondary school that he immediately enrolled his small children in one of the local Catholic primary schools even though he had no other connection to Catholicism. His intention, he said, was for his children to be educated in the atmosphere that he had come to admire so much from his external observations. He described the manner in which the staff interacted with the students outside the classroom and the peacefulness of the students as being what he felt was ideal for his own children. He did not access curriculum information or observe internal classroom management or have any previous experience of the school as a basis for his decision.

The plumber’s decision, which would culminate in his children receiving a full Catholic education, was based on a process that deserves careful analysis. The present study attempts to reveal the meanings that families express within the process of choosing a school for their children in Western Australia. In order to provide the context for such choices, this chapter presents the objectives of this research and its particular significance, and the political, historical, sociological, and theological influences, as well as offering a rationale for the chosen methodology.

**Purpose of the Study**

The renewal of debate, and increase in financial support for education in non-government schools, has accelerated questioning as to how and why families choose a particular form of schooling for their children. While substantial research (listed in Appendix 1.1) has been able to ascertain the reasons underlying parents’ choices, there is little Australian research that describes the actual process of their decision-making or reveals the understandings behind the meanings expressed in their choices. In this sense, the present study is hermeneutical in nature (Kerdeman, 1998, p. 284) in that it attempts to understand the interpretation and meaning behind the choices that are made by the family. The purpose of the present study is to develop a substantive theory that explains the process through which Western Australian families make
choices in relation to secondary schooling that occurs between the school years from Year 8 to Year 12.

**Research Objectives**

Throughout the present study, the following objectives consistently guided the research as it was conducted among the selected families from Western Australian country and city locations.

1. To uncover and explore the meanings surrounding the choices that families make in regard to government or non-government secondary schooling in Western Australia.
2. To identify the central concern of parents as they make decisions about secondary schooling for their children.
3. To develop a substantive theory that (a) explains and interprets the decision making process through which Western Australian families move as they seek to satisfy their concerns and goals in relation to secondary schooling choices, and (b) incorporates the various intervening conditions that explain variations within the process for different families and, in some cases, for different children within a family.

**Definition of Non-Government Schooling**

Schooling in Western Australia can be categorised as either government or non-government, with further distinctions in the latter group identifying private, systemic Catholic, other denominational schools and community schools. In the present study all four types of non-government schools were represented among the participants.

While the term “independent schools” is encountered frequently in the Australian educational context, and does refer to a well-defined group of non-government, affiliated schools that are independent in their governance, it suits the purpose of this study to define the Australian non-government school sector as encompassing Private, Systemic Catholic, Denominational, and Community
Schools. This definition of terms came from the data itself as participants described their various understandings of school choice. The principal characteristics of schools in the non-government sector are summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Types of Australian Non-Government Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Largely autonomous in their governance but still receive government funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly established by religious groups particularly Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High fee paying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long history of high quality provision of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
<td>Low to medium fee paying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Largest non-government group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinated by the Catholic Education Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denominational</td>
<td>Low to medium fee paying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fastest growing sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Established by non-Catholic religious groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community schools</td>
<td>Low to medium fee paying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smallest sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes Montessori type schools and some indigenous schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Established by non-religious groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Context of School Choice

The issue of school choice does not exist in isolation. It has political, sociological, historical and, for those with an interest in religious based schooling, theological contexts that enable the present study to be seen as part of a broader canvas of ideas and influences that are both national and international in their impact. In order to be consistent with recommended grounded theory
practice (Glaser, 1998b), as will be explained in detail later, this context was examined only after the development and validation of the grounded theory. As Glaser maintains (Glaser, p. 67), to present a full and unbiased theory it is important not to complete at the outset a thorough literature search, as it is essential that the researcher can be “as free and as open as possible to discovery and to emergence of concepts, problems and interpretations from the data”. Even though this additional contextualising material was researched after the completion of the theory, it is included here for convenience of the present introduction.

**Historical Context**

*Eastern colonies*

In the Sydney settlement it was not until 1805, 17 years after the First Fleet arrived, that a directive was given by the Secretary of State in England for public funds to be applied for the education of the colony’s children (Fogarty, 1959). Much of the responsibility for teaching and management of education was placed in the hands of the Church of England, as it had been in England, but this proved unsatisfactory to other groups, particularly the Irish Catholics and the Dissenters, the latter being mainly Scottish Protestants (Fogarty, 1959). The Catholics, and the Scottish Presbyterians in particular, objected to the dominance of the Anglicans and were determined to preserve their denominations, as well as their own identities and cultures (Potts, 1999a). This began the serious social problem of sectarianism that gained momentum.

In its response, the government made grants of land available to the different denominations for the establishment of denominational schools, along with funds for salaries and buildings, and left the management of the schools to the various associated church groups (Fogarty, 1959). With sectarianism dividing the social fabric of education, land that had been set aside for education often had several different denominational schools side by side and the quality of the colony’s schooling was compromised (Potts, 1999a). In the 1830s, state schools were established in the New South Wales colony, effectively creating from the earliest days a dual system of government and non-government schooling (Anderson, 1990).
Swan River Colony

The first 17 years of the Swan River Colony, later to become the State of Western Australia, had produced a variety of early attempts at educating its children (Mossenson, 1972), but none resulted in lasting institutions. The situation in Western Australia differed from the eastern colonies in that the government had entered into education from the very beginning of the colony without significant opposition. Mossenson (1972) asserts that this was due to the weakness of the Protestant Churches and their lack of resources rather than any great strength of liberal principles.

The first government funded school in the Western Australian colony was established in the care of the colonial chaplain Reverend J. B. Wittenoom in July 1830 when the colony was only one year old with just over 1000 inhabitants (Fletcher, 1979; Mossenson, 1972). The colonial administration had recognised from the outset the need for its involvement in education, an unusual stance for the time. After several different attempts to maintain the school, however, “the records show that in the mid-thirties only a small proportion of the children of school age were actually in attendance” (Fletcher, 1979, p. 10). In 1838 Wittenoom established a Classical and English School with government assistance to cover the need for the classical education that would have been expected “within a middle-class family in Britain” (Fletcher, 1979, p. 10). However, with the retirement of Governor Stirling and the arrival of John Hutt in 1839, along with an economic depression, government funds were withdrawn and the school collapsed (Mossenson, 1972). Hutt insisted that the parents fund the schools. For those unable to pay for their education, the fees would be paid from the public purse. While this was suitable in England it did not suit the economic circumstances of the new colony and the lack of available education became a concern (Mossenson, 1972). Another difficulty for the early settlers in the colony was the lack of labour since it had begun as a free colony with no convict labour to assist in development. The Swan River Colony was proving to be a difficult environment in which to increase one’s prosperity and children were often diverted into labour rather than given an education. For instance,
Samuel Moore, an early colonist, wrote, “A difficulty now arises ... my children want schooling and I want pig-feeders and shepherds” (Austin, 1972, p. 90).

In 1843, Father John Brady arrived in the Swan River Colony from Sydney, having been sent by Bishop Polding to establish the Catholic Church in the new colony (Tannock, 1979; Bourke, 1979). He established the first Catholic primary school in Western Australia where about 30 children were educated by Brady’s associate, Father John Joostens. Brady subsequently left for Europe and in 1846 returned with a party of 27 missionaries with himself as “the newly-consecrated first Bishop of Perth” (Tannock, p. 124). Among the newly arrived missionaries were six Sisters of Mercy from Ireland who established within a month a “free school for the daughters of the European settlers, ‘without distinction of creed’” (Tannock, p. 125) that operated in conjunction with the boys school being run by Joostens. Brady formally applied for funding in 1846 from the colonial government but it “was refused by the new governor, Andrew Clarke” (Tannock, p. 125) who also resolved to set up a “government-financed public school system to counter the educational initiatives of Brady and the Sisters of Mercy” (Tannock, p. 125). Brady retaliated by petitioning the Colonial Office in London to intervene. Between 1846 and 1848 the Sisters of Mercy had established three schools in Perth and Fremantle and in 1848 the Colonial Office “ordered the governor to institute public grants for Catholic schools based upon population numbers”. A dual system of government-funded education was established and educational choice has thus been a concern for Western Australian parents since the beginning of European settlement.

The experience of the eastern colonies, which had been established for around 50 years at this stage, was also influential. The religious and educational future of the Swan River Colony was already largely determined by the experiments and failures of New South Wales (Austin, 1972). In particular, the struggle for dominance of public education by the Anglican Church in the eastern colonies had encouraged impartiality on the part of the Swan River government from the beginning. Because it was a free settlement and not a penal colony there was no funding from England, as there had been elsewhere for the maintenance of a garrison and convicts. Consequently, the dreams of prosperity seemed at times
to be unrealistic. Eventually, when the colony was recognised to be in serious economic peril, the British government acceded to the colony’s appeal for convict labour.

*Penal Labour in Western Australia*

With the introduction of penal labour into the Swan River Colony in 1850 (Mossenson, 1972; Tannock, 1975, 1979) the proportion of Catholics in the population increased as many Irish political prisoners were sent to the colony and by 1880 one-quarter of the community was Catholic. The parallel systems of education both flourished with the increased numbers but antagonism between the Irish Catholics and the English establishment, although not as rampant as in the eastern colonies, was still a problem (Paull, 2001). The Catholic system continued to receive funds from the government until 1856 when Governor Kennedy terminated state aid (Mossenson, 1972). At this time the enrolment in Catholic schools represented almost one-third of children in the colony, 279 children compared to 590 in the state school system (Mossenson, 1972). In 1855 four Sisters of the French Order of St Joseph of the Apparition arrived with Catholic Bishop Serra and took charge of the St Joseph’s girls’ school in Fremantle, while the Sisters of Mercy later opened new Catholic schools at Toodyay and York and also pioneered secondary education (Mossenson, 1972). The Catholic system continued to fund itself through fee-paying parents and parish support.

*Sectarianism*

In 1871 financial assistance for non-government schools in Western Australia was reinstated through Governor Weld (“Elementary Education Bill,” 1871), and the Catholic and government schools continued to work and expand alongside each other. However, the Catholic Church throughout the world was by that time embattled by sectarianism and saw the world as hostile. The encyclical *Quanta Cura*, (Pope Pius IX, 1864), for instance, insisted that education could not be separate from religion. In 1879 this was reinforced and presented by the Bishops of Australia in stating that:

The Church condemns, with marked emphasis, those schools, and that method of teaching in which the religious element is divorced from the
secular. …which leads to corruption of morals and loss of faith, to national effeminacy and to national dishonour (O'Farrell, 1969, p. 390).

The Bishops were very clear in stating that parents must “send their children, when fit of age, exclusively to Catholic schools” and that failure to follow this obligation would place their children in “danger of perversion” and expose the parents to “serious guilt” (O'Farrell, 1969). Australia was not isolated in this division, as similar arguments abounded in the United Kingdom.

With benefit of hindsight the ending of state aid to non-denominational (sic) schools seems to have been both unjust and damaging to Australia’s social fabric. The church-state question was inherited from the United Kingdom and hardly a single argument was advanced in Australia which had not been aired earlier in British debates, yet in no part of the United Kingdom was so one-sided a settlement imposed as in each of the Australian colonies (Partington, 1997, p. 159).

Partington’s stance is supported by O'Farrell (1985, p. 138), who describes the sectarian disputes over education as being “the centre for what was probably the most passionate, fundamental and continuing ideological conflict in Australia’s history”.

As sectarianism continued in the Australian colonies, a growing public view insisting upon “secular, compulsory, and free education” (Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, 1872) began to dominate the political scene and all funding for non-government schools was systematically withdrawn. Victoria was the first state to enact legislation (Parliament of Victoria, 1872), with Western Australia being the last colony to fall into line ("Assisted Schools Abolition Act, 1895," 1895). Despite the withdrawal of government funding in 1895 from all non-government schools, the student population in Catholic schools continued to grow rapidly with lay women predominantly staffing the parish primary schools, and with religious orders staffing the secondary schools and private schools that operated for profit. This was the case for the remainder of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth (Fogarty, 1959; Ryan, 2001). These schools were dependent on the parish communities for the funds needed to ensure that the schools could be staffed, resourced and maintained. Protestant communities, however, did not have the assistance of religious
teaching orders and were not able to support their schools in the same way and resorted to charging high fees, which made them accessible to only the wealthier families (Potts, 1999b).

The Return of State Aid
In the 1960s, the developments in education, particularly science education, together with the declining availability of teachers from religious orders, placed the Catholic system in serious financial crisis (Hogan, 1978; O'Farrell, 1985; Tannock, 1979). Further developments, such as the post-war baby boom and the high rate of government-sponsored immigration, had a strong effect on Catholic schools as the Catholic families had a higher birth rate and the immigration brought large numbers of people from Southern Europe who were primarily Catholic (Hogan, 1978). A further change during this era was an increased climate of tolerance towards Catholics following the Second World War (Hogan, 1978). In March 1960, E.G. Whitlam, as the new Parliamentary Deputy Leader of the Opposition, suggested that a case for public funding for Catholic schools could be made on the basis of their poverty (Hogan, 1978, p. 15). Different forms of state aid began to be provided through scholarships from State governments and low interest capital loans from the federal government (Hogan, 1978) but it was still not sufficient. Influential lay Catholics, advocating from organisations such as the Parents’ and Friends’ Federation of Western Australia, and in the Knights of the Southern Cross were instrumental in leading the campaign (Hogan, 1978, p. 49). In contrast to other states the effort was Statewide and solid and in 1960 Premier Brand pressed the nation’s Prime Minister for more Commonwealth education funds on behalf of the non-State schools (Hogan, 1978, p. 63). “Western Australia was the first state to provide recurrent funding” (Angus, 2003, p. 117) from the Commonwealth Government.

Further pressure in New South Wales culminated in the Goulburn School Strike of 1962 (Cullinane, n.d.) and, by the time of the federal election one year later, it had become obvious that Catholic voters were swinging towards the Liberal party and away from their traditional Labor party allegiance. “The dogma of a century that state aid was political suicide has been completely overturned. The
new dogma was that state aid was a vote-winner” (Hogan, 1978, p. 87). In 1963 there was a decision to grant direct Commonwealth aid to non-State schools and financial assistance to non-government schools has continued to increase into the twenty-first century. It is now an accepted “plank of platform of the major political parties at the federal level” (Louden & Browne, 1993, p. 116) and, as Anderson declares, “Politically no government, Labor or Conservative, state or federal, would dream of reducing state aid, let alone abolish it” (Anderson, 1993, p. 198).

Political Context
The focus of the current debate about educational choice has been centred on the concept of public versus private schools, particularly since the Federal Government has made two substantial changes in policy that have affected the non-government schooling sector. This is made evident by the amount of media coverage, a sampling of which is listed in Appendix 1.2. The first change was the abolition of the New Schools Policy (NSP) which

... removed Commonwealth minimum enrolment requirements and other funding restrictions placed on new non-government schools which had the effect of constraining the growth in numbers of new schools in that sector. From 1997 new non-government schools have mainly to satisfy State and Territory Government registration requirements to be eligible for Commonwealth recurrent funding. The number of new school applications approved nearly trebled in the first year of the NSP’s abolition but since then these numbers have stabilised to those similar to pre-1997 (Harrington & Winter, 2002b).

The second major change related to the way in which the non-government sector received Commonwealth Funds.

On 11 May 1999, the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, the Hon Dr David Kemp MP, announced a major reform of Australian Government funding arrangements for non government schools from 2001. These arrangements are based on a measure of the socioeconomic status (SES) of school communities (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005).
The trend for Commonwealth funding to have an “increasing proportionate share for the non-government school sector, is expected to continue (Harrington & Winter, 2002, p. 2). This is further evidenced by the joint statement presented by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education, Science and Training:

In every year of the Howard Government, a new record for school funding has been established. This legislation will continue this pattern. ... Many parents contribute to the cost of their children’s education and, for most, this is a considerable commitment representing great personal sacrifice. Overall, state schools enrol 68 per cent of students and receive 76 per cent of public funds for schooling, while non-government schools enrol 32 per cent of students and receive 24 per cent of public funds (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004b).

Under the new SES-based funding model more equitable funding can occur as the model provides a better way to measure “the ability of a non-government school community to support their school” (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005). The Catholic systemic schools were exempted from this funding model as the system had been funded as a block, allowing system authorities to distribute funds to individual schools according to their own assessments of need (Angus, 2003). Within the Catholic system this has meant that funding to the neediest communities will be significantly increased and this has been exemplified in Western Australia by the introduction in 2005 of the Health Care Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme in all Catholic schools. The aims of the scheme are two fold – “to reduce the financial burden on families with limited financial resources currently in the System, and to reduce the financial barrier that prevents Catholic families from accessing a Catholic education” (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2006). The new SES-based funding model only relates to non-government schools, as the funding for government schools is “predominantly the responsibility of the State/Territory Governments” (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005).

The most rapidly growing component within the non-government sector is currently the expanding group of non-Catholic denominational schools that charge medium fees. So rapid has this expansion been that now more than 30%
of the school age children in Western Australia are educated outside the government system (NCEC Annual Report, 2004). The sector has grown from 4% of total school enrolments in 1970 to 12% in 2004 (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2006). This is clearly presented by the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

> Overall, the proportion of full-time students attending government schools fell from 72% in 1991 to 69% in 2001. This shift was the result of a 19% increase in the number of full-time students attending non-government schools, compared with a 1% increase in the number of students attending government schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

The recent changes to federal government funding of non-government schools have come under close scrutiny from different sections of the community. One view contends that the changes have produced inequitable and unreasonable outcomes because “the Howard government has pursued a policy designed to smooth the way for the establishment of new private schools and to enable enrolments in existing ones to grow” (Nicholls, 2004). The debate brings into renewed focus some of the historically orientated divisions that bedevilled the earliest days of European settlement in Australia and which are still held by some as a fearful possibility.

> The history of relationships between government and non-government school sectors has not always been positive. The policies of the current Commonwealth Government and particularly the former education Minister sharpen these divisions. Some common ground needs to be found to avoid reopening the bitter divisions of the past. (Minister for Education, 2002)

Analysts and commentators investigating the balance between government and non-government schooling evidence an awareness of such historical divisions. As stated in the Review of Non-Government Schools in NSW, (Grimshaw, 2004, p. 6), “there is no issue more sensitive or contentious than school funding.” Preston (2004), in her paper, “Choice and National Schools Policy”, reminds her readers of the monopoly that Victorian non-government schools had on matriculation early in the twentieth century. She also notes “Australia is
unique internationally for providing high levels of public funding to nongovernment \textit{(sic)} schools that charge fees and do not accept all comers” (Preston, 2004, p. 2). Preston’s claim is actually incorrect as international data on school choice shows that countries such as the former Soviet Union have fully funded school choice including religious schools and specialised schools with specific agenda (Heyneman, 1997). In her critique, Preston explores the ‘positional good’ that choice of schooling provides, and criticises the position taken by DEST that holds that funding of non-government schools will have no effect on government schools, and makes evident the intensity of debate that still surrounds the political aspects of choice of schooling.

Anderson (1993) presents further criticisms in his examination of the implications of the privatisation of schools in Australia that was occurring in the early 1990s. He contended that the increase of Federal funding to non-government schools would reduce the government school sector to “a welfare safety net, having residual responsibility for educating those children not wanted by the private sector or whose parents are unable to arrange access: children with handicaps and children of the poor” (Anderson, p.198). A decade later, however, this predicted outcome has not eventuated.

Angus (2003) lists four primary instruments that the federal government has used to expand and diversify the non-government school sector in order to extend choice of schooling:

- A mechanism that redirects federal funding from public to private systems.
- The abolition of federal restrictions on the establishment of new private schools.
- The revision of mechanism for recurrent private school funding.
- Public reporting of school performance.

And, moreover, although the movement of enrolments to the non-government schools has continued to increase, the number of newly established schools in this sector is currently proportionately lower than when the New Schools Policy was introduced in 1985 (Angus, 2003).
Plank and Sykes (2003) address school choice internationally and document the widespread nature of the move to give parents more choice about their children’s education. Even though evidence that school choice policies are still only “provisional and equivocal, even in countries where choice policies have been in place for some time, … the move toward choice and competition in national education systems appears inexorable” (Plank & Sykes, p. ix).

In most industrialised countries overseas, the change focus has been on the “identification of the optimal distribution of authority in the provision of educational services given certain fundamental values and policy objectives” (Beare & Boyd, 1993, p. 231). In Australia, however, such optimal distribution is yet to be achieved and continues to be a point of debate between federal and state governments and parents and teachers.

**Sociological Context**

The issue of choice of schooling is not concerned only with questions about the nature or perceived quality of education, per se. It also must be seen within a wider politico-sociological perspective in that the provision of choice involves the allocation of public resources and invokes issues of ideology and freedom of choice. Shifts in official policy that favour and encourage school choice, according to Plank and Sykes (2003), can be seen to flow from four corresponding intellectual and ideological shifts:

1. The construction of community where schools are able to call on the shared values and purposes of a community which will make them richer in social capital and more likely to succeed.
2. The right to choose to be afforded to all families, not only to prosperous families who have always had a choice.
3. The political pressure to dramatically improve the performance of the educational systems motivating governments to reduce costs, increase efficiency and to improve educational performance by choice and competition in the education system.
4. Enthusiasm for the unleashing of market forces within the education system (Plank & Sykes, 2003, pp. x-xii).
Australian policy in the last four decades has shifted progressively in favour of increasing support of non-government schools. Although government school enrolments increased between 1984 and 2000, enrolments in non-government schools grew by 43%. The current debate on the issues of choice and diversity is framed largely around economic rationalist and managerialist motives that are “usually associated with the introduction of market forms of educational provision” (Walker & Crump, 2006, p. 2). Walker and Crump, however, see this as a necessary element in the pursuit of other educational and policy goals rather than as a fundamental thrust in its own right.

The Australian Government has recently used the issue of choice in framing its priorities for the funding for the 2005-2008 Quadrennium (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004a). Facilitating greater school choice is seen by the Government as a means both to extend and enhance schooling options for students and also to put indirect pressure on government schools to improve (Goldhaber & Eide, 2002). Some commentators, moreover, have argued that it would be unhealthy in a democracy like Australia to have simply a monolithic education system controlled wholly by the State (“State Aid,” 1980).

**Parental Involvement**

A sociological interpretation of school choice might view parents as being inclined to choose schools that they perceive to be congruent with their position in the community, and that this might be particularly the case with Catholic parents (Anderson, 1990). Anderson refers to the avowed purpose of Catholic and non-Catholic independent schools as providing religious education and suggests that this can provide a dominant consideration for parents. However, Flynn’s extensive longitudinal study into Catholic schooling found that religious issues had only medium significance, being sixth on a list of ten reasons for choosing non-government schools (Flynn, 1993a, p. 130). Moreover, Aitchison (2002) found in her qualitative study that religious conviction was not cited as a reason for choosing outside the government system. On the other hand, the Sensis Consumer Report found that religion was the main motivating factor behind choice for non-government primary schools, and second in importance
for secondary non-government school choices (Sensis, 2004, p.15-16). The conflicting conclusions drawn from these studies could be related to the different studies’ marked differences in methodology, and it would seem apparent that further investigation may be necessary to resolve the differences.

James Coleman’s seminal report of 1966 (cited in Eastman, 1991; Kahlenberg, 2001a; Marsden, 2005), while focussed specifically on the United States of America, has changed the face of sociological research in education. Coleman found that family background, and not expenditure, was the central explanation for student achievement (Kahlenberg, 2001a). He also found that the characteristics that mattered the least (facilities and curriculum) were the most equal between schools, whereas the factor that mattered the most was the socio-economic background of the students. That this latter characteristic was the most unequally distributed, reinforced Coleman’s conclusion that the role of peers in education was important to educational outcomes. Coleman, in other research into the effectiveness of Catholic schools in the United States, observed also that parents who were prepared to finance fully or partially their children’s education were more likely to provide active participation and support within the school community (Kahlenberg, 2001a).

In a later paper, Coleman (1973) argued that the ideal of equal opportunity was actually a false ideal. It is not possible, he maintained, to create equal opportunities for every child simply through education, and he suggested that public resources would need to be invested where the imbalance in private resources promotes a level of inequality (Coleman, 1973; Wong & Nicotera, 2004). Moreover, he asserts that “the resources devoted by the family to the child’s education interact with the resources provided by the school – and there is greater variation in the former resources than in the latter” (Coleman, 1987). It may be concluded, then, that simply ensuring equal ‘opportunity’ in access to education is unlikely to be enough, as there must be preparedness by governments to direct supplementary, targeted resources in support specifically of those children whose lack of family resources creates serious inequality in their ability to make use of the ostensibly equal ‘opportunities’.
Eastman (1991), when reviewing Coleman’s original work and Coleman’s response to the re-analysis of that work by Jencks (Coleman, 1973), forcefully stated that “The evidence indicated that virtually all schools were competent, but that who succeeds and who fails in schools was being decided outside the school, especially by family factors (Eastman, 1991, p. 128). Eastman also endorses Coleman’s development of the contrasting notions of “social capital” and “human capital” (Eastman, 1991, p. 132). Human capital, according to Coleman, describes developed human resources whereas social capital describes the “norms, social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child’s growing up” (Coleman, as quoted in Eastman, 1973, p. 132). This understanding is supported by Rich (2000a) who investigated the relationship between family involvement and education outcomes. She asserted that there is a need to “understand more fully the educational disadvantages that may arise for some children when the circumstances of their family life are such that parental involvement is difficult or less than it could be” (Rich, 2000a, p. 2).

Further support for this position is found in the research of Bulman (2004) that explored the role of culture in the school choice process. Instead of viewing culture as the sum of one’s ethnicity, social class, gender, and religion, Bulman concluded that culture is a “tool kit” which “people actively use to make sense of the world” and that “as parents make particular sense of education and school choice they draw heavily upon the tools of their past educational experiences (and often religious faith) as they interpret the educational world and take action within it” (Bulman, 2004, pp. 493-494). Aitchison (2002) also supports this idea from her research into mothers and school choice where she found that “a particular experience had lead them to strive to secure the same or different” educational experience for their child. Similar research was presented by Reay (1996) who found that the cultural context of choice for mothers was critical in their capacity to choose and that having options was the product of a particular context (Reay, 1996). She found that individuals act in specific circumstances not in a vacuum. Those circumstances include mothers’ financial resources, social location and the local educational provision. They also encompass a kaleidoscope of
other individuals’ actions: teachers’, children’s, and additionally the reverberations from the actions of other mothers located in very different contexts (Reay, p. 582).

Williams and Carpenter (1990), from their research on the private returns from private schooling, contend that while the returns are not altogether commensurate with their investment, they do have “an advantage none the less” (Williams & Carpenter, 1990, p. 21). While their data did not show any major between-sector difference in learning, there did seem to be a difference that originates with the family. “Whatever the reason, the private sector appears to engender a level of commitment to educational attainment (and perhaps to education itself) that is independent of achievement” (Williams & Carpenter, p. 21) and “it is family advantage rather than school advantage which underlies the observed between-system differences” (Williams & Carpenter, p. 20).

**Funding School Choice**

The public funding of school choice becomes a critical discussion point within the community as the increasing move to non-government schools presents the problem of how resources can be equitably provided by federal and state governments. However, although Australia and many other countries have identified the provision of choice as a preferred option, the funding of choice remains problematical. Tax relief, voucher systems and scholarships are three of the more commonly employed funding options in the international arena. Buying homes in areas known for the quality of their schools is an informal option open to parents directly, but is generally available only to families who have sufficient financial resources and this is not an aspect of choice that is of value to the whole community (Holme, 2002). Partington (2004, p. 59) argues that the funding of families through a voucher system aimed at allowing parents to make better choices for their children’s needs would result in substantial differences between schools and influence particularly the values that are espoused within school curricula.
For all schools in Australia, government and non-government, there are conditions that must be met in order to receive funding from any level of government.

Non-government schools and school systems must meet comprehensive and stringent funding conditions and accountability requirements to be eligible for and retain both Commonwealth and State government funding. Accountability and reporting requirements for Commonwealth funding are set out in the *States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* and in *Commonwealth Programmes for Schools, Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001 to 2004* (National Council of Independent Schools Association, n.d.).

An amendment bill was passed in 2002 to amend the provision for capital funding for the years 2005 to 2007, which represented an increase for all schools (Harrington, 2002a).

The New Zealand experience of the Tomorrow’s Schools program begun in 1989 (Fiske & Ladd, 2003; Macpherson, 1993) showed that full parental choice through total funding of all schools (except independent private schools, which 3.5% of children attend), increased ethnic and socio-economic polarisation. Parents tended to use the “composition of a school’s student body as a proxy for school quality” (Fiske & Ladd, 2003, p. 61), and this meant that schools serving lower socio-economic families were less able to be competitive. There were advantages for schools in higher socio-economic areas but full market place reform disadvantaged the lower socio-economic and ethnically focussed groups. Since New Zealand does not have national testing, there are no means of fully documenting differences. It may be that the students remaining in the lower socio-economic schools do not perform any differently and have greater contentment in their ethnic concentration, but that the students who move to a higher SES school might perform better (Buckingham, 2001).

Mechanisms for facilitating the exercise of parental choice in the United States vary considerably from state to state and include publicly funded vouchers or scholarships, privately funded vouchers or scholarships, tax credits, tax
deductions, private scholarships tax credit, charter schools, magnet schools, public school interdistrict/intradistrict enrolment and home schooling (National Catholic Educational Association, 2006). Australia has not moved to a comparable level of diversity in the public funding of choice options.

Buckingham (2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b) considers several options for the Australian context: charter schools, vouchers, tax credits and full privatisation. These are further discussed by Humphreys (2002) and Watson (2003). Watson also points out that the new funding system instituted by the Federal Government using SES scores has the possibility of being much more “reliable, transparent and incorruptible” (Watson, 2003, p.12) but she disagrees with the Government’s insistence that no school will receive less under the new system, a system that actually delivers increased grants for some of the wealthiest schools. Watson suggests that the current government policy is fundamentally flawed, and disagrees with the transitional exemption it gives to the Catholic education system, delaying its application to those schools for five years. While, as Watson states, the Catholic system in Australia accounts for 64% of all non-government school students (Watson, 2003, p. 16) she does not seem to be aware that within that population there is a great variety of need. The complexity of funding issues will continue to provide opportunities for a variety of competing viewpoints.

Issues concerning school funding in Australia are interwoven with public interest in the performance of the schools, especially in terms of inter-sectoral comparisons (Rich, 2000b). Government education authorities and the teacher unions strongly oppose the publication of informative comparative data on a school by school basis, on the ground that it is difficult to make valid assessments of school performance from test results alone. The availability of such data, she says, could be seen to enable parents and the general public to make claims for redistribution of funding, - whether according to the SES of school catchments or to school systems - and in some way relate it to school performance (Rich, 2000b, para.3). Intensified focus of media attention on school results at the end of the academic year exemplify this problem (see
Appendix 1.2). However, as Hogan (1984) also notes, school excellence is not simply an economic equation:

To point out that there are rich schools and poor schools is not in itself to make an argument that the rich should have to suffer for the sake of the poor. Only the political values of the community can decide whether that is the path that should be followed (Hogan, p. 111, 1984).

These values can be seen in the current manner of funding in Australia, described in Resourcing Australia’s Schools (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2002). The contributions of the Australian Government, the state governments and the parent body, will develop according to political will and demonstrated need, particularly since the current political will is cognisant of the need for Australia to be using educational attainment to remain competitive in the international arena.

**Theological Context of Catholic Education**

The Catholic Church has articulated a theology that provides a direct and essential foundation for the existence of its schools, not only for the education of Catholic children, but also for the total development of the Catholic community. While the same may also apply in part to other providers outside the government system, a strong theological justification for its involvement in the schools have been well articulated throughout the history of the Catholic Church and provides an understanding of why the Church has so tenaciously remained a significant contributor to the educational sector.

*The Roots of Catholic Education*

Catholic education has its roots in the very early mission of Christianity when Jesus commissioned his disciples, “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you”, Mt 28:18-20 (The Jerusalem Bible). Foundational wisdom for such an undertaking is enunciated in the Didache, an ancient text attributed to the Twelve Apostles:

There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love
God who made you; second, love your neighbour as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you, 1:1-7, (trans. by Roberts-Donaldson).

The learning outcome intended by the Church for two millennia, according to Groome, is for an integrated total human development of “mind and will, body and soul, intellect and character, the personal and the communal” (Groome, 2002, p. 46). Groome further establishes that such education promotes not merely knowledge of the mind alone, but also a deeper epistemology where knowing and being are in an integrated relationship and result in wisdom (Groome, 2002). In doing so, he acknowledges an allegiance to Aristotle who first developed the notion of the interconnectedness of knowing and being, knowledge and happiness. Such understanding, however, he argues, disintegrated in the Enlightenment’s “triumph of reason” (Groome, 1998, p. 275); memory and imagination were disparaged and removed as lacking in value. Groome (1998) notes also how the postmodernists of today have now deconstructed the domination of knowledge by science but stresses that even though those ideas are suffering deconstruction, we need to “rewave a ‘way of knowing’ that is humanizing and encourages education for life for all” (Groome, 1998, p. 277). He concludes that “Catholic Christianity can embrace critical rationality” and by “blending this with its ancient commitment to a wisdom way of knowing, it can help to forge a humanizing epistemic for education” (Groome, 1998, p. 277).

The Value of Religious Based Education
As stated in its 1965 Declaration on Christian Education, the Catholic Church considers that

True education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share (Declaration on Christian Education, 1965, para. 1).

The intent of the Declaration is to show that the educational vision of the Church is not centred on responding to sectarian propaganda but rather on the
“most serious obligation” (DCE, 1965, para. 2) of the education of the whole person and in that sense to “contribute to the good of the whole society” (DCE, 1965, para. 2). The Church therefore sees its central Christian mission as being bound up in the development of human beings to further the perfection of all humanity.

The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human (DCE, 1965, para. 3).

A mission that is inclusive of all aspects of human life cannot be left to a secular education system where the diversity of belief and values requires only a basic common understanding. The Church sees that the spiritual dimension permeates the entire human person and requires that education address all aspects of life through a full Christian understanding.

Other Christian education systems have a religious focus that promotes similar values. For example, Carey Baptist College in Perth, expresses its mission as:

To equip young people to be of Godly character and influence. We do this by challenging and encouraging them to seek personal excellence as lifelong learners in their spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical and social development (Carey Baptist College, 2006).

Similarly, the Australian Islamic College emphasises the integration of values in its educational mission:

Through values integration our next generation of children will know how to deal with the world using proper conduct and morals as they are taught to be modest in everything they do. As a result everyone will be at peace with themselves, their family and peers, their surroundings and the environment. … Islamic Values integration teaches that God-consciousness and morality are the foundations of a healthy society (Australian Islamic College, 2006).
Catholic schools, and other schools that have a specific religious focus, provide a particular choice for parents who wish their children to be imbued with values that are beyond secularism and that take into account their spiritual nourishment and development. The Catholic Church suggests that governments therefore have an obligation

… to protect and defend the rights of citizens, [and] must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children (Declaration on Christian Education, 1965, para. 6).

Supporting Structures
The Catholic Church has focussed on developing an understanding and complete epistemology by establishing structures for the support and development of education throughout its sphere of influence. To enable this mission it established the "Congregatio pro universitate studii romani" in 1588 to “supervise the studies at the University of Rome and other notable universities of the time” (Congregation for Catholic Education, n.d.). In 1988 Pope John Paul II gave it its current name, The Congregation for Catholic Education. The Congregation has authority over three diverse sectors: “over all seminaries … and houses of formation of religious and secular institutes; over all universities, faculties, institutes and higher schools of study, either ecclesial or civil dependent on ecclesiastical persons; over all schools and educational institutes depending on ecclesiastical authorities.” (Congregation for Catholic Education, n.d., para. 5).

The Congregation for Catholic Education emphasises the ecclesial nature of the Catholic school as not just a mere adjunct, but as a “proper and specific attribute, a distinctive characteristic which penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, para. 11). A circular letter from the Congregation in the same year refers to one of the
distinguishing features of a Catholic school as being “a school for all” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, para. 7).

There is a serious challenge in many places in the world where no government aid is provided to Church-based schools and families wanting a Catholic education for their children are faced with significant financial burdens and this “constitutes a serious threat to the survival of the schools themselves… but can also result in the exclusion from Catholic schools of those who cannot afford to pay” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, para. 7). In Western Australia this risk has been reduced by the funding subsidies provided by the federal and state governments as described above in the discussion on funding for schools, but it remains a vexed issue for parents who cannot themselves bridge the funding shortfall (Furtado, 2005).

Bezzina (2000) describes some dangers for Catholic schools as competition through market forces and curriculum control enforced through “increasingly prescriptive accountabilities” have been shown to diminish differences between schools and to narrow the focus of the curriculum (2000, p. 5). It becomes increasingly difficult to heed the danger of injustice where Catholic schools become limited to the wealthier classes. This was relayed to the Catholic school communities as a warning in The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) and Bezzina encourages the need to be careful to retain the core values of Catholic education.

While the call to mission for Catholic schools is strong, but yet challenged by difficulties as described above, the very fact that Catholic education has been continuous and supported throughout the history of the Church over many centuries gives the call a substantial strength. The magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church) and specifically the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith have been foundational, but the interconnectedness of the Church has also meant that Catholic communities in one country will reach out to support the development and activities in another where the Catholic schools are in difficulty or newly established. One example of this was described earlier in this Chapter where it
was noted that the new colony of Western Australia had seen the arrival of teaching religious sisters from Ireland to support the new local Church. It happens today where places in need such as East Timor can call on other areas of the Church to provide support for education and other needs. Such historical depth and tradition gives an importance to past experience and a sense of worth that in turn provides some understanding of the tenacious nature of Catholic education.

As mentioned earlier, unity of knowledge did not endure in Western culture as scientific knowing became more important (Groome, 2002). Its demise was virtually enforced in Australia with the declaration that education would be “secular, compulsory, and free” (Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, 1872). The Australian Bishops in 1879 (O'Farrell, 1985) stated that education could not be separated from religion and were, at the time, embattled against the rest of the world where sectarianism was rife. Pope Pius IX (1864) in his encyclical Quanta Cura deplored the intention of Communism and Socialism that supported the idea that the family derives the whole of its existence from civil law alone. Pope Pius IX confirmed the fear of the Church at the time that “the salutary teaching and influence of the Catholic Church may be entirely banished from the instruction and education of youth” (Pope Pius IX, 1864, para. 4). The Australian Bishops reinforced this view by declaring that the intention of Catholic education is not just to teach doctrine but to ensure the interpenetration of a vital Catholic atmosphere in the school (O'Farrell, 1985).

The first encyclical that was specifically on education (Kelty, 1999) was issued by Pope Pius XI in 1929 and stated emphatically

… since education consists essentially in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created, it is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man’s last end, and that in the present order of Providence, since God has revealed Himself to us in the Person of His Only Begotten Son, who alone is “the way, the truth and the life,” there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education (Pope Pius XI, 1929, para. 7).
Modern Developments

Since the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65, the position of Catholicism in the wider world has changed. However, the Catholic Church still holds a strong position on education:

She establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1992, para.8).

With the changes of the Second Vatican Council, however, the emphasis moved principally away from “otherworldly concern” that made the Church inward-looking, to a view “toward preparing people capable of working for the transformation of this world” (Kelty, 1999, p. 13). Catholic education has changed along with these cultural shifts and the interactions of modernity. Not all of those changes have been welcome at all levels.

Putney (2005) describes the most significant changes. Firstly, the families served by Catholic education are not all Catholic but are drawn from a wide cross section of people for a variety of reasons. Secondly, the teachers in Catholic schools are not all Catholic as it is necessary to employ specialist staff particularly in secondary schools and they do not necessarily have any Church affiliation. Thirdly, staff and students do not always participate in Sunday Eucharist whereas the experience in earlier times had been that the necessity for weekly worship was seen as being critically important for the whole community. Fourthly, the Church’s current understanding that its schools should, in principle, be open to all who appreciate and share her values – not only to baptised and practising Catholics – raises questions and tensions about mission integrity and enrolment priorities. Finally, a major change is that funding is now provided by a mixture of Federal, State and school community contributions.

Putney (2005) further describes those things that remain the same. Firstly, Catholic schools in Australia are still established by Church authorities and remain within their jurisdiction. Secondly, the public profile is still Catholic and
one of holding a unity of values. Thirdly, the art and symbols are still Catholic and are recognisable across all the Catholic communities. Fourthly, values and prayer remain Catholic and common to some degree across the school system. Fifthly, there is still religious education that is Catholic and mandated by the Bishops with careful regard for the theology and pedagogy that is employed within the classroom and across the wider school community. Sixth, the Eucharist is still celebrated and there is at times still the presence of a priest, an essential element for the sustenance of a Catholic community.

Such concerns in regard to change were investigated by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (2004) and in their report they concur with the Congregation for Catholic Education by establishing that a “defining feature of catholic schools of the twenty-first century is, to be open to all who seek its values” (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2004, p. 4, Appendix 2). This is because it is “not merely a question of adaptation, but of missionary thrust, the fundamental duty to evangelise, to go towards men and women wherever they are, so that they may receive the gift of salvation” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, para. 3). A Catholic school is described by Dwyer (2002, p. 3) as “not just brains on legs” but a place where “body, mind, imagination, character and spirit are all developed within a general approach to education that seeks to foster a full range of abilities and qualities that enable life to be lived to the full”.

The challenges of change are considerable. No longer is religious education only for preparation for church membership but, as Veverka claims, it is called to “emphasize the transformative and liberating character of education” (Veverka, 1993, p. 243). She also maintains “if we are to resist the homogenizing power of a mass commodity culture, we need strong mediating institutions which can support alternative visions of communal life” (Vererka, p. 243).

While the purpose of Catholic education is inexorably bound to a higher destiny that goes beyond earthly being (McCluskey, 1959, p. 85), a modern view also
places it in the community as a service open to all, and as a transformative and liberating means of education (Ververka, 1993).

There is an understanding, an urge, to fulfil a God given potential that is sometimes expressed in religious terminology and at other times referred to as the wholeness of the child or family happiness. Ancient writers distilled such emotion into the Psalms: “My soul thirsts for you, my body aches for you like a dry and weary land” Psalm 63:2 (trans. International Committee on English in the Liturgy) with St Augustine declaring similarly, “for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee”, (Confessions, 1:1 trans. Albert C. Outler).

A theological perspective provides a critical background towards understanding the context in which the Catholic school system operates in Western Australia. The Catholic Church has an articulated theology that provides a direct and essential foundation for the existence of its schools that serve the entire Catholic community.

**Rationale for the Chosen Methodology**

At the beginning of this chapter, an anecdote related one of the foundational ideas for the present study. Did the plumber concerned make a rational choice according to market forces? Was his choice dependent on information provided to the market place by the school concerned? Was it determined by a school’s ranking in academic achievement? But, as the anecdote reveals, there were other and deeper underlying reasons that ultimately played a role in the plumber’s deliberations and eventual choices. It was such ‘deeper reasons’ that the present study set out to discover through its in-depth interviewing the participant families, and through the subsequent theory development.

The attitudes and understandings of the families and their choices were the primary focus of the present study and the identification and theoretical
explication of a concern common among all the parents interviewed was of the first importance. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the parents’ underlying motivations, the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was selected as the most appropriate qualitative methodology for the purposes at hand. A complete description of the grounded theory method is contained in Chapter 2.

The theory generation approach of grounded theory has much to recommend it in … new areas, where there is a lack of grounded concepts for describing and explaining what goes on. Grounded theory appeals because it concentrates on discovering concept, hypotheses and theories (Punch, 1998, p. 169).

**Significance of the Study**

As noted in the objectives for the present study, it was evident that there was very little published research that had used a qualitative paradigm to understand the significance of secondary school choices that Western Australian families make for their children. Most of the studies published to date (Appendix 1.1) have been done within a quantitative paradigm. As such, they have not lent themselves readily to significant uncovering and probing of the inherently complex bases of decision-making that underpins and guides the eventual choices made by parents in selecting the most appropriate schools for their children. In contrast, the present study has adopted an intensive qualitative design and methodology that has allowed it to uncover the deeper meanings behind the choices made by parents in Western Australia.

It is fair to acknowledge, however, that the recent dramatic increase in choices in schooling available to families in Western Australia has really only been since the mid 1990s and so it is not surprising that there have been relatively few studies since then of the scope and qualitative nature of the study being reported here. Cuttance and Stokes (2000) have recently completed an impressively large study entitled “Reporting on Student and School Achievement”, an investigation involving 364 interviews with parents and a further 16 group meetings. In that study, the authors questioned what the parents considered when choosing a
school (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000, p. 81) and reported in considerable detail on the responses given. However, the report contained little by way of new conceptual development as their work was purely descriptive and offered no theoretical development. It offered a comprehensive account of what parents have chosen but with no contribution to the way in which the choices were made.

In significant contrast, the present study has sought from the outset to develop an explanatory theory of schooling choice that is grounded in the recounted experience of families as they have reflected in interview on the decisions made for their children, and which accounts for the variations across families according to their differing contexts and priorities.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The primary concern of this thesis is the challenge presented to families in Western Australia in regard to their choice of secondary schooling. Secondary schooling refers to students who are generally between the ages of 12 and 17 and attending school in the school years from Year 8 to Year 12. The choice at issue involves a decision whether to enrol the child in the local government school (which is the right of every child), or to choose to apply for access to a different government school outside the appropriate zone, or to seek access to an available non-government school on a scholarship or fee-paying basis. The principal focus of the present study is on the choice between government and Catholic schools. Moreover, this thesis focuses specifically on the decision-making by parents who were predisposed, for faith and enculturation reasons, to actively (and in some cases exclusively) look first to Catholic schools in preference to the available ‘mainstream’ government schools.

This phenomenon of choice was examined through use of the grounded theory method, a qualitative methodology, and an explanatory theory was developed that illuminated the bases for the complex choices that families make and the way in which they maintain, or change, those choices.

The grounded theory method produces a theory by collecting and analysing data obtained from participants who share in a similar problem or concern that is situated in a particular context (Charmaz, 2000). From the rich information derived (in this study, mainly from transcribed interviews) a theory of choice-
making is generated by systematically uncovering the meanings behind what the participants have said about the choices they have made, the factors that influenced those decisions, and their guided reflections on the outcomes experienced. Through painstaking application of the grounded theory method, the present study has sought to discover, within its transcribed interview data, the common essence of the processes each family engaged in as they took decisions or made choices to resolve their concerns about their children’s secondary schooling or to realise their family ambitions and aspirations.

This chapter describes, using the context of the present study, the methods used in grounded theory for data collection, data analysis and the emergence of the theory. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity are also described and respected since the participants in studies of this type typically reveal private and often deeply personal issues related to the phenomenon under study. The chapter concludes with a discussion about how theories of this type can most appropriately be evaluated.

**Grounded Theory Method**

The grounded theory method, initially described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, consists of “systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analysing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data” (Charmaz 2000, p. 509). The resultant grounded theory is valuable to the extent that it adds a micro view of a particular human social process. Originally, Glaser and Strauss maintained that only professional sociologists were able to develop grounded theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, they later worked with researchers in other disciplines (Glaser, 1978) and the method has since been used in education, nursing, business, social work, architecture, communications, religious studies, occupational therapy, art, and sports psychology (Irurita, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), extending far beyond the purely sociological field (Piantanida, Tananis & Grubs, 2002).
The present study into parents’ choice of schooling does not presume to be a contribution to educational sociology, but seeks rather to develop a substantive grounded theory generated by a practitioner-researcher that is useful for the consideration of issues related to school choice (Piantanida et al., 2002).

While grounded theories are richly descriptive, they do not remain merely a description. If they do, the use of grounded theory method is considered to be prematurely closed (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1996). The narrative data will have been under analysed and will “inadequately cover the behavioral variations” (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 128). Grounded theory method, properly and fully implemented, requires that the researcher “collect and analyse data from the natural world” (Chenitz, 1986b, p. 79), its purpose being to “understand the concerns, actions, and behaviours of a group and explain those patterns of behaviour at a higher level of abstraction, a theory” (Chenitz, 1986b, p. 79). Once data has been collected from the natural setting, it is analysed through the use of coding procedures. As Locke, (1996, p. 123) asserts, “at each level the theory becomes more refined, yielding a parsimonious integration of abstract concepts that cover behavioural variation”.

Miller and Fredericks (1999) in describing how a grounded theory explains a phenomenon argue that grounded theory can be both predictivist and accommodationist but that it does not need to be either. Once the theory is complete, with all core categories saturated, generalised to the point of highly abstract concepts and able to fit all areas of inquiry, it is predictivist in that it can predict the outcome of any problem in that particular context (Miller & Fredericks, 1999, p. 550). It is also accommodationist in that, if it is true, it will also accommodate any literature in the same context. Miller and Fredericks further state that grounded theory is “the making of credible inductive arguments for phenomena situated within a context of discovery whose logic is some version and application of the methods of induction” (Miller & Fredericks, 1999, p. 549). Since the method involves constant comparative analysis with ongoing reflective memo writing, there is no linear format, everything remaining concurrent and circular until the theory is complete (Hutchinson, 1986).
Epistemology of Grounded Theory

The philosophical underpinnings of this method were discovered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and are consistent with those researchers’ academic backgrounds. Charmaz (2000) describes how Glaser applied “his rigorous positivistic methodological training in quantitative research from Columbia University to the development of qualitative analysis,” and goes on to say that “grounded theory methods were founded upon Glaser’s epistemological assumptions, methodological terms, inductive logic, and systematic approach” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 512).

Strauss, on the other hand, came from a background of Chicago School field research and symbolic interactionism, which had developed from the work of Herbert Blumer and Robert Park (Charmaz, 2000; Annells, 1996; Kendall, 1999). Annells (1996) describes the basic premises of symbolic interactionism and how grounded theory emerged from this tradition using its philosophical approach to human behaviour and the manner in which such behaviour is investigated. The work of Blumer and Park in the early twentieth century (Metz, 2000; Kendall, 1999) had been developed following the founding of American sociology by George Herbert Mead and others of the Chicago School of Sociology, who emphasised the importance of meaning when looking at the individual and society. Mead and his colleagues “believed that all human understanding is highly interpretive and socially shaped” (Metz, 2000, n.p.), and their symbolic interactionist theory “represented the first major challenge to the privileged status of functionalist theory” (Kendall, 1999, p. 744). Kendall records three theoretical objections that had been brought forward by the Chicago School in its case against functionalism:

First, functionalist theory was inherently normative, evaluative, and conservative and was unable to account for periods of rapid social change. Second, functionalist theory was perceived to be a much more logical and orderly account of social life than supported by empirical observation. Finally, a functionalist theoretical perspective viewed the role individuals occupied to maintain the greater system (family or society) as the basic unit of analysis (Kendall, 1999, p. 744).
Because symbolic interactionism offered an alternative way of looking at society, where life was seen as a “fluid and dynamic process” (Kendall, 1999, p. 744) special methodology was needed for the new study of human behaviour, and it was from this basis that Glaser and Strauss (1967) discovered grounded theory. Grounded theory was “perceived to be able to generate a theory that would be functional for the intended purposes in the world of social science” (Annells, 1996, p. 383). Unlike verificational research that starts with an existing theory and seeks deductive verification in the data, grounded theory … utilizes an inductive, from-the-ground-up approach using everyday behaviours or organizational patterns to generate theory. Such a theory is inherently relevant to the world from which it emerges, whereas the relevance of verificational research varies widely (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 113).

Strauss and Glaser moved apart in their research directions in later years, particularly after Strauss had collaborated with Juliet Corbin. Strauss and Corbin (1990) developed a more prescriptive view of the grounded theory method, a prescriptiveness that was severely criticised by Glaser (1992) as amounting to an unjustified forcing of the theory rather than allowing the theory to emerge from the data as they had originally designed. Strauss, writing in the Preface to Basics of Qualitative Research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), proposed that reading and studying the three major books by himself and Glaser (The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Theoretical Sensitivity, Glaser, 1978; and Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists, Strauss, 1987), is strongly advocated and that while “some of their terminology and specific recommended procedures are not always identical”, all three “express an identical stance toward qualitative analysis and suggest the same basic procedures” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 8). Glaser (1992) vehemently disagreed with Strauss on this issue. “Basics of Qualitative Research cannot produce a grounded theory. It produces a forced, preconceived, full conceptual description, which is fine, but it is not grounded theory” (Glaser, 1992, p. 3). Strauss and Corbin (1990) are more formulaic than Glaser but they also rely heavily on Glaser’s original work with Strauss (Melia, 1996).
Epistemologically, grounded theory method sets out to discover the “relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the would-be knower and what can be known” (Annells, 1996, p. 384). This is dependent on the ontological stance of the symbolic interactionist view that is inherent in the methods of classic grounded theory and reflects critical realism concerning the nature of a “real” reality (Annells, 1996, p. 385). Charmaz claims that both Glaser and Strauss “endorse a realist ontology and positivist epistemology, albeit with some sharp differences” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 513) and that grounded theory need not necessarily always be symbolic interactionist but can lean towards a “simplified, constructivist version … that can be adopted by researchers from diverse perspectives” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514). Annells, however, argues that the classic mode of grounded theory is better placed in the postpositivist paradigm of inquiry as it “leans ontologically toward critical realism and a modified objectivist epistemology with an associated methodology aiming for theory discovery that may be subsequently verified by sequential research” (Annells, 1996, p. 389).

Miller and Fredericks (1999, p. 538) asserts that the term epistemology, as it is being used here, is appropriate because it “characterizes both the type and parameters” of the approach of grounded theory that presents it as a “form of inquiry that produces knowledge of the social world”.

The present grounded theory study has drawn from both founding authors. The initial work was guided by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1997) and the subsequent conceptualisations directed by Glaser’s work (1978, 1992, 1998a, 2001) with a clear awareness of the importance of the emerging theory. My regular participation in a membership of a multi-disciplinary analysis seminar group led by Dr Vera Irurita, an acknowledged grounded theory methodologist, at Curtin University of Technology (Perth, Western Australia) was very instrumental in developing an understanding of the method. Comprised mainly of nurses, the seminar group involved grounded theory research students from education, the police service, social work, and the allied health areas. It provided “an ideal forum for sharing learning experiences and for enhancing the development of
theoretical sensitivity and analytic skills” (Irurita, 1996, p. 3). Although Melia (1996) challenges the popular view that it is necessary to have a mentor in order to do grounded theory, the mentoring experience gained from participation in the Curtin group was critical to the development of the present study.

**Use of literature in the Grounded Theory Method**

In deductive research the available literature is typically reviewed fully early in the research process in order that an understanding of the topic is acquired early, the extent of previous work is acknowledged and analysed, and any unresolved issues are revealed (Hart, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1992). When used in qualitative research, the intentionally inductive nature of the grounded theory method requires that the literature be reviewed only after the emerging theory has been sufficiently grounded in the data, and then principally to relate the theory to the existing literature through the integration of ideas (Glaser, 1978).

As Punch (1998, p. 167) states,

Grounded theory has a different perspective on this matter from other research approaches. The difference lies in how the literature is dealt with, and when it is introduced, and follows from the stress that grounded theory places on theory generation.

Strauss and Corbin (1992), as well as Glaser (1978), give a further caution about the use of literature. It is important, they argue, not to “contaminate one’s efforts to generate concepts from the data with preconceived concepts that may not really fit, work or be relevant” (Glaser, 1978, p. 31) and to avoid being “constrained by having to adhere to a previously developed theory that may or may not apply to the area under investigation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1992, p. 49).

On the other hand, where there are several grounded theories available in the same substantive area, the naming of categories can legitimately and usefully be influenced by previous studies once the data has been coded sufficiently to take on its own meaning (Wuest, 2000). And moreover, during the constant comparative process within the grounded theory method, other relevant studies can be deductively incorporated. As Wuest argues,
...the investigator’s knowledge of relevant literature and theoretical schemes comes into play during constant comparative analysis and as long as primacy is given to what can be inductively derived from the data, only the components of pre-existing theory that fit the data will survive (Wuest, 2000, p. 55).

Strauss and Corbin (1992) define two different types of technical literature that are commonly used in grounded theory. The first relates to the technical aspects of carrying out a grounded theory study and includes “theoretical or philosophical papers characteristic of professional and disciplinary writing” appropriate to the method (Strauss & Corbin, 1992, p. 48). Literature of this type used in the present study included papers, articles, reports and theses using the grounded theory method, as well as text books dedicated to the subject, which together gave a solid background to the processes needed for the construction of a theory. Also included were reports of studies in other substantive areas such as sociology (Mizuno, 1997) and cancer research (Fujimura, 1997) that explicated the use of theory building in other disciplines. Technical literature of this kind was reviewed at the outset of the study.

A second form of technical literature relevant to grounded theory development is literature that focuses on the substantive area of investigation, although it is essential that consideration of it is not permitted to influence the study’s essentially inductive processes. Available substantive literature was fully canvassed but, mindful of the danger of contamination noted by Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1992), this was done only after the essential features of the grounded theory had emerged. Research papers and reports specifically related to the substantive inquiry of the present study were collected during the term of the research as they became available but they were deliberately set aside and not read until the theory, generated from the data of the study, had been completed. Discussion of this literature and its place in the overall process of the study’s grounded theory is presented in Chapter 6.

Non-technical literature is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1992) as:
Biographies, diaries, documents, manuscripts, records reports, catalogues, and other materials that can be used as primary data or to supplement interviews and field observations in grounded theory studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1992, p. 48).

Literature fitting this non-technical definition was collected as data throughout the term of the present study and was used in conjunction with the material obtained from formal interviews, as is described later in this chapter.

**Research Design**

The design for the study was intended to accommodate not only how the investigated parents have reached their decisions about schooling and how the deliberative process “works”, but also what these decisions mean within their own social contexts (Page, 2000). In the 1970s there was substantial change in the study of educational issues as argument raged in academic circles about the usefulness and scientific value of qualitative research (Page, 2000). The intention of this research is not to describe the specifics of parental choices in education but rather to probe “what the described behaviours represent” (Bussis, Chittenden & Amarel, 1976, p. 15) in the sense of capturing the process that all parents go through when making choices about schooling for their children. An understanding of what is foundational to ‘good discipline’, for example, may vary widely among the parent body, and the meanings specific to individual parents must be explored collectively and comparatively in order that the common decision process can be discerned.

Page (2000, n.p.) has outlined the importance of recovering the “hermeneutic, or interpretive, orientation in social research”, as a timely counterbalance to traditional quantitative research in education. Early criticism of qualitative research, according to Page, had centred on two serious problems: namely, that the description of method in many qualitative studies had not been sufficiently exacting in its approach to data and the foundation for the claims made, and that the wider social and historical contexts were often ignored. Both problems, he argued, “raise questions about the authoritativeness of qualitative accounts by
making it difficult for readers to assess their validity” (Page, 2000, n.p.) with the consequence that the presentation of early qualitative research had been challengeable both aesthetically and politically in terms of how, and for whom, the research was presented. Nevertheless, from a review of the more recent example, he asserts “the developments in qualitative research have improved rather than destroyed the methodology by clarifying its distinctive contribution to human understanding” (Page, 2000, n.p.).

Grounded theory addresses both of these criticisms. It is resolutely and consistently rigorous in its method, and by working properly within the parameters and standards of the method it is not possible to generate a full theory that is not fully substantiated. The method of analysis (described in detail later in this chapter) precludes the possibility of producing theoretical schemas that are not based on substantive data, as it is a method that “provides a total package, which takes one from data collection through several stages to a theory” (Glaser, 1999, p. 837).

Glaser (1999) maintains that the grounded theory researcher needs three characteristics, “an ability to conceptualize data, an ability to tolerate some confusion, and an ability to tolerate confusion’s attendant regression” (Glaser, 1999, p. 838). For the present study, it is fair to say that the ability to tolerate confusion’s attendant regression was most certainly necessary in that the theory formed, regressed and reformed a number of times before it reached a level of completion, a reality that made it very difficult at times to predict when the theory would be finished.

A further potential problem for qualitative research, according to Page (2000), arises when the research being undertaken is part of a particular political or ideological agenda. As described in the previous chapter, the issue of choice of schooling has recently become very important in the federal and state political scene in Australia, particularly in relation to the distribution of funding (Preston, 2004; Watson, 2003). This, it is recognised, raises important methodological issues for the researcher, such as: Should the researcher be completely impartial? Could the researcher’s personal stance or interest in the topic
compromise the task of producing unbiased knowledge? With a Catholic background as parent and teacher, my personal immersion in the phenomenon to be studied could have produced unwitting distortions in the interpretation of the data. Grounded theory, however, has a rigour that reduces the potential for such distortion and, in fact, consciously values the theoretical understanding and attendant sensitivity of an informed researcher.

Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t. All this is done in conceptual rather than concrete terms. It is theoretical sensitivity that allows one to develop a theory that is grounded, conceptually dense, and well integrated – and to do this more quickly than if this sensitivity were lacking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) offer four sources of the theoretical sensitivity that can beneficially be brought to the study by an informed researcher: literature, professional experience, personal experience and the analytic process itself (Strauss & Corbin, pp. 42-43). It can be argued, therefore, that my ongoing personal and professional immersion in the phenomenon of research interest was of particular value to the study as it brought into play my firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon being researched and, in that sense, the way in which both the interviewed participants and the researcher were able to cooperate in the creation of knowledge. The interactions within the interviews themselves contributed to the way in which the knowledge was formed.

Similarly, within the analytic process itself, my conceptualising of the data to assist development of the emergent theory was an ongoing heuristic process that culminated an integrated explanation of the phenomenon, rather than simply a comprehensive description. As a result, the eventual theory, suitably saturated, is able to explain the various levels and subjective nuances of the phenomenon of school choice as the participants have experienced it.

As a sensitive insider to the phenomenon under study, I was consciously aware of the hermeneutics of the specific context. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation that includes activities that can explain the meaning of something.
It is about “the theory and practice of interpretation, about the bringing of understanding into language” (Moss, 2005). Through in-depth interviews the participants in the present study have interpreted their own decision motivation in the light of their current context and an understanding of what their choice of secondary schooling has to offer to their child or children. Since these hermeneutics are dialectical in nature, the participants reflect on their choices, desires and expectations and in that reflection can also make a judgement on their choice, affirming it or rejecting aspects of it. At the same time, the researcher is also involved in dialectic of her own. The parents’ meanings cannot be fully interpreted in the sense required for theory development without the engagement of the researcher’s personal insight and contextual sensitivity.

To grasp the meaning inherent in an experienced event, Halliday explains that the, “interpreter must participate in a shared way of life within which the event has significance. Language can be used in at least two important ways to say something about the event and to try to understand what it means” (Halliday, 2002, p. 51). The author concludes that “meaning cannot be reported in a way that is independent of the observer because she or he has to understand what is being said and this [necessarily] implicates them in the subject of their research” (Halliday, p. 51).

Referring to the rigour of the method, Glaser (1978) asserts that

… how the analyst enters the field to collect the data, his method of collection and codification of the data, his integrating of the categories, generating memos, and constructing theory – the full continuum of both the processes of generating theory and of social research – are all guided and integrated by the emerging theory (Glaser, p. 2).

The control extended by the emerging theory over all aspects of the process maintains a rigour that ensures its validity. Throughout the present study it became obvious that it is not possible to imaginatively make additions to the theory if they are not grounded in the actual data as they cannot be substantiated and therefore cannot become part of the theoretical construct.
During the development of the theory about choice of schooling, my own theoretical sensitivity to the issue described one category as *fear of losing own identity*. While there was a sense from the early participants that this was a reality, the subsequent comparative analysis did not support such a category. Although the original intention of the research had been to concentrate on secondary Catholic schools in Western Australia, it became necessary to ignore such delineation so that the actual concern of parents emerged from the data itself and not from a pre-imposed conception. I found, for instance, that it was not possible to conceptualise the real concern of parents participating in the study until I began to look for a basic social concern articulated by all the participants (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 114). The rigour of grounded theory requires analytic fit (Morse & Singleton, 2001), which is the “process of examining two entities and identifying their similarities or compatibilities along some identifiable dimensions” (Morse & Singleton, p. 841). If fit is not achieved it cannot be forced as that would destroy the inductive thrust to the research being undertaken (Morse & Singleton, p. 843).

**Criticisms of Grounded Theory**

Charmaz (2000) declares that grounded theory is actually imbued to some extent with positivism, from the perspective both of Glaser and Strauss and Corbin and their “assumptions of an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data (Charmaz, p. 510). But, in Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) move away from Glaser’s (1992) stance, Charmaz (2000) maintains, as did Annells (1996), that they have moved towards postpositivism, in that they also propose giving voice to their respondents, representing them as accurately as possible, discovering and acknowledging how respondents’ views of reality conflict with their own, and recognizing art as well as science in the analytic product and process (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510).

Punch (1998) comments on how the distinctions between theory generation (as in grounded theory) and theory verification are not as sharp as one would expect them to be. As the theory begins to develop from the data in grounded theory,
he argues it is necessary repeatedly to test it against further data collection, which amounts essentially to a form of progressive verification. To that extent, he concludes, “grounded theory is essentially an inductive technique, but it uses deduction as well” (Punch, p. 166).

**Strengths of Grounded Theory**

Hakim (1997) lists two significant strengths of qualitative research that are relevant to this study. First, because the research is grounded in the actual experience of people and in sufficient depth for the results to be taken as true, the data obtained will be valid. Second, its emphasis on motivations and connections between motivations and other factors, means that qualitative research can be “extremely valuable for identifying patterns of associations between factors on the ground, as compared with abstract correlations obtained from the analysis of large scale surveys and aggregate data” (Hakim, p. 29). Positivist research, by contrast, assumes that everyone shares the same meaning system (Neuman, 1994, p. 63). A parent who cites discipline as the prime reason for having chosen Catholic secondary education in preference to the government system, would thus be assumed to be interpreting this in the same way as every other parent who might also nominate discipline as most important. Interpretive, or postpositivist, qualitative research on the other hand is founded on the assumption that people may or may not experience social or physical reality in the same way. Thus, parents who list discipline as a prime reason may have learned their reality from a totally different context and therefore experience and understand that reality subjectively in quite different ways, imbuing it with their own personal meanings.

As will be shown, the grounded theory study reported in this thesis provides a theory that is grounded in the meanings and motivations presented by parents as they explored their reasons for choosing secondary schooling in a particular context.
Methods of the Grounded Theory Procedure

The principle focus of grounded theory is on the specific analytic strategies required for analysing data (Charmaz, 2000), not the collection of the data. However, since the analysis of the data commences as soon as it is available, the initial collection must be purposeful and disciplined, the objective being to provide depth and richness. Even though some grounded theorists collect data from interviews only, rich data can be drawn from many sources (Charmaz, 2000; Irurita, 1990), particularly ethnographic-type interviews, biographical data sheets, questionnaires, participant observation, informal interviews, examination of documents and literature searches (Irurita, 1990). The present study used all of the above sources except for participant observation.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling, where participants are purposefully chosen with some particular focus in mind (Irurita, 1996; Punch, 1998), was used in situations where the selection of participants was based on the researcher’s personal experience of the phenomenon under study (Irurita, 1996). Identifying and engaging a sample of participants initially was directed by their perceived relevance to the original research question, namely, why parents choose to send their children to Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia. A local Catholic secondary school was chosen as the site for the purposive sampling of participants for the initial interviews because of the ease of accessibility (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 179) and what was already known about the school and its demographic.

Confidentiality and Ethical Clearance

Each prospective participant in the initial and subsequently expanded sample was provided with an information sheet that guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and outlined the interview procedure (see Appendix 2.1). Explicit consent was required for a face-to-face interview, tape recording of the interview, and to be re-interviewed for clarification if necessary. Each participant who agreed to take part in the study signed a consent form that indicated that the information sheet had been read and that consent was given.
(see Appendix 2.2). In the cases where an interview was conducted by telephone, consent was obtained verbally and the interview was recorded with a telephone-recording device and subsequently transcribed to a written transcript. All consent forms received were held in secure storage throughout the period of research. As soon as an interview had been transcribed, all names of people and places were replaced in the transcript with codes to preserve anonymity. Only the principal researcher had access to the identifying details of the coded participants, and these details were maintained in a locked cabinet at all times. Within the text of Chapters 3, 4 and 5, where the theory is presented, the original codes for the participants have been replaced by first-name pseudonyms in order that the text is more easily readable. Moreover, in relating events relevant to the theory, care was taken to exclude the possibility of situations being described in such a way as to make any participant recognisable to others through the context of the situation, thereby further securing anonymity. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Notre Dame Australia gave formal ethical clearance to the study.

**Participants**

The first participants to be interviewed were obtained through a local Catholic secondary college where the principal was known to be enthusiastic about the intended direction of the research. With the principal’s support, a letter inviting participation was sent to all parents of students who had enrolled for the first time at the college for the next school year. These parents were targeted specifically because they were actively involved at the time in the actual decision to enrol their child in the college. Six participants were interviewed from this group.

As coding of the transcripts of the interviews of these parents proceeded, it became obvious that the questioning needed to be much more open and that this initial cohort shared very similar perspectives. Consequently, it was decided that the sampling basis needed to be considerably wider to encompass greater diversity in locality and socio-economic background and to expand the number of participants. It was decided at this point to include a number of rural parents,
as it was clear that remoteness often presented a special set of challenges when the time came for children to progress from primary to secondary education.

Of the 39 participants of this now expanded sample, 30 were mothers and eight were fathers. The remaining participant, who was not a parent himself, had had a long history of association with Catholic schools and was included because of his evident knowledge of surrounding cultural issues. In two instances, the interviews involved the mother and father together. In all other cases the participants (37 mother and six fathers) were interviewed alone, without the involvement of their spouses.

City Participants
City participants comprised 80% of the interviews and were invited to take part in the research through a variety of approaches. While the researcher was working as a research assistant for another project, opportunities arose to interview Catholic parents whose children were not enrolled in Catholic schools and this advantageously broadened the parent cohort. Analysis of data from these participants prompted further sampling aimed at including parents with children at different forms of non-government education in the city area. Parents with children at large private schools were approached through a colleague and this resulted in four further interviews. One other participant initiated contact himself, following publication of early findings of the study in an article in The West Australian newspaper. A copy of the article is included in Appendix 2.3.

Country Participants
When interviewing country participants as part of the other project mentioned above, it became obvious that rural parents had different challenges from those in the city and that this affected their available choices for the education of their children. Among the country participants were three remote families who had fewer choices than those living close to school facilities in major towns. These three were in locations classified by the government as remote on the basis that it takes more than three hours on a bus for their children to access appropriate schooling. Families in such circumstances receive a living-away-from-home
allowance from the government. One of the families did not qualify as they were marginally inside the defined boundary, and this caused them some difficulty.

*It wasn’t quite 3 hours a day on the bus because if it was 3 hours a day he would’ve got a living away from home allowance and he would have been subsidised to go to boarding school and all the rest of it, but because we’re in town here it’s not quite 3 hours on the bus, it’s about 2 and a bit* (Mary, p. 7).

Access to further country participants was sought while visiting a country school to present a professional development seminar as part of my normal work responsibilities. With the assistance of the deputy principal and two families who were already acquaintances, a series of interviews was arranged. One of the participants interviewed at this time subsequently moved to Perth and was interviewed again to follow the family’s continuing story in school choice.

The distribution of school choices made by participants is presented in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1. School choices made by participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prim</td>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>Prim</td>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>Prim</td>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>Prim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other = independent and home schooling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A profile of the study’s 39 participants is presented in Table 2.2. Construction of the participant profile yielded useful information about what kind of schools the parents had chosen, thereby revealing the distribution of choices across the sample as a whole. A further benefit of preparing the profile was the fact that is
summarised important contextual details in an accessible format that enabled easy reference throughout the data analysis and the writing of the thesis.

Table 2.2. Profile of parent participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of total cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of birth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post secondary education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Catholic schooling (parent)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Families with children younger than school age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children currently in Catholic schools in participants’ families</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Data collection in grounded theory is not solely reliant on interviews as it can be drawn from “multiple sources – observations, conversations, formal interviews, autobiographies, public records, organizational reports, respondents’ diaries and journals, and [the researchers’] own tape-recorded reflections” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514). Analysis and collection of the data occurs simultaneously as a grounded
Chapter 2 – Methodology

theory study evolves and progresses (Irurita, 1996; Corbin, 1986b; Glaser, 1992) but, for clarity in the present thesis, details of the data collection will be presented first, followed by a separate discussion of the analysis of the data.

**Self Reflection**

The original area of interest for this study was the choice of Catholic secondary schooling in Western Australia. However, personal reflection and early journal entries helped expose the biases that were present in my own thinking and preconceptions that had flowed from my experience as a Catholic parent and my long involvement as a teacher within the Catholic school system. Constant journaling throughout the early period of data collection and analysis helped me to stimulate and refine my position within the research and, where necessary, to bracket my personal preconceptions.

**Period of Data Collection**

In order to identify early the possible areas of significance in the initial research question a short structured survey was completed during 1998 with colleagues in a Catholic secondary college where I was teaching at the time (See Appendix 2.4). Each of the surveyed teachers had children in the college or in another Catholic school and their contributions assisted in the early development of a line of questioning for the formal interviews that were to take place for this present study.

Formal interviewing of the participants began in 2000, with the majority of the interviews being completed within a two-year period. In conjunction with the interviews, personal memos were recorded on a dictaphone immediately following the conclusion of the interview and subsequently transcribed. Information was also sought through email contact, informal conversations, and policy reports collected from schools and other bodies where interest was shown in the phenomenon. Substantial newspaper coverage in the area of school choice occurred coincidently during the preparation of this thesis, and selected articles have been included in Appendix 2.3 (with a full list presented in Appendix 1.2) as it is pertinent to an understanding of the context of this study. Relevant information revealed by parents in these accounts has been used as
corroborating material, by comparing the material to the theory as part of the process of confirming fit.

The final round of interviews was undertaken during the writing of the thesis in 2005 in order to achieve saturation where there was need, or to review the theory with some of the participants (Irurita, 1996). Only one of the earlier participants was formally re-interviewed in this round but others who had been interviewed earlier engaged in informal discussions about the emerging theory and the way in which their contribution confirmed the theory.

Because positivistic research is generally conducted in a linear fashion it is therefore usually possible to budget accurately the time needed for each phase of a research study (Hutchinson, 1986). In generating a grounded theory, however, the process is “inherently circular in nature, requiring an indeterminate amount of time for conceptualisation to occur” (Hutchinson, p. 126). For the present study, it was necessary to recalculate repeatedly the time needed for completion, as the development of the theory proved impossible to confine within a predetermined time frame.

The Formal Interview
As has been noted, grounded theory requires in-depth information from participants in the research that gives details of their situation to form a rich description within the context of the substantive area of inquiry. The principal means by which much of this information is gleaned is through the formal interview. Formal interviews can be structured or unstructured (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986b; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995), but in grounded theory it is the unstructured interview that produces the richest description, as it allows participants to elucidate in their own words an aspect of their lives in which they are fully involved and for which reason they have been chosen as participants. In an unstructured interview, the interviewer may use a guide that contains “brief, general questions, a topical outline, or a major theme” (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986a, p. 67).
From the initial contacts, a semi-structured interview was formulated based closely on the principles of ethnographic interviewing (Spradley, 1979; Minichiello, et al., 1997; Fontana & Frey, 2000). The ethnographic interview “attempts to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 653). It became obvious after the pilot interview, however, that this particular semi-structured format was too specific and overly structured. By adhering to a predetermined schedule of questioning, the participants were unable to develop their own understandings and reactions to the main topic. Adjustments were therefore made to loosen the structure, leaving the format more open and natural, with trigger questions being used to assist in eliciting further particular aspects of the participant’s story. The use of such triggers is described below.

The opening question of the original interview question list had been “How did you come to the decision to send your child/children to a Catholic secondary school?” By the third and fourth interview, however, it became evident that this question did not always offer a meaningful beginning, as each of the children in question was the fourth child of the family to be enrolled in the school. The second participant illustrated the inadequacy of the opening question by providing the following answer:

\[ \text{Let me have a relook at the question – what motivates parents to choose to send their children to Catholic secondary school? I would say that’s not what I chose. It didn’t work like that (David, p. 1).} \]

By the fifth interview, it was evident that the use of direct questioning was continuing to create problems, in this case because of the nature and special circumstances of the participant. This parent had been recently bereaved and was limited in her facility with spoken English. This meant that short clear questions were necessary, often being repeated in different ways, and it was not until the second half of the interview that she was able to speak at any length about issues that were raised.
For the seventh interview the approach was changed yet again, this time by initially asking the participant to speak about what he thought was a good education (see Appendix 2.5).

From each participant’s initial response, opportunities to open the discussion further were created by prompts introduced by the researcher. For example, when Participant 7 spoke about “general skills” he was encouraged to elaborate by a prompt that asked him what he especially valued in education. It was an easy step for him then to tell his educational story.

When Participant 9 was asked about her understanding of a good education her reaction was negative and she responded with a very critical view and a seeming reluctance to go into detail. To get around this, short and very specific questions were used for some time to allow her to develop confidence in her point of view. By the second half of the interview she was able to respond at length.

In the tenth interview, the initial participant was a woman who was later joined by her husband. She was very hesitant at first, and when her husband entered she said very little and he assumed a confident position. Later in the interview she began to talk confidently and she and her husband complemented each other’s story with further detail to provide a very rich description of country issues in educational choice.

By this stage a pattern had developed where the participants were asked initially about their understanding of what constitute a good education and then prompts proceeded from their response. Further trigger questions were used to maintain the flow of the participant’s story, and to elicit detail. For example:

And how did you feel about that….
What was your child’s response to that….
Can you tell me more about that aspect….
Let’s go back to something that you said earlier…..
Tell me the story behind that…..
So when you say….. Can you tell me what you mean…..
What other aspects of school life can you tell me about…..

While the unstructured nature of the interview allowed for the direction to be established largely by the participant, some particular aspects were introduced into the conversation directly by the researcher. For example, metropolitan participants who had students in upper school were asked about the school’s Year 12 ball. Questions of this type encouraged participants to detail issues on other aspects of the school culture. For the country participants who had children in boarding school, trigger questions were used to prompt a description of that experience and its specific impact on their educational and family needs.

The Language of the Interviewer

In each interview, I considered it important to adapt my language where possible to include vocabulary used by the participant. This not only ensured that it was more comfortable for the participant to respond at a conversational level, but it also reduced the possibility of the researcher’s technical language and preconceptions interfering with, or directing, the participants’ natural response. As Swanson (1986) states, “The interviewer should listen for and be sensitive to language used by the respondent, and should use these terms when appropriate during the interview” (Swanson, p. 68).

Establishing the Connection

As was noted earlier in this chapter, a school principal had been contacted asking for his assistance in order to gain access to participants. The school contacted the parents and asked for their permission to give contact details. The permission included a signed consent form that was then followed by a phone call. In the phone call a broad outline of the study was given, assurance of confidentiality was provided, the importance of the study was explained, and a request was made for an hour of the participant’s time. For those who accepted, an appointment was made.

In all interviews I was very conscientious about punctuality and arrived on time, dressed comfortably and casually and in a peaceful state of mind. In order to
achieve this I gave myself time away from any intense activity and time to read my prompt questions and my own outline. Flexibility was required in terms of time allowed, as the social need to chat on general issues could help establish the connection but this did take extra time. In some cases, even setting up the tape recorder turned out to be a useful establishing action when the participant’s assistance was required in order to access a power point.

The filling out of the biographical data form (Appendix 2.6) also functioned well as an establishing experience for the researcher and the participants. Initially I asked the participants to fill in the sheet, but in later interviews I filled them in myself and asked the questions in a conversational manner. This enabled me to get a picture of the family which was later useful in stimulating appropriate trigger questions, for example, “At the beginning you said that there were three boys at high school, which one haven’t we heard about?”

The place of interview was chosen by the participant and in most instances was in the kitchen/living area of their home. Often a cup of coffee further helped to establish the connection and cover any anxieties that the participant might have had. Extreme flexibility was required in one instance where because the participant who was known well to me spent quite some time crying. My stance as interviewer had to change several times as the tape was stopped and comfort was offered. There was no emotional risk to this participant as a trusting relationship had already been developed through our joint membership of the same parish community.

Being aware of the impact of body language and other forms of communication was also important in establishing and maintaining connections. Understanding the nature and significance of these other forms of communication has come from the field of neuro-linguistic programming (Gray, 1991). Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) develops skills that assist those in a variety of contexts who deal with people in an interview situation in a great variety of places, for example, probation officers, social workers, researchers, school teachers, doctors, and other health professionals. Effective use of the NLP techniques requires that the interviewer is able to recognise certain communication traits in
the participant and is able to replicate and read the behaviour so that communication channels are made clearer and a common understanding is achieved. If the interviewer is able to read quickly the way in which the participant reads the world, trust and understanding can usually be established efficiently. The originators of NLP had discovered that a person’s thoughts or inner processes are expressed verbally through four sensory modalities, visual, kinaesthetic, auditory, and body-movement (Gray, 1991, p. 3). In the present study for instance, people may respond in a visual modality by saying “The way that I see education is this…” If they were kinaesthetic they would say “Well the way I feel about education is…” If they are auditory in their modality they might say “The way I’m hearing the question is …” Eye movement provides another clue to the modality of the person, “upward eye movements reflect visual processing, lateral eye movements reflect auditory processing, and downward movements represent either kinaesthetic processing or indicate that the client is talking within” (Gray, p. 4).

An understanding of body position has been developed in NLP (Gray, 1991, p. 4) that helps the interviewer provide a comfortable communicative environment. Non-verbal mirroring on the part of the interviewer is a powerful tool in actually altering the subconscious indications of understanding. For example, if the interviewer subtly changes body position to mirror that of the participant, then the mutual feeling of trust and understanding can sometimes be established quickly. Reading the body language of a participant in other types of investigations has sometimes resulted in an interviewer simply using the information to interpret the participant, whereas NLP suggests that using the information by mirroring their posture can completely change the dynamics of the interview making it more comfortable for the participant and possibly yielding better results (Gray, p. 4). This form of mirroring of posture was used in interviews where appropriate in this present study.

It is important that the closing of the interview remains tentative (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986a) in order that the connections already established could remain open and useful. In each case the participants in the present study were encouraged to contact me at a later time should they have further information,
or if they wished to further develop anything they had shared with me. An opportunity for me to return for clarification if that should prove necessary was also requested.

*Development of the Interviews*

Unlike most structured interviews, the grounded theory interview evolves and develops responsively throughout the data collection. In the early interviews minimal control was exerted so that the widest possible interpretation could be placed on the subject by the interviewee, thereby ensuring that all possible dimensions and nuances in the participants’ experiences of, and attitudes toward, the topic could surface. Once analysis of the early interviews was complete the formal interviews became narrower in focus as theoretical sampling commenced (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986b). As Chenitz and Swanson note, towards the end of the study it might only be necessary to have a short conversation to check out a few points that then allow the saturation and theoretical completeness to occur. In the case of Participant 35, for example, the necessary information was able to be collected simply through a brief email exchange, since only specific information about the change of schools was required, and this method of data collection was satisfactory to both parties.

A full conceptualisation of the interview process used in this study is contained in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Conceptualising the process in this way was undertaken because it was apparent early in the study that the skill level needed by the researcher in order to complete this demanding form of research was initially inadequate. The conceptualisation together with a detailed exploration of the skills required for interviewing made a substantial difference to the remainder of the study. The importance of such preparation is well supported in the literature (Berg, 2001; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Minichiello et al., 1997; Rubin, 1995; Weiss, 1994).
Figure 2.1. Conceptualisation of interview format

- Request for schools and other sources to provide names of participants and secure consent
- Initial contact with participant – guarantee of confidentiality established, understanding of study given to level of desired interest, appointment made at participant's convenience
- Personal contact made – interview at place chosen by participant, researcher’s personal position assured as casual and calm in every aspect
- Icebreakers – filling out biographical data to establish confidence and family background, hospitality accepted to promote warmth in contact
- Comfortable placement of recording device once permission has been given, and explanation of interview process

- Initial question open ended and clear to promote conversation
- Awareness of body language (NLP) and other non-verbal communication necessary
- Prompt questions easily accessible and non-intrusive
- Use of language that reflects the mode of the participant to encourage confidence and mutuality
- Flexibility and adaptability necessary in response to participant’s needs (eg. stopping the tape for family interruptions, emotional difficulties)
- Careful focus on view of participant which excludes researcher’s opinions or experience
- Desire to understand the participant’s perspective

- Gratitude expressed for participation
- Open ended question about any further response or areas uncovered so far
- Contact details presented so that further information can be relayed
- Request for further interview should it be required for clarification
- Disconnecting conversation – friendly interest
- Unhurried exit
Figure 2.2. From substantive frame to interview guide (Weiss, 1994, p. 15f)

**GLEANING DATA**

**From substantive frame to interview guide:**

- **Initial idea** – good education – what is it?
- **Diachronic approach** – family history of education
- **Relate your experience of education**
- **Your spouse’s experience**
- **Wider family’s response**
- **Your children’s education** – tell the story
- **Current experience** – story of enrolment, starting out, academic emphasis, experience of RE, peer group experience, extracurricular activities, boarding experience, year 12 ball, exam time,
  - **Has this experience given a pleasing result? Any negatives in the experience?**
  - **On a scale of 1 to 10, (10 being best) how would you rate your overall experience of involvement with Catholic secondary education? (Can you tell me why?)** Single quantitative question (Weiss, 1994, p. 50) – can help anchor a qualitative discussion.
- **Move to the future** – personal/family investment – original dreams, new visions, real affect of education on family, relationship with Church
- **After the story is complete, present the categories found so far in the form of “some parents think this, but others think that – where do you stand in this particular aspect?”**

If the interview takes an unexpected direction the guide should be dropped entirely (Weiss, 1994, p. 51)

---

**Theoretical Sampling**

Once the initial interviews have been conducted, transcribed and analysed, further participants are chosen according to the emerging categories. The original interviews reveal the possible range of the substantive frame. Theoretical sampling identifies further relevant participants who can add data to the significant categories that have already been established. Theoretical sampling concludes when the existent categories have reached saturation.

---

**Transcription of the Interviews**

Glaser (1998) forcefully advises solo researchers: “DO NOT TAPE INTERVIEWS” (1998, p. 107, author’s emphasis). His advice is based on several factors; firstly, he says the power of grounded theory can be undermined...
if the amount of data is not delimited quickly and efficiently, and that taping and analysing every small part of the data can overwhelm the research. Secondly, he adds, that taping delays theoretical sampling by prolonging the analysis of the data. Thirdly, taping collects words, not observations, and both interview and observation need to ground the meaning. And, fourthly, Glaser (1998) suggests, taping reduces the skill level of the researcher who should rely instead only on “note taking, immediately coding and analyzing and then theoretical sampling” (Glaser, p. 111). Notwithstanding Glaser’s arguments, it is fair to say that for a neophyte researcher, these high-level research skills of the experienced sociology researcher are seldom present. This study has therefore relied on taped interviews, along with observations recorded in note form. As the coding procedures developed, however, the need for intense scrutiny of every line and word was no longer necessary. (The grounded theory seminar group at Curtin University supported these strategies.)

Of the 39 interviews, ten were able to be transcribed professionally with the funding available. The professional transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement and provided digital and hard copy of each interview. The transcriptions were carefully checked for accuracy and amended where necessary, with all personal and geographical details being given pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. This process increased familiarity with the content of the interview.

Completing the transcription of the remaining 29 interviews myself provided an advantage during later open coding as enhanced awareness of the interview detail was achieved through the painstaking nature of transcription. After each interview had been transcribed, each tape was played again several times, carefully listened to for meaning, and checked against the hard copy for accuracy. The tapes and hard copy were then stored securely.

Easton, McComish and Greenberg (2000) address three problems associated with transcription in qualitative research: “equipment failure, environmental hazards, and transcription errors” (Easton et al., p. 703). The initial interviews for this study were recorded on a Sony microcassette recorder in order that the
recording machinery would be as inconspicuous as possible. Extra batteries and tapes were available at all times.

Transcribing from the microcassette directly without the aid of an appropriate transcribing machine, proved difficult. A larger Eiki™ recorder was therefore used where possible, but this had the disadvantage that it required a power point, usually an extension cord, and was cumbersome and intrusive, even though it was more convenient for transcription. More resources became available through the University when the 11th interview was to take place. A Sony™ portable dictating machine was made available along with a Lanier VoiceWriter™, which made the transcription process more efficient. For the interviews conducted by telephone, an Olympus™ telephone recording pickup was plugged into the dictating machine to provide clear tapes for transcription and analysis. Careful handling and storage of this equipment resulted in no equipment failure.

Environmental hazards were carefully avoided although barking dogs, hungry children, crying participants and soft voices made recording difficult at times. Since the participant always chose the location for the interview, it was a place of comfort and security for them and not a work area, so hazards were minimized.

Transcription errors were avoided by very carefully auditing each tape, whether it was transcribed professionally or personally. Careful attention was given to achieving exact replication of the participants’ language and nuance. For example, the transcript of the interview with Beth and Tom records:

*Beth*: To learn, I didn’t really have a great learning myself when I was a child. I couldn’t sort of get a grasp of things, um, the children these days they seem to get a good education, they come home and know they can spell, read, um yeah. *Tom*: The trouble is that if ya try to hold them, they’ll just rebel. *Beth*: Rebel altogether. Like won’t come home. *Tom*: Like sorta we did a bit, you learn after a while, you know, as you get older, mature a bit, you see the light (Beth & Tom, p.1).
Open coding began by listening to the tape with the corrected hard copy in hand, and specific emphases and linguistic peculiarities were noted at the time. In transcribing the immigrant participants’ interviews, great care was taken to ensure that the cultural understanding was correct. Punctuation was carefully documented so that the meaning of the content was clear. In the instances where crying, children’s needs or other domestic problems interrupted the flow of the interview, the recording device was turned off until the participant was composed and happy to recommence the recording.

Throughout the thesis, quotes from the participants have been used to illustrate the way in which the emerging concepts have drawn directly from the data. Where identifying details within the quotes have been changed (for example, the name of a college or suburb), brackets enclose the changes. Engaging the readers in the actual language of the participants in this way provides them an opportunity to assess the researcher’s level of inference. For example, Samantha was concerned about her children’s access to Catholic schools when they moved to Western Australia and reflected in her interview about the reasons for this concern:

\[
I \text{ suppose my dream is that because [my husband] and I went to Catholic schools all our lives, we just presumed we'd do the same with our children (Samantha, p. 3).}
\]

This particular part of the transcript was coded as a response to her own personal history.

In Appendix 2.7 a brief description of each family provides a background for the richness of the descriptive narrative. It gives a further opportunity to deepen the understanding of the participants’ stories and experiences.

**Data Analysis**

Although data collection and analysis proceed concurrently and in circular fashion in grounded theory development, they are discussed separately in this
chapter for the purposes of clarity of exposition. The grounded theory method of data analysis is described in following section.

**The Constant Comparative Method**

The strategic method used to generate a grounded theory is constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1992; Hutchinson, 1986, Corbin, 1986a). Constant comparative analysis proceeds through four stages: comparing incident to incident to form categories, integrating the categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The strategic aim of the analysis is to “generate theoretical constructs that, along with substantive codes and categories and their properties, form a theory that encompasses as much behavioural variation as possible” (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 122).

Some actual data from the present study will be used here illustrate constant comparative analysis. For example, one of the participants in this study, an immigrant, described his appreciation of the kind of home country education he had had that later became unavailable to other coloured people during the apartheid period. He recounted a strong appreciation of what his parents had done for him, particularly by taking him each day to the city to attend the same school where his father had been educated. His education, he declared, was as good as any available at that time. He was very appreciative also of the choices that his parents had made and the sacrifice that those choices had entailed. Another participant, who had also been born and educated overseas, spoke of her education and the choices that her parents made for her. She was among the first generation of girls that were given equal access to education, even to the extent that she was the only girl in her class in her initial secondary school experience. After completing her schooling her parents allowed and encouraged her to travel overseas to gain further education and to seek professional employment.

The accounts related by these two participants are different in that the second one recounted an experience that was in the forefront of the change that ensured
proper advantage for girls in education in her country, while the first was at the end of equal educational opportunity immediately before the apartheid regime was established. Yet they both embody and convey a similar sense of appreciation as they explored the meaning of their personal experience in relation to educational possibilities for past or future generations. The second had reached a time of independence unknown to previous generations of women in her country and the first had achieved an education that was denied to the following generations of his race, which in turn deprived the children of opportunity. Comparative analysis of both accounts helped the researcher to develop and name a category of “Personal History”, a category which later became important in the “refining of family imperatives” that emerged as a key procedural element in the first iteration of the theory as described in Chapter 4.

The general process through which the analyst moves from raw data to the eventual integrated theory can be schematised as shown in Figure 2.3. Even though the figure seems to imply a hierarchical development, there is much activity that is concurrent and circular. It has been presented in a hierarchical manner only to convey the progressive growth character of grounded theory development.

**Memos**

Memoing is a vital part of the process of elevating descriptions of events in the substantive area to a theoretical level that encompasses meaning and relationships (Hutchinson, 1986, Corbin, 1986b). Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe the function of memos as “written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 197). They are the means by which the researcher's ideas are given shape and recorded in order that they can later be used in development and articulation of the theory (Irurita, 1996, Corbin, 1986b). During the span of years taken to write this thesis, memos proved to be invaluable in recording what I thought about a particular area of the data at the time, what it appeared to mean to the participant, and what it seemed to signify in a more general sense. Relational schemas were drawn and associated memos described my emerging understanding and appreciation of the significance of what the participant had said. Such information captured in the memos and schema was important for ongoing discussions with my supervisor.
Figure 2.3. Construction of a grounded theory

![Diagram showing the construction of a grounded theory]

Grounded Theory Constructed

Theoretical construct of core category and linking categories schematically presented

Pool of data used to provide every possible variation in describing the categories

Concepts abstracted into categories

Similar ideas grouped into concepts by constantly comparing incident to incident

Data fractured in open coding process
Each piece of data named

Pool of data from participant interviews and other sources
and provided much of the conceptual raw material for the eventual theoretical development.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to three different types of memos: code notes, theoretical notes and operational notes (Strauss & Corbin, p. 197). In this study I did not seek consciously to create different types of memos, although an examination of those I did write would reveal some differences in content and purpose. I simply memoed everything that occurred to me as I struggled to find the underlying meanings in the transcript data in order to ensure that nothing was missed or forgotten and so that the developing theory could be as comprehensive as possible. Categorising of memos occurred through the action of filing them as coded entries within the word processing documents used for recording and retrieval. A well-structured system of category folders enabled the rapidly accumulating memos to be accessed according to their relevance. Where it became evident that a particular memo was needed in a newly developed category it was simply moved to, or added to, the new folder. Memos were also used to record both the means by which I was able to progress the research and the particular strategies that made the analysis cohesive. Two examples illustrative of the general form of memo used in the present study are reproduced in part below:

**MEMO – Categories 26 March 02**

**Assessing Children’s needs**

Much earlier on this category emerged as the first category found. However, I did not even delimit it by describing its properties. From participant one, I have now been reviewing this category and asking what really is she doing? Therefore, I am listing all of the things that have emerged from her interview and am going to use the constant comparative method to try and show which categories are present and what properties they have. She has done things like:....

**RESPONDING TO PERSONAL HISTORY**

Describing family structure – complicated personal history, bereavement, background. Noting different expectations initially

Showing prejudice against single sex private schools

Describing reasons for prejudice – perceived artificial environment, crisis when dealing with the real world, arrogance

Explaining – bereavement difficult

Relating of personal experience of education, parents, family

Describing self in upper IQ level – possible scholarship
Participant’s parents choosing to keep her within her home and people – proximity of close family, closely bonded, stay within social class
Finding strength in own background
Communication capacity good, extensive, because of background, capable of using different language
Describing poverty of peers who were bright students

Other information concerning aspects relevant to the progress of the study and development of the thesis was recorded in a separate research journal. The following memo recorded a supervisory discussion and illustrated my impression of the status of the developing theory at that time.

**Memo 1 October 2002**

*This morning had a meeting with Tony and presented my document that shows the theory in full. Filled in categories as Wombing Their Future 1Oct02.*

The theory itself is robust enough as a model to include all parents and guardians who intelligently consider their children’s future and make choices. The differences that will cause parents to go outside the government education system will be involved in what they need to do to preserve their family identity. That might mean that the individual needs of the child take them outside the government system when they have already educated one or more children within this system.

Those who choose outside the “norm” system, choose within a spectrum that is not included in the norm. In applying their own imperative to preserve the family identity, it might mean that they provide completely different education for the individual.

In the final phase of the process, there needs to be some rearrangement. The justifying choice category can swing off in two directions. With supporting dynamics being the intervening condition, the parents/peers/school add to the child’s chances of success. If there are challenges and negative dynamics, then they leave the justifying and either change the choice or exit the system.

In the final stages of theory development it was very important that it be possible to revisit and retrace all steps of the theory development to ensure that nothing was excluded or overlooked and to provide an effective audit trail for the study. The evolving story line was preserved through memos of the kinds discussed above. The memo below demonstrates the emerging theoretical construct at a particular time within the analysis period.
Memo 27 Feb. 03 Theoretical construct
(a complex idea resulting from a synthesis of simpler ideas)

BASIC SOCIAL CONCERN: Wombing the Future

Causal condition: Rumbling
education compulsory
responsibility of rearing children
have to make a decision – variety of choices available
no perfect answer, no control over some facets

Contextual condition: Limits and needs
awareness of family imperatives
desire to preserve family identity
awareness of limited resources: economic, social, personal.
awareness of each child’s needs
awareness of own educational history
geographical location

Consequences: Making a Match
Harmony OR Disquiet

families required to make a match so that the family remains in harmony.
Family has successfully made a match where there are no challenges that
make them enter into the basic social process. Anxiety over the choices
available and the fear of error and world influences on the children give rise
to a great deal of disquiet in some families, and little in others. If there is
disquiet, the family enter into the basic social process to resolve the
consequences of their concern.

BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS:
Preserving Family Identity

Phase one: Refining family imperatives (responding to personal history
a contextual factor of this category)
Assessing specific needs of each child

Phase two: Framing their options (intervening condition – availability -
closure of local schools, chosen school full,) committing
family resources, sourcing information, ensuring
opportunities available

Phase three: Balancing
minimising and maximising options
re-engaging family imperatives, singularising result

Phase four: Managing the result
three subcategories: Maintaining the choice
Changing the choice - redo
Exiting the system to restore
balance

By continually preserving, revisiting and reflecting on the ideas and insights
contained in the recorded memos, it was possible to move progressively forward
with the construction of the theory. Neuman (1994) describes the analytical
memo of the qualitative researcher as forging a link between the concrete data or
raw evidence and more abstract, theoretical thinking, and characterises most qualitative researchers as “compulsive note-takers” (Neuman, 1994, p. 411). Note taking is not only compulsive for most, but is also compulsory. Important ideas often occur in strange places at strange times when the mind is free to wander and move among different levels of abstract thought. The initial field notes might be simply the researcher’s fresh impressions of the participant and the interview as well as the atmosphere and the environment. Once recorded, however, they can provide content for further reflection and contribute to the emergence of more abstracted ideas over time. For a considerable period I frequently carried a micro-cassette recorder to capture ideas, particularly when driving any distance, where there was time available for thinking clearly about the detail of the interviews and for developing abstractions. As this compulsive note taking progressed, blocks of the original transcript data that were relevant to the memos were filed in the same folder so that when the actual writing of the findings took place there was already a wealth of direct participant-language excerpts to enrich and ground the text.

**Saturation**

Saturation refers to “the completeness of all levels of codes when no new conceptual information is available to indicate [the necessity for] new codes or the expansion of existing ones” (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 125). New data will not be independently useful as a contribution to theory development unless it calls for the creation of a new code or the alteration of an existing code. Irurita (1996) describes saturation as being one of the later stages in the analysis where “no additional data [has been] found to develop new categories or properties of the categories, as they related to the core category or process” (Irurita, p. 7). In this study, saturation was reached by seeking parents, through purposive and theoretical sampling, who had different backgrounds and geographical settings, had made specific choices, and had made choices other than Catholic schooling. In the final stages of data analysis and interpretation that continued into the early phases of the actual writing of the thesis, further theoretical sampling was undertaken to fill in small areas where it was necessary to ensure that saturation was achieved.
Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is a personal quality of the researcher that is a consequence of the researcher’s awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Such awareness gives the informed researcher an “ability to generate concepts from data and to relate them according to the normal models of theory in general, and theory development in sociology, in particular” (Glaser, 1992, p. 27). Researchers with this ability will be able to conceptualise their data to the highest levels of theoretical abstraction, taking its significance well beyond that of a merely rich description of a substantive area.

Professional experience, personal experience, and in depth knowledge of the data in the area under study truly help in the substantive sensitivity necessary to generate categories and properties, provided the researcher has conceptual ability (Glaser, 1992, p. 28).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify four sources of theoretical sensitivity in the researcher: literature, professional experience, personal experience and the analytic process itself. By reading literature of the substantive discipline in which the research is situated, one can be sensitised to what is relevant to the phenomenon being studied. By working professionally in the area the researcher will often be able to identify more easily the events and actions pertinent to the study. Personal experience, too, can add to the researcher’s sensitivity by providing concrete examples from which potentially relevant concepts and possible relationships can be generated. The analytic process itself can also be an additional source of theoretical sensitivity as the researcher interacts with, and interprets, the data. Such sensitivity, however gained, is necessary to undertake the construction of a theory that is appropriately and comprehensively grounded in relevant data from the substantive area.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling, which depends on and derives from theoretical sensitivity is “the further collection of data for coding and analysis guided by the identified categories and the generated interpretations or ideas” (Irurita, 1996, p. 6). These categories and interpretations are then used to “direct further data collection, from which the codes are further theoretically developed with respect to their
various properties and their connections with other codes until saturated” (Glaser, 1978, p. 36). The theoretical sampling process interacts continually and cumulatively with the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher to produce an emerging theory. This intrinsic relationship underlines the importance of interweaving data collection with data analysis. “Each feeds into the other thereby increasing insight and recognition of the parameters of the evolving theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 43).

Because the first round of interviews had shown so much similarity that little variation was apparent, theoretical sampling was used to include a more diverse range of participants in order that other perspectives and experiences could enlarge the emerging categories. Deliberate expansion of the participant group continued in this way throughout the study as reflection on the accumulating categories suggested new avenues to be explored with subsequently included participants. For example, one participant was included solely for his experience where his child had been directed to leave a particular school and seek enrolment elsewhere against the original desire and intentions of the family. This incident provided saturation for the relevant category. A further example involved a non-parent with particular expertise in education and pastoral care. As a parish priest over a long period of time, his observations and pastoral knowledge of the educational choices made by parents added further anchorage to the theory and saturation in a specific category. Theoretical sampling was also used in order to include Catholic parents who had chosen to enrol their children in government schools. Participants selected on grounds such as these provided valuable, new information that consolidated, enriched and helped to saturate the categories that had emerged from my ongoing analysis of the transcript data.

Data Coding Procedures

Following each interview, the recording was transcribed ready for analysis. Each transcript was formatted in a single column with wide margins, such that when printed as hard copy hand written codes could be added with ease. The
formatting also included the elements necessary for entering the data into a software package, NUD*IST™ 6, that was used to assist in data management. NUD*IST™ is a QSR™ software application for recording and manipulating free-form text data. NUD*IST™ stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (Richards, 1998, p. 10). The hard copies were maintained in secure storage and were constantly referred to during the analysis and writing up of the present study.

Glaser (1978) refers to two levels of coding; substantive coding and theoretical coding. Substantive coding involves two actions: open coding and selective coding. First, the open coding fractures the transcript data from the substantive area of enquiry and then second, particular codes are selected to delimit the coding as the core variable emerges. The next level uses theoretical codes that “conceptualise how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory” (Glaser, p.72).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) offer another variant in their coding procedures as they also introduce a further step into the substantive coding, which they call axial coding. The present study has been influenced by Strauss and Corbin’s coding procedures to a larger extent than by those of Glaser.

Open Coding

During the open coding of a transcript, each line, sentence or incident is named so that connections can be made through comparative analysis – “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser (1978) stresses that this coding is about typing behaviour, not people, so the open coding mechanism is used to examine in great detail the behaviours represented by the participants in the research.

While Hutchinson (1986) refers to open codes as level I codes, they are also, at times, called in vivo codes. In vivo means that the actual words of the participants are used and come from the Latin term “in a living thing” (Wilkes & Krebs, 1999). Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe them as being “catchy ones that immediately draw your attention” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 69). Glaser (1978,
p. 70) sees them as the “behaviors or processes which explain how the basic problem is resolved or processed”. In the present study, *in vivo* codes become obvious when the actual words of the participant were used in the open coding or when the action was described. They are first level codes (Punch, 1998, p. 205), “requiring little or no inference beyond the piece of data itself.” They fracture the data (Glaser, 1978) and also summarize segments of data to provide a basis for later higher-order coding (Punch, 1998).

Glaser (1978, p. 57) offers some rules of operation when open coding to “ensure its proper use and success”. Initially, three questions must be continually asked of the data: What is this data a study of? What category does this incident indicate? What is actually happening in the data? For the present study, keeping these three questions in constant view was of great assistance.

Glaser (1978) also insists that the analysis be done line by line. This can be very difficult for neophyte researchers and so it was greatly beneficial that I had been able to join the grounded theory seminar group at Curtin University where the members assisted each other. Open coding selections of each other’s transcripts helped establish as many variant views as possible, and thus to avoid the danger of coding on the basis of the analyst’s preconceived or narrowly interpreted ideas.

Glaser (1978) insists also that the analyst must do his or her own coding. Personally doing the transcribing and the open coding means that the researcher will develop a very thorough knowledge and appreciation of the data and that theoretical sensitivity is maximised. For the interviews that I did not transcribe, I was careful to listen to the tapes and read through the hard copies so that I not only corrected any typographical errors, but also increased familiarity with the text and developed some early ideas about the thematic content of the data.

Further, Glaser (1978, p. 60) insists that the researcher should “stay within the confines of his substantive area and the field study” At one stage of this research, fascination with a great deal of historical data about education in Western Australia thwarted the analysis and Glaser’s rule became obviously
appropriate to the furtherance of the desired theory. It was necessary to curtail any further work on the historical context of education in Western Australia so that the substantive area of the research returned to be the central focus.

Finally, Glaser (1978, p. 60) directs the researcher not to “assume the analytic relevance of any … variable such as age, sex, social class, race, skin color etc., until it emerges as relevant”. Earlier in this chapter (Table 2.1) variables describing and differentiating the participants were presented but no theoretical relevance was drawn unless it came out later in the coding of the data. The inclusion of this information was to indicate where the theoretical coding and analysis directed the theoretical sampling to occur without making any assumption about the relevance of the information provided in the participant profiles.

Examples of open coding used in the present study are shown in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 to illustrate both the nature and depth of the coding and the intensity of scrutiny applied to the data.

*Table 2.3. Sample of open coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript example</th>
<th>Open coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Started with [our son’s] needs. We know he’s got a very rare chromosomal abnormality which is irrelevant in itself but it means that he is physically small, that’s got implications for choosing a school. | Assessing  
Assessing Parent describing needs  
Rare disorder – medical, intellectual, physical  
Implicating school choice as important |

The open coding shown in Table 2.3 and 2.4 records what, in my understanding, the participant was actually conveying in her statement about her son’s needs. My coding connects the participant’s description to actions or circumstances that I was able to discern had been important contributors to her choice or influential in her deliberations. The word “implicating” was used as an *in vivo* code as it freshly presented the participant’s immediate concerns.
While such extensive open coding was time consuming and laborious, the experience of coding and the resultant codes themselves were extremely important in ‘opening up’ the data so that the underlying meaning in the participants’ descriptions and explanations was available for conceptual development. Interviews later in the sequence were not as laboriously or extensively open coded, as they were for the most part focussed on specific incidents or ideas that were being pursued through theoretical sampling to ensure saturation of the theory.

Table 2.4. Further sample of open coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript example</th>
<th>Open coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I think probably by year 9, she felt secure enough to be able to make the move. In herself. She’s a shy girl, so I don’t think it was boys. It wasn’t to be with the boys. Maybe the closeness to home too. ‘Cause often, she was in athletics and sports and was often after school – it was late. Ah, yeah, the closeness. She always had to get the bus, whereas [our son] just hopped onto his bike and rode to school. | Increase in maturity → could change choice  
Characteristic – shy, likes being close to home  
Geographical disadvantage for her  
Closeness to home important  
Son had advantage of proximity and independence  
Geographical advantage |

Software for Qualitative Data Analysis: NUD*IST™ 6 and Inspiration®

Once the interview transcripts had been appropriately formatted and hand-coded, they were imported into the qualitative database NUD*IST™ 6. Within the NUD*IST™ database, each of the researcher-coded sections is assigned a numeric code that allows whole transcript, or sets of related transcript, to be efficiently searched for the purpose of comparative analysis and the extraction and grouping of passages that share common codes or are related through other codes in a tree-structure.

The assigned codes can be changed within NUD*IST™ at any point as the conceptualisation of the data progresses, and new codes can be attached to the existing tree of codes. NUD*IST™ was used for the first nine interviews as they were intensely open coded and were well suited to the structured analysis
made possible by the software. However, the first major breakthrough in the conceptualisation of the data occurred when the tree of codes in NUD*IST™ was exported to Inspiration®, a specialised conceptual imaging application that was designed to assist in the development of a variety of schema. The export of the tree of codes resulted in a visual image that greatly assisted the development of the emerging categories. Clusters generated within Inspiration® revealed the inherent directionality in the coding structure, enabling me to proceed with the theoretical development. In order to see the whole picture I printed out the entire tree of codes and placed it on a wall where it took almost the entire expanse. As such, it is physically too extensive to be reproduced here.

**Axial Coding**

Open coding and axial coding do not occur in simple linear sequence, but rather are engaged in the analysis simultaneously (Strauss & Corbin 1990, Chenitz & Swanson 1986). Whereas open coding fractures the data so that individual categories can be identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), axial coding puts the data back together again by “making connections between a category and its sub-categories” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 97).

Glaser (1992) does not use the term axial coding, and in fact he severely criticises Strauss and Corbin on this issue. Glaser uses the term theoretical coding for the part of the analysis where

… theoretical codes conceptualise how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory. They, like substantive codes, are emergent; they weave the fractured story back together again (Glaser, p. 72).

Glaser’s use of theoretical families of codes is undoubtedly useful for sociological theory, but this study does not presume to be fully sociological. It is therefore appropriate to use Strauss and Corbin’s axial coding for the analysis.

In the present study, for instance, open coding revealed that “rumbling”, an *in vivo* code, developed into a category that related to the participants’ behaviour as they responded to the realisation that the time for decision about school
choice was approaching. As other parents began to talk about their possible choices and their ideas, the participants began to look at what they needed and what was possible. They also included in their deliberations their own schooling experiences. While considering all of this data, it emerged that they were linked and so axial codes entered the picture. As axial coding began to reconnect the data, rumbling became associated with refining as the family began to deeply assess what they wanted in schooling. The child’s needs, attitudes of others, the influence of the wider family and their own personal history all became important as they refined their own imperatives in the first stage of making a choice about schooling. During this phase of the analysis many memos were written describing each step and connection of data to keep track of the ideas and the development of the theoretical construct.

*Inspiration®* assisted in imaging such theoretical constructs throughout the comparative analysis. The graphical connections between items and codes were readily moved and changed and this facilitated the development and visual manipulation of the ideas. Images generated within *Inspiration®* could then be exported as stand-alone graphics to conventional documents as illustrated in Figure 2.4.

Although some of the ideas and connections that emerged during the axial and open coding process were described by schema produced using *Inspiration®* others were represented as simple box diagrams drawn directly within Microsoft Word as illustrated in Figure 2.5

Management of the changing names of codes was initially a difficulty. In NUD*IST™ it soon became excessively complicated to be changing the codes continually and then re-imaging the relationships to be assured of the development. Consequently, an alternative introduced whereby every code entered into the margin of a particular transcript hard copy was listed in a separate document where it was placed under its appropriate category heading, with its transcript page number noted. An extract from one such transcript cover
Figure 2.4. Diagram generated with Inspiration®

**BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS**

- Nurturing Family Potential

**PHASE ONE**

- APPLYING THEIR OWN IMPERATIVE
  - RUMBLING: beginning of questioning
  - ASSESSING needs the individual
  - RESPONDING to personal history
  - EXPRESSING personal values

**PHASE TWO**

- FRAMING THEIR OPTIONS.
  - COMMITTING family resources
  - SOURCING information

**PHASE THREE**

- BALANCING
  - MINIMISING and MAXIMISING options
  - SINGULARISING result

**PHASE FOUR**

- MAINTAINING CHOICE
  - IMPROVING chances of children's success

- JUSTIFYING CHOICE
  - Causal condition: SUPPORTING dynamics

**DIMENSIONS**
- Medical
- Educational
- Spiritual
- Social

**RENEWING PROCESS**

**EXIT SYSTEM**

- Dimensional properties:
  - Peer group
  - Family
  - School
Figure 2.5. Microsoft Word diagram

Educational Choice

Family needs and limits

CHALLENGED BY CHOICE

OPTIMISING FAMILY POTENTIAL

Refining Family Imperatives

Framing Their Options

Making a Match

Contextual conditions

sheet is shown in Figure 2.6. This document was then attached to the front of the transcript for ease of reference. If insertion of data was needed for quotation in the thesis it was easy to locate it and transfer it from the transcript file. While this was a laborious activity initially, it ensured that the tracking and replication of data was efficient and reliable. As various diagrams were drawn and redrawn during the development of the analysis, the original code names could easily be assumed into the new development.
Figure 2.6. Summary of specific participant codes as grouped under the category “Responding to personal history”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responding to personal history P12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>showing development of values in own history, family p1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authoritarian experience in very large class p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not all kids survived in class of 50 p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial constraints precluded non-gov schooling p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gov schools had boundaries – no choice p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remembers respecting science teacher p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edn a good experience – above average student p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family economic need – propelled into workforce – limited edn p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tradesperson and life long learner p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disappointment at lack of edn p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no family knowledge or culture of tertiary edn p3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tried part time, limited help in making edn choices p3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marriage intervened in edn pursuit p3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deep desire to be professional – started at para-professional level p3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now at uni full time p3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of engagement – personal desire for edn continual, persistent p4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wife held responsible bank position p6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identifying Causal Concerns

While some of this development remained and was included in the final theoretical construct, much of it was discarded as the theory emerged through further use of the data and coding. During this phase of the development of the theory, a causal concern began to emerge. This was a particularly difficult aspect of the analysis but was assisted by the Curtin University seminar group discussions on grounded theory. A high level of abstraction was needed to identify a causal concern from the categories that had already been developed. By the continual use of comparative analysis, the perspectives of each participant were compared to those of other participants so that a common causal concern could be elucidated. Many schemas, including Figure 2.7, were developed to establish the basic social concern.

Eventually the analysis produced a basic social concern called being challenged to choose, the emergence and consolidation of which is described thoroughly in Chapter 3.
Intervening Conditions

As the emerging theory began to crystallise and the various categories began to fit into a more coherent structure, it became evident that there were conditions that would facilitate or constrain the parents’ actions or interactions as they moved closer to making the choice of school. For example, during the deliberations that were taking place as parents progressed through their *rumbling and refining* activity, conditions often intervened that facilitated or constrained the direction that the deliberations were taking. These included the child’s needs, the attitudes of others, the influence of the wider family, and the personal history of the participants. The result of this particular action and interaction was that the family’s imperatives in regard to educational choice were refined so that the next step could eventuate. The influence of intervening conditions such as these, in shaping and constraining the course of the family’s deliberations was relevant to all stages of the decision process as the family moved towards eventually making their choice of schooling. Figure 2.8 illustrates graphically the nature of the interaction generated by these intervening conditions.
Figure 2.8. **Intervening conditions relevant to Rumbling and Refining**

Selective Coding

Although a yet higher level of conceptual integration is necessary for selective coding, it is in many respects simply a further step of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The result of selective coding is the selection of the core category. During axial coding, the categories were described carefully with full substantiation from the data ensuring that they had “richness and density” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 117). During this time, consideration was also being given to the totality of relationships and how a theoretical construct could be developed around a core category. Many ideas developed along the way but proved unable to absorb all categories and therefore were unable to explain their position in the story. Formulating the story line was an important step in identifying the core category, as is fully described in Appendix 2.8. The particular version in that Appendix is one of the early explications of the story and further developments saw the emergence of the final core category that is fully described in Chapters 4 and 5.

Evaluating a Grounded Theory

There are four significant criteria for evaluating a grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Hutchinson, 1986, Charmaz, 2000): fit, work, relevance and
modifiability. The categories that are developed from the collected data must fit – the data must be clearly explained by the categories (Morse & Singleton, 2001, p. 841).

Fit refers to the process of identifying characteristics of one entity and comparing them with the characteristics of another entity to see if similar characteristics are present. Fit may also refer to complementary relationships, as in fitting pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Fit is therefore the process of examining two entities and identifying their similarities or compatibilities along some identifiable dimensions.

The extent to which fit has been achieved for the present theory is evidenced in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 where the theory is explained. Every aspect is described with the appropriate data so that it is clear that the categories have emerged directly from the data and therefore fit. Figure 2.7 shows schematically one of the early versions of the basic social concern that was named preserving family identity. This category emerged early in the construction of the theory but, as the data collection and analysis continued, it became evident that preserving family identity could no longer provide a fit and was therefore discarded. Through theoretical sampling further data enabled a more robust basic social concern to emerge.

A grounded theory must also be able to work, that is, it must be useful in providing a theoretical construct that explains the phenomenon that is being studied (Charmaz, 2000). The major behaviour in the substantive area, along with the variations within that behaviour, must be explained by the theory. If any observed variation cannot be explained then it must be accepted that the theory does not work (Charmaz, 2000). In order to prove that parents choose schooling outside the freely provided government system, the theory has to encompass all possible variations within the parent group. When the data collection reached saturation, there were no other variants emerging that would change the categories that had emerged through the analysis of the data. To this extent, the theory about choice of schooling thus can be said to work. And, moreover, taking the full theory back to families who were participants and reviewing it with them to ensure that it works in their case provided further
confirmation that the theory does indeed *work*. The theory has also been tested against other scenarios of choice presented in newspaper articles and informal conversations.

The *relevance* of a grounded theory is demonstrated when the core variable is able to explain the social processes that are ongoing in the context of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2000, Hutchinson, 1986). In this study, the core variable was the process through which the family moved when they made choices for and during the schooling of their children. As is explained fully in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 the core variable, *realising family potential*, is able to explain the actual problems and basic processes of how parents make a choice of schooling.

A final characteristic of a quality grounded theory is its *modifiability*. Researchers can “modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 511). Should further variables emerge in the process of parents choosing education for their children, the theory should be able to be modified to accommodate those changes. While the present theory, as it stands, fully accommodates all of the data obtained to date, the construction of the theory is such that it allows for subsequent variation or modification should further data require it.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the way in which qualitative methodology has been used to form a grounded theory that explains the processes and meanings surrounding the complex substantive area of choice of schooling. The primary means of collecting data was formal interviews of thirty-nine participants. NUD*IST™ 6 and Inspiration® software as well as other self-generated processes using Microsoft Word were used to manage the data. An overview of the ways by which the eventual theory has been evaluated was presented along with measures taken to ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was protected.
PERSONAL NOTES

Attaining sufficient competency in the grounded theory method so that a parsimonious theory could be developed proved to be much harder than originally anticipated. My data collection periods were immensely stimulating as I shared rich conversations with my participants about the education of their children in particular. Transcribing and coding the data was laborious and time consuming although it improved as my expertise increased, and became really fascinating as the categories began to develop. It was exciting to uncover the first categories and begin to make sense of the data. Being a highly visual person, my first real breakthrough came with the use of Inspiration®, as it enabled me literally to see the clusters of information and the development of the first categories as I wallpapered one wall of my office with the whole picture. While the categories had all been coded and arranged through NUD*IST™ 6 software, the visual presentation through Inspiration® changed the dynamics and made the distinctions clear. Being part of the postgraduate student grounded theory seminar group at Curtin University greatly assisted me in being able to carefully remain within the norms of the grounded theory method.
CHAPTER 3

BASIC SOCIAL CONCERN:
BEING CHALLENGED TO CHOOSE
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Grounded theory accounts for social action in a substantive area (Glaser, 1998, p. 115). In this study the families involved in the action of choosing secondary schooling were motivated by a prime concern. Their attempt at resolving this concern is the core variable and the continual process in which the participants engaged is the focus of this grounded theory (Glaser, p. 116).

This chapter defines the basic social concern, which has been named being challenged to choose. This major category emerged from the data as each participant showed that a serious challenge they faced in rearing their children was to provide education within the limits of their resources and circumstances, yet taking into account the needs of their whole family. This chapter deals with the causal conditions that resulted in the families being challenged to choose.

The participants in the study were all involved in a common circumstance, that is, of choosing education for their children. Even though education is a focus for all parents in Australia because it is compulsory for children to attend school until 15 years of age (School Education Act, 1999), there are causal conditions that give rise to the phenomenon where parents are challenged to choose outside of the education provided at the local government school. The parents who participated in this study shared meanings and behaviours that constituted the substance of the theory, but, as is assumed by grounded theorists, the shared specific social psychological problem was not necessarily articulated (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 114). As the participants spoke of what they were doing
in the education of their children early in the data collection, a process of decision-making began to emerge. However, in order to reach a conceptual understanding of their basic social concern a much higher level of inference was required in the conceptualisation of the data. This has resulted in an understanding of the shared concerns and meanings of the participant group.

All participants were aware of the compulsory nature of education in Western Australia and, to a greater or lesser extent, of the variety of options that were available to them. The extent of the possible choices was considerably different according to their geographical location, educational awareness and socio-economic group. Substantial information was obtained through interview about the limits and needs of each family and about the imperatives that had guided their negotiations throughout the education of their children as the needs and limits changed. The families were propelled towards complex decision making procedures because the education provided at their local government school did not meet their needs. For example, geographically isolated participants had no local school available. The degree to which parents engaged in the challenge to choose was related to their goal orientation and the obstacles that they encountered and ranged from a minimalist stance to one of extreme effort where the family emigrated in order to provide a satisfactory choice.

**Causal Conditions of Being Challenged to Choose**

The personal meanings expressed in the participants’ decision making cannot be understood in isolation, and need to be interpreted in context. In each case, there are situational conditions or circumstances that caused the parents to be challenged to choose outside the local government schools. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 100) define as causal conditions, those “events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon”. The causal conditions that are described in this chapter directly lead the parents into being challenged to choose. Where these conditions do not occur, parents face no challenge to choose different schooling because the local government school education that
is provided satisfactorily fulfils their needs. The choice of government schooling is not to be seen, however, as purely a default action, as many families actively chose their local government schooling in preference to the other options.

From the data obtained through interviewing the study participants, it became clear that there were three major reasons why parents choose schools outside the government sector. They have been named: *family imperatives, availability of schooling, and specific needs of the child*. In the language of grounded theory, these are interpreted as being ‘properties’ of the core concern. Each of these properties is dimensionalised, which in effect, gives the dimension over which a category might vary (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 70). For example, *family imperatives* can range over a continuum from relatively minor family aspirations that will influence a schooling decision in the initial process, to intense levels of commitment to ideals that they see as non-negotiable. Figure 3.1 represents diagrammatically how these three properties exist in causal relationship to the basic social concern, *being challenged to choose*. Any or all of these causal influences may be operative in a particular case, though the relative strengths or significance of the individual causes will vary from case to case.

*Figure 3.1. Three properties of the Basic Social Concern of Being Challenged to Choose*
**Family Imperatives**

For the purpose of this study, the term *imperatives* means those things that are essential by nature to the identity and priorities of the family concerned. Each family has some aspects of their value system and life experience that define what is important to them and where they will centre their choices. For example, some families will not look outside the Catholic school system because their Catholicity and cultural immersion automatically excludes any other options unless a crisis of some kind occurs for them.

The range of imperatives that drives families into being challenged to choose, and therefore becoming engaged in a process that could lead to enrolment of their children in non-government education, is dimensionalised by the level of engagement. Such engagement is indicated by the intensity of the family’s imperative and of their active participation in the issues that emerge from the need for education of their children. Figure 3.2 shows how the property *family imperatives* was itself dimensionalised based on interpretation of the interview data.

*Figure 3.2. Sub-category – Family imperatives*
Religious Based Imperatives

Religious based imperatives identified in the data included issues revolving around a culture of faith, religious commitment and support of family values.

Religious based imperatives: Culture of faith.

Even before children are born, some families have made educational decisions and presumptions. Samantha and Greg who participated in this study had cause to repeatedly move around Australia due to Greg’s employment commitments. Samantha and Greg had each completed their own schooling within the Catholic system:

_I suppose my dream is that because [my husband] and I went to Catholic schools all our lives, we just presumed we’d do the same with our children_ (Samantha, p. 3).

Samantha and Greg’s desire for their children to be surrounded by a culture of faith, as they themselves had been, formed their initial imperative for educational choice but this was challenged by their employment mobility and their access to Catholic schooling. On arriving in Western Australia, in contrast to their experience in other states, long waiting lists meant that their ready access to Catholic primary schooling was essentially impossible. Interstate arrivals often have no alternative but to enrol in government schools. The distress felt by Samantha and Greg was increased by the attitude, similarly experienced by other interstate families, of the school’s administrative staff who seemed less than welcoming. Pressure on some Catholic schools who have excessive waiting lists has meant that there is no allowance made for interstate people who then have no alternative but to use government schools. In her narrative Samantha described her feelings:

_Shocking- absolutely shocking. In fact, when the lady at [the Catholic primary school] spoke to me quite nastily, just before Christmas, I went home to Greg and said, "There's no room at the inn."_ (Samantha, p. 1).

_Oh, look, if I could have my way, I would like to get them into a Catholic school if we possibly could. Somewhere along the line, a miracle might happen. I would still like to do that - not for the education but hopefully for their religious education which is so important._ I'm not a

Chapter 3 – Basic Social Concern: Being challenged to choose
religious freak by any means. I'm not anything like that but I just think there's something that's going to give them the background that I really believe in. I'd like them to get that. But whether our situation really does that, I don't know. I think now, at least I'm thinking more realistically that it may not happen and we're going to have to find something else. I don't know whether there will be youth groups that they can join in the parish. I don't know, but hopefully there'll be something (Samantha, p. 7).

Another family, where both parents were from Catholic families and had themselves received a full Catholic education, spoke of the culture of their Catholicism.

There’s got to be reason for me sending my kids to the Catholic school, and it’s not that I think there’s a better class of people there or, not even that there’s better discipline at a Catholic school 'cause there’s some very good government schools around. It really comes down to that culture of um, supporting your values, not just um you know in terms of um the commandments as such but, the whole thing of the social conscience, that we have a responsibility and I think that’s there (Julie, p. 2).

Having themselves being formed within the Catholic culture, Julie and her husband are drawn to continue the same within their own family.

The reverse, however, can also be true. One family, who had migrated to Australia because of the husband’s employment, came from an enculturation in faith quite different from what is typical within the Australian experience. Damien had no Catholic schooling at all, while his wife, Rachel, had had only some in primary and a little in secondary. In their country of origin it was only seldom possible to access Catholic schools. Their faith had therefore been nurtured essentially within the family and the parish. As a result, Damien and Rachel saw no necessity at all for Catholic schooling. Rachel and Damien were being challenged to choose because of their strong desire to maintain their Catholic culture, but this was not, for them, dependent on Catholic education. Talking to work colleagues confronted them with aspects of education in
Catholic schools that seemed to them to threaten their family culture of faith, and they chose to use the government system of education instead.

It comes from a number of people we know through work and through socialising that have sent their children to Catholic schools and they’re not remotely interested in Catholicism at all ... So whilst on one hand I initially thought it was a good option, I began to think, “Why are people in Western Australia sending their kids to Catholic schools?” I changed my thinking about it a bit in the sense that I’m seeing a lot of people sending their kids there because they think that’s the best thing to do. “It’s the best thing to do.” Well, yes, it may be, but you’re not a very devout Catholic and if the idea of me sending my child to a Catholic school is to get a Catholic education, then I don’t know if I necessarily want my child rubbing elbows with your child, because your child is coming to school here, but he’s hearing from you that Catholicism is not something that you endeavour to practice, it’s something that you’re just buying, like you buy an education off the shelf. So it’s really discrediting it (Rachel, p. 5).

Damien and Rachel’s eldest son was, at the time they were interviewed for the study, attending the local government high school because they felt that their son’s faith development would be under threat if he were to be schooled in a presumably Catholic environment but surrounded by those whom, they had been told, were actively discouraging faith expression. Rachel and Damien were, however, having different thoughts about their second son because Rachel was very keen to encourage him to the priesthood and so felt that there was a greater need on his part to be given the opportunity for a fuller immersion in Catholic culture.

I think the next couple of years will probably be pivotal for [him] because he’s eight now and -- I think assessing the needs is important. Because we don’t embrace this notion that Catholic schools give the children that Catholic culture, that’s less of an issue than -- I think there are a lot of people who say, “Yes, we embrace the Catholic culture” but they still don’t rock up on Sunday. I think some of them are being quite hypocritical when they say that. I think we’ll have to assess [his] needs, assess what we feel [the Catholic boys’ school] can give him. I would have said if [he] is leaning towards the priesthood, yes we will definitely go towards [the
Catholic boys’ school] - because I know then that he will get more focus towards that sort of thing than he will get if he goes to another school (Rachel, p. 14).

Another participant, Jane, described it as her passion to provide a firm foundation in faith while the boys were in their school years.

In the secondary area, it’s just a passion of mine that hopefully we can provide this for the boys so that perhaps they can develop that stage [of their faith] further (Jane, p. 6).

Jane modelled her faith life on that of her grandmother. Witnessing her grandmother’s regular trek up the hill to the church had been a beacon in Jane’s early years and very important in the development of her religious values.

I had a very devout Catholic grandmother who I absolutely adored - beautiful lady. She was strong. Everything went wrong in her family. You think, but through it, all I can see is her going up and down this hill every Sunday. She took every opportunity she had to go to church. I guess that's the influence, that's the role model that I look at ... I looked at her as a role model. She was such a wise lady, such a strong lady. That's the only thing I can pinpoint that helped her get through all the things she got through - and my grandfather too. My grandfather was a very devout Catholic man ... (Jane, p. 6).

Despite the fact that her husband did not share her faith, Jane was able to persist in her own faith development and has found important expression of it through being able to support friends in their times of distress.

I’m not very well educated in it but it doesn’t matter to me. It’s a very deep faith, something I truly believe in. I have friends who have faith but have no religion who rely on me when their mothers pass away or their marriages split up or whatever. I find they turn to me because they’re looking for something else, they’re looking for something they have no connection with. I don’t say, “Oh you must come to mass with me and pray with me. I will pray for you.” It’s just something that they think, “[Jane] might understand this and might understand why I’m feeling this way.” They think I understand things in a larger sense, I think. I try not to look at -- I just try to help them through it (Jane, p. 17).
Chapter 3 – Basic Social Concern: Being challenged to choose

Jane’s strong personal faith commitment and appreciation formed an initial imperative that caused her to engage the challenge to choose. Although she would have preferred to have enrolled her children in Catholic primary schools where the faith component would reinforce what she was trying to inculcate at home, the high cost of the fees presented an obstacle for the family at the time. Reluctantly, she enrolled her children in the local government school. As a counterbalance, she elected to work only part-time in order that she could have maximum personal availability for her children outside school hours, hoping that this could compensate for the fact that they would not be receiving a Catholic primary education. Although she had agonised over the decision at the time, she was comfortable with the decision she had reached.

This level of faith commitment and appreciation formed the imperative for Jane to enter the challenge of choosing and accessing schooling that would reinforce what she is trying to achieve within her family domain. Decisions about primary schooling presented a challenge since Jane’s family lived in a new area with no easy access to a Catholic primary school. Jane made a decision, with which she was well satisfied, to send her children to the local government primary school. She made a decision to work part time so that she could have the maximum personal availability for her children but at a cost of not having a Catholic primary education.

I felt that in order to send him to primary Catholic school, I would have to work full-time to afford the fees. I had to weigh it up. “Is my influence going to be better to work part-time and be with them more than a Catholic education for primary?” I determined in my own mind that I needed to be here in the younger years, and when they're taking these outside influences later is when they need it reinforcing at school, in the environment that he’s in during the day. That’s the way we’ve looked at it (Jane, p. 2).

Secondary schooling offered a different challenge for Jane.

In the secondary area, he needs to go to a Catholic school. He’s obviously starting adolescence. I had a different sort of adolescence to that which I hope he experiences, in the fact that my family split. So lots of things didn’t get continued, including my Catholic
I find now that they're grasping influences from a wider range as they're getting older. I feel that he needs that reinforcement now of the faith and that needs developing. He's not necessarily going to be listening to his parents, so to speak. It was a financial decision not to send them to primary Catholic school but, even though that financial aspect is probably still there, the importance is now greater (Jane, p. 2).

Choosing government primary and then Catholic secondary was the experience for a number of families. The close proximity of the government primary school, along with the needs of other very young children, motivated the initial decision reached by Belinda and her family. However, a new imperative changed the direction of her thinking once the difficulty of small babies had been left behind and she was becoming aware of what her children were missing by being apart from the other Catholic children in her parish.

I think just because I always went to a Catholic primary school and Catholic high school and I just didn't feel ... We were going to church on Sundays and I didn't feel they were part of that community. The children from Catholic schools would be called up to do something and mine were like left out. There was Sunday school for those who didn't go to Catholic schools. I just felt ... The kids didn't feel it, I don't think, but I did. I didn't feel part of the community because they weren't at the Catholic school (Belinda, p. 2).

Sally’s family, who also chose government primary and then Catholic secondary schooling, experienced a similar situation. Sally was highly engaged in her children’s religious education through an out-of-school program called the Parish Religious Education Program that is run through the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth. However, by the time her children had reached the end of their primary schooling she was concerned there would be nothing further for them in the parish program. She felt the time had come to switch to a Catholic school for their secondary years. Even though she felt that she was ‘copping out’ of their religious education by sharing the responsibility with a Catholic school, she was very aware that as adolescents they would need Catholic enculturation outside the home as well.
I think I’ll cop out and send them to a secondary Catholic school. That’s what I think I’m going to be doing (Sally, p. 16).

While Sally’s reference to ‘copping out’ seems on the face of it to be somewhat dismissive of the importance of continuing with formal faith education, her engagement level was extremely high, as she sought information from many schools to ensure that the Catholicity of her children was supported to the highest possible extent through their future secondary schooling.

Another family, in this case from a remote rural area, were challenged on two fronts. Their remote location meant that secondary schooling of either form was not easily accessible, and their Catholic background and personal values provided the imperative that determined their eventual choice. Even though their farm had to provide for three families, including the retired parents, the continuing education of their children was a key priority.

My husband and I are on a farm with our brother-in-law. It’s still a family farm and we still support my husband’s parents, who live in [retirement] as well. We are wanting, quite a few of us - the three of us who work on the farm. But it is something that has always been done in the family: No matter what else, you educate your kids properly. That’s a decision that we’ve made (Tracey, p. 19).

Their faith imperative was such that giving their children a ‘proper’ education meant doing whatever was necessary to ensure that their secondary education would be in a Catholic school.

...when you're in this isolated area they basically know from day one that that’s what’s going to happen; they're going to go away and there is absolutely no other choice. They could go to [two other country towns] but you want the best opportunities for your children. Specifically, I really wanted my children to have a decent Catholic education that they just don’t get out here (Tracey, p. 14).

Religious based imperatives: Religious commitment.

Although, at the time of being interviewed, Tricia was not yet at the stage of committing to an enrolment in secondary schooling, she showed deep concern
for the spiritual well being of her children. Having had great difficulties in her early life she had found solace in faith and converted to Catholicism and married into a Catholic family. Even though Tricia’s husband does not regularly practise his faith he supports her efforts and her need for religious expression. Tricia’s overriding concern was that she wanted religious education for her children in secondary school. This imperative derives from her personal conviction that a well-nurtured faith is life supporting.

... I think they still need it in high school because there are a lot of children out there who are having difficulties. I think religion is a good way to help them get through difficult times. ... There were times when I found religion to be a great asset (Tricia, p. 13).

Religious expression and commitment were synonymous for Tom and Beth in their supporting of family values. Tom’s father had very strictly controlled Tom’s religious upbringing and, having appreciated its value as he matured, Tom wanted his own children to have a similar experience.

If I wasn’t to go to church or anything the kids wouldn’t have a clue. They don’t know that part of it. So, Dad did it to us, I hated it but, you can see where I’m back again (Tom, p. 18).

This focus had also driven Tom to ensure that the children would receive as much Catholic education as was possible within the limitations of the family’s means and country domicile.

The bottom line, I just like the convent, I like them to get taught some religion and hopefully more there than you’d get anywhere else ... That’s what I hopefully want for the kids, some religious instruction, good teaching, that’s it. ...And the values that goes with it which are great. Because I think even there are more non-Catholics up at the convent than there are Catholics but they get taught just like a Catholic and I think it also teaches them a few values that they don’t have anywhere else (Tom, p. 28-29).

Religious based imperatives: Support of family values.
Mary and Gerard considered that bringing their children up within a Catholic background would be central to bringing about the desired inculcation of values.

\[
\text{I suppose partly because Gerard had had that background that he’d ... and I’d become a Catholic as an adult, and I thought that um hopefully if we sent them to a Catholic school they would receive the sort of values, or the reinforcement of the values that we’d given them at home, um I hope that would be the case (Mary, p. 4).}
\]

Since Mary and Gerard had begun their early family life by working overseas for five years, they were concerned initially that their children might be at risk of discrimination in school due to their somewhat different outlook and wider experiences. They were satisfied however, that the Catholic system, in the most part, had supported their values.

\[
\text{So we’ve appreciated the good in the Catholic system ... There’s definitely been good in it, and the good has been in the reinforcing of the values that we’ve been trying to bring them through with and where those values have been reinforced it’s been good (Mary, p. 19).}
\]

Albert described his ideal of a good education as one that aligned the values of the school and the family.

\[
\text{...there’s two elements to it, the good upbringing and then a good education. The two, you know the two have to co-exist. You can’t give them a good upbringing at home and then send them to a school where they won’t get a good, where they won’t carry on that role that you are portraying at home.}
\]

\[
\text{[I’m looking for] the things to do with our faith, that they are taught to respect one another, respect teachers, respect the school, you know, respect your uniform, and so on and so on (Albert, p. 3).}
\]

Albert’s family had emigrated from a difficult political and racial environment and showed a high level of engagement in their faith through their relationships and commitment, evidenced also by an array of pious objects in the home that reflected the strength of their religiosity.

**Non-Religious Based Imperatives**
Non-religious based imperatives revealed by the interview data included a desire to develop independence within the children, a commitment to education as preparation for life long learning, and the importance of proximity and good schooling.

*Non-religious based imperatives: Developing independence.*

Participants from rural areas faced a variety of special problems and opportunities, and the way in which they fulfilled the needs driven by their imperatives was, for the most part, different in style from that of their city counterparts. Garry, for instance, concluded that the most important issue for his children was the need to achieve a level of independence after the comfort and easy familiarity of a country town. The goal of university and independent life in the city, away from the family and farm, as well as the difficulties associated with a country domicile, drove his engagement level in the issues of choice.

*I think, it’s always in the back of my mind, it’s always been that, if they’re going to go to university they’ve gotta go somewhere else, if they’re going to go to TAFE they’ve got to go somewhere else. It was always the life skills that were important, they needed to become independent ... I think that I was always conscious of the fact that it was a very comfortable situation [at school in a country town] (Garry, p. 10).*

*There was going to be no independence taught to them. You know, it was probably, it was totally from their perspective ... it was just totally from the kids’ point of view (Garry, p. 12).*

Garry felt that the greatest need that his daughters faced was to be in a safe and secure environment in which to grow in independence, and this caused him to be challenged to choose a suitable school. He looked to Catholic boarding schools to provide that security.

*That was sort of the focus and I think ... from there 11 and 12 we... you know, we wanted something that would give them some independence but still sort of, nurture that sort of caring (Garry, p. 23).*

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Many friends from Garry’s country town had made similar choices and so he was familiar with the benefits, as were his daughters, although he and his family had had very little contact with Catholicism at the time of interview.

[Our friend’s] twins regularly went down, so sort of knew the pattern, year 10, year 11, year 12 ... so you’re well aware of what they’re doing ... there was also another girl from [our town] going there and I think that’s something that in the end became important to [our daughter] (Garry, p. 15).

Developing independence was a concern for another family but from a different perspective. When choosing schools for the eldest boy and girl of their large family, Rebecca and Terry were concerned that the responsibility they had already engendered in them through their place in the family not be lost, but rather encouraged further.

...the attraction for the school was its smallness, was the ability to be, and we also took into account the fact that these two kids were the eldest of seven children and they were, they had a responsible position in the family but they were also, it was better for them to be able to go to a place where they could make their own way to be bigger fish in a smaller pond, rather than the old you know, little fish in a big pond ... (Rebecca, p. 3).

Non-religious based imperatives: Education for life long learning.

Understanding the importance of education provided the imperative for George. He described his own attitude to education as being a “passion” (George, p. 4).

...since our children have been babies, and I mean literally since they’ve been, oh what, since they’ve been babies there have been books in our household in front of the kids, at their level. We both recognise the value and importance of education (George, p. 4).

George described himself as a life long learner. He had been above average as a student himself but had been propelled into the workforce early due to his family’s economic circumstances.

I ended up becoming a trades person and then pursuing education through the rest of my life (George, p. 4).
My aim was that all my children would go to university, and that’s one of those sociological things, mum and dad started out in trade, second generation only one of them goes to uni, and then the third generation they all go to uni and fourth generation and so on, I mean, that’s sociological phenomena in Australia (George, p. 22).

At the same time, he was realistic about his children:

I mentioned a hope for tertiary education, my over-riding hope for my children is that they would be the best they could possibly be. Whatever that meant, so that …might not have meant tertiary education. ‘Cause I was always privately hopeful that they would’ve experienced some of my genes for learning capability and um, and that might mean they would go on to university. Now, as it happens, two of them have, one of them has not (George, p. 24).

George had confidently sent his children to the local government primary school and both he and his wife had engaged strongly in the children’s support. However, as the time approached for secondary school they were challenged to choose outside the government sector because of the specific needs of their eldest child and George’s preoccupation with his children reaching tertiary level and developing life long learning habits. George’s tertiary education goals for his children were indicative of his level of engagement in his imperative for life long learning.

Maura and Pat, an Irish couple, had moved to Australia when their eldest son was about to start secondary school. They had come from a family who had previously migrated to England where they had lived as a tight community bound together in many ways by fear and discrimination. On arriving initially in New South Wales, Maura and Pat’s eldest son was enrolled in a Catholic school in Sydney, largely by default because they did not at the time understand the diversity of the Australian system and the options available to them.

When we arrived we didn’t know anything. A friend of ours said, “There’s a Catholic school just up the road”. So we fronted up to this Catholic school. We didn’t realise it was a private school and that all Catholic schools are private schools. We just fell into that; it wasn’t a choice. Looking back, I don’t think I would
have changed it, because he made a lot of good friends there” (Maura, p. 7).

Their second son is considerably younger and so, after the experience with their eldest son, they were determined to make a different choice for him. While their eldest son had had a reasonably positive experience of secondary school, there were aspects of the Catholic nature of the school that they found contradictory and unnecessary for their imperatives. Maura had always wanted to be involved with a Montessori type school since she was a child.

...I knew always that I wanted to send a child to either Montessori school or... My sister and I had this idea that she’d be the teacher and I’d run the school. It was going to be a Montessori-type school. So it’s always been in the back of my mind (Maura, p. 19).

Maura and Pat investigated what was available in terms of Montessori type schools in Australia and found one in Western Australia. Although it meant that they had to move to the other side of the continent, they were prepared to do so because their imperative was to be able to provide a particular type of education that would benefit their son through its particular educational philosophy.

...it’s lovely. It’s like Paradise. We’ve never, since the day he’s gone there – he’s been there right from kindy – had a day when we weren’t thankful that he can go there (Maura, p. 20).

Teresa and her husband, a Western Australian couple, sent their two boys to their local government primary school but felt discouraged by the size of the secondary school within whose boundaries they lived.

I guess with the schools that are around, like [our local high school], which was the next choice - it’s a public school and very big. I go that way sometimes and I see the boys when they go through the shops. I think, “I don't really think I’d want [my boys] to be hanging around. But they are allowed to go, aren’t they? It’s a school boundary. With [the two Colleges we’re interested in] they can’t. They can’t just skip down to the shops and eat McDonalds or whatever. [Our local high school] is a very big school. I prefer a smaller school.... They have about 1,700.... and [the next closest high school] is the same. Because [my husband] is the president of the [primary school] P&c, he goes to the school meetings. They were saying that at [the high school in the next
They had considered the nearest Catholic college but were discouraged by its large waiting list and the number of people seeking enrolment. Because their sons were not attending one of the College’s Catholic feeder primary schools they were aware that their chances were not good and therefore investigated, and eventually chose, another local private school run by a different Christian denomination. Their imperative was to seek what they considered to be a good education and they were confident that the private school of their choice would provide a quality education because they “select the better teachers” (Teresa, p. 12). The wider family supported their imperative to the extent that the paternal grandfather provided financial backing.

When [my husband’s] father passed on, he said, “I’d really like the boys to have a good education.” So he made allowances....That money would go towards their education, whether it be high school or university.... They’re very lucky children. He realised how important education is (Teresa, p. 14).

Non-religious based imperatives: Proximity and good schooling.
Focusing on good educational standards through her own family’s history meant that Suzanne had been educated at a reputable government school and, along with her siblings, had achieved good results. A further imperative for Suzanne was proximity. If a government school close to home has a good reputation, then, other things being equal, that is her preferred option. However, since her own schooling, Suzanne had become aware of a common perception of degradation in the government system.

I think at that time we probably felt that private schools were a better option than the government schools, like anybody else ... and the fact that the state schools were not performing as well as the private schools (Suzanne, p. 7).

Asked for the source of this information, she explained that she had relied on personal experience.
I’ve been to [my old school] to do a few talks. From my own observations, watching kids - the socio-economic thing - drugs, the whole bit - the whole data of information ... You just see it. The school was run down, there were no finances - just the general look of the kids, the behaviour - the whole structure of the thing. It certainly wasn’t like that in my time (Suzanne, p. 8).

The obstacle presented by this change of perception of quality became a motivating factor in Suzanne’s engagement in stepping outside the family norm of the local government school. The development of her educational imperatives is based in her own family’s background.

My family background was certainly very much Catholic, even though I did go to [a state high school]. The education was a big interest with my parents. My two brothers got degrees as well, and Dad has a degree. So the focus was on, “What’s a good school? This is a good school; let’s go to it. And it’s five minutes down the road.” When it came to our kids, I suppose with three kids - two boys and a girl - it’s the same thing: Is there a good school very close to home? I didn’t want to go through the government schools because I thought a private school seemed to have - I wanted a co-ed one and the private Catholic schools with a Catholic background so you’re happy with them being taught that. And also the structure and the thinking and the education (Suzanne, p. 8).

Similar perceptions that government education is in a degraded state emerged in concerns expressed by several participants. Linda, for instance, used the term “surviving” when speaking of her own previous experience in state schools and that of her eldest son today. She remembers thinking about it.

I went to [the local state school] when I was younger. It was a lot stricter than it is now, as far as even uniform was concerned. I remember driving past the school and seeing some of the girls and what they were wearing and thinking, “This school has really gone downhill fast.” Then I thought, “God, I’ll be sending my child to that school. How will he survive?” But he is pretty level headed – he’s my eldest (Linda, p. 4).

For Nicole, her knowledge of the government system from her experiences with the two eldest of her sons, emphasised the lack of quality. She declared, “There
was no way I was sending any more children to [our local] high school” (Nicole, p. 9). She even had difficulties with the primary schooling her two younger sons had had at their local government school.

_They had not had good principals. There’d been issues of bullying and all sorts of things – teacher strikes.... I couldn’t even go near the school in the end, I’d get so angry, because of different things that were happening_ (Nicole, p. 9).

Belinda had a similar experience:

_I was very unhappy with [the local primary] school – just the things that were going on at the time there with the kids_ (Belinda, p. 3).

David had a similar perception based on information from other parents. He described the local government senior high school as being,

...1 kilometre away, handy, convenient, free Government, but we thought “No way, he’d get killed there, eaten alive”.... First of all it’s a big high school, it’s one of the biggest in the state, other people who have children there said it’s pretty busy and it would be very rough (David, p. 3).

After visiting her local government high school, Rosa’s perceptions about the externals of the school were not positive.

...[the] local government school appeared to have had no or limited maintenance due to the uncertainty of it closing. There were no lockers available for students and I observed the students walking around campus with these huge heavy packs on their backs as they had no place to store their books (Rosa, p. 2).

**Availability of Schooling**

Figure 3.3 shows the dimensions of availability of schooling. While initially it seemed that availability of schooling was more likely to be an issue for participants from the country, the data revealed that problems of availability similarly arose in the city. This became a concern that challenged some families to review their imperatives and engage in possible choices outside the government sector.
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Country Issues
The experience for rural families always provided some geographically imposed considerations that would not be relevant for metropolitan dwellers. As indicated by participants in the earlier section, they knew that it would be necessary to send their children away to school. For one family the options were to send them to a government school hostel in the nearest large country town or to send them to a boarding school in Perth. The nearest Catholic school was 200km away and had no boarding facilities.

...when you're in this isolated area they basically know from day one that that's what's going to happen; they're going to go away and there is absolutely no other choice. They could go to [two other country towns] but you want the best opportunities for your children (Tracey, p. 14).

In situations such as this the children have to leave home in Year 8 to undertake their secondary education at boarding school. The sadness for the families lies in the realisation that many of these children will never come back, other than for school holidays. There are few opportunities in the country for the sons and daughters who do not return to the land. When asked about the likelihood of the children returning to the country after completing their schooling, Tracey’s response was:

The girls will probably not – no. Or we certainly won’t be encouraging them to come home (Tracey, p. 13).

Tracey’s aunt, Betty, faced a similar dilemma when educating her children in their earlier years but found that issues of availability of schools also challenged
her in another direction. Numbers attending Catholic schools during her time of choice were dropping and in order to encourage an order of religious sisters to staff their country Catholic primary school, they had to ensure that they would send their daughters to board at the school in the city run by the same religious order.

... because we wanted to get the nuns here, one of our commitments through the parish council was to send our girls to [their school]. We had to sign on the dotted line, sort of thing (Betty, p. 11).

In the larger country centres there are senior high schools covering Years 8 to 12 and it is possible for local children to complete their education without having to leave home. In smaller towns, however, there are only district high schools that provide only for the compulsory levels of schooling, Years 8 to 10. This leaves most country parents being challenged to choose if they want their children to complete a full secondary education. Government hostels, boarding schools, staying with family or friends to attend a metropolitan high school, being home schooled with the aid of distance education support, or extensive bus travel are the most common options.

Garry was very pleased with the quality of the secondary education at the district high school, where he was a teacher at the time of interview. With its 108 students it had sufficient numbers to warrant specialists in several subjects and the teachers were, in his opinion, generally very caring and committed. Garry’s knowledge of the teachers in the next town where there was a senior high school gave him some concern, as there was, as he saw it, a problem with staff continuity.

It is ... not so flexible, it’s that little bit bigger but not big enough to be, I shouldn’t say very flexible, but there’s less understanding I think amongst the staff so it’s not quite the same caring approach. I mean they’re all nice people I’m sure, they just don’t take that same interest in their school. They’re a lot more itinerant (Garry, p. 15).

As a parent and a country teacher, Garry was generally not supportive of children being sent away to school in Year 8 believing that in most cases
it was not necessary:

... there’s no reason to send them away [to boarding school] unless they’ve got to travel an hour and a half or something on the bus each way [to their local district high school]. Why would you wanna get rid of your kids? I have this argument regularly in [the town] with people who send their kids away in Year 8 and don’t have to (Garry, p. 23).

Mary, on the other hand, was concerned that her children might be deprived in important ways from being brought up in the country.

... we think about it and we think are we depriving our kids by being in the country and being no, you know, they really haven’t got the opportunities for that extra development in music and drama and all sort of areas that they might be able to do if they were in the city. But then when we say to them, well why don’t we move to the city and then you can do it, no, no, no, we like to have our country, we like to be here ... oh we love being here but at times we just feel as though we are in Siberia culturally (Mary, p. 18).

Mary and Gerard, though living and working in the country, were themselves not a farming family. A large part of their reason for not sending their children away for the whole of their secondary schooling was that there was no farm to attract their return to the country.

... the farming family is a little different because quite often their kids are going to come back again. They’re only there for their education and they come back to the farm especially if they’re boys. Once our kids have left this house to go to boarding school, that’s it. They don’t live here anymore and they’re never going to live with us again. They’re going to come home for holidays but they don’t live in this house anymore. And to do that at Year 8, like the year they turn 13, I just couldn’t bear that nor did the kids want it (Mary, p. 6).

While the lack of availability of schooling in the country challenges the parents to choose, it resides within a context of distressing separation and considerably different family dynamics to those of city families. The often crushing financial burden, especially in an era of rural decline, also needs to be taken into
consideration. Both of these facets are discussed in the next chapter where the focus is on the influence of intervening conditions.

City Issues

The closure of some city high schools (usually for declining enrolments associated with changing demographics) has given concern to some parents and caused them to be challenged to choose.

When our son was in Year 5/6 one of the local government high schools had a major fire. The buildings were older and in need of attention so we thought our timing was right for a new school being rebuilt. However, discussion was underway for the closure of three local government high schools and the building of a new megaschool and as this process was being debated, no rebuilding occurred for two years. Instead the school became a "demountable city". Once decisions were finalised as to the outcome of the local government school our son was ready to commence Year 8. Re-building was just commencing and my partner was not happy to send our son to "a building site" for high school (Rosa, p. 1).

Rosa explained that she and her partner had had non-government options in the back of their minds but, being immigrants, they were not aware of what was available.

Being an immigrant meant that we were not familiar with the school system and options available to students in WA (government, Catholic and private). When our son was in primary school we put his name down for a local Catholic school although he had not been baptised. My partner and I had attended Catholic schools overseas and wanted to keep this option open for our son (Rosa, p. 1).

Upon investigation they discovered that because of the closure of a number of nearby government high schools, and the unresolved debate over a proposed mega school intended to replace those being closed, more than 200 families were on the waiting list for the nearest Catholic systemic secondary school. Moreover, because their son was not a baptised Catholic he could only be included in a list for a small number of possible places available to similar applicants. While Rosa had other options in mind initially, the closure of local
government schools, and a fire in another local secondary government school, propelled them into a situation of being challenged to choose.

Specific Needs of the Child
Children with specific needs presented for some parents a major causal factor in being challenged to choose. Figure 3.4 shows five dimensions of the sub-category, specific needs of the child. While this is not an exhaustive list, it nevertheless indicates the diversity of needs as indicated by the data. Each dimension is discussed in turn to illustrate the ways in which they can contribute to the parents being challenged to choose.

Figure 3.4: Sub-category – Specific needs of the child

Giftedness
A wide range of special needs was presented by parents who were being challenged to choose by factors specific to a particular child. One family had chosen a relatively nearby government high school for their eldest son, which he been able to access through a scholarship, and because the school’s reputation for art was exceptional. As Caroline explained:

Ah the eldest went to [the high school] on an art scholarship, he was actually offered a place at a Protestant school but didn’t want to go there ‘cause um, his personality would have rebelled against the
Chapter 3 – Basic Social Concern: Being challenged to choose

Caroline was well pleased with the result of this choice as their son was receiving excellent stimulation for his artistic giftedness and at the same time was in an atmosphere that required less conformity, a feature that suited his personality.

Academic Stimulation
When choosing for her daughter, Caroline knew that her daughter had very different needs from those of her son (described above) and chose for her a single sex, Catholic, secondary private school.

She is highly intelligent, um, during her primary school she was um, picked on because she was intelligent that we picked up that the government school system doesn’t either protects or encourages children who are academically bright. It just lets them ...she was viewed as a “no problem” student cause she was so bright she did her work quietly, she was left alone. But there was no stretching, there was no active encouragement, and also because she was picked on she was quite sensitive about showing that she was intelligent. And um, we thought that from what we’d seen of the [government school] system that it was very likely that that was going to continue into secondary school, um, at a time of her life when she was like, well it was possible that she’d buckle under the system to conform. She would pretend that she wasn’t as bright as she was just so that she could have friends or whatever, and, so we saw a very bright girl who had the potential to be crippled by a government system (Caroline, p. 2).

Caroline and her husband are both university graduates and their engagement in their children’s schooling was driven both by their strong personal commitment to education, and by the obstacle presented by what they perceived to be the inability of the local government school to realise their daughter’s potential.

Appreciation of their eldest son’s specific academic gifts and goals moved David and Michelle to make a special choice for his secondary schooling. He
was a gifted language student and even though he had been enrolled provisionally in a private school they had subsequently become unhappy with some aspects of the school and decided to rethink the choice.

...he was enrolled at [the private school] anyway when he was born and so then we kept getting mail saying your child is on our list. It is now time to confirm, now time for interview, now time to pay your deposit (David, p. 6).

Their eventual choice was a government school with a high reputation and capacity to extend their son’s language capabilities. Because David and Michelle lived outside the official catchment for this school, they applied for a scholarship based on the boy’s excellence and were able to enrol him.

[Our eldest son] got to [this school] because he was a language student and he won a scholarship (David, p. 9).

**Learning Difficulties**

When speaking of their second son, David explained that his own views had to be subsumed by the special needs of the child.

So [the decision for our second son] came not with just my background and my knowledge and attitude but with an application to him as individual (David, p. 1).

Their son had specific learning, physical and emotional difficulties. While he had matured considerably before moving to secondary school, he still needed special assistance even though his particular difficulties were not obvious.

...our child would have particular needs which are definite and significant...He’s not only small he’s physically a little cumbersome so he won’t do well at sport (David, p. 1).

How is this child developmentally handicapped, and intellectually retarded and yet he’s brighter than me at lots of things. Nobody knows how to classify him (David, p. 11).

He needs a school that’s sensitive to his physical limitations. His handwriting is very poor and so a school that will cope with that (David, p. 2).
... our initial thought was we’d put that to [the local] Senior High School which is one kilometre away, handy, convenient, free Government, but we thought “No way, he’d get killed there, eaten alive” (David, p. 2).

David and Michelle’s eventually chose a Catholic systemic secondary school because of the specialist facilities it had that would help their son to cope with his particular needs. While this choice immediately proved successful, David and Michelle are aware that ongoing support and encouragement from them is necessary because of the effort that it takes him to present the required work.

He’s done exceptionally well for the predictions earlier on. So most who meet him would not question his handicap and new teachers say what’s the big deal about [your son]? He can just perform normally. And Michelle used to say “He looks fairly good but you don’t realise the effort that’s gone into this and the struggle, if he reads a book, writes an essay and performs moderately, he’s actually put three times as much strain and effort into it as the kid who just scribbles it off (David, p. 11).

Emotional Needs

The decision by some families to make different choices for different children denoted a high level of engagement for the parents in their children’s education. One family had chosen the local government primary school for their daughter’s education, but when it came to secondary schooling they reconsidered because of the issues that arose towards the end of her primary years. George knew his daughter was being bullied and, while it did not seem to be of a serious nature at first, they became increasingly concerned that the consequences could continue into the local government high school where they had planned to enrol her.

OK, well, there were some slight social problems at Year 7. She was ah, what is now probably called bullying, she was subject to, although I wouldn’t give it that terminology, and it was quite affecting her and we had as a precaution put her name down at [a church school], really just to get her pencilled in, just in case (George, p. 7).

George and his wife attended parents meetings at a Christian denominational school, but without any real intent at that time of sending her there. However,
when it became apparent that the pressure on their daughter that had blighted her primary years would follow her into secondary if she remained with the government system, they made the decision to change.

*The same group of people that were pressuring her were going to be going to the local high school. We felt that it was important for her growth, her emotional growth, to extract her from that situation and our only other option at that stage, was as we felt, the other option we chose, it wasn’t the only other option other than to send her to another government high school, was to send her to [the church school] having, and the reason for that was primarily that we are members of that church (George, p. 7).*

This decision then impacted on their second child, a boy, who could be enrolled automatically at the same school due to the school’s sibling preference policy.

*...having one child at the school and having a preferential place, the school operates with a preferential place for siblings, we thought well, the preferential place is there, we’ll use it (George, p. 11).*

Garry’s priority had been for his daughter’s emotional needs. She had been protected and given special encouragement and support throughout her schooling until Year 10 but then needed to move from the country to the city for her upper secondary schooling. Garry’s concern about his daughter’s emotional frailty and the need for a pastoral care program and school ethos that would support her final years of school was articulated several times in the interview.

*And the reason there became I think um, to me, [she] sort of emotional level, ah, to send her off to a big state school, was going to destroy her. It was just beyond her. It just doesn’t have, I suppose I reflect, I mean I loved high school, um, as I said earlier, socially, but when I reflect back to it I just couldn’t see [her] surviving in some of these big schools (Garry, p. 18).*

**Sporting Prowess**

In choosing secondary schooling for her two boys, Linda faced two quite different challenges. Her eldest son went through the government system successfully and was, at the time of the interview, completing an apprenticeship, an outcome that was especially satisfying for the mother.
It was a dream, actually. He’s the type of character that sails through things – nothing really upsets him. He seems to go on. He’s not a troublemaker or anything like that – he’s quite level headed (Linda, p. 5).

The second son, however, was a “much more demanding child” (Linda, p.5). He was an extroverted child who needed much more attention and had a high interest and ability level in sports.

He went to the same state primary school [as his brother] and that was fine. I knew he’d be fine there. When it came to high school, I thought, “In [the local high school], is he going to get hurt?” He’s very, very involved in sports - sports orientated. At [the local high school] they didn’t have a lot of sports where school was involved and he didn’t have that nautical interest like [his brother] had (Linda, p. 6).

The mother then directed her attention to finding a suitable school and enrolled him in a large private Catholic boys’ school.

Well, I’d heard that they're a very sporting school and they pride themselves on their sporting achievements. You just have to go to the school and have a look around at all the sporting ovals and facilities and you know very well ... (Linda, p. 6).

For her eldest son there had been no thought of schooling outside of the government sector, although she did speak in terms of survival when she referred to her own education at government schools, and also that of her son.

I was educated in the government system. I’m the last of six children, so our parents were in no position to put us through private schools. We all survived the schools (Linda, p. 1).

He didn’t even think of private school and neither did I, at that stage, because he was so intent on doing this nautical studies course at [the local government high school]. I said, “Well, if that’s going to keep you interested at school and survive state school, then go for it” (Linda, p. 4)
Mary and her husband gave special consideration for their choice of school for their son because of his exceptional sporting prowess and desire for success in football. They were able financially to support their son’s desire and had confidence in his own capacity to make the choice for the particular college that would support his exceptional capacity and lead him into a career as a professional athlete.

[Our son] was excelling at everything at [our town] and he went to [the local district high school] which um, quickly ceased to challenge him after a couple of years. Meanwhile a couple of his friends had gone to [a city boarding school] and he was pretty keen to go to [there] and join them and get into a bigger field and he particularly specified [this college] because he wanted to be in a big field, he wanted to be in a big pond where he could spread his wings and take on the bigger challenge, and he also knew that [their] football team had talent scouts from the various [laugh] WAFL clubs and you know, he could see, right from the time he was four years old he knew he was going to be an AFL footballer so he’d worked out that his best pathway was to go to [the college] and get into their A grade team and eventually captain their A grade team and then from there play for [this footy team] and on to AFL. So [his] course of schooling was mostly determined by his football career. That’s what he, he worked it out (Mary, p. 12).

Nicole had struggled in bringing up two boys from her husband’s previous marriage and had found great difficulties in keeping them engaged and involved at their local government high school. Although she had engaged herself in the school wherever possible, and tried to stay in touch, both boys eventually dropped out of school and continued along a difficult path. The next two boys were her own and she was determined that they would not go to the same high school. Their third boy had excellent sporting prowess and was very attractive to girls, so they chose a single sex private school that had excellent sporting facilities and programs.

...girls were a problem. He was also sporting. There was no way I was sending any more children to [the local] high school. I couldn’t get them into [the
preferred government high school]. It was a case of looking back. When I’d been at school, [the college] was always known for the networking. It was networking that had a big part to play, but also when we started going into it, it was the pastoral care and the sporting side of things (Nicole, p. 9).

It was a successful choice, and their fourth son followed by attending the same college. Even though he did not have the same physical talent as his brother, he found value in the community service program and stimulation in the academic excellence of the college. Nicole had been challenged to choose outside the local government system because of her bad experiences with the two older boys and the sporting prowess exhibited by their third son.

Conclusion

Careful analysis of the kinds of data discussed in this chapter produced a grounding for the basic social concern named being challenged to choose. As this chapter has shown, the participants have been challenged to choose education outside of their local government schooling because of the presence of factors related to their own family imperatives, the availability of schooling, or their children’s special needs. These causal conditions exist within the overall context of the parents’ need or concern to make choices regarding the schooling of their children. Some of the participants responded to only one of the causal conditions, while for others it was a combination of factors and their interrelatedness that moved them into the arena of choosing outside of the locally provided government education.

PERSONAL NOTES

Discerning the problem or cause for concern proved to be the most difficult part of writing this grounded theory. Initially I was asking the question “What motivates parents to choose Catholic schooling?” This made it impossible to find the prime concern of parents as the question was wrongly focussed. The Grounded Theory Seminar group helped me to see my data differently and focus
on grounded theory questions such as “What is this data a study of?” “What category does this incident indicate?” “What is actually happening in the data?” Once I began to concentrate on these questions the real concerns of the parents became clearer and the core concern began to develop. This clarity also showed me that I was too narrowly focussed in my data collection and so I began to seek data from families using many different types of schooling.
CHAPTER 4

BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS:
REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL
MAKING THE CHOICE
CHAPTER 4

BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS: REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL

MAKING THE CHOICE

Phase One: Making the Choice

Strauss and Corbin (1990) summarise process in grounded theory as the way in which the sequence of actions and interactions are linked over time. They describe this action/interaction of bringing process into analysis as an “essential feature of a grounded theory analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 157).

Process is the linking of action/interactional sequences, as they evolve over time. Bringing process into analysis is an essential feature of a grounded theory analysis. To do so, the analyst must consciously look for signs in the data indicating a change in conditions, and trace out what corresponding changes in action/interaction that these bring. Once identified, there are two main ways that process can be conceptualised in grounded theory studies. One is to view it as stages and phases of a passage, along with an explanation of what makes that passage move forward, halt, or take a downward turn. Another way to conceptualise process is as nonprogressive movement; that is, as action/interaction that is flexible, in flux, responsive, changeable in response to changing conditions (Strauss & Corbin, p. 157).

In the present study, the process belongs to the former of the types referred to by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The process entitled realising family potential describes how the family makes a decision and then maintains or changes that
decision in respect to secondary schooling. Unlike the latter process described by Strauss and Corbin as a “nonprogressive movement” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 157), the process described in this theory has a forward movement towards an end result. Each family experiences this movement differently according to the factors that intervene to affect the process either by energising it to continue, to stop, or to change direction. This chapter describes the process. When causal conditions, such as those described in the previous chapter, are in place then the family must move into a double-phased, multi-staged process in order to solve their concern over being challenged to choose outside the education provided at the local level by the government. If these particular causal conditions are not present to a challenging extent, then the choice for government schooling will satisfy them. There is a nobility of choice in the vast majority of families educating their children. Some families will adamantly choose government education for philosophical and political reasons; some families will have historical and cultural reasons to actively choose their local government school. The present study considers those who move outside the system due to the causal concerns described in the previous chapter.

Although the process is similar to that of a passage, it is also flexible in that while some families will experience some phases and stages in great depth and almost bypass others, other families will experience it differently. The conceptualisation of this process has emerged from the data taken from families from both metropolitan and country locations who had engaged in making educational choices both within and outside the government system. This present study does not seek to discover a model that will predict the course of parents’ choices, but rather, one that interprets the data in such a way as to find meaning within their behaviour.

Realising Family Potential informs the conceptualisation of the core process of this theory. Family potential is being realised in the sense that the potential is being brought to fruition (Wilkes & Krebs, 1999, p. 1231) with the help of education. Realising the family potential through education continues throughout the process and, where there are challenges, changes are made. This process and the way it operates is the primary focus of the theory.
A dimension of the core process is the family’s understanding of its own potential as it grows during this process, and the future possibilities that evolve. A further aspect of that dimension occurs when there is a growing understanding of a child’s limited potential and its impact on the family’s future educational choices, as well as other life choices. This aspect of the process reveals itself as a challenge and may cause the family to make changes that re-engage the process and refine their family’s imperatives. A deeper explanation of this will unfold as the core process is presented through the data.

In realising their family potential, each family participated in the different phases at different levels. The action within one of the phases or goals could be of minor importance to a particular family’s context, the level of engagement in each phase or stage being dependent on the goal orientation and any obstacles that were impeding the attainment of that goal. Some families needed to engage in the process only to a minimal degree while other families had to engage at a very high level, bringing to bear all of their resources.

Figure 4.1 describes the process schematically. The goal of the process is to realise the family’s potential. It does not refer only to their educational potential, as many family needs must be balanced in the process. In the first phase, once the family has refined its imperatives, the relevant options are framed and the balancing process reaches its initial conclusion when a match has been made taking account of all possibilities. In the second phase, management of the result will then involve either maintaining the choice or re-engaging the process when, and if, the choice must be changed. This second phase is described in Chapter 5.
REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL

PHASE ONE: MAKING THE CHOICE

BEING CHALLENGED TO CHOOSE

Stage One: Refining Family Imperatives

Stage Two: Framing Their Options

Stage Three: Making a Match

CHOICE MADE

PHASE TWO: MANAGING THE CHOICE

CHOICE MADE

Stage One: Reviewing and Justifying

Stage Two: Resolving the issues

Choice changed

Choice maintained
Stage One: Refining Family Imperatives

Although refining family imperatives is the first stage of the process, it is also an aspect of the decision that the family returns to time and again when challenges arise. The more challenges that intervene in the decision-making, the more the imperatives are refined and re-ordered. Family members’ responses to their own personal histories intervene as a condition in the refinement of individual imperatives, along with the attitudes of others around them, their growing understanding of their child’s needs, and the needs and influence of the wider family.

As will be shown, this stage begins with rumbling, then develops into refining, and operates as a continuum that concludes when the family’s imperatives have been sufficiently refined that they are able to frame the options that are open to them (Figure 4.2). If the options within the frame are changed by some other intervening condition, then the family must re-engage the first stage of this phase of the process.

Figure 4.2. Stage One – Refining family imperatives

Rumbling and Refining

Refining is the process that the family enters into in order to reach a stage where their imperatives are sufficiently clear that they can identify options from which to choose a suitable school. Early in the analysis of the data, an in vivo code, named rumbling, emerged that described the beginning of the refining stage. It has an expressive nature that describes the action of the participants.
Rumbling gives the sense that the action is still a long way off and while there is no immediacy there is the sense that it is time to begin considering what to do. At this rumbling stage, parents are beginning the process of choosing a form of education for their children that they hope will realise their potential. They are aware that the need for secondary schooling is approaching and that a decision has to be made. For some families, the causal conditions have already established that there is a need, or desire, to move outside the schooling provided by the government at the local level. The participants then engage in what David described as ‘rumbling’.

I am pondering how other people, how parents choose. There’s a kind of ruffling, a rumbling through the community about the kids in Year 6 and 7. Where are we going to send them? What are we going to do? What are you doing? What do you know? How do people choose? Where do they get their information? And their criteria. (David, p. 17).

Garry and his family needed to make schooling decisions governed by their country location and the lack of upper secondary schooling in the town and so they began their rumbling when their eldest daughter was in Year 8.

...when [our eldest] reached Year 8 we realised we had to make some decisions about whatever we were going to do and ah, as I started to say before, [our friend’s] twins had gone off to boarding school... we then started thinking, gee we gotta start doing something, we’ve gotta decide ... and we both sort of thought they should move on to [the city] (Garry, p. 13).

A further example came from Samantha and her husband, Greg who were very mobile due to his profession and the associated need to move constantly within Australia. While rumbling about how they were going to realise their children’s potential through education, they were constantly conscious of the reality of their mobility.

By the time[our eldest] is in high school, we want to be settled somewhere to get them through that high school period. That would be the perfect scenario. You just have to go from day to day in our situation. There are a lot of people like it - not just in [our employment situation]. There are people in banks. I’ve met so many people who are ... moving around (Samantha, p. 8).
Sally describes the *rumbling* stage as the first conscious expression of her original hopes and dreams.

*My original hopes and dreams were that they’d go to a little Catholic primary school. I believed in that myth too – ha!* (Sally, p. 15).

The realisation of those early dreams, however, did not eventuate, even though her underlying imperative remained in place. When Sally discovered that “little Catholic schools” did not exist in her area of suburbia, she had to refine her imperatives by bringing proximity, rather than Catholicity, to the top of her list, and subsequently to opt to send them to the local government primary school. The school was small and offered all that she desired for her children’s secular education while she attended to the needs of their Catholic faith by enrolling them in the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP). Further *rumbling* occurred when the need to choose secondary school came closer, because the PREP course finished in Year 7 and nothing further was provided for faith development for the older children in the parish.

*That’s why secondary school is really important, because what do I do? There isn’t anything else* (Sally, p. 10).

Tricia had begun the *rumbling* part of the stage in her concern for her children in their teenage years. She was content for them to be at their local government school for their primary years but her recognition of the potential pitfalls for their faith and values was addressed in her concern for their secondary education.

...*I think from now onwards it’s going to be very hard for a child going through high school and the upper years of primary school. We always talk about sharing and caring and loving – you love one another as you love yourself. We try to endorse that. I think it is going to be hard for them. That’s why I would like the boys to go to the Catholic high school* (Tricia, p. 9).
Tricia was working towards realising the potential of her family through education but also increasing her understanding of the potential of their faith development and obstacles to that development.

For the choice of secondary schooling, *rumbling* often begins when the child is in upper primary, as was described by Teresa.

> You worry about, when they go to high school, who they’ll make friends with; are they going to go in the right direction. ... Everyone usually rallies around in Year 6 and decides where they’re going to go. You have to listen to everyone and make up your own mind. You hear good and bad about every school ... where some people have pulled their child out and put them into [another primary school]. You really have to make up your own mind by looking at your child and seeing what’s best for them and not be swayed by other parents (Teresa, p. 18).

For some of the families the *rumbling* had started with the birth of their children. Diane describes how she had enrolled her daughter from the earliest opportunity, even though as it happened, she later had to cancel, and then reinstate, when her husband’s employment mobility intervened.

> [Our eldest] was booked in there from birth. We cancelled it when we moved over here because we didn’t know what we were going to be doing. When I knew earlier this year that we were going to be moving back at Christmas time, I got on to them straightaway (Diane, p. 19).

David, too, spoke of early enrolment.

> He’s been on the waiting list for [the college] ...since he was practically born (David, p. 3).

David and his wife had chosen schooling outside the government sector, as dictated by their imperatives, long before being aware of the child’s specific needs and, as with Diane, there emerged some intervening factors that subsequently realigned the enrolment and further refined their imperatives. *rumbling* is the beginning of the continuum that moves towards the *refining* of the family’s imperatives, which once consolidated, then confirms a frame of options for the next phase.
Intervening Conditions

The conditions that intervene to either facilitate or constrain the movement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) towards the refinement of the family imperatives do not occur in a specific order and not all the conditions will be relevant to all participants. For those who were challenged to choose because of the high level of strength of their imperative, there was little room for further refinement of those imperatives and so they moved quickly into the phase of framing their options. For example, Tracey’s family had two powerful imperatives: secondary schooling was not readily available because of the remoteness of their farm, and they were also determined to provide Catholic education. As we have already seen in relation to remoteness of location, Tracey acknowledged the inevitability that her children were going to go away. She added:

Specifically, I really wanted my children to have a decent Catholic education that they just don’t get out here (Tracey, p. 14).

The strength of these two imperatives moved the family through the phase of framing their options more rapidly than other families.

Figure 4.3. Stage One – Refining family imperatives, with intervening conditions

While moving along the rumbling and refining continuum from being challenged to choose outside locally provided government schooling, to where
the family have their *imperatives refined*, the family is influenced by intervening conditions. These do not occur in any set order and not all are relevant to every family, but whether activated or not, they do influence the pace with which the family moves to the next stage.

Personal history includes each parent’s own educational experience as well as their experiences in making educational choices for their eldest children, which then relates to choices made for their younger children. The condition influences how their imperatives are refined. Albert summed up this particular aspect of the decision making process in his response:

*Well, you always tend to, well we do anyway, we sort of look at you know um what our parents did for us and sort of took the best out of it and you know, we said, well, you know the not so good things we won’t bother about, the good things we will hold onto and cherish and make use of* (Albert, p. 7).

**Intervening conditions: Personal history.**

Michelle and David’s second son had very special needs and it became clear that the original enrolment was not going to be suitable. David had been educated at an elite government school where each student had to earn enrolment through an academic scholarship exam. Although David, as parent, was opposed to elitism through wealth, he was in favour of intellectual elitism to a certain extent, as he had experienced the benefits of such an education.

*I guess I came from an education elite background ... it was scholarship only until the year I joined and the year I went there it was thrown open to everybody so I watched the transition from an exclusive intellectual school to a local high school.*

*I enjoyed it, I really appreciated what it taught me, we had a very stimulating class, and taught each other and stimulated each other, we had very good teachers, I was very appreciative of that education. I liked the fact that it was government and free otherwise I don’t think my parents could have afforded to send me there, they both went there as high school kids, they won scholarships... ... we lived nearby and it would’ve been our local high school anyway. So I found myself pondering is it good to have exclusive, elitist schools for the intellectually able
or not, I’ve still got mixed feelings as you can see (David, p. 5).

Although, as a child, Michelle had been considered a good candidate for a scholarship to a school that had a high academic emphasis, she had, in the end, attended her local high school. As it happened she had still been able to move into an elite professional field. In describing her personal background, Michelle was very conscious of her working class roots and her peers’ material poverty, and yet she had a powerful connectedness to family and a strong belief in education as a key to the advancement of the next generation.

My peers were children of immigrants really ... They’d grown up in things like garages with dirt floors and things like that ... They were also very bright kids and with a very different background to the average (Michelle, p. 13).

...I went to middle to working class high school that was by choice (Michelle, p. 12).

...it was a suggestion that I sat for the scholarships to go off to [a special high school]...and my parents said no, they didn’t want me to sit the scholarship or, I probably would’ve won them because they felt that I was moving out of my social class.....my uncle, Dad’s uncle, lived next door to us and there was a cousin a block away and Dad built the house on land he’d bought from grandfather and had been born, sort of, just down the road (Michelle, p. 12).

Michelle was keenly aware that her strength in her current professional level was due in part to her particular personal history and this awareness governed what she felt was important for her children’s education.

And I see a great strength in that background. I have a different language ... I have a working class language which is now modified too because of what I have done (Michelle, p. 13).

Michelle and David had decided that they wanted their eldest son to have a developed capacity for broad based social communication and felt strongly that it would not be possible to acquire that through private schools.

...I felt that it was very important that he learns to communicate... I wanted him to be able to have that kind
of communication skill as well ...which I don’t think you get at upper, kind of private schools (Michelle, p. 13).

Michelle and David were responding to their own educational history as they refined their imperatives to frame a set of options for the enrolment of their sons in secondary school.

Teresa reflected on her husband’s memories of his own educational history, the effect that it had had on his career and how it had affected his input to the decision-making for their children.

Peter said that when he went to high school, he messed around a bit. When [our eldest] was a baby, Peter went and did his degree at University... He looks back and thinks, “I wish I had worked harder.” His brother is an engineer and is a partner in a firm...[Peter] looks back now (Teresa, p. 18).

Teresa’s own education had been influenced by her mother’s experience with nuns teaching her in the country.

She had a lot of years in [the country] with the nuns and everything. She used to tell me some horrible stories about the rulers hitting her knuckles and that. I guess she really didn’t want that for me.... Therefore I didn’t have that schooling. I think Mum wanted me home too (Teresa, p. 15).

Sally’s own education had been influenced in an unusual way by her mother’s experience, an intervening condition for Sally that had clearly refined the family imperatives.

On day one, I'd been enrolled so off she goes to do the rest of the hoo ha with the paper work, I suppose. Apparently the principal just took too long and she had to sit and wait for a while. She said this smell came back to her. She waited a bit longer and she got up and she came home and said, "I can't do it to you." So I went to [the] Senior High School (Sally, p. 4).

Sally’s mother had had “fairly sad” experiences with the nuns and “she was of the belief that [the] nuns showed no mercy” (Sally, p. 4). Sally’s personal experience was also a formative factor in refining her imperatives.
I think non-stop about the selection of a secondary school for my children. My mother thinks that I have a complex about the schools. It’s not because I’m a teacher, it was because I was sort of removed, from Grade 1. I went to a country school for six months and came back again. She says that obviously traumatised me to the point where I refuse to take my children out of the school. We should be going to [the local primary school] at the bottom of this street, but they’re still at [the other primary school] because I won’t change them. So the decision about secondary school is really important because I won’t change it – that’s it (Sally, p. 23).

Mary spoke of her husband’s desire for Catholic schools, implying that his own education had been a refining factor in their decision, along with their imperative of smallness in order that the children would get individual attention.

Why did we pick the Catholic school? …ah. I suppose partly because [Gerard] had had that background that he’d…and I’d become a Catholic as an adult, and I thought that um hopefully if we sent them to a Catholic school they would receive the sort of values, or the reinforcement of the values that we’d given them at home, um I hoped that would be the case. [Gerard] seemed to think it was a benefit that he went through the Catholic system and he thought it was of benefit to him. And so yeah, I remember we talked about it because we didn’t have any money and so it was a bit of a struggle to pay for it. Also, it was a smaller school than the state school would have been and we hope that they would get more sort of individual attention, or more opportunity for um, sort of understanding attention (Mary, p. 4).

Julie reflected on her own experience and that of her husband, John.

I was thinking about that and I think a lot of that, it’s your own experience, [John] and I both went to Catholic schools and to Catholic high schools, and that’s what you know and you’re comfortable with. There is that element of fear about the unknown and um, and sending them to high schools (Julie, p. 3).

While Julie and John’s imperatives dictated a choice of Catholic schooling, they had also been influenced by their own history that had encouraged social separateness through their Catholicism and so engendered a fear of the
unknown. Albert had a similar sense of his own education, but in this instance
the value refined is that of co-education.

Well, I suppose because I went to a co-ed school and I,
we, I did primary school at a Catholic school and my
high school was done at a state school, not in Australia,
and they were both coeducational and I couldn’t see any
reason for [being otherwise] (Albert, p. 3).

David was also aware of the issues involved with single sex versus co-
educational schools. Even though he had been to an intellectually elite school
himself, it was co-educational and through his own experience he could see the
resultant social value.

Well, teenagers to learn to relate to people of the
opposite sex in a natural way. Develop friendships
instead of lacking exposure and I think, I’m cautious
about homosexual development in all-boys schools. Not
a big deal but it does involve a danger with
experimentation with attitudes ...more of a tendency is
it’s a closed off school... I can see some sort of old
fashioned value in strict moral code in separation of the
sexes but I don’t think that works in the 1990s because
you can close them off for five years in theory but
weekends they’re out with their peers...they’re destroyed
if they haven’t learned enough... My feeling is that a
single sex school in our current society is an
anachronism (David, p. 8).

Julie and John both went to Catholic single sex schools and through their
experience they concluded that they wanted the opposite for their children and
refined their imperatives accordingly.

I just.. I really liked the idea of them having a normal
situation at school. I remember at, you know because
you didn’t interact with boys as a teenager it was too big
a deal, it was just, people went silly and I just, I didn’t
like that. So and it seemed... when [our college], I
suppose if [it] had’ve been a single sex school maybe we
would’ve considered it because it was close but I don’t
think so, I think I wanted all my kids to go to the same
school (Julie, p. l4).

When considering secondary education for her eldest son, Irene’s brothers’
experience was important.

...I liked the idea of co-ed. My brothers all went to a
boys’ school and they didn’t like it. I went to [a girl’s
college]. I always said I wouldn’t send my girls there. I hear that all the time. But as I say, I was very unhappy with [the local primary school] (Irene, p. 3).

For Irene, her original desire, prompted by her own personal history, was to have Catholic co-educational secondary schooling for her own children. However, her imperatives had to be refined by the fact that her children were ineligible for the closest co-educational Catholic college and the only other realistic choice was for a girls’-only Catholic school.

*Intervening conditions: Child’s needs.*

David and Michelle’s imperative for private education was further influenced by the intervening condition of their child’s specific needs. They were challenged to choose outside the local government system because their imperatives required a private education and because the specific needs of their two sons, for whom they had chosen secondary education, were dominant. As David stated:

*[Our son] came with not with just my background and my knowledge and attitude but with an application to him as individual (David, p. 1).*

David further describes his own attitude that had to change according to the needs of his son.

*[Catholic education] was not on our agenda since we’re not Catholic. My childhood was programmed anti Catholic, beware of Catholics. If someone had said to me when I was 15 “Your son’s going to a Catholic high school” I would have screamed “No way!” (David, p. 4).*

Michelle and David’s second son had a rare disability that meant that he would require social and physical support but was intellectually very competent in some areas.

*My thoughts were that our child would have particular needs which are definite and significant (David, p. 2).*

They initially considered the local government high school, as David was still struggling with his concern over elitism in schools. However, considering his son’s special needs that idea had to be dismissed.
So we, our initial thought was we’d put that to [our local] Senior High School which is one kilometre away, handy, convenient, free Government, but we thought “No way, he’d get killed there, eaten alive”. ...it’s a big high school, it’s one of the biggest in the state, other people who have children there said it’s pretty busy and it would be very rough so it wasn’t based on going there or interviews (David, p. 3).

When Michelle and David approached the private school where their son had been enrolled since birth they were met with a patronising response that was most unwelcome.

Seemed to have a more compassionate pastoral care approach than we’d believed and detected earlier on but that was balanced by the negative “We will look after your son... We are very sensitive and in fact we would take pleasure in having him on our books. It would be good for us to be able to care for this poor handicapped child.” It was slightly on the patronising and it’ll be good for us. We’ll get brownie points for looking after your ...child. ...It was terrible to treat him like a pawn (David, p. 3).

As a result, they turned to the Catholic system. Although this had originally been low in their priorities, the needs of Michelle and David’s son refined their imperatives and turned their attention to a local Catholic College that was reputed to have an excellent support system for students. On visiting the school, they found compassion and sensitivity.

The first visit where we went to meet [the teacher] and the whole process of getting there, parking in the car park, being welcomed in, being conducted to his room by the volunteer helpers or parents, the whole atmosphere seemed to be one of consistent compassion and sensitivity. That’s what I picked up (David, p. 4).

On the other hand, their eldest son had a high level capacity for languages and they were unable to find a suitable private school that had a specialist program in languages. Because they lived outside the catchment area of the government high school of high repute that did have a suitable language program, they had no automatic right of entry. Accordingly, they enrolled their son to sit for that school’s scholarship exam and, happily, he was accepted on the strength of it. While Michelle and David’s original preference had been for a private school,
the intellectual and social needs of their son intervened, and causing them to refine their imperatives so that a specialist government high school was appropriately valued.

Betty’s firm imperative was that her children needed to receive a Catholic education. However, since she and her husband lived in a remote area of the country, it had to be boarding school. For their son, his personality influenced the particular choice of boarding school.

*My son went to [a residential country Catholic Agricultural College] because he was such a larrikin. I couldn't imagine him being in a straight shirt and tie... Not his style. His style was riding bulls and things in the paddock. He enjoyed [the college]. He had a good time there* (Betty, p. 10).

Their eldest daughter was intellectually handicapped and this presented special needs for her education in her adolescent years. Fortunately, she was able to live with her grandmother in a country town and attend a school that could provide for her needs.

Jenny had been *rumbling* about decisions for secondary school but was not actively concerned about it at the time she was interviewed for the study. Although the family’s country domicile clearly meant there were limitations that would eventually have to be addressed, she seemed oddly reluctant to engage in the process.

*...haven’t really thought much about it. I should be but... Still got three years to think about it, so yeah. And then it’s, and then it will depend on what she wants to do...Time goes so quickly, I mean it’s amazing* (Jenny, p. 7).

Jenny appeared to have very limited goal identification for her children and only became engaged when an obstacle (her son’s health) forced her to be involved. Their youngest son was diagnosed with a serious, life long illness, which required daily attention and affected his schooling, which in turn will continue to affect his and his family’s future choices.

*[It has] a great control over your mood swings. If you’re high it’s very agitated, cranky, no patience, and low, he gets very cranky as well and lethargic and, ...*
but he’s very good with it, he knows when its low (Jenny, p. 11).

Her son’s need for special care influenced the entire family as it necessarily involved substantial costs and considerable effort on Jenny’s part and forced her to review her imperatives.

It probably costs us about, ‘cause there’s a lot of travel involved for clinics and things like that, costs between $1500 and two grand a year. It’s very expensive (Jenny, p. 11).

One of Jenny’s prime imperatives is independence, a conviction that had been strongly inculcated in her by her own mother.

..but my mother insisted that you had to go away, leave home you know, get out, yeah so, and I was not an academic, so I decided on a tech course instead of going to fourth and fifth year...well not leave home but to get away from home, like boarding school and that ‘cause she thinks, oh well you do, you do grow up a lot and you gotta learn to be independent and all that (Jenny, p. 3).

Jenny’s son’s illness, however, has made him very dependent on her, even though this ran counter to what she would have preferred for him. While she was keen not to deepen his dependency, she found that she needed to be directly involved in his other activities.

...even when he has swimming lessons in the pool, I’ve gotta be there, the education department won’t take responsibility for him which means I gotta, well he didn’t do it last year, I refused, which means you gotta go to town every day... (Jenny, p. 10).

Intervening conditions: Attitudes of others.

Garry found that the attitude of other families in their country town only served to intensify and further refine his own imperatives.

I have this argument regularly in [the town] with people who send their kids away in year 8 and don’t have to. If you’ve got the opportunity. If it was [another country town] and they didn’t have the opportunities, maybe you could think about it but gee, you don’t have kids to get rid of them (Garry, p. 22).
Rachel and Damien, an American couple who had moved to Australia, sought to make educational choices for their children. Both being Catholic, they moved initially in that direction. However, new friends and work colleagues were subsequently influential in refining Rachel’s imperative about faith education because their expressed reason for favouring Catholic education seemed to Rachel to be shallow and cynical.

*It comes from a number of people we know through work and through socialising – that have sent their children to Catholic schools and they’re not remotely interested in Catholicism at all. “I don’t really believe, you know. I don’t really believe in Catholicism”. I’ve heard them say this, and it’s not just one person either – several people (Rachel, p. 5).*

The resultant choice for Rachel and her family was that the eldest boy was, at the time of the interview, attending the local government high school, receiving his faith education through the parish program and through his family. Rachel and Damien had taken this decision so that nominal Catholics who chose Catholic education simply to give their children a socially valued form of private education would not influence his faith education.

*Intervening conditions: Needs and influence of wider family.*

Mary and Gerard were *rumbling* about the possibilities for their youngest child, an only girl. They had limited availability of choice due to their country location and needed to *refine their imperatives* because of the different options available to girls. Their daughter was experiencing difficulties at primary school.

*I don’t know, [she] may be too sensitive, I don’t know but she’s very unhappy, often, and when she goes to school I say “Have a good day” and she says “I’ll try, you know, I know I’m going to be teased”. I think it’s deteriorating, I really do. I think that the, oh, I think it’s not where it was and ah, I mean she tries to play basketball and she’s told to fuck off; that wouldn’t have happened when the nuns were running the school. Those words would not have been uttered. If they would, they would have had their little mouths washed out and that would have been the end of it, you wouldn’t come out with it again. But it’s just like, tough... (Mary, p. 16).*
Home schooling had been considered, as had the option of working overseas as they had done in their years as a young family. Their concern was exacerbated by the needs of Gerard’s aged father, which intervened to refine their imperatives.

*I guess the only thing that’s holding us here is Grandpa, [Gerard’s] dad is 92 and in the old folks home, there’s nobody else so we can’t go too far away, but otherwise we’d be well and truly looking for opportunities to work overseas again... anywhere you know, and she would be quite happy to come with us and to be home schooled and I would enjoy that, we’d both enjoy it, but while we’re still here, I don’t know (Mary, p. 16).*

Belinda’s capacity to refine her imperatives was influenced by her children’s growing independence. While her imperative was initially anchored in Catholic education, it was refined when her third and fourth children were babies.

*The older two went to [the local government primary school]... because it was closer. It was just down the road at the time. The other school was the [Catholic primary]. It was too far for me to drive because I still had two younger ones. So they went to the local primary school (Irene, p. 1).*

Later, however, these circumstances within the family changed and allowed Belinda to fully comply with her original imperative, a Catholic education for her children. The eldest two children had started their schooling when the younger two were small babies, and this had limited Belinda’s mobility. As the younger ones grew older and were less dependent the choices increased.

*There are buses... By that stage my younger two were older, they weren’t babies. There was a six-year gap from the older two to the younger two (Irene, p. 1).*

**Stage Two: Framing their Options**

In the second stage of the process of realising family potential, the family uses their refined imperatives to identify possible choices and source information about the schools selected for consideration. Intervening conditions that can affect the choices, made evident in this present study, are the availability of resources, geographical location, external factors, accessibility of the chosen school, and critical family events. The refined imperatives of the family,
combined with information about the candidate schools, leads the family into *framing their options*. In many instances, only one possible option was framed and in these cases the family moved directly to enrolling their children and managing the result of that enrolment. (If more than one option remained within the frame, engagement in the third stage was necessary so that a final choice of school could be made.)

A facet of the second stage is the degree to which the parents have engaged in deliberate sourcing of information to ensure that they have the greatest number of options available for consideration. Some are prepared to go to great lengths to ensure that the desired opportunities will be available, for example, by securing enrolment at birth in special schools, or by moving into a particular neighbourhood in order to be near a desired school. This level of engagement is related, as before, to the goals set for achievement, or to the magnitude of the obstacles encountered.

*Figure 4.4. Stage Two within Phase One of the basic social process*

![Diagram showing stages of Phase One: Making the Choice]

**REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL**

**PHASE ONE: MAKING THE CHOICE**

- **Stage One:** Refining Family Imperatives
- **Stage Two:** Framing Their Options
- **Stage Three:** Making a Match

**CHOICE MADE**
**Sourcing Information**

*Sourcing information* is the procedural activity in which the family engages when *framing their options*. There are many and varied ways in which to gain information and the range of family engagement in this activity is extensive, from relying on one simple source only (family or friends) to multiple ways of accessing information that requires a great deal of time and energy. Once again, the level of engagement is governed by the family’s goal orientation and by the nature and size of the obstacles encountered.

*Figure 4.5. Stage Two – Framing their options*

Sally, a qualified teacher herself, presented a very high level of engagement in the process of sourcing information. She had a strong professional interest in a holistic education.

*I’m desperate to send them to a Catholic school but I won’t do it unless I perceive that it is a good educational institution as well as … I know that I’m going to get the spiritual side of it – that’s a given. It’s everything else as well* (Sally, p. 7).

In her search for information she used many forms of investigation.

*I’ve made it my business to find out. I’ve been on school tours, I’ve spoken to parents and staff. I’m making sure I make the correct decision about where my child goes. I’m involved in the state system... so I know what goes on* (Sally, p. 2).
I’ve read all the information. From the standpoint of an ordinary person, I’ve been to the orientation day and I’ve read all the information. I don’t really get a sense of what their package is. I have made my own inquiries. I pigeon-holed one of the heads of department at a conference and made him go through the mill. He gave very good answers – not a problem. I have a good friend who has just been employed there. If they’ve employed her, that’s a very good indication (Sally, p. 3).

I had six months of long service leave last year. I went to nearly every school you can name and did the tour and interviewed them. I’ve got that many booklets and brochures. They were wonderful. I went on their little tour, I spoke to them (Sally, p. 21).

The result of her extensive investigation was the decision to enrol her children in a college that she considered to be the best option.

Francesca, who had migrated to Australia with her husband to join other members of her family, found her choice of preferred school quite readily. She evidently trusted the opinions of others in her local ethnic community and her primary interest was in the immediate happiness of her sons. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the level of engagement is determined by the goal orientation of the family and the obstacles that they encounter. Since the goal orientation was the immediate happiness of her sons, and because there were no substantial obstacles to challenge them, the family were happy to assume the same choices as the rest of their ethnic community.

My sister-in-law who was living here – her kids also attend state schools. We just put my boys into the same school as her kids. My boys were happy there and just love it there. Although I’d be happy to send my kids to a Catholic school because both my husband and I were attending Catholic school when were young. We thought that would be a good upbringing (Francesca, p. 6).

Michelle had enrolled her two eldest boys in a local private school at birth and later, when two further Christian schools were being developed in the area, she enrolled them in those schools as well. A prime source of information for her was a friend who taught at the one of the Christian schools.
...one of our good friends was a teacher at [the college] and she said not to send him [there] ... There’s almost inherent bullying in the school that’s not addressed and that he would be, he would be picked on and that there’s not enough support for a child like him (Michelle, p. 7).

On the strength of this information about bullying from her friend, Michelle did not include that particular school in the family’s frame of options.

Rebecca and Terry engaged at a high level in their search for information about possible choices. Their goal-orientation for each of their children was high, according to the ability of each child, so they engaged in sourcing information at a high level. Being fully committed to Catholic education, they did not want to think outside of that arena. They were aware of the differences in ethos of different groups of Catholic educators, and felt it important to ensure that their children were educated in a context in which they were comfortable and included. The town they had moved to was “very parochial and all the girls whose mothers ever went to [a particular College], they all go to [that College]” (Rebecca, p. 1). There was a variety available, including two very academic, single sex schools, and two vocational single sex schools that were amalgamating. Since their own personal history favoured single sex schools, they were inclined in that direction but clearly were prepared to look also at co-educational facilities. However, they perceived problems with the co-educational schools.

... the problem was because those two schools were amalgamating and taking two different charisms and ... trying to put them together into one new situation, with a lay principal, um, well we just decided to hold off, we’d better take a “wait and see” attitude on that one” (Rebecca, p. 2).

To source further information on one school where they had some prior sense of community they attended the 25th anniversary of the school. They had had connections in their home state with the founding religious order of the school and so felt very much part of that style of community. However, geographical issues made it a difficult choice. It was on the far side of a large country town and the buses would have made travel difficult and, with several other small
children, Rebecca was unable to drive them daily. To further source information, Rebecca rang two of the schools and asked for a prospectus to be sent out. The response from each school was revealing of their attitudes. The first school’s response was:

“I’m sorry you’ll have to wait ‘til open day”. When we rang the [other] school and said could we have the prospectus they said “We’ll have it in the post this afternoon” and it was, it was there the next day (Rebecca, p. 3).

In making choices for the younger children in their large family, they had a further intervening factor in that for employment purposes they recently moved to Western Australia from interstate and thus had no knowledge about the local systems and no feeling of connectedness. Consequently, Rebecca felt that they had to “do their homework” to ensure they had an understanding of what was available to them locally (Rebecca, p. 1).

It was rather interesting, that experience, because I did a lot of searching on the Internet. Um, we had maps so we had a vague idea of where we wanted live north of the river, close to the beach ‘cause that was the only way we could get [one son] to come happily, um, and so we sort of were looking from, I suppose from [among four colleges]. So I rang colleges up and I said you know can I get your prospectus and you get that same attitude of no, sorry, we can’t send one because we are fully booked, in some cases, um, not even an attitude of well, let’s try and see what’s going on, I’m not saying that they should say if they don’t have places, but an attitude that says well we don’t have places, not we don’t need you (Rebecca, p. 6).

Rebecca persisted in her information search.

... we had some that sort of said yes, and sent stuff over and we had a look at it and rang up and said that we’d be in town, could we have interviews, and the only ones that we actually had interviews were with [two of the colleges]. Um,[one] was um, quite an interesting, it looked as though it was going to be very academic which possibly was not going to suit our youngest son but would suit [our youngest daughter]. Um, it sort of looked a lovely school, we had a most interesting interview because we didn’t meet a single educational member of staff (Rebecca, p. 6).
Mary, a country mother, also engaged to a very high level in sourcing information due to her goals for each individual child, her professional outlook which she shared with her husband, Gerard, and the obstacles that country living provided. With a large family to educate, she and Gerard sought information from a wide variety of possibilities.

*I think I mainly just canvassed around every possible option, perhaps the different institutions got the information, I remember making a great big file of that. And we did check out every possibility because, oh we checked out... there’s a couple of hostels in [the city] that send kids to the state government senior high schools, and um, they have a pretty good record, so we canvassed everything (Mary, p. 8).*

With the information in hand, Mary enrolled each child in a school that each helped to choose. Each child was fully consulted and their own needs and personalities taken into account.

Rosa and her husband, holding high academic goals for their children, were challenged to work hard at choosing a suitable secondary school to further their dreams. Following careful research, they had decided that only private schools would be in their frame of options.

*I attended open days for three private and three government schools plus arranged visits to two local catholic (sic) high schools. I methodologically (sic) researched the school options as I would anything I was unfamiliar with. We wanted our son to gain a “well rounded” education that included academics, music and sport. I met the headmasters or principals for each school and was most impressed by the headmaster of the school we eventually chose (Rosa, p. 2).*

One of the ways in which Rosa ensured that options would be available for them was to have her son sit exams for entry scholarships.

*Our son wrote exams for private school scholarships plus the government exams for enriched programs. He did not receive a private school scholarship but did well enough that they contacted us and offered him a place without our even applying. He did well in all exams and could have chosen enriched programs for two government high schools (not local) but we were not happy that the programs were streaming students into*
Belinda depended on information gleaned from others.

[I gained information] from other parents with older children. They were very happy there and it seemed to have a good name – from general talking to people. People were happy with the school and that’s where we wanted him to go (Belinda, p. 3).

Having moved to Australia when her children were small, Barbara’s children were enrolled in a Catholic primary school by her husband who had arrived in Perth well before his family.

... when we moved here, my husband enrolled them in a Catholic school, because he knew I was Catholic. He had heard that private schools are better than government schools and that there would be a waiting list. He just went ahead and enrolled them (Barbara, p. 3).

Subsequent dissatisfaction with the school’s academic program motivated the mother to move them into the government sector during their primary schooling and discouraged her from considering, or seeking any information about, Catholic secondary schooling. She declared “she didn’t want to pursue a Catholic education after that” (Barbara, p. 11).

**Intervening Conditions**

Even though parents employed a range of strategies (as described above) to source information to identify their options in choosing a school, not all available schools were automatically included in the frame of options. Various conditions intervened to increase the attractiveness of some options, while other conditions provoked a negative view of some schools to the extent that they were not included in the final frame of viable options.

**Intervening conditions: Resources.**

A substantial intervening factor for families in *framing their options* was the availability of resources, in regard both to time and finances. Francesca and her
husband went no further than to listen to the assessment of others.

When we came from [our home country], we arrived in March and they were halfway through the first term. We didn’t have time to look for schools. We were told by friends and relatives that private school are expensive, so we were put off by that (Francesca, p. 6).

Figure 4.6. Stage Two – Framing their options, with intervening conditions

Sally declared that finances were not a difficult issue as the family was “obviously not hard-pressed for money” (Sally, p. 18). However, even though the resources were readily available, she was keen to stress that she did not believe that expensive fees were a necessary indicator of value.

Although, I’m not stupid. I look at those $10,000 a year schools and think, “Are you silly?” I know that you get a class of 25 and that’s a big thing. I also checked out [another private school] and it’s a much better school. It’s a fine school. We checked out [the previous college I mentioned] and I wouldn’t send anybody there…. A shocking atmosphere. Boys, hunched shoulders, looking down, shuffling. My mother and I were absolutely gob-smacked. We were absolutely horrified at the atmosphere and the way in which the boys – there wasn’t a spark of life in any faces – dead – mullets (Sally, p. 22).

Sally managed to enrol her children in a college that she and her husband believed offered optimum benefits, but subsequent events created an intervening
condition related to their financial situation that prevented them taking up the opportunity.

If I could have my choice, it would be [this particular college]. We actually had the house up for sale. They were enrolled at ...a feeder primary. The only way you can get in is to be in a feeder primary. Circumstances happened – we didn’t sell the house, GST came in – the whole thing stopped (Sally, p. 2).

For Julie’s family, financial resources were clearly stretched, although they managed to maintain their choice for their five children, despite the financial challenge.

We did at one stage consider [sending them to a state school] not because we weren’t happy with Catholic schools but there was a time when we were really struggling and were getting into a lot of debt and we had to kind of think about well, you know, a lot of this was happening because we were sending them to Catholic schools (Julie, p. 3).

We were fine until they went to high school. Then we had a year with three of them at high school and we just you know, got into more and more debt. [The College] were fantastic and they let us accumulate the debt but the debt’s always there. That was a big deal and I went back to work which I didn’t want to do and that was quite traumatic so it was a big sacrifice to keep them there and we seriously thought about taking them out but we couldn’t do that so... and it’s all worked out in the end. We’ve caught up [laugh] sort of! (Julie, p. 8).

A further issue for Julie’s family was that their finances limited them to one car.

Cause we have one car so the location was quite important at that stage. John was working there, the kids [were] at [the Catholic primary school] and we had one car so that was very convenient (Julie, p. 2).

The imperatives for Teresa’s family demanded that their sons not go to a large, local government high school, because they wanted better pastoral care. However, they realised this carried a significant financial burden. Fortunately, a grandparent assisted them.

I think it’s mainly the size of it – and where would [my eldest son] fit in there? Whereas I know if he goes to a private school, they do look after them. And that’s what you pay for. That is what the money is for.
It was [my husband’s] idea so he’s quite keen on that.... When [his] father passed on, he said, “I’d really like the boys to have a good education.” So he made allowances. That money would go towards their education, whether it be high school or university (Teresa, p. 14).

Albert and his wife had to carefully consider the financial burden when considering schools for their four children.

...we came to question probably when he was in Year 4, Year 5 maybe, we won’t be able to afford to send him to private school and that’s why we looked at the different options, different schools, and I think in Year 5 we had to sort of make a decision. At that stage we said “yes we can afford it” um, I mean the choice would have been if we can afford it, they’ll go to Catholic schools, if we can’t then it’ll be a state school and then we would have to find you know a good state school (Albert, p. 3).

Albert was also conscious that, as a shift worker on a limited income, the decision to enrol the children in a Catholic school would have significant financial ramifications for his family.

... we’ve been happy with it. Um the children are happy with it as well because you know sometimes they ask you questions like “why can’t we go on holiday you know, so and so’s been overseas last year and they’re going next year again” but we say that’s the choice they make, those children go to such and such a school you know. Both the mum and the dad work so it’s quite different, they can afford it. With us it’s different we can’t. Our main priority is to put you through schooling make sure you have a good education, a good upbringing, and once that’s been achieved then we can start going on holidays [laugh] (Albert, p. 3).

To assist with the financial burden, Albert’s wife returned to the workforce when most of the children had reached high school.

Tricia had always wanted her boys to go to Catholic schools but was aware of their financial limitations.

We would have liked to afford for them to go to a Catholic primary school but the financial state was that we wouldn’t afford it. My husband has just been given a career opportunity and he’s been given a promotion. So
Tricia had sourced information about the financial implications for her family should they engage in Catholic education and it had a critical effect on framing their options such that Catholic education had at first seemed out of the question. Fortunately, with an increase in income and a strengthening of her imperative about Catholic education, Tricia and her husband were, in the end, able to include Catholic schools within the frame of viable options.

Nicole had had a great deal of difficulty in educating her two stepsons. When she and Graham’s two younger sons (their third and fourth sons) were ready for secondary school, Nicole enrolled them in a large private boys’ school. The financial cost was gladly borne, particularly when their third boy showed a remarkable difference in his behaviour and attitude shortly after commencing at the school. Nicole related how Graham responded to the financial challenge:

_He just accepts, because of the problems we’ve had with the older ones that something else had to be done. When he saw how [our third son] was when he first started and just how excited he was and the whole thing, [Graham] said, “Whatever it’s going to cost us, it’s all worth it” - to see the different change (Nicole, p. 14)._ 

Linda, a single mother, was working part time to care for her two sons. The second son showed clear sporting prowess and her concern was that at the local high school where the older boy attended there would not be sufficient sporting interest to stimulate and support the younger boy. Although she lacked the funds to pay private school fees, other parents in her son’s local football team encouraged her to write to a large Catholic boys’ school that had special facilities for sportsmen.

_I spoke to a few friends who were going to [the College] – [my son] plays football with them. They just said to write a letter and tell them the situation, so I did. He had contact with the sports master there. I couldn't afford to send [my son] as a full paying student - he had to go on some sort of scholarship. I knew he was good at sport and I knew [the College] liked sports people (Linda, p. 6)._
Using her ex-husband’s name, since he had himself been a student of the college and was a prominent sportsman, she wrote and applied for her son to receive a scholarship and was successful. By using information gleaned from other parents, she was thus able to reduce the effect of her lack of resources by approaching the problem from a different angle.

Clarissa and her husband had migrated to Australia when the eldest of their four children was in primary school. Although her family origins were deeply rooted in Catholicism, and even though their son had attended a Catholic school before migrating, they enrolled him in the local government school when they arrived in Australia. The only information Clarissa had sourced was through a friend who had told her: “Don’t put them in the [local Catholic school]” (Clarissa, p. 10). Clarissa and her husband’s financial resources were very limited: “It was going to be hard, because we were just starting” (Clarissa, p. 10). Since the eldest child continued his schooling in the local government primary school and later in the government high school, it became the easiest option for the next son to follow the same path. Even though she would have liked her second son to be in the Catholic school, the significantly greater distance to the Catholic school would have further stretched their resources.

Well, less money to pay. Fine, he’ll go with [our eldest]. It would’ve been a big effort for me anyway because I would have had one child here and one child there…Money does make it a big decision – it was for us, having three children at the time… (Clarissa, p. 11).

School fees are sometimes not the only financial burden to be carried by parents who choose schools outside those provided locally by the government. Tracey, for instance, spoke of the necessity to remain in close phone contact with her daughter while she was at boarding school.

We have huge phone bills, but I don’t care because that’s my support to them. If that’s the way I have to give it, then that’s the way it is (Tracey, p. 14).

Tracey and her husband farm within a family business and the education of the children is high in their list of priorities. “No matter what else, you educate your kids properly. That’s a decision that we’ve made” (Tracey, p. 19). The cost of their boarding school fees is deliberately included in the family farm budget.
Intervening conditions: External factors.

External factors beyond the control of the family were also experienced as an intervening condition when some families were sourcing information. One such factor involved the long standing expectation by the Church, as described in Chapter 1, that children of Catholic families would attend Catholic schools. While its interpretation and application varied from place to place, the decision of the early bishops was still effective 100 years later. Hugh spoke of two incidences where parish priests excommunicated parents for not sending their children to the Catholic school.

This family friend of mine, this one guy, it’d be in the 1930s I suppose, where his parents get excommunicated, because they pull him out of the convent because he’s being bullied by older boys and sent him to the state school and the parents get excommunicated by the parish priest ... Nobody could challenge what they could do. This guy was parish priest in the one place for 49 years and six months. Imagine how much control... in 1960 in [a country town]. [My friend’s] mother was excommunicated because she sent him to the high school and not to the convent which had about six boys in it all doing the one stream of subjects (Hugh, p. 12).

The exercise of such power in the local parish system had an effect on what parents could view as their choices and, while it is not enforceable today, it exists to some extent in the collective memory of the Catholic community.

Another external factor impacting one country family revolved around the provision of Catholic schooling in their country community. In order to have a religious order of teaching sisters come to their town to help with the Catholic education of their primary school aged children, the parents were required to sign a contract to say that they would send their daughters to that particular congregation’s city boarding school when they progressed to secondary school. Although Betty and her family, for instance, had their imperative of Catholic schooling firmly in their minds, being able to include a Catholic school in their options framed meant that it had to be the particular girls’ boarding school run by the religious order that provided Catholic education for primary children in their town.
...we wanted to get the nuns here, one of our commitments through the parish council was to send our girls to [their boarding school]. We had to sign on the dotted line (Betty, p. 11).

Intervening conditions: Accessibility of school.

A causal condition for the families’ being challenged to choose outside the local government schooling was described in the previous chapter under the sub-category of availability of schooling. A further dimension of this sub-category appears as an intervening condition during the phase of framing their options. While a lack of availability affected city and country families, an ability to access the schools chosen also intervened as a condition affecting their frame of options.

The experience for a number of families in the metropolitan area was that the excessive demand for Catholic secondary schooling made accessibility a problem in framing their options. Since most systemic Catholic schools provide non-government education at a low to medium fee level, they are very attractive to both Catholic and non-Catholic families (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2006). Moreover, unless a Catholic child who wishes to enrol in a Catholic secondary school has attended a Catholic primary school, the chances of being accepted are reduced unless the family can show that the child has been attending a Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) and that the parents are committed and practising within their parish.

You had to be involved in the parish. I was a reader anyway, at the time, at the parish, and then I took on teaching as a catechist. I knew that would all help, and it did, because he got in (Belinda, p. 3).

Jane, for instance, had been unable to afford to send her boys to a Catholic primary school so she had engaged the boys fully in the parish religious education program and did everything that she could to access a Catholic secondary school.

I came home, promptly filled [in the application forms], sent in the deposit and waited for a couple of years for the interview process. We had an interview with the
priest, who was brand new. He didn't know us (Jane, p. 12).

The process is lengthy and has to be begun well in advance of the child’s starting date at secondary school, requiring the parents to be fully aware of what is necessary and to be proactive for the future.

People were saying to me last year, “But he doesn't start until Year 8.” “Yes, I know.” “But how do you know you’ve already got a position?” Because they have to do it that far ahead. Whereas other schools are obviously just doing it this year for next year. You have to be one step ahead of yourself at all times. Are they going to do RE [in the parish]? Do you really want to ever look at secondary [schooling]? “You have to be one step ahead of yourself (Jane, p. 12).

Several participants reported that the enrolment system did not need to seek their enrolment, but rather they were required to pursue the various procedures that the secondary school had required. Jane’s experience describes such a situation.

You’re not in a system that guarantees you will get the prompt saying, “This is what you now do.” You have to be aware. Obviously [the parish priest] had had to go back and look at our records as to how long we’d been going to RE. Fortunately again the coordinator was very familiar with them; she knew my boys, and she was brilliant. She said, “Look, don’t worry, he’s aware. I’ve got a list of who has been coming for how long and all of that.” That was great because he’d been literally been in the parish about two months when the interview process began (Jane, p. 12).

Importance is also attached to the way the child presents at interview. Jane describes how her son participated in the interview and the importance of his response.

[Our eldest] interviewed brilliantly, he was great, our son. He was very very good. We must have [the priest’s] support and then we went to the school and interviewed with the school and again [our son] was brilliant. He had a lovely report from school. His previous report was very good. You just provide the last report that the child received and fortunately that was excellent. We just waited and hoped (Jane, p. 12).
Sally, Michelle and David gave similar accounts about the need for the child to present well at the interview required by the secondary school in the enrolment process. Since availability of secondary school places in Catholic schools is at such a premium, parents face an anxious wait for confirmation of enrolment, or disappointment. Should the latter be the case they then need to return to the same process before they can ensure they have their options framed. As Jane explained:

_We felt it was like a lottery. My husband would say to me, “Have we got a 50% chance or a 30% chance or a 70% chance? What chance have we got?” I said, “It’s just like a lottery, as far as I can tell. He’s not in a feeder school, he’s done everything he can do to achieve it. He’s done his RE, he’s got his sacraments - we’ll just have to wait and see.” Very fortunately, he was offered a space. That is great for our second child, of course, because he’s sort of halfway there having a sibling in the school. Not that it’s guaranteed, but at least he has that as well and hopefully he will get in. I enrolled both at the same time. It’s just a matter of waiting. They were saying in the newsletter at church last week that the interviews for the following year from [our eldest] are about to start happening (Jane, p. 12)._ 

The level of Jane’s engagement in the process, and the degree of her pro-activity in working towards enrolment for her sons in a Catholic secondary school, has been driven by the strength of her imperative. As described in the previous chapter, Jane’s faith formed the imperative that propelled her to seek assistance in the faith education of her sons in their teenage years. With limited resources, she was content to engage in local government primary education along with the parish religious education program, so that she could conserve her resources for Catholic secondary schooling.

Teresa was aware that it would have been very hard to access the low fee paying Catholic school that is closest to their home.

_We thought about [the closest Catholic College], but the actual interview process is very hard. They have feeder schools and the sibling rule, so it would have been very hard to get in. I heard what the interview process is like and it is quite rigorous (Teresa, p. 10)._
Clarissa was not successful in her application to a Catholic primary school for her third son, which disappointed her because that would have ensured her sons’ successful enrolment in the Catholic secondary school.

I was seeing [the previous parish priest]. I knew him because my children -- that was my church at the time because I was [living locally to his church] and that’s where [our eldest] was going to have his religious education. I didn’t know [the new parish priest] that much. That’s when you need to have a priest, - for a reference. That’s who I went to because that’s who I knew. As far as I know, it was to go to [the nearest Catholic primary school] because we were moving from [our previous place] to live [near to Fr Y’s parish school]. I don't think it was for [Fr X’s parish school]. I had made the choice for [the other Catholic school] then, but he didn't get accepted (Clarissa, p. 11).

Fulfilling the eligibility criteria was difficult for Clarissa because they had had to move several times while they were renting, prior to buying their own home. She believed that accessibility to the Catholic primary school was governed, in the end, by one’s financial contribution to the parish.

I feel because I wasn’t paying, at the time, at the church. You know how you have the envelope that they hand out?...I had an interview with [the parish priest]. That was the one thing, looking back, that made them take the decision that he wasn’t accepted (Clarissa, p. 10-11).

Clarissa’s inability to meet the admissions criteria governed much of her decision making for the schooling of their first three sons.

I would have preferred to put all my children in a Catholic school. We started here 12 years ago and we didn’t have the money to put them in private schools. I’m definitely going to put [our fourth son] into a Catholic school (Clarissa, p. 1)

However, her underlying imperative for a Catholic education has remained strong, along with her own faith. At the time of interview, Clarissa’s fourth son was still below school age and much younger than the other three boys but she was clear in her desire for him to become a priest, and in her mind this necessarily involved a full Catholic education.
I’d love him to be a priest. I’d love to have one child that really is so... how am I going to get that if they don’t get it from the word “go”? I feel that life, basically here in Australia, is very far away from faith... At least in a Catholic school, I hope he’ll have more contact (Clarissa, p. 14).

With increased financial stability due to her husband’s improved employment, the eldest boy working, and finally being in their own home, Clarissa had every hope that her fourth son would now be assured of a full Catholic education since she had the necessary characteristics in place for a successful enrolment in the Catholic primary school attached to the parish that she now consistently attended.

**Intervening conditions: Critical family events.**

A further condition that influenced the framing of a family’s options was the intervention of critical family events. For example, Geraldine and her husband had moved to Western Australia primarily for the academic goals that they desired for their children as they were convinced that such possibilities were unavailable in their home country at the time. Their family had been critically affected by discriminatory government policy. As Geraldine explains:

*It’s very difficult to compete with, in [our country]. For example you get A and the other fellow get C and you can’t get into university. So that’s why a lot of parents [from our country] they just sell the property just to send the children’s so they know their children get an education (Geraldine, p. 14).*

On arriving in Australia their first choice was for Catholic education but another Christian private school offered places to them for their two children and in their anxiety to have them placed they accepted.

*...we send them there because when we immigrated here we put their names, rather my son’s down at [the Catholic school] and then we didn’t get a reply until, before we got a reply from [the other Christian College] so we grabbed that one and two weeks later we got a place in [the Catholic school]. But it was too late so we continued to put the boy there (Geraldine, p. 1).*

Geraldine had always felt uncertain about the choice and when her husband died she felt that she needed to return to her original imperative and seek Catholic
education once again. In the year prior to her husband’s death, Geraldine had been aware that her daughter seemed to become more remote from her Catholic faith practices.

...when she went to [the College] and gradually she lost that [Catholic way of praying] (Geraldine, p. 3).

With her husband’s death, her need to be more connected to the Catholic community increased in intensity. The eldest of their two children, a son, had just graduated from Year 12 but her daughter was still in Year 9 at the time so Geraldine pursued an enrolment for her in the Catholic College and she was accepted.

While Michelle and her husband were living overseas, Michelle’s husband died. Such a critical event seriously affected all her previous plans for her two sons.

I was living in Germany and my husband died and left me with the two older boys. They were seven, going on eight, nearly eight, and 15 months. The one who was 15 months is the fellow that we’re talking about…. So when I came back...here to Perth ...schooling was a bit of a problem because we always expected to end up either, internationally or in Melbourne and the older boy had his name down for two [private schools] (Michelle, p. 1).

A critical family event that caused a change to the framing of options for one family was related to the employment of the mother. Anne had worked part time shift work as a nurse for many years as the family matured but finally reached a crisis point in the political upheavals in the work place.

What seemed like a great job that was just going along, all of a sudden became the ghastliest, political, yucky thing. I worked through that and decided I’d stay as long as I absolutely had to, and that I would ... sometimes you can’t change things. It was either stay and be totally revolting or leave. I stayed as long as I could and we started a home-based business. That enabled me to leave. When I left work, I’d been doing it for 25 years in between having babies and going to school and all that. Then I stopped. It was an unbelievable change (Anne, p. 3).

The change that Anne referred to then opened the possibilities for a new range of options that included a change of school choice for her last two children if
that became necessary. She had found that the home business which she and her husband had begun was providing sufficient income for her to resign from her difficult position and engage in a much more flexible life style.

Diane’s situation had always presented difficulties because her husband, Peter, travelled frequently for employment purposes. They had moved interstate to Perth and things had settled to the point that Diane felt that her children were settled in their education. However, pressure from Peter’s employer was applied to her and to Peter in order to get them to move to yet another capital city.

_All of our family are in [another capital city] ... so I prefer to go back there. It was offered... Peter’s boss was desperate. He flew [over here] and wined and dined us, trying to talk me into going to [another major capital city]. The cost factor of Peter commuting between [capital cities] every three weeks was going to be an issue_ (Diane, p. 15).

The result was that the family moved back to their original state capital and resumed the educational choices that they had made prior to leaving.

The critical family event that intervened in the education of Rebecca’s children was the shift in her husband’s employment to Western Australia. Having moved from the eastern states where they had actively pursued the best possible Catholic education for their children, they were now faced with engaging in the entire process again for their two youngest children.

_...that was the background for that change and then when I came across here we went looking again_ (Rebecca, p. 6).

**Intervening conditions: geography.**

Availability of schooling was one of the three causal conditions described in Chapter 3 that challenged the family to choose outside of the local government schooling. One dimension of that causal condition was the geographical location of the school in relation to the family home and it now reappears as an intervening condition when families source information so that they can frame their options of good available choices. The earlier discussion of resources as
an intervening factor had shown that geography was firmly enmeshed as a factor for some of the participants. The location of the school had to be considered in tandem with resources and other issues in order to discover whether the family could, or could not, access the desired school.

Mary described country life as being “in Siberia culturally” (Mary, p. 19). There were limited possibilities for education in upper school particularly, and in cultural areas.

...we think about it and we think are we depriving our kids by being in the country and being not, you know, they really haven’t got the opportunities for that extra development in music and drama and all sorts of areas that they might be able to do if they were in the city (Mary, p. 18).

Mary and her husband faced difficulties when questions of upper schooling first arose. Their country town provided good schooling up until Year 10 at the local district high school but upper schooling became a problem. They could send them to other large country towns where there were boarding facilities but, as they wanted Catholic education, it was sensible to go to the city so that they had maximum possibilities. And since the city cultural life was a drawcard, it was clear that family needs would need to be pointed in the same direction. When they educated their eldest boys, options had been very limited.

... there were only two Catholic boys schools taking boarders at the time ... it was like 10, 15 years ago... but then the rural depression hit and people couldn’t afford boarding school and also the population numbers dropped a bit I think (Mary, p. 8).

For their third son, given that he was very happy in the country school and because carpeted boarding facilities would be a problem for his severe asthma, Mary and Gerard decided that travelling by bus to the nearest large town would be the best alternative. The country location of the family home was a continual influence in all decisions that Mary and Gerard made for their children’s schooling.

Betty spoke clearly about the difficulties that their rural, farm-based location posed when they came to frame their options for secondary schooling.
There is a three-year high school at [a large country town] and the bus comes out to [our town] and some of them go there – not very many……it’s an hour bus trip… The rest have to go to either [the city] …Then there are boarding facilities at the high school. The WA Hostels Association have a hostel……two hours away again. Some of them go there because they can come home a bit more often. There are not many choices (Betty, p. 7).

When there is a combination of intervening factors, the choices become more difficult to make. Farming incomes are subject to many variables that are not within the farmer’s control and when upper secondary school education is not available in their local area, the choices can become very difficult for the family financially.

Tom and Beth’s rural location, combined with a difficult financial situation in the agricultural sector generally, greatly limited the available choices within their frame of options.

*It’s the cost of sending them away (Beth).*

*That’s the trouble, we just haven’t got the money to send them away (Tom).*

*We were lucky with [our second child] because we got assistance to send her away, and that was great. With [our other daughter], she’s not quite sure where she wanted to go and I said to [Tom], well perhaps [the next country town] because she’s a different child, not as worldly as [our eldest girl] and I think it’s only an hour and a half away and I’ve heard good reports on the school, you know, and it’s half the price (Beth).*

*Just mainly prices a common factor (Tom).*

*If you just haven’t got the money you can’t send them. It doesn’t matter where they go but they have to go away…(Beth & Tom, p. 20).*

While geographical location is of critical significance for country families, it is also an intervening condition relevant to many city families as well. Julie was conscious that the location of their chosen school was influential.

*’Cause we have one car so the location was quite important at that stage. John was working there, the kids*
at [the adjacent Catholic primary school] and we had one car so that was very convenient. ...the kids can get a bus. Yeah. And you know, like my sister’s children go there so we sort of share driving and stuff like that if we need to (Julie, p. 2).

Teresa had considered the family’s location in relationship to a very reputable government high school, which would be a possible option to consider.

Because we’re on this side of the [boundary] road, we’re not about to move so that we can go into the [school’s] zone ...they’re not taking any out-of-boundary students. That’s how tough it is. We weighed all that up and decided that we’d rather -- we’d always had our hearts set on [one of the local Christian schools] (Teresa, p. 12).

Because their geographical location excluded the state high school of their choice, it was then removed from their frame of options.

**Stage Three: Making a Match**

Stage Three of the process describes how the decision to commit to an enrolment in one particular school is made. Once the family have defined their imperatives, and formed a frame of options, they then need to make a match within their possible options by balancing all of the various intervening factors to deliver an outcome that provides the best prospects for realising the family’s potential. Where the frame includes more than one candidate school, this ‘matching’ involves identifying among the set the single school that, if chosen, secures the best possible match between what it can offer the family and what the family is seeking to achieve in terms of family potential.

It is evident from the data described below that this phase for some families is encountered concurrently with the previously described phase because the framing of their options provides only one choice. It is therefore only the family with more than one option in the frame that must complete the third stage separately. Figure 4.7 illustrates this by depicting two pathways to the point at which the choice is made.
Figure 4.7. Stage Three within the basic social process

Balancing
Stage Three involves the parents, and possibly the children, in balancing the perceived merits of the available options (Figure, 4.8). At this stage it is possible that the family may once again have to re-engage and further refine its imperatives. The speed with which the eventual decision is made is dependent on various factors. Should there be only two schools in the final frame of options, there will eventually be a factor that will lead to a confirmation of enrolment in one of the two schools. Of course, if the final frame contains only one school, enrolment could be immediately confirmed unless the family are confronted subsequently by other critical events that require them to return them to a previous phase in the process.

Intervening Conditions
During the balancing process various conditions intervene in a way that tips the scales in favour of a particular choice. Time periods for enrolment, the attitudes
of those involved in school communications, and the individual child’s needs in relationship to family needs, all combine in varying degrees to influence the final choice. Initially it seemed evident that family resources also were an issue during the balancing phase but the data conclusively indicated that the issue of resources was usually resolved earlier as the family framed their options.

After completing this third stage of Phase 3, the optimum match is achieved (Figure 4.9) and the family concludes the enrolment of their child, or children, in the chosen school.

Each of the intervening conditions in Figure 4.9, and the ways in which they can contribute to the balancing that eventually identifies the choice offering the best match in terms of the family’s values and imperatives, will now be discussed in detail.
Chapter 4 – Basic Social Process: Realising Family Potential Phase One

**Intervening conditions: Timing.**

Barbara and her husband Charlie were internationally mobile because of his employment. Charlie initially came alone to Australia in order to commence his new position, procure a home in readiness for the rest of the family, and enrol the children in a school so they could attend as soon as they arrived. Information from those around him suggested that the private schools generally offered the best education, and given that his wife was Catholic, the initial frame of options was determined. As Barbara explained:

> We moved a lot, so she was in an international school at first. Then when we moved here, my husband enrolled them in a Catholic school, because he knew I was Catholic. He had heard that private schools are better than government schools and that there would be a waiting list. He just went ahead and enrolled them (Barbara, p. 3).

Timing was an important issue for Barbara and Charlie because of the circumstances of their migration and the reality that there was little opportunity for much investigation and balancing of options.

A similar issue of timing arose for Jane and her family, where a change of locality was necessitated.

> We moved up; [our son] was starting Year 1 as we moved. We moved in the December and [he] started in Year 1 in the January. There had been a lot of uncertainty as to whether we were actually going to move into this house or not. From here, the [local government] primary school is like 50 steps and you’re there. It was within the community and that sort of thing. So I guess for convenience, I didn’t look any further (Jane, p. 3).

Although Jane would have considered Catholic schools, her limited knowledge of what was available, and the limited time available to them because of the lateness of their relocation, meant that there were few schools in Jane and her husband’s frame at the time a decision had to be made. Later, Jane discovered that there was a Catholic school that could have been preferable had she been aware of its existence at the time. However, moving at the critical time when their son was starting school had a determining effect on their choice.
There is another Catholic primary school in [the next suburb] that, to be honest with you, I wasn’t aware of when I first moved here...It’s about the same distance, but I was working in [another suburb]. I just didn’t look into it very well, I suppose. Had I realised, perhaps they could have gone there (Jane, p. 3).

Timing was also an intervening condition affecting Rosa’s ability to achieve the best possible match for her son’s secondary schooling. In framing their options they ended up with a co-educational Catholic school and a boy’s Christian private school as their available options, but the time eventually ran out as far as the Catholic option was concerned even though enrolling their son in a Catholic school would have been their preferred choice.

The government option was not acceptable to us and the Catholic school option was not hopeful so we waited as long as we could for the Catholic school to accept our son but the deadline came and went. We chose a local boy’s private school that promoted Christian ideals and provided a wide range of options (academically, musically and in the sporting area) (Rosa, p. 2).

Intervening conditions: Attitudes encountered

In Stage One on Phase One, where families are refining their imperatives, the attitudes of others is often an intervening condition that affects how individual families develop what they believe is essential to achieving the desired result from their choice of school. However, at the end of Phase One, when making a match, the attitudes of others once again can become important as the decision to finalise the eventual choice is brought to conclusion.

During the balancing stage, for instance, one final encounter that helped Rosa’s family to confirm their decision to send their son to a particular school was the attitude displayed by the principal. His direct and evidently genuine efforts to make personal connections with their son impressed Rosa and her husband sufficiently to confirm their enrolment.

We arrived for an interview (myself, husband and son who was in Year 7 at the time) and as we walked into his office the headmaster went straight to our son, shook his hand and encouraged him to look him in the eye. He
addressed him "as an adult“ and this demonstrated respect and caring to us. He also introduced himself to us but he kept the focus of the interview on our son by directly asking him questions and gently encouraging him to be involved in the conversation. We were impressed by this as it demonstrated to us how important our son was to him and it modelled to our son how he could/should behave (Rosa, p. 1).

Sally, similarly, was influenced by the attitude and appearance of staff when she went for an admissions interview at the Catholic secondary school that she had chosen for her son.

This may sound petty, but originally the interview was meant to be with the principal. That’s fine; towards the end of the year she was busy, so it went to the deputy principal. It’s fine that he took it on board and it’s fine that he was actually in a rugby top and shorts. [As it was now] at the end of the year, he could have been packing boxes or playing with his staff – a myriad of reasons why. But he made no attempt at making apologies for his appearance. Then he almost had my son in tears because of the examination in which he went through his report. [My son] is just a fairly typical boy. He is bright, he’s involved in the PEAC program, which [the deputy] did not know existed. Such a widespread government school program which is the gifted and talented program, and the deputy didn’t know about it! (Sally, p. 3).

Although she had many negative things to say about the interview, she felt the need to balance her response against her very strong imperative for faith education at secondary level, and thus decided in the end to enrol her son in the school.

Although Rachel and her husband, who had migrated from a country where Catholic education was not easily available or affordable, would have preferred to send their sons to Australian Catholic schools, they were deterred by the attitudes of other Catholic acquaintances who had their children in Catholic schools. The perception within the community, as relayed by several participants, that the quality of government schools had diminished in recent years, was presented to Rachel and her husband as they were making a decision about schools for their sons.
I don't know if it's particular to WA but people seem to think the government schools are bad and the only way you get a good education in Australia is to buy it by giving your child a Catholic education, even though you might not necessarily be Catholic... It comes from a number of people we know through work and through socialising - that have sent their children to Catholic schools and they're not remotely interested in Catholicism at all.

The attitude of these acquaintances proved to be a negative influence for Rachel as she came to resent the parental indifference to the values that she associated with her Catholicism.

In fact, some of the mothers that I have met have actually happily sent their children to Catholic schools but actively discouraged any -- even when their kids say, “I might be interested in going to church”, they actively discourage their children. “I don’t really believe, you know. I don’t really believe in Catholicism”. I’ve heard them say this, and it’s not just one person either - several people. So whilst on one hand I initially thought it was a good option, I began to think, “Why are people in Western Australia sending their kids to Catholic schools?” I changed my thinking about it a bit in the sense that I’m seeing a lot of people sending their kids there because they think that’s the best thing to do. “It’s the best thing to do.”

The resultant lack of confidence in Australian Catholic education that Rachel and her husband found through the attitudes of others caused them to choose government schools for their sons.

... if the idea of me sending my child to a Catholic school is to get a Catholic education, then I don’t know if I necessarily want my child rubbing elbows with your child, because your child is coming to school here, but he’s hearing from you that Catholicism is not something that you endeavour to practice, it’s something that you’re just buying (Rachel, p. 5).

Garry and Judy, who were concerned about their daughter’s move to a city boarding school, eventually reduced their frame of acceptable options to two schools, both girls’ Catholic boarding schools. The differing attitudes they encountered when visiting the schools tipped the balance in favour of one as their final choice. In the first school, for
instance, there seemed to be a policy of not allowing prospective boarders and their parents to view the boarding facilities before making a commitment to apply for enrolment.

... the interview [at the school we eventually excluded] was great, I mean it was impressive, they, facilities around the office admin area was good but ah, they wouldn’t take us to see the ah, they had a reason, but I can’t remember what it was, I can’t remember, but they wouldn’t take us to see the accommodation part of it and the reason didn’t go down, stick with me really. I just felt a bit uneasy about the fact that we couldn’t at least walk down there and have a look, even if we didn’t go through the rooms, I mean the privacy thing ... (Garry, p. 18).

The second girls’ boarding school in their frame of options had an entirely different attitude to prospective boarders viewing the accommodation.

And I think also always in the back of [our daughter’s] mind was the fact that [the boarding facilities at the first school] was the unknown, completely, whereas she’d up to, she’d been inside the rooms at [the second college], I mean she’d been up there to pick [our friend’s twins] up, we’d always take them out when we went to [the city] ... We got an interview there, and, you know they took us through the boarding part which impressed, we’d already seen but they were keen to show off the whole school... there was no show put on, they weren’t ashamed to show us the school... And, but they took us up to the boarding part, they were keen to show that off (Garry, p. 18).

The friendliness and openness of the second boarding college had so impressed the family, particularly the daughter, who felt she would be able to relax in such an atmosphere, that Garry and Judy confirmed their desire to enrol her there. The attitude of the school mirrored for them their values of country hospitality and so set them all at ease with the difficult nature of the change in their family life. Their daughter’s attitude towards the decision was also crucial. The second college mentioned was already familiar to her because a long-time school friend was already in attendance and such familiarity eased her anxieties regarding her forthcoming separation from home.

*Intervening conditions: Needs of the family.*

The needs of the family are considered at many different levels of the process...
towards realising family potential through education. In Stage One of the process both the child’s needs and those of the wider family are considered in the refining of the family’s imperatives. In Stage Two, where the family is framing their options, critical family events and the maximal use of the family’s resources are important while information is sourced so that specific options can be placed within a frame of choice. In this third stage, the family’s needs are considered yet again while they balance their options and finally make a match. The individual needs of the child are placed in relationship to the family’s needs.

Julie and John, for example, were able to make a match with rapid ease as it clearly fulfilled all of the family’s needs and satisfied their imperatives. Because of the strength of their faith imperative, they did not consider any options outside of the Catholic system, and since no obstacles were placed in their way, their enrolment in the Catholic college in their locality was immediate.

..we’d just moved into the area and [the college] was really the only school in this area. John got a job there straight away and the children got into [the parish primary school], which was the only Catholic school around. So, that was a natural kind of progression. We didn’t know a lot about the school except that John worked there, and was happy with what was happening...We didn’t really consider anything else (Julie, p. 2).

Because the school had been framed as the only meaningful option for them, they had no need to engage in balancing as there were no competing alternatives within the frame.

Albert and his wife had made a decision to engage in Catholic schooling while their children were very young and so when it came time for secondary schooling the needs of their family dictated that it must be available to them through public transport and be supported by the child.

...we spoke to [our eldest son] about it you know and told him that we think [this College] is where we’re going to send him, he was happy with that because “oh yeah, yeah
Since the child was content to be enrolled along with his friends, there was no further issue for the family and the one school that was within the frame of choice as being Catholic and accessible through public transport accepted their enrolments.

Mary and Gerard had given considerable time and effort to finding a school for each of their seven children that would suit the child’s specific needs. Their imperatives were strong and their goals for their children high and, as their financial resources strengthened over time, Mary was highly engaged in the whole process and spent considerable time and energy in sourcing information that would help determine the best possible option for each child. The first three sons had attended a Catholic boarding school in the city that had satisfactorily fulfilled the family’s needs. Mary and Gerard’s fourth son had particular gifts and easily outpaced his peers at the local district high school in their country town, but since he had made up his mind when he was only four years old to be a high level athlete, he chose a large metropolitan boarding school for the remainder of his schooling.

...he really made the choice. I suppose we wanted him to have the best possible opportunity to express all the potential that we knew he had and so it had to be a big school, it had to be a fairly high profile place where he would be able to excel. ... He went in Year 10, he had three years there. He only boarded in Year 10, he hated the boarding because it was so restrictive and his brothers were living across the river you know, a trivial bike ride away... so we let him go and live with them in Years 11 and 12 (Mary, p. 12).

The family’s needs were satisfied and driven by their fourth son’s natural drive, ambition and his proximity to his older brothers.

Mary and Gerard’s fifth son also had different needs for his upper secondary education. They again went through the whole process of choosing so that his individual needs would be satisfied. There were several schools in the frame of options and so the family had to balance their various needs against what was
offered. To make a match, the concluding factor was that he did not want matriculation and so a country boarding facility at an agricultural college was suitable to all of their needs.

[Agricultural College] became the choice for him ... He was actually happier there than any of the boys had been at boarding school...it just seemed an attractive option for [him] because it gave him two further years of schooling, Year 11 and 12 but it wasn’t the pressure of the TEE thing (Mary, p. 13).

Beth and Tom spent considerable time balancing their options. With a slump being experienced in the rural economy at the time, they were finding it difficult to provide sufficient resources for their second child, a daughter, to go to the city for schooling. With no upper secondary schooling provided locally, she clearly had to go away and the city was the most attractive option as she wanted to pursue tertiary education. Fortunately, financial assistance was made available by the government and this increased their frame of options. Their family’s desire for unity was challenged in the balancing process in that one option they considered was to purchase a second house in the city. However, Tom rejected this idea as it would obviously have to split the family.

I could always buy a house in [the city], [my wife] could go up there and the kids could go to school from there or something, like a lot of them do, but I married [her] and I want her here. Right there, I don’t want her, like one up there and one down here. That’s no good. (Tom, p. 10).

Beth and Tom were eventually able to make a match with confidence when their daughter was able to live with Tom’s sister in the city while she attended upper school.

George was confident that the local government high school was the appropriate place for his children’s secondary schooling. He was mostly content with the primary schooling his three children had experienced locally but had also been looking at the possibilities of secondary schooling at an independent Christian school that was within their reach financially and geographically, particularly since it was of their own religious denomination. The local government high
school, other reasonably close high schools and the independent school were all in the frame of options. Referring to the independent school, he said:

*But*[we had] *no real intention of sending her there. Um, even went to the parents’ night, the introductory parents’ night which is six or nine months ahead of the start of the school year, but with still no intention of sending her there even after that, but it wasn’t until the pressure of what was happening to her, that we made a decision to put her into [the Christian] school knowing that the government high school… the same group of people that were pressuring her were going to be going to the local high school. We felt that it was important for her growth, her emotional growth, to extract her from that situation and the only other option... Other than to send her to another government high school was to send her to the [Christian school] ... and the reason for that was primarily that we are [of the same denomination] (George, p. 8).

The eventual match was made when George and his wife were confident that the school would meet the family’s needs in line with their family imperatives, even when balanced against his general confidence in the government school.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the first phase of the process through which a family moves in order to realise their family potential. In this initial phase of the process, since they are challenged to choose outside the local government system, the family makes a choice about secondary schooling. Data gathered directly from the participants and presented has grounded the first phase emerging theoretical model of choice by confirming that families move through three identifiable stages towards their eventual decisions to enrol their children in particular schools for their secondary schooling.
PERSONAL NOTES

Delimiting the core process for this present study was less difficult than anticipated. Parents were very clear in describing what they did to secure the education of their children. Their ultimate goals and their deepest concerns were harder to clarify and more difficult to conceptualise. An exciting aspect of this part of the research was the brainstorming I was able to do with my supervisor. We would air the ideas and the codes and categories that I had established and then spend time moving the ideas in various directions until strong concepts began to appear. It was then a stimulating task to write memos of the ideas and form them into schema that began progressively to make sense of the data. Actually naming the activities and parts of the process was extremely important and using gerunds and gerund-like words to make sense of the data became a favourite intellectual exercise. I would find myself needing to record my ideas at different times of the day and night as they occurred to me, and made it a habit to carry a dictaphone with me whenever I was driving so that I could easily capture them for the record. As this area of the process developed into the thesis, further analysis progressively refined the ideas.
CHAPTER 5

BASIC SOCIAL PROCESS:
REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL
MANAGING THE CHOICE
Phase Two: Managing the Choice

Phase Two of the basic social process concerns the family’s management of the choice they have taken to enrol a student in a particular school and their ongoing evaluation of the efficacy of the original decision. When a family makes a decision to place their child in a particular school, their quest for the fulfilment of family potential has, in an important sense, just begun. Clearly, the decision to place a child in a school has not itself delivered the potential they are seeking to realise through the schooling of their child; it has only put the child onto a path which, in the light of what is known at the time, appears to offer the best prospects for fulfilment as the child’s ensuing educational experience unfolds. The ultimate efficacy of the original decision will reveal itself only over time and may well be threatened from time to time along the way if conditions or circumstances change or the experience turns out for some reason to be other than expected.

Throughout the interviews and the analysis of the data it was evident that participants were engaged in an ongoing process of reviewing the efficacy of their original enrolment choice, reflecting more or less continuously on the extent to which the experienced reality was continuing to align with the family’s current expectations. At any point in the process, this reflection leads them either to reaffirm the appropriateness of the present situation and leave things as they are,
seek to change conditions at the current school that seem to them to be threatening the child’s best interests, or explore options for changing to another school.

Evidence from the interviews indicates that the maintenance of the original choice of school, or a decision to move the child elsewhere, is sometimes quite complicated and can cause significant strain on the family’s resources. Moreover, not all participants in the study were equally concerned with or engaged consciously in the ongoing management of their original decision or its consequences. While some parents, for example, were extremely vigilant about the ongoing welfare and outcomes for their children, others appeared to be completely trusting in the professionals in whose care they had placed their children. The following discussion of managing the choice, Phase Two of the basic social process of realising family potential, exposes the variety of ways in which parents engage in continuing reflection on the suitability of their original decision and an assessment of how well the child’s current experiences are matching the family’s expectations. Figure 5.1 depicts that this second phase of realising family potential can lead either to a maintenance of the original decision or a decision to change to another school.

Figure 5.1. Phase Two within the basic social process
As seen in Figure 5.1, the theoretical construct of this phase, managing the choice, emerged as two specific stages and each has been dealt with separately in this chapter. The intervening conditions that affect the way in which each family manages the choices that they make in regard to secondary schooling requires Stage One and Stage Two to be dealt with separately. Describing the model in this way required the problems faced by families to be separated from the way in which the family managed to resolve those problems. While this necessitates some repetition of data, it allows the theoretical model to unfold with the best possible clarity.

**Stage One: Reviewing and Justifying the Choice**

Reviewing and justifying are joint activities in which the family engages during the initial stage of managing their choice. If the parents are not able to justify the continuation of their choice unchanged, their imperatives necessitate a change and they move to Stage Two where they resolve the issue and either change the enrolment or put strategies in place that can support the maintenance of the existing enrolment (Figure 5.2).

*Figure 5.2: Reviewing and justifying the choice*

The interview data confirmed that where a family deemed their choice to have been efficacious, they were content to continue without change on the grounds that it was continuing to satisfy their imperatives, their availability issues, or the special needs of their child.
Albert and Josie, for example, had enrolled their children in Catholic primary schools with the intention that they would continue, if at all possible, with Catholic schooling throughout their secondary years as well. Their family imperative was strongly related to their faith and they desired that it be nurtured in their children. They had been impressed with the culture of their children’s Catholic schools and felt that there were currently no obstacles that challenged them in the maintenance their original choices.

*I think it’s probably a lot to do with the environment that the Catholic School embraces ... there was never any situation where I could see ... they had a friend or a friendship with someone who was you know, not in the same character, same expectation that we had of [our] children (Albert, p. 14).*

Albert and Josie felt that their strong religious imperative was being well supported and they found that the resultant development of values in their children was very satisfying. Albert related an incident, for instance, where one of his sons asked whether another student who was living in a foster home could come to celebrate Easter with their family. The foster family were going overseas for the holidays and she would be alone. Albert commented: “So … when things like that happen, you sort of see the benefits of [the College support] (Albert, p. 13). As with many families, Josie had to return to the work force to ensure the family had sufficient resources to cover payment of school fees, as they were confident that keeping the children in Catholic schools was well worth the cost.

Rebecca and Terry, similarly, were strongly engaged in their Catholic faith and this dominated their educational choices. Because their faith imperative looked for satisfaction beyond the years of schooling, they reviewed and justified their choices largely in faith terms even though they clearly had some concerns about academic outcomes.

*...which is probably why we’ve made decisions not to run the schools, why we’ve stuck with Catholic education in spite of the fact that in some cases we would’ve thought that their academic work wasn’t satisfactory. That within that environment there’s going to be more given than would be given elsewhere even if the academics were greater. Make sense? (Rebecca, p. 11).*
Rosa and Greg had chosen a private boys’ college for their son. Even though they were confident of the choice that they had made, they evidently kept it under continuing review.

*Fortunately he has thrived in the environment and we have carefully monitored his progress along the way. If we were not happy we would have made a change. Making this decision was a stressful time but once it was made we were prepared to support the decision as long as our son benefited. He is currently in Year 12, a school prefect, house captain and a grade A student!* (Rosa, p. 2).

Barbara eventually withdrew her children from the Catholic primary school in which they had been first enrolled, because of her growing concerns about their lack of progress in numeracy. At the time of interview, her eldest daughter was in Year 8 at the local government high school and Barbara was keen to establish the efficacy of her choice. Although Barbara and her children were Catholic, she was influenced by her own personal history in her country of origin where Catholic education was not available and felt comfortable that her daughter was having an experience similar to her own high school life. Her daughter’s new school had a very high reputation for excellence.

*Yes, *[she’s]* really, really happy there. I’m just so pleased with how she’s settled in. She has really grown up. .. It’s a pretty big school – there are 350 kids in her year. That’s about the size I graduated with... I think the care has been great. Every parent meeting that I’ve gone to, I’m just real impressed with how the principal tries to make things better by getting parent feedback. If it’s a good idea, she puts things into place right away. They have peer support groups. When [our eldest] first started, there were older kids that she met with every day. If she had questions, she could ask them* (Barbara, p. 14).

Diane invested considerable energy in choosing a Catholic girls’ secondary college for her eldest daughter. When she and her husband moved from another State their two daughters were in primary school and because they were unable to find a Catholic primary school with vacancies for both girls they enrolled their two girls in the local government primary school. When it came time for choosing secondary schooling, Diane was determined to enrol her girls in a Catholic school. Diane, who was evidently keen to emphasise the importance she attached to her decision, recounted it in terms of support for their faith as this was
their family imperative. She was also conscious of the support that she necessarily had to give continually to the school as they worked together to provide the education and formation that she so intensely desired for her girls. Her support contributed to the continued efficacy of their choice.

*I want the kids to be surrounded by their faith on a daily basis – not just on Sundays when we go to Mass, but by the people they speak with, the things that they do and the things that they say…..But like attracts like, and things you do – at [the college] socially, everything is Catholic based. You all have the common goal, you’re all wanting the same thing for your children and you’re all coming from the same faith. You celebrate Mass together. [Our eldest daughter’s] class celebrated a class Mass a couple of weeks ago. All we parents got out of bed really early and ... froze in the church, but it was nice, you know (Diane, p. 16).

Suzanne, a trained teacher, was determined to make sure that her children had the best education possible. Their original concerns had settled around the need for a “good school” that was close to where they were living. Proximity was a key issue, as she wanted to be involved on many levels in the children’s schooling. Financially, Suzanne had the opportunity to stay at home to care for the children’s needs and she felt strongly that this was an important ingredient of successful parenting. She and her husband had chosen a nearby Catholic boys’ college for the secondary schooling of their two boys and were clearly very pleased with the result.

*[Our eldest] is in the First Eleven. He’s done extremely well in his schooling. Both kids were lucky enough to be Head Boys in the junior school... Academically they’re doing very well. [Our eldest] was lucky enough to be Dux of the year. Again I take it that the school’s done well, but then he’s got a particular talent as well....I suppose if he went somewhere else, he might do just as well – who knows? But my sort of thinking is that because it’s a boys’ school, the school itself is excellent... these kids, as I said, have flourished. But again, I take a personal interest and keep a tab on things.... The fact that it’s a Catholic school – I like that too because they get religious education...I think they’ve seen the genuineness of it – that these people are genuinely looking after their spiritual and emotional needs (Suzanne, p. 10).
Michelle and David had chosen a Catholic secondary college for their son as their causal concern and their family imperative called for a situation where his fine motor skills deficiency could be met by the support unit provided within the school. They wanted him to be cared for and stimulated in those other areas where he was capable in order that he could achieve the potential he had.

*It would be good if he could learn a language but I don’t know that he could...I know another thing that’s been really lovely. We wanted him to do some music because he actually is quite musical. We started him on keyboard but he wasn’t able to, the fine motor skills were quite difficult with that and um, we looked at other kinds of instruments, so we went along and we talked over with the music department about what he could do and they tested him and they came back and said that his pitch and his musicality is excellent, he is really very, innately musical, and then they suggested that maybe he learn voice which is just wonderful...it gets away from the fine motor stuff and I was just so thrilled that that’s, that’s, a real breakthrough in one sense...He’s having private tuition, his voice has actually broken or in the process of breaking so he’s going to start learning voice stuff and he’s just really enjoying it enormously...and that opens up a whole new range of things. That’s just brilliant* (Michelle, p. 21-22).

Michelle and David were pleased that the special needs of their second son, the reason why they chose a Catholic secondary college for him, were being cared for in a significant way, and reaffirmed for them the efficacy of their choice.

The evidence discussed above indicates that when a family reviews their choice of school they typically do so in terms of the original concerns that had challenged them to make that choice (Figure 5.3). The particular selections included above reveal families who, in their review, were clearly sufficiently satisfied with the continuing efficacy of their choice that they have continued with their original enrolment. However, not all families were content to leave the original decision alone. Intervening conditions, for instance, can sometimes cause a family to move into a subsequent stage in the management of their choice, as is discussed in the next section.
Intervening Conditions in Stage One

If, and when, obstacles were presented, the family will usually engage initially in strategies aimed at resolving the issue and thus allowing them to remain with their current choice of enrolment. Where the issue was of a level that challenged the family equilibrium, the family typically had to review their family imperatives and possibly make choices about available resources and their capacity to overcome the problem. Depending on the outcome of this review, the family would then decide to either change or maintain their choice. In other instances, opportunities were offered or critical incidents occurred within the family that caused them to carefully review the child’s, or children’s, current enrolment. Such obstacles, opportunities or critical events occur as intervening conditions in the management of the choice (Figure 5.4). When one or more of the intervening conditions identified in Figure 5.3 are present, the family must move to the next stage, namely to resolve the issue. The intervening conditions that affect the family sufficiently to cause them to need such resolution are discussed separately below, and the resolution of their difficulties is presented in the Stage Two.
Intervening conditions: Obstacles presented.

Some families experienced obstacles that presented difficulties for the maintenance of their choice. Mary and Gerard, for instance, were raising a large family in the country. For each of their children they expended considerable time and energy in deciding which upper schooling situation would be optimum. Their sixth son was to go to a boys’ boarding school in the city where their fourth son had excelled in every way. Having a completely different personality, however, had made boarding school life extremely difficult for the sixth son. He suffered a great deal of bullying from the beginning of his enrolment in Year 11 and was ostracised by the other boys in his year group as the hero status of his older brother was still very evident in the upper school cohort. In the middle of the year, the tragic death of a Year 11 student eased the situation as the associated pastoral care initiatives produced a more cohesive and compassionate group of students.

*By the time those kids had attended the funeral and memorials, any thought of bullying one another wasn’t there. It sort of threw them together. It brought things into perspective for them a little bit. I really thought - not that you’d ever want that to happen - “Thank God that one little spin-off from the poor kid’s death was that these kids had started to behave in a civilised manner towards one another”* (Mary, p. 22).

Figure 5.4. Intervening conditions within Stage One in Phase Two
At the beginning of Year 12 he was once again in difficulties and by midway through the year he was clinically depressed and required medication.

*Year 12 kicked off and he just seemed to go straight into depression. Even though he wasn't dreading going back to Year 12, within a couple of weeks he was back into the same sort of depressed state as he was at the beginning of Year 11* (Mary, p. 1).

Such an obstacle caused the family to carefully reconsider their choice.

Beth and Tom were distressed by the necessity for all four of their children to leave the farm after Year 10 because of the lack of upper secondary schooling in their country location. With the price of wool and sheep at a very low level, the family was finding it difficult to provide for their children’s education, but they were driven by a faith imperative as well as strong family values. When their second child, a daughter, began at a Catholic girls’ boarding school they were distressed that she was unhappy, but the father was driven by his own values and his own family educational history and clearly wanted to keep her at the school if it was at all possible.

*See, one way, my sisters went to [that boarding school], see, and I wanted to send her there, but in the long run she probably would have been better going to [Year 11 in the next country town] because they had a cookery course in that year whereas [the boarding school] didn’t. And because she’s gonna do the chef bit she wouldn’t been probably better doing that but just because I’s Catholic, I wanted to send her to the Catholic school but in the long run prob’ly she woulda been better off going to [the next country town] for this cooking and all that sorta stuff there. She woulda done some practical ...I jist got it in my head, I wasn’t going to send her there you know because of the Catholic part of it. Maybe in hindsight prob’ly should have sent her somewhere else* (Beth & Tom, p. 10).

As their daughter’s unhappiness increased, Beth and Tom were forced to consider her needs above what they considered to be their family imperatives. It became an obstacle to the efficacy of their choice and therefore they needed to resolve the issue.
Anne and Michael and their six children were leading a very busy life with both Anne and Michael working in professional areas and the children all enrolled at Catholic schools. Their second child, a boy, had had problems in the classroom, through his dreamy personality, and this had caused substantial difficulties that Anne and Michael had to resolve. At the conclusion of their son’s schooling, they were aware that he had been unable to realise his potential because of his different learning style that presented problems for his teachers, and this awareness significantly eroded their confidence in the efficacy of their original decision.

I knew he was smart, I knew he was more intellectual and had more capacity to do things if he was given the opportunity. So he did. He finished Year 12 and he did two TEE subjects purely because doing senior English wouldn’t have been challenging enough. He went on to do drafting and now he’s over in London earning way more than the average person here. I’m thinking... I just wouldn’t accept it. He did have the capacity. He wasn’t easy to teach and he did look like he was constantly in dreamland, but with the right style, and if you persevered, he actually... he started to realise that he actually could do a lot of things. I didn’t want the same thing happening to [our youngest daughter] (Anne, p. 4).

Anne and Michael’s two youngest children were twins, a boy and a girl. In Year 6 they were challenged by one of the twin’s active behaviour that became an obstacle to her success in the normal classroom situation. She was an intelligent child but a highly kinaesthetic learner. With their older son’s experience in mind, their review of the efficacy of their choice for the twins brought a serious obstacle to the fore. Anne described the daughter (one of the twins) as very active.

She’s just more jumping-out-of-her-skin. She’d probably be branded as ADD or something. She has been accused by the teachers – “Have you been tested for ADD?” I’m saying, “That’s a bit sad.” We discussed it. I’d thought of home schooling a long time ago but it’s one of those things like, “How could I?” I was working (Anne, p. 4).

Intervening conditions: Critical family events.

Critical family events can act as intervening conditions impacting both the original choice made by the family (discussed earlier in Stage Two of Phase One), and the subsequent management of the choice, as is seen here in the first stage of
Phase Two. Such critical family events can obviously happen at any time and therefore can potentially influence both the original choice and its maintenance. Depending on which phase the family is in at the time of the event, the family will respond within that particular part of the process.

Geraldine and her family had moved to Australia primarily for the education of their children since, in their country of origin, there was discrimination towards particular ethnic groups, including theirs. As Catholics they particularly wanted Catholic schooling but their first enrolment offer came from another Christian school and circumstances at the time dictated that they take up the opportunity. Over the years, however, Geraldine constantly questioned whether her two children were getting sufficient support for their faith.

> It’s different. And then... and also ... when she went to [the Christian school] and gradually she lost that thing, [that Catholic way of praying] (Geraldine, p. 3).

When the younger child, their daughter, was in Year 9 they tried to enrol her in the nearby Catholic secondary college but there were no vacancies at the time. Then Geraldine’s husband died of cancer. It thus became increasingly important to her that her daughter would be in a Catholic environment for her final years of schooling where she would be supported in faith as she coped with the difficulties they were facing. At this time their son had already completed Year 12 and moved on to university and Geraldine had few concerns about his welfare.

Eileen had many challenges in her life as she had a disabled husband and four children and had to maintain employment to keep them all. She was very committed to keeping them within a Catholic structure. Her husband was supportive, although not actively so.

> The thing is, my husband has this disability. We bought a house very close to the school so the kids could get to the primary school, and I could physically get there and back again, and they could get back by themselves. So we set ourselves up and I really wanted them to have this religious education. I wanted them to have faith but of course that's entirely up to the person. I also wanted them to know about God and that God loves them no matter what. You know, in troubled times - it doesn’t matter if they turn away from their faith, they can come
back. There's always something to come back to - and there's life after death. There's something to work for too. Religion is really a structure of your life, it is the guidelines for how you live your life. I thought that was a good thing. When we looked at sending [our second child] to a Catholic school, I did look around and I found this school had a good reputation. I was very impressed with the principal and everything like that. It was a good school and there was a nice community. (Eileen, p. 2).

Eileen and her family continued to enjoy the benefits of living near to the Catholic school and being part of its parish community. They felt it was particularly important for their second child to be in the school as she had been born with a congenital difficulty and had already had substantial medical intervention. However, an accident at the school became a critical incident that intervened to challenge her initial confidence.

One day we got a phone call and they said that my daughter had been injured and I should come down to the school. When I got there -- I get really angry. She should have called an ambulance. Why they didn't call an ambulance, I don't know. So firstly, I don't believe the duty of care was followed through. She was sitting in the front office and she had a tea-towel on her mouth. So they didn't actually ignore it. She had braces on her teeth. If she hadn't had braces on her teeth, every one of the teeth in her mouth would have been on the ground. They were dislodged. Every tooth in her mouth was only in her mouth because of the dentures. When she opened her mouth and I could see this, I was nearly hysterical (Eileen, p. 3).

Eileen had serious concerns about every aspect of the accident. The specialist who was called cast doubt upon the school’s version of events, as it seemed unlikely that a push in a classroom could have resulted in such an extreme injury to the child’s mouth. Permanent damage had resulted. The wrong emergency number had been rung, no ambulance had been called, there was no teacher in the room at the time of the incident, the child was left alone with her injuries while the principal comforted the perpetrator. Over the next few weeks and months, no support was offered to the family by the school even though their daughter had to have emergency surgery. There was no adequate insurance cover and different groups within the parish and school would not communicate compassionately.
with Eileen. This critical incident put the suitability and efficacy of their school choice in serious doubt and presented them with an issue to resolve.

**Intervening conditions: Opportunities presented.**

George described how a new opportunity had led him to change the enrolment of his youngest child. Although the child’s older siblings had attended secondary school at a Christian College, she had been enrolled instead in their local government high school because it had advertised a dance program that would, George believed, suit her particular passion for dancing in ways that would not have been possible at the Christian school her older brother and sister had attended.

... the choice of high school was based upon the options being offered at the school. She’s more of a um ... showed signs of being more arty person and [the local] high school, in her case particularly dance, she’d been doing all types of dancing since she was young, um and the [local] high school was offering the dance, such arts program, and so, since [the Christian college where the older ones went] was only offering it as an interest subject where the people, the observations of parent nights where we strut all our stuff, showed that the standard of dance .... was well below what the youngest would’ve put up with (George, p. 13).

She was maintaining a B average academically as well as being heavily involved in the school’s dance program and in a private dance studio that was some distance away. However, it was difficult for her parents to transport her to and from the studio after hours and she was relying on public transport. “She ended up having to catch two buses and a train” (George, p. 22). Fortunately, because of her excellence in dancing and leadership, a Catholic College near to the dance studio offered her a scholarship that covered the school fees.

That was based on ah the fact that several of the students at a particular ballet school that she was going to were already students at [the Catholic College] and had mentioned her to the deputy principal who happened to visit the ballet school one night and sent us a letter saying, or gave her a letter to bring home saying we’d like you to come to [our college] and lead our dance program (George, p. 14).
George and his family were faced with the need to resolve the issues that such an opportunity raised.

Diane and Peter had moved to Western Australia from the Eastern States when their girls were in primary school. Unable to achieve their preference of enrolling them in Catholic primary schools, Diane worked hard to ensure they had the opportunity of Catholic secondary schooling. However, Peter worked interstate 50% of the time and the company concerned wanted the family to move to another state to cut the ongoing commuting costs.

\[\text{All of our family are in [another state] so I prefer to go back there. It was offered – my [husband’s] boss was desperate. He flew [across the country] to here and wined and dined us, trying to talk me into going to [the city of their head office]. The cost factor of [my husband] commuting between [cities] every three weeks was going to be an issue. I said, “No. If that be the case I may as well stay here. I like [this place]. The weather is a bit sultry sometimes, but it’s better than [where head office is]. I have friends here now, and the kids are in school. Why would I want to give that up to move...? For me and the kids, it would mean starting all over again. Not only that, once we were there, I would be loathe to leave until [our eldest] had finished high school. I’m not pulling her out of high school. That has a negative impact on them. No – once we move, that’s it until the kids are through school (Diane, p. 15).}\]

The opportunity offered to Peter, and the benefits being used to entice the family, had to be considered in the full context of the realisation of family potential and they had to resolve the issues raised by this opportunity.

**Stage Two: Resolving the Issues**

As depicted in Figure 5.5, families move towards resolving issues when they have been presented with obstacles, critical family events or opportunities that change the way in which they view the suitability or efficacy of the choice they have made. When the process of reviewing and justifying reveals no challenges that are sufficiently serious to encourage the parents to consider change, they typically implement support practices to counteract whatever difficulties had been presented and thereby resolve the issue with the need for a change of school.
In Michelle and David’s case, for instance, their eldest son had some homework related difficulties while in Year 9. He had received a scholarship in his area of excellence to attend a government high school outside their locality and Michelle and David were constantly reviewing his progress. Fortunately the school’s internal discipline systems proved sufficient to rectify their son’s problem and to bring him back into line with his studies.

...he went through a patch where he was telling them at school that all his homework was at home and he was telling us at home that he didn’t have any homework. So, we talked with the Year coordinator and with people and they had organised a system where for about a term probably, at the end of each period he had to actually get the teacher to sign each period and sign what homework he actually had ... so that he had to make contact with the teacher at the end of every lesson and have it signed. At the end of the day we had to sign it ...So it was very close supervision ... and that really pushed him back on track. His marks started to go up and that gave him you know that was quite helpful (Michelle, p. 3).

However, as in the cases described previously, some challenges require substantial efforts for the resolution of the issues (Figure 5.6). Through Stage
One where the reviewing and justifying process is engaged, the parents either choose to maintain the current enrolment through providing extra support systems, or move to Stage Two where they will be resolving the issues that have been presented. How the issues are resolved depends on the particular conditions that intervene during the resolution process.

*Figure 5.6. Resolving the issues*

**Intervening Conditions in Stage Two**

Data from the interviews indicate that four intervening conditions affect a family’s resolution of the issue confronting them at this stage: support available, cost (financial, social and opportunity costs), imperatives, and degree of challenge. Support can come from a variety of sources such as the family, school pastoral care system, extended family and resources within the wider community. A decision to change can have financial, social and opportunity consequences. Financially, change of enrolment can mean extra costs in administration fees, extended travel, new uniforms and books. Social cost may be evident when relationships are broken, new relationships are needed, and previous support networks are lost. It can also incur an opportunity cost where subject choices are not available in the new school and a different and unfamiliar school culture is encountered reducing the child’s capacity to work within a known system. Imperatives that have been refined by the family can be challenged and face further refinement, or else indicate that a change of enrolment must be made. The degree of the challenge, and the family’s resources available to face that challenge, will be very influential in the resolution of the issue. The family might
need to deal with more than one intervening condition as they resolve the issue, or issues, that they faced in the maintenance of their enrolment.

In the following section, the issues that needed to be resolved in the examples discussed in Stage One of Phase Two are dealt with in terms of the intervening condition that was most influential. As many of the families are influenced in this phase by more than one condition, their movement in the process is either facilitated or constrained by the particular conditions that occur within the context of the management of their choice of schooling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 103).

*Intervening conditions: Support available.*

Geraldine and her husband moved to Australia to ensure that their children received a good education, with the possibility of going to university and gaining a high level of professional employment. With their particular ethnic origins, they had been discriminated against in their birth country. Geraldine related how some families who immigrated for similar reasons have ended up regretting the move.
because of the breakdown of cultural norms of behaviour that it produces within
the family and the consequent diminution of traditional forms of support.

...some parents have regret that they’ve brought their
children out here...they become more outspoken...I think
it’s because of the influence of the media, television...
and I don’t know, while this influence is good, what is it
in fact, how big is the influence and how it affect them
you know.

They do find it a bit difficult because a lot of them the
husband are not here, they coming in and out because
they gotta go to work in [the other country] yes, so that
they can bring the bread in, as they say... the family split
and the mother find it very difficult... The fathers are...
some of the fathers are trying to fill their absence by
material things for the children...and the mother is
more... and this is very difficult for the mums. And
subsequently because the children more outspoken it’s
very hard for the mother (Geraldine, p. 9-10).

For these families, however, making changes even within localised choices,
would usually involve great social and opportunity cost and family distress. And
to return to their country of origin would negate their very strong imperative for
freedom of faith and education, as well as incur significant financial losses
through re-location and asset transfer.

Geraldine was faced with an issue of serious concern when her husband died of
cancer, as was described in the previous section in relation to critical family
events. She had for some time been anxious about her daughter’s faith
expression, as the Christian school that she had attended since primary school was
not able to provide the Catholic spiritual support that she desired for her daughter.
Her son had completed Year 12 and they were happy with his completion of
schooling but now could concentrate further on faith support. With her husband’s
death, she felt that her daughter needed the support of their Catholic faith
community and was eventually able to gain her a place at the Catholic secondary
college in Year 10. Geraldine had also been disappointed with the Christian
college at which both her children were enrolled, as it offered no compassion at
the time their father was dying.

I thought the principal was very cold, very odd. ...I did
say ...you know, just let probably the tutorial, they have a
tutor in each group, let the tutor watch out for them and see how it goes but they offered us nothing. Even [my son] was in Year 12 there was no back up for him, nothing.... I was disappointed (Geraldine, p. 10).

With no support forthcoming Geraldine felt it necessary to change schools to resolve such a difficult situation.

As described previously in Stage One of Phase Two, Mary and Gerard were deeply concerned about their son in Year 12 as he was suffering clinical depression due to being bullied and ostracised at the boarding school that he attended. The social and opportunity costs that would be incurred by moving to another school at this time was considered to be too great, as his TEE was at stake. Another alternative was to rest for the remainder of the year and return the next year to matriculate, but the loss of the value of the studies already undertaken plus the energy required to recommence was considered too high. However, Mary was able to engage sufficient resources to support him in a way in which he could succeed in his quest to finish his matriculation and survive. Change of school was not necessary, but withdrawal from the boarding facility and arranging for accommodation with a friend who lived near to the school, was critical.

Three weeks into third term, we pulled him out of boarding school. It was either that or come home and quit Year 12, if we wanted to save Year 12 at all. By that stage the doctor had finally won the day and put him on antidepressants. He was home for a couple of weeks until they kicked in and then he was on those. We arranged accommodation for him with a friend of [our older son’s] who lived [locally]- so he was riding his bike to school. He became a day scholar. Within a few weeks, he actually started to find some friends, thank God. It was touch and go for a while, whether he was going to sink or swim. He had the help of this young fellow, his brother’s friend, who was 27 or 28, a happy sort of guy who kind of gee’d him up a bit. Then I suppose the antidepressants helped a bit. He started to find some friends. It was the best thing of all when the friends started calling around for him on a Friday night and taking him out somewhere for a couple of hours. It wasn’t anything major, but the contact was just brilliant (Mary, p. 2).
At this point the bullying issues and depression were sufficiently resolved to be able to maintain the boy’s enrolment as a day student. A further crisis presented itself as the TEE exam period approached and it was once again necessary to change living circumstances so that support was available to keep him sufficiently buoyant to complete his exams to the best of his potential.

Then for the exams, in fourth term I went up there. We used to get hold of a unit for a few weeks that belonged to some farmer down south. They rented it to us for that limited space of time...he was very much on the edge. It was on a knife-edge, just balancing between trying to keep him focused on the work. Actually he took himself off the antidepressants in the study break in October. He decided that he couldn't study. Okay, they improved his frame of mind a bit but they fogged up his brain too much and he couldn't focus on the study. So he said, “I’m going to have to go off them because I can’t do TEE in this frame of mind. My brain just will not do it.” Again that was a bit of a knife-edge situation, going off them (Mary, p. 2).

Mary was able to continue living in the city to support her son through the exam period where he needed to focus all his resources despite his battle with depression.

It was [a big risk], but he did it and he thought he’d have a go. He said, “If I’m going to do TEE at all, it’s going to have to be without the drugs, because they don’t help with the study.” So he did, thank God, and got 90 or whatever - enough to get into [university] and be accepted into marine science (Mary, p. 2).

The support that Mary was able to offer was sufficient to resolve the problem and no change of school was necessary. The family’s strongest imperative in realising their potential was to match the style of education to the individual needs of the child in the interest of their own personal, life long learning. This included a strong set of religious values and a profound respect for the unique qualities of the individual. Admittedly, this did cause a great deal of difficulty for the children at times.

It does seem to make them incompatible with the system. They're likely to run into trouble. No. 2 son has said the same thing. A couple of years after he left school ... I
remember him saying to me one night, “You know, Mum, you and Dad didn’t do us a great favour as far as school was concerned, because you brought us up to be lateral thinkers, to be individuals, to not follow the mob and do what you’re told, but to think it through.”

I said, “But [son], they were meant to be useful tools for life.” He said, “Yeah, but they didn’t do us a lot of good in boarding school.” And in fact they ran them into a lot of trouble (Mary, p. 24).

While such a comment indicated that the family’s choices of schooling were heavily formed through their family imperatives, Mary was able to engage sufficient support from her own resources, with the support of the rest of the family, to ensure that her children were successful despite issues needing resolution.

Julie and John had numerous children at Catholic schools and, with most of them at a secondary College, there was a serious financial challenge.

We did at one stage consider [pulling them out and sending them to high schools] not because we weren’t happy with Catholic schools but there was a time when we were really struggling and were getting into a lot of debt and we had to kind of think about well, you know, a lot of this was happening because we were sending them to Catholic schools. Um, but we decided that we weren’t prepared to take the risk and send them to government schools (Julie, p. 3).

John and Julie’s imperative about Catholic schooling propelled them to find other solutions rather than “risk” government schools.

We were fine until they went to high school. Then we had a year with three of them at high school and we just you know, got into more and more debt. [The College] were fantastic and they let us accumulate the debt but the debt’s always there. That was a big deal and I went back to work which I didn’t want to do and that was quite traumatic so it was a big sacrifice to keep them there and we seriously thought about taking them out but we couldn’t do that so…and it’s all worked out in the end. We’ve caught up (laugh) sort of! (Julie, p. 18).

The support of the college in being able to negotiate appropriate forms of payment made the difference for John and Julie’s family to be able to continue in
their choice of school. Julie’s engagement in going back to work was also a support that they put in place to be able to continue with their particular choice.

Nicole and Graham had a blended family of four boys. The first and second sons were from Graham’s first marriage and had had a very stressful early life with consequent schooling difficulties. Since Graham worked away from home for considerable amounts of time, Nicole had been responsible for much of the secondary education for the two older boys and was aware that their schooling was not able to assist them to realise their full potential because of their background difficulties. She therefore involved herself heavily in the education of the third and fourth sons.

A primary school class teacher created a very difficult environment for the third son and, since she was sensitive to any difficulties, Nicole was determined to pull him out of that particular school. However, she advisedly sought other help first.

Graham was [overseas] and I’d have this child so upset. I was sending him off to school, and then he hit a child and I pulled him out... I took him to a kinesiologist (sic.) and to various places to get help for him and got him fixed. He was right. He was never going back to that school when I pulled him out. [However, because of the circumstances] he went back, and within a week when someone pointed out [his] Medic Alert bracelet, he had a teacher say in front of the class, “[He’s] got that because he’s psychologically sick and damaged.” I was furious (Nicole, p. 10).

Nicole tried speaking to the deputy principal of the primary school, she wrote to the Education Department, and even photocopied a newspaper editorial that she enclosed in a letter in order to reach some satisfactory result with the problematic relationship between her son and the primary teacher concerned. During these difficulties, a new principal was appointed for the primary school. Because the fourth son was very afraid of having bad experiences with the same teacher, Nicole asked for an interview with the new principal of the primary school to avoid any future problems.

I was going to pull the youngest out. He was terrified of going in and getting this teacher. Normally I don’t interfere with that but he was just so upset, he wasn’t going to school. We’d said, “All right, you don’t have to have

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him.” Since the new principal came in, I went for an interview. Instead of pulling him out like I was going to, he said, “Just give me a term.” Well, within the first week, he’d moved mountains. He just went at it all year. He did incredible things. He healed a lot of hurts and a lot of the damage that had been done (Nicole, p. 10).

With the support of the new primary school principal, Nicole and Graham were able to maintain their third and fourth son’s enrolment until they were ready for Year 8.

For their secondary schooling they chose a large boys’ private school. The third son flourished to the extent that Graham’s comment was, “Whatever it’s going to cost us, it’s all worth it” (Nicole, p. 14). Four years later the youngest of the four boys was also enrolled but was very nervous as he had a weight problem. Nicole became very involved with the school to help her younger sons and encouraged the fourth one to do the same so that this would ease his way into the school community. With Graham working away much of the time, a strong male influence was needed for the boys. With Nicole’s constant encouragement, the youngest boy, their fourth son, made positive changes.

He set a goal. He wanted to be in the swimming squad. He didn’t want to be in the swimming team as such – he knew he wasn’t fast enough – but he wanted to be in the squad. So he got that. He’s now doing quite a bit of community service. He put his name down. He’s been doing boat handling. On Saturday at the Head of the River, he’ll be one of the boat holders. He’s a Year 8. There are only eight or so allowed and most of them are Year 12s (Nicole, p. 15).

The support that Nicole had been able to provide her third and fourth sons by engaging herself in the school community and encouraging her sons to do the same had meant that possible difficulties could be avoided and their proactive stance could support the maintenance of their choice.

In Stage One of this phase it was shown that opportunities presented to the family could be an intervening factor when the school choice is being reviewed and justified. Diane and Peter had an opportunity presented to them when Peter’s employer made a very attractive offer to them to move to the Eastern States. The
enticements were offered as encouragement to move to the city where the company head office was, thus saving the cost of flying Peter across the country repeatedly. Since they had made a home in Western Australia and had successfully enrolled their eldest daughter in a Catholic girls’ school, Diane was very reluctant to change unless sufficient support was offered. An alternative was to return to their state of origin and for Peter to commute to head office from there. The distance from head office would not be as great and there would be family support.

I’d rather stay here - I’d love to - than go back. [However] it won’t be so bad [in our home state] because all the family is there and we all live just about within walking distance of one-another. It’s like living in this estate, how close we all are. They will be back with their own things. If one of the kids is sick and I need a hand my dad can come and help out. He is widowed now. My mum passed away a couple of years ago. My sister and brother are close - it’s all good (Diane, p. 5).

Because of the family support that was available, and with the company’s acceptance, Diane and Peter decided to return to their home state and re-enrol their daughters in the Catholic high school where they had originally been enrolled.

Intervening conditions: Cost.

Choosing different schools for different children in the same family was, in some instances, a direct reflection on the schooling experience of an older child, in that even though the older child was not moved, different choices were now made for subsequent children. Choosing a new school for the younger child meant substantial change for the whole family, this was usually not done with ease and often required a high level of engagement of family resources. Some families instead worked hard to stay with their original choice, as this seemed to them to be a better option overall than to make a change.

For families that had moved from overseas for what they saw as the educational advantage available to their children in Australia, the opportunity to change an initial enrolment was often very limited, given the sheer magnitude of the relocation and other costs that had already been borne. Maura and Pat, for
example, were the only members of their extended family who had migrated to Australia.

...we're the only part of our families that have ever moved away... So we want him to still have something in common with all his cousins and some sort of 'relatability'. We want him to know what they're talking about in terms of Catholic life and spiritual life and all that sort of thing. That's another important aspect (Maura & Pat, p. 9).

On arrival they knew very little of the Australian culture of choice in schooling but were strongly aware that they wanted their two sons to be imbued with their Catholic faith in their schooling as well as through the family experience.

When we arrived we didn't know anything. A friend of our said, “There's a Catholic school just up the road.” So we fronted up to this Catholic school. We didn't realise it was a private school and that all Catholic schools are private schools. We just fell into that; it wasn't a choice. Looking back, I don't think I would have changed it, because he made a lot of good friends there. He's kept his... he goes to church on Christmas (Maura & Pat, p. 7).

The school also provided a strong army cadets program, which the family found quite a paradox and distinctly in contrast to their cultural origins. However, to make changes would have meant engaging in a difficult process because they were already dealing with the major change of migration and so they maintained their enrolment, particularly since their son had established some valuable friendships. Nevertheless, certain negative aspects of their eldest son’s schooling had been of sufficient concern that they felt they needed to consider a different choice for their much younger second son.

[Our oldest boy] didn't have such a great experience... In fact, it was kind of one of the reasons why we didn't put [our youngest son] into that environment (Maura & Pat, p. 7).

They also decided that the Catholicity that was being presented by the older boy’s school was not to their liking.

... the school itself was very religious in the old-fashioned way, I thought. ... Taking them on retreats and, [our son] said, they put the fear of God in them all the time. He might just have been over-reacting anyway. How can I
describe it? There just wasn’t – there was no feeling of community… (Maura, p. 7).

Their minds were effectively made up by the time their younger son was ready to start school and they were determined to try something very different. Pat and Maura felt that having decided to change they could now really move towards their ideal and engage all their resources. Given that their older son had finished school and was pursuing his own tertiary studies, they decided to move interstate to access a Montessori school and take on the full responsibility of their younger son’s faith education themselves by engaging in the parish religious education program.

*It’s like Paradise. We’ve never, since the day he’s gone to the Montessori school – he’s been there right from kindy – had a day when we weren’t thankful that he can go there. A lot of the children start off [at Montessori] in kindy but they have a break somewhere about Year 7 or 8 and they want to go out and see what the real world is like because [Montessori’s] a bit of a cocoon. They go out and go to the state schools or private colleges or something. A lot of them come back – they don’t stay out there* (Maura, p. 20).

**Intervening conditions: Degree of challenge.**

As described previously in the section on critical family events, Eileen was faced with a very difficult situation to resolve when her second daughter was seriously injured in a classroom accident. The school community failed to support the family in their distress and behaved in a defensive manner.

*There were a lot of things, and this thing that there was no insurance, this thing that there were no accidents on the ground. I felt very isolated. There was no parent support, there was no information in the school that this had happened. I wanted to go to the school board and talk about it. [The Principal] drilled it into me and told me that I was not allowed to approach the school board…*  

*I started to tell one of the ladies that I was very close friends with about it, because I was distressed about it. She said to me, “Look, I don’t want to hear anything about it. We want our kids to go to a Catholic school, and I don’t want to hear anything other than… I don’t*
want to hear that it’s a bad place; I don’t want to hear anything.” I felt very shut out of the community. I just couldn’t believe it, we were totally isolated” (Eileen, p. 6).

While the perceived serious lack of support from the school was an intervening condition in relation to Eileen’s capacity to resolve the issue, the greatest impetus came from the sheer magnitude of the stress and disappointment she had experienced over the school’s response to the incident involving her daughter. The classroom incident where her daughter had been injured became too difficult to manage in every aspect. The lack of support experienced, the serious challenge to the family’s imperatives and the cost already involved in sending the children to a Catholic school were all serious considerations, but it was the level of distress caused by the size of this particular challenge that eventually convinced Eileen that she needed to change her children’s school enrolment to the local government school.

The teacher, in this interview [with the principal]. He just sat there and cried. My husband and I were just sitting there. [The teacher] never contacted us, he never did anything. From now, looking back, you can see that he wasn’t accountable. [The principal] said he was not accountable. This whole thing - then all in the logistics of my husband saying, "I want the kids out of that school." I knew that if we took the kids out of the school that would be it, that would be the end of a religious school, that would be it. I fought for them and I kept saying to him, "No, no, it’ll all sort out. They’ll do the right thing, it’ll all sort out." They never did the right thing - they never sorted it out. [The Principal] just wanted it to go away. She just wanted to sweep it under the carpet. She wasn't going to do anything and I wasn't strong enough to fight the whole school (Eileen, p. 7).

Eileen was under a great deal of pressure in being the sole provider for a family of four children and a disabled husband. However, the most difficult part of the issue for Eileen was her fear that it would happen again. While waiting for her children on another day she saw the same teacher concerned using exactly the same process of bringing the children into the classroom unsupervised that she felt had been the critical factor in her daughter’s injury.

I was upset with the school board. I dealt with [the Principal], and basically she told me that I couldn’t go
there, and I wasn’t strong enough to fight her. I was a mess. I had all this other stuff to deal with. When [the classroom teacher] did the same thing, the same pattern again, I went home and said to my husband, "Right, we’re taking the kids out of the school." I went and saw the social worker - they had a psychiatrist or social worker at the school for the students - someone to talk to. I made an appointment with her. I went to see her and asked her the best way of doing it. This happened halfway through the year. The kids attended school for another whole term while I was thinking it was going to be sorted out and it was all going to work out.

Eileen engaged the help of the social worker to see if the issues could be resolved as she evidently had an underlying hope that a positive resolution was possible.

The social worker said that the best thing would be to leave the children until the end of the year. I thought, "I can’t. I can’t guarantee that they’re going to be all right."

At that time I felt that - and I do believe any child in [that teacher’s] care is at risk - just basic safety. Forget about whether they’re learning anything in the classroom. Safety was at risk. I couldn’t stand it. I just kept thinking something else was going to happen.

So we did move the children at the third term. We took them out of the school. Before I took them out of the school, as soon as I mentioned it to my family that they were taken out of the school, I got hell for leather (Eileen, p. 7-8).

The degree of challenge was too great for Eileen to resolve at that particular time and, even though her extended family were distressed by her intention to move her children from the Catholic school, she proceeded with the change.

**Intervening conditions: Imperatives.**

As described in Stage One of Phase Two, Beth and Tom were faced with the distress of their daughter attending a city boarding school in which they had enrolled her with the view of maintaining their family imperative of Catholic education. Tom was highly engaged in the desire to have their daughter in the Catholic girl’s boarding school that his sisters had attended, but her unhappiness increased to such a level that his imperatives had to be reconsidered. In the final analysis they decided that their daughter’s happiness was the overriding consideration and that they had to look to other options. Fortunately, they were
able to optimise the situation by arranging for their daughter to move in with Tom’s sister in the city and attend TAFE to undertake a cooking course.

...she didn’t want to do her Year 12 she just wanted to go and do cooking. So that’s what she’s doin’ and she’s doin’ very well. Um, she’s had three tests this year, 91% and 98% of her tests, so um, yeah. And she’s really enjoying it, very happy, like, yeah. Always bored but happy [laugh] you know how they get. I think [her mum] was really glad to get rid of her. [laugh]
[She lives] with [my] sister ... They live together, just the two of those. My sister’s not married, but she’s one of them girls that’s gone all over the world. She can’t settle down see, by the time she got back the available boys are too old (Tom, p. 10-11).

As they were no longer able to justify their choice of the Catholic boarding school, and because their desire for their daughter’s happiness and success had now become the priority, they chose to resolve the issue by changing her place of living and helping her to pursue a new educational opportunity.

Anne and Michael were presented with an obstacle that also required resolution through the management of their choice of schooling. They had already faced academic problems with two of their children who had been perceived by their school as less academically able than Anne and Michael knew them to be, and when their fifth child began to have difficulties they found their imperative about child centred education being threatened by the current arrangements. They had enrolled all their children in Catholic schools as the development of their faith life was very important. However, as their children’s academic development was not being fulfilled to their satisfaction, they came to feel that they could take on the faith aspect themselves and, with that aspect no longer in the forefront, concentrate on resolving the academic issues separately. A change in Anne’s professional life was also a contributing factor as she then had the time available to make home schooling an option, at least for their critical middle-schooling years, for resolving the issues that concerned them.

I started home-schooling because about five or six years ago I had a major crisis at work... ... When I left work, I'd been doing it for 25 years in-between having babies.
They spent six months deciding whether taking them out of school for their two or three middle school years would be an advantage or disadvantage, as they also had to consider whether they would be able to enrol them in the Catholic high school of their choice for Year 9 onwards when home school would no longer be viable.

They were in Year 6. They'd started Year 6. I said, "Why don't we look into it?" We took six months to look into it. We took quite a few mental health days off school to go and suss things out, because if we did it - I said that if you come out, more than likely, you won't be able to get back into that school. So if you're going to do it, we're probably going to have to look at doing it until you finish primary school, because someone else will probably come in and take your place. You wouldn't want to go just to the school down the road; you wouldn't want to go to another school, so we'd really need to look at it. And you'd need to really be wanting to do it and we'd need to be really sure that that's what we wanted to do. It took us six months to decide that.

In their “mental health days off” Anne and the twins were able to work through the issues that would challenge them in the choice for home schooling.

... you can become compatible. You just have to understand each other. We did that and they decided that yes, [home schooling] would be a good idea and they wanted to do it. They were both quite keen. So then we did. They liked it. When it got to Year 8, we had them booked into [the Catholic high school]. We were saying, "Okay, so what do you want to do? I'd be prepared to continue if you wanted to, but it's up to you." [One of the twins] very strongly wanted to continue and [the other one] was not so sure. [She], thinking that all high schools had to be like the television - but what about a locker? Watching too much Sabrina. In the end, after lots of - and probably leaving it a bit late for the school, I went and said that no, they weren't going to be starting and that they'd decided they wanted to be home-schooled for another year and could we book them in for Year 9. He said, "Well, you know, chances are they could get in, but maybe they can't." I said, "We'll take our chances." So we continued [with home schooling]. Just finishing primary school, they both realised - [She] had completely decided she was no good at maths but she

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realises she can do maths. They can do anything. They know that they can do anything if they want to, if they can apply themselves and if it's interesting enough (Anne, p. 4).

The family’s educational imperatives were thus refined to the point that the children’s achievement of academic potential became a more important determiner of the choice of mode of schooling given that other options were available for accommodating the faith development imperative.

George’s daughter, Grace, had an opportunity presented that became an intervening factor when the school choice was being reviewed and justified. She had been invited to move from her local government high school and take up a scholarship at a Catholic secondary school in order to lead the school’s dance program. George was determined that it should not disadvantage her as the family’s foremost imperative was to get a good education that would lead to lifelong learning.

*I was a bit ambivalent about it. But, as long as, I was very clear with my daughter, in fact I’d made her do an absolute promise, that if she didn’t maintain her B average she was out of there and back at a school where she was going to maintain a B average. That wasn’t a threat, it was a promise. [laugh]*

*I wasn’t uncomfortable with it. Um, the [college] had had a long reputation at being good at, across the board a wide range of things and they’d established scholarships in various areas, now the only two areas that I’m aware of but I believe there are far more, were in different sports as well as the arts. So they actually offered full fee scholarships to people who could enhance the school in those areas.*

*Well, of course she did maintain her B average, I mean this was quite surprising when kids are in the middle of a vigorous rehearsal thing and they just plonk themselves down and grab a history book out of the bag and start studying, you know, and that was the way they did their study. There was a whole environment of excellence. Ah, both in the dance which translated itself to the study. Like there was a peer group there that was operating ... (George, p. 14).*
With the maintenance of their imperative for life long learning being unthreatened, the opportunity was accepted and the situation was resolved with a change of enrolment.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the second phase of the process through which a family moves in order to achieve family potential. As has been shown, once they have completed the first phase where the initial choice has been made, they then move to the second phase, during which the family engages in the ongoing management of their choice of secondary schooling. Data gathered in the study and presented here has grounded this theoretical model, indicating that all of the families involved in the study moved in various ways through two stages in the implementation of their choice of schooling: *making the choice* and *managing the choice*.

**PERSONAL NOTES**

The existence of the density and detail of this second phase of the process only became obvious when the thesis was being written. Many memos were written throughout the time of data collection and coding, and then further memos as discussions refined the concepts and categories. These were then extremely valuable during the writing phase as they tracked the development of thought and retained important ideas in a manageable way so that retrieval and inclusion in the thesis were possible. Early in the course of this research I gave considerable thought to the organisation of my data, memos, coded materials, transcripts, reference material and all the other necessary paraphernalia. Even the development of the information technology during the time has been extraordinary. Instead of storing precious material on a series of floppy disks to store at different locations for security purposes, it is now emailed to myself between home and the university, and also transported via one flash memory stick to be stored on my university computer and network space.
CHAPTER 6

THE GROUNDED THEORY:
REALISING FAMILY POTENTIAL
THROUGH CHOICE OF SCHOOLING
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THROUGH CHOICE OF SCHOOLING

Introduction

The previous three chapters have described in detail, with supporting data, the phenomenon under study and the way in which the participants have resolved their concerns pertaining to that phenomenon, namely, the decisions parents make when choosing forms of schooling for their children. The present chapter, integrating the findings of those three chapters, brings together the whole of the substantive grounded theory, this time without the data, in order to convey its essentials in a parsimonious manner. The theory presents a highly conceptualised grounded model that gives a comprehensive understanding of what a family does when challenged to make choices about their children’s schooling. The social process that is presented does not end with a result, but rather uncovers the meanings inherent in the activities in which parents engage when making decisions about school choice.

The chapter concludes with a single diagram that presents the entire theory.

Research Overview

The present study focussed on developing a substantive theory through the grounded theory method that would explain and give meaning to the process through which the family moves when faced with the issue of school choice. Rich descriptions of the family context and motivations that affected decisions...
about their children’s schooling elucidated the basic social concern of being challenged to choose.

The core process that emerged during this present study involved realising family potential as each family endeavoured to use school choice decisions to make the best possible use of their potential. The family moved through two phases in the process, making the choice and managing the choice. A level of stability is achieved when the family has made a choice that is believed to be optimal under the present circumstances. The family maintains this choice unless it is challenged by something that appears to threaten the family’s realisation of their potential.

Many families, especially those who are highly engaged in choice issues, remain vigilant as they constantly review the choices that they have made. It became evident through the development of this theory that making a choice does not necessarily guarantee the desired outcome. While a family’s goals may remain relatively fixed in regard to the realisation of their family potential, changes in the context may well demand a subsequent review of the appropriateness of the original choice to the extent that the process needs to be re-engaged.

Changes are continually being made about school choice, as there are many intervening conditions that influence the process. They are the “broad and general conditions bearing upon action/interactional strategies” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 103) that make a difference to the movement of families through the process of managing the choice and maintaining the choice. Some of these conditions were imposed by outside influences while some were directly related to the experience of being in the school chosen.

**Foundation of the Study**

The prime focus of this study was to uncover and explore the meanings surrounding the choices that families make in regard to government or non-government secondary schooling in Western Australia. Such family choices are situated in a particular context that has historical, political, and sociological and,
in some cases, theological influences. This context was described in Chapter 1 in some detail and sets the scene for the elaboration of the theory. The central concern of parents was identified and then the theory was developed that explained and interpreted the decision making process through which the interviewed Western Australian families moved as they sought to satisfy their concerns and goals in relation to secondary schooling choices. It also incorporates the various intervening conditions that caused variations within the process for different families and, in some cases, for different children within a family.

**Concern Shared by Families**

This present study discovered three particular conditions that caused families to move into *being challenged to choose*. As described in Chapter 1, these conditions exist within a context where government policy both locally and in the international arena is increasing school choices. School choice is not just increasing within the non-government sector where government has made increased funding available, but is available within the government sector as well. Choice and market competition seem to be well established within the education sector (Ladd, 2003). The “most compelling justification for giving parents more choice over the schools their children attend is to force schools to compete for students and thereby to improve the quality of education they offer” (Ladd, p. 5). This closely links the concepts of parental choice, self-governing school and competition and is based on market models.

Figure 6.1 portrays diagrammatically the various categories and properties of the parents’ shared concern of *being challenged to choose*. The three main categories within the causal concern are the *specific needs of the child*, *availability of schooling* and *family imperatives*. There was extensive variation in the specific needs of the child as each individual brings their own set of needs and differences. The range of such needs is described through the data in Chapter 3.
Family Imperatives

While a number of reports list religion as being an important aspect of choice (Anderson, 1990, 1993; Flynn, 1993a, 1993b, 2000; Sensis, 2004), the present study found that while it was certainly one of the imperatives that drove the family to choose non-government schooling, it was not the sole focus of the imperatives. There are other aspects that are of importance to the family’s identity and they are divided into religious based and non-religious based imperatives. The religious based values focus on a culture of faith, religious commitment and support of family values. Where families desired a culture of faith in the school they looked for a variety of aspects of school life experience. They would seek external signs within the school such as religious artefacts and the presence of a priest, but they would also look for specific religious behaviours within the school. For some families their own religious commitment meant that they were so immersed in religious connectedness that it would be very hard for them to seek schooling for their children outside of the religious context. Family values such as social justice, equality and respect were important and the enunciation of these values made it possible for participants to engage in dialectic that assisted them to make meaning from their experience of choice.
Non-religious based imperatives included developing independence, education for life long learning, and proximity to good schooling. Parents specifically looked for school choices that would continue their parenting focus of developing independence. This could be either independence in terms of living skills or independence as a prime value that encouraged critical thinking about the world that we live in.

Where parents had a focus on life long learning, they sought school choices that promoted such learning and not simply a place where each numbered student has to proceed. To engage in ideas of life long learning, the parents typically had a wider view of their children’s capacity that they could not see being sufficiently nurtured and fulfilled by the government schooling that was available to them. It also linked to their sense of self and the continuing desire for learning that focussed on their own particular giftedness.

Proximity to good schooling was an important consideration for many families. It was not only attached to a geographical location and the aspects such as safety, economy and travel that are important in school choice, but it also included aspects of their family history and experience of their own schooling. For those for whom it was possible, moving house to actually be close to their idea of a good school was a preferred reality. This has been reflected in the data.

Availability of Schooling
Data analysis indicated that the property, availability of schooling, had two distinguishable dimensions: country issues and city issues. The former had major ramifications for the families involved, as resolution of the challenges presented by living remote from the capital, or large country town, typically required the children to be educated away from their home. Many country families found it difficult to access their most preferred schooling options, particularly if their financial circumstances presented severe limitations, a common experience in the prevailing rural decline. In some instances, costs needed to be built into the family budget many years before school choices had to be made.
Availability issues also presented challenges for some city families, particularly where there had been school consolidation and relocations within the government school sector as a consequence of changing demography and enrolment demands.

**Specific Needs of the Child**

Learning difficulties encompass a wide range of experiences for families. It had been suggested by Anderson (1993, p. 198) that, despite the general drift of enrolments to the non-government school sector, many children with learning difficulties would not enjoy the same access to choice and remain by default in the government system as “children with handicaps and children of the poor.” However, the present study has shown that this need not be the case. In reality, it is often the schools in the non-government sector that have excellence in care and support for those with learning difficulties, as a commitment to children disadvantaged by circumstance is frequently an explicit part of the school’s social mission. And for the Catholic schools in particular, the recent introduction of direct financial support for low income families through the Catholic school system’s Health Care Card access policy, has ensured that school choice in the lower socio-economic areas is a now a reality for many low-income families.

Participants in this study carefully considered the emotional needs of their children and evidenced an awareness of the vulnerabilities they felt could result in damage were the child to be limited only to the available government schools. Whether there is in fact less emotional care for at-risk students within the government school sector was not ascertained in the present study as that was beyond the scope of the investigation, but it is clear that many parents of children with learning or emotional difficulties had concerns about the children’s prospects within the mainstream government school sector.

For some children, their sporting prowess opened access opportunities at private schools where they would otherwise not have been eligible for entry. Parents showed concern where a child had a particularly high level of sporting skill that they wanted to nurture for them and were thus drawn to choose a school that
would nurture the talent in a particular way. With sporting heroes enjoying high regard within the Australian community, an opportunity to maximise fulfilment of a child’s sporting potential can offer social mobility as well a significant financial rewards.

Parents of children with particular giftedness in areas such as music, art, dance, drama or languages were typically keen to have these talents developed to a level of excellence. Although scholarships are available within the government school sector to allow talented children, regardless of where they live, to enter designated schools that specialise in one or more areas of giftedness, parents unable to take advantage of them were often challenged to choose from the non-government sector.

Awareness of a child’s special academic abilities or interests also challenged some parents to consider options outside the government school sector. Where there was a perception that the local government school did not have the resources or reputation for academic excellence, parents were often challenged to choose from the non-government school sector, sometimes on those grounds alone.

Any of the above considerations was often sufficient to create for the families concerned a situation of being challenged to choose. Having faced that reality, families typically then set about consciously and deliberately to arrive at a choice of school that would be consistent with the family’s imperatives and aspirations and, hopefully, deliver satisfaction in the short and longer term.

Discovering and documenting the basic social process in which the families engaged as they endeavoured to achieve this became the focal objective and core category of the present study. At its heart was the inherent drive that most families experienced towards realising as fully as possible their family’s potential. It was this drive towards realising family potential that constituted the basic social process and core category of the study’s discovered grounded theory.
Realising Family Potential

The basic social process and core category of realising family potential through decisions regarding school choice was found to consist of two sequentially related phases: making the choice and managing the choice. Each of these phases included within it a number of stages for the family to move through as they prepare for and eventually progress to making and sustaining their choice. As has been described in detail in Chapter 4, the basic social process of realising family potential is first engaged when the family finds that it is being challenged to choose something other than what is immediately accessible within the available local government school. While this may result in the parents choosing a school outside the government sector altogether, it might alternatively result in finding a way for the child to enter a different school in the government sector. Regardless of the eventual destination, the common feature is the driving desire by the parents to ensure that their child is able to access a school environment that best matches the family’s imperatives and the parents’ aspirations for the child and family.

Figure 6.2 depicts the basic social process of realising family potential in terms of its two component phases of making and managing the choice of school, and the particular named stages within each phase.

Figure 6.2. Core category of realising family potential
As can be seen, the basic social process modelled by the theory moves first though an initial phase that leads through three linked stages to the point at which the choice is made, and then through a subsequent two-stage phase of managing the choice, the result of which may be either to maintain the original choice if any attendant issues can be resolved, or to change the choice where the issues cannot be resolved satisfactorily within the current school. As the diagram suggests, if the decision resulting from Phase Two is to change the child’s enrolment, the parents are effectively re-entering the process afresh with a second pass through Phase One of the model. The essential features of two phases of the process are discussed separately in the following sections, drawing from the discussion of their development that was presented in detail in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

Phase One: Making the Choice

As was explained in Chapter 4, the first stage within Phase One has been identified from the interview data as a sub-process of refining family imperatives, a process that involves rumbling and refining. Figure 6.3 depicts this process with the intervening conditions that affect the movement of the family through this stage of refining family imperatives. While the rumbling and refining is in progress, the child’s needs, attitudes of others around them, the needs and influence of their wider family, and their own personal history can affect the way in which the family’s imperatives are refined.

Figure 6.3. Stage One – Refining family imperatives, with intervening conditions
Once the family’s imperatives have been suitably clarified and ordered in this way, the parents move to frame their viable options by identifying from among the available schools those that appear to be consistent with their imperatives and aspirations and worthy of further detailed consideration and evaluation. As depicted in Figure 6.4, this second stage of Phase One requires that the parents consider a variety of influences during sourcing information that will help them to define and delimit the viable options. While sourcing the information, critical family events, external factors, the family’s geographical location, the accessibility of schools, as well as their own resources will all be influential in how they move towards their options being framed.

**Figure 6.4  Stage Two – Framing their options, with intervening conditions**

If the frame generated from the sourcing and evaluating activities in Stage Two includes more than one school, the family typically then engage in a balancing action where the relative merits of the framed options are compared and weighed against the outcomes the parents are seeking. As shown in Chapter 4, factors that can intervene to shape and direct this part of the basic social process include the time available to reach a decision, external considerations that affect whether a decision is required sooner rather than later, attitudes and opinions expressed by influential others, and particular family needs at the time. Once the most appropriate match has been found between what the parents want and what a particular option appears to offer, a choice of preferred school can be
confirmed, an outcome that represents successful conclusion of Phase One of realising family potential and is represented in Figure 6.5.

**Figure 6.5. Stage Three – Making a match, with intervening conditions**

Had there been just one school remaining within the frame of viable options at the end of Stage Two of Phase One, the balancing action that would otherwise be a feature of Stage Three would not be required and making the choice would be essentially an automatic outcome, in which case Phase One would conclude at that point.

**Phase Two: Managing the Choice**

The need for conceptualising a second phase within the basic social process of realising family potential was an unexpected development in the study as none of the initial research objectives had envisaged anything other than discovering what was involved in reaching the point at which a decision is first made for the choice of school for the child. It soon became obvious, however, that it was not possible to leave the explication of the process only at the point of first making a choice. Parents, and the children concerned, typically continue over time to review and justify in an ongoing way the choice they have made and changes are usually made if it becomes evident for some reason that maintaining the current enrolment can no longer be justified in light of the family’s imperatives and aspirations. Many intervening conditions can impinge upon the original choice and necessitate or precipitate a review. As can be seen in Figure 6.6, new opportunities, obstacles and critical family events can intervene in various
forms to require a reconsideration of the extent to which the existing arrangements are now continuing to fulfil expectations for the family or the child.

*Figure 6.6. Intervening conditions within Stage One in Phase Two*

If, in the family’s assessment, the initial choice has been and remains efficacious, the child’s enrolment in the school can be maintained as it is seen to be continuing to satisfy what the family wants, their availability issues and the needs of the child. But where the original choice is considered no longer to be efficacious, the family will typically look for ways to rectify the situation. If the perceived shortcomings cannot be rectified by achieving some meaningful adjustment within the current school, or by engaging new resources that can compensate for what is missing, the decision may be taken to remove the child from the school in order to provide a better match elsewhere. In most cases this will involve enrolling the child in another school, but in some cases, may include a decision to educate the child at home.

As was noted earlier, if the situation develops to the point that the parents choose to remove the child, they are in effect beginning afresh the process of choosing a suitable school. To that extent, it can be seen that the family are at this point re-engaging the first process, namely, *making a choice*. In this sense,
the basic social process is potentially cyclic. However, the more important point is that the data shows that the process, especially within the phase of managing the choice, is a living and dynamic process, reflecting the evolving perceptions and personal logic underlying the ongoing decision making of parents as they seek continuously to optimise the realisation of their family potential. The essential elements of the overall theory are depicted together in Figure 6.7.

*Figure 6.7 Grounded Theory of Realising Family Potential*
As was explained in detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the complete theory developed from the data includes both the discovered social process that is directed towards the realisation of family potential, and the underlying causal concern of being challenged to choose that provides the stimulus and necessity for engaging in the quest for realising family potential in the first place. These two, taken together, fulfil the essential requirements for the kind of grounded theory that the study sought to discover from the testimonies of the participants who shared their recollections of how they experienced the process of making decisions about the choice of schooling for their children where the choice included opportunities to move outside the mainstream government school availability.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the grounded theory discovered from data and includes a basic social problem, being challenged to choose, and a core category, realising family potential, that is the basic social process in which families engage to make choices about schooling for their children. Despite a considerable search of available literature, no other substantive grounded theory dealing with the phenomenon of school choice was found. To this extent, the present study has made an original contribution.

**PERSONAL NOTES**

Where the theory had been presented with examples from the full set of data it was too extensive to allow the whole theory to be seen in parsimonious clarity. The presentation of the theory in its entirety attempts to bring the whole theory together. This chapter was not in the original plan but is valuable in its presentation of the complete theory. I had originally attempted to place the theory from the present study within a much larger framework but it went well beyond what was possible here and offers an opportunity for further work.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. (Aristotle)

Introduction

The present study has discovered, described, explored and analysed the phenomenon of school choice in Western Australia using the grounded theory method. Using the specialised analytic methods of grounded theory development the researcher was able to identify among the subjective experiences contained in the told stories of all of the parents who participated in the study, the existence of a common intent or strategic preoccupation that gave purpose, direction and meaning to what they were seeking to achieve through their deliberations and decisions about the schooling of their children.

This common orientation, which has been named realising family potential in order to convey the subjective purpose that was found to run through all of the parents’ accounts, was identified as the basic social process of the resulting grounded theory. It represents the underlying essence of what all of the studied participants were doing, in a strategic or actualising sense, when seeking to choose one school from the options they saw as being available to them. In all of the cases examined, this common social process or quest was triggered by an event, or an experience, or a perception, that produced a level of concern that in turn led to the parents being challenged to choose in order to find resolution of
their concerns. This shared experience of being challenged to choose became what has been named as the basic social concern in the grounded theory.

For all of the studied parents, the common process of realising family potential was found to consist of two distinct phases – first, making the choice, and then managing the choice once it has been made. Furthermore, it was found that the ways that individual families moved through this common process was governed by intervening conditions, specific to the family and its particular circumstances, that shaped and influenced what the parents considered would enhance outcomes for the child and for the family as a whole.

Analysis of the data made it clear also that the reality for all parents is that the process of realising family potential is an ongoing and dynamic process that extends through the whole of the child’s schooling years, and is not something that is ‘over and done with’ once the initial decision is taken. In each case, though to varying degrees of engagement, the parents clearly understood that their underlying goal of achieving the best for their child and the family required ongoing vigilance and review in order to ensure that at any point the child’s and the family’s best interests are kept in the foreground of their thinking and decision-making. Whether to maintain the child in the school originally chosen, or to look to other options that seem to offer better prospects under the circumstances, was a feature in all of the stories shared by the participants.

It was also clear from the stories related by the participants that families typically do not see school choice as an isolated issue, but rather as a highly important part of the way in which the family is nurtured so that the potential of the family itself is enhanced. For most parents, the goals and decision making related to school choice are not seen as a matter simply of securing the best possible educational or social outcomes for the child but are addressed within the context of a much broader range of considerations that bear upon the well-being and future for the family as a whole, including its economic prospects, social and spiritual aspirations, and its ongoing cohesion as a family. It is in this sense that a family’s decision-making about schooling involves much more than simply deciding on which school appears best suited to the child’s
educational needs. It requires careful consideration also of the impact that any particular choice of school will have on a broad range of other aspects of the child’s and the family’s continuing development and well-being. Realising a child’s educational potential is thus seen by most families within, and as an integral part of, a more holistic concern for realising family potential in the broader sense.

**Relationship with Other Theories about Decision Making**

Although there does not appear in the literature of school choice to be any similarly comparably comprehensive theory of what parents are doing, in a strategic sense, when making decisions about the schooling of their children, there are many alternatives theories about decision-making in general that might usefully be compared with the theory presented from the present study. Of particular interest would be the extent to which they overlap or complement the explanatory contributions that have emerged from the present study’s inductively-grounded approach to theory development. Or, to put it differently, would there be particular interpretations or insights revealed by the present study’s in-depth qualitative approach that would have been unlikely to have emerged had the process followed the methodologies that have been used in other studies of decision-making? Such a discussion is valuable at this point in the thesis as the theory has now been presented clearly and it is appropriate to note any congruence between the grounded theory of *realising family potential* and other decision-making theories that could be relevant in the substantive area.

The following discussion looks briefly at four different model types that have achieved some prominence within the general literature on decision-making, each of which offers a specific approach to the way in which people behave when engaged in making decisions.

**Ethnographic Decision Models**

Ryan and Russell (2000) provide a description of Ethnographic Decision Models (EDMs). These models are “qualitative, causal analyses that predict
behavioural choices under specific circumstances” (Ryan & Russell, p. 787). EDMs represent an aggregate decision process and do not necessarily represent what is going on inside people’s heads (Ryan & Russell, p. 789). The grounded theory produced by the present study does not represent such an aggregate decision process. The core category of realising family potential shows the family trying to resolve their concerns about their choice of education in the wider perspective of their desire for realising their family potential. The present theory reveals what is going on inside people’s heads and what goal-directed meaning they attach to their actions; it does not predict what a family will do when making educational choices.

**Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theory has been used throughout social science (Miller, 2004; Quackenbush, 2004) and much criticism of its value has been in terms of the “rationality of rational choice theory” (Quackenbush, p. 88). Science seeks to explain the world in which we live by formulating theories that can be tested and then be useful in simplifying the complexities that they seek to explain (Quackenbush, p. 89). An assumption (or axiom) is made and then tested. Rational choice theory is a “descriptive phrase used to describe any of a number of individual theories that use the rationality assumption” and it “assumes that the outcomes are the result of choices made by actors” (Quackenbush, p. 92). Within the development of the grounded theory in the present study, there seemed to be many occasions where factors influencing the decision did not seem rational, but which, on closer examination, showed a level of underlying rationality. For example, when one mother sought to enrol her daughter in the Catholic high school that she herself had attended as a child, the smell of the corridor brought back unpleasant memories and so she discontinued her enrolment endeavours (Sally, p. 4). This seems to be an irrational statement but Quackenbush (2004) claims that since the person concerned is acting according to her own preferences then she is acting rationally (Quackenbush, p. 93). Since grounded theory is not formed from assumptions and then tested, there is little congruence to be noted except that it could be used as a way of testing the final theory that has been developed and presented in this study.
Bosetti (2004 p. 388), considering policies made by school governing bodies, states that most school choice planning assumes that the choices made by parent follow a rational choice model. However, she maintains that recent research … indicates that the context of parental decision-making is far more complex than the result of individual rational calculations of the economic return of their investment in particular education options (Hatcher, 1998). Parental choice is part of a social process influenced by salient properties of social class and networks of social relationships.

This is congruent with the present study, as this grounded theory has produced a model that shows all of the influences and meanings that parents attach to their decision-making in relation to school choice and the complexity of the social relationships that are involved.

**Framing Effects**

An interesting congruence of information exists between this grounded theory and research on framing effects. Chaves and Montgomery (1996) talked about framing effects in human decision-making in regard to religious choice. They found that standard rational choice theory “assumes that an individual’s preferences are not affected by the framing of a choice problem” (Chaves & Montgomery, p. 129) but they discovered that decision frames do affect preferences in religious choices and the present study also discovered that framing of options was a definite stage in the decision-making process. It was important in that the decision would be very different if the bases of the framing of their options were different. Both framing effects, as discussed by Chaves and Montgomery (1996), and the framing of options as described in the present study, are dependent on context and intervening conditions. The participants in this study framed their options by refining their own family imperatives – what are the things that are most important to the family? If those imperatives were changed the entire result could be changed. Miller (2004, p. 30), who was also looking at religious choice, asserts “humans will choose and pursue spiritual goods in the same way they pursue material ones – according to their interests and by calculation”, that is, by framing the options presented by an examination of their interests and calculated in relation to the conditions that intervene at that particular time.
Random Utility Model

Decision-making models provide information that is useful to policy makers and offer some means of predicting or explaining the decisions on specific issues (DesJardins, Ahlburg & McCall, 2006). The authors show that the Random Utility Model can be used to determine the factors influencing student enrolment decisions in higher education using an underlying assumption “that students have a set of schooling and non-schooling alternatives and they will attempt to maximize their net utility when making their schooling decisions” (DesJardins, Ahlburg & McCall, p. 386). While this type of theory development is useful as a predictive factor for policy makers, the grounded theory of the present study does not operate to give predictive information, but rather to understand the reasons behind the decision and therefore offer a different way in which to consider other research findings.

Usefulness of Theory

Why make a theory? Why do we want a theory on this subject and has grounded theory been successful in delineating the emergent theory of school choice? Thomas (1997) examines the allure of theory in education despite the “emergence of strong anti-theoretical strands in postmodern thought” (Thomas, n.p.). He challenges the process of theorising in education and contends that such theorising places serious obstacles to thought thereby lessening its possibilities of being creative and anarchic. However, educational research for higher degrees demands that studies be shown to have value and relevance within the context of current research. Thomas declares that theory occupies a rarefied position because of its supposed success in science. Theories can become dangerous when they oversimplify and force “the worlds in which we work into theoretical molds (sic)” (Thomas, n.p.) which can lead to distortion and misperceptions.

Grounded theory has the advantage of coming from the opposite direction so is not reliant on previous theories (which may be in error) because it distils explanatory notions from data (Thomas, 1997, n.p.). The value of the grounded theory produced by the present study is that it is a specific investigation into the meanings behind what the family is doing when it makes choices about
schooling and it does not force any realities into theoretical moulds, but rather presents a theory that has emerged from actual data.

**Potential for Further Research**

The grounded theory developed in the present study is complete in its interpretation and analysis of the concern and process that engages parents on the issues of choice of schooling. However, when reflecting personally on the theory and what it might mean in a more general sense, it has occurred to me that there may be a yet more powerful metaphor to distil the essence of what the parents ultimately are doing or seeking to achieve. Midway through the study, a revelational insight surfaced that provided a strikingly rich image – evidenced incidentally in one of the memos presented for another purposes in Chapter 2 – that sought to capture in my own mind what parents are doing in their efforts to realise the potential of their family. That image, captured only fleetingly at the time and not developed further or validated in the theory itself, is an image I had at the time named ‘wombing the future’. As my thinking has now turned to speculation about the broader context within which the discovered social process of realising family potential might usefully be interpreted, the potential of this biological analogy of the mother’s nurturing of an unborn child in the womb being used to understand more fully what motivates family’s in their decision making in general is enticing.

As the participants in the study spoke of the responsibility of raising their children to adulthood, they acknowledged the fundamental importance of raising them to adulthood safely and securely, such that they would be able to take their place independently and successfully as well-formed and fulfilled independent members of their communities in the widest sense. Many of the participants used the notion of “doing their best” in a broad sense to underline that their concern for their children is ultimately far reaching. They engage in balancing their own expectations, and those of their children, with the potential that is there to be realised and see that support and protection of their own identity and values are paramount while they engage in wombing the future to encase the realisation of their potential. The image of wombing the future thus holds
encouraging potential for understanding this phenomenon of what parents do in relation to schooling within the broader context of the other aspects of family life and the needs that must be fulfilled.

This speculative understanding of the broader context within which the findings of the present study might be further situated and interpreted offers an intriguing opportunity for further research, with two particular strands that could be pursued. First, it would be of interest to return to the participants of the present study to explore with them the extent to which this metaphor of wombing the future resonates with their understanding and experience. Second, if this context is in fact broader than school-choice and encompasses other dimensions of the decision-making activities within families, it may be useful to explore the extent to which the current grounded theory model can encompass and explain the family’s decision-making in other dimensions of their lives as they seek to fulfil their potential.

A further area of interest is the interrelatedness of family and school in the development of the child and was referred to in Chapter 1 in the sociological contextualisation of the theory. This has implications for assistance to families where such support is necessary to increase the success of proposed educational outcomes and to resource the areas where there is need to redress inequalities. Where schools in low socio-economic areas reflect particular social problems that affect the learning of the child, other social support mechanisms might need to be established linking the school and community.

The exploration of cultural, human and social capital and their relationship to parental involvement and school choice could also reveal rich possibilities for further research. More ideas about capital of different kinds are emerging and they offer further ways of understanding the whole issue of family engagement in education.

Should school choice widen even further as it has done in other places in the world? There could be investigations into the way in which particular kinds of teachers could be encouraged to teach in lower SES schools where the job
satisfaction and value given to their endeavours would have a different focus than in other types of schools. This could build on the work being done in New Zealand (Fiske & Ladd, 2003). As increased school choice widens the variety of education styles available to a very pluralistic Australian community, there would be a need to ensure that there are quality teachers in all areas. I would argue that, as academic results do not measure the full value and success of a school, then the particular areas of enrichment that each school can offer needs to be examined, formulated and expressed within the community.

The relationship between religious motivation and choice of schooling also deserves further investigation with a focus on social justice issues that are critical within Christian ideals (Bezzina, 2000). Theological perspectives need to be developed as the enrolment in schools with a religious focus is increasing and the family interest in, and expression of, their spiritual nature is changing. If the major contact between Church and family is the school, then the relationships and implications for ecclesiology open up rich areas of research as the Catholic Church responds to the “signs of the times” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965, para. 4).

**PERSONAL NOTES**

*Completion of a work such as the present study gives rise to reflections on the process itself. There were times where I found the isolation required for this project to be a very difficult barrier to completion. My learning style was seriously challenged as I function more effectively as a collaborative learner. To complete this study therefore required me to develop a capacity for totally individual work and a capacity to analyse and synthesise ideas in a complex way that I had not previously encountered. The success of such a development was greatly assisted by my supervisor who delighted in sharing the product of such thought processes and challenging the conclusions that I had reached. Such stimulation was invaluable as a contribution to the finished thesis. It also required a trustworthy proofreader who could view the wordy product in a completely objective way and provide accurate feedback that supported the final result.*
Life continues despite projects such as this one and during the development of this thesis we had many births (6 grandchildren), deaths (my father, to whom this thesis is dedicated, my brother-in-law and a grandson) and marriages (of two of our children as well as numerous members of our wider family) as well as other serious crises of health and living. While this has extended the time taken to do the thesis, it has anchored it in the richness of life.
REFERENCE LIST
Elementary Education Bill, Parliament of Western Australia (1871).
The Education Act 1872, Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, 17 December Sess. (1872).
Assisted Schools Abolition Act, 1895, Parliament of Western Australia, 12 October Sess. (1895).


_Parent survey: Why parents choose independent schools._

Brisbane: The Association of Independent Schools of Queensland Inc.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1.1

RELATED SUBSTANTIVE RESEARCH
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Why parents choose private or public schools</td>
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<td>Jonathan Kelley and MDR Evans</td>
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<td>Choice between government, Catholic, and independent schools: culture and community, rather than class</td>
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<td>Chris Ryan and Louise Watson</td>
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APPENDIX 1.2

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ISSUE OF SCHOOL CHOICE AND RELATED ISSUES
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APPENDIX 2.1

INFORMATION SHEET
INFORMATION SHEET

Research topic: Choosing Catholic secondary education

You are invited to participate in a study about Catholic secondary education.

My name is Angela McCarthy and I am a researcher at the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle. My aim in doing this study is to learn about parents’ choices to enrol their children in Catholic secondary schools. This research will deepen our understanding of the choices that are made so that those in policy making positions will have a better picture of parent’s wishes.

Information about your experience in education will be obtained through an interview that is expected to last about an hour. The interview will be tape recorded, transcribed and analysed. When this process is completed I may need to make a further appointment with you to discuss or clarify issues.

During the interview, you may decline to answer any question and you may ask me to cease the interview or turn off the tape recorder at any time. At no time will you be able to be identified by the information you have given me, as any reports or articles written concerning the outcomes of the study will protect your confidentiality. Code numbers will be given to each interview and I will be the only person involved in the study who will know your name.

Your consent is required for the following:
- To be interviewed by me at a mutually agreed place and time regarding your experience in choosing Catholic secondary education
- To have the interview tape recorded
- To be re-interviewed if there are areas that need clarification

The findings of this research will be publicly reported and you will be welcome to a copy of the short report if you would like to read it.

If you have any further questions or require any further information about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at The University of Notre Dame on 9239 5612 or 9239 5600 or amccarthy@nd.edu.au. If you prefer, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Tony Ryan, College of Education, University of Notre Dame on 9239 5600.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Angela McCarthy, Principal Researcher.
APPENDIX 2.2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Topic: Choosing Catholic secondary education

I …………………………………………………………….have read the information sheet accompanying this informed consent form relating to the study on Catholic secondary education.

I understand that by signing this consent form I am agreeing to be interviewed by Angela McCarthy, to have that interview tape-recorded, and to be reinterviewed if necessary. I understand that I may cease the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

I understand that if I have any question or concerns I can contact Angela on 9239 5612 or 9239 5600, or her supervisor, Professor Tony Ryan on 9239 5600.

Signed ………………………………………………………….Participant

Signed ………………………………………………………….Researcher

Date …………………………………………

Appendix
APPENDIX 2.3

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES
Respect key in school choice

Parents think values eroded in public system: researcher

Reports by Susan Hewitt

PARENTS believe children will learn to respect their peers and teachers at a private school but not at a government school, according to a university researcher.

Angela McCarthy, of the college of education at Notre Dame University, expects Catholic parents to be more concerned about values than their children's high school.

She said the schools showed they wanted their children to learn the same values they had been taught, and would help them stay in the Catholic-based school system.

"What is coming through strongly is the strength of the tradition in a parent's decision," said Mr. McCarthy.

Ms. McCarthy said the new values curriculum framework, which was adopted in total consensus with a range of Catholic schools, had the values that are designed to be part of all learning areas.

Ms. McCarthy said the values that are designed to be part of all learning areas.

"Some people think teaching is important to teaching, but it's a teacher standing up in front of a class, she said.

Chairman of the school board of education said parents are looking for someone who is going to be their child, she said.

Appendix
Appendix

ERAS OF SCRUTINY

Schools face new era of scrutiny

The West Australian

Friday, January 27, 2006

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Token Page
Threat to schools: perform or be shut down
By Linda Doherty, Education Editor
November 14, 2003

The Federal Government has told schools to lift students' academic performance and give more information to parents as a condition of almost $7 billion in funding.

The federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, yesterday outlined a national education framework which, for the first time, flags the US-style closure of under-achieving schools and the sacking of their principals.

As part of a policy of "intolerance of poorly performing schools", federal funding would depend on schools being more transparent with information provided to parents.

"The Australian Government will be insisting upon this as a condition of funding for the next four years," Dr Nelson said.

He highlighted regular school inspections in Britain that have resulted in closures of schools failing to improve student results, and US President George Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, where principals can be sacked and students moved to better schools.

The two-year-old US act has already resulted in overcrowded classrooms, especially in New York City, after large transfers of students from failing schools.

The NSW Education Minister, Andrew Refshauge, said such policies would punish schools that educated the most disadvantaged students.

"Closing schools and moving students to other schools does nothing to assist the education of poorer performing students," he said.

The president of the NSW Secondary Principals Council, Chris Bonnor, said there was no fair measure to determine good and bad schools, apart from the value-adding process that is not used by all schools.

Value-adding evaluates academic progress through levels of education, essentially determining the difference a school made to a student's achievement regardless of their socio-economic status.

Dr Nelson said he would seek amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act to positively discriminate and attract men into teaching. Only one in five teachers in primary schools is male.

Detailed school reports, which will be mandatory next year in NSW public schools, would also be a condition of federal funding for non-government schools.

Dr Nelson said the reports should detail the school's performance in standardised tests, teacher credentials, class sizes and student drop-out rates.

"This is not about league tables, but about parents' rights to full information," he said.

The Federal Opposition education spokeswoman, Jenny Macklin, said Dr Nelson's words "stand in stark contrast to his actions, with wealthy private schools receiving higher funding increases in percentage terms than struggling non-government schools".

Federal funding to non-government schools this financial year is $4.4 billion, while public schools will receive $2.5 billion. Dr Nelson said the median fee for a non-government school was $1568 a year, according to a 2001 analysis by the Education Department.
He acknowledged that lower-end Catholic and independent schools had larger class sizes and "far more humble" facilities than many public schools.

This had not stopped families switching to non-government schools. "There is at least a public perception by some that Catholic and independent schools are better," he said.

The drift was partly being driven by the public education lobby whingeing about a lack of funding and constant reports of unhappy, underpaid teachers, he said.

The chairwoman of the NSW Public Education Council, Lyndsay Connors, said Dr Nelson was trying to "bully into silence" parents and teachers who were fighting for better public school funding.

"This framework should not be allowed to distract attention from the fact that the Commonwealth has progressively starved public universities and largely ignored public schools," she said.

This story was found at: http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/11/13/1068674317944.html

Executive Highlights
No. 71

Free the teachers to help the students
Parental choice in schooling will improve education

Jennifer Buckingham

Published in The Australian 23 January 2002

A systematic comparison of the academic results of state and non-government schools has been a long time coming. Last week, the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) released a report confirming what many have suspected but have not been able to prove.

After taking into account differences in family circumstances and the attitudes of students, non-government school students achieved significantly better academic results than state school students. That is, non-government schools, particularly independent schools, do something for their students that goes above and beyond any advantage conferred by parents' income, occupation and education.

The first possibility that springs to mind is that the better average results in non-government schools can be explained by their much higher level of expenditure. We can compare the average expenditure per student in the different school sectors with their average results to see if this explanation holds up.

The simple answer is it doesn't. The average Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Ranks in independent schools, Catholic schools and state schools were 78.2, 72.8 and 66.7, respectively. Average per student expenditures in 1998 were $8112, $5330 and $6425, respectively. The state school figure does not include payroll tax, long-service leave or the user cost of capital, so underestimates the true value by an estimated $1500, the addition of which makes expenditure differences almost disappear. This is consistent with the findings of sophisticated studies all over the
world that financial resources are not directly related to school performance.

Another possible explanation is that a number of high-performing students in non-government schools elevate the average results. According to the ACER research, however, the success of independent schools has more to do with their ability to ‘markedly improve the performance of students who performed poorly in Year 9’. Independent schools seemed to achieve high averages not by just pushing the most talented students to the extremes of their ability, but also by lifting the performance of less able students.

What is it that non-government schools provide that state schools do not? Research by Dr Ken Rowe, also of ACER, has shown that teacher quality explains the greatest amount of variation in student achievement. Do non-government schools, particularly independent schools, have better teachers than state schools? This seems doubtful.

It is more likely that good teachers and principals are enabled to have a greater impact in non-government schools. The main operational difference between non-government and state schools is their greater freedom to make decisions about how best to spend their resources and educate their students. A study of results in the Third International Maths and Science Survey found that performance was closely related to the level of budgetary and educational control allowed to individual schools and teachers. Given the opportunity and motivation, it is conceivable that state schools would benefit from such freedoms. Victorian state schools are leading the way.

In the last thirty years, the proportion of children in non-government schools has increased steadily. In 2000, more than 30% of all students and more than 37% of senior secondary students attended Catholic and independent schools. It seems that parents may have long known what academics and educators either didn’t know or wouldn’t admit.

Now that we have hard evidence, what is the appropriate course of action for parents who want the best for their children and for educationists and others who seek to maximise the educational opportunities of all children?

Clearly we need to make choice of school—state or non-government—more readily available to all parents through either a system of tax credits or vouchers. Careful research over the last decade in the US and the UK has demonstrated that parental choice in schooling provides benefits for children and schools across the board. Where parents are given more choice in schooling, all schools raise their standards, parents became more involved with their children’s education, and both parents and students say they are more satisfied. Also according to US research, parental choice of schooling has resulted in less ethnic, religious and socioeconomic segregation, and private school students are more likely to volunteer for community projects, have more cross-racial friendships and are involved in fewer race-related conflicts.

Student-centred funding and school choice have been on the agenda in other countries for many years, yet still provoke knee-jerk responses and vitriolic abuse when raised in a public forum in Australia. It really is time for us to become more open to new ideas. To ignore this new evidence is shameful, and condemns us to another decade of ineffective policy and talking in circles.

About the Author:
Jennifer Buckingham is a Policy Analyst at The Centre for Independent Studies and author of Families, Freedom and Education: Why School Choice Makes Sense.
Baptists appeal for new school

By Geraldine Capp

THE Claremont Baptist Church has made another bid for State Government support for a low-fee private college in Perth's western suburbs.

The church has sent Education Minister Colin Barnett an independent study of trends in education and population growth which it hopes will sway him to support a proposed new school.

Mr Barnett has refused accreditation for the proposed college based on the area's static population growth for the intake area from Karrinyup to Fremantle. This means the school does not qualify for Government funding and low-interest loans.

But the church's educational consultant, Alan Mitchell, said a report by demographic experts Delaney, Woods and Associates Information — which had confirmed that growth would be static in the college's intake area — had also noted that the population would grow from a high degree of residential infill in Karrakatta, Leighton, Swanbourne, Churchlands and Wembley.

A spokeswoman for Mr Barnett said the report backed advice he got from his department not to support the college.
The growing trend

WA leads private school switch

Bertrany Hatt

The West Australian

5 March 2003
Run ad campaigns, Ravlich tells schools

JESSICA STRUITT

WA public schools need to market themselves better if they wanted to stop the trend towards parents choosing private schools for their children, Education Minister Liliana Ravlich says.

She said yesterday it was up to individual schools to sell themselves to the community and advertising campaigns could be one way.

Ms Ravlich admitted the Education Department should provide more support to schools to ensure they were in a position to promote what they had to offer and help stop the drift of students from public to private schools.

She said the education sector had become much more competitive over the years as the number of private schools increased.

"Given that we’ve had a monopoly historically in terms of education, I think it’s fair to say that there’s not really a culture of having to sell the public school product," she said.

"But now obviously with growth in terms of competition from Catholic schools and competition from independent schools, there needs to be a little bit of shift. The challenge for the public school sector is just to adapt to that competition."

Figures released this week revealed WA parents were turning to private schools at a rate far greater than the national average, with a 40 per cent jump in non-government school numbers in 10 years.

Ms Ravlich said the booming State economy had provided more parents with the money to opt for private school.

Shadow education minister Simon O’Brien said he did not think advertising campaigns were the answer.

There was nothing wrong with public schools marketing themselves, particularly if they offered specialist courses, but there were other ways to do this including word-of-mouth.

"Image in education has to be generated by competence, excellence and reputation, not by advertising gimmicks," he said.

"Clearly the image of our State school system needs to be enhanced at every opportunity."

"That means making sure that our teachers have a good working environment and they’re not fighting with the Government as they have been for the last five years."
Parents pick on schools

Public and private systems are under scrutiny, writes Louise Perry

IDEOLOGY, religion or status do not figure when Charlene and Leon Green choose a school for any of their four children — it's all about individual happiness.

The Perth couple are among the growing number of parents switching between the public and private school systems — playing the role of consumer to the hill and focusing on their child's contentment and the programs offered by each school.

"There are people who take a pragmatic approach and feel that choosing a school is simply a case of fitting the child with the right school," said Martin Forsey, an educational anthropologist at the University of Western Australia.

Dr Forsey is examining why parents, students and teachers switch between systems.

"For some, it is also just a matter of fees or where the school is and then for others it is about ideology, religion or tradition," he said.

"In Australia there are also quite a few people who have a deep commitment to the egalitarian ethic of a public school system but, at that individual consumer level, people have choices that they didn't have 20 or 30 years ago and that is showing."

The Greens' eldest son, Brody, went to a public primary school, then a private Christian high school, before his parents sent him to a public high school more than a year ago. The 15-year-old couldn't be happier now because the private school just didn't suit him, Mrs Green said.

"Our decision to initially send Brody to a private school was made for a number of reasons," she said.

"We had a perception of more accountability in the private system, a belief that the private school would be working for us and our child and an expectation of mutual respect and support of our family values. We also thought there would be better facilities and better pastoral care for students."

She said the private school fell short of expectations, lacked facilities and policed minor uniform infringements overzealousy.

"Ultimately, our decision to move school systems has been motivated by our child's level of happiness," Mrs Green said.

"We found our child was better suited to the public school ... we continued."

From Page 21

have also found the level of pastoral care better than expected.

The family recently removed their two younger sons and daughter from their public primary school.

"My daughter was reduced to tears every day and was in a large class, sitting on the floor doing her work because there weren't enough desks," Mrs Green said.

"We had decided we would pay whatever it took to get them into the private primary school near us."

Another mother mentioned a small public school not far away. "It turned out to be a shining example of how good a public school can be," Mrs Green said.

"The teaching staff there and the management are fantastic, and we couldn't be happier with them. All you want is a safe environment where your child progresses academically and personally. Whether that comes from a private or public school is frankly irrelevant. It is about finding the school that fits the child."

Dr Forsey, who has worked in public and private systems, is seeking participation for the project. He has nearly 50 signed up, including teachers who are switching between the systems.
Catholic school funds boost

Needy families to benefit from extra Federal money

CANBERRA
By Ben Ruse

CATHOLIC schools will get $362 million extra from the Federal Government in the next four years under funding arrangements announced yesterday.

The move could mean a Catholic primary school education in WA being available to needy families for as little as $60 a year.

Catholic Education Office executive director Ron Dullard said the increase was welcome and would help Catholic schools offer more affordable education from next year.

The office wanted to introduce a program that offered the children of parents with Health Care cards a place in Catholic schools for the same fee charged by the State Government.

These fees are $60 for primary students and a maximum of $135 for Years 8 to 10. The program is being tested in two Catholic schools in WA.

From 2005, Catholic schools will join the funding system that covers all other private schools and is based on the socioeconomic status of its students.

Prime Minister John Howard said in practice this meant about 40 per cent of Catholic schools would get more funding while the rest got the same amount.

"The Catholic Church has made, and continues to make, an invaluable contribution to the education of many young Australians," he said.

Mr Dullard said that in WA the money would be distributed to needier Catholic schools, which would especially benefit those in country areas.

Shadow education minister Jenny Macklin said Labor welcomed extra funding for very needy Catholic schools but the Prime Minister had failed to recognise that State schools also needed extra money.

Under the Howard Government's system, the amount of Federal Government money given to some elite private schools had doubled in three years while grants to State schools increased only 20 per cent.

Although the Federal Government gives twice as much money to private schools as it does to State schools, Mr Howard said that when State Government funding was taken into account the State system got 76 per cent of government funding despite having 68 per cent of students. The Government wanted to encourage choice and support parents who made sacrifices to give their children a private school education.

Fees at WA Catholic schools average about $600 a year for a primary student and $2,800 a year for a high school student.
**UWA an enclave for private schools**

By Charlie Wilson-Clark

THE University of WA is becoming an enclave for private school students.

New figures show a steady decline in the proportion of government school leavers going there.

In 1999, 44.8 per cent of school leavers starting at UWA were from the government school sector. This year just 38.3 per cent achieved the record cut-off scores.

Vice-chancellor Alan Robson said he was concerned about the trend and saw it as a sign of the State’s lack of available university places based on Commonwealth funding limitations.

Professor Robson, who was educated in government schools, said the proportion of students from Catholic schools was staying level while the intake of independent school students was increasing.

“Many very good students who are very capable of studying at UWA cannot get a place,” he said.

Professor Robson said a scholarship and excellence program ensured one student from every school in the State, government and private, was guaranteed a place at UWA.

“But we really believe we should get considerably more places in order to see cut-off scores fall and give very capable students a chance,” he said.

UWA Guild president Susie Byers said there was a perception the university was for private school students. Federal changes allowing universities to increase Higher Education Contribution Scheme fees up to 25 per cent were expected to make the situation worse.

Edith Cowan University accepted the biggest proportion of government school students, with 35.4 per cent of this year’s intake.

Murdoch University accepted the next highest proportion of government school students at 32 per cent. Curtin University’s intake had 46.6 per cent government school leavers.
PM’s teacher caning means pain for Labor

The West Australian
FRIDAY JANUARY 22, 2021

Appendix
Squeeze on private school aid

Carpenter takes the axe to top-fee education

By Susan Hewitt

STATE Government funding to our most expensive private primary schools has been slashed under a new structure to be announced today by Education and Training Minister Alan Carpenter.

WA private schools with the highest fees will be most penalised under the new funding arrangements.

Mr Carpenter has refused to increase funding to schools which charge the highest fees, effectively giving them a 3 per cent cut after allowing for inflation.

All other independent and Catholic schools have had their increases capped at 3 per cent, compared with rises for most last year of 5.2 per cent.

Association of Independent Schools WA president Audrey Jackson said she was disappointed with Mr Carpenter’s decision, which was unfair and reactionary. WA director of Catholic education Ron Dullard said the new package was fair.

In addition to the fees for schools, the Catholic Education Office will get a payment of $5.7 million and the Association of Independent Schools WA a $1.2 million grant.

“I cannot justify handing more money out to the State’s richest and best-resourced private schools with the present financial pressures on the government school system,” Mr Carpenter said.

Though most private schools got a 2.5 per cent increase last year, those charging highest fees got 3 per cent.

For the 2004 year, high-fee schools get what they got last year: $1456 per kindergarten student, $970 a pre-primary and primary student and $1472 for high school students.

Increasing funding to these schools by another 3 per cent this year would have cost about $350,000.

Mrs Jackson said the decision was highly political and based on the personal and government philosophies of Mr Carpenter.

“We are being penalised for the Minister’s political viewpoint,” she said.

Mr Carpenter had apparently based his criteria on an old Commonwealth formula where all independent schools were categorised on a scale from level one to 12.

The Federal Government now uses a model based on a socio-economic scale State Labor governments had criticised.

Mrs Jackson said it was an unfair way of assessing independent schools and not all those on the list had benefited from changes in Commonwealth funding models.

“There is a perception around that all of the parents who send their children to the schools in that group are wealthy and can afford to pay the increases,” Mrs Jackson said.

“But Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that it is not the people from the top end of town who send their kids to these sorts of schools – it is people who have middle incomes.

“I am concerned (the Minister) is perpetrating a view that I don’t believe is correct.”

Appendix
Outside marker should rate schools: expert

Barnett afraid scheme would tag poor performers

By Carmelo Amaffi

A FAMILY with two children can expect to pay a total of about $340,000 for a primary and secondary private school education, compared with $36,000 for a government school education, according to a new survey.

But parents continue to go to private and independent schools even though fees since 1995 have jumped from 13 to 16 times greater than those for public schools.

The national survey of randomly selected schools was conducted by the Australian Scholarships Group Friendly Society, a co-operative of about 270,000 members which has published a checklist of secondary school costs in Australia.

The checklist estimates that in 1999, the average cost of fees and levies in public high schools would be about $5500, compared with nearly $2800 for private or independent schools.

Survey sparks fear of inequality of school opportunities

By Carmelo Amaffi

A FAMILY with two children can expect to pay a total of about $340,000 for a primary and secondary private school education, compared with $36,000 for a government school education, according to a new survey.

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The checklist estimates that in 1999, the average cost of fees and levies in public high schools would be about $5500, compared with nearly $2800 for private or independent schools.

Society spokesman Terry O’Connell said the gap was widening and he was disappointed by the trend, which seemed likely to make educational choices inequitable for many Australian parents. “If Australia is to avoid becoming a nation split by classes of education, action is needed to ensure that equal opportunities are available to all children, irrespective of race, ethnic origin or the family income bracket,” he said.

“Parents with babies born this year face huge costs for their secondary education.”

There was now greater demand for private schooling, but it was a pity fees increases since 1995 were likely to force families to make greater sacrifices. Dianne Kerr, relieving director-general of education in WA, said the number of parents choosing non-government schools was growing.

She said that while the trend was towards private schools in WA, the movement did not signal an avalanche.

The Australian Education Union says it is planning a national campaign for higher pay and reduced workloads for teachers in a bid to attract more newcomers to the profession.

Appendix
Catholic schools set pace for low fees

BY KERYN ASHWORTH

WA PARENTS can send their children to private primary schools for as little as $324 a year and to high schools for $960.

A survey of fees charged shows that Roman Catholic schools are the cheapest.

At the other end of the scale, the most expensive private institutions charge up to $7350 for primary and $8420 for secondary schooling.

These include Presbyterian Ladies' College, St Mary's Anglican Girls' School, Methodist Ladies' College, Scotch College and Christ Church Grammar School.

But Anglican Schools' Commission director Michael Bromilow estimated that the expensive schools comprised less than a quarter of all non-government schools.

"When people refer to private schools they usually have in mind high-fee, single-sex boarding schools, when in fact these constitute a very small proportion of all non-government schools," Mr Bromilow said.

Most private schools set their fees at levels within the reach of a broad cross-section of the community. He said Anglican schools associated with the commission set aside 10 per cent of their income as concessions for parents having difficulty meeting payments.

Catholic Education director Therese Temby said Catholic schools also set aside money to help parents who faced financial hardship. In some cases the fees were waived and in others instalment payments were arranged.

Mrs Temby said everything possible was done to help give Catholic families access to Catholic education. Non-Catholic families were welcome to enrol their children in Catholic schools.

Yesterday's survey was carried out after new figures revealed that one in five families earning less than $26,000 a year sent their children to private schools.

The figures, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, also showed that nearly half of families earning more than $104,000 a year sent their children to State schools.

State School Teachers' Union president Brian Lindberg said the proliferation of cheaper private schools was a result of the Federal Government's decision to scrap the New Schools Policy, which restricted the growth of non-government education.

The Government had increased the amount of money to private schools so they were not under pressure to increase fees.

Mr Lindberg said this created great inequities in the education system because private schools getting big amounts of public money were not subject to the same accountability as State schools. Unlike government schools, they were free to select and exclude students.

"Eventually, we will have a three-tier schooling system with very rich private schools, poor private schools and State schools catering for the very poor and socially disadvantaged," he said.
The quality of schools, much of the quality of life, the health of our children and the community is at stake. The decision on whether to attend school or not, which determines the future of our children and the future of our community, is in our hands. As parents, we have a responsibility to ensure that our children receive a quality education. This is not just a moral obligation, it is an economic necessity. Education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and creating opportunities for our children.

Parents and teachers must work together to provide a safe, positive learning environment. This includes enforcing discipline, setting clear expectations, and providing support to students who need it. We must also ensure that schools are well-funded, with adequate resources to support our students.

The private sector can also play a role in improving education. Private schools can provide a different model of education, with smaller class sizes and more individualized attention. However, we must be careful not to privatize education to the point where it becomes a luxury reserved for the few.

In conclusion, the quality of our schools is a reflection of our society. We must work together to ensure that our children receive a quality education, which will benefit not only them, but also our entire community.
Schools: Families dig deep
Emphasis now on cultural values

The core values of a new curriculum framework in schools are not specifically about religion but emphasizing them can be difficult.

"They are common cultural values," Churches Commission on Education director Ted Witham said. "It is values in general rather than Christian values."

The way the values are disseminated in schools varies. But under the new framework, teachers are expected to include them in all learning areas.

And this is supported by chaplains in government schools that have them.

Mt Lawley Senior High School chaplain Andrew Paul said he was not at the school to teach Christianity.

"I am funded by the Christian community, who provides the service to the school," Mr. Paul said.

"But I am not here just to help Christian kids or to gain or pray. I am here to help people."

Mr. Paul works with students from different backgrounds and with different religious beliefs. He said having the values laid out in the curriculum was important.

Year 10 Mt Lawley students Dean Keplin, Patton Anfiso, Berdhana Parodi and Osama Mak said they want to see a value system which accepts and teaches different beliefs.

"If you go to a certain religious school you don't get a view on anything else," Patton said.

"But coming to a public school is really different; the teachers and kids are all from different places and religions."

Dean moved to Perth this year from South Africa, where he attended a Jewish school. His grandmother, Osama, was born in Saudi Arabia and went to a Muslim primary school.

"In South Africa, we were just taught based on Jewish beliefs," Dean said. "I am happy that I am here because you get a different exposure to another other than religion."

Osama said in a multicultural country like Australia, students need to understand where everyone came from.

"There are certain common beliefs that we all share. We are all West Australians and these values are common things we want to teach our kids," Mr. Paul said.

"I am not here to push a burden of my religion and I am not here to be a Christian."

"I am here to be a Christian person."
APPENDIX 2.4

QUESTIONNAIRE
QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Data: please fill in the spaces or tick the appropriate boxes.

Age group: 
- less than 40
- 40 - 49
- 50+

Sex: 
- Male
- Female

Your country of birth: ______________________________________________

Your children’s country of birth: ____________________________________

Parish or faith community to which you belong:
1. Catholic Parish
2. Other Christian community
3. Non-Christian religion
4. No religion

If you answered 1, 2, or 3, please name the parish or community:
_________________________________________________________________

Children currently enrolled in Kolbe:
- Year 8
- Year 9
- Year 10
- Year 11
- Year 12

Relationship to children at Kolbe:
- Father
- Mother
- Step-father
- Step-mother
- Guardian
- Friend
- Other person – please specify

Final year of your own schooling completed in 19___

Year level at which you finished school: ______________________________

Level of tertiary study completed: ________________________________
Parents’ choice of Kolbe Catholic College:

Circle the letter for each statement that reflects your opinion on why you chose Kolbe Catholic College for your son or daughter’s secondary schooling:

A. Not important  B. Little importance  C. Important  D. Very important  E. Most important

1. The discipline is very good
2. The uniform is attractive and good value
3. The college is the closest secondary school
4. The supportive way in which the college cares for my son or daughter
5. The way in which the college develops the Christian faith
6. The attitude of the college in supporting the students’ right to learn
7. The advantage that the students have in gaining employment
8. The moral values that are taught by the school
9. The sound curriculum offered by the college
10. The specific programs that the school runs e.g. music, sport, cultural events
11. The prestige of the college
12. The quality of the teaching staff
13. The religious education program that is based soundly on Gospel teachings
14. The way in which the college educates the students about drugs
15. The status of the college in the Rockingham area
16. Other local secondary schools do not offer what the Kolbe community does

Appendix
Parents’ expectations of Kolbe Catholic College:

Circle the letter for each statement that reflects what you expect your son or daughter to take with them when they leave Kolbe Catholic College.

A. Not important     B. Little importance     C. Important     D. Very important     E. Most important

When my son or daughter leaves Kolbe College I expect them to have…..

1. A good sense of personal discipline
2. A good preparation for their future career
3. An understanding of Christian values to help them develop into adults
4. A level of personal discipline and independence
5. Good preparation for University study
6. Good preparation for study at TAFE
7. Good preparation for seeking work
8. Respect for people of all races and religions
9. An appreciation of what it means to be a good citizen
10. A desire to live according to Christian values
11. An understanding that education is a life long need
12. A sense of social justice in regard to the poor and oppressed
APPENDIX 2.5

INTERVIEW GUIDE
INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Initial idea – good education – what is it?
- Diachronic approach – family history of education
  - Relate your experience of education
  - Your spouse’s experience
  - Wider family’s response
- Your children’s education – tell the story
  - Current experience – story of enrolment, starting out, academic emphasis, experience of RE, peer group experience, extracurricular activities, boarding experience, year 12 ball, exam time,
  - Has this experience given a pleasing result? Any negatives in the experience?
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, (10 being best) how would you rate your overall experience of involvement with Catholic secondary education? (Can you tell me why?) Single quantitative question (Weiss, 1994, p.50) – can help anchor a qualitative discussion.
  - Move to the future – personal/family investment – original dreams, new visions, real affect of education on family; relationship with Church

If the interview takes an unexpected direction the guide should be dropped entirely (1994, p.51)

TRIGGER QUESTIONS:

And how did you feel about that….
Tell me the story of your education…
Tell me the story of your children’s education….
What was your child’s response to that….
Can you tell me more about that aspect….
Let’s go back to something that you said earlier…..
Tell me the story behind that…..
So when you say…. Can you tell me what you mean…..
What other aspects of school life can you tell me about…..
What do you think is important to you about your child’s education…
Why do you say that?
OK. Now there’s another issue I wanted to ask you about. It is…(managing transitions, Weiss,1994, p. 81)
Could you explain that again, I don’t think I quite got it.
APPENDIX 2.6

PARTICIPANT PROFILE
PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Age group:
- less than 40
- 40 - 49
- 50+

Sex:
- Male
- Female

Your country of birth: ______________________________________

Your partner’s country of birth: ____________________________

Your children’s country of birth: ___________________________

Parish or faith community to which you belong:
1. Catholic Parish
2. Other Christian community
3. Non-Christian religion
4. No religion

If you answered 1, 2, or 3, please name the parish or community:
_____________________________________________________

Year level at which you finished school: ______________________

Post secondary school education: ___________________________

Did you attend Catholic schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Younger than school age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gov</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>Gov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd child</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4th child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th child</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of children currently in Catholic schools: ________________
APPENDIX 2.7

FAMILY DESCRIPTION
FAMILY DESCRIPTION

To assist the descriptive narrative, each participant has been given a pseudonym and the table below describes each family’s experience in choosing education for their children. All information is directly sourced from the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Family Origin</th>
<th>Family Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1a</td>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Professional couple with 3 children, one daughter and two sons. Eldest son artistically gifted and daughter gifted intellectually but emotionally vulnerable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Highly intelligent and professionally advanced from blue collar background. Married to David. Lived overseas with first husband until his death. Two sons, one with a disability, eldest gifted in languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>High level professional married to Michelle. One son together. Had his secondary schooling in an intellectually elite school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Catholic family with five children. Husband, John, a teacher in a Catholic school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Migrated from racially insecure country to Australia after birth of first child. Four children educated in Catholic schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Geraldine</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Migrated with deceased husband to Australian to ensure the tertiary education of their two children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Catholic mother of four married to non-Catholic. Began in government primary schools but moved to Catholic schools when possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Garry</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Country teacher with two daughters. Migrated to Australia before marrying an Australian.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Page</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Country professional with seven children. Pursued different schooling choices with all children according to their need. Mary and husband Gerard, lived overseas for five years and began with home schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10a</td>
<td>Beth &amp; Tom</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Farming family with four children and struggling financially. Beth began the interview but Tom joined once his suspicions were eradicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10b</td>
<td>(interviewed together)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Wife of highly mobile professional husband, Greg. Moving constantly within Australia a continuing problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>An intelligent father interested in life long learning, at the time of interview he was studying at university full time now that all of his three children have left school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>School teacher with strong Catholic commitment and highly energised in sourcing information about educational choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Mother of a family living in Australia due to her husband Damien’s current employment. Three children, one of whom she is encouraging to be a priest. Involved in PREP*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Remote farming family. Three families being supported by the farm, four children, two who having minor learning difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15b</td>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Aunt of Tracey. About to retire from country living to coastal living having worked very hard in PREP* program.</td>
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and support of families in remote farming area.

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<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Tricia</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Converted to Catholicism in early 20s. Married first generation son of post war migrant people. Very supportive of her children in their schooling and PREP*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Mother of six who has resigned her professional life to concentrate on home schooling her last two children and running the family business from home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P18a &amp; P18b</td>
<td>Maura &amp; Pat (interviewed together)</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Migrated to Australia to distance themselves from effects of intense cultural immersion. Moved to WA from NSW to educate their second son in Montessori type school. Religious education through PREP*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Country divorced mother with one daughter. Involved in PREP* program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P20</td>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Withdrew her four children from a Catholic school after one was permanently injured due to a classroom accident. Involved in PREP*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P21</td>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Moved to Australia to educate his son in a Catholic school. His goal is tertiary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P22</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Blended family of four children. Older two from Graham’s previous marriage. Originally from the country. Moved to the city specifically for educational opportunity. Her own elder son needed a single sex school with strong sporting characteristics, pastoral care and networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P23</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Single divorcee with two boys. Father of the boys an elite athlete with second son showing similar capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P24</td>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Wealthy family with three children. She has chosen to stay at home to care for the children and is very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Commitment to Their Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>P25</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Migrated to Australia before marrying and having two boys. Chose government primary schooling so that she could work part time and be with her boys. Will need to work full time to support their Catholic secondary schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P26</td>
<td>Francesca</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Migrated to Australia to educate their two boys to tertiary level. Part of a cultural group in adopted country who all have the same cultural origin. Not at Catholic schools and completing religious education through PREP*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P27</td>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Moved from interstate with husband who works across Australia and travels a substantial amount. They have two girls and found it difficult to get Catholic primary schooling in WA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P28</td>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Mother of four boys, religiously committed but struggling with husband and two older boys who no longer practise their faith. Committed to religious education through PREP* and wants youngest boy to have a Catholic education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P29</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Mother of one daughter who is involved in PREP* program. The mother has intellectual limitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P30</td>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>With husband, Peter, family of country origin with two boys. Both boys are involved in the PREP* and attend government primary schools. Father not a Catholic. Enrolled in Non Catholic denominational school for high school due to grandfather’s legacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P31</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
<td>Family living in Australian due to her husband’s employment. Not happy with academic level of Catholic</td>
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primary school so moved her children to government primary school and is involved in PREP*.

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<tr>
<td>P32</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family with seven children living in WA temporarily due to husband, Terry’s employment. Deeply connected to Catholicism and highly engaged in their children’s educational choices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P33</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not a family participant but an academic and historian who was able to provide details of the Catholic church in WA through his personal experience and pastoral expertise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P34</td>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Non Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couple with three children who have moved to WA for employment purposes. Both had Catholic education in their country of origin but while keeping that option open for their children, they chose denominational schooling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P35</td>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father of two with his eldest suffering ADHD. Required to move to a different school due to problems encountered with medication.</td>
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*PREP = Parish Religious Education Program.
APPENDIX 2.8

THE STORY LINE
The Story Line (25 Feb. 03)

[NOTE: This is the story line as at the date above. It was further developed before the completion of the thesis in 2006]

(Strauss & Corbin 1990, p.119) The story line is the conceptualisation of a descriptive story about the central phenomenon of the study.

The basic social concern of each family is to optimise their family potential by matching their desires and expectations, and what education can contribute to the end result.

The causal condition of this concern is termed Rumbling: the family recognises that education is compulsory in WA, rearing children is a high level responsibility and they want the best for the children. Since there is a variety of choices available, a decision has to be made and there will probably be no perfect answer.

The Rumbling occurs within the context of Limits and Needs. The family is aware that there are limited resources; economic, social and personal. They are aware that each child has specific needs, some of which have to override other family needs. They are also acutely aware of their own educational history. Intertwined with the limits and needs is an awareness of family imperatives and a desire to preserve their own family identity.

The consequences of such concern for the family is placed on a continuum. At one end there is harmony where the family have made a perfect match and there are no further issues. At the other end the family experiences disquiet. A match has to be made so that the family remains in harmony. Anxiety over the choices available and the fear of error and world influences on the children are dimensionalised between a great deal of disquiet in some families, and little in others.

To process towards family harmony and the best possible match, the family use a basic social process named Realising Family Potential. Each family enters into this process because it is an imperfect world. Some will only need to engage in the process to a minimal degree while other families will engage to a very high level bringing to bear all of their resources.

In the first phase the family refine their imperatives. While this is the first stage of the process, it is also an aspect of the decision that the family returns to time and again when there are challenges to what they desire. The more challenges to their decision, the more the imperatives are refined to the highest order. Family members respond to their own personal history as a context for this refinement and also continue to assess the specific needs of the child/children concerned.

The second phase of the process is framing their options. Having explicatied their imperatives at this point, in the context of their own history, values and specific challenges to their parenting, there is now a set of schooling options that are available. An intervening condition will be the availability of what they require and the resources that are available. Another facet of this particular category is the degree in which the parents have engaged in sourcing information to have the greatest number of options available, and the degree to which they have ensured that opportunities are
available e.g. enrolment at birth in special schools or moving into a particular
neighbourhood to be near the desired school.

The third phase involves the parents, and possibly the children, in the balancing of the
options. At this stage the imperatives can once again be re-engaged and refined. If
the challenges are sufficient in magnitude, then the family will have to let go some of
their previously important ideas and values and compromise to ensure that the options
are maximised. At the end of this phase the family singularise their result. One
property of this category is the way in which that final decision is made. It can rely on
what seems at first to be trivial features of the school involved, and then in some
instances, a major difference brings a particular school to the forefront of all the
possible options.

Phase four is the management of the result. There are two subcategories;
maintaining the choice, or changing the choice where the previous phases are
revisited and either a new school is chosen or the family engages in home schooling.