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A grounded theory: Realising family potential through choice of schooling

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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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

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

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 (*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 “reweave 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 ecclesial 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” (Veverka, 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.